



Implementing Curriculum Reform in Philippine Social Studies: Teachers' Experiences With Matatag Araling Panlipunan 7

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ABSTRACT: This study explored teachers' experiences in implementing the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum in Philippine Social Studies, focusing on curriculum goals and objectives, content and structure, instructional coherence, assessment alignment, responsiveness to learners, and the opportunities and challenges encountered during implementation. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed because it enabled an in-depth examination of teachers' experiences and perspectives within actual school contexts without making causal claims about curriculum effectiveness. The study was conducted during School Year 2024–2026 in ten selected public secondary schools under the Schools Division Office of Ilocos Sur, Philippines, comprising six Mega Schools and four Large Schools. Purposive sampling was used to select 26 Araling Panlipunan 7 teachers with direct experience implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. Three teachers were selected from each Mega School and two from each Large School. Data were gathered through researcher-made semi-structured interviews covering participants' profiles, perceptions, challenges, and coping mechanisms related to curriculum implementation. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or through Zoom following informed consent, audiorecorded, transcribed, and anonymized. Thematic analysis involved repeated transcript review, initial coding, categorization, pattern identification, and theme development. Teachers generally experienced MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 as more focused, coherent, relevant, and manageable than the previous curriculum. They particularly valued its clear objectives, streamlined content, logical progression, and alignment between competencies and assessment. Teachers also reported that localized activities and connections to learners' lived experiences supported academic, personal, cultural, social, and civic development. However, implementation challenges included limited learning resources and references, technological demands, competing school responsibilities, and the need for additional knowledge and professional support. MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 was generally experienced as a positive and meaningful curriculum reform that promotes focused, coherent, contextualized, and competency-oriented learning. However, teachers' experiences indicate that curriculum clarity alone does not ensure confident and effective implementation; adequate resources, professional learning, technological assistance, and institutional support remain important conditions for translating curriculum intentions into classroom practice.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in preparing learners to respond to the social, economic, and civic demands of a rapidly changing society. Achieving this purpose requires a curriculum that provides relevant knowledge while developing the skills and values necessary for meaningful participation in society. In the Philippine basic education system, Araling Panlipunan or Social Studies is

particularly important because it develops learners' understanding of history, geography, culture, government, economics, and society. Through these areas of learning, the subject contributes to the formation of informed, critical, culturally aware, and responsible citizens.

In response to persistent concerns in Philippine basic education, the Department of Education (DepEd) introduced the MATATAG Curriculum as a major curriculum reform intended to strengthen foundational competencies and address longstanding challenges in the basic education system. Officially launched on August 10, 2023, the reform emphasizes the mastery of essential skills, including literacy, numeracy, and life and work competencies. DepEd (2023) also outlined the implementation and monitoring of the curriculum through the pilot rollout from Kindergarten to Grade 10. The reform therefore represents not only a revision of curriculum content but also a significant shift in how teachers plan, deliver, and assess learning.

Within this reform, the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum places greater emphasis on essential historical, cultural, and civic knowledge while encouraging critical thinking, active participation, and appreciation of Filipino identity. Its streamlined content and emphasis on essential competencies are intended to provide learners with more focused and manageable learning experiences. Estrellado (2024) described the curriculum modification as an initial response to enduring concerns within the Philippine education system, while Saro et al. (2024) noted its potential to strengthen learners' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Olipas (2024) likewise highlighted significant changes between the MATATAG Curriculum and its predecessor, particularly in the organization and content reflected in the revised curriculum guides.

The implementation of curriculum reform, however, extends beyond the development of curriculum documents and learning competencies. Teachers are central to translating curriculum policies into actual classroom practice, and their understanding of curriculum goals and structures can influence how reforms are interpreted and enacted. Tolentino et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of teachers' perspectives in the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum, particularly as educators adjust to new expectations, content, and teaching approaches. Similarly, Bentayao et al. (2024) examined the application of the MATATAG reform through Lewin's change management framework, highlighting curriculum implementation as a process of organizational and instructional change. These perspectives suggest that curriculum reform must be examined not only as a policy initiative but also as a process experienced and negotiated by teachers in their everyday practice.

The classroom implementation of MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 also raises important questions about the coherence and responsiveness of the curriculum. Teachers must translate curriculum goals and objectives into instructional plans, organize content into meaningful learning sequences, align learning activities and assessments with intended competencies, and adapt instruction to the diverse needs and contexts of learners. The reform's emphasis on essential competencies and critical thinking may provide opportunities for deeper learning, but its implementation may also require teachers to develop new instructional approaches and adjust existing practices. Such adjustments are particularly important in Araling Panlipunan, where learning involves not only content knowledge but also cultural understanding, critical examination of social issues, civic awareness, and the ability to connect classroom learning with learners' lived experiences.

