

# What Works and What Doesn't in the K-12 Curriculum; Insights for the MATATAG Curriculum Implementation

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**Abstract**— This case study examined how well-prepared teachers were for the K-12 and MATATAG curricula at one of the public elementary schools, exploring both the challenges and advantages of implementing these curricula. This investigated the curriculum implementers or teachers' views on their training and readiness, pinpointing strengths and weaknesses in implementation. The research also explored practical hurdles faced by teachers and administrators, including adapting teaching methods, managing workload, resource access, and integrating MATATAG. This also identified the perceived benefits of both curricula, focusing on student learning, teacher development, and stakeholder participation. By focusing on a single case of a school, the study offers practical insights into curriculum implementation, suggesting areas needing further support for successful educational reforms in the Department of Education.

**Keywords**— MATATAG Curriculum, K-12 Curriculum, Curriculum Implementation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a transformative force that drives individual and societal progress (Williams, 2023). It is arguably the most significant instrument for transforming one's existence. Education plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of a person's life. It enhances knowledge and skills while also fostering personality development and shaping attitudes (Abragan et al., 2022). One of the benefits of education is that the educational system teaches us how to obtain and develop critical and logical thinking and make independent decisions. Education is the key to turning a weakness into a strength (Abragan et al., 2022)

The education system in the Philippines has undergone significant transformations in recent years, particularly with the implementation of the K-12 curriculum (DO, s. 2013) and its subsequent enhancement through the MATATAG Curriculum (DO 10, s. 2024). These changes aim to address ongoing challenges in basic education, such as content overcrowding, inconsistent cognitive demands, and insufficient emphasis on foundational skills. Although the goal of the K-12 curriculum was to promote global competitiveness and holistic development, its implementation revealed shortcomings that hindered its success. As a response, the Department of Education (DepEd) introduced the MATATAG Curriculum in 2023 to enhance these strategies and better equip students for the challenges of the 21st century (Tinio, 2024). The success of

MATATAG is rooted in its dedication to empowering students. By focusing on providing learners with hands-on skills, the ability to analyze and deconstruct challenges, and a strong sense of their collaborative responsibilities, the program aims to tap into their inherent potential.

Although there have been considerable reforms in the education system of the Philippines, such as the K-12 curriculum and its improvements with the MATATAG Curriculum, there is still a lack of empirical evidence regarding their effectiveness in practice at the school level. The K-12 curriculum was designed to provide students with sufficient time for mastery of concepts and skills, develop lifelong learners, and prepare graduates for tertiary education, employment, and entrepreneurship (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2012).

Despite its ambitious goals, the K-12 curriculum has faced numerous challenges, particularly in terms of its implementation and the performance outcomes of students (Kilag et al., 2024). The MATATAG Curriculum, this revised curriculum aims to address issues such as congested content and misplaced prerequisite learning competencies, which have been identified as obstacles in the K-12 framework (DepEd, 2023). However, initial pilot runs have highlighted implementation challenges such as teacher familiarization, resource alignment, and infrastructure limitations (Malipot, 2023)

The launch of the MATATAG Curriculum offers a chance to tackle these shortcomings, but there is limited understanding of how experiences from the K-12 implementation can contribute to its effectiveness. This research seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing the successes and challenges of the K-12 curriculum based on the viewpoints of teachers and administrators, offering practical recommendations to enhance the MATATAG Curriculum implementation, to recognize the perceived advantages of the former K-12 curriculum as experienced by teachers, school administrators in the Philippine education system, To pinpoint the perceived shortcomings and challenges of the former K-12 curriculum as experienced by teachers, school administrator in the Philippine education system, and to determine the factors that contributed to the perceived successes and failures of specific components or aspects of the previous K-12 curriculum. This may include factors related to curriculum design, content delivery, teacher training, resource availability, assessment methods, and stakeholder engagement.

The research titled "What Works and What Doesn't in the K-12 Curriculum; Insights for the MATATAG Curriculum Implementation" aims to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with curriculum delivery. In particular, it intends to:

1. Pinpoint effective methods and strategies for implementing the K-12 curriculum, concentrating on aspects such as teacher development, instructional resources, and student-centered methodologies.
2. Investigate the difficulties encountered by teachers, which include curriculum overload, lack of resources, administrative barriers, and the integration of technology.
3. Provide actionable insights to enhance the MATATAG Curriculum implementation by simplifying competencies, improving foundational skills, and fostering equitable access to resources.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This details the qualitative research approach used to explore educators' experiences and views on implementing the K-12 and MATATAG curricula at a specific public elementary school in Iloilo, Philippines.

This study adopted a qualitative case study design, which enables the researchers to explore the complexities and nuances of curriculum implementation in a real-world context, gathering contextualized data from the participants directly involved. The focus is on

understanding the experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits associated with both curricula within this specific context, particularly implementing them in the school setting.

