

Beyond the Four Walls: Teacher's Experiences in Championing the MATATAG Curriculum

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Abstract

Championing a new curriculum implementation requires a lot of effort and may face different challenges before its total implementation. This study aimed to explicit the narratives of the Grade 7 teachers' lived experiences in the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum for S.Y. 2024-2025. A qualitative method engaged in a Phenomenological design was utilized in this study. A purposive sampling technique was employed to consider the 11 Grade 7 teachers handling MATATAG subjects as the respondents. Using an unstructured interview the teachers' lived experiences were transcribed and assessed by employing thematic analysis to determine the themes that emerged from the responses. The results revealed 4 significant themes from the lived experiences of the teachers: Theme 1: Championing resiliency, Theme 2: Championing the assumption of responsibility, Theme 3: Championing the sense of resourcefulness, and Theme 4: Championing in becoming adaptive. The on-the-ground implementation of the curriculum from the four walls of the classrooms contributed different lived experiences of the teachers who were making sure that the agenda of MATATAG would be realized. Amidst the challenges faced by the teachers as curriculum implementers, they remained steadfast in ensuring that every student from the grade 7 level upon implementing the MATATAG curriculum will be matatag, stay matatag, and always matatag. A corresponding teacher support implementation plan, including but not limited to scheduled technical assistance, capacity-building, and psychological support is significant for teachers to continuously champion the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum.

Keywords: MATATAG Curriculum, teachers' lived experiences, curriculum reform, education system, Philippines

Introduction

Transforming the educational landscape into a new curriculum will take a lot of challenges and efforts before its total implementation. Curriculum development is a dynamic process and attainable hard effort in the manifestation of curriculum developers' goals and their program objectives were based on measurable outcomes (Rajurkar et al., 2019). In the Philippines- Department of Education (DepEd), it is not new to have a curriculum reform to meet the international standards of education. To ensure the global competitiveness of the graduates in basic education, the department introduced the gradual implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. Singh (2024) noted that the MATATAG stresses essential skills students require, such as reading effectively, completing math, and learning things for employment and daily living. Focusing on the development of literacy, numeracy, and other life skills.

In the study of Kilag et al. (2024), they highlighted that the MATATAG curriculum is an innovative strategy for education in the Philippines, with the goal of empowering students and increasing their competitiveness on the global stage. The curriculums desire to improve the student's performance in international assessments, decongest competencies, and promote a nurturing learning environment. Compelled with its main principles to (1) MAKE the curriculum relevant to produce competent and job-ready, active, and responsible citizens; (2) Take steps to accelerate delivery of basic education facilities and services; (3) Take good care of learners by promoting learner well-being, inclusive education, and a positive learning environment; and (4) Give support to teachers to teach better (DepEd, 2024).

Based on the latest report from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) the Philippines placed 77 out of 81 from the participating countries. This implies that students in basic education lack the necessary competencies to meet the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) standard average in mathematics, reading, and science. These results motivated the DepEd to take some strategic moves in educational transformation as K-12 programs resulted different learning drawbacks to students.

On some note, the implementation of the curriculum faced a lot of challenges. One of these is the daily struggles experienced by the teachers in championing the curriculum. Teachers confronted difficulties such as confusion, dissatisfaction, and feeling powerless given that teachers had a vital role in carrying out the agenda (Domingo & Masabpi, 2024). Teacher preparedness and effective support mechanisms are key to the successful implementation of the MATATAG curriculum (Kilag et al, 2024). Providing the teachers with adequate support will significantly help

in the total implementation of the curriculum. Keiler (2018) stresses ways to help teachers as they move to nontraditional teaching must be developed.

Consequently, teachers' full participation in the MATATAG curriculum will help to realize the goal of the department to develop a graduate that is globally competitive. Hence, this study aimed to explicit the narrative of Teachers' lived experiences in the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum for S.Y. 2024-2025.

Research Questions

This study aimed to explicit the narratives of the Grade 7 Teachers' lived experiences in the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum in Maghaway National High School, Talisay City, Cebu for SY. 2024-2025 as a basis for a proposed teachers support implementation plan.

Specifically, the study explored the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the teachers in the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum?
2. Based on the teachers' narratives, what are the themes that emerged from the responses?
3. Based on the findings, what teachers support implementation plan can be proposed?

Related Literatures

To further elaborate on the relevance of MATATAG curriculum implementation to the lived experiences of the Grade 7 teachers, the literature review asserts the role, challenges, and opportunities experienced by the teachers can significantly influence the implementation of the curriculum.

Educational Reform

An antiquated curriculum may leave students unprepared for the changing demands of the current world. Embracing curricular change does not involve recreating the wheel; rather, it ensures that the educational vehicle can navigate the complex roads of innovation (Estrellado, 2023). Rajurkar et al. (2019) describes that curriculum development encompasses standards at several levels, including interpersonal, institutional, social, national, and international.

