

# More Than In-Locho Parentis: Responsibilities Toward Pupils' Safety In School

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## Abstract

**Background:** This article is trying to understand the issues and challenges faced by the teachers in primary schools as 'in loco parentis' which enabled them to take charge and responsibility on the safety of the pupils to maintain the safe learning environment.

**Objectives:** The aim is to explore the views and perceptions of teachers from four different schools on their roles and responsibilities on the students' safety in the school compounds.

**Design:** Adaptation of qualitative analysis of 'six-phase frameworks' by Braun and Clarke were applied in the semi-structured interview questions. While for the validity and reliability, the guide was taken from Creswell by the involvement of two experienced teachers as inter-raters to evaluate the findings.

**Participants:** Four teachers from a school from Kedah, Kuala Lumpur and two schools from Selangor were selected to participate in this study. The teachers were selected based on their experiences, expertise, as well as their involvement in the school disciplinary unit in their respective schools.

**Key results:** Two main components which hold the key to the safety of the students in schools; the classroom conditions and the communication between teachers, students, and parents.

**Conclusion:** The state of 'in loco parentis' played by the teachers need to be supported by other main components which built the school structure; students as well as their parents. These parties need to work as a team in providing the safest school conditions for the students and finding the best interventions to avoid any incidents from occurring.

**Keywords:** In loco parentis, responsibility, safety, teacher.

## INTRODUCTION

Recorded by Imam Al-Ghazali in regard to the responsibilities of a teachers, the first duty is to accept the students as if they are his very own children unconditionally as his own (Nabih, 2007), as in a hadith of the Prophet (SAW):

"I am to you like a father who desires to save his child from the fires of hell."

As the same as any parents, the main responsibility of a teacher is to make sure the safety of the children is secured, and they are free from harm. When dealing with the safety, it is without any doubt, teachers are the one who directly involved with this matter but with the help and support from various layers of context, including the parents, school administrators and the students. There were multiple studies indicated that pupils have a very high percentage of trust towards teachers and school in dealing with their safety (Mitchell, Kensler & Tschannen-Moran, 2018). By this, we may say that with the cooperation of all; especially from teachers and parents, school is one of the safest ground for the pupils to gain their learning experiences.

Teachers need to possess certain criteria and characteristics especially as a mediator and influencer on the children's behavior (Dousay, Graves, Santos Green & Asino, 2018). This has been highlighted by the Quran in the matter of child education and the role to play in dealing with their safety.

“As part of the mercy of God, you deal with them gently; if you were severe and had a hard heart, they would have broken away from you.” (Al-Quran, 3:159)

As schools are prone to multiple threats, the safety aspects in school have long been discussed by various authorities. The teacher's negligence is always accused to be the contributing factor as pointed by the outsiders. However, we tend to forget that the school's community consists of not just the teachers. There are more than just negligence issues, and we need to take teachers' views into views as they are the people who directly involved (Porsanger, 2021).

Pupils and parents are also the community within the 'eco-system' which are supposed to work together collaboratively, but in many occurrences, they are playing the blame game whenever any incidences occurred. The lack of good rapport between these three has caused other side issues which we tend to overlook, such as the safe physical environment in schools and the awareness of everybody's roles. Teachers are just part of the school units which functions as the keeper and the mediator to make sure the other than their duty accomplished, as well as other expect in between the process may well be achieved (Zirkle, 2016) .

The prevention of any incidences from happening in school is a must; regardless of the situations faced. The preliminary elements or the contexts are the surrounding, which consist of the classroom conditions, as well as the equipment that the pupils are utilizing during the learning activities. In most cases, we might observe that schools in the local context, especially in government school, the equipment is poorly maintained, and the general conditions are very poor.

It is a known by all that teachers responsible to observe and control the pupils' behavior in school. Many cases of incidents in the primary schools occurred due to the pupils' misconduct and misbehavior (Ladislaus, Semali, & Philbert, 2016). Some safety elements in the classroom are not sufficient to manage and control these young learners. Their curiosity and excitement during the learning process might be the reason for the occurrence of incidents, and teachers need to be able to manage this by being creative and by building some characters onto the pupils at their best. It is no doubt that teachers are the main figures to deal with the pupils' safety issues in school. However, we need to study the context of the school environment which might help teachers to stay in control and help them to understand their roles and actions need to be done by them.

The school security and safety are constantly the main topic of discussion among the school community. As we may observe, not many changes have been implemented and take into actions to cope with these issues. This is due to various reasons and factors such as political issues, economic and perceptions of the people involved. Authorities may suggest as many ideas and opinions that they want, but they need to listen to what teachers need to say because they are the first to witness and the first to run the duty as the in loco parentis on the pupils (Verdugo, & Glenn, 2002). Teachers are also trained to always take precautions and stay alert on the matter of safety of their students. This makes them understand more than others in this aspect.

Even though the responsibility of keeping the safety of the pupils has been the duty of teachers, the core and foundation of understanding need to be established between the involved community of the school, namely, the teachers, pupils, as well as the parents. Ensuring the safety of the pupils is a fundamental need in schools and securing this will give a positive impact on their psychological states (Bradshaw & Lindsey ,2014).

