



The Evolution of Curriculum Reform in the Philippines: The MATATAG Curriculum and its Role in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Curriculum reform is a critical aspect of improving educational quality and relevance. In the Philippines, the recent introduction of the MATATAG Curriculum marks a significant shift in education reform, aimed at addressing various social, economic, and technological changes. This paper explores the reasons behind curriculum change, the historical context of education reforms in the Philippines, and the specific features of the MATATAG Curriculum. Through a theoretical lens grounded in educational innovation, this paper assesses the curriculum's alignment with 21st-century learning demands and its potential for transforming the Philippine education landscape.

Keywords: MATATAG Curriculum, Philippine education reform, 21st-century skills, Teacher training

Introduction:

Curriculum change is a fundamental aspect of educational progress, driven by the evolving demands of the global economic, technological, social, political, and ideological environments. As Fullan (2007) emphasized, these changes can occur at various levels, from minor modifications in subject content to comprehensive reforms that overhaul entire educational structures. In the Philippines, the need for a more responsive and relevant educational system led to the introduction of the MATATAG Curriculum, a macro-level reform designed to modernize the curriculum and better prepare students to meet the challenges of the 21st century. This curriculum embodies a forward-looking approach to education, reflecting the country's ambition to align with global standards while addressing local needs.

The MATATAG Curriculum, introduced by the Department of Education (DepEd) in 2024, was a response to the growing demand for an education system that is not only academically robust but also adaptable to the needs of a rapidly changing society. After a thorough review of the existing educational framework, DepEd identified gaps in relevance, learner engagement, and teacher support, which the new curriculum seeks to address. By emphasizing key areas such as curriculum relevance, efficiency, learner well-being, and robust teacher support systems, the MATATAG Curriculum aims to create a holistic educational environment that nurtures students' intellectual and emotional growth. This reform highlights the urgency of equipping learners with skills that go beyond the classroom, fostering their readiness for employment and active citizenship.

In addition to its practical goals, the MATATAG Curriculum reflects a shift in the educational philosophy of the Philippines. The new curriculum not only seeks to improve the quality of education but also to ensure that it is more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the diverse needs of Filipino learners. It places a significant emphasis on learner well-being, recognizing the importance of mental and emotional health in academic success. Moreover, the curriculum provides enhanced support for teachers, acknowledging that effective teaching is at the heart of successful education reform. This support includes ongoing professional development, access to better teaching resources, and a stronger focus on teacher welfare, ensuring that educators are well-equipped to implement the new curriculum effectively.

This paper explores the broader implications of curriculum reform in the Philippines, with a specific focus on the MATATAG Curriculum. It examines how this reform addresses the shortcomings of previous educational systems, its potential to improve student outcomes, and the challenges it may face during implementation. By analyzing the MATATAG Curriculum's key components and objectives, this paper contributes to the ongoing discussion on



educational reform in the Philippines, providing insights into how curriculum changes can shape the future of education in the country.

Historical Context of Philippine Curriculum Reform

The Philippine educational system has undergone a series of significant reforms throughout its history, each reflecting the socio-political and cultural shifts of the time. During the Spanish colonization era, education was heavily influenced by religious institutions, focusing primarily on religious indoctrination. The American colonial period brought about a major shift with the introduction of secular education, marking the beginning of a more modern and inclusive approach to learning. These early reforms set the foundation for a continuously evolving curriculum that aimed to meet the changing needs of Filipino society, adapting to the political and economic climate of each period.

Post-independence, the Philippines continued to adapt its educational system, responding to both internal demands and global trends. Policies like the bilingual education program emphasized the importance of language in shaping national identity, while the Education for All (EFA) initiative, launched in the 1980s, sought to expand access to education across the country, particularly in underserved regions (Kilag et al., 2024). In the 1990s, the Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM) spearheaded further reforms, placing greater emphasis on learner-centered approaches. The passage of Republic Acts 7722 and 7796 marked a shift toward improving higher education and technical-vocational training, reflecting the growing recognition of the need for more specialized education in a rapidly modernizing world.

A major turning point came with the introduction of the K-12 system in 2013, which extended basic education from 10 to 12 years. This reform aimed to align the Philippines with international educational standards and better prepare students for both higher education and the workforce. The K-12 system also reflected the growing influence of globalization, as it sought to ensure that Filipino students were competitive in the global labor market (World Bank, 2022). Despite its ambitions, the implementation of K-12 revealed several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, teacher preparation, and disparities in educational resources, prompting the need for further reforms.