The responsiveness of curriculum reform to learners is likewise dependent on how teachers experience and enact its provisions. A curriculum may articulate broad goals for developing academically capable and socially responsible learners, but its practical value is shaped by classroom interactions and teachers' ability to contextualize learning. For Araling Panlipunan 7 teachers, this may involve connecting historical and social concepts to local contexts, incorporating learners' cultural experiences, encouraging collaboration and critical inquiry, and using appropriate assessment approaches to determine whether intended competencies are being developed. Examining teachers' experiences is therefore important for understanding how curriculum intentions are translated into learning opportunities for students.

At the same time, emerging studies indicate that the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum presents both opportunities and challenges for educators. Estrellado (2024) noted that teachers' views of the reform influence how they approach its implementation, while Saro et al. (2024) identified its potential for developing important higher-order skills. However, the transition to a new curriculum may require teachers to adjust instructional planning, teaching strategies, assessment practices, and the use of learning resources. These practical dimensions of implementation are particularly relevant to teacher confidence and teaching effectiveness because educators must work within the resources, technological conditions, professional support, and institutional responsibilities available in their respective schools.

Despite the growing discussion surrounding MATATAG, the experiences of teachers who directly implement the curriculum remain an important area for further investigation. Torrefiel et al. (2025) emphasized the significance of examining the perspectives of teachers in Grades 1, 4, and 7, who are directly involved in the implementation of substantial curriculum changes. Bejasa (2026) likewise underscored the value of examining teachers' real-world experiences to understand the challenges, successes, and practical realities associated with curriculum implementation. Such teacher narratives can reveal how curriculum reforms are interpreted in practice, how instructional decisions are made, and what forms of support teachers require as they navigate changes in curriculum expectations.

Against this background, there remains a need for context-specific inquiry into how Araling Panlipunan 7 teachers experience the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum, particularly in relation to curriculum coherence, learner responsiveness, and the

practical realities of classroom implementation. Understanding teachers' experiences can provide insight into how goals and objectives, content and structure, instructional practices, and assessment are translated into classroom practice, as well as how the curriculum responds to learners' academic, personal, cultural, social, and civic needs. It can also illuminate the opportunities and challenges teachers encounter in instructional planning, teaching effectiveness, teacher confidence, access to resources and technology, curriculum localization, and professional support.

Thus, this study explores teachers' experiences in implementing the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum in Philippine Social Studies. By examining teachers' accounts of curriculum design and coherence, learner responsiveness, and the opportunities and challenges encountered during implementation, the study seeks to contribute grounded evidence on how curriculum reform is experienced at the classroom level. Such evidence may provide useful insights for curriculum refinement, teacher professional development, instructional resource provision, and institutional support for the continuing implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum.

Objectives

This study aims to explore teachers' experiences in implementing the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum in Philippine Social Studies. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. examine teachers' experiences of the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum in terms of its goals and objectives, content and structure, instructional coherence, and assessment alignment;
2. describe teachers' experiences of the curriculum's responsiveness to learners' academic, personal, cultural, social, and civic needs; and
3. identify the opportunities and challenges teachers encounter in implementing the curriculum, particularly in relation to instructional planning, teaching effectiveness, teacher confidence, resources, technology, localization, and professional support.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore teachers' experiences in implementing the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum in selected public secondary schools in the Schools Division Office of Ilocos Sur. The design enabled the researchers to capture teachers' experiences and perspectives regarding curriculum goals and objectives, content and structure, instructional implementation, learner responsiveness, assessment, resources, and implementation challenges within actual school contexts. It also facilitated the identification of recurring patterns in teachers' accounts without making causal claims about the curriculum's effectiveness.

The study was conducted during School Year 2024–2026 in ten selected public secondary schools under the Schools Division Office of Ilocos Sur, Philippines, comprising six Mega Schools—Sinait, San Juan, Lussoc, Santa Maria, Narvacan National Central, and Tagudin National High Schools—and four Large Schools—Cabugao, Naglao-an, Magsingal, and Suyo National High Schools. These schools were selected as relevant implementation settings for examining teachers' experiences with the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum, particularly its instructional requirements, learner responsiveness, resource availability, and implementation challenges.

