



Educational Transformation: Perspectives on the Implementation of the Matatag Curriculum in the Philippines

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Abstract:

The Matatag Curriculum represents a transformative approach to education in the Philippines, aiming to empower learners and enhance their competitiveness on the global stage. This research investigates the perceptions of educators, stakeholders, policymakers, and students regarding the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum. Findings reveal a consensus on the curriculum's potential to foster critical thinking, creativity, and holistic development among students, while also highlighting challenges such as resistance to change and resource constraints. Recommendations for improvement include additional training for educators, development of comprehensive support materials, and mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. By addressing these challenges and implementing these recommendations, policymakers can enhance the effectiveness and impact of the Matatag Curriculum, paving the way for a more equitable, inclusive, and responsive education system in the Philippines.

Keywords: Matatag Curriculum, education reform, curriculum implementation, learner-centered pedagogy, 21st-century skills

Introduction:

In recent years, the Philippine educational landscape has witnessed significant transformations, particularly with the introduction of the Matatag Curriculum by the Department of Education (DepEd). Scheduled for phased implementation from the academic year 2024-2025 to 2027-2028, the Matatag Curriculum represents a pivotal shift in educational paradigms, aiming to enhance the quality of basic education across the nation. Rooted in the imperative to address the multifaceted challenges faced by Filipino learners, this curriculum reform initiative underscores the government's commitment to fostering holistic development and global competitiveness among its citizens.

The Matatag Curriculum, as articulated by Jocelyn Andaya, Director of the DepEd Bureau of Curriculum Development, embodies a holistic approach to education that prioritizes hands-on activities and age-appropriate experiences. This approach, characterized by a play-based methodology, seeks to empower learners by nurturing their critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity—an essential framework for navigating the complexities of the 21st century (Bacelonia, 2023).

Furthermore, the development of the Matatag Curriculum was not solely motivated by a desire to improve performance in international assessments like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Undersecretary Michael Poa emphasized that the curriculum overhaul was a comprehensive endeavor, informed by the insights of over a thousand education experts from various sectors (Valente & Mendoza, 2024). While the aspiration for improved performance in international benchmarks remains implicit, the primary focus of the Matatag Curriculum is to decongest competencies and foster a conducive learning environment that enables learners to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

The phased implementation of the Matatag Curriculum underscores the government's recognition of the need for a systematic and gradual transition to ensure its efficacy and sustainability. As Undersecretary Gina Gonong iterated, realizing the learning outcomes envisaged by the Matatag Curriculum requires time and concerted effort. With the first batch of students expected to fully experience the curriculum's benefits in 2037 or 2038, it is evident that the transformative potential of this educational reform will unfold gradually (Bacelonia, 2023).

Drawing from insights gleaned during the pilot testing phase, it is apparent that the successful implementation of the Matatag Curriculum hinges upon overcoming various challenges, including the need for extensive teacher training and the provision of adequate support materials. Nevertheless, amidst these challenges lie opportunities for refinement and innovation, as the DepEd endeavors to refine the curriculum based on feedback from stakeholders and experts.





This research aims to critically examine the Matatag Curriculum, shedding light on its objectives, implementation process, challenges, and potential impact. By synthesizing insights from educators, and stakeholders, this study seeks to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding curriculum reform in the Philippine context.

Literature Review:

The Matatag Curriculum represents a significant departure from traditional approaches to education in the Philippines, signaling a paradigm shift towards a more holistic and learner-centered model. In this literature review, we examine key concepts and research findings related to curriculum reform, educational paradigms, and the factors influencing successful curriculum implementation.

Curriculum Reform and Educational Paradigms

Curriculum reform initiatives are not unique to the Philippines but are a global phenomenon driven by the evolving needs of society and advancements in educational theory. According to Fullan (2025), curriculum reform is a complex process that requires a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural, political, and economic factors shaping education systems. The Matatag Curriculum aligns with the principles of transformative curriculum reform, which emphasizes the need to move beyond mere content delivery towards the development of critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills (Oloube, 2015).

At the heart of the Matatag Curriculum is a commitment to learner-centered education, which prioritizes the needs, interests, and abilities of individual learners (Smith, 2003). This approach contrasts with traditional teacher-centered pedagogies characterized by rote memorization and passive learning (Kember & Leung, 2005). Research suggests that learner-centered approaches are associated with higher levels of engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (Staker & Horn, 2012). By adopting a play-based methodology and emphasizing hands-on activities, the Matatag Curriculum aligns with best practices in learner-centered education.