A teacher must possess a certain standard such as the ability to motivate, to teach as well as to care for the safety and security of the pupils (Azram, 2019). The fact that the duty of a teacher is really challenging especially within our local school context where the number of pupils occupying a classroom can reach up to fifty in a class is already a burden to them. What more on the matter of safety and security which need to be managed by these same teachers has add to the stress in managing their duty.

In the pupils' side, researchers suggested that the characters and behaviors of children can be identified at the elementary age (Thakore, Apfeld, Johnson, Sathiyakumar, Jahangir & Sethi, 2015). It is important

for schools to generate a mutual and close relationship with the parents in order to understand or at least predict any threatening reactions from these children either from information shared or by the study of the family social background. We need to have a serious look at the communication between the parties involved, the teachers, parents as well as the pupils. This will bring us to the next focus which is the usage of the communication medium of interactions. Nowadays parents and teachers prefer to use social media to communicate and interact. This may be due to the level of conveniences it offers to both parties despite a few drawbacks raised.

The ability to predict pupils' behavior and reactions crucial and important to avoid incidents from happening (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). However, this will require a certain frame of time especially for the teachers before they start to understand, recognize and to be able to get control on the behaviors of their pupils. As mentioned, when dealing with pupils, the number allocated in a single classroom itself made them hard to control and there were incidents of negligence by teachers that occurred due to the massive number of pupils within a classroom.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD.

Six-phase guide by Braun & Clarke was used as a guide for this study. The guide helps in providing step by step analysis from the preliminary stage towards finalizing and determining the themes (Clarke. & Braun, 2006). Four teachers were involved as informants. They were selected by using purposeful sampling technique. The teachers were all from four different schools located in Kuala Lumpur, Kedah, and Selangor. Since the informants are acquainted professionally with the writer for more than five years, it is easier to fore-see their stands and belief in the issue discussed (Marshall, 1996). Here is the brief information on the informants involved:

Table 1: Brief information on the informants involved

Informant	Gender	Location	Age	Experience in school
1	Female	Kuala Lumpur	38	12 years
2	Male	Kedah	35	9 years
3	Male	Selangor	54	29 years
4	Female	Selangor	58	32 years

These four teachers were chosen as the target because of their expertise and active participating school tasks they are handling. The school locations were also helping us in observing how the schools, teachers and parents were coping with the issue. The schools in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor with the population of the school pupils is now reaching one thousand five hundred students. While for the school in Kedah, the pupils are now around 400 students. These differences showed us that the operational systems of our local school are the same regardless of the number of students they are having. However, there are sub-operational procedures that might involve.

These teachers are directly involved with the school discipline units, and they have direct access to cases happening in their respective schools. Their statements and facts shared were highly based on their experiences and observations. This helped the researcher in the next process of analyzing and foresee the patterns with the data gathered the four teachers. Semi-structured interview questions were used as a guide to draw the theme for the next steps of data analysis.

After conducting the interview sessions, the transcriptions gathered were analyzed according to the steps as follows:

### Step 1: Become Familiar with The Data.

As mentioned, a semi-structured interview sessions were conducted on the four teachers. Sixteen interview questions were generated from the research questions, and they were used to ask the teachers during the interview sessions. The interview responses from the informants were transcribed and being analyzed and familiarized. The similarities and contradictions within the transcriptions were taken into notes for the use in the next stage.

## Step 2: Generating Initial Ideas.

The responses gathered from the interview questions were used to generate the main ideas. The elaboration given by the informants were analyzed and the number of occurrences on the main discussions or the key words were recorded. This was to show the level of its significance based on the frequency of the theme used. Six main ideas were generated from the transcribed responses given by the informants. The list is as below:

1. old furniture and school equipment.
2. Parents corporation.
3. Parents-teacher relationship or the open gate policy.
4. The use of social media.

## Step 3 And 4: Search for Themes and Review Themes

Four main ideas mentioned were found during the phase of analyzing the interview contents and from the four ideas, two themes were generated, which are the classroom conditions and the communication.

Table 2: Generated Themes from the main ideas

Main ideas	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Old furniture and school equipment.</li></ul>	Classroom conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Parents corporation.</li><li>● Parents-teacher relationship or the open gate policy.</li><li>● The use of social media.</li></ul>	Communication.

For this study, two inter raters helped to have a look at the reliability of the data and giving their opinion on the themes as well as the supporting statements from the main ideas based on their expertise and experiences handling such cases and individuals. The two inter rater were experienced administrators from primary schools which are under the students' affairs unit.

## Step 5 and 6: Define themes and Write-up.

The themes generated were rechecked by cross reading with the response given by the informants. This was to avoid overlapping and repeating the themes which have the similar focus. We also need to know whether the theme is in the response with the context before starting to write the report of the findings (Moir & Brid, 2017).

## Trustworthiness, Validity, And Reliability.

These three elements are very important in designing any qualitative research (Creswell, 2016). To validate the interviews, the transcriptions were sent to the informants who were involved in the interview process for validating purposes, and they were asked to verify the transcriptions and to add any missing information they think necessary.

