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Implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum in Grade 7: Teachers' Experiences in Public Secondary Schools of Cordon North and South Districts, Schools Division of Isabela

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Abstract

The implementation of the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum represents a significant reform in Philippine basic education, emphasizing foundational mathematical competencies, learner-centered instruction, contextualized learning, and the development of higher-order thinking skills. As front-line implementers of the curriculum, Grade 7 mathematics teachers play a crucial role in translating curriculum standards into meaningful classroom experiences while responding to learners' diverse needs. This study explored the experiences of Grade 7 mathematics teachers in implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum in public secondary schools of Cordon North and South Districts, Schools Division of Isabela. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed involving ten Grade 7 mathematics teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis and were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. The findings revealed that teachers adopted learner-centered pedagogical strategies, contextualized mathematics instruction, collaborative learning approaches, formative assessment practices, and reflective teaching to facilitate curriculum implementation. Despite challenges related to curriculum transition, instructional resources, learner diversity, and time constraints, teachers demonstrated adaptability, resilience, and professional commitment in delivering quality mathematics instruction. The study highlights the importance of sustained professional development, collaborative curriculum implementation, instructional support, and contextualized teaching resources in strengthening the implementation of the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum. The findings provide valuable insights for curriculum developers, school leaders, mathematics educators, and policymakers in enhancing curriculum implementation and mathematics teaching practices.

Keywords: MATATAG Curriculum, Grade 7 Mathematics, curriculum implementation, teachers' experiences, mathematics education, phenomenology, qualitative research



1. Introduction

The successful implementation of any curriculum reform depends largely on teachers, who serve as the primary agents in translating curriculum policies into meaningful classroom instruction. In mathematics education, curriculum implementation requires teachers to integrate appropriate pedagogical approaches, assessment strategies, and contextualized learning experiences that enable learners to develop conceptual understanding, mathematical reasoning, problem-solving skills, and positive attitudes toward mathematics. As educational reforms continue to reshape classroom practices, teachers are expected to adapt their instructional approaches while responding to the diverse learning needs of their students.

The Department of Education introduced the **MATATAG Curriculum** as part of its efforts to strengthen foundational learning, decongest curriculum content, and improve the quality of basic education in the Philippines. In Grade 7 Mathematics, the curriculum emphasizes mastery of essential competencies, learner-centered instruction, contextualized problem-solving, mathematical communication, and the development of higher-order thinking skills. It encourages teachers to facilitate active learning experiences that promote conceptual understanding rather than procedural memorization while ensuring that instruction remains relevant to learners' daily lives and future learning.

Grade 7 mathematics teachers play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. They are responsible for interpreting curriculum standards, designing learning experiences, selecting instructional resources, implementing formative assessment, and creating classroom environments that encourage learner engagement and mathematical inquiry. Their pedagogical decisions significantly influence learners' mathematical understanding and the overall effectiveness of curriculum implementation.

Implementing a newly introduced curriculum, however, presents several challenges. Teachers often encounter adjustments related to curriculum orientation, instructional planning, resource availability, assessment practices, learner readiness, and varying classroom contexts. Responding to these challenges requires teachers to demonstrate flexibility, continuous professional learning, collaborative planning, and reflective practice while maintaining the quality of mathematics instruction.

Although recent literature has discussed the goals and features of the MATATAG Curriculum, relatively few qualitative studies have examined the lived experiences of Grade 7 mathematics teachers during its implementation in Philippine public secondary schools. Understanding these experiences is essential in identifying effective instructional practices, implementation challenges, and professional support mechanisms that contribute to successful curriculum implementation.

Therefore, this study explored the experiences of Grade 7 mathematics teachers in implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum in public secondary schools of Cordon North and South Districts, Schools Division of Isabela. The findings are expected to contribute to improving curriculum implementation, strengthening mathematics instruction, enhancing teacher professional development, and informing educational policies that support meaningful and sustainable curriculum reform.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to explore the experiences of Grade 7 mathematics teachers in implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum in public secondary schools of Cordon North and South Districts, Schools Division of Isabela.