Effective curriculum implementation hinges upon the capacity of educators to translate policy objectives into meaningful learning experiences (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Teacher training and professional development play a crucial role in equipping educators with the pedagogical knowledge and skills necessary for successful curriculum delivery (Desimone, 2009). However, research indicates that many teachers feel ill-prepared to implement new curricula due to limited training opportunities and inadequate support (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). The findings of Participant 2 (2023) underscore the importance of ongoing capacity-building initiatives to support teachers in adapting to the demands of the Matatag Curriculum.

Challenges of Curriculum Implementation

Despite the potential benefits of curriculum reform, the process of implementation is often fraught with challenges and obstacles (Cuban, 1990). Common challenges include resistance from stakeholders, resource constraints, and mismatched expectations (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977). The phased implementation strategy adopted for the Matatag Curriculum reflects a recognition of the complexities involved in scaling up educational reforms. By piloting the curriculum in select schools and gathering feedback from educators and stakeholders, the Department of Education aims to identify and address implementation challenges proactively.

Assessment is a critical component of curriculum reform, providing valuable insights into student learning and informing instructional decision-making (Brookhart, 2018). However, traditional assessment practices may not align with the goals of learner-centered education, which prioritize holistic and authentic forms of assessment (Wiggins, 1998). The Matatag Curriculum emphasizes a shift towards competency-based assessment, which focuses on measuring students' mastery of key concepts and skills rather than their ability to recall factual information. This approach aligns with international trends in educational assessment and has the potential to enhance the validity and reliability of student evaluations.

Global Perspectives on Curriculum Reform

The Matatag Curriculum reflects broader trends in global education, including efforts to cultivate 21st-century skills and competencies (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Countries around the world are rethinking their educational systems to prepare students for an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing world (OECD, 2018). The Philippines' participation in international assessments like PISA underscores the government's commitment to benchmarking its educational outcomes against global standards (Bacelonia, 2023). By aligning the Matatag Curriculum with international best practices, the Department of Education seeks to enhance the competitiveness of Filipino learners on the global stage.

The Matatag Curriculum represents a bold and ambitious attempt to transform education in the Philippines. Drawing on insights from curriculum reform literature and international best practices, this research aims to critically evaluate the implementation and impact of the Matatag Curriculum. By identifying key success factors and potential challenges, this study seeks to inform future policy decisions and contribute to ongoing efforts to improve the quality and relevance of basic education in the Philippines.

Methodology:

The research employed a phenomenological study design to explore the perceptions of educators and stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand the essence of human experiences and the meanings individuals attribute to them (Moustakas, 1994). This methodological approach was chosen to provide rich, in-depth insights into the complexities of curriculum reform in the Philippine educational context.

A convenient sampling technique was used to select participants who could provide diverse perspectives on the Matatag Curriculum implementation. Participants included educators, school administrators, and representatives from the Department of Education. Efforts were made to ensure representation from different geographical regions, educational levels, and institutional contexts to capture a comprehensive range of experiences.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants to explore their experiences, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the Matatag Curriculum. The interview protocol was designed to elicit detailed narratives and reflections on various aspects of curriculum implementation,





including its objectives, challenges, successes, and areas for improvement. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

A thematic analysis approach was employed to identify recurring patterns, themes, and categories within the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts were coded line-by-line to identify meaningful units of text, which were then grouped into broader themes and sub-themes. Through an iterative process of coding and thematic refinement, overarching patterns and insights emerged, providing a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives.

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness and rigor of the research findings. Member checking was conducted to validate the accuracy and interpretation of participants' responses, allowing them to review and confirm the researcher's understanding of their experiences. Additionally, peer debriefing and reflexivity were utilized to critically examine the researcher's own biases, assumptions, and preconceptions throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Ethical principles were rigorously adhered to throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study, and measures were implemented to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions, and their privacy and dignity were respected at all times.

