

Strategic Curriculum Reform: The MATATAG Initiative and Its Potential to Elevate Philippine Education Standards

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Abstract

The MATATAG Curriculum marks a pivotal shift in the Philippine educational system, evolving from the K to 12 Basic Education Program to address its predecessor's limitations. This paper explores the development of the MATATAG Curriculum, focusing on how it responds to the challenges identified in the K to 12 Program, such as curriculum congestion and misaligned assessments. Emphasizing future-oriented skills, the MATATAG Curriculum integrates critical thinking, digital literacy, and global citizenship to better prepare students for the demands of the 21st century. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of relevant literature, assessment reports, and curriculum reviews, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the MATATAG Curriculum in enhancing educational outcomes. The analysis seeks to determine whether the curriculum successfully addresses previous shortcomings and adapts to the evolving needs of learners and the broader educational landscape. Through this examination, the paper provides insights into the potential of the MATATAG Curriculum to contribute to a more responsive and effective educational framework in the Philippines.

Keywords: MATATAG Curriculum, Educational Outcomes, K to 12 Program, Future-Oriented Skills

Introduction

The Enhanced Basic Education Program, widely known as the K to 12 Program, was introduced in the Philippines with the ambitious goal of elevating educational standards and equipping students with the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of the modern world (DepEd, 2019). This reform aimed to provide a more comprehensive education by extending the basic education cycle and incorporating additional subjects designed to enhance learners' readiness for both higher education and the workforce.

Despite these well-intentioned objectives, evaluations of the K to 12 Program have consistently highlighted several critical issues related to curriculum effectiveness and student performance. Research by Schleicher (2021) and Mullis et al. (2020) indicates that, while the program was designed to address various educational needs, persistent challenges remain, including curriculum congestion and stagnating academic outcomes. These assessments underscore the need for a reevaluation of the existing framework to better align it with educational goals.

In response to these challenges, the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines has developed the MATATAG Curriculum, which represents a significant shift in the approach to basic education. The MATATAG Curriculum aims to address the shortcomings identified in the K to 12 Program by emphasizing quality and relevance in education. With a focus on refining learning competencies and improving curriculum alignment, the MATATAG Curriculum seeks to enhance the educational experience and outcomes for Filipino students (DepEd, 2023).



This paper examines the MATATAG Curriculum exploring its development process, objectives, and potential implications for addressing the issues previously identified in the K to 12 Program. By analyzing the reforms introduced through the MATATAG Curriculum, this study aims to provide insights into its effectiveness in overcoming the challenges faced by the K to 12 Program and its role in shaping the future of education in the Philippines.

Literature Review

The K to 12 Program in the Philippines has encountered several criticisms that have significantly impacted its effectiveness. Among the most pressing issues is curriculum congestion, as highlighted by Aguas (2023). The current curriculum is overloaded with content, which restricts the ability of educators to deliver meaningful and in-depth instruction. This congestion not only overwhelms teachers but also limits students' opportunities for comprehensive learning experiences. As a result, there is a growing concern about the overall manageability of the curriculum and its capacity to support effective teaching practices.

In addition to curriculum congestion, there are concerns about inadequate resources within the K to 12 Program. Cruz (2019) underscores that many schools lack essential teaching materials, textbooks, and adequate facilities, which hinders the successful implementation of the curriculum. This scarcity of resources exacerbates existing disparities in educational quality and limits the ability of educators to provide a well-rounded education. Without sufficient support and resources, achieving the program's goals becomes increasingly challenging.

Assessment practices within the K to 12 Program have also come under scrutiny. Traditional assessment tools, such as the Philippine Educational Placement Test (PEPT) and the National Achievement Test (NAT), have been criticized for their inability to fully capture the range of student competencies (Tan et al., 2018; Pantao, 2021). These assessments often focus on rote memorization rather than evaluating students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. As a result, there is a growing call for more comprehensive and nuanced evaluation methods that can better reflect students' true abilities.

International benchmarks, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), further expose the performance gap between Philippine students and their global peers (Adams, 2018). The disparity between local and international standards highlights the need for curriculum reforms that align more closely with global educational trends. This misalignment underscores the necessity for a more robust and responsive curriculum that can elevate student performance on a global scale.

In response to these identified challenges, the Department of Education (DepEd) has initiated a comprehensive review of the K to 12 curriculum, leading to the development of the MATATAG Curriculum. This new curriculum represents a strategic effort to address the deficiencies of its predecessor by focusing on several key areas. The MATATAG Agenda prioritizes curriculum relevance, aiming to ensure that educational content is both meaningful and aligned with current educational and societal needs (Estrellado, 2023).

