

Original Article

# Navigating Change: Lived Experiences of Science Teachers in the Pilot Implementation of the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum

Ivan L. Lorayna<sup>id</sup>, Cristine Jean V. Mirafuentes, Meliza P. Alo<sup>id</sup>

## Author Information:

College of Graduate and Professional Education, Davao del Sur State College (DSSC), Digos City, Davao del Sur, Philippines

## Corresponding Author:

[Ivanlorayna4@gmail.com](mailto:Ivanlorayna4@gmail.com)

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**Abstract.** This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of science teachers during the pilot implementation of the Strengthened Senior High School (SHS) Curriculum mandated by DepEd Memorandum No. 012, s. 2026. While the reform aims to strengthen competency-based and learner-centered education, limited research has examined how science teachers experience and negotiate curriculum change during pilot implementation. This study sought to describe how teachers interpret, adapt to, and make sense of the instructional, emotional, and professional demands of the strengthened curriculum. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with seven science teachers from Sta. Cruz National High School. Findings revealed that teachers experienced the reform as a dual condition of promise and pressure. While participants recognized the curriculum's potential to promote deeper learning, real-world application, and learner-centered instruction, they also experienced uncertainty, increased workload, instructional adjustments, and resource limitations during implementation. Teachers described adaptation as a continuous process of improvisation, negotiation, and professional recalibration within constrained classroom conditions. The findings further revealed that professional development, collegial collaboration, administrative support, and resource availability served as critical structures that enabled teachers to sustain implementation despite ongoing pressures. The study concludes that the lived experience of science teachers during pilot implementation is characterized by continuous adaptation under conditions of uncertainty and constraint. Curriculum reform, therefore, is experienced not merely as a structural change in instruction but as an evolving professional process that requires resilience, institutional support, and sustained opportunities for teacher development.

**Keywords:** Curriculum reform; Lived experiences; Phenomenological study; Science education; Strengthened SHS curriculum

In the Philippines, the continuous refinement of the K-12 program reflects the government's effort to improve educational quality and align learning with 21st-century competencies. As part of this initiative, the Department of Education (DepEd) introduced the Strengthened Senior High School (SHS) Curriculum, which is scheduled for full implementation in School Year 2026-2027, beginning with Grade 11. The reform emphasizes competency-based learning, reduced curriculum congestion, and stronger integration of real-world applications

to promote more responsive and learner-centered education (DepEd, 2026).

In science education, the strengthened SHS curriculum introduces substantial changes in content organization, instructional delivery, and assessment practices. Compared to the previous curriculum, which often emphasized broad topic coverage and recall-based learning, the strengthened curriculum prioritizes competency development, deeper conceptual understanding, and the practical application of scientific knowledge. Science teachers are expected to shift from lecture-centered instruction toward inquiry-based and learner-centered approaches that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and real-life scientific investigation. Assessment practices are likewise restructured, moving from traditional written examinations to more performance-based and application-oriented tasks. These shifts require teachers to redesign lesson planning, instructional strategies, learning materials, and assessment methods within actual classroom settings.

**Table 1.** *Key Shifts in Science Teaching under the Strengthened SHS Curriculum*

| Aspect                | Previous Practice               | Strengthened SHS Curriculum             | Teacher Adjustment                   |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Content</b>        | Broad, content-heavy coverage   | Streamlined, competency-based           | Prioritize depth over coverage       |
| <b>Instruction</b>    | Lecture-based, teacher-centered | Inquiry-based, learner-centered         | Redesign activities and strategies   |
| <b>Assessment</b>     | Written tests, recall-focused   | Performance-based, application-oriented | Develop authentic assessments        |
| <b>Materials</b>      | Textbook-dependent              | Contextualized and flexible resources   | Create/adapt instructional materials |
| <b>Classroom Role</b> | Teacher as knowledge source     | Teacher as facilitator                  | Shift teaching approach and identity |

As shown in Table 1, the strengthened curriculum requires science teachers to modify instructional strategies, assessment methods, and classroom roles. These shifts make the pilot implementation a complex professional experience that demands continuous adjustment and adaptation.

Understanding curriculum reform requires examining how it is experienced by those directly involved in its implementation. In this study, lived experiences refer to how science teachers perceive, interpret, and respond to the pilot implementation of the strengthened SHS curriculum within their actual classroom practice (Neubauer et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Science teachers play a central role in translating curriculum policy into classroom instruction, making their experiences essential in understanding how educational reforms are enacted in real teaching environments.

