

Child Safeguarding Standards and Perceived School Readiness in Nepal


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ABSTRACT

Child safeguarding strategy and school readiness are crucial for creating a safe and sound learning environment in schools. In this context, this study intends to assess the influence of child safeguarding strategy on school readiness. So, the researcher carried the cross-sectional survey as the research design and adopted the self-administer questionnaire to collect data from 393 primary level school teachers from the Bagmati province of Nepal. After gathering data, the linear regression model was employed to analyze the data for obtaining results. This study obtained the significant relationship between child safeguarding strategy and school readiness. In the line with this result, school readiness is highly contributed by child safeguarding strategy in school settings. Overall, it is settled that ensuring child safeguarding strategies like policy, people, procedure, and accountability are essential for promoting school readiness. Thus, the child safeguarding strategy is necessary to establish a safe and sound environment for learning, which is also the motto of school readiness.

KEYWORDS

Accountability; child safeguarding strategy; people; policy; procedure; school readiness.

INTRODUCTION

A successful school is a top priority for school stakeholders, and it is determined by a number of criteria. One of them is ensuring that pupils have a sound and safe learning environment. This safe learning environment is an essential component of school preparedness (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2012; Williams & Lerner, 2019). The school preparedness is defined as school readiness (High, Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care [CECADC], & Council on School Health [CSH], 2016) and it is also created by establishing child safeguarding standards (Victoria State Government [VSG], 2016). Child safeguarding standards are defined as a set of rules that must be met during all school operations in order to keep children safe. Moreover, child safeguarding standards include policy, people, procedures, and accountability as its dimensions (Keeping Children Safe [KCS], 2014). Taking this into account, the four child safeguarding criteria create a secure and protected learning environment for pupils in school. Creating a safe and secure atmosphere is thus a necessary criterion for students' school readiness.

School readiness refers to a ready school, which implies developing conducive learning settings for children. It is the school's and instructors' entire readiness to create favorable circumstances that has led to the best learning among their students (UNICEF, 2012). The teaching style, building a learning atmosphere, relationships with instructors, and use of school educational technologies all contribute to producing favorable learning settings (Dangol & Shrestha, 2019). In addition, a positive learning environment and excellent relationships are related with school child safeguarding requirements. As a result, child safeguarding guidelines are valuable for planning, implementing, and monitoring all available remedies to protect their pupils from damage and abuse in school (KCS, 2014). These tasks fall under school readiness, and their quality in entire organizations depended on child safeguarding standards.

The child safeguarding guidelines foster a child-friendly learning environment on school grounds by keeping all children safe from various types of harm (e.g., physical abuse, sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation, neglect, emotional abuse, and commercial exploitation). As a result, low child protection measures in schools may cause many children to be afraid and further victimize them through corporal punishment (e.g., Plan Nepal, 2011 as cited in Bhattarai & Yadav, 2012; Khanal, 2016; Shrestha, 2018), sexual abuse, and harassments (UNICEF, 2015; UNICEF, 2018). Also, this lacking of poor child safeguarding standards affect school readiness. For instance, UNICEF (2015) collaboratively claims that more than 80% of students encounter violence in schools of Nepal. This finding is similar to Khanal and Park (2016), where the author elucidates that 82% of students suffered from physical punishment in Nepal. Besides, the Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN, n.d.) argues that many girls experienced physical punishments, sexual abuse, and exploitation in their schools. Moreover, some female students were victims of rape by their male teachers and classmates (Karki & Singh, 2008). This evidence of corporal punishment and sexual abuse signifies the poor child safeguarding practices in

schools of Nepal. So, it discloses that the child safeguarding standards and student readiness are still the least priorities in the school. That's why the researcher aims to examine the relationship between child safeguarding standards and school readiness in schools of Nepal.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Child Safeguarding Standards

Child safeguarding refers to the organization's efforts to ensure the wellbeing of children and their protection from injury and abuse. It assures that there are no harmful behaviour such as abuse, harassment, discrimination, violence, or neglect in the school. So, the child safeguarding standards ensure the organization's degree of excellence. It is a strategy which made promises by schools to guarantee that their students are not harmed or are protected from all sorts of abuse, harassment, inequity, violence, and neglect (e.g., UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC], 1990). The KCS has internationally acknowledged international child safeguarding standards in four areas: policy, people, procedures, and accountability.

