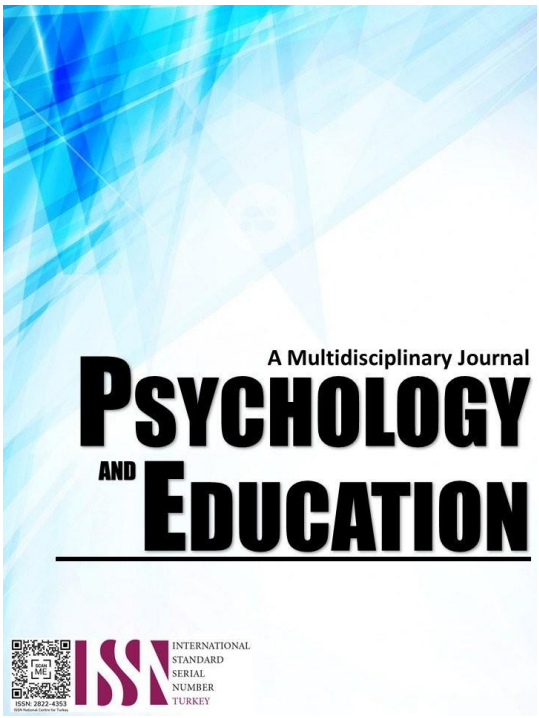
FROM CHALLENGES TO SOLUTIONS: HOW TEACHERS IN REMOTE SCHOOLS COPE WITH THE MATATAG CURRICULUM SHIFT



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Research Article

From Challenges to Solutions: How Teachers in Remote Schools Cope with the MATATAG Curriculum Shift

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Abstract

This qualitative research explores the challenges faced by teachers in remote schools with coping mechanisms during the implementation of MATATAG Curriculum in the Philippines. It follows the descriptive-phenomenological research design which turned out to represent lived experiences of purposively selected five educators from a rural place in Davao del Sur. In-depth interview and focus group discussions were conducted to generate rich narratives that, when analyzed thematically, revealed the issues and adaptive strategies that have arisen during the curriculum shift. Four major challenges of the teachers show: insufficient and delayed delivery of instructional materials, technological and internet connectivity limitations, difficulties in curriculum contextualization, and lack of stakeholder understanding and support. These challenges became the barriers in the system of effective curriculum implementation that usually led to interruptions in teaching and disengagement of learners. All the teachers embraced these challenges, whereas constant ways of coping were quite resilient and innovative. The latter localized teaching approaches, utilization of offline and improvised resources, community collaboration, innovative assessment techniques, and reliance on peer support systems. These combined approaches did partially well toward that end but had not eliminated all gaps caused by persistent structural factors, particularly those associated with resources available and digital access. Such interface brought about challenges and coping strategies that both worked for and against student performance. Increased creativity and participation were observed among students; however, these experienced gaps in conceptual understanding due to perennial infrastructural problems. It brings to the fore issues of contextualization of curriculum and community mobilization, underscoring the requirement for reforms that are sustainable, driven by policy. Recommendations include resource upgrading and improved allocation; enhancing rural technological infrastructure; promoting a flexible and contextualized design and curriculum implementation; enhancing the stakeholder engagement, along the steps of continuous teacher development. The study affirms that while teacher innovation elevates teaching, the challenge of sustaining curriculum implementation lies in robust institutional and systemic support.

Keywords: *challenges, coping strategies, teachers, MATATAG curriculum, remote schools*

Introduction

The society's future is highly influenced by education. Any changes in curriculum has a direct impact on teachers, especially in poor and distant places. To bridge the ongoing learning gaps and improve teaching techniques of educators, MATATAG Curriculum implementation in the Philippines seeks to enhance the standards and accessibility of education. Employing the new curriculum entails numerous challenges, especially for instructors in distant places with limited resources.

Launched by the Department of Education (DepEd), the MATATAG Curriculum aims to enhance teaching strategies to enhance learning outcomes through improved coherence of learning skills, promotion of basic reading and numeracy, and strengthening of teaching methodologies through which their coherence is strengthened. While rural teachers have significant challenges to effect this transition because of the lack of proper resources, training, and connectivity, students will stand to benefit from it. The challenges would impact the education results for the students and curriculum implementation effectiveness. Teachers who are teaching in far-flung areas are likely to experience logistical challenges such as; limited exposure to up-to-date instructional aids, minimal professional development opportunities, and poor infrastructure. Bernardo and Mendoza (2022) observe that the ability of rural teachers to implement curriculum reforms effectively is compromised if they have problems accessing training opportunities.

Additionally, research indicates that inadequate technological resources and scant internet access hinder the effective utilization of digital learning tools (Sarmiento & Corpuz, 2021). The identified issues highlight the adaptable methods teachers in remote areas employ.

