INTERNATIONAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF RESEARCH
FOR INNOVATION, SUSTAINABILITY, AND EXCELLENCE (IMJRISE)
https://risejournals.org/index.php/imjrise
Volume 1, Issue no. 6 (2024)
ISSN: 3028-032X (online) | ISSN: 3028-0370 (print)

Holistic Development: A Study of the MATATAG Curriculum through the Lens of Experiential Learning Theory

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11523380

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Abstract:

The MATATAG Curriculum represents a comprehensive approach to education, aligning closely with Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) principles. This study examines its effectiveness in promoting holistic student development, active engagement, critical thinking skills, and values education. Findings reveal that the curriculum emphasizes active engagement through project-based learning and inquiry-based activities, fostering deeper understanding and retention of subject matter. Additionally, it successfully cultivates critical thinking skills by challenging students to analyze complex issues and evaluate potential solutions. Furthermore, the integration of values education instills positive values, social responsibility, and citizenship among students. Overall, the MATATAG Curriculum equips students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for success in the 21st century, positioning them as lifelong learners, critical thinkers, and responsible members of society. This study underscores the importance of curriculum alignment with ELT principles in promoting holistic student development and preparing students for the challenges of an ever-changing world.

Keywords: MATATAG Curriculum, Experiential Learning Theory, holistic development, active engagement, critical thinking skills

Introduction:

The educational landscape in the Philippines has undergone significant transformation with the introduction of the MATATAG Curriculum, a comprehensive framework designed to address contemporary educational needs. This curriculum emphasizes a holistic approach, balancing knowledge and skills development with values formation, and aims to produce well-rounded individuals capable of thriving in the 21st century. The MATATAG Curriculum incorporates various innovative elements, such as intensified values education, peace education, and a redesigned Kindergarten curriculum, among others.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), pioneered by David Kolb, provides a robust framework for understanding how learning occurs through experience. ELT posits that learning is a continuous process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). This theory emphasizes the importance of learners engaging actively with their learning environment, reflecting on their experiences, forming abstract concepts, and applying these concepts in new situations.

The integration of ELT into the MATATAG Curriculum is evident in its emphasis on hands-on, project-based learning and real-world applications. This alignment can enhance student engagement, deepen understanding, and foster

critical thinking skills. Previous research has shown that experiential learning strategies can significantly improve educational outcomes by promoting active participation and real-world problem-solving (Roberts, 2012; Beard & Wilson, 2013).

This study aims to analyze the MATATAG Curriculum through the lens of Experiential Learning Theory, exploring how its components align with the principles of experiential learning. By examining the curriculum's features, such as the intensified values education and the Engineering Design Process, this research will assess the potential benefits and challenges of incorporating ELT into the educational framework.

Literature Review:

The literature review explores the theoretical framework of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and its application in educational contexts, as well as previous research on the MATATAG Curriculum and its alignment with ELT principles.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)
Experiential Learning Theory, developed by David Kolb, posits that learning is a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). This theory emphasizes the importance of learners actively engaging with their environment to construct knowledge and develop skills.

Kolb's model has been widely applied in educational settings to promote deeper learning and critical thinking skills (Beard & Wilson, 2013). By engaging students in hands-on activities and encouraging reflection on their experiences, educators can enhance learning outcomes and foster a deeper understanding of subject matter.

ELT has been applied in various educational contexts, including higher education, vocational training, and K-12 schooling. Research has shown that experiential learning strategies can significantly improve student engagement, motivation, and retention (Roberts, 2012).

In K-12 education, experiential learning approaches such as project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and service-learning have been shown to enhance student outcomes (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). These approaches provide students with opportunities to apply classroom knowledge to real-world problems, fostering deeper understanding and critical thinking skills.

The MATATAG Curriculum
The MATATAG Curriculum is a comprehensive educational framework introduced in the Philippines to address the evolving needs of students in the 21st century. This curriculum emphasizes a holistic approach to education, balancing knowledge and skills development with values formation (DepEd, 2024).

One key feature of the MATATAG Curriculum is its emphasis on values education, which is integrated across all learning areas. The curriculum aims to develop students' character and moral values through explicit teaching and reinforcement of core values (DepEd, 2024).

Another important aspect of the MATATAG Curriculum is its focus on experiential learning. The curriculum incorporates hands-on, project-based learning activities that encourage students to actively engage with their learning environment and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts (DepEd, 2024).