Policy

A comprehensive framework of plans and processes to lead personnel to guarantee child protection in the school is referred to as policy (Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare [MoWCSW] and Central Child Welfare Board [CCWB], 2015). The policy are written in the statement form which is used to express the organization's objective. Furthermore, a governance body of a school develops and implements child safeguarding policy as a method. The child protection policy shows how the school commits to preventing damage to children (International College [IC], 2019). It depicts the outline of steps that must be considered in order to prevent events from occurring in the school.

People

People are the most important stakeholders in ensuring that the school's child protection requirements are followed (UNICEF, 2014). People are defined under the child safeguarding guidelines as all members of a school's staff and associates who are given explicit duties. Mostly, teachers falls under the category of people in the school. So, the school also sets standards for individuals who are hired in terms of supporting and executing child protection measures.

Procedures

Procedures for executing the policy for creating a child-safe environment in the school are connected to child safeguarding requirements. It is a series of actions that explains how child protection may be implemented in a school (Committee for Children [CC], 2014). As a result, procedures refer to a series of processes that must be followed in order to create a child-safe environment.

Accountability

Accountability relates to a school's overall duty for child safety practices, which must be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. It helps to examine the current state of child safeguarding standards, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, while putting them into

practice (KCS, 2014). As a result, it gives input to the overall child protection standards, which will be critical throughout implementation.

School Readiness

It is referred to as a ready school because it creates a supportive atmosphere for student learning. Prior education experience varies and differs around the globe, influencing school preparedness (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2007). School readiness is an important component of children's high educational achievement (Dangol & Shrestha, 2019) in the schools of Nepal. In the school settings, Dangol (2017) identified that the majority of school students claims their teacher's exhibits high level of school readiness towards teaching learning process. According to the Dangol (2017), elements such as the instructor and school characteristics help to determining a high degree of student preparation by making the classroom uncomfortable, intelligible, inspiring, and stimulating enthusiasm in learning. Thus, the school readiness incorporates the instructional program implemented in the classroom, instructional medium, education principles, teaching style, school structure, appropriate time spent to learning in the classroom, adequate supply of learning resources, and teacher competency, among other things. Connecting it, the variables of school readiness described by UNICEF (2012) in the school readiness and transitions are as:

Teaching Style of Teacher

The techniques which are preferred by teachers to address issues and carry out activities for completing teaching and learning activities in the classroom are referred to as the teaching style (Sternberg & Zhang, 2001). The teaching style of teacher incorporates the methods, materials, and educational technology which emphasized student and activity centered teaching in the classroom.

Creating Learning Environment

A learning environment is a place where students feel comfortable and encouraged while also being motivated by their surroundings in their quest of knowledge. The school and teacher have a crucial role to create the safe and sound learning environment by establishing mutual assist and courteous communication with their students (Clapper, 2010). Similarly, the school also creates readiness among student by maintaining their learning expectations (UNICEF, 2012) and using of appropriate medium of instructions (Tomlinson, 2003) in the classroom.

Creating Continuity

The continuation of education in the case of a holiday, protracted school shutdown or student absence is known as continuity of learning. Linking it, the continuity of learning among students can creates by providing the home and class assignments, taking regular class attendance, and maximize the effort for effective learning (Dangol, 2017).

Structure of School

The school structure refers to the school building which are constructed safe and learning friendly, sufficient availability of playground, safe drinking water, sanitation facility, and practical facility to the students. Supporting it, Chorrojprasert (2020) elucidates that these

infrastructures are the basis facilities in the school which needs to be available to students to create learning readiness among them.

Research Gap and Conceptual Framework

From reviewing the literature, the researcher found several studies about child protection and safeguarding (e.g., Hermino, 2017; Jones et al., 2008; McElearney et al., 2011; Munro, 2010) and school readiness (e.g., Dangol & Shrestha, 2019, 2020; Duncan et al., 2007; Lewit & Baker, 1995; Snow, 2010) in the context of school settings. However, the researcher didn't found any studies about relations between child safeguarding strategy and school readiness in Google scholar and ProQuest database to this date. So this study is crucial for assessing the effects of child safeguarding strategy on school readiness in the school settings of Nepal. Due to this reason, the researcher designed the conceptual framework of this study based on reviewed literature where school readiness is identified as a dependent variable, which is influenced by independent variables as child safeguarding strategy in Figure 1.

