

Innovations

Heartful Action Network and Development (HAND): Intensifying Responsiveness on Child Protection Policy in Bantayan National High School

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Abstract: *This action research aimed to intensify the responsiveness of teachers through the Heartful Action Network and Development (HAND) program in the implementation of Child Protection Policies in Bantayan National High School. Using a mixed methods concurrent embedded research design, this study evaluated teachers' level of responsiveness before and after the implementation of HAND. The participants included 30 teachers from Bantayan National High School during the school year 2022-2023. Data were collected through observation checklists and focus group discussions, and analyzed through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The research built upon Craig's (2009) reactive action research model and Grundy's (1982) practical action research model. The study incorporated three main components: (1) Information Dissemination, (2) Updating of Existing Localized Child Protection Policy, and (3) Campaign against Violence, Abuse and Bullying. Findings demonstrated significant improvement in teachers' responsiveness to child protection policies after the implementation of HAND, contributing to the creation of a safer school environment. Recommendations included continued professional development for teachers, enhanced stakeholder collaboration, and regular evaluation of child protection practices to ensure sustained improvement in child protection policy implementation.*

Keywords: *1. Child Protection Policy, 2. Teacher Responsiveness, 3. Action Research, School Safety, 4. Child Rights, 5. Educational Policy Implementation*

I. Introduction

Child protection has become a critical concern worldwide, with increasing recognition of the prevalence and impact of abuse and exploitation on children's well-being and development (UNICEF, 2021). Global efforts have been underway to strengthen child protection policies and practices in various settings, including schools, to prevent and respond to instances of abuse and neglect (WHO, 2020). International conventions and frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), emphasize the importance of ensuring children's rights to protection from all forms of

violence, exploitation, and abuse (United Nations, 1989).

In the Philippines, despite efforts to address child protection concerns, significant challenges persist (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017). The country faces issues such as child labor, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and abuse, exacerbated by factors such as poverty, inadequate access to education and social services, and cultural barriers (UNICEF Philippines, 2020). The prevalence of these issues underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and effective child protection measures at all levels of society, including within educational institutions.

Bantayan National High School serves as a microcosm of the broader Philippine context, where students may be vulnerable to various forms of abuse and exploitation. Located in a community facing socio-economic challenges, the school's population likely includes students from marginalized backgrounds who may be at heightened risk. Moreover, cultural factors and traditional norms may contribute to underreporting abuse and a lack of awareness about child protection rights and resources.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated child protection efforts in educational settings. As Panela (2022a) noted in his study on teachers conducting action research during the pandemic, educators experienced "a really difficult time adjusting to an out of the ordinary situation of unprecedented consequences yet they persevere to do what they can to conduct and complete action researches and instill light and hope not only to themselves but for the people they are serving." Similarly, Panela (2022b) highlighted that "the transition to a new normal was such a direct hit to teachers who were forced to look for an alternative way of teaching and assessing the students." These challenges have necessitated innovative approaches to upholding child protection policies while adapting to changing educational environments.

Project HAND (Heartful Action Network and Development) emerged as a response to these challenges, aiming to fortify child protection policies and practices in Bantayan National High School. By cultivating a safe and nurturing environment, the program sought to shield students from abuse and ensure they developed as resilient individuals capable of overcoming adversity. The program extended beyond the confines of the school walls, permeating through the community by fostering a culture of accountability and empowerment among educators, parents, and community members to stand as guardians of children's rights and well-being.

II. Objectives

This action research aimed to intensify the responsiveness of teachers through Heartful Action Network and Development (HAND) program in the implementation of Child Protection Policies in Bantayan National High School.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the teachers' level of responsiveness in the implementation of Child Protection Policy before HAND is implemented?
2. What is the teachers' level of responsiveness in the implementation of Child Protection Policy after HAND is implemented?
3. Is there a significant difference in the teachers' level of responsiveness in the implementation of Child Protection Policy before and after HAND is implemented?
4. How can HAND intensify the teachers' level of responsiveness in the implementation of Child Protection Policy?

Finally, it tested the following hypothesis:

1. There is no significant difference in the teachers' level of responsiveness in the implementation of Child Protection Policy before and after HAND is implemented.

III. Review of Related Literature and Studies

Child protection policies are essential frameworks within educational settings to ensure the safety and well-being of students (Gilbert et al., 2009). These policies, rooted in international standards such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), emphasize the fundamental right of children to be protected from harm (United Nations, 1989). By establishing clear guidelines for prevention, reporting, and intervention, child protection policies aim to create nurturing and secure learning environments where students can thrive (Cross et al., 2012).

Legal mandates in many countries compel schools to implement child protection policies to uphold the rights of children and address instances of abuse or neglect effectively (Devaney & Spratt, 2009). Compliance with these laws is paramount to ensure the safety and welfare of students within educational institutions (Barron & Topping, 2014). Through comprehensive policies and procedures, schools can create a protective environment where students feel safe and supported (Finkelhor et al., 2009).

