Challenges And Coping Mechanisms Of Teachers In Transitioning To The Matatag Curriculum: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract: *The Department of Education in the Philippines has implemented the MATATAG Curriculum, signifying a crucial transition to learner-centered and competency-based education. This study examines the experiences of eight teachers from the Kibawe West District, Division of Bukidnon, during the transition to the new curriculum in the 2024–2025 academic year. The study employs a transcendental phenomenological design based on Curriculum Theory, Stress and Coping Theory, and Resilience Theory to identify significant obstacles and coping strategies utilized by teachers. Data were collected via comprehensive interviews and analyzed by Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction methodology. Out of these three major themes, ten sub-themes emerge, which include teachers' experiences and perceptions of challenges and the impact of challenges on teaching practices. Also, teachers revealed their competence in coping mechanisms, which include coping strategies and mechanisms employed and support received from school and DepEd. Moreover, the effectiveness of support mechanisms, changes in teaching style and approach, student learning outcomes and engagement, balancing curriculum requirements with individual needs, long-term implications for teachers and learners, and teachers and learners' recommendations for curriculum improvement also came out. Teachers performed their roles during the curriculum changes, positively adapted to the new curriculum, and equipped themselves with learnings from their experiences. Those experiences shaped them to be better teachers. Like gems polished with friction, teachers become more flexible and competent after experiencing a crisis. Moving forward, their journey in the new curriculum led them to be resilient in their respective classrooms.*

Keywords*: MATATAG Curriculum, teacher experiences, coping mechanisms, curriculum transition, phenomenology, educational reform*

Introduction

The education sector in the Philippines has undergone significant reforms in recent years, with one of the most notable being the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. As part of the Department of Education's ongoing efforts to improve the country's education quality, the MATATAG Curriculum was designed to address the evolving needs of 21st-century learners. The curriculum is built on four core elements. Firstly, it aims to ensure graduates are well-prepared for their desired workplace. Second, it focuses on providing a conducive learning environment, including fast delivery of equipment and the construction of facilities to enhance learners' learning experiences. Third, it prioritizes creating a supportive learning environment by promoting inclusivity and student well-being. Lastly, the teaching approaches aim to enhance teaching experiences and student engagement.

The MATATAG Curriculum, derived from the acronym "MATATAG," which signifies "Make the curriculum relevant to produce job-ready, active, and responsible citizens; Take steps to accelerate the delivery of basic education facilities and services; Take good care of learners by promoting learner well-being, inclusive education, and a positive learning environment; and Give support to teachers to teach better," was crafted to address the dynamic requirements of 21st-century learners. In contrast to the K to 12 curriculum, the MATATAG Curriculum prioritizes real-world applicability, enhances student preparedness for the workforce, and promotes active and responsible citizenship. It focuses on the enhancement of fundamental education services, the promotion of student well-being, inclusion, and a conducive learning environment, alongside offering extensive support for educators to improve their instructional methods. MATATAG prioritizes integrated learning modules that foster critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, in contrast to the K to 12 system, which adhered to a more traditional, subject-specific approach. The MATATAG Curriculum employs a comprehensive strategy to provide a dynamic and flexible educational framework that caters to the varied needs of learners, educators, and the community, thereby establishing a new benchmark for educational excellence in the Philippines.

The transition to the MATATAG Curriculum represents a significant shift from the previous K-12 curriculum, a necessary reform to improve educational outcomes in the Philippines. However, while the MATATAG Curriculum offers numerous potential benefits, its implementation has also posed considerable challenges for educators. The implementation of the new curriculum in primary education encounters various challenges and difficulties, and effectively addressing these issues could enhance its execution in schools (Xhemajli, A., Malaj, F., & Mehmeti, L., 2023).

In this study, teachers' challenges and coping mechanisms will be the focus. Teachers are essential in successfully implementing the new school curriculum, working with fellow educators, and assessing student performance to enhance learning

outcomes (Katshuna, H., & Shikalepo, E., 2023). Teachers have had to adapt to new teaching methods, integrate unfamiliar content, and employ innovative assessment strategies all while managing the day-to-day demands of their profession.

As one of the teachers in the Department of Education, the researcher witnesses how have faced pressure during this transition. The move towards learner-centered learning means that traditional teaching methods must be reassessed while introducing new content areas, requiring significant investment in professional development. Consequently, the increased workload due to the changes has led to an extra burden on the teachers, resulting in thoughts about burnout and job satisfaction. Despite the Department of Education offering training and seminars, teachers continue to struggle with implementing the MATATAG Curriculum.