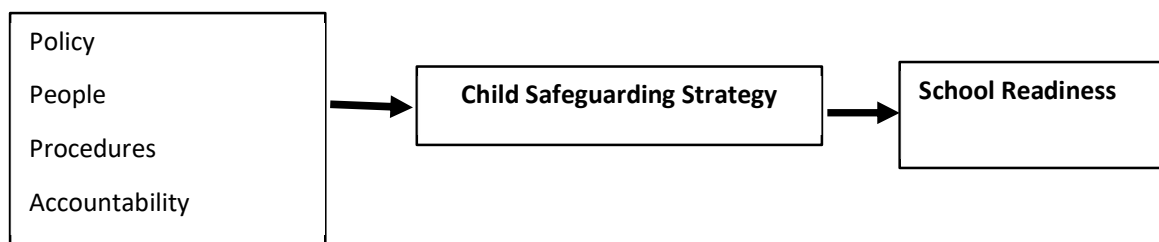


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sampling Procedures

For achieving the purposes of this study, the researcher carried the cross-sectional survey as the research design to examine the contributions of child safeguarding standards on school readiness towards student learning. For this purpose, the researcher identified the Kathmandu valley as the study area and its entire primary school teachers as the study population, which are 22,777 in numbers (Central for Education and Human Resource Development [CEHRD], 2020). The Kathmandu valley is the central part of the Nepal which consist three districts, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur. Altogether these three districts, the Kathmandu valley consists the larger numbers of school teachers and schools than other parts of Nepal. So the researcher determined the sample size of this study as 393 school teachers by adopting Solvin's (1960) approaches at a 95% confidence limit. Then, the researcher employed a multi-stage stratified cluster as the sampling design of this study.

More specifically, the researcher carried the multi-stage stratified cluster sampling in five levels. In the first level, the researcher categorized the Kathmandu valley in Metropolitan city,

Sub-metropolitan city, Municipality, and Rural municipality based on the political division of local levels (e.g. Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2014). However, the Sub-metropolitan city is not exists in Kathmandu valley. So, the researchers considers only three clusters in the Kathmandu valley. In the second level, the researcher picked randomly one municipality from all these three categories. It means that the researcher selected three municipalities from the entire Kathmandu valley. Then, the researcher further categorized those selected municipalities at the ward level according to the political division done by the Nepal government. So the researcher randomly picked three wards of municipalities that represent the entire Kathmandu valley on the basis of its development process. After this, the researcher prepared the list of schools and their teachers within those selected three wards as the fourth level of sampling procedures. Finally, the researcher continuously picked those schools and their entire available teachers on the day of data collection as a sample of this study until the required numbers are not fulfilled.

Tools and Procedures of Data Collection

After this, the researcher collected the data from the selected sample teachers with the help of the structured questionnaire. The questionnaire regarding child safeguarding strategy and school readiness is adopted and from KCS (2014) and Dangol (2017) respectively. After this, the scale is contextualized in the Nepali context with help of language editors and school teachers. The contextualized scale regarding child safeguarding strategy and school readiness incorporated 24 and 9 items. Then, the researcher employed the modified scale in the pilot testing by taking the pilot sample as 10 % (n=40) of the total sample (e.g., Hertzog, 2008) of this study. The pilot testing contributed researcher to establish the high internal consistency of scale by obtaining a high Cronbach alpha value (> 0.7) (Santos, 1999) of child safeguarding strategy and school readiness as .748 and .735 respectively. After ensuring internal consistency of scale, the researcher carried the data collection process via a Google form. The Google forms are sent to all respondents through their mail and in their messenger with request and consent letters. Then, the collected data was downloaded from Google forms in an excel file.

Data Analysis Procedures

The downloaded data in the excel file from Google form was further transformed in the SPSS software. Then, the researcher ensured the assumptions of multiple regression analysis like the normality of data, the absence of multicollinearity and autocorrelation, and linearity (e.g., Shrestha & Dangol, 2020). After ensuring its assumptions, the researcher employed the linear regression model to examine the influences of child safeguarding on the school readiness of school teachers.

RESULTS

Testing the Assumptions of Regression Analysis

The researcher ensured the assumptions (e.g., normality, linearity, and absence of multicollinearity and autocorrelation) after performing regression analysis in this study (Table 1).

Table 1. Assumptions regarding Correlation and Regression Analysis

Dimensions of IL	Skewness	Kurtosis	Linearity	Collinearity Statistics		Durbin-Watson
				Tolerance	VIF	
School Readiness	-.495	.458	0.421	1.00	1.00	1.857
Child Safeguarding Strategy	-.526	.812				

*Dependent variable = School Readiness, **Independent Variable = Child Safeguarding Strategy

The normality of data is established by obtaining values of Kurtosis and Skewness of school readiness (Zkurt = -.458, Zskew = -.495) and child safeguarding strategy (Zkurt = .812, Zskew = .458). The obtained values of kurtosis and Skewness is lie in the range of ±1 which ensured the normal distribution of the data (Garson, 2012) which allowed the researcher to perform a regression analysis in this study. Similarly, the researcher sketched the scatter plots (Figure 2) regarding school readiness against child safeguarding strategy (R² linear= 0.421) which are in between ±1. It means that the obtained data are in linear forms.