Schools play a critical role as frontline protectors of children, and their policies shape the educational environment (Whitaker et al., 2006). Establishing robust child protection policies involves not only preventing abuse but also promoting a positive and inclusive culture where students can thrive (López & Andrews, 2016). By fostering open communication and trust, schools can create an environment where students feel empowered to report concerns without fear of reprisal (Melton et al., 2017).

Best practices in child protection policies encompass a range of evidence-based strategies, including risk assessments, staff training, and collaboration with external agencies (Shakeshaft et al., 2008). These proactive measures are essential for creating a culture of safety and support within schools (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017). By engaging stakeholders in policy development and

implementation, schools can ensure that policies are responsive to the unique needs of their community (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018).

Regular evaluation and monitoring of child protection policies are vital to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement (Gilbert et al., 2009). Evaluation processes inform policy development and enhance overall effectiveness, ensuring that policies remain relevant and responsive (United Nations, 1989). By engaging in ongoing assessment, schools can adapt their policies to address emerging challenges and evolving needs within their community (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018).

With the increasing use of technology, schools must address online safety concerns (Finkelhor et al., 2009). Technology-based interventions help students navigate the digital world safely and responsibly, mitigating risks associated with cyberbullying and online exploitation (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018). By incorporating digital literacy education and implementing robust cybersecurity measures, schools can protect students from online threats (Scott & Barrett, 2020).

Trauma-informed practices inform child protection policies to prioritize support for traumatized students (SAMHSA, 2014). Creating trauma-informed environments promotes healing and resilience among students who have experienced adversity (McAfee et al., 2014). By recognizing the impact of trauma on students' behavior and learning, schools can provide the necessary support and resources to help them thrive academically and emotionally (Whitaker et al., 2006).

In a recent study on teachers conducting action research during the COVID-19 pandemic, Panela (2022a) identified three major themes: (1) Warrants of Sudden Changes; (2) Watering Down the Effects; and (3) Working and Thriving. The study highlighted that "teachers experienced a really difficult time adjusting to an out of the ordinary situation of unprecedented consequences yet they persevere to do what they can to conduct and complete action researches and instill light and hope not only to themselves but for the people they are serving." This resilience and commitment to service parallels the dedication required for effective implementation of child protection policies, especially during challenging times.

Similarly, Panela (2022b) explored how college teachers found balance during the pandemic transition, noting that "the transition to a new normal was such a direct hit to teachers who were forced to look for an alternative way of teaching and assessing the students." The study evaluated mediating strategies for alleviating the effects of technodependence, finding that "with the introduction of online time reduction, forming faculty support groups, and committing to physical modules, performances of teachers improved significantly." These findings suggest that collaborative approaches and structured support systems can enhance teachers' capacity to manage complex responsibilities, including the

implementation of child protection policies.

The reviewed literature and studies emphasize the pivotal role of child protection policies in educational settings and underscore the need for comprehensive, evidence-based strategies to ensure the safety and well-being of all students. Effective implementation of these policies requires collaboration, training, and a commitment to prioritizing child safety, ultimately creating nurturing and inclusive learning environments where students can thrive.

Furthermore, the studies by Panela (2022a, 2022b) highlight the importance of adaptability, resilience, and collaborative support systems in enabling educators to fulfill their responsibilities effectively, even in challenging circumstances. These findings have significant implications for the implementation of child protection policies, suggesting that similar approaches—such as structured support networks, balanced workloads, and clear guidelines—may enhance teachers' responsiveness to child protection concerns.

IV. Methodology

a. Innovation, Intervention and Strategy

This study was anchored in the 1987 Philippine Constitution and the United Nations Convention on the Child's Rights (UNCRC) (1989). These legal and international principles are the bases of policy framework, management decisions, and educational implications where this study stems from. These principles were selected to give legal and theoretical insights into the gaps between the experiences on implementing child protection policies in San Roque District. Moreover, as the study aims to present the lived experiences of secondary teachers regarding child protection policies and practices, it is pertinent that the fundamental frameworks are understood.

In this respect, the constitution also recognized the role of education institutions in protecting the rights of the children as it stated that "All educational institutions shall inculcate patriotism and nationalism, foster love of humanity and respect for human rights, appreciation of the role of national heroes in the historical development of the country, teach the rights and duties of citizenship, strengthen ethical and spiritual values, develop moral character and personal discipline, encourage critical and creative thinking, broaden scientific and technological knowledge, and promote vocational efficiency." (Article XIV, Section 3).