Findings and Discussion:

Perceived Benefits of the Matatag Curriculum

The Matatag Curriculum, as perceived by participants, offers several notable advantages, aligning with contemporary educational paradigms and aiming to equip Filipino learners with essential skills for success in the 21st century. Educators and stakeholders, in particular, underscored these benefits, emphasizing the curriculum's learner-centered approach, hands-on learning experiences, and its potential to cultivate critical 21st-century competencies.

Firstly, participants lauded the Matatag Curriculum's emphasis on learner-centered pedagogy, a cornerstone of modern educational theory (Piaget, 1972). According to Participant 1 (2023), the curriculum prioritizes active engagement and participation, allowing learners to take ownership of their learning journeys. Such an approach resonates with contemporary educational research, which highlights the importance of empowering learners to construct their knowledge actively (Vygotsky, 1978). By fostering autonomy and agency, the Matatag Curriculum aims to create a more dynamic and student-driven learning environment, conducive to deeper understanding and skill acquisition.

Moreover, participants commended the curriculum's commitment to providing hands-on learning experiences, recognizing the value of experiential learning in promoting deeper understanding and retention of concepts (Dewey, 1938). Participant 2 (2023) noted that the curriculum pilot testing yielded positive feedback regarding the integration of practical, real-world applications into instructional practices. This aligns with research suggesting that hands-on experiences enhance student engagement and facilitate the transfer of knowledge to new contexts (Kolb, 1984). By incorporating experiential learning opportunities, the Matatag Curriculum seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice, preparing learners for diverse real-world challenges.

Furthermore, educators expressed appreciation for the Matatag Curriculum's focus on developing 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. These competencies are increasingly recognized as essential for success in today's rapidly evolving global landscape (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007). Participant 3 (2023) emphasized the curriculum's potential to nurture these skills through innovative pedagogical approaches, such as project-based learning and collaborative inquiry. By prioritizing the cultivation of higher-order thinking skills, the Matatag Curriculum aims to equip Filipino learners with the adaptive capabilities necessary to thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Additionally, stakeholders highlighted the curriculum's alignment with global educational trends and its potential to enhance the competitiveness of Filipino learners on the international stage. Participant 4 (2023) noted the importance of equipping students with globally relevant skills and competencies to prepare them for success in an interconnected world. This sentiment resonates with research advocating for educational systems that foster global citizenship and cross-cultural competence (UNESCO, 2017). By aligning with international benchmarks and standards, the Matatag Curriculum seeks to position Filipino learners as competitive participants in the global knowledge economy.

The perceived benefits of the Matatag Curriculum underscore its potential to revolutionize educational practices in the Philippines. By prioritizing learner-centered pedagogy, hands-on learning experiences, and the development of 21st-century skills, the curriculum aims to create a more dynamic, engaging, and globally competitive educational landscape. These perceived advantages align with contemporary educational research and underscore the significance of ongoing curriculum reforms in preparing learners for success in the 21st century.

Challenges in Curriculum Implementation

While the Matatag Curriculum holds promise for transforming education in the Philippines, participants in the study also identified several significant challenges encountered during its implementation. These challenges, ranging from resistance to change among educators to resource constraints, underscore the complexities inherent in enacting meaningful educational reform.

One of the primary challenges highlighted by participants was the resistance to change among educators. Participant 2 (2023) noted that some teachers found it difficult to transition from traditional lecture-based teaching methods to more collaborative and interactive approaches advocated by the Matatag Curriculum. This resistance to change is not uncommon in educational settings, where entrenched practices and beliefs can impede innovation and reform efforts (Fullan, 2007). Moreover, Participant 3 (2023) expressed concerns about the readiness of schools and teachers to effectively implement the curriculum, citing a lack of familiarity and comfort with new pedagogical approaches. Addressing this resistance to change requires targeted professional development initiatives and ongoing support to help educators navigate the transition to new instructional practices (Guskey, 2002).





In addition to resistance to change, participants identified resource constraints as a significant barrier to curriculum implementation. Participant 4 (2023) highlighted the challenges posed by limited funding and inadequate infrastructure, particularly in remote and underserved communities. Resource constraints can manifest in various forms, including a lack of instructional materials, technology, and physical facilities (UNESCO, 2016). Without sufficient resources, educators may struggle to effectively deliver the curriculum and provide students with enriching learning experiences. Participant 5 (2023) emphasized the importance of addressing resource inequalities to ensure equitable access to quality education for all learners.

