**Challenges of Social Studies Teachers in the Implementation of the Matatag Curriculum: A Case Study from Northern Philippines**

**ABSTRACT**

Education plays a vital role in the development of well-informed and critical citizens, which enables them to keep pace in the ever-changing and evolving world. With this, the Department of Education implemented the Matatag Curriculum, also known as the *“Bansang Makabata, Batang Makabansa”.* This curriculum was formulated as a response to the loopholes of the K to 12 Curriculum. However, like other curriculum reforms, it also posed challenges to teachers as the primary implementer. This study explores the challenges in the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum, contextualized to the teaching of Araling Panlipunan 7. This study utilized qualitive research design specifically case study following thematic approach to data analysis.The participants of this research is composed of five Junior High School Social Studies Teachers who are teaching Araling Panlipunan 7, in the Schools Division of Ilocos Norte. Through a series of interviews, the study was able to generate responses from the Social Studies 7 teachers specifically in terms of the challenges they face in the implementation of the Matatag curriculum as well as their initiatives to somewhat address said challenges. Findings reveal that the challenges posed by the implementation of the curriculum is no ordinary to the challenges encountered from previous curriculum reforms which include; inadequacy of professional trainings and seminars, lack of available aligned resource materials such as textbooks, inaccessibility of online resources due to poor internet connection in schools, poor stakeholder engagement as a result of limite knowledge about the Matatag Curriculum, and teacher readiness as a result of lack of resources and trainings. These challenges hinder the effective delivery of instruction; however, it also revealed that teachers employ mitigating practices such as the use of textbooks and educational resources, whose content are similar to the Matatag Curriculum, and an exploration of related books and articles to gain additional understanding about the curriculum. The study contributes to the growing discourse on the continuous refinement of the curriculum and underscores the need for a collective effort of all stakeholders for its successful implementation.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Education serves as a fundamental pillar of development and progress for any nation because it ensures the production of informed and critical citizens who are able to creatively and critically analyze situations to make the society better. It is pivotal in the development of empowered individuals, bridging gaps, driving innovation and growth, fostering critical thinking, and creating informed citizens (Staff & Staff, 2024). In the context of Philippine culture, many families still argue that education is the key for a better life and regarded as a treasure that no one will ever steal. According to Alampay and Garcia (2019), Filipino families place a high regard on children’s educational achievement and consequently, children consider educational success as means by which they meet filial obligations and parental expectations. These have placed emphasis on the high value of education for Filipinos.

 The Philippine education system continues to evolve and transform, incorporating cultural elements, traditions, and Filipino values. One of the prominent developments in the Philippine Education system is the implementation of the K to 12 Curriculum in 2013. This curriculum focuses on the production of graduates that are ready for three career paths; employment, education, and business. The institutionalization of the K to 12 curriculum is a major transformation to the educational landscape because it aligns to global standards to allow Filipinos to be at par with other nationalities in terms of education and employment (Abraga et.al., 2022).

 Despite of the positive notes in the implementation of the K to 12 Curriculum, it still faces a number of challenges by parents, students, and teachers. In the study of Tarraya (2023), she presented the following issues and problems: overloaded curriculum, excessive teaching demands, and an overwhelming academic load. The Department of Education, on the other hand, after a comprehensive review on the K to 12 Curriculum, highlighted the following issues of the curriculum: 1. the curriculum was overcrowded with misaligned competencies and cognitive demand; 2. Students have hard time mastering basic skills such as reading and arithmetic; 3. There is a need to update the curriculum to align with international standards; and 4. It has to be simplified to reduce workload for teachers. These findings stand to be a strong perception on the weaknesses of the K to 12 Curriculum. To address the problems and in response to the goal of the United Nations to provide quality education as institutionalized under Sustainable Development Goal no. 4, the Department of Education introduced the Matatag Curriculum as a strategic initiative to address these problems (Abellanosa et.al, 2024). This curriculum is known as “Bansang Makabata, Batang Makabansa”, which aims to prioritize the mastery of fundamental skills such as numeracy and literacy among learners alongside the development of socio-emotional skills (Presidential Communications Office, 2023).

 The Matatag Curriculum, as stipulated in the DepEd Order no. 10, s. 2024 or the Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of the Matatag Curriculum, fosters inclusivity by integrating global citizenship and respect for diversity and promotes a future-thinking mindset that empowers learners to embrace and shape change while cherishing their national identity and sense of nationhood. With these being said, the Matatag Currciculum is expected to: ensure that all learners are equipped with necessary life skills, inculcate the value of citizenship, help learners to effectively respond and handle problems in everyday life, and foster critical and creative thinking by collaboratively working with their peers. It aims to develop skills in math, life skills, and reading that are essential to job and daily life (Admin, 2024b). Implementing this curriculum gives emphasis on the continuous effort of the government to provide quality basic education for all young Filipinos.