Heartful Action Network and Development (HAND) program is operationally defined as a comprehensive initiative aimed at promoting child protection and holistic development within educational institutions. The program encompasses a series of structured activities, training sessions, and resource provisions designed to empower school communities in recognizing, preventing, and responding to instances of abuse, exploitation, and neglect affecting children. Through collaborative partnerships with schools, families, and

community stakeholders, the HAND program seeks to foster a culture of compassion, safety, and resilience, thereby creating nurturing environments where children can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Additionally, the HAND program incorporates elements of capacity building, awareness raising, and advocacy to support the effective implementation of child protection policies and practices, ensuring the well-being and rights of all children are upheld.

b. Production

Information Dissemination

- Development of comprehensive information materials on child protection policies
- Creation of informational presentations for different stakeholders
- Design of accessible guidelines for reporting and responding to concerns

Updating of Existing Localized Child Protection Policy

- Review and revision of current policy documents
- Integration of new research and best practices
- Development of implementation guidelines and protocols

Campaign against Violence, Abuse and Bullying

- Design of campaign materials and messaging
- Creation of age-appropriate educational resources
- Development of social media content and awareness materials

c. Utilization

Information Dissemination

- Seminars to Teachers on Child Protection Policy
- Seminars on Responsible Parenthood and Positive Discipline
- Students Orientation

Updating of Existing Localized Child Protection Policy

- Organize a Child Protection Policy Committee
- Conduct Regular Meeting of CPP Committee
- Create a close coordination to the following:
 - Women & Child Protection Desk PNP
 - Local Social Welfare Development Office
 - Barangay Council for the Protection of Children
 - Other Government and Non-government Offices

Campaign against Violence, Abuse and Bullying

- Campaign against any form of abuse and bullying (poster and bulletin)
- Anti-Bullying Seminar for Students
- Manage Social Media Concerns

d. Validation

The copies of HAND were submitted to the District Quality Assurance Committee for initial evaluation. The research paper and the viability of the innovation were screened in District Action Research Conference. Next, it was forwarded to the Division Research Coordinator who endorsed the same to the Curriculum Implementation and Development for division level quality assurance to be conducted by the Senior Education Program Specialist in Social Mobility (SocMob). Constructive suggestions and revisions were complied with to guarantee the approval of the innovation.

e. Research Design

This research built upon Craig's (2009) reactive action research model to address the ongoing challenge of low responsiveness in implementing the Child Protection Policy program. Additionally, we drew on Grundy's (1982) practical action research model, as our intervention design was researcher-developed. Overseeing the entire process, we employed a mixed methods concurrent embedded research design (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2003) to collect, analyze, and interpret diverse data. This approach allowed us to concurrently analyze documentation of teachers' responsiveness levels alongside conducting interview sessions. By separately analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, we aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the program's effectiveness.

f. Participants and Sampling

In this study, a typical purposive sampling technique was used as only those who indulged in the whole process from determining factors that affected the responsiveness level among 30 teachers during the school year 2022 -- 2023 were included.

g. Data Collection

Observation checklist was the primary data gathering instrument that was used in this action research. Specifically, observing class sessions such as the lesson plan and activity proposals before and after the implementation of the HAND were tallied. Here is the observation checklist that was utilized:

Observation Checklist for Teachers' Responsiveness in Implementing the Child Protection Policy:

- Awareness:
 - Teacher demonstrated familiarity with the Child Protection Policy by referencing it during interactions or discussions.
 - Teacher articulated the key components and objectives of the Child Protection Policy accurately when prompted.
 - Teacher demonstrated an understanding of their role and responsibilities as outlined in the Child Protection Policy through verbal or written communication.

- **Understanding:**
 - Teacher identified potential signs of abuse, neglect, or exploitation in students' behavior or physical appearance.
 - Teacher followed the correct procedures for reporting concerns related to child protection, as outlined in the Child Protection Policy.
 - Teacher demonstrated awareness of the importance of maintaining confidentiality and privacy when handling child protection issues.
- **Adherence:**

Teacher consistently applied the guidelines and procedures outlined in the Child Protection Policy in their interactions with students and colleagues.

Teacher took prompt and appropriate action when they suspected a child might be at risk of harm, following the protocols specified in the policy.

Teacher actively collaborated with other staff members and relevant authorities to ensure that child protection concerns were addressed effectively and in a timely manner.
- **Proactivity:**
 - Teacher actively sought out professional development opportunities related to child protection, such as attending workshops or training sessions.
 - Teacher initiated or participated in discussions and initiatives aimed at improving child protection practices within the school community.
 - Teacher advocated for the rights and well-being of children by raising awareness of child protection issues and promoting a culture of safety and support.
- **Supportiveness:**
 - Teacher provided emotional support to students who disclosed experiences of abuse or neglect, demonstrating empathy and compassion.
 - Teacher created a safe and supportive classroom environment where students felt comfortable expressing their concerns about their safety and well-being.
 - Teacher collaborated with parents, guardians, and external agencies to provide support and resources to students affected by child protection issues, actively involving them in the intervention process when appropriate.

