

## **Policy Gaps in School Safety and Student Protection: A Comparative Case Study of Recent School Violence in Malaysia**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores policy gaps in school safety and student protection through a comparative case study of recent school violence incidents in Malaysia. Using qualitative document analysis, data were gathered from credible online news reports, government policy documents, and institutional publications to assess how existing frameworks address issues of bullying, assault, and student welfare. The findings reveal inconsistencies between policy intent and implementation, particularly in areas of enforcement, accountability, and preventive education. The study highlights the urgent need for a standardized national safety audit and stronger policy mechanisms to ensure that Malaysian schools provide safe learning environments free from violence and neglect.

**Keywords:** school safety, student protection, policy gaps, school violence

### **Introduction**

School safety has become a growing concern in Malaysia following several high-profile incidents of violence that have raised questions about the effectiveness of existing protection policies. Cases such as the fatal stabbing of a student in Bandar Utama (*The Star*, Zolkepli, 2025) and the alleged gang rape of a Form Three girl in Melaka (Bahrom, 2025) have highlighted serious lapses in school security and student supervision. Despite the presence of guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2023), the recurrence of such events indicates a systemic problem in the implementation and enforcement of safety measures. These incidents underscore the urgency of reassessing current frameworks to ensure that schools are secure environments conducive to learning and personal development.

The problem statement arises from a mismatch between policy formulation and ground-level practice in Malaysian educational institutions. While existing circulars and preventive programs address bullying and violence conceptually, enforcement remains inconsistent across schools and regions (Heng & Peredaryenko, 2025). This inconsistency has contributed to policy gaps that leave students vulnerable to harm, both physically and psychologically. Furthermore, media reports on cases like the Zara Qairina bullying incident (*The Star*, Sokial, 2025) suggest that disciplinary action often occurs only after severe incidents gain public attention. Therefore, a clearer understanding of how school safety policies are operationalized in practice is essential to identify weaknesses and propose more effective interventions.

The research problem focuses on how policy gaps contribute to continued cases of school violence and inadequate protection for students in Malaysia. Specifically, the study seeks to determine why existing safety policies have failed to prevent serious

incidents and how institutional responses vary across cases. The guiding research questions include: (1) What are the main policy gaps in school safety and student protection in Malaysia? (2) How do these gaps affect the management of school violence cases? and (3) What improvements can be made to strengthen policy enforcement and preventive mechanisms? These questions aim to uncover the underlying causes of policy ineffectiveness and offer insights into more sustainable solutions.

The objectives of this study are to analyze the implementation of school safety policies, identify critical gaps between policy and practice, and recommend measures to enhance student protection. By comparing multiple case studies of recent school violence, this research aims to evaluate the degree to which Malaysia's education policies align with international standards for school safety (Free Malaysia Today, 2025). Additionally, it seeks to promote accountability among school authorities, educators, and policymakers by emphasizing the importance of preventive frameworks rather than reactive responses. Ultimately, the study contributes to ongoing national discussions on student welfare and aims to support the creation of a safer, more responsive education system for all Malaysian learners.

## **Literature Review**

School safety has been widely recognized as a key determinant of students' well-being and academic success, yet recent events in Malaysia have exposed persistent weaknesses in the system. Earlier studies emphasize that effective school safety policies rely on both preventive and responsive strategies that ensure a secure learning environment (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2004). However, despite Malaysia's commitment to educational reforms, incidents such as bullying, assault, and even fatal violence continue to occur, raising doubts about the depth of policy implementation (Heng & Peredaryenko, 2025). This suggests that while safety guidelines exist on paper, their translation into school-level practices remains inconsistent and reactive.

The Malaysian Ministry of Education has developed frameworks such as the *Garis Panduan Pengurusan Salah Laku Buli di Institusi Pendidikan* (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2023), which aims to standardize procedures for handling bullying and violence in schools. These policies, however, often focus more on disciplinary measures after incidents occur rather than on preventive education, counseling, and early intervention. As reported by *The Star* (Sokial, 2025) and *The Rakyat Post* (Bahrom, 2025), schools tend to respond to cases only after they gain media attention, which demonstrates a lack of proactive monitoring and student support systems. The gap between policy creation and ground-level enforcement reflects insufficient training for educators and weak accountability among school administrators.

Scholars have noted that societal and institutional factors both play critical roles in perpetuating school violence. Research by Safrie and Nor (2024) found that overcrowded classrooms, limited counseling resources, and inadequate supervision contribute significantly to bullying behaviors and student conflicts. Moreover, cultural attitudes that normalize aggression among peers can make it difficult for victims to seek help or report incidents. This aligns with Heng and Peredaryenko's (2025) observation that Malaysia's anti-bullying initiatives lack a comprehensive framework that addresses both social and psychological dimensions of student safety.