Curriculum development aims to meet student needs and enhance their learning outcomes (Alsubaie, 2016). Classroom-level curriculum development refers to the curriculum-building and curriculum-making procedures that teachers incorporate into the official curriculum at the classroom level (Shawer, 2017). Handelzalts (2019) noted that improving the curriculum is unconsciously motivating for teachers to perform well.

The MATATAG Curriculum

The MATATAG Curriculum aims to enhance inclusive education and reduce learning results gaps across various student groups. However, problems with inclusive education remain, including inadequate government policies, a lack of resources, and building limitations (DepEd, 2023). Discussed by Uy et al. (2024) that the MATATAG curriculum's emphasis on learner-centeredness and adaptability is consistent with current educational ideas, encouraging student participation, critical thinking, and individualized learning experiences that are adapted to various learner needs.

The MATATAG Curriculum intends to solve basic education difficulties and guarantee that the country's education quality is "on par with international standards." (Malipot, 2023). It emphasizes five skills: language, reading and literacy, mathematics, nationalism, and excellent manners and conduct (Estrellado, 2023). It also provides opportunities to localize and contextualize history and geography teachings (Olipas, 2024). Subsequently, Alvarado (2023), highlights that the MATATAG curriculum has a capacity to improve the international assessments of Filipino learners, to provide a firm basis for students, and to develop their communication competence.

Teachers Significant Role in the Curriculum Implementation

To make curriculum development effective and schools successful, teachers must be active in the development process (Alsubaie, 2016). Also, Teachers should be equipped with the ability to harness values and instill them as part of their spiritual practices (Ancheta, 2024).

Teaching has been described as a difficult job that leads to burnout. Less is known about how teachers experience and cope with work-related pressures (Richards et al., 2018). In the implementation of the curriculum Domingo and Masabpi (2024) pointed out that the implementer constantly considers the learners' demands, and teachers must first address the issue of the students' reading ability. A teacher's enthusiasm and knowledge may capture students' interest and lead to increased learning outcomes and students academic achievement (Pardillo et al., 2021).

Research Method

A qualitative method engaged in a Phenomenological design was utilized in this study to explore the lived experiences of the teachers in the 1st phase implementation of the MATATAG curriculum. A purposive sampling technique was employed to consider the 11 Grade 7 teachers handling MATATAG subjects as respondents from Maghaway National High School in S.Y. 2024-2025.

To explore the lived experiences in the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum of the teacher respondents, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Using a tape recorder the responses of the teachers were collected following the researcher-made 4 guiding questions which were validated by the experts: (1) What are the teacher's perspectives on the influence of the MATATAG curriculum on their professional development and teaching practices? (2) What challenges and opportunities did teachers meet in implementing the MATATAG curriculum? (3) How does the teacher perceive the curriculum outcomes in terms of student learning and participation?, and (4) Which components of the curriculum support system do teachers find most valuable?

The data-gathering process followed a set of phases. First, the researcher submitted an official letter to the principal's office requesting permission to conduct the study. Upon approval, the researcher administered the scheduled unstructured interview with the respondents. After collecting the participant responses, the data was transcribed and evaluated in the most accurate manner possible by obtaining in-depth insights into the lived experiences of the teachers in the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum using a thematic analysis. To correctly present the gathered data a focus group discussion among researcher and respondents was taken.

Before the interview took place, the researcher obtained permission from the respondents by asking for their permission to participate in this research study with their full consent. As part of the interview process, respondents were properly notified of their rights. Human privacy was strictly respected during the interview process and data collection. The researcher protected the secrecy of the responses and the respondents' identities. Finally, they were assured that all research materials would be destroyed following the completion of the study.

Findings and Discussions

After the analysis of the transcribed responses, the researcher cascaded and interpreted the responses of the teachers based on their lived experiences in the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum. The study revealed 4 significant themes that emerged from the teacher's responses: Theme 1: Championing resiliency, Theme 2: Championing assumption of responsibility, Theme 3: Championing the sense of resourcefulness, and Theme 4: Championing becoming adaptive.

The identified themes highlighted the lived experiences of the Grade 7 Teachers from Maghaway National High School in the 1st phase of the MATATAG implementation.

Theme 1: Championing Resiliency

The first theme, championing resiliency, emerged from the lived experiences of the Grade 7 teachers and how they managed to withstand the challenge of having 6 hours of actual teaching per day with 45 minutes per subject. This new schedule has shaken the time management of the teachers in handling the first section to the next. Despite the time constraints the teachers stayed matatag and committed to delivering the curriculum in the most accurate and standard manner.

Some of the selected excerpts for Theme 1 are:

"Everything is in the experimental stage, considering the time of 45 minutes per class which is very constrained in delivering the content."-Teacher C

"If we talk about the time allotment it will affect the class specially during the travel period from one building to another"-Teacher A

"I wasn't able to provide more engaging class activities because my planned activities were not realized due to the short time allotted" -Teacher F

"The main problem now is the time allotment; you cannot cover the whole competencies and objectives in the identified period." Teacher H

"It is very tiring because the teachers handled 6 hrs actual teaching with 8 subjects per day" – Teacher G

Teachers play an essential part in the curriculum implementation, thus it's crucial that they are well-prepared for handling new curriculum frameworks (Padillo et al., 2021). Policymakers and educational leaders may help teachers manage curriculum changes and achieve positive educational results for every student by emphasizing professional development, building supportive school cultures, and providing enough resources (Kilag et al., 2024).