To check on the reliability, two inter-rater were chosen to examine the transcriptions and the themes to avoid any prejudice or biases in the report. The two participants were chosen based on their

expertise and direct involvement in the area of school leadership and discipline management in school. The brief information on the inter-rater are as follows:

Table 3: Brief information on the inter-rater

	Gender	Location	Age	Positions in school
1	Male	Klang, Selangor	50	Head of Discipline Unit
2	Female	Klang, Selangor	47	Senior Assistant of Students Affairs

The agreement rate from the theme was calculated to find the agreements or disagreements of the themes coded from the transcriptions. For this study, we shall use the calculation from Miles and Huberman (1994) to calculate the reliability rate, and the finding are as follows:

Figure 1: Adaptation of Miles and Huberman's reliability rate

$$\text{Reliability: } \frac{\text{Number of Agreements}}{\text{Number of Agreements} + \text{Disagreements}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Inter Rater 1: } \frac{6}{6} \times 100.$$

$$\text{Inter Rater 2: } \frac{5}{6} \times 100.$$

Table 4: Reliability rate

Inter Rater	Gender	Coder Reliability Rate
1	Male	100 %
2	Female	83 %

The first inter-rater agreed to all the themes and coding derived from the transcriptions. However, only 83% reliability rate was given by the second inter-rater. The inter-rater disagrees with one of the main ideas touches on parents' role and participation in schools' activities and meetings. According to the inter-rater, parents' participation during the meetings or any school gatherings from her experiences were not overwhelming and affective because parents are not vocal. They rather chose to express themselves by writing through social platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram.

As a Senior Assistant of the Students Affairs, the inter-rater also highlighted on the school responsibilities on becoming more creative and at the same time schools need to ensure that the relationship between teachers and parents remain in harmony. In the matter of participation during meetings, the second inter-rater mentioned that parents now are easier to make contacts due to the various mediums of communications we have now. That is how meetings are handled in the second inter-rater's school, both by voicing out their opinion or writing it on social platforms.

## DISCUSSION

Teachers, parents, and pupils are the three entities that built their partnerships based on good communication. The communication styles will determine the level of success and harmony of all parties in achieving the goal of the communities they are serving, in this case the success of the schools. A success in communication can be symbolized as trust built between the school communities and this will ease the entire process of running and managing the school.

The nature of communication is shifting these days. Other than the need to suit the cultural context, the medium of communication has also changed for the past few years. Parents and teachers are in favor of the implementation of social media such as Telegram and WhatsApp to communicate. This is due to the attributes of these platform which fulfilled certain criteria (Swick, 1991), such as:

- i. The use of these mediums will make all parties which are involved with schools to become more approachable, and they tend to feel comfortable due to various factors. The nonverbal approach will give ways to those who are not vocal to voice out their opinions and comments.
- ii. Flexibility, especially with time, is one of the reasons teachers and parents are in favor of the use of social media. Parents' working time will not be affected and more crowd and participation will be achieved.

Discipline is an important aspect in maintaining the school environments and safety under control. School and discipline are the two entities which can never be segregated because the aim of the implementation of discipline is to bring the students behavior with the positive standards of a school. It can be perceived as a mold in shaping the behavior of the pupils which need to start from the early stage of their learning process. Teachers play their parts as the supervisors and the one who instill the learning aspects through the elements of self-discipline. Through discipline, we can cultivate a self-value and set a good lesson on responsibilities towards the pupils as well as the people surrounding them.

The goal of the implementation of discipline in school is to ensure the pupils' safety and to generate a conducive learning environment for them (Moles, 1989). However, it is also crucial in the implementation of rules and discipline guidelines to get the support from the parents. Parents are the support system in generating a constant effect of any implementation of disciplinary rules, which is portrayed through the positive and good behavior of the pupils. The mutual understanding between the school administrators, teachers, pupils, and parents needs to be set properly to avoid any issues and conflicts after.

The means of setting certain rules and discipline is to instill the feeling of security and safety towards the pupils and the community within the school boundary. A secured learning environment will help to reduce the incidents that happen in school, and at the same time will reduce the threat of being harmed during the learning environment (Rich, 1982). A set of rules and discipline implementations will provide a good platform for shaping certain standards of behavior on the students.

## SUMMARY

Teachers appear to have multiple and diverse considerations when it comes to the aspect of security of the pupils, not just within the classroom but it covers the entire school context. To draw a mutual understanding between the three affected groups; teachers, parents and the pupils is a must in order for the whole management process to run smoothly, and the security of the pupils can be sealed tightly.

Various aspects need to be looked into when dealing with the aspect of safety and incidents in school. Other than the mutual relationship between all parties, the security of other aspects needs to be focused as well. The consideration of the physical aspect such as the sports equipment is also important because it had been proven that there were multiple incidents involving this particular aspect that occurred before.

We need to understand that the safety of the pupils is not just the responsibility of the teachers but also on the parents. They need to participate in most of the school decisions. However, there are setbacks when it comes to having face-to-face communication and interaction because parents are mostly working, and some are with other responsibilities. So, we may say all schools have ventured into the use of social media or platforms such as Telegram, WhatsApp, and Facebook.

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