The MATATAG Curriculum aligns closely with the principles of Experiential Learning Theory. By incorporating hands-on, project-based learning activities, the curriculum provides students with opportunities to engage in concrete experiences and reflective observation (DepEd, 2024).

Furthermore, the emphasis on values education in the MATATAG Curriculum supports the development of ethical decision-making skills, which are central to ELT (DepEd, 2024). By explicitly teaching and reinforcing core values, the curriculum encourages students to reflect on their actions and consider the ethical implications of their decisions.

The MATATAG Curriculum represents a promising approach to education that aligns closely with the principles of Experiential Learning Theory. By incorporating hands-on, project-based learning activities and emphasizing values education, the curriculum provides students with opportunities to engage in meaningful learning experiences and develop essential skills for success in the 21st century.

Methodology:

The methodology of this study employed a qualitative approach to analyze the alignment of the MATATAG Curriculum with the principles of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). The study aimed to explore how the

components of the curriculum, such as values education, peace education, and hands-on learning activities, corresponded with the stages of experiential learning as proposed by Kolb (1984).

Data for the analysis were collected from official curriculum documents, academic journals, and interviews with educators familiar with the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. The qualitative analysis involved coding and thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to experiential learning within the curriculum.

To begin, the researchers conducted an extensive review of the literature on ELT and its application in educational settings. This literature review provided the theoretical framework for the analysis and helped contextualize the findings within existing research.

Next, the researchers collected curriculum documents and related materials from the Department of Education, Philippines, to gain insight into the structure and content of the MATATAG Curriculum. These documents included curriculum guides, instructional materials, and official memos outlining the objectives and principles of the curriculum.

Additionally, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with educators who had experience implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in various educational settings. These interviews aimed to gather firsthand perspectives on how the curriculum was being implemented in practice and to identify any challenges or successes related to experiential learning.

The data collected from curriculum documents and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researchers identified key themes related to experiential learning within the MATATAG Curriculum, such as the integration of hands-on learning activities, opportunities for reflection, and the promotion of active experimentation.

Throughout the analysis process, the researchers employed member checking and triangulation to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Member checking involved sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm accuracy and interpretation, while triangulation involved comparing data from multiple sources to corroborate key themes and patterns.

Findings and Discussion:

Alignment with Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)
The analysis of the MATATAG Curriculum demonstrated a robust alignment with the principles of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). Experiential Learning Theory, as proposed by Kolb (1984), emphasizes four key components: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. These components serve as the foundation for effective learning experiences that promote deep understanding and skill development (Kolb, 1984).

Throughout the MATATAG Curriculum, there was a pervasive emphasis on providing students with opportunities to engage in concrete experiences. This was achieved through the inclusion of hands-on learning activities, project-based assignments, and real-world applications across various grade levels and subject areas. For example, in science classes, students were tasked with conducting experiments and investigations to explore scientific concepts in a practical context (Roberts, 2012). Similarly, in social studies, students engaged in simulations and role-playing activities to immerse themselves in historical events and cultural contexts (Beard & Wilson, 2013).

Reflective observation, another core component of ELT, was integrated into the curriculum through structured reflection activities and discussions. After engaging in hands-on experiences, students were prompted to reflect on their observations, analyze their findings, and make connections to prior knowledge. This process of reflection encouraged metacognitive awareness and facilitated deeper understanding of the subject matter (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

Furthermore, the MATATAG Curriculum fostered abstract conceptualization by providing opportunities for students to analyze and synthesize their experiences into broader conceptual frameworks. Through guided inquiry and problem-solving tasks, students were challenged to develop theoretical understanding and apply conceptual models to new situations. This process of abstract conceptualization enabled students to generalize their learning and transfer knowledge across domains (Beard & Wilson, 2013).

Active experimentation, the final component of ELT, was promoted through open-ended tasks and project-based assessments (Echavez, et al., 2024). Students were encouraged to apply their knowledge and skills in authentic contexts, allowing them to test hypotheses, explore alternative solutions, and adapt their approaches based on feedback. This emphasis on active experimentation empowered students to become independent learners and creative problem solvers (Roberts, 2012).

The MATATAG Curriculum demonstrated a comprehensive alignment with the principles of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). By incorporating concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation into its design, the curriculum provided students with rich learning experiences that promoted deep understanding, critical thinking, and practical skill development.