Specifically, it sought to:

1. describe the pedagogical practices employed by Grade 7 mathematics teachers in implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum;
2. explore the experiences of teachers in facilitating mathematics instruction under the MATATAG Curriculum;
3. identify the challenges encountered by teachers during the implementation of the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum;
4. examine the strategies employed by teachers to address implementation challenges and enhance learners' mathematical understanding; and
5. provide implications for strengthening curriculum implementation, teacher professional development, and mathematics instruction under the MATATAG Curriculum.

3. Review of Related Literature

Curriculum reform is a dynamic process that seeks to improve educational quality by aligning learning competencies, instructional practices, and assessment with the changing needs of learners and society. Effective curriculum implementation requires teachers to interpret curriculum standards, adapt instructional strategies, utilize appropriate learning resources, and continuously evaluate teaching practices to ensure that intended learning outcomes are achieved. As front-line implementers of educational reform, teachers play a critical role in determining the success of curriculum initiatives.

The **MATATAG Curriculum**, introduced by the Department of Education, was developed to strengthen foundational learning, decongest curriculum content, and provide learners with more meaningful and developmentally appropriate learning experiences. In mathematics education, the curriculum emphasizes mastery of essential competencies, conceptual understanding, mathematical reasoning, problem-solving, and learner-centered instruction. By reducing curriculum congestion, the MATATAG Curriculum allows teachers to devote more instructional time to developing learners' deep understanding of mathematical concepts rather than emphasizing content coverage alone.

Learner-centered pedagogical approaches are central to the successful implementation of the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to facilitate inquiry-based learning, collaborative problem-solving, contextualized instruction, mathematical communication, and differentiated teaching strategies that actively engage learners in constructing mathematical understanding. Research has shown that these instructional approaches enhance conceptual learning, critical thinking, learner participation, and long-term retention of mathematical knowledge.

Teacher competence and pedagogical content knowledge are equally important in implementing curriculum reforms. Effective mathematics teachers possess strong content knowledge, pedagogical expertise, assessment literacy, and the ability to adapt instruction to learners' diverse needs. Continuous professional development, collaborative lesson planning, mentoring, and Learning Action Cells (LACs) enable teachers to strengthen their instructional competence and respond effectively to curriculum changes.

Despite the intended benefits of the MATATAG Curriculum, teachers continue to encounter implementation challenges. Curriculum transition, limited instructional resources, diverse learner abilities, classroom management concerns, assessment adjustments, and time constraints influence the implementation of learner-centered mathematics instruction. Teachers frequently address these challenges by contextualizing lessons, utilizing locally available resources, collaborating with colleagues, integrating technology when available, and engaging in reflective instructional practice.

Although recent literature has discussed the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum and mathematics education reforms, limited qualitative studies have examined the lived experiences of Grade 7 mathematics teachers implementing the curriculum in Philippine public secondary schools. This study addresses this gap by exploring teachers' pedagogical practices, classroom experiences, implementation challenges, and adaptive strategies in implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum in Cordon North and South Districts, Schools Division of Isabela.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on **Curriculum Implementation Theory** by Michael Fullan (2007), **Constructivist Learning Theory** by Jean Piaget, **Social Constructivism** by Lev Vygotsky, and **Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) Framework**. These theories provide the conceptual foundation for understanding the experiences of Grade 7 mathematics teachers in implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum.

Curriculum Implementation Theory (Fullan, 2007) explains that successful curriculum reform depends on teachers' capacity to interpret, adapt, and implement curriculum innovations within their specific educational contexts. Curriculum implementation is influenced by teacher beliefs, professional competence, school leadership, instructional resources, collaboration, and continuous professional learning. The MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum requires teachers to adjust instructional practices, assessment approaches, and classroom management strategies while responding to the evolving learning needs of students. Fullan's theory highlights that meaningful curriculum implementation is achieved through sustained professional support, collaborative learning, and reflective practice rather than simple compliance with policy directives.

