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Teaching in Transition: Realities of Science High School Teachers During the MATATAG Phase 1 Implementation

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological research aimed to describe the lived experiences of Science High School teachers during the initial phase of the MATATAG Curriculum implementation. It utilized online semi-structured interviews in gathering qualitative data among the five (5) Grade 7 science teachers from four (4) different public high schools in Bukidnon through a purposive sampling technique. The collected data was analyzed and interpreted using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method.

The findings of this study revealed that the MATATAG Curriculum had both positive and negative impacts on science teachers during its initial implementation. On the positive side, teachers benefited from reduced workload, clear exemplars, and fewer competencies, which allowed for deeper and more focused instruction. They also demonstrated adaptability and resourcefulness despite limited support. However, challenges emerged, including inadequate training, insufficient teaching materials, time constraints for lesson delivery, misalignment with regional assessments, and student difficulties in comprehension and readiness. This study recommends enhancing and strengthening teacher training, aligning assessments with the curriculum, and providing adequate resources. Schools may support flexible scheduling, and teachers may adopt innovative strategies. Future studies may examine long-term impacts and student readiness.

KEYWORDS: *realities, lived experiences, MATATAG Curriculum, science teachers, initial implementation*

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine educational system has undergone several waves of reform in response to the growing demands for quality, relevance, and equity in basic education. One of the most recent and ambitious initiatives is the MATATAG Curriculum, launched by the Department of Education in 2023. This reform aims to decongest the curriculum, reinforce foundational skills, promote learner well-being, and give stronger support to teachers (Department of Education, 2023). The pilot implementation of MATATAG marks a significant shift not only in curricular content but also in instructional delivery — a shift that directly impacts the daily realities of classroom educators.

While curriculum reforms often promise transformative outcomes for learners, their success depends largely on the readiness and adaptability of teachers. As Aytaç (2023) emphasized,

teachers' perceptions and involvement in curriculum implementation are crucial factors in determining whether reforms can be effectively translated into classroom practices. In the context of the MATATAG rollout, Science High School teachers face both structural and instructional changes that demand immediate adaptation. These include restructured learning competencies, altered content sequencing, and the need for newly aligned instructional materials (Kilag et al., 2024; Uy et al., 2022).

Moreover, challenges such as time constraints, inadequate training, and limited access to contextualized learning resources continue to surface (Lagbao, 2024; Garma, 2024). Despite the Department of Education's efforts to support teachers through orientation programs and revised curriculum guides, many educators report feeling unprepared for the depth and scope of change introduced by the MATATAG Curriculum (Domingo & Masabpi, 2023). The work of Desimone and Garet (2009) further supports that professional development needs to be sustained, content-focused, and collaborative to produce measurable impacts on teaching effectiveness.

Given these emerging challenges, it becomes essential to emphasize the voices of educators who are responsible for translating curriculum goals into classroom realities. Studies such as those by Saro et al. (2024) and Alvarado (2022) have begun to surface insights into how the MATATAG Curriculum is perceived, yet there remains a gap in capturing the lived experiences of teachers from specialized institutions like Science High Schools.

Therefore, the researchers conducted this study to describe and explore the lived experiences of Science High School teachers during the Phase 1 implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum from four (4) public high schools in Bukidnon. It aims to understand the challenges they encounter, the adjustments they make, and the perspectives they hold as they navigate this period of educational transformation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was conducted to primarily explore and describe the lived experiences of science teachers during the phase 1 implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are Science Teachers' experiences in the initial phase of implementing the MATATAG Curriculum?
2. What is the perceived impact of the MATATAG Curriculum in teaching Science at the Secondary level?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological research design, aimed to describe the direct experiences and first-hand perceptions of science teachers' during the phase 1 implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. Semi-structured interview guide questions, which were content validated by experts, were used to collect qualitative data via online interviews with five (5) Grade 7 Science teachers from four (4) public high schools in Bukidnon, who were selected as research participants through a purposive sampling technique.