On the other hand, focus group discussion was conducted face-to-face. Initially, five interview questions were raised. Follow-up questions were raised to enable us to deepen our understanding of their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about the program.

***h.* Data Analysis**

The tally count was analyzed through descriptive statistics specifically frequency and percentage. When using a Likert scale with the scoring system of 1 for "Strongly Disagree," 2 for "Disagree," 3 for "Neutral," 4 for "Agree," and 5 for "Strongly Agree" to assess observations, responses were interpreted as follows:

- Often (4-5): Responses coded as 4 or 5 indicated that the behavior or characteristic described in the checklist item was frequently observed or strongly endorsed by the teachers.
- Sometimes (3): Responses coded as 3 suggested that the behavior or characteristic described in the checklist item was occasionally observed or moderately endorsed by the teachers.
- Neutral (3): Responses coded as 3 suggested that the behavior or characteristic described in the checklist item was neither frequently nor infrequently observed by the teachers.
- Rarely (1-2): Responses coded as 1 or 2 indicated that the behavior or characteristic described in the checklist item was rarely observed or weakly endorsed by the teachers.
- Never (1): Responses coded as 1 indicated that the behavior or characteristic described in the checklist item was never observed or strongly disagreed with by the teachers.

With a 5% level of significance, an independent means t-test was used to test the hypothesis that there was no significant difference in the level of integrative assessment on the content knowledge of the teachers' lesson plans and activity proposals before and after the implementation of HAND. This was followed by the test on effect size, where interpretations of the effect size were based on the criteria provided by Rosenthal (1994):

Interval	Interpretation
0.50-1.00	Large
0.30-0.49	Medium
0.10-0.29	Small

In terms of the qualitative data reflected in the interview transcript, Erlington and Brysiewicz's (2017) thematic analysis model was used for analysis.

i. **Research Reflexivity**

In this study, the researcher's approach was different in terms of other researchers' perspectives. As a person who knew the struggles of teachers implementing child protection policies and their aspirations, the researcher understood her stand that might lead to a different development and an equally valid understanding of the particular situation under study.

The study had a preconception with a tone of positivity of eventually creating meaning during the entire process. The position and the background of the researcher affected the choices made in the investigation, from an angle, with the methods that best judged the sole purpose of the study, framing, coming up with themes and the overall conclusion of it. With the intent of sharing the results to the participants of the study, preconception was

not equated in any form of bias unless the researcher failed to mention them (Malterud, 2012).

j. Ethical Considerations

The teacher-participants were offered no reward nor coerced to participate as a gesture of respect for their right to decline from participating in the study. Additionally, they were provided with details of the scope and limitations of the action research through an informed consent form to protect their right to be informed of research objectives. Furthermore, pseudonyms were used instead of their real names in the discussion of results to safeguard their right to anonymity. Moreover, their test scores and interview responses were kept confidential, ensuring that individuals unrelated to the research project did not have access to them. Importantly, measures were taken to ensure that no psychological, emotional, or physical stress nor financial burden was incurred by the participants. Additionally, ideas adapted from the literature were properly cited using APA 7th edition guidelines. Furthermore, proper protocols were followed in conducting the study, including securing permission to conduct the study from the division research coordinator and the division schools superintendent.

V. Results and Discussion

Results

The results of this action research are presented according to the research objectives and the hypothesis tested. Data were collected through observation checklists and focus group discussions with 30 teacher-participants from Bantayan National High School during the 2022-2023 school year.

Research Question 1: Teachers' Level of Responsiveness Before HAND Implementation

The pre-implementation assessment of teachers' responsiveness to the Child Protection Policy revealed concerning gaps in awareness, understanding, adherence, proactivity, and supportiveness. Table 1 presents the mean scores for each dimension before the implementation of HAND.

Table 1

Teachers' Level of Responsiveness in Child Protection Policy Implementation Before HAND (N=30)

Dimension	Mean Score	SD	Interpretation
Awareness	3.22	0.26	Sometimes
Understanding	3.15	0.24	Sometimes
Adherence	3.07	0.31	Sometimes
Proactivity	2.68	0.45	Rarely

Dimension	Mean Score	SD	Interpretation
Supportiveness	3.28	0.19	Sometimes
Overall	3.08	0.32	Sometimes

As shown in Table 1, teachers demonstrated a "Sometimes" level ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.32$) in their overall responsiveness to child protection policy implementation before HAND was introduced. The dimension of "Proactivity" received the lowest rating ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.45$), interpreted as "Rarely," suggesting that teachers seldom initiated actions related to child protection. "Supportiveness" received the highest rating ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.19$), though still within the "Sometimes" interpretation range.