 Despite its successful implementation, the Matatag Curriculum faces significant challenges and series of scrutiny. For example, in the study of Javier (2023), she revealed various obstacles such as the need for appropriate implementation approaches, inadequate government policies for inclusive education, and technical problems upon implementation. In the study of Macasero (2023), she also highlighted problems, which includes teacher readiness, lack of access and information resources, and infrastructural limitations. She then argues that these have imposed limitations in the effective implementation of the curriculum. The study of Andrin (2024), also revealed critical challenges in the implementation of the said curriculum particularly in teacher readiness and support for curriculum deliver, as well as concerns about inclusive education and equity. The lack of adequate training and professional developments for teachers profoundly impact the effective delivery of instruction. The findings of the study of Germuth (2018) suggest that adequate training for teachers has a positive impact in navigating curriculum reforms. Other studies revealed a pervasive concern regarding curriculum reform in the Philippines such as in the study of Abragan, (2022) and restated in the study of Andrin, (2024), both studies identified pedagogical knowledge gaps, inadequate training, and limited access to instructional materials as challenges in to curriculum reform in the Philippines. These disparities are detrimental in the school’s effort to foster inclusivity and equal access to education resources (Churchwell, et. al., 2020). These challenges pose significant threat on the successful implementation of the Matatag Curriculum.

Furthermore, this study is grounded on the sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social and cultural factors in shaping a learning environment. This theory can provide an understanding on the impact of curriculum reforms to school setting and how can reform be made more inclusive and equitable. It recognizes learning as sociocultural, which means learning is made and valued as people interact with one another and gain experiences across many contexts (Guerin and Morton, 2017). This theory helps the researcher to understand the challenges faced by teachers as a result of curriculum reform by analyzing the importance of interactions, collaboration, and the role of the teacher as a facilitator rather than a sole knowledge provider. This framework also allows for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the issues beyond simply identifying resource gaps.

This paper then explore the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum, contextualized in the teaching of Araling Panlipunan 7. It will try to understand and analyze the challenges faced by Social Studies teachers in the junior high chool, and by identifying key challenges and providing recommendations, this paper will contribute to the continuous development and refinement of the curriculum towards achieving its goal. The study was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by Grade 7 Araling Panlipunan Teachers particularly in the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum?

2. What mitigating practices do they employ to overcome these challenges?

3. How do these challenges affect the effective delivery of instruction?

**METHODOLOGY**

 **Research Design.** The study utilized qualitative research design specifically focused on exploring the experiences of teachers through a case study approach. The case study as an approach is a research method that involves an in-depth investigation of specific setting and context that are being studied to seek patterns and causes of behavior (MSEd, 2024). In this study, this approach helped the researcher to do a thorough investigation on the challenges of Social Studies Teachers in the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum. It also ensures that the researcher was able to gather a detailed account and a contextualized analysis of specific situations allowing the researcher to delve into the challenges, experiences, and strategies of the respondents in the implementation of the curriculum.

 **Locale of the Study.** The study was conducted in the Schools Division of Ilocos Norte. The identified schools are among the schools classified as big school, which caters to Social Studies Teachers who are teaching Araling Panlipuna 7, a subject area that is under the Matatag Curriculum. Research participants were choosen with the use convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling method is a non-probability sampling method chosen based on the availability, accessibility, and proximity of the respondents to the researcher (Stewart, 2025). This method was utilized because of limited number of participants who want to participate, and the proximity of the respondents to the researcher. This sampling method facilitated efficient contact and communication with the respondents, allowing the researcher to clarify key concepts, pose follow-up questions, and gain deeper insights from the collected data.

 **Data Gathering.** Prior to the commencement of the study, the researcher contacted Social Studies teachers to identify who among them are teaching Araling Panlipunan 7 and asked about their willingness to be participants of a study regarding the challenges faced by Social Studies Teachers in the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum. Thereafter, a letter to conduct study was transmitted to the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent. Upon approval of the letter the researcher personally presented the letter to the respective school principals of the selected schools to inform them about the study and the participation of their Social Studies Teachers in Grade 7.