Previous studies suggest that the success of curriculum reform depends largely on teacher readiness, institutional support, and the ability to adapt instructional practices. Fullan (2020) emphasizes that educational change becomes difficult when teachers are insufficiently supported during implementation, while Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) highlight the importance of professional development, resource availability, and alignment between curriculum expectations and classroom realities. In the Philippine context, Barrot (2021) found that teachers implementing curriculum reforms continue to experience challenges related to workload demands, instructional alignment, and pedagogical adaptation. Similarly, Antipolo and Rogayan (2021) noted that science teachers encounter difficulties in lesson planning, assessment design, and addressing diverse learner needs during curriculum transitions.

At the local level, Sta. Cruz National High School in Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur, one of the pilot schools for the strengthened SHS curriculum, provides a meaningful context for examining how science teachers experience curriculum reform in actual classroom conditions. Initial observations suggest that teachers continually adjust their lesson planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, and assessment practices in response to new curriculum expectations. Despite existing studies on curriculum implementation, limited qualitative research has specifically explored how science teachers experience the pilot implementation of the strengthened SHS curriculum in real classroom contexts. This gap highlights the need to examine how teachers navigate uncertainty, instructional adjustment, workload pressure, and professional adaptation during curriculum transition.

Hence, this study aims to explore the lived experiences of science teachers in the pilot implementation of the strengthened Senior High School curriculum. By examining their perceptions, challenges, and adaptive strategies, the study seeks to deepen understanding of how curriculum reform is experienced and negotiated in the classroom. The findings of the study may help the Department of Education, school administrators, and policymakers strengthen implementation support systems, improve professional development initiatives, and enhance curriculum delivery in science education. Furthermore, this study contributes to understanding

curriculum reform not only as a policy initiative but also as a lived professional experience shaped by adjustment, tension, and adaptation within actual teaching practice.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of science teachers during the pilot implementation of the strengthened Senior High School curriculum. Phenomenology is appropriate for this study because it focuses on understanding how individuals construct meaning from a shared phenomenon within their professional context (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

### Bracketing and Reflexivity

To ensure that findings were grounded in participants' perspectives, the researchers practiced bracketing (epoché) by consciously setting aside prior assumptions about curriculum implementation. Personal beliefs about curriculum effectiveness and teacher challenges were documented in a reflexive journal before and during data collection. This process helped minimize researcher bias and allowed participants' narratives to emerge more authentically.

Reflexivity was continuously practiced by reflecting on how the researcher's background in education might influence data interpretation. Field notes and reflective memos were used to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' lived experiences rather than pre-existing expectations.

### Deriving the Essence of Experience

The essence of the phenomenon was derived through iterative analysis of interview transcripts, identifying significant statements, meaning units, and patterns of shared experience. These were then synthesized into thematic structures that reflect the common lived essence of science teachers' experiences rather than isolated or surface-level issues.

### Participants and Sampling Technique

The study was conducted at Sta. Cruz National High School in Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur, a pilot site for the strengthened Senior High School curriculum. The participants were seven (7) science teachers selected through purposive sampling, chosen based on their direct involvement in curriculum implementation.

### Inclusion Criteria

- Licensed science teachers
- Currently teaching Senior High School science subjects
- Direct involvement in the pilot implementation of the strengthened SHS curriculum

Table 1.2 Participant Profile Table

| Participant | Years of Teaching Experience | SHS Teaching Experience | Science Specialization | Role in Pilot Implementation |
|-------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| P1          | 5-6 years                    | 4-5 years               | General Science        | Pilot Implementer            |
| P2          | 1-2 years                    | 1 year                  | General Science        | Pilot Implementer            |
| P3          | 4-6 years                    | 3-5 years               | Biology                | Pilot Implementer            |
| P4          | 3-5 years                    | 2-3 years               | Chemistry              | Pilot Implementer            |
| P5          | 4-6 years                    | 3-4 years               | Physics                | Pilot Implementer            |
| P6          | 1-2 years                    | 1 year                  | General Science        | Pilot Implementer            |
| P7          | 5-6 years                    | 4-5 years               | Biology                | Pilot Implementer            |

Note. Identifiers remain anonymous to protect confidentiality.

This profile strengthens transparency and allows readers to understand how variation in experience may shape lived interpretation of curriculum reform.