Educators apply different coping strategies in battling hindrances in teaching, like; peer tutoring, collaborative learning, and independent professional development. Strategies employed by teachers to enhance instruction (Guzman et al., 2020).

Designed by school teachers, bespoke curricula make use of community resources in response to the dearth of standard materials (Reyes, 2019). Adaptive practices help educators ride with education platform changes.

Distance learning environment curriculum alteration introduces a number of challenges. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) stress that educators in rural districts often do not have enough opportunities for professional development, which results in the lack of consistency in curriculum implementation. According to Lego (2021), the implementation of new curriculum standards is complicated by the

inefficient teaching materials, outdated facilities, and the lack of access to the Internet.

Bautista & Ocampo (2019) stated how peer support and knowledge transfer aid in curriculum adaptation, through collaborative modes of teaching such as mentoring and teachers learning circles. Technological interventions, like mobile learning applications, and digital materials for teaching—enhance conventional teaching methodologies significantly (Soriano, 2020). Localized curriculum reforms—where teachers align their methodology of teaching with available resources and community needs—have been very successful in improving the delivery of the curriculum, even with infrastructural limitations (Garcia & Santos, 2021). Research shows that the modifications to the curriculum impact heavily on teacher performance, teaching efficiency, and motivation. Supported changes to the curriculum, according to Villegas and Ramos (2022), improve student performance and promote teacher dedication.

Insufficient training and resources can wear teachers out, and indirectly influence teaching in the classrooms (Lopez, 2021). Therefore, there is an urgent requirement for an enduring support structure such as funding clauses and capacity-building programs to assess the efficiency of curriculum refinement engagement in distant-pedagogical platforms.

The challenges of educators in far-flung schools during the adaptation of MATATAG Curriculum are examined in this study. This seeks to explore the hindrances faced by the educators, and the coping mechanisms used during the implementation of ne curiculum in seslected rural schools. The findings might inform further curriculum planning to ensure diversity and flexibility in most learning settings.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the primary challenges faced by teachers in remote schools in adapting to the MATATAG Curriculum?
2. What coping strategies do teachers in remote areas employ to adapt to the changes brought about by the MATATAG Curriculum?
3. How do the challenges face by remote school teachers and their coping mechanisms?

Literature Review

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive-phenomenological research design was used in this study to explore the lived experiences of remote school teachers who are having difficulties with the MATATAG CURRICULUM.

Respondents

Creswell & Poth (2018) show that phenomenological studies normally incorporate a participant range of 3 to 10. Utilizing purposeful sampling, five educators with different educational backgrounds will be selected to participate in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Educators employed in rural schools within Davao del Sur form the population under study. These teachers are concerned with teaching from five years back and the current year.

Instrument

This study utilized a guided interview question set. The interview guide questions were subjected to expert evaluation before the data collection process. This was to ensure that the questions asked were appropriate for the study.

Procedure

Different methods were used to obtain the necessary data for this research. Before the interview, participants were apprised of the study nature. After orientation, schedules were set according to participants' availability. Then, a thorough interview gave participants a chance to share their collective experiences and views.

The data collection process was planned within a specified period to coincide with the availability of the participants. Thematic analysis was applied to the interviews via verbatim transcriptions. Peer debriefing, member checking, and giving detailed descriptions in reporting all play important roles in ensuring rigour and trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations

Taking ethical considerations into account provides an element of reflexivity. Throughout the study, there was a strict adherence to maintaining informed consent and confidentiality. The meaning of teachers' resilience in the new curriculum was explained with accuracy; the results consisted of detailed descriptions and verbatim quotations.

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings derived from the interviews conducted with the participants. The themes and coding illustrate the outcomes of the study. It is essential to optimize the data by integrating the data, coding, and themes (Howitt, 2019).

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Adapting to the MATATAG Curriculum

Insufficient Resources and Delays in Material Delivery

Teachers frequent problem in adapting the new curriculum is the chronic instructional materials shortage, and the delays in delivery of this essential learning materials.

> "The curriculum's shift towards a more holistic, skills-based approach is challenging, especially when it requires resources we do not have. Our remote setting means that we experience frequent delays in receiving new textbooks and digital content, which disrupts the planned schedule." (TP 4-1:4-5)

Teachers noted that textbooks, modules, and other materials arrived late and insufficient in quantities. These instances force them to improvise with materials available locally. This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting that remote schools typically experience significant logistical challenges that affect timely resource distribution (Smith & Lee, 2020).

Technological and Connectivity Limitations

One of the most reported hindrances, the unstable internet connection and insufficient digital device access. These hinder the integration of digital materials, and online learning tools into the current curriculum.