The qualitative data from focus group discussions corroborated these findings. Teachers expressed uncertainty about their roles in implementing the Child Protection Policy, as exemplified by the following statements:

1. "I know there is a Child Protection Policy, but I'm not completely sure about all the procedures we need to follow." (Teacher 4)
2. "Sometimes I notice concerning behaviors in students, but I'm hesitant to take action because I'm not confident about the proper steps." (Teacher 17)

These findings aligned with previous studies indicating that school personnel often lack sufficient knowledge and confidence in child protection matters (McAfee et al., 2014). According to Whitaker et al. (2006), this hesitancy can significantly impact the effectiveness of child protection efforts in educational settings.

Research Question 2: Teachers' Level of Responsiveness After HAND Implementation

Following the implementation of HAND, a post-assessment was conducted to evaluate changes in teachers' responsiveness. Table 2 presents the mean scores for each dimension after the implementation.

Table 2

Teachers' Level of Responsiveness in Child Protection Policy Implementation After HAND (N=30)

Dimension	Mean Score	SD	Interpretation
Awareness	4.35	0.18	Often
Understanding	4.27	0.21	Often
Adherence	4.19	0.24	Often
Proactivity	3.96	0.31	Often

Dimension	Mean Score	SD	Interpretation
Supportiveness	4.42	0.15	Often
Overall	4.24	0.22	Often

The post-implementation results revealed a substantial improvement across all dimensions. The overall responsiveness level increased to "Often" (M = 4.24, SD = 0.22). Most notably, the "Proactivity" dimension, which had the lowest pre-implementation score, showed a marked improvement from "Rarely" (M = 2.68) to "Often" (M = 3.96). "Supportiveness" remained the highest-rated dimension (M = 4.42, SD = 0.15).

The qualitative data from post-implementation focus group discussions reflected these improvements:

1. "The HAND program gave me a much clearer understanding of my responsibilities. I now know exactly what steps to take when I suspect a child protection issue." (Teacher 9)
2. "I feel empowered to advocate for students' safety. The training and resources provided have been instrumental in building my confidence." (Teacher 22)

These findings were consistent with research by Scott & Barrett (2020), who found that comprehensive training and clear protocols significantly enhanced educators' capacity to address child protection concerns.

Research Question 3: Significant Difference Before and After HAND Implementation

To determine if there was a significant difference in teachers' responsiveness before and after HAND implementation, a paired t-test was conducted on the overall scores and scores for each dimension. Table 3 presents the results of this analysis.

Table 3

Paired t-test Results Comparing Pre- and Post-Implementation Responsiveness (N=30)

Dimension	Pre-Implementation Mean (SD)	Post-Implementation Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)	Interpretation
Awareness	3.22 (0.26)	4.35 (0.18)	1.13	18.43	<.001**	0.85	Large
Understanding	3.15 (0.24)	4.27 (0.21)	1.12	17.96	<.001**	0.83	Large
Adherence	3.07 (0.31)	4.19 (0.24)	1.12	16.42	<.001**	0.81	Large

Dimension	Pre-Implementation Mean (SD)	Post-Implementation Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)	Interpretation
Proactivity	2.68 (0.45)	3.96 (0.31)	1.28	19.87	<.001**	0.87	Large
Supportiveness	3.28 (0.19)	4.42 (0.15)	1.14	21.05	<.001**	0.89	Large
Overall	3.08 (0.32)	4.24 (0.22)	1.16	18.75	<.001**	0.86	Large

Note: ** indicates significance at $p < .001$

The results revealed a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$) in teachers' overall responsiveness before and after the implementation of HAND, with a large effect size ($d = 0.86$). Significant improvements were observed across all dimensions, with effect sizes ranging from 0.81 to 0.89, all interpreted as "Large" based on Rosenthal's (1994) criteria. The most substantial improvement was in the "Proactivity" dimension, with a mean difference of 1.28 points.

These findings led to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0 : There was no significant difference in the teachers' level of responsiveness in the implementation of Child Protection Policy before and after HAND was implemented). The significant improvements across all dimensions provided strong evidence for the effectiveness of the HAND program in enhancing teachers' responsiveness to child protection policy implementation.

Research Question 4: How HAND Intensified Teachers' Responsiveness

The qualitative data from focus group discussions and open-ended responses in the observation checklist provided insights into how HAND intensified teachers' responsiveness. Thematic analysis using Erlington and Brysiewicz's (2017) model identified three primary themes: (1) Knowledge Enhancement and Clarity, (2) Confidence Building and Empowerment, and (3) Collaborative Support Systems.