The research was conducted in one public elementary school in the Philippines, which was purposely chosen to provide a focused and manageable scope for the case study. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with two teachers and one school administrator to gather in-depth insights into their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the curriculum. The data collection process involved using a series of structured questions designed to elicit detailed responses about the effectiveness of the curriculum, implementation challenges, and potential improvements. This purposive sampling approach allowed the researcher to focus on participants with direct and practical experience, ensuring relevant and focused data for the study.

Purposefully selected participants from a public elementary school, composed of a school head and two teachers representing Grade 1 (Key Stage 1) and Grade 4 (Key Stage 2). This selection ensures perspectives from early and middle primary levels are captured, potentially highlighting differences in curriculum implementation. The school head's inclusion offers an administrative viewpoint to capture the holistic approach in the curriculum implementation.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to systematically identify recurring patterns and meanings related to the research questions, utilizing the interview data. This process begins with the verbatim transcription of audio recordings, followed by researchers' immersion in the data through repeated readings of transcripts and field notes, which are then coded inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data. These initial codes are subsequently grouped into broader themes, which are then refined to ensure accuracy and relevance to the research questions. Finally, the findings are reported, with supporting quotes from participants to illustrate the identified themes. Member-checking was also conducted to ensure the validity of the transcribed and interpreted data.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main conclusions of the qualitative case study carried out in a public elementary school in Iloilo, Philippines, are presented in this section. Four main themes surfaced from the thematic analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006): (1) Teacher Training and

Preparedness, (2) Implementation Difficulties, (3) Perceived Advantages of the MATATAG Curriculum, and (4) Policy Support Suggestions.

### 1) *Teacher Preparedness and Training*

*“May ara man kami trainings but still limited lang kag selected ang maka attend”*, said by Participant 1.

Participants acknowledged having undergone training for both the K–12 and MATATAG curricula, but expressed concerns regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of such training. Some teachers have received training on the K-12 curriculum. This suggests an initial effort by the Department of Education (DepEd) to equip educators with the necessary knowledge and skills for the reform.

Based on the study of Malbas et al., 2023, the lack of adequately trained teachers posed a significant obstacle to the successful execution of the program, leading to discrepancies in the educational experience across different schools. Insufficient training and professional development opportunities for teachers have been identified as significant factors contributing to the challenges in educational delivery (Quijano, 2023). Insufficient training has hindered teachers' ability to adapt to the evolving educational environment, resulting in inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning experiences for students.

*“For MATATAG ang School Heads ang required to attend seminars kag gina relay lang namon sa amon mga co-teacher’s kung ano ang amon agenda for that seminar”* mentioned by participant 3.

A potential shortcoming identified is the possible lack of comprehensive training specifically tailored to the MATATAG curriculum. While school heads may share information, the depth and breadth of understanding might vary compared to direct training for all teachers.

Moreover, issues such as teacher readiness, and lack of access to information resources, pose significant challenges to the effective rollout of the curriculum (Macasero, 2023). Providing ongoing training and support, educators can enhance their pedagogical practices, adapt to curriculum changes, and effectively cater to the diverse needs of learners. (Kilag et al., 2024). The MATATAG Curriculum introduced a range of training programs aimed at supporting teachers through the transition. A study by Kraft, Blazar, and Hogan (2018) emphasizes the importance of sustained professional development in improving teaching

practices and student outcomes. These programs include workshops, seminars, and online courses that cover various aspects of the curriculum, such as instructional strategies, assessment methods, and content integration. (Kilag et al., 2024).

### 2) *Implementation Challenges*

*“The K to 12 implementations began in 2011-2012, with a step-by-step approach starting with kindergarten. Major challenges included teacher readiness, curriculum tweaking, resource availability, and stakeholder engagement,”* mentioned by participant 3

*“I will definitely choose MATATAG Curriculum, mas hapos siya itudlo sa mga kabataan. Matatag is easier to implement due to compressed competencies, provided materials, and technical assistance.”*, mentioned by Participant 2

Several potential effectiveness in teacher preparedness for the MATATAG curriculum are noted. Firstly, teachers' existing familiarity with the K-12 curriculum can serve as a foundational understanding upon which to build new knowledge. Secondly, the involvement of school heads in seminars and training, followed by their efforts to disseminate information within their schools, suggests a top-down approach to knowledge transfer. The emphasis on active and play-based learning, particularly in the early years, aligns with established pedagogical best practices and may leverage existing teacher skills. Furthermore, the perceived increased involvement and support from school heads could contribute positively to teacher preparedness and confidence.