### Research Instrument

Semi-structured interview questions were developed to explore science teachers' lived experiences during the pilot implementation of the strengthened SHS curriculum. The instrument was validated by experts in science education and qualitative research to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with phenomenological inquiry. Revisions suggested by experts were incorporated to ensure that questions encouraged deep reflection on lived experience, with a particular focus on emotions, challenges, meaning-making, and adaptation processes.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

Data collection was conducted through in-depth individual interviews. The following steps were followed:

- (a) permission was secured from school authorities prior to data collection;
- (b) participants were oriented about the study purpose, confidentiality, and recording procedures;
- (c) semi-structured interviews were conducted, focusing on the lived experiences of curriculum implementation;
- (d) interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and verified by participants for accuracy (member checking).

This process ensured that participants' narratives were accurately represented and grounded in their actual experiences.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic analysis framework:

1. Familiarization with data through repeated reading of transcripts
2. Initial coding of meaningful statements
3. Grouping codes into potential themes
4. Reviewing and refining themes for coherence
5. Defining and naming themes based on meaning structures
6. Producing a final narrative that reflects the essence of shared lived experience

Although thematic analysis was used, interpretation was guided by phenomenological principles, ensuring that themes reflect the meaning structures of lived experience rather than merely categorizing responses.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

To ensure rigor in qualitative inquiry, the study followed Lincoln and Guba's criteria of trustworthiness:

#### ***Credibility***

- Member checking was conducted by returning transcribed interviews to participants for verification
- Peer debriefing was used to review emerging codes and themes
- Prolonged engagement with data ensured an accurate representation of experiences

#### ***Dependability***

- An audit trail was maintained, documenting coding decisions, theme development, and analytical steps
- Data analysis followed a systematic and transparent procedure using Braun and Clarke's framework

#### ***Confirmability***

- Reflexive journaling was used to reduce researcher bias
- Interpretations were grounded directly in participant narratives rather than assumptions

#### ***Transferability***

- A thick description of context and participant profiles was provided to allow readers to assess applicability to similar educational settings

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study strictly followed ethical protocols to protect the rights, dignity, and confidentiality of all participants. Prior to data collection, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the conduct of interviews.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all participants were assigned pseudonyms (P1-P7), and any identifying information was removed from the transcripts and final presentation of findings.

All audio recordings from the interviews were securely stored in a password-protected device accessible only to

the researchers. Transcripts were likewise saved in encrypted files and backed up in a secure storage system to prevent data loss or unauthorized access. Printed copies of transcripts and notes were kept in a locked and secure location.

After transcription, all audio recordings were permanently deleted once accuracy checks were completed and participant validation (member checking) was done. Data were used strictly for research purposes only and were not shared with any unauthorized individuals.

These measures ensured that participant privacy was protected throughout the research process, from data collection to analysis and reporting.

## **Results and Discussion**

Three experiential meanings emerged from the narratives: (1) encountering the reform with both optimism and uncertainty, (2) experiencing emotional and professional tension during implementation, and (3) rebuilding teaching practices through adaptation.

### **Encountering the Reform with Both Optimism and Uncertainty**

Teachers initially viewed the strengthened curriculum positively because it appeared more organized, competency-based, and focused on meaningful learning. Participant 2 described the curriculum as “quite promising and streamlined,” while Participant 4 explained that it is “more organized and focused on developing students’ skills, not just memorizing information.” Participant 3 also noted that the curriculum has “clearer and more focused competencies but requires significant adjustment.”

Although teachers appreciated the direction of the reform, they also described uncertainty during the transition. Several participants explained that understanding the curriculum on paper was different from implementing it in the classroom. Participant 6 shared that the curriculum is “quite complicated and difficult to implement, especially with limited preparation.” Similarly, Participant 7 described the transition as “challenging for both teachers and students in terms of adapting to new methods and content.” Participant 1 added that the experience “tests patience,” especially when students struggle with prerequisite knowledge.

These experiences show that teachers did not experience the reform as a smooth transition. Instead, they gradually realized that previous teaching routines were no longer fully effective. Some participants described feeling uncertain about whether their strategies still matched the needs of the new curriculum. This reveals an important phenomenological meaning: teachers experienced the reform as a period of professional transition where they had to relearn how to approach instruction while continuing to meet classroom demands.