1. Knowledge Enhancement and Clarity

The HAND program significantly improved teachers' knowledge about child protection policies and procedures. The information dissemination component, which included seminars and orientation sessions, was particularly effective in clarifying roles and responsibilities:

1. "The seminars helped clarify exactly what signs to look for and what procedures to follow. Everything is much clearer now." (Teacher 7)
2. "Having concrete guidelines and flow charts for reporting made a huge difference in my understanding." (Teacher 15)
3. This finding echoed research by Patchin & Hinduja (2018), who emphasized the importance of clear guidelines and protocols in effective policy implementation.

2. Confidence Building and Empowerment

Teachers reported increased confidence in addressing child protection concerns after participating in HAND:

1. "Before, I was afraid of making mistakes or overstepping boundaries. Now I feel confident in my ability to respond appropriately to concerning situations." (Teacher 11)
2. "The role-playing exercises we did during training gave me practical experience in handling difficult conversations with students and parents." (Teacher 25)

This aligns with findings from Panela (2022a), who noted that teachers "persevere to do what they can...and instill light and hope not only to themselves but for the people they are serving" when provided with adequate support systems.

3. Collaborative Support Systems

The formation of a Child Protection Policy Committee and coordination with external agencies created a robust support system that teachers found invaluable:

1. "Knowing that I'm not alone in handling these sensitive issues is reassuring. The committee provides guidance when I'm unsure." (Teacher 3)
2. "The collaboration with the Women & Child Protection Desk has been extremely helpful. Having direct contact with professionals in this field makes us more effective." (Teacher 19)

This theme aligned with the findings of Melton et al. (2017), who emphasized the importance of collaborative approaches in child protection, and Panela (2022b), who found that "forming faculty support groups gave the necessary boost to really perform beyond expectations."

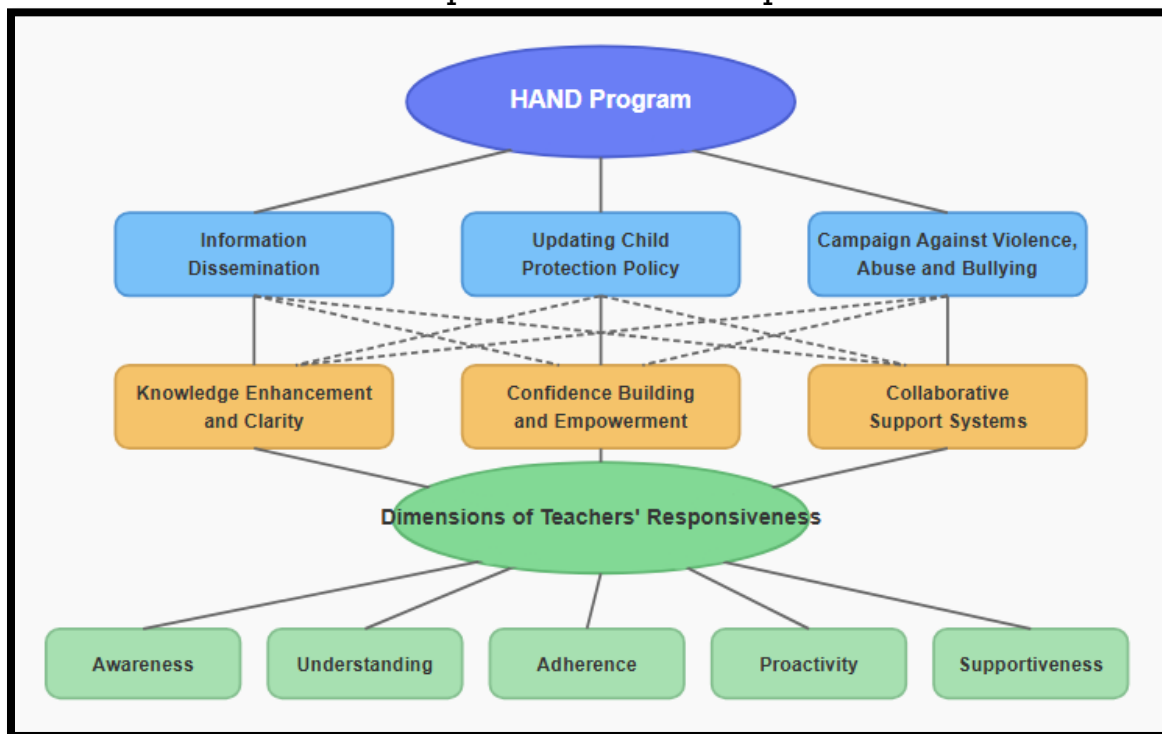
The proposed framework in Figure 1 illustrates the dynamic relationship between the HAND program components, the emergent themes, and the dimensions of teachers' responsiveness. The three core components of HAND—Information Dissemination, Updating of Existing Localized Child Protection Policy, and Campaign Against Violence, Abuse and Bullying—operated in synergy to create a comprehensive intervention. While each component had its primary influence on a specific theme (as shown by solid lines), they also contributed to the development of other themes (indicated by dashed lines), demonstrating the integrated nature of the program. This interconnectedness aligns with

Melton et al.'s (2017) assertion that effective child protection requires coordinated approaches that address multiple aspects of teachers' professional development and institutional support.