> "Internet is sporadic; sometimes, I can't even download a simple video that would otherwise help explain a concept." (TP 3-1:7)

A key constraint faced by teachers in the application of curriculum was the lack of access to reliable internet and the limited availability of digital devices. They mentioned difficulties in downloading digital resources and conducting online assessments, as well as incorporating multimedia into the lessons taught. These issues represent the much broader aspect of a digital divide that comes with rural education, where minimal connection makes technology enhanced learning adoption near impossible (Brown & Davis, 2019).

Curriculum Adaptation and Contextualization Challenges

Many educators faced challenges in providing standardized competency-based curriculum in their local culture. This made lessons difficult to relate students daily lives.

> "Balancing traditional teaching with new competency-based goals forces me to spend additional time on lesson planning and developing alternative assessments." (TP 4-1:8)

Participants concurred in that they found it an uphill task to localize the standard, competency-based curriculum to their contextual areas. The same stated that the MATATAG Curriculum was crafted on urban or general bases and so needed modifications in lesson content to integrate cultural and environmental specifics of communities. This is an earlier assertion found in studies stressing the necessity of flexibility in the curriculum because of its various educational contexts (Garcia & Torres, 2018).

Community and Stakeholder Concerns

Participant reveled parental skepticism and community concerns contribute to teaching-learning complication. Stakeholders expected to be involved to changes and learning gaps.

> "Parents are cautious and sometimes skeptical, worried that the new methods might not prepare their children for local job markets." (TP 2-1:10)

Most of these teachers had to contend with challenges brought about by stakeholder perception. Because the new education model lacked an introduction to parents and the community, its importance was questioned, thus adding pressure on the teachers. It has been cited that effective stakeholder engagement is one of the essential footings for success in curriculum implementation, whereas mistrust will forestall much in educational reforms (Nguyen & Patel, 2017).

Coping Strategies Employed by Teachers in Remote Areas

Localized Teaching Strategies and Curriculum Adaptation

While changing lessons, teachers tied local culture, community stories, and really lived examples in the new curriculum to have more substance and approach for students.

> "I often use locally printed handouts, community stories, and even props from everyday life. I also adapt content from open educational resources online when possible." (TP 1-2:13)

On the other hand, in adapting their lessons to compensate for the generalized nature of the curriculum, teachers have included local cultural elements, community stories, and real-life examples. These methods have been found to be more relevant and connecting for the students. Such localized practices are recognized as good practices in bridging the gap between standardized curriculum and local educational needs (Lopez & Ramirez, 2020).

Utilization Offline Resources

Resource limitations have made world teachers improvise teaching aids and use offline digital contents to supplement what they lack in the official source.

> "Since digital access is limited, I rely on offline resources. I download materials when possible and distribute printed copies to students." (TP 1-2:14)

> "I prepare lessons offline and use printed materials. I also store digital content on USB drives for occasional use during rare connectivity windows." (TP 4-2:14)

However, resource constraints along with technology limitations have resulting in a greater extent using other creative off-line alternative sources like digital libraries. On a practical front scenario, this has helped teachers with the continuity of instructions despite the non-arrival of official resources. Work on remote education gives emphasis on the use of offline resource as a realistic option to cope with issues related to digital divide (Chen & Wang, 2019).

Collaborative and Community-Based Approaches

A recurrent strategy is closely working with fellow teachers, community elders, and local stakeholders, which also contributes toward sharing best practices, pooling resources, and co-creating lessons.

> "I regularly meet with fellow teachers to share resourceful ideas, and I also collaborate with community elders who can provide cultural insights that enrich our lessons. " (TP 3-2:16)

> "I collaborate with other teachers at our center, as well as with local community leaders, to co-create lesson plans that incorporate both traditional and modern educational approaches." (TP 5-2:16)

To include pooling resources to share the best practices and face challenges together, collaboration between teachers and partners in the community have emerged as critical coping mechanisms. Literature shows that community-based collaboration is very vital in resource-limited settings to improve both teaching quality and student learning outcomes (Singh & Kumar, 2018).

Innovative Engagement and Assessment Techniques

Group work, project-based approaches, role plays, and other alternative assessment methods that connect with the curriculum and local context are among the interactive strategies used by teachers to engage with students.

> "Assessment is continuous and multifaceted, ranging from oral presentations and creative projects to simple quizzes that reflect our contextual realities." (TP 5-2:17)

Innovative interventions to the ways students attend classes have included project-based learning, roleplaying, and interactive group activities. In spite of their resource constraints, these innovative interventions also include developing rigorous alternative assessment methods that make student progress readily apparent in a competency-based framework. Such innovative practices are noted to be effective practices in overcoming the inherent challenges within remote education (Mitchell & Roberts, 2021).

Self-Motivation and Peer Support Mechanisms

Resilience and motivation strengthen individual teachers, and thrust them in partnership with peers through the institution, and that form of partnership makes it easier to endure the difficult experiences of day-to-day teaching.