 The transmittal of the letter to the respondents, explaining the rationale of the study and confidentiality of the data gathered, officially begun the data gathering procedure. The researcher utilized a structured-interview questionnaire, which is composed of five dimensions/challenges focusing on professional development via trainings; classroom implementation; learning resources; partnership with stakeholders; and readiness of teachers. Structured interviews were implemented because it is crucial in gathering data that are credible, reliable, and uniform data collection process for a more organized analysis (VidCruiter, 2024). In order to achieve the research objectives, the researchers conducted a thematic analysis to determine and analyze the challenges of social studies teachers in the Implementation of the Matatag curriculum.

 The data collected from the study was treated using the 6-phase coding framework from Braun and Clarke (2013). This framework includes the following phases: 1) familiarization of data; (2) generation of codes; (3) combining codes into themes; (4) reviewing of themes; (5) determining significance of themes and; (6) reporting of findings.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The challenges encountered by Social Studies teachers in the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum can be explained and analyzed in different dimensions, which include: 1) preparedness of teachers via professional trainings; 2) classroom implementation; 3) availability and access to learning materials; 4) partnership with stakeholders; and 5) readiness of teachers.

 **Preparedness via Professional Trainings**. Trainings and seminars are essential in the development of teachers professionally and personally because it allows them to creatively engage in their discussion and craft for new strategies and activities that help in the attainment of learning goals. According to Ahmed, Pasha and Malik (2021), in-service training can be an effective way to impart knowledge, skills, and motivation and to provide continuous education to teachers. This is particularly important in the implementation of the Matatag Curriuclum. Social Studies teachers who are teaching Araling Panlipunan 7 have undergone trainings and seminars that target the production of interactive materials. The teacher-respondents highlighted seminars such as cultural mapping, interactive project, and development of multimedia learning resources. These, according to them plays a significant role in helping them engage their learners. It is also found that they also undergone training that is directly aligned to the Matatag Curriculum. These seminars and trainings were undertaken prior to the implementation of the said curriculum and spearheaded by the schools division office, which they believe helped them in the teaching-learning process and equipped them with necessary skills relevant to content and pedagogy. However, the teacher-respondents emphasized that the inadequacy of the trainings and seminars has become a challenge to effectively deliver instruction in the newly-launched curriculum, especially that they have to learn and navigate the new concepts and ideologies offered by the Matatag Curriculum. The findings were further reinforced by the study of Ambarin (2023), which explained that teachers who lack proper training may have dfficulty to address the needs of the students and in delivering adequate learning and instruction. To address this challenge, one respondent explained that she uses audio-visual materials from the internet and reads related books and articles to get herself familiar with the new concepts. The respondents highlight the need for more trainings and seminars to equip them more, and consequently be more confident to deliver instruction under the Matatag Curriculum.

 **Classroom Implementation.** Classroom implementation refers to the practical process of translating planned curriculum into real-world setting. The teacher-respondents, as regards to classroom implementation, highlight that they have a high level of familiarity with the competencies and contents of Araling Panlipunan 7 under the Matatag Curriculum, which allows them to formulate and implement appropriate learning materials and pedagogies to make instruction and learning effective. However, their biggest challenge was the lacking of available learning materials aligned to Matatag Curriculum, which results to the inability of the students to have mastery of basic concepts. With this, one respondent explicitly explained that she uses all available resources such as materials in the internet, old textbooks, audio-visual materials, and others only to understand and explain better the contents of the new competencies of Araling Panlipunan 7, even though they are not aligned to the new curriculum. This is in corroboration to one study which posited that when learning materials are not available, it will become disadvantageous to the individuals and to the over-all education system that can lead to various impediments within the subject area (Kapur, 2022).

 **Accessibility of Learning Materials.** Learning materials are crucial in ensuring the success of the learning process because it aids teachers to attain teaching-learning goals. Given the nature of the Matatag Curriculum as new, the accessibility and availability of learning materials become a common and biggest challenge. It is found that there are available digitized resources, but internet connectivity posts a challenge to their accessibility. It is also highlighted by the respondents that digitized resources only include worksheets and lesson exemplars, which do not cover nor present a comprehensive content of the topics and competencies of Araling Panlipunan 7. It is also highlighted by the respondents that they resort in the use of materials not aligned to the Matatag Curriculum and just discern necessary information based on the competencies of Araling Panlipunan 7. Accessibility and availability issues of learning materials impends the success of every teaching and learning delivery. This can lead to limited knowledge, reduced engagement, and the decline in the overall quality of education. As such, the availability of learning materials improves school effectiveness because they are reliable in giving out good academic turn outs (Koome, 2020).