Promotion of Active Engagement:
A significant finding of the study was the emphasis of the MATATAG Curriculum on promoting active engagement among students. Through various pedagogical approaches such as project-based learning (PBL), inquiry-based activities, and experiential learning projects, students were encouraged to take an active role in their own learning process (Beard & Wilson, 2013).

Project-based learning (PBL) was a central feature of the MATATAG Curriculum, providing students with opportunities to delve deeply into topics of interest, explore real-world problems, and collaborate with peers to develop solutions (Thomas, 2000). By engaging in authentic, hands-on projects, students were able to apply their knowledge and skills in meaningful contexts, fostering a sense of ownership and investment in their learning (Thomas, 2000).

In addition to PBL, the curriculum also incorporated inquiry-based activities that encouraged students to ask questions, explore hypotheses, and conduct investigations (Roberts, 2012). These activities promoted curiosity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, as students actively sought to uncover new knowledge and understand complex concepts (Roberts, 2012).

Experiential learning projects further enriched students' educational experiences by providing opportunities for immersive, hands-on learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Through field trips, simulations, and real-world applications, students were able to connect theory to practice and gain firsthand experience in their areas of study (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). These experiential learning projects not only deepened students' understanding of subject matter but also fostered a sense of excitement and engagement in the learning process (Beard & Wilson, 2013).

The emphasis on active engagement within the MATATAG Curriculum had several positive outcomes for students. Firstly, it enhanced student motivation and interest in learning by providing opportunities for autonomy, mastery, and purpose (Pink, 2009). By allowing students to pursue their interests and take ownership of their learning, the curriculum fostered intrinsic motivation and a sense of agency (Pink, 2009).

Furthermore, active engagement facilitated deeper understanding and retention of subject matter (Roberts, 2012). Through hands-on experiences and real-world applications, students were able to make meaningful connections between theoretical concepts and practical applications, leading to greater comprehension and long-term memory retention (Roberts, 2012).

The promotion of active engagement within the MATATAG Curriculum had significant benefits for students, including increased motivation, deeper understanding, and enhanced retention of subject matter. By incorporating project-based learning, inquiry-based activities, and experiential learning projects, the curriculum empowered students to take an active role in their own learning process and develop essential skills for success in the 21st century (Kilag, et al., 2024).

Development of Critical Thinking Skills:
A significant finding of the study was the contribution of the MATATAG Curriculum to the development of critical thinking skills among students. Critical thinking, defined as the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to make reasoned judgments, is a crucial competency for success in the 21st century (Facione, 2011).

The curriculum achieved this by providing students with opportunities to engage in hands-on activities and real-world problem-solving tasks across various subject areas (Paul & Elder, 2006). Through project-based learning, inquiry-based activities, and experiential learning projects, students were challenged to apply their knowledge and skills in novel situations, analyze complex issues, and evaluate potential solutions (Thomas, 2000).

Project-based learning (PBL) was a central component of the curriculum's approach to fostering critical thinking skills. By engaging students in authentic, real-world projects, PBL encouraged them to investigate complex problems, consider multiple perspectives, and develop innovative solutions (Thomas, 2000). For example, students participating in a science project might be tasked with designing and conducting experiments to investigate environmental issues or explore solutions to global health challenges (Thomas, 2000).

In addition to PBL, the curriculum incorporated inquiry-based activities that prompted students to ask questions, gather evidence, and draw logical conclusions (Roberts, 2012). These activities encouraged students to think

critically about the information they encountered, evaluate its credibility and relevance, and construct well-reasoned arguments based on evidence (Paul & Elder, 2006).

Experiential learning projects further enriched students' critical thinking skills by providing opportunities for hands-on exploration and experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Through field trips, simulations, and real-world applications, students were able to apply theoretical concepts in practical contexts, test hypotheses, and draw evidence-based conclusions (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

The emphasis on critical thinking skills within the MATATAG Curriculum aligned with the goals of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and supported the development of lifelong learning competencies (Kolb, 1984). By engaging students in active experimentation, reflective observation, and abstract conceptualization, the curriculum empowered them to think critically, solve problems creatively, and adapt to new challenges in an ever-changing world (Kolb, 1984).