Furthermore, participants noted a lack of adequate training and support materials as a key impediment to curriculum implementation. Participant 1 (2023) highlighted the need for comprehensive professional development opportunities to equip educators with the knowledge and skills required to effectively implement the Matatag Curriculum. Research suggests that ongoing training and support are essential components of successful curriculum implementation, enabling educators to navigate challenges and adapt to evolving pedagogical practices (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Moreover, Participant 6 (2023) emphasized the importance of providing educators with access to high-quality instructional materials and resources to support their teaching efforts. Without adequate training and support materials, educators may struggle to implement the curriculum with fidelity, compromising its intended impact on student learning outcomes.

Addressing the challenges of curriculum implementation requires a multifaceted approach that acknowledges the diverse needs and contexts of schools and educators. Policymakers must prioritize capacity-building initiatives and allocate resources strategically to support educators in navigating the complexities of curriculum reform. Moreover, fostering a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility among stakeholders can help mitigate resistance to change and promote collective ownership of the reform process. By addressing these challenges proactively, stakeholders can pave the way for the successful implementation of the Matatag Curriculum and realize its transformative potential in Philippine education.

Impact on Teaching and Learning Practices

The implementation of the Matatag Curriculum heralded a significant transformation in teaching and learning practices, ushering in a new era of pedagogical innovation and instructional excellence. Participants in the study attested to the profound impact of the curriculum on educational practices, highlighting a paradigm shift towards more learner-centered, interactive, and technology-integrated approaches.

One of the most notable changes observed was the adoption of learner-centered pedagogies, reflecting a departure from traditional teacher-centric instructional methods. Participant 2 (2023) remarked on the increased prevalence of project-based learning, cooperative learning, and experiential learning activities facilitated by the Matatag Curriculum. These pedagogical approaches prioritize active engagement and collaboration, empowering students to take ownership of their learning and apply theoretical knowledge to real-world contexts (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). By shifting the focus from rote memorization to inquiry-based exploration, educators sought to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity among students, in alignment with the curriculum's overarching goals.

Furthermore, participants noted a heightened emphasis on the integration of technology and digital resources to enhance teaching effectiveness and student engagement. Participant 4 (2023) highlighted the widespread adoption of educational technologies, such as interactive whiteboards, learning management systems, and multimedia resources, in classroom instruction. These digital tools served as catalysts for innovation, enabling educators to create dynamic and interactive learning environments that cater to diverse learning styles and preferences (Means et al., 2009). By leveraging technology, educators aimed to enrich the learning experience, promote information literacy, and prepare students for success in the digital age.

Moreover, the Matatag Curriculum's emphasis on holistic development contributed to a more comprehensive and student-centered educational experience. Participant 1 (2023) observed a renewed focus on cultivating not only academic skills but also socio-emotional competencies, values, and attitudes essential for holistic growth. Educators embraced a multidimensional approach to education, incorporating activities and experiences that nurture students' physical, emotional, social, and moral development (Echavez Jr, et al., 2024). By attending to the holistic needs of learners, educators sought to cultivate well-rounded individuals capable of thriving in diverse personal and professional contexts.

The impact of the Matatag Curriculum on teaching and learning practices was profound and far-reaching, ushering in a new era of educational excellence and innovation. Participants described a pedagogical landscape characterized by learner empowerment, technological integration, and holistic development, reflective of the curriculum's overarching vision. As educators continue to embrace the principles and practices espoused by the Matatag Curriculum, they are poised to shape the future of Philippine education, equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to navigate an ever-changing world.

Recommendations for Improvement

Drawing upon their experiences and insights gained from the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum, participants in the study offered a range of recommendations aimed at enhancing its effectiveness and impact. These recommendations encompassed various facets of curriculum implementation, including professional development for educators, resource provision, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, and flexibility in implementation.

A recurring theme among participants' recommendations was the need for additional training and professional development opportunities for educators. Participant 3 (2023) emphasized the importance of equipping teachers with the knowledge, skills, and pedagogical strategies necessary to effectively implement the curriculum. Research suggests that targeted professional development initiatives can enhance teacher efficacy and instructional practices, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes (Guskey, 2002). By investing in ongoing training and support, policymakers can empower educators to navigate the complexities of curriculum reform and adapt to evolving educational trends.

Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of developing comprehensive support materials and resources to assist educators in curriculum implementation. Participant 1 (2023) underscored the need for accessible curriculum guides, instructional materials, and digital resources tailored to the diverse needs and contexts of schools and learners. Research indicates that high-quality instructional materials can enhance teacher effectiveness and student engagement, facilitating the delivery of standards-aligned instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).





Policymakers must prioritize the development and dissemination of robust support materials to ensure equitable access to quality education for all learners.

In addition to training and resources, participants stressed the importance of establishing mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of curriculum implementation. Participant 4 (2023) highlighted the need for systematic data collection and analysis to assess the fidelity and effectiveness of the curriculum in achieving its intended outcomes. Research suggests that regular monitoring and evaluation can inform evidence-based decision-making, identify areas for improvement, and drive continuous improvement efforts (Fullan, 2014). By instituting a culture of accountability and transparency, policymakers can ensure that curriculum reforms are responsive to the evolving needs of learners and educators.

Moreover, participants underscored the importance of stakeholder engagement and collaboration in shaping future curriculum reforms. Participant 2 (2023) emphasized the need for inclusive and participatory processes that solicit input from educators, students, parents, and community members. Research suggests that involving stakeholders in decision-making can foster ownership, trust, and buy-in, leading to more sustainable and equitable educational change (Bryk et al., 2015). Policymakers must prioritize meaningful engagement with stakeholders to create curriculum policies and practices that reflect the diverse perspectives and priorities of the Philippine educational community.

Lastly, participants emphasized the importance of flexibility and adaptability in curriculum implementation to accommodate the diverse needs and contexts of schools and learners across the Philippines. Participant 5 (2023) highlighted the importance of allowing for local autonomy and customization to ensure that the curriculum resonates with the unique cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds of learners. Research suggests that flexible implementation models that allow for adaptation to local contexts can enhance relevance, ownership, and sustainability (Echavez Jr, et al., 2024). Policymakers must embrace a flexible and responsive approach to curriculum implementation, acknowledging the dynamic nature of educational contexts and the diverse needs of learners.

The recommendations offered by participants underscore the importance of investing in educator capacity-building, developing comprehensive support materials, instituting robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, fostering stakeholder engagement, and embracing flexibility in curriculum implementation. By heeding these recommendations, policymakers can enhance the effectiveness and impact of the Matatag Curriculum, paving the way for a more equitable, inclusive, and responsive education system in the Philippines.

Conclusion:

The study explored the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum in the Philippine educational landscape, examining its perceived benefits, challenges, and recommendations for improvement. Through the perspectives of educators, stakeholders, policymakers, and students, valuable insights were gleaned regarding the transformative potential of the curriculum and the opportunities and obstacles encountered in its implementation journey.

The findings of the study illuminated the perceived benefits of the Matatag Curriculum, including its emphasis on learner-centered pedagogy, hands-on learning experiences, and the development of 21st-century skills. Participants lauded the curriculum for its potential to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity among students, aligning with global educational trends and enhancing the competitiveness of Filipino learners on the international stage. Moreover, the curriculum's focus on holistic development was commended for nurturing well-rounded individuals capable of thriving in diverse personal and professional contexts.

However, alongside these benefits, participants also identified various challenges encountered during the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum. Resistance to change among educators, resource constraints, and a lack of adequate training and support materials emerged as prominent barriers to effective implementation. Despite these challenges, participants expressed optimism about the curriculum's potential to revolutionize teaching and learning practices, provided that proactive measures are taken to address implementation gaps and build educator capacity.

In light of the findings, several recommendations were proposed for improving the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum. These recommendations encompassed the provision of additional training and professional development opportunities for educators, the development of comprehensive support materials and resources, the establishment of mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and flexibility in implementation. By heeding these recommendations, policymakers can enhance the effectiveness and impact of the Matatag Curriculum, fostering a more equitable, inclusive, and responsive education system in the Philippines.

The Matatag Curriculum represents a pivotal step towards educational transformation in the Philippines, embodying a vision of learner empowerment, pedagogical innovation, and holistic development. While challenges persist, the commitment of educators, stakeholders, policymakers, and students to the ideals of the curriculum bodes well for its continued evolution and success. Through collaborative efforts and sustained dedication, the Matatag Curriculum has the potential to shape the future of Philippine education, equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to thrive in the 21st century and beyond.

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