The framework further demonstrates how the three identified themes—Knowledge Enhancement and Clarity, Confidence Building and Empowerment, and Collaborative Support Systems—served as crucial mediating factors between program activities and outcomes. Knowledge Enhancement provided the cognitive foundation, addressing what Patchin & Hinduja (2018) identified as a critical prerequisite for effective policy implementation. Confidence Building tapped into the affective domain, echoing Panela's (2022a) observation that teachers need emotional support to "instill light and hope" during challenging circumstances. The Collaborative Support Systems theme created the organizational infrastructure necessary for sustained implementation, reflecting Panela's (2022b) finding that "forming faculty support groups gave the necessary boost to really perform beyond expectations." Together, these themes created a comprehensive scaffold for improving all dimensions of teachers' responsiveness.

Figure 1

Proposed Framework of HAND's Impact on Teachers' Responsiveness



The analysis revealed that HAND's comprehensive approach addressed multiple aspects of teachers' needs, from knowledge acquisition to practical support. The program's multifaceted nature ensured that teachers not only gained understanding but also developed the skills and confidence to apply that knowledge effectively. The greatest improvements occurred in the Proactivity dimension, suggesting that the combination of

knowledge, confidence, and supportive systems was particularly effective in transforming passive awareness into active engagement with child protection responsibilities. This transformation echoes López & Andrews' (2016) observation that effective child protection requires not just policy awareness but a deeper cultural shift toward proactive responsibility for children's well-being. The framework thus provides a valuable model for understanding how comprehensive interventions can create meaningful change in teachers' approach to child protection.

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Reflection

The findings of this action research prompted several important reflections on the implementation of child protection policies in educational settings and the effectiveness of the HAND program in enhancing teachers' responsiveness.

Reflection on Teachers' Initial Responsiveness

The pre-implementation assessment revealed that teachers had moderate awareness and understanding of child protection policies but lacked proactivity in implementation. This finding resonated with the observation by López & Andrews (2016) that simply having policies in place is insufficient without adequate training and support for implementation. The "Sometimes" level of responsiveness across most dimensions suggested that teachers recognized the importance of child protection but lacked the tools, confidence, or clear guidance to fully embrace their roles.

Particularly concerning was the low score in the "Proactivity" dimension, indicating that teachers rarely took initiative in child protection matters. This passive approach potentially left vulnerable students without adequate support, as noted by Finkelhor et al. (2009), who emphasized that proactive identification and intervention are crucial for effective child protection.

This initial state reflected the broader challenges in the Philippine educational context, where despite legal frameworks for child protection, implementation at the school level often remains inconsistent (UNICEF Philippines, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic likely exacerbated these challenges, as Panela (2022a) observed that teachers experienced "a really difficult time adjusting to an out of the ordinary situation."

Reflection on the Transformation Through HAND

The significant improvement in teachers' responsiveness after HAND implementation demonstrated the program's effectiveness in addressing the identified gaps. The

transformation from a "Sometimes" to an "Often" level of responsiveness represented a substantial shift in teachers' approach to child protection.

The large effect sizes across all dimensions suggested that HAND's comprehensive approach—combining information dissemination, policy updating, and campaigns against violence and abuse—successfully addressed multiple aspects of teachers' needs. This multi-faceted approach aligned with best practices identified by Shakeshaft et al. (2008), who advocated for combining awareness-raising, skill-building, and systemic support.

Most remarkable was the improvement in "Proactivity," which saw the largest mean difference (1.28 points). This shift from rare to frequent proactive engagement with child protection matters represented a fundamental change in teachers' mindset—from passive observers to active advocates for children's safety and well-being.

The qualitative findings revealed that HAND fostered a sense of collective responsibility and community support, creating what Melton et al. (2017) described as a "protective environment" where child safety becomes everyone's concern. The collaborative aspects of HAND, particularly the formation of support networks and coordination with external agencies, appeared to be key factors in this transformation.

Reflection on the Broader Implications

This action research demonstrated that enhancing teachers' responsiveness to child protection policies requires more than simply disseminating information—it necessitates building capacity, confidence, and support systems. The findings supported Panela's (2022b) observation that "forming faculty support groups gave the necessary boost to really perform beyond expectations."

The results also highlighted the importance of context-specific interventions. HAND was designed with the particular needs and challenges of Bantayan National High School in mind, incorporating local knowledge and resources. This localized approach likely contributed to its effectiveness, as it addressed the specific barriers teachers faced in their particular context.