Consequently, safety interventions tend to focus narrowly on punishment rather than behavioral change or student empowerment.

Another major theme in the literature is the weak inter-agency collaboration between educational institutions, parents, and law enforcement. Free Malaysia Today (2025) highlights that many schools still lack proper crisis management protocols or partnerships with local authorities, leaving students vulnerable in emergencies. Similarly, Reffien and Chan (2020) argue that inconsistent reporting mechanisms make it difficult to gather accurate national data on school violence, hindering evidence-based policymaking. Without systematic data collection and communication across agencies, responses remain fragmented and reactive rather than coordinated and preventive.

Comparative studies from other OECD countries show that successful school safety models integrate continuous teacher training, mental health programs, and active community participation (OECD, 2004). Malaysia's current policies, by contrast, tend to isolate safety management within schools, with limited external oversight or student engagement. The lack of national-level monitoring systems further compounds this problem, as there are no standardized tools to evaluate how schools implement safety guidelines (Heng & Peredaryenko, 2025). This limitation highlights the need for research that bridges the divide between international best practices and Malaysia's localized context, where cultural, institutional, and socio-economic factors play critical roles.

The research gap lies in the absence of comprehensive, empirical evaluations of Malaysia's school safety policies and their actual implementation across diverse school settings. While existing literature and government circulars address bullying and violence conceptually, few studies critically assess their effectiveness or explore the experiences of affected students and educators (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2023; Free Malaysia Today, 2025). Most existing analyses rely on media reports or theoretical discussions rather than longitudinal data or field studies. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by conducting a comparative case analysis of recent incidents to uncover how policy shortcomings manifest in real contexts and to propose reforms that can strengthen both preventive and responsive mechanisms in Malaysian schools.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study approach to examine policy gaps in school safety and student protection following recent incidents of school violence in Malaysia. Data were collected through the analysis of credible online news reports, government publications, and institutional documents from sources such as *The Star* (Zolkepli, 2025; Sokial, 2025) and *The Rakyat Post* (Bahrom, 2025), which provided firsthand accounts and official statements on cases of school violence. Complementary policy documents from the Ministry of Education Malaysia (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2023) and research analyses (Heng & Peredaryenko, 2025; Free Malaysia Today, 2025) were reviewed to assess existing frameworks and identify shortcomings in school safety implementation. Through document analysis, themes related to policy enforcement, stakeholder accountability, and systemic response were coded to highlight inconsistencies between stated policies and actual protection measures in Malaysian schools.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal a significant disconnect between Malaysia's national school safety policies and their implementation at the institutional level. Analysis of recent school violence cases demonstrates that while the Ministry of Education has issued comprehensive guidelines to address misconduct and bullying (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2023), enforcement remains inconsistent. According to Heng and Peredaryenko (2025), many schools lack the administrative capacity and trained personnel to apply these policies effectively, resulting in uneven protection standards. Thematic analysis identified "implementation disparity" as a core theme, showing that policy success depends heavily on the commitment of individual principals rather than systemic oversight.

Quantitative data from the Malaysian Ministry of Education's 2024 internal safety report, cited by Free Malaysia Today (2025), indicate that 23% of schools reported at least one major case of student violence in the past year, with 8% involving severe physical harm. However, only 41% of these incidents were formally documented in accordance with national policy. This discrepancy supports the finding that procedural compliance remains low. The lack of standardized reporting systems contributes to under estimation of actual violence rates, weakening the foundation for evidence-based policy reform.

The second major theme, "reactive enforcement," emerged from both media analysis and policy review. Case studies such as the Bandar Utama school stabbing (*The Star*, Zolkepli, 2025) and the Melaka classroom assault (Bahrom, 2025) revealed that administrative and legal responses typically occurred after public outrage rather than through proactive intervention. Interviews and qualitative data from school safety workshops reviewed in Heng and Peredaryenko (2025) further confirmed that most educators are unaware of formal crisis response procedures until an incident occurs. This suggests that preventive frameworks, though present in policy, are rarely operationalized in daily practice.

A recurring pattern of "institutional silence" was observed in the aftermath of high-profile cases. Schools involved in violent incidents often refrained from releasing detailed information, citing reputation concerns or ongoing investigations (Sokial, 2025). This aligns with the OECD's (2004) observation that institutional reluctance to acknowledge safety failures exacerbates systemic problems. Qualitative evidence suggests that this silence not only delays justice but also discourages victims and parents from reporting, perpetuating a cycle of underreporting and inadequate intervention.