Adapting to the new curriculum presented a major hurdle for teachers, encompassing the need to grasp novel teaching methodologies, learning resources, and the spiral progression framework. This transition was further compounded by a reported increase in teacher workload stemming from the introduction of new subjects and more rigorous assessment demands. Additionally, schools encountered difficulties due to shortages in crucial learning materials and the necessary technology for successful K-12 implementation.

*“Area for improvement is the lack of clear guidelines regarding time allocation per subject,”* says participant 2.

Implementing the MATATAG curriculum may necessitate providing teachers with adequate support to

fully comprehend and effectively apply its new framework, suggesting a potential learning curve. Furthermore, the integration of this new curriculum with current teaching methods and established school procedures could pose both logistical and pedagogical difficulties. Critically, ensuring the availability of suitable and sufficient learning resources specifically tailored for the MATATAG curriculum is recognized as a significant challenge.

An extensive analysis of the K to 12 Basic Education Program has uncovered various problems, such as overcrowded curriculum and misaligned learning competencies (DepEd, 2024). Findings of Casimiro et al., (2021) showed that teachers lacked exposure to relevant seminars, training, and readings pertaining to their specialization in the K+12 curriculum and the lack of available modules for various subject areas, limited access to books and references in school and community libraries. Same with the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum, is not without its challenges. Initial pilot runs have revealed various obstacles, including the need for appropriate implementation approaches, inadequate government policies for inclusive education, and technical problems in implementation (Javier, 2023).

### 3) Perceived Benefits of the MATATAG Curriculum

Despite the challenges, teachers appreciated some aspects of the MATATAG curriculum. They noted its emphasis on holistic education, including values formation, critical thinking, and practical life skills.

The K-12 curriculum aimed to enhance student learning and better prepare learners for higher education and the demands of the workforce, reflecting a long-term vision for improved educational outcomes.

It encouraged teachers to become more reflective practitioners by actively engaging in professional development, thereby fostering a culture of continuous improvement within the teaching profession.

Additionally, the curriculum emphasized the importance of parental involvement and community support, recognizing the holistic nature of the learning process and the vital role of stakeholders in a child's educational journey.

*"The Integration of Skills, essential skills like literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning are integrated into the curriculum," said by participant 1.*

It is anticipated that MATATAG may address specific skill gaps that were identified within the previous K-12 curriculum, suggesting a targeted effort to refine educational content and focus. The curriculum may align more closely with broader educational goals for the Philippines, indicating a strategic direction for national education.

In the study of Caup, D. and Buda, A. (2017), The Department of Education has strong faith in the K-12 Program, believing it will enhance the quality of education through a spirally progressing curriculum that begins with simpler topics and gradually moves to more complex ones, enabling learners to master concepts and skills. For the teachers, teacher identity is a term that is used to refer to how teachers understand themselves as teachers (Mockler, 2011). Teacher professional development that supports effective teaching practices is therefore critically important for improving student learning. The MATATAG curriculum has been carefully designed to align with the DepEd's commitment to student-centric education. The framework urges teachers to extend beyond the limits of conventional teaching and employ diverse teaching and learning practices.

### 4) Recommendations for Policy Support

Participants strongly emphasized the need for systemic support to ensure the success of curriculum implementation. Recommendations for enhancing the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum include the provision of more frequent and practice-focused training sessions for teachers, the development and utilization of contextualized instructional materials relevant to the local environment, the fostering of stronger engagement among all stakeholders, especially parents and local community leaders, and the streamlining of teacher workload to afford them more dedicated time for effective instructional planning.

The school head also pointed out the importance of collaboration between school administrators and policymakers, stressing that reforms must consider on-the-ground realities.

### CONCLUSIONS

Both the K-12 and MATATAG programs are major educational reforms in the Philippines, each with advantages, disadvantages, hurdles, and expected positive outcomes.

While K-12's rollout highlighted the critical need for teacher training, insufficient and uneven training

hampered its initial success. Teachers struggled with the new structure, heavier workloads, and resource scarcity. Despite these challenges, K-12 fostered positive changes by focusing on 21st-century skills, encouraging teacher reflection, and valuing stakeholder participation.

MATATAG builds on K-12, utilizing teachers' existing experience. The strategy of using school heads to disseminate information is a key element of its initial preparation. However, a potential lack of comprehensive teacher training on MATATAG specifics could be a major obstacle. Challenges include understanding the new framework, integrating it with current practices, and securing sufficient resources. The anticipated benefits of a more student-centered approach, addressing skill gaps, and aligning with national goals suggest a determined effort to enhance Philippine education.

MATATAG's success hinges on effective, widespread teacher training to overcome identified shortcomings, proactively addressing integration and resource challenges, and leveraging its potential benefits to improve Filipino learning.

Learning from both the successes and failures of K-12 is vital for MATATAG's smooth implementation.

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