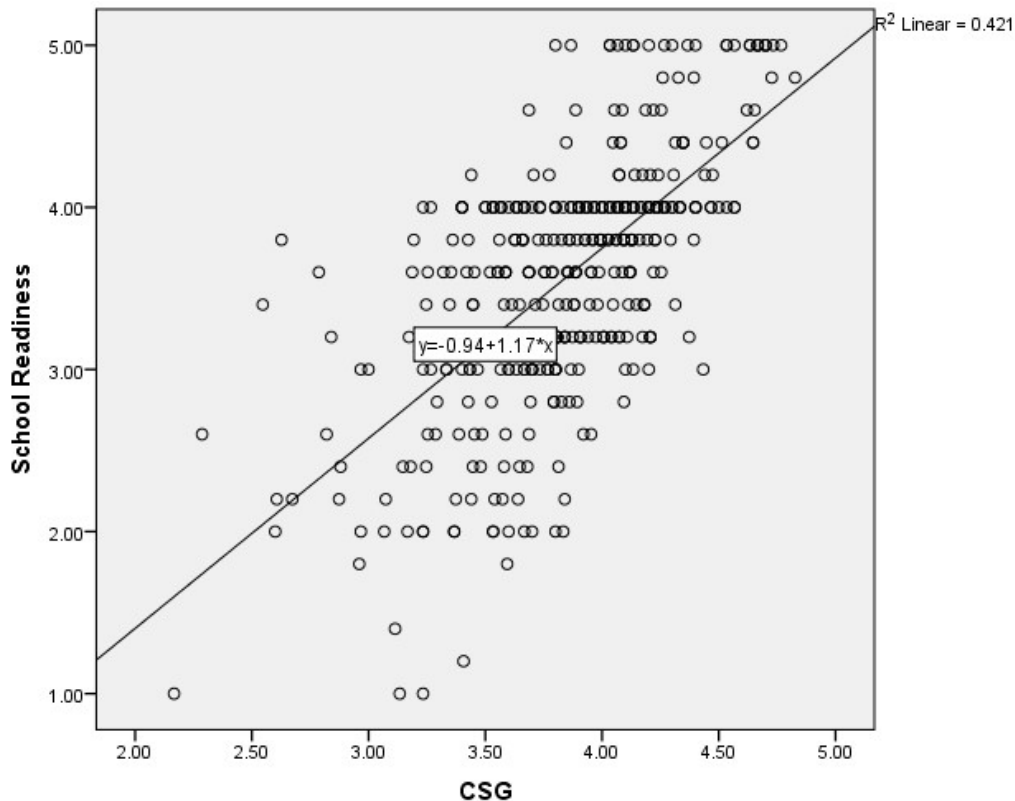


Figure 2. Linearity between Child Safeguarding Strategy and School Readiness

Moreover, the researcher carried multicollinearity test by deriving the values of Tolerance ($T=1-R^2$) and Variance Inflation Factor ($VIF=1/T$) as 1.00 and 1.00. The obtained values of T ($<.20$) and VIF (>4.0) show that there is an absence of multicollinearity (Garson, 2012) between Child safeguarding strategy and school readiness. Furthermore, the value of the Durbin-Watson test is derived as 1.857 which is between 1.5 and 2.5. So the obtained values of the Durbin-Watson test ensured the absence of correlation (e.g., Garson, 2012; Lama & Shrestha, 2020) between child safeguarding strategy and school readiness. Overall, the ensuring of normality and linearity of data with the absence of multicollinearity and autocorrelation permits the researcher to perform linear regression analysis in this study.

Influences of Child Safeguarding Strategy in School Readiness

The researcher carried a regression analysis model to examine the effects of child safeguarding strategy on school readiness. Considering this model ($Y = a + bX$), the child safeguarding strategy (X) and school readiness (Y) were taken as independent and dependent variables respectively in Table 2.