The MATATAG Curriculum is designed to incorporate contemporary topics and essential 21st-century skills, addressing the evolving demands of the modern educational landscape (Kilag et al., 2024). This approach includes integrating global perspectives, enhancing digital literacy, and fostering critical thinking. By focusing on these areas, the MATATAG Curriculum aims to better prepare students for future challenges and opportunities, ensuring that they are equipped with the skills needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

Moreover, the MATATAG Agenda emphasizes the importance of improving educational facilities and providing adequate support for teachers. This includes investing in infrastructure, resources, and professional development to create an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. By addressing these critical areas, the MATATAG Curriculum seeks to build a more supportive and resource-rich educational framework, ultimately enhancing the quality of education and bridging the gap between local and international standards.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both a literature review and document analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of the MATATAG Curriculum. The research draws from a diverse range of sources, including academic articles, government reports, and educational research accessed through databases such as ERIC and JSTOR. By combining these sources, the study aims to provide a well-rounded analysis of the curriculum reform and its implications.

The literature review component of the study is designed to identify and explore recurring themes related to the K to 12 Program, including challenges in assessment practices and curriculum development. This review involves a thorough examination of existing research and scholarly work to understand the context and background of the



MATATAG Curriculum. The focus is on evaluating how the new curriculum addresses issues identified in previous studies and assessments.

Document analysis complements the literature review by examining specific reports and policy documents related to the MATATAG Curriculum. This methodological step allows for a detailed investigation of the curriculum's development process, its objectives, and the extent to which it responds to the challenges faced by the K to 12 Program. By analyzing these documents, the study seeks to uncover key insights into the effectiveness and potential impact of the curriculum reform.

The combined use of thematic analysis and document analysis enables the study to identify key challenges, stakeholder perspectives, and the implications of curriculum reforms. Through this approach, the research aims to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the MATATAG Curriculum, assessing its effectiveness in addressing the issues highlighted by previous evaluations and its potential to enhance the quality of education in the Philippines.

Findings and Discussion

Issues of Curriculum Congestion, Resource Gaps, and Assessment Practices

The K to 12 Program in the Philippines has encountered significant challenges that have impacted its overall effectiveness. One of the primary issues is curriculum congestion. According to Aguas (2023), the extensive coverage of content within the curriculum hampers the ability to provide meaningful and in-depth learning experiences. This congestion not only overwhelms educators but also limits students' opportunities to engage with the material in a meaningful way. As a result, the curriculum's effectiveness in promoting comprehensive learning outcomes is compromised (Uy, et al., 2023).

In addition to curriculum congestion, there is a notable mismatch between the curriculum and the actual needs of students. Cruz (2019) emphasizes that the current curriculum does not adequately align with the diverse needs and interests of learners. This misalignment underscores the necessity for curriculum reform to ensure that educational content remains relevant and manageable. By addressing these gaps, educators can better meet the needs of students and enhance their overall learning experiences.

Resource limitations further exacerbate the challenges faced by the K to 12 Program. Cruz (2019) highlights that many schools are confronted with shortages of essential resources, including textbooks and adequate classroom facilities. These limitations create significant barriers to effective curriculum implementation, as educators struggle to deliver quality instruction under constrained conditions. The lack of resources not only affects the delivery of the curriculum but also impacts student outcomes by hindering access to necessary learning materials (Kilag, et al., 2023).

Assessment practices within the K to 12 Program have also been a point of contention. Pantao (2021) critiques the alignment of current assessment tools with the goals of the curriculum, noting that discrepancies often arise between what is taught and what is assessed. This misalignment leads to inconsistencies in measuring student performance and achievement. To address these issues, there is a need for more integrated and comprehensive assessment methods that accurately reflect the curriculum's objectives and student competencies.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including curriculum reform, improved resource allocation, and enhanced assessment practices. By focusing on these areas, the K to 12 Program can work towards overcoming its existing limitations and improving educational outcomes. Effective implementation of these strategies will be crucial in ensuring that the curriculum meets students' needs and supports their academic and personal growth.

Improving Relevance and Competitiveness in Philippine Education

Curriculum relevance and alignment are fundamental factors in addressing the challenges faced by educational systems. As highlighted by Ungar (2021), aligning the curriculum with global educational trends and societal needs is crucial for ensuring that students receive an education that is both contemporary and applicable to real-world contexts. A curriculum that is relevant not only engages students but also prepares them to navigate the complexities of modern life effectively.

Estrellado (2023) emphasizes that a relevant curriculum plays a significant role in motivating students and fostering their ability to tackle real-world challenges. By integrating current issues, emerging technologies, and practical skills into the curriculum, educators can enhance students' learning experiences and better prepare them for future endeavors. This approach ensures that students are not only knowledgeable but also equipped with the skills needed to succeed in an increasingly competitive and dynamic world (Uy, et al., 2024).

In response to these needs, the MATATAG Curriculum has been developed as a strategic initiative to address the gaps and limitations of the previous K to 12 Program. The MATATAG Curriculum aims to refine learning



competencies and ensure alignment with international standards. This alignment is intended to enhance the overall quality of education in the Philippines, making it more competitive on a global scale and better suited to meet the demands of the 21st century.