The introduction of the MATATAG Curriculum in 2024 marks the latest evolution in the Philippine educational landscape, building on the strengths and addressing the weaknesses of previous reforms. Developed by the Department of Education (DepEd), the MATATAG Curriculum aims to address persistent issues in the education system, such as the need for more relevant and efficient teaching methods, the importance of learner well-being, and the critical role of teacher support. Its key objectives include producing job-ready graduates who are not only academically competent but also equipped with the skills needed for active citizenship in a rapidly changing world.

The MATATAG Curriculum continues the tradition of curriculum reform in the Philippines, reflecting the country's ongoing efforts to adapt to modern educational challenges. By focusing on both academic and non-academic competencies, the curriculum strives to create a more holistic educational experience for Filipino learners. It seeks to bridge gaps left by previous reforms, especially in terms of relevance and inclusivity, while promoting a learning environment that supports both students and teachers in achieving long-term success.

The MATATAG Curriculum Core Features

The MATATAG Curriculum is grounded in the understanding that educational reforms must continually adapt to the evolving needs of society. In an era where 21st-century skills have become essential for both personal and professional success, the curriculum was designed to equip students with competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, and emotional intelligence (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Kilag et al., 2024). These skills are increasingly valued in a rapidly changing world where traditional education models no longer suffice. The MATATAG Curriculum seeks to respond to this demand by restructuring the educational framework in a way that better prepares learners for the complexities of modern life.

One of the core pillars of the MATATAG Curriculum is relevance. The curriculum emphasizes the need for content that reflects both global and local realities, ensuring that students are equipped with knowledge and skills that are directly applicable to today's job market. By aligning educational content with current socio-economic demands, the curriculum addresses the gap between what students learn in school and what is required of them in real-world scenarios. This focus on relevance not only enhances the employability of graduates but also ensures that they are well-prepared to engage with contemporary issues in their communities and beyond.

Another key focus of the curriculum is efficiency. Recognizing that curriculum overload can overwhelm students and impede effective learning, the MATATAG Curriculum seeks to streamline the educational process by focusing on core competencies. Rather than burdening students with excessive content, the curriculum prioritizes depth over breadth, ensuring that learners master essential skills without unnecessary distractions (OECD, 2020). This approach allows for a more focused and meaningful learning experience, where students can fully engage with the material and develop a deeper understanding of key concepts.



Learner well-being is also a central pillar of the MATATAG Curriculum, which emphasizes the importance of emotional and social learning alongside academic achievement. The curriculum integrates approaches that foster the holistic development of students, ensuring that their mental health and emotional well-being are prioritized in the learning process. This focus on well-being acknowledges that students' emotional and social needs must be addressed to create an environment where they can thrive academically and personally (Zins et al., 2004). By promoting a balanced approach to education, the curriculum aims to nurture well-rounded individuals who are capable of both intellectual and emotional growth.

The MATATAG Curriculum places a strong emphasis on teacher support, recognizing that the success of any educational reform is contingent upon the preparedness of educators. The curriculum includes provisions for continuous professional development, ensuring that teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the new curriculum effectively (Darling-Hammond, 2000). By investing in the professional growth of teachers, the curriculum aims to create a sustainable and supportive learning environment where educators can confidently guide students toward achieving the curriculum's goals. This comprehensive approach not only empowers teachers but also ensures that students receive high-quality instruction aligned with the curriculum's core objectives.

Diffusion of Innovations: The Role of Stakeholders in Curriculum Change

Curriculum change in the Philippines typically follows a cascading, top-down approach, where policies are developed at the highest levels and then gradually disseminated to school administrators, teachers, and other educational stakeholders. This approach aligns with Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory (1962), which outlines how new ideas are communicated and adopted within a social system. The theory suggests that for reforms to be successfully integrated, they must first be accepted by key influencers before they can spread to the wider population. In the case of the MATATAG Curriculum, the central government plays a crucial role in initiating these changes, which are then implemented by educational institutions nationwide.

The success of the MATATAG Curriculum depends on the active involvement and collaboration of multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, schools, teachers, and local communities. Each of these actors has a distinct role in ensuring the smooth rollout of the new curriculum. Policymakers are responsible for creating a framework that addresses the country's educational needs, while school administrators translate these policies into actionable plans at the institutional level. Teachers, as front-line implementers, are tasked with adapting their teaching methods to align with the curriculum's objectives. Meanwhile, community involvement is essential to support students and ensure that the curriculum resonates with local realities.