Table 2. Regression Analysis between Child Safeguarding Strategy and School Readiness

Model	UC		SC	T	Sig.	R	RS	ARS	ANOVA	
	B	SE	Beta						F	Sig.
(Constant)	-.94	.268		-3.52	.00					
Child Safeguarding Strategy	1.17	.069	.65	16.96	.00	.65 ^a	.42	.42	287.59	.00 ^b

^a Predictors (Constant): Child Safeguarding Strategy, ^b Dependent Variable: School Readiness

*UC: Unstandardized Coefficients, SC: Standardized Coefficients, RS: R Square, ARS: Adjusted R Square, SE: Std. Error

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

In this model, 'a' and 'b' are referred to as constant and regression coefficients. Then, the first output is associated with the model summary, which derived R-value as .65. The obtained value of R indicated that there is a high correlation between child safeguarding strategy and school readiness. In the line with this, the derived value of adjusted R square ($r^2 = .42 \times 100 = 42\%$) indicates that this regression model is moderately fitted to the data. Similarly in the second output, the derived values ($F = 287.59, p = .00$) from the second output as the ANOVA table indicates that child safeguarding strategy significantly predicts the school readiness in the regression model. Finally, in the third output, values of "a" and "b" considering the regression model are derived as -.94 and 1.17 respectively. Then the regression model is computing as " $Y = -.94 + 1.17 X$ ", where the obtained values of regression coefficient refer that 1 unit changes in child safeguarding strategy get 1.17 times more increases in school readiness. It means that the child safeguarding strategy significantly ($p < 0.05$) makes 117% changes in

school readiness. So school readiness is positively influenced by child safeguarding strategy in school settings.

DISCUSSION

The derived results confirm that there is a positive relationship between child safeguarding strategy and school readiness. Moreover, the child safeguarding strategy determines a high degree of school readiness in school settings. These findings are supported by KCS (2014) who advocates that the child safeguarding strategy aims to create a safe and sound learning environment among students in their schools. It ensures free from activities which harms children like child abuse, harassment, exploitation, punishment, and other injurious activities (Mansoor et al., 2019) in the school. Free from these activities ensure the holistic development of the child and securing their physical and mental safety. Feeling of safety and free from risk builds confidence and eagerness among students to learn (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019) in the school. This conceptualization of feeling safe and the development of eagerness to learn is also related to school readiness.

As analogous to the child safeguarding strategy, school readiness is the task that prepares schools for making a safe and sound environment for student learning (Dangol & Shrestha, 2019). The creation of a safe and sound environment assures students that they are physically and mentally free from risks by others. This safe physical and mental space assures them that they are in the safe zone for learning (Oregon Department of Education [ODOE] & Oregon Health Authority [OHA], 2021). So this safe and sound environment inspires them to be ready for learning in the school. The development of a safe and sound environment is common between both child safeguarding strategy and school readiness. That's why the motives of school readiness are compatible with the child safeguarding strategy. This fact is revealed in this study as the result where child safeguarding strategy has a positive relationship with school readiness.

The child safeguarding strategy influences school readiness which is also depicted in this study. This result is seeming supported by conceptual prepositions of both child safeguarding strategy (e.g., KCS, 2014) and school readiness (e.g., Dangol & Shrestha, 2019). This literature shows that both (child safeguarding strategy and school readiness) have analogous aims as creating a safe and sound environment for students which helps them in ensuring learning readiness in the context of school. In the child safeguarding strategy, the school develops the policy and implements it for creating a safe environment in the school (KCS, 2014). In addition, Department for Children, Schools, and Families (DOCSF, 2010) states that school needs to recruit only those personnel who are not possibly threats to the students concerning their safety. The consideration while recruiting teachers in relation to child safety also ensures the child safe guarding strategy. Similarly, the school employs only those procedures which are not harmful and removes the risk to the students. Finally, the child safeguarding strategy makes school families accountable for creating a safe learning environment (KCS, 2014). These all strategy of child safeguarding is related to the school readiness. So the child safeguarding strategy

enhances school readiness in the school settings. The increment of the school readiness increases the overall learning readiness and supports the academic achievement of the school.

CONCLUSIONS

Child safeguarding strategy contributes to school readiness in settings of school is explicated in this study. This study claims that an increment in child safeguarding strategy brought a 1.17 times increase in school readiness which is one crucial part of learning readiness. So child safeguarding strategy is related to school readiness which ensures a safe and sound learning environment for students in school. That's why the child safeguarding strategy and school readiness promote the academic achievement of the school. Overall, the synergy between child safeguarding strategy and school readiness promotes high academic achievement through ensuring a sound and safe learning environment in schools.

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