Before the data-gathering procedure, a letter of permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Dean of the College of Education through the Chairperson of the Science Education Department. A Research Ethics Committee (REC) permit from the Institutional Ethics Review Committee (IERC) was also secured to ensure that the study adhered to the ethical standards. The researchers then applied for an endorsement letter from the Schools Division Superintendent, which was forwarded to the selected schools to formally allow the conduct of the study. Lastly, informed consent forms were distributed to all identified participants prior to the interviews.

Furthermore, the data collected were analyzed through the use of Colaizzi's method of descriptive phenomenology, wherein it used seven (7) distinct processes: familiarizing data, identifying the significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering into themes, writing exhaustive descriptions, reporting of the fundamental structure, and verifying the fundamental structure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

During the initial phase of implementing the MATATAG Curriculum, as shown in Figure 1 below, science teachers reportedly went through both positive and negative experiences. Notably, they demonstrated professional adaptation to new strategies and experienced a reduced workload. It reflects what the curriculum offers, including flexible teaching approaches, reduced hours, and simplified, ready-made lessons. However, a major concern was the insufficient mastery training, which left many feeling unprepared to implement the curriculum effectively.

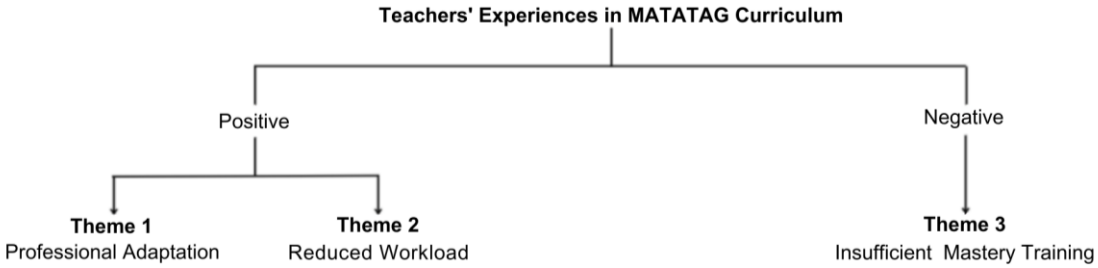

Figure 1. Experiences of Science Teachers During the Initial Phase of MATATAG Curriculum

Professional Adaptation

In the context of curriculum reform, teachers emerge as the agents of delivery. They are not only responsible for transmitting the content of the curriculum but also for interpreting and contextualizing it in ways that are responsive to their learners' needs (Priestley et al., 2012; Zhu, 2023). The initial implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum has demonstrated how teachers, particularly in Science Education, have shown this adaptive capacity despite systemic limitations. Participant 4 emphasized this by stating:

> *"So, the success of this actually depends on the teachers' adaptability. It also depends on how resourceful the teacher is and, of course, their instructional competencies."*

Participant 3 further explained that teachers cannot depend solely on ready-made lesson plans. She stressed the need for teachers to critically assess instructional materials, determining when to follow or diverge from them to best support student learning:

> *"And then, the adaptability of teachers. [They] must know how to drive…not just really rely on what's in the lesson exemplars. You really need to explore ways for you to offer approaches or use pedagogies that are suited to the level and skills of the students."*

She also emphasized the urgency of continuous professional growth and accountability, asserting:

> *"Yes, because if you are not going to change, you will be left behind. And if you will be left behind, you are the problem. If you cannot solve the problem, you find the solution. If you find a solution, you take the solution and take some actions."*

This remark resonates with a deeper sense of professional responsibility. Teachers are not only expected to keep pace with reforms but are also called to be proactive problem-solvers. To be part of the solution requires a conscious effort to grow, evolve, and take ownership of change (Manalu et al., 2023). In essence, stagnation in teaching practice is seen not only as personal failure but as a systemic liability (Trnová, 2014).