This research explores teachers' difficulties when switching to the MATATAG Curriculum and identifies how they cope with these challenges. Using a phenomenological perspective, the researcher aims to gain an in-depth understanding of what teachers go through during this period and provide recommendations for future policy and practice. It is how to explore the challenges and coping mechanisms of teachers in the transition to the new curriculum and document their journey from academic disruption to adaptation. Teachers' resilience amidst uncertainties and crises was captured as the essence of their narratives. Stories on how teachers support learners in handling transition-related concerns may lead to conversations about instituting school-based assessment measures. Teachers' proactive, comprehensive, and transparent approach as leaders will make a difference in teaching and learning in the new curriculum.

Implementing the MATATAG Curriculum was a big change in the Philippine education system that aimed to meet the changing needs of learners in the 21st century. The curriculum aimed to fill in gaps in traditional teaching methods by putting real-world relevance, inclusion, and teacher support at the top of its list of priorities. This better prepares learners for the workforce and an active society. But these goals come with problems that have a big effect on teachers, who were in charge of delivering the material. As frontline workers, teachers must learn new methods and material while also dealing with more work and the needs of a learner-centered approach.

This study is essential because it looks into what teachers went through when they switched to the MATATAG Curriculum. It shows them what problems they faced and how they dealt with them. Even though the Department of Education offers professional development programs, teachers still have a hard time. This shows that policy implementation needs to be more tailored and helpful.

This study addresses a gap in research by focusing on teachers' firsthand experiences during curriculum changes, an area that has received limited attention. Most existing studies examined the impact of policy shifts on learners and their academic performance. However, there is a lack of in-depth, qualitative research that amplifies the voices of teachers implementing these changes. By capturing their narratives, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges, adaptations, and resilience demonstrated by educators throughout the transition.

In the end, the findings of this study will guide informed decision-making and the development of strategies that enhance both the implementation process and the well-being and effectiveness of teachers. Successful educational reforms depend on supporting the educators who bring these changes to life in the classroom. By sharing their experiences, this study aims to spark meaningful discussions and provide valuable insights for creating a more inclusive and responsive school system.

Research Questions

The study explored teachers' challenges and coping mechanisms of teachers in the transition to MATATAG Curriculum in the District of Kibawe, Division of Bukidnon, during the school year 2024-2025. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1) What challenges do teachers face when transitioning to the MATATAG Curriculum?

2) How do these challenges impact teachers' professional practices and personal well-being?

3.) What coping mechanisms do teachers use to handle the challenges associated with the transition to the MATATAG Curriculum?

Review of Related Literature

Legal and Policy Context

The implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum is anchored in Republic Act No. 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, which established the K to 12 program. The Department of Education's (DepEd) Order No. 010, s. 2024 outlines the phased rollout of the MATATAG Curriculum starting with Kindergarten, Grades 1, 4, and 7 in School Year 2024–2025. This policy framework prioritizes essential learning competencies and mandates DepEd to provide support systems for teachers. However, the transition entails significant instructional and structural shifts, requiring teachers to adjust their methods, pacing, and content delivery with limited preparation.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Curriculum Transition

Teachers are central to curriculum reform, yet studies reveal consistent challenges during transitions. These include insufficient orientation, lack of clear guidelines, and limited instructional resources. Kilag et al. (2024) found that many Filipino teachers felt unprepared and unsupported in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum, often leading to confusion and dissatisfaction. Similarly, Ngwenya (2020) identified resource scarcity—including human and material resources—as a significant barrier to curriculum implementation. Teachers must revise lesson plans, adopt new pedagogical strategies, and manage an increased workload, all while addressing student learning needs.

Furthermore, several studies highlight that teacher perceptions vary depending on the level of training and support they receive. Potera and Shala (2019) emphasized that adequately trained teachers are more likely to respond positively to curriculum reforms. Razali (2020) also stressed that teacher understanding and preparedness are critical for effective implementation. These findings underscore the importance of contextualizing teacher experiences through a phenomenological lens, focusing on their personal and professional adaptations.