A researcher-made semi-structured interview guide was used as the primary qualitative instrument. It consisted of four areas: Profile, Perceptions, Challenges, and Coping Mechanisms, covering teachers' experiences with the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum, including its goals and objectives, content and structure, learner relevance, instructional implementation, resources, technology, and perceived changes from the previous curriculum. The guide also explored teachers' challenges and coping strategies, including collaboration, localization, resourcefulness, and professional learning. Its semistructured format ensured consistency across interviews while allowing follow-up questions to clarify and deepen participants' responses.

Purposive sampling was employed to select Araling Panlipunan 7 teachers with direct experience implementing the MATATAG curriculum. The participants comprised 26 teachers from the ten selected schools: three teachers from each of the six Mega Schools and two teachers from each of the four Large Schools. All identified teachers participated in the study, providing information-rich accounts of their classroom experiences with the curriculum. The sample was intended to provide contextualized qualitative insights rather than statistical representation of the broader population of Araling Panlipunan teachers.

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was secured from the University Research Ethics Review Board (URERB), followed by permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of Ilocos Sur and coordination with participating school heads. Interviews were scheduled according to participants' availability and conducted either face-to-face or through Zoom after informed consent was obtained. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and anonymized using participant codes. All research data were securely stored, while physical and electronic records were destroyed after the prescribed retention period through shredding and permanent deletion, respectively, to maintain confidentiality.

Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Transcripts were repeatedly reviewed for familiarization, followed by initial coding of meaningful statements, grouping of related codes into categories, identification of recurring patterns, and development

and refinement of themes in relation to the research objectives. Participants' narratives were used to support the resulting themes and preserve the contextual meaning of their experiences. This systematic process of coding, categorizing, and developing themes was consistent with the qualitative analytic approach described by Aguas (2020, as cited in Malapira, 2026) for examining narrative interview data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study on teachers' experiences in implementing the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum in selected public secondary schools in the Schools Division Office of Ilocos Sur. The findings are organized around teachers' experiences of the curriculum's goals and objectives, content and structure, responsiveness to learners, assessment alignment, and the opportunities and challenges encountered in classroom implementation. The participants' narratives indicate that teachers generally viewed the curriculum as more focused, coherent, and responsive than the previous curriculum, while also identifying concerns related to instructional implementation, technology, learning resources, and professional support.

3.1 Teachers' Experiences of the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 Curriculum Goals and Objectives

Teachers generally described the goals and objectives of the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum as clear, focused, relevant, and attainable. Their accounts suggest that the curriculum provided a more manageable framework for instructional planning by emphasizing essential historical, cultural, and civic knowledge rather than requiring teachers to cover an excessive number of competencies. This perception is consistent with the curriculum's emphasis on essential competencies appropriate to Grade 7 learners (Department of Education, 2022). The findings further suggest that teachers appreciated the clarity of the objectives because it helped them identify what learners were expected to understand and demonstrate, thereby providing a clearer basis for planning classroom activities and assessments.

The perceived focus of the curriculum was particularly evident in teachers' descriptions of its reduced content load. Teacher 1 explained:

"Ti un-una narigat talaga nga awaten. Ta damo garod. Ngem nu kayat mo talaga nga awaten kada sursurwen detoy nga curriculum maawatam met laeng. Kasla ti panag-kitak di un-una ket naarigat ngem haan met gayam. Mas decongested detoy klaro ken on point dagitay objectives kada competencies na ngay" (At first, it was difficult to understand because there were many concepts. But if you truly want to comprehend and study this curriculum, you'll eventually grasp it. It seemed challenging at first, but not anymore. It's more streamlined, clearer, and the objectives and competencies are on point.) – Teacher 1

This account illustrates an important dimension of curriculum reform: initial unfamiliarity does not necessarily translate into sustained difficulty. Rather, the teacher's experience suggests that continued engagement with the curriculum enabled greater understanding of its organization and expectations. The description of the curriculum as "more streamlined" and "clearer" also supports the broader finding that teachers valued the prioritization of essential competencies. A focused curriculum can provide learners with greater opportunities to engage deeply with important concepts rather than encounter excessive content, consistent with principles concerning cognitive load and meaningful learning (Bauer & Kenton, 2005; Sweller, 1994; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Teachers also emphasized the relevance of the objectives to learners' contexts. The curriculum's emphasis on historical, cultural, and civic knowledge provided opportunities for teachers to connect classroom content with learners' lived experiences and social environments. Such contextualization is consistent with culturally responsive approaches that recognize the importance of learners' cultural and social contexts in making classroom knowledge meaningful (Louis et al., 2004; Gimbel, 2023). Similarly, curriculum relevance may strengthen learners' motivation and facilitate the transfer of knowledge when students perceive what they are learning as meaningful to their own experiences (García & Weiss, 2020). The findings therefore suggest that teachers valued the curriculum not simply because it contained fewer competencies, but because its focused objectives allowed them to devote greater attention to essential concepts and their application.