Constructivist Learning Theory (Piaget, 1972) posits that learners actively construct knowledge through meaningful experiences, inquiry, and problem-solving. In Grade 7 Mathematics, the MATATAG Curriculum encourages teachers to facilitate learning experiences that allow learners to explore mathematical concepts, discover relationships, and develop conceptual understanding through active participation rather than passive reception of information. This learner-centered orientation supports deeper mathematical understanding and long-term retention of knowledge.

Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizes that learning develops through social interaction, collaboration, and guided instruction. Mathematics teachers facilitate collaborative problem-solving, mathematical discussions, peer learning, and scaffolded instruction that enable learners to build understanding through interaction with teachers and classmates. The MATATAG Curriculum supports these collaborative learning experiences by promoting communication, reasoning, and active learner engagement.

Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) Framework (Shulman, 1987) highlights the importance of integrating deep content knowledge with effective teaching strategies. Mathematics teachers must understand not only mathematical concepts but also the most appropriate ways to present these concepts, anticipate learner misconceptions, differentiate instruction, and design meaningful assessments. The implementation of the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum requires teachers to utilize strong pedagogical content knowledge in delivering developmentally appropriate, learner-centered, and competency-based mathematics instruction.

Collectively, these theories explain how curriculum implementation, learner-centered pedagogy, collaborative learning, and pedagogical expertise shape teachers' experiences in implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum. They provide the theoretical basis for understanding teachers' instructional practices, implementation challenges, and adaptive strategies in Grade 7 mathematics classrooms.

5. Methodology

This study employed a **qualitative phenomenological research design** to explore the experiences of Grade 7 mathematics teachers in implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum in public secondary schools of Cordon North and South Districts, Schools Division of Isabela. The phenomenological approach was selected because it seeks to understand teachers' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of curriculum implementation within authentic educational settings.

The study was conducted in selected **public secondary schools in Cordon North and South Districts, Schools Division of Isabela**. The participants consisted of **ten (10) Grade 7 mathematics teachers** who had direct experience implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum. Participants were selected through **purposive sampling** based on their teaching assignment, experience in implementing the curriculum, and willingness to participate in the study.

Data were gathered using a **researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide**, complemented by classroom observations and document analysis. Relevant documents, including lesson plans, Daily Lesson Logs (DLLs), learning activity sheets, assessment materials, curriculum guides, and teachers' reflective notes, were reviewed to triangulate the interview findings. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Schools Division Office and the respective school administrators before data collection. Written informed consent was secured from all participants, and interviews were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and validated through member checking.

The collected data were analyzed using **Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis**, which involved familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This analytical process facilitated the identification of recurring themes describing teachers' pedagogical practices, curriculum implementation experiences, instructional challenges, and adaptive strategies.

To establish the trustworthiness of the findings, the study adopted the criteria of **credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability**. Credibility was achieved through

member checking, prolonged engagement, and triangulation of interview, observation, and document analysis data. Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through peer debriefing and maintaining a comprehensive audit trail, while transferability was enhanced by providing detailed descriptions of the participants, research setting, and instructional context.

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the appropriate educational authorities before data gathering. Participation was voluntary, and all participants signed informed consent forms after receiving a full explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, benefits, and possible risks. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms, and all collected information was securely stored and used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

6. Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Facilitating Learner-Centered Mathematics Instruction through the MATATAG Curriculum

The findings revealed that Grade 7 mathematics teachers embraced learner-centered instructional approaches as they implemented the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum. Participants emphasized that the curriculum encouraged active learner participation through collaborative problem-solving, mathematical investigations, contextualized activities, and classroom discussions. Rather than relying on lecture-based instruction, teachers acted as facilitators who guided learners in exploring mathematical concepts, constructing solutions, and communicating their mathematical reasoning. They observed that learner-centered instruction increased classroom engagement, strengthened conceptual understanding, and encouraged learners to become more confident in solving mathematical problems.