Despite the difficulties, some scholars point out the potential benefits of the MATATAG Curriculum. It aims to integrate critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity—skills necessary for 21st-century learners (Kilag et al., 2024; Echavez Jr. et al., 2024). However, achieving these objectives depends heavily on the readiness and support systems available to teachers.

Coping Mechanisms of Teachers

Teachers employ a range of coping strategies to manage the stress and challenges of curriculum reform. Support from school administrators and peers significantly enhances their ability to adapt. Diab and Green (2024) found that instructional and emotional support correlates with higher teacher engagement and resilience.

Self-directed learning, collaboration, and effective time management are among the most common adaptive strategies. Alpuerto (2022) noted that teachers who engage in self-training and peer collaboration become more confident in using ICT and implementing reforms. Salkovsky et al. (2015) and Lipayon (2020) highlighted that physical activity, maintaining a positive mindset, and proactive classroom management help teachers reduce stress and maintain instructional quality.

Coping also involves creative instructional adjustments. Teachers use active learning strategies and technology to enhance student engagement (Cao, 2024). Additionally, adopting real-world, competency-based approaches aligns the curriculum with learners' and teachers' evolving needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed transcendental phenomenology as outlined by Moustakas (1994) to explore the lived experiences of teachers transitioning to the MATATAG Curriculum. This approach is appropriate when the goal is to understand how individuals make meaning of a shared phenomenon—in this case, the challenges and coping mechanisms experienced by teachers during curriculum reform.

A key component of Moustakas' approach is the idea of epoche, in which the researcher completely focuses on the viewpoints of the participants while putting aside personal biases and assumptions. The participants' narratives were examined through in-depth interviews to find significant statements, which were subsequently grouped into themes that reflect their experiences as well as how they perceived them.

These were synthesized into a composite description to reflect the essence of the teachers' shared experiences. This method allowed for a deeper understanding of the emotional, professional, and contextual dimensions of the transition to the MATATAG Curriculum, giving voice to the educators at the center of this educational reform.

Research Locale and Participants

This study was conducted in Kibawe West District, Division of Bukidnon during the school year 2024-2025. The district includes 13 schools in predominantly rural and agricultural settings. The study respondents comprised one teacher from a medium school, four from an integrated school, and three from a small schools. They were purposefully selected to capture various experiences, as they come from different schools with varied contexts.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher followed proper protocol when gathering the data. The researcher secured the approval of the research committee to launch the instrument. Then, the researcher requested a written recommendation from the Dean of the Graduate Program. After this, a letter of permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of DepEd Bukidnon Division was secured, asking permission from the Public Schools District Supervisor of Kibawe West District to launch the instrument to the identified teacher respondents.

In each interview, the researcher restated and summarized information from respondents to ensure accuracy. After the taped interviews were transcribed, the researcher asked each participant to review the accuracy of their transcript. Follow-up questions were used to clarify points or information that seemed unclear. The researcher also sought guidance from resources and faculty advisors throughout the study. The faculty advisor's input helped the researcher focus on important details provided by respondents, which led to the development of themes from the data. Lastly, the researcher collected relevant participant data to validate the study's findings.

Ethical Considerations

After identifying the respondents for the study, an orientation about the details of the research was conducted. Free, prior, and informed consent from the respondents was secured. Their participation was voluntary, and they may opt not to be part of the study.

All the narratives and views written in the study include anonymity and confidentiality. Anonymity is insufficient to protect a person's privacy by disclosing personal issues. Thus, the researcher refrained from soliciting private information that was not even closely related to the research questions and the written consent signed by the respondents.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through face-to-face phenomenological interviews using a researcher-made interview guide. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and participants were asked to review their transcripts for accuracy. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly followed.

Data Analysis

The study used phenomenological reduction to analyze the gathered data, including bracketing, horizontalizing, organizing invariant qualities and themes, and constructing textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

The analysis started with bracketing, which is done by grouping the questions or topics. Followed by horizontalizing, or listing all relevant expressions, where the researcher cleans the data, removing irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping statements. Then, invariant qualities and themes were organized, describing the data to create core themes through clusters. Thematic analysis entails searching across the data set to identify, analyze, and report repeated patterns. Finally, the researcher constructed textural descriptions and extracted the meanings and essence of the experience.