Participant 5 affirmed this idea, pointing out the importance of instructional efficiency:

> *"Now, as teachers, my questions really always bounce back to the teacher factor. Why? Because if you, as a teacher, know how to manage your time and how to deliver the lesson effectively, 45 minutes is more than enough."*

This reinforces the idea that beyond curriculum design, it is ultimately the teacher's skill in time management, communication, and pedagogical execution that determines student outcomes. In line with this, Randi (2022) stated that adaptability and resourcefulness are essential for teachers, especially when resources are limited. This aligns with the idea that effective teaching is not just about having all the right tools but about being flexible and creative to meet the diverse needs of students. Both emphasize that teachers can still create meaningful learning experiences by thinking on their feet and making the most of what they have, ensuring success even in challenging situations.

Reduced Workload

The MATATAG Curriculum has helped reduce teachers' workload by narrowing down competencies and providing lesson exemplars. This change allowed teachers to concentrate on essential topics and engage students more effectively. Teachers appreciated the reduced workload because the curriculum simplified certain expectations. By focusing on fewer competencies, they could concentrate on essential topics and engage students more profoundly (Balansag et al., 2024). Most participants shared similar experiences regarding this change.

Participant 3 shared that under the MATATAG curriculum, teachers have fewer teaching hours, resulting in a lighter workload compared to the previous K-12 system, where they had more responsibilities:

> *"To tell you honestly, in the field, all the things we learned during our college days…it's really different. It's like in war…what's being talked about is different from being the one actually fighting. The teaching hours required for teachers in the MATATAG Curriculum is only six hours of teaching hours. The remaining two hours is for the checking of papers, which we didn't have under the K to 12 Curriculum because we were fully loaded back then."*

However, participant 5 emphasized that the extent of workload reduction varies by school context. In institutions with adequate staffing, the benefits are more apparent. Conversely, in schools with limited personnel, the burden remains considerable. As she noted:

> *"If we base it on workload, that should be on a case-to-case basis or school-to-school basis."*

Participant 1 also explained that while schools with fewer teachers still struggle with a heavy workload, larger schools benefit from reduced teaching loads. She pointed out that teachers no longer need to create lesson plans from scratch; instead, they follow provided exemplars. This makes the workload more manageable and allows them to focus more on teaching rather than preparation. When asked about this shift, she shared:

> *"It is lesser…but maybe in some schools where there are only a few teachers, the workload is still heavy. However, for us now, on my part, with all 50+ teachers, the workload has been somewhat reduced compared to the younger teachers. Then, you no longer need to make a lesson plan. What you're going to do is just follow the exemplar, and no one will dictate how you use the exemplar as long as it covers one week…that's what you'll work on."*

The use of exemplar-based lessons not only saves time but also gives teachers the flexibility to adapt materials to their students' needs, provided that learning objectives are met. This promotes instructional autonomy within a structured framework, balancing consistency and adaptability.

Across schools, participants agreed that reduced workload supports better teaching. With less time spent on paperwork and extended class hours, teachers can focus on lesson delivery, assessment, and instructional improvement. This aligns with Saro et al. (2024), who found that fewer teaching hours and reduced administrative tasks enhance teacher engagement and professional development.

Ultimately, the reduced workload under the MATATAG Curriculum serves as a structural support system. It allows teachers to become more reflective and responsive, fostering a balanced environment that promotes both teacher well-being and student learning (Olipas, 2024).

Insufficient Mastery Training

While the MATATAG Curriculum introduced promising features such as reduced competencies and ready-made lesson exemplars, structural improvements did not fully compensate for what many participants described as an overwhelming, insufficient mastery training. The initial phase of implementation revealed significant gaps in teacher preparedness, leading to confusion, uncertainty, and inconsistencies in classroom delivery. This challenge stems primarily from the insufficient duration and intensity of the training provided before rollout.

Despite the support provided through exemplars and reduced competencies, the participants still felt that their preparation and professional development were insufficient. The initial training was limited in duration, which affected their ability to fully implement the curriculum effectively.