Despite the structured approach to curriculum dissemination, challenges remain in the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum, particularly concerning teacher readiness. Many teachers may struggle to transition to the new framework due to a lack of training or resources. Effective curriculum change requires that teachers not only understand the content but are also equipped with modern pedagogical skills to deliver it. Without sufficient professional development opportunities, teachers may find it difficult to fully engage with the curriculum's objectives, resulting in inconsistent application across different schools and regions.

Resource availability is another significant hurdle in the successful implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. Schools, particularly those in underfunded or remote areas, may lack the necessary materials, infrastructure, or technology to support the curriculum's goals. This disparity in resource distribution can exacerbate existing educational inequities, limiting the potential impact of the curriculum in marginalized communities. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders to ensure that the curriculum reform is not only well-designed but also adequately supported at every level of implementation.

21st Century Skills and the MATATAG Curriculum

A central motivation behind the MATATAG Curriculum is the urgent need to equip Filipino students with the 21st-century skills required to thrive in a rapidly globalizing world. In an age where technological advancements and societal changes demand more than just academic knowledge, competencies like creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (the 4Cs) have become indispensable (Fredricks et al., 2004). Recognizing this, the MATATAG Curriculum not only integrates these competencies but also expands them into the 7Cs framework—critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, character, citizenship, and compassion (Kilag et al., 2024). These skills form the bedrock of the curriculum's learner-centered approach, aimed at nurturing well-rounded individuals who are ready to tackle complex global challenges.

This emphasis on 21st-century skills aligns with broader trends in global education, as countries around the world strive to prepare their students for a future defined by uncertainty and innovation. International assessments like the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) highlight the need for education systems to go beyond traditional rote learning and focus on real-world problem-solving and critical thinking (OECD, 2019). In this



regard, the MATATAG Curriculum places the Philippines in line with global best practices, ensuring that Filipino students are not left behind in the race to develop the competencies required for modern-day employment and citizenship.

Moreover, the MATATAG Curriculum's focus on the 7Cs framework underscores the importance of character and compassion, attributes that are often overlooked in traditional academic curricula. By emphasizing values such as citizenship and social responsibility, the curriculum aims to produce not only competent workers but also engaged and empathetic members of society. This holistic approach ensures that education is not solely about economic productivity but also about creating a generation of learners who are socially aware and capable of contributing positively to their communities.

However, the challenge remains in the effective implementation of these 21st-century competencies, particularly in regions where resources and teacher training are limited. While the curriculum's goals are ambitious, achieving them will require sustained efforts to provide educators with the necessary tools and professional development to integrate the 4Cs and 7Cs into their teaching practices. Without addressing these gaps, the full potential of the MATATAG Curriculum in fostering a generation of globally competent and socially responsible students may remain unrealized.

Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing the MATATAG Curriculum

The MATATAG Curriculum marks a significant advancement in Philippine education, yet its implementation faces considerable challenges. Key obstacles include a lack of adequate resources, insufficient teacher training, and the potential for uneven application across various regions, particularly in rural or underserved areas (Kilag et al., 2024). These disparities could hinder the curriculum's ability to reach its full potential, especially in delivering a high-quality, equitable education nationwide.

Despite these hurdles, the challenges also offer opportunities for innovation and improvement. The curriculum's strong emphasis on teacher support and professional development provides a pathway to enhance teaching quality across the country. By investing in educators and equipping them with the skills necessary to effectively deliver the curriculum, the government can address the issue of teacher readiness, which has been a persistent barrier to reform in the past. This focus on professional development is crucial in ensuring the successful adaptation and delivery of the MATATAG Curriculum across diverse contexts.

The curriculum's focus on learner well-being opens up possibilities for addressing deeper issues within the education system, such as student engagement and high dropout rates. By incorporating emotional and social learning into the curriculum, it aims to create a more supportive and inclusive environment that fosters both academic and personal growth. This holistic approach could help mitigate some of the long-standing issues in the Philippine education system, contributing to a more engaged, resilient, and well-rounded student body.

Conclusion

Curriculum reform is an ongoing process, driven by the need to adapt to the changing demands of society. The MATATAG Curriculum is a testament to the Philippine government's commitment to improving education, making it more relevant, efficient, and supportive of both learners and teachers. However, for this reform to be truly effective, it will require the continued involvement of all stakeholders and a commitment to addressing the challenges that arise during implementation.

The MATATAG Curriculum, with its focus on 21st-century skills, learner well-being, and teacher support, has the potential to transform Philippine education and prepare students for the demands of the modern world. As the country continues to adapt to global educational trends, the success of the MATATAG Curriculum will depend on how well it is implemented and how effectively it addresses the needs of Filipino learners.

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