However, clarity at the curriculum level did not necessarily eliminate difficulties in classroom execution. Teacher 2 differentiated between understanding the objectives and implementing them:

"Nadaras la maawatan ji objectives tay lesson. Ti narigat lang nu kasanom nga i-execute ma'am. Ta tay lesson exemplar met lang ti in provide da ma'am," (The objectives and the lesson are understandable, ma'am. The challenge lies in how to effectively implement them, as only the lesson exemplar was provided.) – Teacher 2

This response is significant because it demonstrates that teachers' experiences of curriculum reform involve both curriculum clarity and implementation demands. Although the objectives may be understandable, teachers still need adequate instructional resources, strategies, and professional support to translate those objectives into effective classroom practice. Thus, the findings indicate that curriculum coherence should be considered not only in terms of how clearly objectives are written but also in terms of whether teachers are adequately supported in implementing them.

3.2 Teachers' Experiences of Curriculum Content and Structure

A second prominent finding concerned the focused and streamlined organization of the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum. Teachers perceived the curriculum as less congested than the previous curriculum and more manageable in terms of content coverage. This shift from breadth toward greater depth created opportunities for teachers to concentrate on essential knowledge and higher-order thinking rather than rushing through numerous competencies. Such an orientation is consistent with Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), which emphasizes movement beyond basic recall toward analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

Teacher 3 described the change in content organization as follows:

"Ma-appreciate ko man iti lessons ita. Nauurnos nga amang ita, ken saan unay nga adu ti content na. Haan da ma ov-verwhelmed iti information but they are empowered to master essential content. Solid foundation ba. Isu't masapol ti AP. Haan nga palikolikosen." (I appreciate today's lessons. They are well-organized with just the right amount of content. Students won't be overwhelmed but are empowered to master essential knowledge, building a strong foundation. This is why the AP curriculum must be focused and clear, not complicated or scattered.) – Teacher 3

The narrative emphasizes teachers' appreciation of a curriculum that provides sufficient content without overwhelming learners. More importantly, the teacher associates content reduction with the development of a "solid foundation," suggesting that curriculum decongestion may create instructional space for deeper engagement with essential concepts. This interpretation is consistent with the view that excessive information can increase cognitive demands and interfere with meaningful learning (Sweller, 1994). It also supports the argument that carefully focused curricula can allow learners to develop deeper understanding of essential competencies (Bauer & Kenton, 2005).

The importance of managing content was further illustrated by another teacher, who explained that teachers should not simply provide all available information to learners:

"Kasla kuma daytoy nga topic Konsepto ng Kasarinlan aan laeng nga panagited ti impormasyon ti ubraen tayo.i divide tayo chunks ba kasi ado ti lessons nga ag fall ken dita nga topic. Haan tayo masapol i-feed kanyada amin kasi dagitay ubbing, ag panpanunot dagita eh. Ada tay panunot da niya kadi iti koneksyon ti napasasamak ken ti epekto na detoy." (For instance, this topic on the Concept of Independence shouldn't just be about giving information. We should break it into chunks because many lessons fall under this theme. We don't need to feed them everything at once these kids think critically. They can understand the connections and the impact of what happened.) – Teacher 4

This account demonstrates how curriculum decongestion may influence teachers' instructional decisions. Rather than treating teaching as the transmission of information, the teacher describes the importance of organizing content into manageable segments and allowing learners to examine relationships among historical events and their consequences. This approach is consistent with the development of higher-order thinking emphasized in Bloom's Taxonomy (1956).

The comparison with the previous curriculum was also explicit in another teacher's narrative:

"Para kanyak ma'am, compare ti old curriculum mas kay-kayat ko detoy ta mas decongested ti topics. Kasi ma'am, ag focus tay lang ti SoutheastAsia/ Timog Silangan Asya which is, the Philippines is part of it. Na-atay atay ti topics nga ag focus lang ti memesa nga region. Unlike before nga limang rehiyon sa Asya ang topic. Ang daming competencies ang tatapusin to the point na hindi natatapos lahat. Kaya for me, MATATAG Curriculum is much focused" (For me, ma'am, compared to the old curriculum, I prefer this one because the topics are more decongested. We're focusing only on Southeast Asia/ Timog-Silangang Asya which includes the Philippines. The topics are more concentrated since we're focusing on just one region. Unlike before, when we had to cover five regions of Asia. There were too many competencies to finish, to the point that we couldn't cover everything. That's why, for me, the MATATAG Curriculum is much more focused.) – Teacher 5

The comparison suggests that teachers experienced curriculum decongestion as a practical improvement in instructional feasibility. Rather than attempting to complete an extensive range of competencies within limited instructional time, teachers perceived greater opportunity to focus on a defined geographical and cultural context. This finding reinforces the importance of alignment between curriculum scope and the actual conditions of classroom instruction.