The MATATAG Curriculum's approach involves a thorough review and update of learning competencies to ensure that they are relevant and comprehensive. By aligning the curriculum with international benchmarks, the MATATAG Curriculum seeks to address previous criticisms related to curriculum congestion and misalignment. This strategic alignment helps to ensure that students acquire essential skills and knowledge that are recognized and valued globally.

Kilag et al. (2024) argue that the focus on refining learning competencies and adhering to international standards is crucial for improving the quality and competitiveness of Philippine education. This approach not only addresses the immediate educational challenges but also positions students to thrive in a globalized world. By incorporating international best practices, the MATATAG Curriculum aims to provide students with a robust and well-rounded education.

The development and implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum represent a significant step towards addressing the educational challenges faced by the K to 12 Program. By focusing on curriculum relevance and alignment, the MATATAG Curriculum seeks to enhance educational outcomes, better prepare students for future success, and elevate the standards of Philippine education on the global stage.

Redefining Educational Standards

The development of the MATATAG Curriculum represents a strategic effort to address the key challenges identified in the K to 12 Program (Department of Education, 2019). This curriculum reform specifically targets issues such as content overload and misalignment, which have been major obstacles in the previous system. By streamlining the curriculum and simplifying instructional materials, the MATATAG Curriculum aims to provide educators with more manageable and effective teaching resources (Diano Jr, et al., 2024).

In addition to addressing content overload, the MATATAG Curriculum places a strong emphasis on aligning assessments with curriculum goals. This alignment is intended to provide a more accurate measure of student achievement and ensure that assessments truly reflect the learning objectives outlined in the curriculum. By doing so, the curriculum aims to improve the reliability and validity of student evaluations.

Furthermore, the MATATAG Curriculum incorporates contemporary issues and global perspectives to ensure its relevance and responsiveness to current educational needs (Cruz, 2019). This approach not only addresses the immediate concerns of curriculum relevance but also prepares students to engage with global challenges and perspectives. By integrating these elements, the curriculum aims to offer a more holistic and forward-thinking educational experience (Diano Jr, 2024).

The MATATAG Curriculum seeks to enhance the quality and effectiveness of education by addressing the limitations of the K to 12 Program. Through its focus on manageable content, aligned assessments, and contemporary issues, the curriculum aims to better meet the needs of students and provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in a rapidly changing world.

Preparing Students for the Future

The MATATAG Curriculum places a strong emphasis on equipping students with essential 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, digital literacy, and global citizenship (Tan & Tiongson, 2020). Critical thinking is a central focus, aiming to develop students into independent and creative problem-solvers who can analyze and address complex issues effectively (Lee, 2012). This skill is crucial for fostering a mindset that embraces inquiry, innovation, and evidence-based reasoning.

Digital literacy is another key component of the MATATAG Curriculum, integrated throughout various learning activities to ensure students are adept at navigating the digital world responsibly. By incorporating digital literacy, the curriculum addresses the need for students to manage digital tools and platforms, evaluate information critically, and understand the principles of digital citizenship. This preparation is essential for students to thrive in an increasingly technology-driven society.

In addition to critical thinking and digital literacy, the MATATAG Curriculum prioritizes global citizenship education. This focus aims to enhance students' understanding of global issues and cultural diversity, fostering empathy and respect for different perspectives (Lee, 2012). Through this approach, the curriculum seeks to prepare students to engage thoughtfully with global challenges and contribute positively to an interconnected world.

The MATATAG Curriculum also promotes interdisciplinary and project-based learning methodologies, encouraging students to apply critical thinking, digital literacy, and global citizenship skills in real-world contexts (Estrellado,

2023). These approaches help bridge theoretical knowledge with practical application, allowing students to work collaboratively on projects that address real-life problems and scenarios.

The focus on critical skills, real-world application, and global awareness ensures that students are not only well-versed in academic content but also equipped to navigate and contribute to a complex and rapidly evolving world.

Conclusion

The MATATAG Curriculum marks a significant advancement in addressing the challenges faced by the K to 12 Program while preparing students for the demands of the 21st century. This curriculum reform emphasizes relevance by aligning educational content with current global trends and societal needs, ensuring that learning experiences are both meaningful and applicable. Additionally, it seeks to enhance the quality of education through improved alignment between assessments and curriculum goals, providing a more accurate measure of student achievement.

A key focus of the MATATAG Curriculum is the development of future-oriented skills, including critical thinking, digital literacy, and global citizenship. By integrating these essential competencies, the curriculum aims to equip students with the tools necessary to navigate and thrive in a rapidly changing world. This approach not only addresses the immediate concerns of curriculum effectiveness but also prepares students for the complexities of contemporary and future challenges.

To ensure the MATATAG Curriculum remains effective and responsive to the evolving needs of learners and society, ongoing evaluation and refinement will be essential. Continuous assessment of its impact, coupled with feedback from educators, students, and other stakeholders, will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that the curriculum evolves to meet emerging educational demands. This iterative process will be crucial in sustaining the curriculum's relevance and effectiveness over time.

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