Thematic analysis also revealed "limited parental and community engagement" as a contributing factor to ineffective safety management. Safrie and Nor (2024) emphasized that schools with active parental involvement and transparent communication systems reported 35% fewer bullying incidents compared to those without. However, many Malaysian schools still treat safety as an internal administrative issue, excluding parents from formal decision-making. This isolation undermines trust and limits the potential for community-based prevention programs.

A related statistical trend concerns gender and location disparities in school violence. Reffien and Chan (2020) found that male students in urban secondary schools were

twice as likely to be involved in violent incidents compared to their rural counterparts, largely due to peer pressure, competitive environments, and exposure to social media challenges. In the recent Melaka gang assault case (Bahrom, 2025), social influence and online peer validation were key motivating factors. These findings suggest that school safety policies must incorporate digital literacy and behavioral education to address modern sources of violence.

Policy enforcement data further revealed a structural weakness in school-level accountability. According to Free Malaysia Today (2025), only 38% of schools have an active safety committee, despite national policy requiring all institutions to form one. The absence of such committees leaves disciplinary actions to ad hoc decision-making, increasing inconsistencies in how cases are handled. Heng and Peredaryenko (2025) argue that Malaysia's safety governance remains "directive-heavy but execution-light," meaning that the Ministry provides abundant circulars and manuals but minimal follow-up or monitoring.

From a qualitative perspective, the theme of "emotional trauma and psychological neglect" emerged prominently. Interviews reviewed in Safrie and Nor (2024) showed that 64% of students exposed to violence reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, yet less than half received counseling support. In the Zara Qairina case (*The Star*, Sokial, 2025), reports indicated that both victims and perpetrators lacked access to structured psychological rehabilitation programs. This gap reflects the policy's overemphasis on punishment rather than emotional recovery and resilience building.

The data also highlight "teacher undertraining" as a systemic barrier. Although the 2023 *Garis Panduan Pengurusan Salah Laku Buli* (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2023) mandates training for educators on handling bullying, only 29% of teachers have completed such programs, according to internal ministry statistics reported by Heng and Peredaryenko (2025). Many teachers expressed uncertainty about procedures for reporting or mediating violent incidents. This skill gap weakens the enforcement of policy measures and undermines trust between students and staff.

Another significant finding concerns "policy fragmentation" between federal, state, and school-level authorities. The OECD (2004) warns that decentralized systems without clear inter-agency communication channels are prone to failure during crises. In Malaysia, responsibility for school safety is divided among multiple units, including district offices, local police, and the Ministry of Education, often resulting in slow coordination. Free Malaysia Today (2025) advocates for a unified "National School Safety Council" to harmonize these roles and ensure rapid response mechanisms nationwide.

The study also found that digital surveillance and anonymous reporting tools remain underutilized in Malaysian schools. Although some urban institutions have adopted e-reporting platforms, 72% of schools still rely on manual complaint boxes, which students often fear using (Heng & Peredaryenko, 2025). As a result, bullying and harassment continue unchecked until cases escalate to severe violence. Integrating safe, tech-based reporting systems could provide a crucial preventive mechanism, especially for vulnerable students.

The findings confirm a persistent research and practice gap between policy design and on-the-ground enforcement. Malaysia's current approach remains largely

reactive, addressing violence only after it occurs rather than preventing it through early detection and education. As the OECD (2004) and Safrie and Nor (2024) note, successful school safety systems depend on a continuous cycle of monitoring, feedback, and reform. Bridging this gap requires not only stricter policy enforcement but also investment in teacher training, counseling infrastructure, parental engagement, and data-driven evaluation.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that despite Malaysia's extensive policy framework for school safety and student protection, significant gaps persist in implementation, accountability, and preventive mechanisms. The analysis of recent violent incidents reveals that schools often adopt a reactive rather than proactive approach, with limited coordination between administrators, teachers, parents, and law enforcement agencies (Heng & Peredaryenko, 2025; Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2023). Thematic and statistical data indicate that inadequate training, poor reporting systems, and insufficient psychological support remain major obstacles to effective policy execution. To build safer educational environments, Malaysia must strengthen enforcement through systematic audits, continuous teacher development, and inclusive stakeholder collaboration. Moreover, the government should prioritize data-driven policy evaluation and integrate mental health and digital safety initiatives into the national curriculum to prevent future cases of school violence and ensure holistic student protection (Free Malaysia Today, 2025; Safrie & Nor, 2024).

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