3.3 Structured Progression and Instructional Coherence

Teachers also described the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum as having a more logical progression of topics. They emphasized the importance of establishing foundational knowledge before introducing more complex concepts. Such sequencing enables teachers to scaffold instruction and may help learners establish conceptual connections across lessons.

One teacher explained:

"Ti panag-kunak laeng ma'am, masapul nga adda umuna a maawatan dagiti ubbing ti terms ma familiaze da palang sakbay da a maawatan dagiti ad-adu ken narigat a leksyon. No saan da a maawatan ti simple a geography ti Pilipinas, masapul da pay laeng ti tulong tapno maawatan da ti kasaysayan tayo. No nasurot ti agsisinnaruno dagiti leksyon, saan da a malipatan ken mas maawatan da ti amin nga ar-aramiden da" (What I'm simply trying to say, ma'am, is that it's important for the students to first understand and familiarize themselves with basic terms before they can grasp more complex lessons. If they cannot yet understand the simple

geography of the Philippines, they will still need support to comprehend our history. If the lessons follow a logical and sequential flow, they are less likely to forget and will be able to better understand everything they are doing.) – Teacher 6

The teacher's narrative highlights instructional coherence as more than the mere ordering of topics. The sequence is perceived as important because foundational concepts serve as prerequisites for understanding more complex historical and social concepts. This finding also reflects the principle of connecting new learning with prior knowledge and experiences.

Another teacher perceived the curriculum as reflecting a form of spiral progression:

“Detoy MATATAG tatta ma'am ket kasla Spiral progression in nature, for instance ma'am diay mesa nga topic pagkilala sa sarili kuma idi elementary da, tatta highschool da haan nga jai bagi da pag focuse-san dan instead they have that civic awareness'n ta ti kla-klaseyen tattan ket toy surroundings tayo, gingga mapan ti bansa until mapan ti neigboring counties tayo lalo ditoy Timog-Silangang Asya” (The current MATATAG curriculum, ma'am, appears to follow a spiral progression approach. For example, a topic such as 'knowing oneself,' which was introduced in elementary, is no longer the focus in high school. Instead, the emphasis has shifted toward civic awareness. Students are now learning about their immediate surroundings, gradually expanding to national issues, and eventually to topics concerning their neighboring countries, particularly in Southeast Asia.) – Teacher 7

This account suggests that teachers perceived learning as progressively expanding from familiar and immediate contexts toward broader national and regional concerns. Such a progression is consistent with Bruner's (1960) conception of curriculum development through increasingly complex treatment of knowledge. For Social Studies, this progression is particularly relevant because learners' understanding of society can develop from immediate experiences toward broader historical, geographical, cultural, and civic relationships.

3.4 Responsiveness to Learners' Academic, Personal, Cultural, Social, and Civic Needs

Beyond content organization, teachers described the curriculum as supporting learners' holistic development. Their accounts indicate that the curriculum was perceived as addressing not only cognitive development but also learners' cultural awareness, social interaction, emotional growth, and civic formation. This finding is consistent with the view that social and emotional competencies contribute to broader educational and life outcomes (Weissberg, 2019).

A teacher emphasized the broader developmental purpose of Araling Panlipunan:

“Nasayaat ti kurikulum ta pagtutok na ti panunot, rikna, ken panagtrabaho a kas grupo dagiti estudyante. Ti panagadal iti kasaysayan ken heograpia ti Pilipinas makatulung tapno maawatan da ti kultura da. Adda met ar-aramiden a mangtulnog iti panagtittinnulong ken panangusar ti adal iti aldaw-aldaw a biag. Saan laeng a para iti eksamen ken quizzes, nudiket para iti panagbalin a nasayaat a tao.” (The curriculum is effective because it emphasizes students' intellectual, emotional, and collaborative growth. Learning about Philippine history and geography helps students appreciate their culture. There are also activities that encourage teamwork and applying knowledge to everyday life. The focus is not just on exams and quizzes but on helping students become good individuals.) – Teacher 8

The teacher's account positions Araling Panlipunan as a subject that extends beyond academic content. Learning history and geography is perceived as contributing to cultural understanding, collaboration, everyday application, and character development. This aligns with Banks' (2015) emphasis on cultural understanding and active citizenship and with Dewey's (1986) view that meaningful learning is connected to experience and social interaction. It also corresponds with UNESCO's (2024) broader emphasis on education that develops the whole person and prepares learners for responsible participation in society.