Participant 2 shared:

"The MATATAG Curriculum encourages us to let learners discover mathematical concepts on their own. Instead of simply explaining procedures, I allow them to explore, discuss, and justify their solutions."

Participant 8 stated:

"Group activities and contextualized problems help learners become more active during class. They are more willing to participate because they can relate mathematics to their everyday experiences."

These responses demonstrate that teachers perceive learner-centered instruction as a significant feature of the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum. By facilitating collaborative learning, mathematical communication, and contextualized problem-solving, teachers promote meaningful learning experiences that strengthen conceptual understanding and higher-order thinking skills. The findings support **Constructivist Learning Theory**, which emphasizes that learners actively construct mathematical knowledge through inquiry and authentic experiences. They also align with **Social Constructivism**, highlighting that collaborative interaction and guided learning contribute significantly to conceptual understanding and learner engagement.

Theme 2: Strengthening Conceptual Understanding through Contextualized and Meaningful Mathematics Learning

The participants emphasized that contextualizing mathematics lessons enabled learners to better understand abstract concepts by connecting them with real-life situations and familiar experiences. Teachers integrated examples from learners' homes, communities, local businesses, and daily activities to demonstrate the practical applications of mathematical concepts. They explained that contextualized instruction increased learners' motivation, participation, and confidence while making mathematics more relevant and less intimidating.

Participant 4 explained:

"When I connect mathematics lessons to situations that learners experience every day, they understand the concepts more easily because they can see the purpose of what they are learning."

Participant 9 remarked:

"The MATATAG Curriculum encourages us to use contextualized examples. Learners become more interested because they realize that mathematics is useful in their daily lives."

These findings indicate that contextualized instruction enhances learners' conceptual understanding by bridging classroom learning with authentic experiences. Teachers' deliberate use of real-world examples helps learners develop deeper mathematical reasoning, improve problem-solving abilities, and appreciate the relevance of mathematics beyond the classroom. The findings reinforce **Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework**, which emphasizes teachers' ability to transform subject matter into meaningful learning experiences appropriate to learners' developmental levels. They also support **Fullan's Curriculum Implementation Theory**, which recognizes teachers' professional judgment and instructional adaptation as critical factors in successful curriculum implementation.

Theme 3: Navigating Curriculum Implementation Challenges through Instructional Adaptability

The findings revealed that teachers encountered various challenges during the implementation of the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum. Participants identified curriculum transition, diverse learner abilities, limited instructional resources, insufficient learning materials, and time constraints as common concerns that influenced classroom instruction. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated instructional adaptability by modifying lesson delivery, simplifying mathematical concepts, utilizing locally available resources, and adjusting learning activities to suit learners' needs and classroom contexts.

Participant 3 shared:

"Every class has learners with different levels of understanding. I adjust my teaching strategies and provide additional activities so that everyone can follow the lesson."

Participant 7 stated:

"Since the curriculum is still new, we continuously adjust our lesson planning and instructional strategies. We learn through experience and collaboration with fellow teachers."

These responses indicate that successful curriculum implementation requires flexibility and responsiveness to diverse classroom realities. Teachers' ability to adapt instructional approaches enabled them to sustain learner engagement while ensuring that essential competencies were achieved. The findings support **Fullan's Curriculum Implementation Theory**, which emphasizes that meaningful educational reform depends on teachers' capacity to adapt, reflect, and respond to contextual challenges during implementation.

Theme 4: Strengthening Mathematics Instruction through Professional Collaboration and Continuous Learning

The participants emphasized that collaboration with colleagues and participation in professional development activities significantly strengthened their confidence in implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum. Teachers regularly participated in Learning Action Cells (LACs), curriculum orientation programs, workshops, mentoring sessions, and collaborative lesson planning to exchange instructional strategies, clarify curriculum expectations, and improve classroom practices. These professional learning opportunities enabled teachers to develop a deeper understanding of curriculum standards while strengthening their pedagogical competence.