 **Partnership with Stakeholders.** Engaging stakeholders is crucial in ensuring that the curriculum is relevant, effective, and addresses the needs of teachers, learners, and the community leading to better learning outcomes. In the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum, parents, the school administration, and the community as a whole play a vital role in its success. According to Lemke and Wai (2015), stakeholders may exert their agency, either to support or oppose curriculum reform in their community or institutions. Hence, it is crucial that stakeholders are included in the formulation and planning of curriculum reform.

 Parents are placed at the frontline because they are the primary caregivers and role models. It is found that the parents of the learners have lesser engagement in the learning of their children. The respondents further explained that this is due to the fact that parents are busy with their work and have less knowledge about the new curriculum. However, they further explained that parents provide motivation and encouragement to their children in the completion of assignments and tasks given leading to the achievement of the objectives of the curriculum. In the study of Ahmed (2022), it is explained that children perceive parental involvement as critical in their education because they felt inspired to study.

On the part of school administrators, the teacher-respondents explained that they serve as a strong support system in the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum because they provide all necessary assistance and guidance. The respondents highlight that administrators religiously inform them of necessary information such as the availability of learning materials and seminars and trainings, which they emphasize as crucial in the success of the Matatag Curriculum on the part of the teachers as implementer. This is particularly true because school leaders can empower teachers to effectively navigate curriculum changes to better learning outcomes of the learners (Andrin, 2024).

On the context of the community as an active agent in the implementation of the Matatag Curriculum, findings of the study underscore the lack of knowledge of the community on the emergence, goals, and objectives of the said Curriculum, which resulted to no involvement in th its implementation. According to Abragan, (2022), the community is a great learning resource, which teachers can tap for the local community and materials to successfully implement the curriculum. Nonetheless, the community is still an active agent of the school, it is highlighted by the respondents that the community, especially barangay officials provide support in school activities such as providing security during school programs.

 **Readiness of Teachers.** Teacher readiness is crucial in the successful implementation of curriculum reform. In the state of the Matatag Curriculum, teachers are provided with seminars and trainings. However, the respondents are hesitant to confirm their readiness for its implementation. They highlight that having limited trainings and seminars, in addition to lack of available resources and references hinders the effective teaching and learning, leading to challenges to adapt to new methods and understanding new concepts. Teachers should be given continuous professional development to be equipped with necessary skills and knowledge required for the implementation of a new curriculum (OECD, 2020). This aids the teacher as an implementer of curriculum. The principle behind the Matatag Curriculum is the development of whole-rounded individuals as stipulated in the phrase “Batang Makabansa, Bansang Makabata”which emphasizes connecting knowledge to real-life situations, enriching the curriculum beyond textbook-based concepts, and deviating from traditional rote memorization (OECD, 2020). This can only be attained with the teacher actively engaging.

**CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study underscore the perennial problems of curriculum reforms in the Philippines, which is evident in the findings of previous researches. This research highlights that the Matatag Curriculum, like any another curriculum reforms, has its own challenges and limitations. Its introduction as a strategic solution to the complications of the K to 12 Curriculum faces series of debate and scrutiny, which raises serious questions on its effectiveness to deliver instruction and meet the goals of education. This research underscores the underlying problems and challenges faced by Social Studies Teachers in the implementation of the said curriculum, which provides new perspective for its enhancement.

As a relatively new curriculum, issues on teacher trainings, availability of aligned resources, accessibility of online resources, poor stakeholder engagement, and teacher readiness, are the common findings of this research, which, based on previous studies, can be seen in other implemented curriculum reforms such as the K to 12 Curriculum. These challenges hinder the successful attainment of learning objectives and goals of the Matatag Curriculum. It also threatens the confident of the teachers to deliver instruction that is directly aligned to target the goals of education to gain better learner outcomes. Yet these challenges highlight teachers’ resiliency and creativity, which allow them to sustain meaningful and evidenced-based learning.

The Matatag Curriculum, despite of its own set of challenges and limitations remain to be a testament to the government’s commitment to uphold the highest quality of education for young Filipinos. This initiative proves that the educational system continues to evolve and transform, incorporating cultural elements, traditions, and Filipino values. This curriculum with its own set of goals, fosters inclusivity by integrating global citizenship and respect for diversity. It also promotes a future-thinking mindset that empowers learners to embrace and cherish local heritage.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

 The success of the Matatag curriculum heavily relies on the collective effort of the school and the community to foster quality education, promote the use of local educational resources, strong support to teachers, and advocate for inclusive and meaningful learning. For all of these to be attained, there must be synergy amongst all the actors in the education sector.

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