The finding is particularly important for the second objective of the study because teachers did not describe learner responsiveness solely in terms of academic achievement. Instead, their narratives incorporated cultural identity, social interaction, civic awareness, and personal development. Thus, teachers' experiences suggest that the curriculum's responsiveness is partly realized through opportunities to connect Social Studies content with learners' identities, communities, and everyday experiences.

3.5 Learner Relevance and Curriculum Localization

The findings further indicate that teachers perceived localization as an important mechanism for making MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 more responsive to learners. Rather than treating curriculum materials as fixed resources, teachers described the need to adapt activities to learners' local environments. This is evident in the teacher's discussion of the DepEd-provided lesson exemplars:

“In fairness met ken dagejai lesson exemplars nga inted ti DepEd ada idyaen. Ready'n ejai lang mangi-modify lalo ti activities ta masapol mo pay i-localize” (In fairness, the lesson exemplars provided by DepEd are quite useful. They are already prepared and just need to be modified, especially the activities, which need to be localized to suit the learners.) – Teacher 9

The narrative reveals a balance between centrally provided curriculum resources and teachers' contextual adaptation. The lesson exemplars were viewed as useful starting points, but their effectiveness depended on teachers' ability to modify activities according to local circumstances. This finding supports the importance of culturally and contextually responsive teaching (Louis et al., 2004; Gimbel, 2023), particularly in Social Studies where learners' immediate communities can serve as meaningful contexts for understanding broader historical and geographical concepts.

The value of localization was further demonstrated through learners' familiarity with their *physical environment*:

“Dagejai ubbing tatta ma’am mas nadardaras da ma gets jai question example kuma ma’am nu ag pa quiz kada ag pa recitation nak. Ta ejai garod ma ex-experience da ditoy mismo ayan mi ma’am lalo makitkita da. Example kuma ma’am, tay topic mi Anyong Lupa ammo da isungbat dan nu damagek kuma magbigay ng halimbawa ng Anyong Lupa ti sungbat da met ma’am ket, kapatagan kada bulubundukin ta ditoy mismo ayan da ket makitkita da lalo ditoy yan mi ditoy upland” (The students today, ma’am, tend to understand questions more quickly, particularly during quizzes and recitations. This is largely because they have direct, firsthand experience with the subject matter in their immediate environment. For instance, when discussing landforms, they are able to respond accurately and provide examples such as plains and mountains, which are readily observable in our local area, especially in the upland.) – Teacher 10

The teacher’s account illustrates how local experience can function as a bridge between abstract curricular concepts and learners’ existing knowledge. Rather than relying exclusively on textbook descriptions, learners can draw from their direct experiences of their physical surroundings. Such contextualization can make Social Studies concepts more accessible and meaningful and is consistent with the emphasis on connecting academic knowledge with learners’ lived experiences (Louis et al., 2004; Gimbel, 2023).

3.6 Assessment Alignment and Opportunities for Meaningful Learning

Teachers also perceived assessment practices under the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum as generally aligned with learning objectives and competencies. This alignment is important because assessment provides evidence of whether learners have achieved the intended outcomes. Coman et al. (2020) emphasized the role of assessment in determining whether lesson objectives have been achieved. In the teachers’ accounts, assessment was not limited to traditional tests but included activities and performance-based tasks that enabled learners to apply and communicate their understanding.

The use of varied assessment approaches is particularly consistent with the curriculum’s emphasis on meaningful and competency-based learning. Performance tasks can provide opportunities for learners to demonstrate understanding through application, analysis, communication, and creative production rather than through factual recall alone. This orientation is compatible with higher-order learning described in the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

The teachers’ experiences also suggest that the availability of lesson exemplars supported assessment and instructional preparation, although adaptation remained necessary. The previously cited account of Teacher 9 is relevant here because the teacher recognized the usefulness of DepEd-provided materials while emphasizing the need to localize activities. Thus, assessment alignment appeared to be strengthened when teachers could adapt prescribed materials to learners’ contexts.