Theme 2: Championing Assumption of Responsibility

The second theme emerged from the lived experiences of the teacher implementing the MATATAG to grade 7 students is the championing assumption of responsibility. The teachers showed a willingness and effort to fully implement the curriculum in various ways despite having not enough training, unattainable suggested activities, and lack of total understanding to the whole MATATAG agenda.

Some of the selected excerpts for Theme 2 are:

"The preparation is time-consuming and tiring because we need to develop a discovery approach in class so the students can realize and analyze the purpose of every lesson." – Teacher B

"I am having a hard time discussing the ICT lesson because I wasn't able to attend any Matatag training, so I just asked my co-teachers and read on the internet the best ways to implement the curriculum in my class."-Teacher J

"The lesson exemplars are engaging; however, I need to modify them due to some resources not being available in our school community."- Teacher E

"I am not totally familiar with the MATATAG because I am not the one who attended the training but since I am assigned to teach Grade 7 I have to find ways"- Teacher I

Matatag curriculum's success relies upon teacher's dedication to lifelong learning. Transitioning to a new curriculum is difficult but equipped with a drive to create a difference in students' lives, teachers and administrators must collaborate to guarantee that the Matatag curriculum is entirely grounded in Filipino values (Ancheta & Ramos, 2024). Also, Handelzalts (2019) pointed out that collaboration between teachers is intended to improve performance.

Theme 3: Championing the Sense of Resourcefulness

The third theme, championing the sense of resourcefulness emerged from the responses of the teachers with how they managed the class despite the lack of available resources. The teachers showed the ability and creativity to cope with the arising problems from having a lack of textbooks, learning manuals, available ready-to-use power presentations, etc.

Some of the selected excerpts for Theme 3 are:

"It is discouraging in the implementation due to the unavailability of some learning materials so we have to look to the internet" Teacher A

"The lesson exemplar is available however the suggested examples are not suitable to my type of student, so I have to innovate" Teacher F

"As of now, there are not enough resources available in my subject, so I need to look on the internet for another source to be used in my class" Teacher B

According to Domingo and Masabpi (2024) teachers preparation is recognized as vital for successful curriculum implementation. School administrators prioritize ensuring teachers are sufficiently for the implementation of the MATATAG Agenda, which included supplying teaching materials and scheduling training sessions to meet the new curriculum's expectations.

Theme 4: Championing in Becoming Adaptive

The fourth theme, championing in becoming adaptive emerged from the teacher's responses on how they managed to adapt with the new curriculum. The teachers showed versatility in implementing the curriculum despite the determined problems. The teachers were able to adjust and modify their teaching methods and styles in order to fully implement the MATATAG curriculum.

Some of the selected excerpts for Theme 4 are:

"The curriculum is new to me, it provides new topics and with this, we can deliver a new idea to the students" Teacher D

"The lesson in every topic is explorative, so I must prepare activities in the same manner."- Teacher G

"It was a shorter time in terms of dissemination of the curriculum and we are loaded with all the information needed also, we need to study our lessons before coming into our classes because of some new topics we are not familiar with." Teacher I

"I need to level my discussion to the capacity of my student because some of the suggested topics are not attainable by my type of student." Teacher J

Keiler (2018) found out in her study that a significant shift in the learning environment can have predictable effects on teachers' concepts and teaching techniques. Teachers appreciate the curriculum's emphasis on student engagement and empowerment. In addition, teachers appreciate the emphasis of the MATATAG Agenda on providing a variety of learning experiences that are suited to each student's specific requirements and interests (Domingo and Masabpi, 2024).

Conclusions

The 1st phase of implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum revealed multifaceted challenges and opportunities. The on-the-ground implementation of the curriculum from the four walls of the classrooms contributed different lived experiences of the teachers who were making sure that the agenda of MATATAG would be realized. Amidst the challenges faced by the teachers as curriculum implementers, they remained steadfast in ensuring that every student from the grade 7 level upon implementing the MATATAG curriculum will be matatag, stay matatag, and always matatag.

Based on the transcribed themes from the lived experiences of the Grade 7 teachers in implementing the MATATAG curriculum it is beneficial to revisit some of the suggested topics and activities mapped from the curriculum so the teachers can utilize it in their respective classes without any difficulties. It is also recommended that a faculty receive a corresponding teacher support implementation plan, including but not limited to scheduled technical assistance, capacity-building, and psychological support for them to continuously champions the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum.

Limitations

This study only determined the lived experiences of the Grade 7 teacher handling the MATATAG subjects in the 1st phase of implementation. To better understand the scope of the MATATAG curriculum it is suggested to study impact of MATATAG implementation on students and other stakeholders.

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