In the study, the researcher first asked the questions. After collecting data through phenomenological interviews with teachers who had experienced the phenomenon, the data were analyzed following Moustakas' phenomenological data analysis procedure. Upon completing the interview, the researcher organized, analyzed, and reviewed the data to identify significant themes or ideas that would guide the discussions concerning assessment-related issues in teachers, based on recurrent themes or ideas.

The results were reviewed and summarized according to recurrent themes to develop sub-emergent themes. Additionally, the researcher subjected the results to experts' comments and suggestions, and their feedback was used to refine the findings.

Results

The study investigated teachers' actual experiences negotiating the shift to the MATATAG Curriculum. Three main topics emerged from data collected by means of in-depth phenomenological interviews with eight teachers: Challenges of Curriculum Transition, Teacher Coping Mechanisms, and the Impact on Teaching and Learning. Every topic captures sub-themes that highlight the intricacies of curriculum execution from the viewpoint of classroom practitioners.

1. Challenges of Curriculum Transition Issues with Curriculum Change Instructional design, classroom delivery, and assessment techniques all saw major changes with the MATATAG Curriculum. Teachers said they were overwhelmed by the sudden change from conventional education to learner-centered, competency-based strategies. Many said they struggled to fit with unknown abilities, including play-based and real-life learning, and adapt to new educational frameworks.

Respondent statements:

"The first day of the new MATATAG curriculum felt like stepping onto a different planet. Gone were the familiar lesson plans, replaced by a whole new system emphasizing collaborative learning and project-based assessments"

"The most significant challenges I encountered in transitioning to the MATATAG Curriculum were the stress of adjusting to the new competencies and the difficulty of ensuring that learners fully understood the lessons."

Adding to these difficulties was the scarcity of adequate resources, such as technology tools, learning materials, and instructional manuals. Teachers from both elementary and secondary levels, especially those in under-resourced institutions, said they often turned to personal spending and makeshift supplies to make up for institutional deficiencies. The change raised their administrative duties and burden, sometimes causing exhaustion and lower job happiness.

Respondent statements:

"So, every day is a challenge. But in terms of our curriculum, the challenge is the materials. The materials and the connection with technology."

"Another major issue was the lack of resources, particularly gadgets and other learning materials."

2. Teacher Coping Mechanisms Teachers showed a great degree of tenacity despite these difficulties. One important coping strategy was collaboration; teachers deliberately looked for help from peers via both formal and informal networks. Online networks, group chats, and peer-to-peer resource sharing let teachers share ideas and seek emotional support.

Respondent statements:

"I joined online forums and connected with other teachers who were also transitioning to MATATAG, sharing strategies, and supporting each other. This collaborative approach was incredibly helpful."

"Working with colleagues, exchanging resources, and implementing instructional practices to fill in for shortages in materials and keep in line with the pace of the curriculum took front stage."

Many teachers also welcomed creative teaching as a way to fit the new syllabus. This covered the integration of creative teaching strategies, material localization, and varied instruction. Reflective practice, self-directed study, and advanced preparation helped teachers to keep instructional excellence despite the systematic demands. Particularly via training courses and workshops, help from the Department of Education and school leadership helped to ease the change. Although teachers valued these capacity-building initiatives, they underlined the importance of continuous, consistent, and need-based professional development to preserve efficient curriculum execution.

Respondent statements:

"The Department of Education provided training sessions and seminars to help us understand the framework and its objective. These were very helpful in aligning our goals with the curriculum's intent."

"The most helpful support was the combination of practical training and the emotional support network. The workshop and training session provided me with the knowledge and skills I needed to implement the MATATAG curriculum effectively."

3. Impact on Teaching and Learning the MATATAG Curriculum spurred a move toward more dynamic, student-centered teaching. Teachers abandoned lecture-based approaches and embraced interactive learning techniques including project-based assignments and experiential learning activities. Increased student involvement, participation, and development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities followed this educational change.

Respondent statements:

"The transition to MATATAG has fundamentally changed my teaching style. I've moved away from traditional lecturing and group learning towards a more facilitative role."

"The transition to the MATATAG Curriculum has encouraged me to become more equipped and adaptive in my teaching strategies within the classroom setting. It pushed me to explore innovative approaches and refine my methods to address the challenges of the new curriculum."

Teachers, on the other hand, said it was challenging to strike a balance between the varied student learning needs and the uniform curriculum requirements. Ensuring inclusion and fairness in the classroom became increasingly dependent on differentiated

education. Under the new framework, teachers underlined that providing a good education depended on flexibility, careful lesson planning, and ongoing assessment.