3.7 Opportunities and Challenges in Instructional Planning, Teaching Effectiveness, and Teacher Confidence

The findings indicate that the MATATAG Curriculum created opportunities for more intentional instructional planning by providing teachers with clearer learning competencies and a more focused content structure. Teachers described the curriculum as enabling them to concentrate on essential learning rather than attempting to cover an excessive number of topics. This may create greater space for learner-centered strategies, collaborative activities, performance tasks, and critical inquiry.

The emphasis on critical thinking and historical analysis is consistent with Anderson and Krathwohl’s (2001) revised Bloom’s Taxonomy, which places higher-order cognitive processes at the center of meaningful learning. Similarly, the use of learner-centered and collaborative approaches corresponds with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers, which emphasize teaching practices that support active and meaningful student learning (Department of Education [DepEd], 2017). The curriculum’s attention to values formation, nationalism, and civic responsibility is also consistent with the broader goals of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533, 2013).

However, the findings also reveal that curriculum clarity does not automatically result in teacher confidence. One teacher explicitly described difficulty in implementing the curriculum because of limited resources, technological challenges, and competing school responsibilities:

“Sa totoo lang, hindi ako masyadong confident bilang guro na ituro ang MATATAG curriculum gawa na din na kulang sa learning resources at references at lalo na ngayon na marami pa akong ibang gawain dito sa school, tapos bago pa ang curriculum kaya kailangan ko pa ng dagdag na idea at knowledge.” (To be honest, I’m not very confident in teaching the MATATAG curriculum due to the lack of learning resources and references. This is especially challenging since I also have many other responsibilities at school, and with the curriculum being new, I still need additional ideas and knowledge.) – Teacher 11:

This account introduces an important counterpoint to the generally positive perceptions of curriculum structure. While teachers may appreciate the curriculum’s focused design, successful implementation also depends on the conditions under which teachers are expected to enact it. Limited resources, insufficient references, competing responsibilities, and the need for additional knowledge can constrain teachers’ confidence and instructional effectiveness. The finding therefore supports the importance of professional development and updated instructional resources in sustaining curriculum reform, as emphasized in the broader implementation of the MATATAG framework (DepEd, 2023).

The challenge is also consistent with the broader literature indicating that curriculum reform involves adaptation by educators and institutions. Bentayao et al. (2024) viewed MATATAG implementation through the lens of change management, suggesting that curriculum reform requires movement from existing practices toward new ways of working. In this context, teacher confidence may

develop progressively as teachers become more familiar with the curriculum, gain access to appropriate resources, and receive sustained professional support.

3.8 Teachers' Experiences of Improvement Over the Previous Curriculum

A recurring pattern across the narratives was teachers' perception that MATATAG represented an improvement over the previous curriculum, particularly in terms of content focus and instructional manageability. Teachers emphasized that reducing the number of competencies allowed greater attention to essential knowledge and skills. One teacher explicitly contrasted the focused treatment of Southeast Asia under MATATAG with the broader coverage of the previous curriculum, describing the former as more manageable and focused.

This perceived shift has implications for instructional effectiveness. When teachers are not required to move rapidly through an extensive number of competencies, they may have greater opportunity to develop activities that encourage analysis, discussion, collaboration, and application. The emerging literature on MATATAG likewise identifies changes in curriculum organization and implementation as important aspects of the reform (Olipas, 2024; Estrellado, 2024).

Teachers also associated the reform with greater opportunities for learner engagement. The emphasis on age-appropriate and relevant content may allow students to establish stronger connections between classroom learning and their experiences. Bernardo & Mante-Estacio, (2023) similarly reported the importance of learner relevance and engagement in understanding the emerging classroom implications of the MATATAG Curriculum. However, the present findings should be understood as teachers' reported experiences and perceptions rather than as direct evidence of measured changes in student engagement or achievement.

The narratives further suggest that the reform can strengthen teachers' sense of instructional purpose when curriculum expectations are sufficiently clear. The availability of focused competencies can help teachers determine what should be prioritized, while localized and learner-centered activities provide opportunities to adapt instruction to particular classroom contexts. Such conditions may support the kind of instructional responsiveness emphasized in the MATATAG framework (Department of Education Philippines, 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate that perceived curriculum improvement and implementation difficulty can coexist. Teachers may regard MATATAG as more focused and coherent while simultaneously experiencing challenges in accessing resources, using technology, managing additional responsibilities, and developing confidence with a new curriculum. This tension is important because it indicates that curriculum reform should not be evaluated solely by the quality of its written framework. Its sustainability also depends on the practical support provided to teachers who are responsible for translating curriculum policy into classroom practice.