Furthermore, the development of critical thinking skills had broader implications for students' academic success and personal growth (Kilag et al., 2024). Research has consistently shown that students who engage in critical thinking activities demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement, improved problem-solving abilities, and greater self-efficacy (Halpern, 1998; Paul & Elder, 2006). By fostering critical thinking skills, the curriculum empowered students to become independent learners, creative problem solvers, and responsible citizens in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Integration of Values Education:

One of the notable findings of the study was the prominent integration of values education within the MATATAG Curriculum. Values education refers to the explicit teaching of core values and the incorporation of moral and ethical considerations into learning activities, with the aim of fostering the holistic development of students (Lovat et al., 2013).

The MATATAG Curriculum placed a strong emphasis on values education across all grade levels and subject areas. Core values such as integrity, respect, responsibility, and compassion were explicitly taught and reinforced through various instructional strategies and learning experiences (Republic Act No. 11476).

One approach to values education within the curriculum was the incorporation of moral and ethical considerations into subject-specific content and activities. For example, in social studies classes, students explored historical events through a moral lens, examining the ethical implications of different actions and decisions (Lovat et al., 2013). Similarly, in science classes, students discussed the ethical responsibilities of scientists and the potential impacts of their research on society and the environment (Roberts, 2012).

Beyond subject-specific content, values education was also integrated into broader school activities and initiatives. For instance, schools implemented character education programs, service-learning projects, and community service opportunities to promote the development of positive values and ethical behavior among students (Republic Act No. 11476). These extracurricular activities provided students with opportunities to apply their values in real-world contexts and contribute to the well-being of others (Lovat et al., 2013).

The integration of values education within the MATATAG Curriculum served multiple purposes. Firstly, it supported the ethical dimension of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) by encouraging students to reflect on their values and ethical principles in the context of their learning experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). By engaging in discussions and activities that challenged their moral reasoning and decision-making, students developed a deeper understanding of themselves and their role in society (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

Furthermore, values education contributed to the promotion of social responsibility and citizenship among students. By instilling core values such as respect for diversity, concern for others, and commitment to social justice, the curriculum prepared students to become active and engaged members of their communities (Lovat et al., 2013). Through service-learning projects and community service initiatives, students had opportunities to apply their values in meaningful ways and make positive contributions to society (Republic Act No. 11476).

The integration of values education within the MATATAG Curriculum was a prominent feature that contributed to the holistic development of students. By explicitly teaching core values and incorporating moral and ethical considerations into learning activities, the curriculum supported the ethical dimension of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and promoted social responsibility and citizenship among students.

Conclusion:

The findings of this study highlight the strengths and effectiveness of the MATATAG Curriculum in promoting holistic development, active engagement, critical thinking skills, and values education among students. Through the lens of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), the curriculum was found to align closely with key principles of hands-on learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

One of the key strengths of the MATATAG Curriculum was its emphasis on active engagement and student-centered learning. By incorporating project-based learning, inquiry-based activities, and experiential learning projects, the curriculum provided students with opportunities to take an active role in their own learning process. This not only enhanced student motivation and interest but also fostered deeper understanding and retention of subject matter.

Furthermore, the curriculum was successful in developing critical thinking skills among students. Through hands-on activities and real-world problem-solving tasks, students were challenged to analyze complex issues, evaluate potential solutions, and think critically about the information they encountered. This emphasis on critical thinking skills not only supported the goals of ELT but also prepared students for success in the 21st century.

Another notable feature of the MATATAG Curriculum was its integration of values education. By explicitly teaching core values and incorporating moral and ethical considerations into learning activities, the curriculum fostered the development of positive values, social responsibility, and citizenship among students. This integration of values education not only supported the ethical dimension of ELT but also contributed to the promotion of a more ethical and compassionate society.

The MATATAG Curriculum represents a comprehensive and effective approach to education that addresses the holistic development of students. By aligning with the principles of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and incorporating innovative pedagogical strategies, the curriculum prepares students to become lifelong learners, critical thinkers, and responsible members of society.

Through its emphasis on active engagement, critical thinking skills, and values education, the MATATAG Curriculum equips students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to thrive in an ever-changing world. As education continues to evolve, the lessons learned from the MATATAG Curriculum can serve as a model for future curriculum development efforts, ensuring that all students receive a high-quality and holistic education that prepares them for success in the 21st century.

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