Respondent statements:

"By balancing curriculum implementation with individual student needs, required flexibility, differentiated instruction became a core strategy, allowing me to cater to varying abilities while meeting curriculum standards."

"Careful planning, adaptability, and using differentiated strategies are required in order to achieve a balance between meeting the objectives of the curriculum and catering to the specific requirements of each of my students."

Over time, teachers saw the MATATAG Curriculum's promise to improve both instruction and learning. They appreciated chances for their professional development and said hope for the evolution of 21st-century skills among students. Yet, they underlined again the need for continuous institutional support, adequate funding distribution, and feedback systems to guarantee that changes result in real educational benefits.

Respondent statements:

"For teachers, I guess we need ongoing professional development to adapt to the new curriculum's demand, which includes training in differentiated instruction, assessment strategies, and technological integration."

"As a teacher, it makes me realize how important it is to keep learning in order to keep up with the demands of the job, like organizing time, making sure lessons are aligned with standardized tests, and coming up with new ways to get students interested."

Discussions

The results of this study show the double character of educational reform: although seeking to improve learning experiences and results, changes also add complexity and pressure on those charged with carrying them out. The shift to the MATATAG Curriculum exposes discrepancies in institutional readiness and resource availability as well as the conflict between innovation and readiness.

Teachers' difficulties reflect current studies on educational transformation, especially the emotional and cognitive price of adjusting to new teaching paradigms. The feeling of being overwhelmed by unknown material, more work, and fewer resources reflects world trends where curriculum changes sometimes outstrip systematic support mechanisms. This emphasizes the need for consistent, well-supported implementation plans that give teachers agency and preparation priority.

Coping strategies used by teachers show their autonomy and professionalism. A great dedication to educational progress is shown by cooperation, lifelong learning, and pedagogical creativity. These results support theories of teacher resilience and professional learning communities, which promote reflective practice and peer support as cornerstones for durable transformation.

The MATATAG Curriculum's effect on teaching and learning is both encouraging and cautionary. Although increases in student involvement and critical thinking are significant, the success of such advances relies mostly on continuous teacher development and resource availability. The results imply that changes ought to be all-encompassing, covering not only curricular material but also teacher well-being and capacity-building.

Ultimately, the move to the MATATAG Curriculum offers insightful analysis of the reality of carrying out educational changes in various classroom environments. A vital perspective for politicians and stakeholders to assess and improve reform initiatives is provided by teachers' voices. Transformative curriculum objectives are met by supporting teachers with appropriate training, tools, and feedback systems.

Conclusion

This study examined the lived experiences of teachers transitioning to the MATATAG Curriculum and revealed key insights into the implementation process. Teachers faced significant challenges, including unfamiliar teaching strategies, increased workload, time constraints, and insufficient resources. Despite these difficulties, educators employed a variety of coping mechanisms such as collaboration, self-training, and instructional innovation to adapt to the demands of the new curriculum.

The study underscores the importance of sustained institutional support, accessible professional development, and robust communication between educators and administrators. Moreover, it highlights the role of reflective practice and peer support in

enhancing teacher resilience and instructional quality. The transition not only altered teaching methodologies but also positively influenced student engagement and learning outcomes. Ultimately, the MATATAG Curriculum was perceived not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity for professional growth and transformation.

Recommendations

Given the discussion and findings, several implications become evident for future research.

1. Teachers may engage in collaborative efforts with colleagues and pursue independent study to ensure that their professional competencies remain current. Utilize and disseminate the most effective strategies to enhance student engagement in both learning and instructional processes. Utilize the digital tools and technologies that are accessible to enhance instructional practices within the classroom setting.
2. School heads may set up organized professional development programs that focus on integrating technology, managing the classroom, and teaching learners with different needs. Set up mentoring programs so that teachers with more experience can help those who are having a hard time with the change. Make it easier for teachers and administrators to talk to each other so that execution problems can be fixed quickly.
3. The Department of Education may provide all the learning tools that are needed. This includes textbooks and teacher guides. Review the program from time to time to see how it's working and make changes based on what teachers and learners say. Additional funds should be given to schools so they can buy teaching materials and technology.
4. Another study may be conducted in a larger scope or in another research design to further the investigation of the challenges and coping mechanisms of teachers.

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