### **Experiencing Emotional and Professional Tension During Implementation**

Teachers recognized that the curriculum promotes deeper understanding and more meaningful learning experiences for students. However, these improvements were often accompanied by emotional strain and professional pressure. Participant 5 explained that the curriculum “introduces more updated topics and aims to make learning more meaningful for students.” Participant 3 also observed that it encourages “deeper understanding and better student engagement.”

Despite these positive observations, participants described moments of frustration and self-doubt during implementation. Participant 1 shared: “You have given all the best strategies in teaching, and yet you are dismayed by the results of their quizzes.” This statement reflects the emotional disappointment teachers experienced when instructional effort did not immediately translate into improved student performance. Participant 6 described the curriculum as “too demanding,” explaining that “some lessons are not suitable for the students’ current level.” Participant 7 similarly stated that it is “demanding, making it hard for teachers to deliver lessons and for students to keep up.”

Over time, teachers described becoming more cautious and reflective in their teaching decisions. Some participants explained that they became more patient, more flexible, and more aware of the gap between curriculum expectations and classroom realities. These narratives suggest that the reform affected not only instructional practice but also teachers’ sense of professional confidence. Teaching became an emotional process of balancing expectations, student readiness, and personal responsibility.

### **Rebuilding Teaching Practices Through Adaptation**

Teachers consistently described adaptation as necessary for surviving the demands of implementation. Rather than applying the curriculum exactly as written, participants continuously modified lessons, activities, and instructional strategies based on classroom realities. Participant 3 described “continuous adjustment in teaching approaches,” while Participant 2 explained the need to “fully understand each lesson before teaching it.” Participant 6 also shared that they often had to “simplify lessons step by step during actual discussion.”

Teachers emphasized that adaptation became part of their daily teaching experience. Participant 1 shared: “Sometimes there are no books or resources available, so we really have to make our own materials.” Participant 7 added: “The workload and limited time make preparation difficult, especially when we are also adjusting to the new curriculum.” Participant 5 further explained: “There are times when we revise activities immediately because students cannot follow the lesson the way we expected.”

These accounts show that teachers experienced adaptation not as a planned process but as a practical response to immediate classroom demands. Over time, participants gradually developed confidence in modifying instruction to meet student needs and available resources. This reflects a deeper phenomenological insight: teachers experienced professional growth through continuous adjustment. Their identity as science teachers gradually shifted from simply delivering lessons to constantly reconstructing instruction in response to changing classroom conditions.

Across participants, the pilot implementation of the strengthened SHS curriculum was experienced as a continuous process of transition. Teachers entered the reform with optimism, but actual classroom implementation exposed them to uncertainty, emotional pressure, and instructional challenges. Over time, participants learned to adapt their teaching practices, manage expectations, and become more flexible in responding to student needs and curriculum demands. The essence of the experience lies in teaching through transition. Teachers experienced the reform not simply as a policy change but as an ongoing process of adjustment that reshaped their instructional practices, emotional responses, and professional identity.

### **Challenges in Adapting to the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum**

This section presents the challenges experienced by science teachers during the pilot implementation of the strengthened SHS curriculum. Teachers described adaptation as a demanding process that required them to manage workload pressures, instructional uncertainty, limited resources, and insufficient preparation.

Four experiential meanings emerged from the narratives: (1) experiencing workload pressure and exhaustion, (2) navigating instructional uncertainty, (3) improvising teaching practices during implementation, and (4) confronting resource and support limitations.

#### ***Experiencing Workload Pressure and Exhaustion***

Teachers consistently described the increased workload as one of the most difficult aspects of implementation. The preparation of lesson plans, the alignment of competencies, the development of activities, and the creation of assessments required significant time and effort.

Participant 5 explained that there was an “increased workload, difficulty aligning activities with learning competencies, and limited time to prepare effective lessons.” Participant 6 also shared that the curriculum feels “overwhelming because there are too many competencies to cover.” Participant 7 added: “Sometimes preparation becomes exhausting because aside from teaching, we also handle reports and other school responsibilities.” Participant 1 similarly stated: “There are times when you prepare for hours but still feel that the lesson is not enough for the students’ needs.” Participant 3 also shared: “Even after class hours, we continue revising activities and assessments because we want the lessons to fit the competencies properly.” These experiences reveal that teachers did not simply experience workload as additional tasks. They experienced it as physical and emotional exhaustion that affected their confidence, pacing, and daily teaching routines.