Participant 1 compared the MATATAG training unfavorably to the previous K–12 rollout, where teachers were given a full month to prepare. She reflected:

> *"During the K-12 implementation, we undergo a one-month seminar. But, here in MATATAG, we were only given three days to have the seminar. So, when we started, everything was still very blurred, because supposedly, before we begin, we should already have things to look at…like the textbook, or even the manual and the curriculum guide."*

Her statement shows that effective curriculum implementation depends not only on its design but also on how well teachers are prepared. With insufficient thorough training and time, teachers face the changes with little support. The short period of training given gives the teachers confusion in implementing the curriculum. Participant 3 experiences the same situation as Participant 1. The short duration of training for implementing the new curriculum may lead to confusion and insufficient preparation. Participant 3 stated that:

> *"So, the training was only three days, because during that training, it was really intense, right. Because that is also the second phase of the National Learning Camp…are you familiar with that? So, we, the Grade 7 teachers, were kind of dizzy during that time because we had three seminars: the SOLO HOTS, the MATATAG Curriculum, and the National Learning Camp. So, the MATATAG training was really just three days."*

Similarly, Participant 2 affirmed the inadequacy of the training duration, expressing concern that the short timeframe did not allow for full comprehension and preparedness:

> *"So, before the MATATAG curriculum was implemented in our school, teachers was trained to…for this implementation, it was for one week or three days. But, I guess that is not enough for the training…for the teachers."*

This reinforces the pattern observed throughout the responses: training sessions were perceived as rushed, incomplete, and disconnected from the complexities of real classroom contexts.

These concerns are strongly supported by Desimone and Garet (2009), who argue that effective professional development must be sustained, content-rich, and embedded within the realities of teaching practice. They emphasize that short-term, one-off training events rarely lead to lasting instructional change. Applying this framework to the MATATAG context suggests that a three-day training, regardless of its content, cannot produce the depth of learning required for teachers to implement a new curriculum confidently and competently. For MATATAG to succeed, it needs ongoing and well-structured training. This should include follow-up support, collaboration among teachers, and chances to apply learning in real classrooms. Without these, the reform may remain theoretical and poorly implemented.

Following the exploration of science teachers' initial experiences during the early phase of the MATATAG Curriculum, the focus now turns to the observable outcomes of its implementation. The participants' accounts reveal recurring patterns and challenges that illuminate the broader implications of the curriculum on instructional practices. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how the reform is unfolding within actual classroom contexts, particularly in the teaching of science, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