Participant 1 explained:

"Learning Action Cell sessions help us discuss difficult competencies, share teaching strategies, and learn from one another's experiences in implementing the curriculum."

Participant 6 remarked:

"The seminars and workshops gave me a better understanding of the MATATAG Curriculum. I became more confident in preparing lessons and facilitating learner-centered mathematics activities."

These findings demonstrate that collaborative professional learning contributes significantly to effective curriculum implementation. Through continuous professional development and peer collaboration, teachers enhance their instructional competence, curriculum understanding, and confidence in delivering mathematics instruction. The findings reinforce **Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework**, which highlights the importance of continuously strengthening teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical expertise to improve instructional quality.

Theme 5: Reflective Teaching as a Pathway to Continuous Curriculum Improvement

The findings revealed that teachers consistently engaged in reflective teaching to evaluate the effectiveness of their instructional practices and improve the implementation of the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum. Participants regularly reflected on learners' classroom performance, analyzed lesson outcomes, modified instructional approaches, and adjusted assessment strategies to better address learners' needs. Reflection enabled teachers to identify effective teaching practices while recognizing areas requiring further improvement.

Participant 5 shared:

"After every lesson, I reflect on whether my learners understood the concepts. If many learners struggle, I revise my strategies and prepare different activities for the next lesson."

Participant 10 stated:

"Implementing a new curriculum requires continuous reflection. Every classroom experience teaches us how to improve our instruction and better support our learners."

These responses suggest that reflective teaching is an essential component of successful curriculum implementation. Teachers' willingness to evaluate and improve their instructional practices promotes responsive teaching, enhances learner engagement, and strengthens curriculum delivery. The findings highlight that reflective practice, combined with professional commitment and continuous learning, enables teachers to effectively implement educational reforms while fostering meaningful mathematical learning experiences for Grade 7 learners.

7. Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of Grade 7 mathematics teachers in implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum in public secondary schools of Cordon North and South Districts, Schools Division of Isabela. The findings revealed that teachers embraced learner-centered pedagogical approaches, contextualized mathematics instruction, collaborative learning, and reflective teaching to facilitate meaningful implementation of the curriculum. They demonstrated pedagogical flexibility by adapting instructional strategies to address learners' diverse mathematical abilities while maintaining alignment with the curriculum's essential learning competencies. Despite challenges related to curriculum transition, limited instructional resources, varying learner readiness, and time constraints, teachers remained resilient and committed to providing quality mathematics instruction. Professional collaboration, continuous learning, and reflective practice emerged as essential factors that strengthened teachers' confidence and competence in implementing the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum. The study concludes that successful curriculum implementation extends beyond curriculum compliance and is sustained by teachers' pedagogical expertise, adaptability, collaborative professional culture, and commitment to improving learners' mathematical understanding. These factors contribute to meaningful mathematics learning and support the long-term goals of the MATATAG Curriculum in strengthening foundational competencies and higher-order thinking skills.

8. Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for mathematics education, curriculum implementation, and educational leadership. The Department of Education and the Schools Division Office should provide sustained professional development programs that deepen teachers' understanding of the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum, learner-centered pedagogy, contextualized mathematics instruction, assessment practices, and differentiated teaching strategies. School administrators should strengthen Learning Action Cells (LACs), mentoring programs, and collaborative lesson planning sessions to encourage teachers to share effective instructional practices, address curriculum implementation challenges, and continuously improve classroom instruction. Adequate instructional resources, contextualized learning materials, digital technologies, and mathematics manipulatives should be made available to support meaningful curriculum implementation across diverse school contexts. Curriculum developers may utilize the findings to refine instructional guides, teacher support materials, and assessment resources that facilitate effective implementation of the MATATAG Mathematics Curriculum. Future researchers are encouraged to replicate this study in other school divisions or employ mixed-methods and comparative research designs to further examine teachers' experiences, instructional

innovations, and the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum across different educational settings.

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