Taken together, the findings indicate that teachers generally experienced the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum as more focused, coherent, relevant, and manageable than the previous curriculum. Teachers valued its clear objectives, streamlined content, logical progression, and alignment between competencies and assessment. Their narratives also indicate that the curriculum provided opportunities to address learners' academic, cultural, social, personal, and civic development through contextualized and localized learning experiences. These characteristics are consistent with the broader goals of curriculum reform and the development of meaningful, learner-centered education (Department of Education, 2022; DepEd, 2017; Republic Act No. 10533, 2013).

At the same time, the findings reveal that the successful enactment of curriculum reform depends on more than curriculum design. Teachers' experiences point to continuing needs for adequate learning resources, technological assistance, professional learning, instructional references, and institutional support. The contrast between teachers who described greater confidence because of the curriculum's clarity and those who reported limited confidence because of insufficient resources demonstrates that implementation is shaped by both the quality of the curriculum framework and the conditions surrounding its enactment. Consistent with the emerging literature on MATATAG implementation (Torrefiel et al., 2025; Bejasa, 2026; Estrellado, 2024), the findings underscore the importance of listening to teachers as frontline curriculum implementers. Their experiences provide critical evidence for understanding how curriculum reform is translated from policy into classroom practice and what forms of support are necessary to sustain the implementation of MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 curriculum was generally experienced by teachers as a positive and meaningful curriculum reform. Teachers perceived the curriculum as more focused, coherent, relevant, and manageable than the previous curriculum, particularly because of its clear objectives, streamlined content, logical progression of topics, and alignment between competencies and assessment. The reduced content load enabled teachers to devote greater attention to essential historical, geographical, cultural, and civic concepts and to create opportunities for deeper learning, critical thinking, collaboration, and application rather than merely completing numerous competencies.

The findings further indicate that the curriculum was perceived as responsive to learners' academic, personal, cultural, social, and civic needs. Teachers described how localized activities, connections to learners' lived experiences, and emphasis on Philippine history, culture, and civic awareness helped make Social Studies more meaningful and accessible. The curriculum was also perceived

to support holistic development by fostering intellectual, emotional, collaborative, cultural, and civic growth. These experiences affirm the importance of contextualized and learner-centered approaches in Araling Panlipunan instruction (Banks, 2015; Dewey, 1986; Louis et al., 2004; Gimbel, 2023).

However, the findings also demonstrate that the effectiveness of curriculum reform depends not only on the quality and coherence of the curriculum itself but also on the conditions in which teachers implement it. While teachers appreciated the clarity and focus of MATATAG, some experienced difficulties related to limited learning resources and references, technological demands, competing school responsibilities, and the need for additional knowledge and professional support. Thus, curriculum clarity did not automatically translate into teacher confidence or ease of implementation. Sustained professional development, accessible instructional resources, technological assistance, and institutional support remain essential to strengthening teachers' capacity to translate the intended curriculum into effective classroom practice.

Overall, the study concludes that MATATAG Araling Panlipunan 7 represents a promising direction for Philippine Social Studies curriculum reform because it shifts emphasis from extensive content coverage toward focused, coherent, contextualized, and competency-oriented learning. Nevertheless, its long-term success requires continuous attention to the experiences of teachers as frontline curriculum implementers. Strengthening teacher support systems, expanding localized instructional resources, providing sustained professional learning opportunities, and addressing technology-related and workload concerns may help ensure that the intended benefits of the MATATAG curriculum are consistently realized in diverse Philippine classrooms.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare no known financial or non-financial competing interests. No personal relationships influenced this work.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

JJLT designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. JKMR managed the analyses of the study and contributed to the literature searches. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained from all teacher-participants before data collection. Participants were provided with clear information regarding the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written consent was secured before the interviews, and participants were informed that interviews would be audio-recorded only with their permission. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no participant was subjected to coercion or undue influence. All consent documents were securely maintained by the researchers in accordance with applicable institutional and ethical requirements.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The study secured ethical clearance from the University Research Ethics Review Board (URERB) and permission from the Schools Division Office of Ilocos Sur and participating school heads before data collection. Participant identities were protected through the use of codes, and all interview recordings, transcripts, consent forms, and related documents were securely stored with access limited to the researcher. Data were used solely for research purposes and were securely destroyed after the prescribed retention period, including the deletion of electronic files and shredding of physical records. These procedures ensured respect for participants' autonomy, privacy, confidentiality, and welfare throughout the study.

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