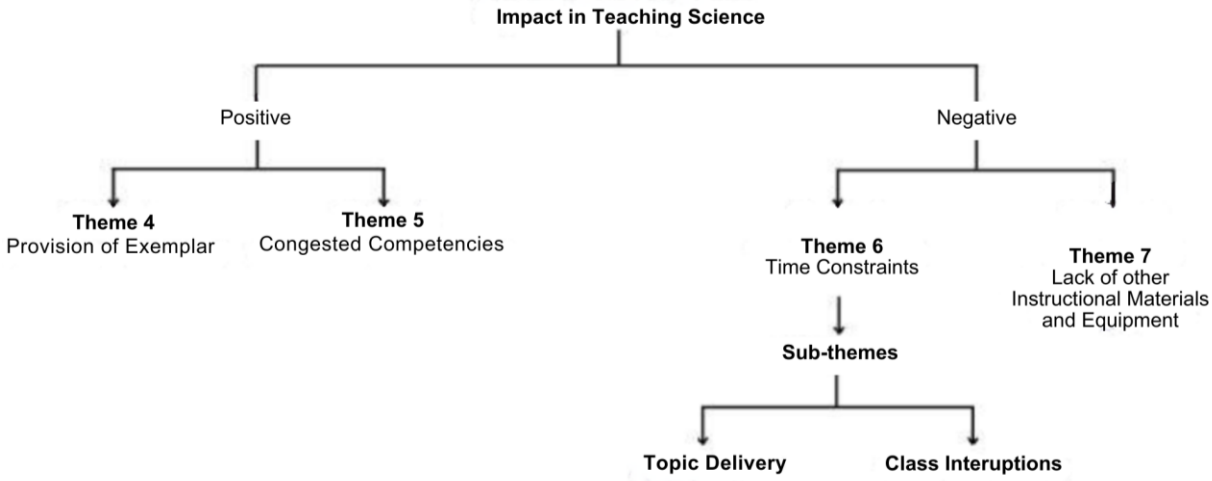

Figure 2. Impact of the MATATAG Curriculum in Teaching Science at the Secondary Level

Provision of Exemplar

The provided exemplars were highly valued by the teachers. They served as structured guides for lesson planning, making the transition to the MATATAG curriculum much easier. Participants described how these exemplars significantly provided transparent, ready-to-use formats, enabling them to focus more on teaching rather than the administrative task of lesson planning.

Participant 1 mentioned that the availability of exemplars made their work easier by eliminating the need to create lesson plans from scratch. Instead, they followed the structure provided in the exemplar, which covered the entire school year. The following is what she said:

> *"Actually, in MATATAG, the teacher's work is easier because the exemplar, which serves as the lesson plan for the entire duration from the 1st quarter to the 4th quarter, is already prepared."*

> *"Then, you no longer need to make a lesson plan. What you're going to do is just follow the exemplar, and no one will dictate how you use the exemplar as long as it covers one week—that's what you'll work on."*

Participant 4 shared views similar to those of Participant 1. She stated that the MATATAG curriculum is much better than the previous curriculum because the exemplars provide them with all they need, including suggested strategies to use with their students.

> *"The MATATAG curriculum is really better because the lesson exemplar is already provided. So, all we need to do is follow the lesson exemplar. There's no need to think about what strategies to use since everything is already included there."*

Moreover, participant 3 expressed her happiness with the lesson exemplars the Department of Education provided, describing them as ready-made lesson plans outlining activities and lesson flow from Day 1 to Day 5. She appreciated how these exemplars simplify planning and support effective teaching.

> *"I am very happy because the Department of Education provided us with an exemplar. The exemplar serves as the lesson plan, outlining the different activities and the flow of the lesson from Day 1 to Day 5."*

She explained that the exemplar is a detailed lesson plan that covers each day's activities and helps teachers easily understand what to teach and how to organize the lessons, making planning simpler and more efficient. Exemplars in the MATATAG curriculum reduced teachers' workload by providing structured, ready-made resources. This support helped teachers transition smoothly into the new system by eliminating the need for extensive lesson planning and allowing them to focus more on teaching (Lagbao, 2024).

According to Johnson et al. (2020), exemplars help align teaching with curriculum goals, ensuring classroom consistency. The clear, consistent structure of the exemplars ensured that teachers could cover key competencies effectively without creating new materials. This likely contributed to a more positive and less overwhelming experience for teachers during the initial phase of MATATAG implementation.

Congested Competencies

The reduced number of competencies allowed teachers to focus on fewer and more critical areas, which led to better student mastery of key concepts. In this way, teachers may cover the material in greater depth, giving students a stronger foundation in Education. Due to this, Participant 4 stated this phrase:

> *"I am actually amazed by this curriculum because it is the updated version of the K-12 basic education curriculum. Moreover, it emphasizes a streamlined and competency-based approach to teaching."*

Participant 2 emphasized the depth of learning in MATATAG, emphasizing that the lessons are more comprehensive compared to K-12, where some content only serves as an introduction, leaving gaps in the learning process.