> "The support from my close-knit community and fellow teachers helps me stay motivated. I also take time for personal reflection and celebrate small successes in class." (TP 3-2:18)

Finally, many of the teachers interviewed indicated the importance of self-motivation and the benefits of peer support in sustaining their efforts under adverse conditions. Regular exchanges with colleagues, mutual encouragement, and professional networking have proven crucial for maintaining morale and promoting continuous improvement in teaching practices. This finding is in congruence with studies which highlight the positive impact of peer support on teacher resilience and well-being (Evans & Thomas, 2020).

Interaction Between Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

Partial Success of Adaptive Strategies

Teachers observe that while these innovative coping strategies (localized content and collaborative approaches) seem to bring some salience to and enliven lessons, they do not seem to address the underlying issues.

> "Using local contexts in lessons has greatly helped bridge the gap between theory and practice. Our improvised methods often lead to creative learning solutions." (TP 2-3:19)

The study observed that most of the adaptive strategies put into practice demonstrated improvement in student engagement and instructional delivery; however, they were not completely effective in overcoming structural barriers faced by remote teachers. Teachers accepted the fact that localized teaching and collaborative approaches had brought partial success, but perennial shortages of resources and technological constraints limited their overall influence. Supported by previous evidence, which shows that adaptive strategies can mitigate but not completely overcome deep-rooted infrastructural challenges (Wilson & Park, 2019).

Persistent Gaps Despite Adaptive Measures

Despite having so many coping strategies, persistent problems such as insufficient technological resources and delays in the provision of materials still threaten teaching effectiveness and learning continuity.

> "Some issues persist—particularly the unreliable internet and the slow arrival of official materials. These continue to affect lesson delivery despite our best efforts." (TP 1-3:20)

Although teachers have numerous coping mechanisms, large gaps exist between them and their students, particularly in the area of consistent resource availability and technological support. Truly persistent problems with regard to the localized adaptation show the limits of these adaptations when above problems continue to plague the broader system. Studies also indicate that such adaptation strategies would have only temporary solutions without long-term systemic interventions (Foster & Johnson, 2020).

Impact on Student Outcomes

A recurring strategy is working closely with fellow teachers, community elders, and local stakeholders. This collaboration helps in sharing best practices, pooling resources, and co-creating lesson plans.

> "Students have shown increased creativity and resilience. However, when official resources are lacking, there are occasional gaps in their conceptual understanding." (TP 5-3:22)

However, the combination of challenges and coping strategies produced mixed results regarding learning outcomes for students. Innovations and localized approaches improved student participation and creativity, but they drained the energy of teachers involved in dealing with ongoing challenges (Miller & Davis, 2018).

Conclusions

This research studied the hardships of teachers in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in rural areas. The findings revealed that teachers were facing the following challenges: lack of teaching-learning materials, technological and connectivity problems, issues in curriculum adaptation, and disbelief on the part of stakeholders. Challenges are therefore systemic hindrances to the new curriculum's effective implementation.

Under these challenges, educators would therefore adopt resistant coping mechanisms by means of such behaviors as diversified methodologies of teaching, the offline learning resources, working in collaboration with their counter-part and the participating members of the community, and in such different ways of innovative participation. A large part of success has been achieved through these methods towards the set objectives amidst hurdles, but there exist still certain gaps in various areas, particularly that of availability of resource and also in the sphere of information technology accessibility. The interplay between such challenges and coping mechanisms has yielded diverse effects on student outcomes through improved participation and imagination offset at times by periodic learning gaps that part take of systemic inadequacies. In conclusion, research confirms the contention that although individual adaptations of teachers and initiatives from local communities toward curriculum implementation are important, institutional and policy-driven interventions in a comprehensive manner do take precedence over them. For long-term success, basic reform is necessary, which will tackle root problems faced.

Conclusion of the study was in favor of a strong recommendation under timely allocation and transfer of resources for state governmental and educational institutions to significantly improve provision and provision of instructional materials specific to poor areas. Establishment of decentralized distribution centers will reduce material delivery timelines, thus ensuring that teacher stakeholders have the relevant tools required for effective curriculum implementation.

Upgrade technology infrastructure to solve connectivity problems arising from online learning. Some of the connectivity solutions include improved internet connectivity within rural schools, offline digital libraries, and preloaded educational content. Moreover, the establishment of government-subsidized technology initiatives will equip educational institutions with value-added digital resources in support of modern teaching techniques.

The curriculum needs to be more flexible in contextualizing the curriculum to be effective in its implementation. Custom-designed instructional materials that include local knowledge and culturally significant resources would create lessons that could be seen to

relate more to students. Moreover, adequate training has also to be provided to teachers on techniques of curriculum contextualization.

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