The COVID-19 pandemic created additional challenges for child protection efforts, as noted by Panela (2022a), yet HAND demonstrated that meaningful improvements were possible even amid these constraints. The program's success suggested that with appropriate support and resources, teachers could overcome significant obstacles to fulfill their child protection responsibilities.

Finally, the sustained improvement across all dimensions of responsiveness indicated that HAND's impact went beyond superficial change—it appeared to foster a deeper

transformation in teachers' attitudes and practices. This aligned with the findings of Cross et al. (2012), who noted that effective child protection programs must address both knowledge and cultural factors to create lasting change.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

This action research provided compelling evidence for the effectiveness of the Heartful Action Network and Development (HAND) program in intensifying teachers' responsiveness to child protection policies at Bantayan National High School. The findings demonstrated significant improvements across all dimensions of responsiveness—awareness, understanding, adherence, proactivity, and supportiveness—with large effect sizes indicating the substantial impact of the intervention.

Before HAND implementation, teachers exhibited a moderate but inconsistent level of responsiveness to child protection policies, with particularly low scores in proactivity. This initial state reflected broader challenges in translating child protection policies into consistent practice, as identified by previous research (Gilbert et al., 2009; UNICEF Philippines, 2020). The implementation of HAND, with its comprehensive approach combining information dissemination, policy updating, and campaigns against violence and abuse, transformed teachers' responsiveness to a consistently high level.

The qualitative findings revealed that HAND's effectiveness stemmed from three key mechanisms: knowledge enhancement and clarity, confidence building and empowerment, and collaborative support systems. These mechanisms addressed not only teachers' informational needs but also the emotional and practical aspects of child protection work, creating a holistic support framework that enabled meaningful change.

The success of HAND underscored the importance of comprehensive, context-specific approaches to enhancing child protection in educational settings. As Panela (2022a, 2022b) observed in related contexts, teachers can demonstrate remarkable resilience and commitment when provided with appropriate support structures, even amid challenging circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ultimately, this research affirmed that enhancing teachers' responsiveness to child protection policies is not merely a matter of policy dissemination but requires intentional capacity building, confidence development, and the creation of supportive communities of practice. HAND provided a model for such comprehensive intervention, demonstrating that significant improvements in child protection practices are achievable within the Philippine educational context.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this action research, the following recommendations are

proposed to further strengthen child protection efforts at Bantayan National High School and potentially in other educational settings:

- **Sustain and Expand the HAND Program**

- The demonstrated effectiveness of HAND warrants its continuation and potential expansion. Regular refresher sessions should be conducted to maintain the high level of responsiveness achieved. The program could be expanded to include other stakeholders, such as non-teaching staff, parents, and community members, creating a more comprehensive protective environment for children.

- **Formalize Collaborative Networks**

- The Child Protection Policy Committee and connections with external agencies proved valuable in supporting teachers' responsiveness. These collaborative networks should be formalized through memoranda of understanding and regular coordination meetings to ensure sustainability. As Melton et al. (2017) emphasized, effective child protection requires coordinated community responses.

- **Develop Specialized Training Modules**

- While HAND improved overall responsiveness, specific areas might benefit from more targeted training. Specialized modules addressing complex issues such as online safety (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018), trauma-informed approaches (SAMHSA, 2014), and cultural sensitivity in child protection (López & Andrews, 2016) could further enhance teachers' capacity to respond to diverse child protection challenges.

- **Incorporate Student Voice**

- Future iterations of HAND should actively involve students in age-appropriate ways, recognizing their agency and perspectives in child protection efforts. As Scott & Barrett (2020) noted, empowering students to participate in safety initiatives can enhance the effectiveness of child protection measures.

- **Establish Regular Monitoring and Evaluation**

- To ensure sustained effectiveness, regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established to track teachers' responsiveness and identify emerging challenges. This could include periodic self-assessments, peer observations, and feedback from students and parents, creating a continuous improvement cycle.

- **Address Systemic Barriers**

- Some challenges to effective child protection may stem from systemic factors beyond the school level. Advocacy efforts should address these broader barriers, potentially including policy recommendations to education authorities regarding resource allocation, staffing, and institutional support for child protection initiatives.

- **Document and Share Best Practices**

- The successful strategies and lessons learned from HAND should be documented and shared with other schools and districts. Creating a repository of best practices, success stories, and practical tools could benefit the broader educational community in enhancing child protection efforts.

- **Explore Digital Platforms for Support**

- Building on Panela's (2022b) findings regarding technology use in educational settings, digital platforms could be explored as supplementary tools for child protection training, reporting, and support. However, care should be taken to balance technology use with face-to-face support systems, recognizing both the potential and limitations of digital approaches.

These recommendations aim to build on the success of HAND while addressing potential areas for growth and sustainability. By continuing to strengthen teachers' responsiveness to child protection policies, Bantayan National High School can create an increasingly safe and nurturing environment where all students can thrive.

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