> *"The learning competency for the MATATAG curriculum, uh... the lesson is more in-depth compared to the K-12. Because in the K-12, some of the lessons are just introductory, kind of like they're just a teaser."*

Participant 3 also commented on the MATATAG curriculum, noting:

> *"So that's why it's really broad, we can't make it specific. It's not like MATATAG, which is not like that, it's actually decongested, it has a specific goal. It's no longer about having many things for the children, it focuses more on the mastery and the skills of the learners."*

Participant 1 added:

> *"But that on the MATATAG program is very nice compared to K-12, as it reduces the competencies and content."*

Participants 3 and 1 emphasized that the MATATAG curriculum is designed to be more focused and manageable compared to other approaches. The key difference, they pointed out, is that MATATAG simplifies and narrows down the scope of content, eliminating unnecessary elements to allow for more in-depth learning. This approach prioritizes mastering essential skills and competencies over covering various topics. This aligns with Olipas (2024), who emphasized that the MATATAG Curriculum aims to enhance the quality of education by ensuring that learners develop a deeper understanding and proficiency in specific areas, rather than just being exposed to a wide variety of concepts. Hence, the participants find it easier to teach and understand the lesson because it is concise and very specific. It does not confuse the learners, which is suitable for their faster take-up of the lesson. This may also promote a deeper understanding of the concepts.

Time Constraints

Topic Delivery

Teachers emphasized that the time allocated for each lesson was often too short to complete the necessary content and engage in hands-on activities. The 45-minute class was particularly challenging for subjects like science, where practical experiments and discussions are essential. According to Participant 1:

> *"Actually, 45 minutes is quite short compared to everything. It feels like you can't cover much content, and you won't immediately see the students' output within 45 minutes. Previously, one hour was already considered long, but even then, not everything could be achieved within that time. How much more with just 45 minutes, which is much shorter?"*

Based on Participant 1's statement, it was highlighted that an hour of class would not be enough. How much more than a 45-minute class? Also, given that there are school activities that will require the teachers to suspend the class, this will matter based on the institution and the type of teacher.

In connection with this, the given class hours are insufficient, given that students have different learning styles and capacities. It was stated by Participant 2 that:

> *"Aside from that one, some students find it difficult to comprehend some of the given selection. So that is why some of the competency cannot be achieved for the quarter."*

Many students struggled to meet the demands of the MATATAG curriculum, particularly in terms of scientific literacy and critical thinking. Teachers faced challenges in addressing these gaps, which slowed the overall progress of curriculum delivery.

Teachers emphasized that the time allocated for each lesson, particularly the 45-minute period for science, was insufficient to complete the required content and conduct essential hands-on activities. This limitation was further compounded by the need to accommodate students' varying learning styles and comprehension levels. Many students struggled to meet the demands of the MATATAG Curriculum, especially in terms of scientific literacy and critical thinking, and teachers faced challenges in addressing these gaps, which slowed curriculum delivery (Po, 2025).

Class Interruption

Participant 2 expressed a challenge with completing the science learning competencies, stating:

> *"Even if they say that science learning competencies are congested, I still can't finish all the learning competencies for the given quarter because it is still very long, and sometimes there are a lot of school activities that can interrupt the classes."*

This illustrates an ongoing difficulty in managing the volume of content within a limited time frame, further complicated by interruptions such as school activities. Despite efforts to manage the curriculum, these factors make covering all the required competencies challenging.

From the data gathered, participants have found that the MATATAG Curriculum's content only sometimes aligns with centralized assessments, creating difficulties for students who study different materials. This misalignment, compounded by class interruptions, further exacerbates the challenges teachers and students face, leading to discrepancies between what is taught and what is evaluated.

> *"I can say that the questions given to us are a factor because we didn't create the questions ourselves. The questions were created by the region, right? When we create questions, Ma'am and Sir, we make a table of specifications to calculate the percentage and the number of items based on the hours given to the topic, correct? So, it seems that what we noticed is that the person who created our first-quarter exam was a bit confused. They didn't align the content of the questions with our exemplar but instead got the questions from the K-12 curriculum. So, it is definitely a factor."*

Participant 2 shared a concern regarding the first-quarter exams, stating:

> *"In terms of our exam, the first-quarter exam is coming from the regional office; one of our problems is not the curriculum but the students themselves."*

Beyond the limited time, class interruptions further complicate the delivery of science education. Participant 2 points out that frequent school activities disrupt the flow of lessons, making it challenging to complete the required content within the allotted time.

These disruptions, when combined with an already limited class period, hinder lesson continuity and slow curriculum delivery. This finding is consistent with research indicating that even minor interruptions to classroom learning can accumulate over time and substantially limit opportunities for instruction (Kraft & Monti-Nussbaum, 2021).

According to Cattaneo et al. (2017), instructional time is crucial for a better understanding of the lesson. This emphasized the need for a more flexible approach to curriculum delivery, acknowledging the realities of school schedules and the importance of accommodating school activities.

Insufficient Instructional Materials and Equipment

The insufficient teaching resources (such as textbooks, laboratory equipment, and digital tools) hindered the full implementation of the MATATAG curriculum. Teachers had to be resourceful and often relied on their own materials to supplement what was available. Participant 3 highlighted the recommendation that:

> *"To continue improving Science education at the secondary level under the MATATAG Curriculum, several aspects can be further developed. For example, there needs to be an enrichment of resources and infrastructure."*

Participant 1 expressed concerns about the insufficient teaching materials provided during the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum. She stated:

> *"The implementation has already started, and we don't have any materials prepared by the government, such as textbooks, manuals, teacher's guide—only the exemplar has been given to us this year."*

Participant 5 also raised a common concern among teachers pertaining to the issue of limited teaching resources and materials that are specifically suited for the MATATAG curriculum, which affects teachers' ability to effectively implement the curriculum, saying:

> *"Perhaps one of our main concerns as teachers is the availability of teaching resources and, of course, materials that truly cater to the MATATAG curriculum."*

Limitations of resources, such as insufficient teaching aids and poor school facilities, hamper the dissemination of new curricula and lead to teacher dissatisfaction (McGoey et al., 2014). Resources are essential tools for teachers, helping them effectively deliver instruction while also enabling students to better absorb and understand the information. These resources

bridge the gap between teaching and learning, ensuring that both educators and students have what they need for a productive and engaging educational experience.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, Science High School teachers demonstrated a high level of adaptability and resourcefulness during the phase 1 implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. Despite facing systemic limitations, they made necessary instructional adjustments to meet the demands of the revised curriculum. The reduced number of competencies and the provision of ready-made lesson exemplars contributed to a lighter workload, allowing teachers to focus more on instruction delivery. However, while these structural supports were appreciated, they were not sufficient to address deeper issues concerning preparedness. One of the most pressing concerns was the inadequacy of the training provided. Compared to the more extensive preparation for the K–12 curriculum, the three-day MATATAG orientation left many teachers feeling underprepared and confused, especially given the complexity of the changes.

Moreover, the 45-minute time allotment per class was deemed insufficient for effective science instruction, particularly in conducting experiments and engaging students in discussions. This issue was further aggravated by frequent school activities that interrupted instructional time and by misalignment between regional assessments and the actual curriculum content. While exemplars helped streamline lesson planning, teachers emphasized the need to customize these materials to address diverse learning needs, highlighting the importance of professional autonomy and innovation in teaching. Another major challenge was the limited availability of instructional materials, such as textbooks and laboratory equipment, which hindered the full realization of curriculum goals.

This study recommends that the schools may enhance and strengthen its teacher training programs by offering more sustained, in-depth, and context-specific professional development. Assessments may also be aligned with the competencies and content of the MATATAG Curriculum to ensure fair evaluation of students' learning. Additionally, schools may be provided with adequate and additional teaching resources and flexible scheduling to support effective instruction. Teachers may also be encouraged to adopt innovative and contextualized approaches beyond the exemplars to better cater to their learners. Finally, future research may explore the long-term impacts of the MATATAG Curriculum on both teacher performance and student learning outcomes to better inform future curriculum rollouts.

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