#### ***Navigating Instructional Uncertainty***

Teachers also experienced uncertainty in translating curriculum competencies into actual instruction. Several participants explained that they were unsure whether their lessons, strategies, and assessments fully matched

curriculum expectations.

Participant 4 shared difficulties in “adjusting lesson plans to fit the new curriculum and making lessons suitable for all learners.” Participant 5 also explained that aligning classroom activities with competencies was challenging. Participant 2 stated: “Even if the competencies are clear, it is still difficult to determine the best way to teach them depending on the students.” Participant 6 added: “Sometimes we question if what we are doing is already aligned with what the curriculum really expects.” These narratives show that uncertainty became part of teachers’ daily instructional decision-making. Teachers constantly evaluated, revised, and reconsidered their teaching approaches while implementation was ongoing. Over time, participants described becoming more reflective and flexible in their approach to lessons. This suggests that the transition shaped not only classroom practices but also teachers’ understanding of their professional role.

### ***Improvising Teaching Practices During Implementation***

Teachers frequently described modifying lessons during actual classroom instruction. Prepared activities often had to be adjusted based on student understanding, classroom participation, and time limitations. Participant 6 explained that they were “trying to adjust during actual teaching and simplifying lessons step by step.” Participant 3 also described “continuous adjustment in teaching approaches depending on student responses.” Participant 2 shared: “Sometimes you prepare one strategy, but during discussion you realize students need a different approach.” Participant 5 added: “We learn through experience because not everything works the first time.” Participant 1 further explained: “There are moments when you immediately change the activity because students look confused or cannot connect with the lesson.”

These experiences demonstrate that adaptation occurred directly within classroom interaction. Teachers experienced teaching as an active process of experimentation, adjustment, and immediate decision-making.

### ***Confronting Resource and Support Limitations***

Teachers consistently described the lack of instructional resources and limited institutional support as major difficulties during implementation. Participant 2 explained: “It is difficult to rely solely on the curriculum guide without having sufficient textbooks or reference materials.” Participant 3 also shared: “There is a lack of ready-made instructional materials and limited access to science resources.” Participant 4 mentioned “lack of training for teachers,” while Participant 6 stated that they felt “not fully equipped to handle all the changes in the curriculum.” Participant 1 added: “We often create our own materials because there are not enough resources provided.” Participant 7 further shared: “Sometimes we spend our own money just to prepare materials needed for the lesson.”

These experiences show that teachers often relied on personal initiative and peer support to continue instruction. Participants described spending additional time searching for references, creating materials, and learning independently. The lack of resources and training did not stop implementation, but it changed how teachers experienced the reform. Many participants described feeling responsible for solving problems that they believed should have been addressed structurally.

Across participants, adapting to the strengthened SHS curriculum was experienced as a demanding and emotionally challenging process. Teachers dealt with exhaustion, uncertainty, and resource limitations while continuing to meet instructional expectations. Despite these challenges, participants continued to adjust their teaching approaches and develop coping strategies through experience. The essence of the experience lies in sustained adaptation under pressure. Teachers experienced curriculum implementation as a continuous process of balancing expectations, classroom realities, and personal responsibility while gradually reconstructing their professional practice.

### ***Support Systems and Adaptive Enablers in the Pilot Curriculum Implementation***

This section presents the support systems that helped science teachers adapt to the strengthened SHS curriculum. Teachers described support not only as assistance but also as a source of confidence, emotional stability, and professional motivation during implementation.

Four experiential meanings emerged from the narratives: (1) professional development as confidence-building, (2) collaboration as emotional and instructional support, (3) leadership support as stability during transition, and

(4) resources and workload support as enabling conditions.

### ***Professional Development as Confidence-Building***

Teachers described seminars, webinars, and training sessions as important for understanding curriculum expectations. Participant 2 emphasized the importance of training on curriculum implementation and teaching strategies. Participant 6 also explained that webinars helped “explain the new curriculum clearly.” Participant 5 shared: “The trainings helped us understand how to align competencies and activities properly.” Participant 4 added: “After attending seminars, I became more confident in preparing lessons.” These experiences show that professional development reduced uncertainty and gradually increased teachers’ confidence during implementation.

### ***Collaboration as Emotional and Instructional Support***

Teachers consistently described collaboration with colleagues as one of the most important forms of support. Participant 1 shared that teachers often helped one another in lesson preparation. Participant 7 emphasized “sharing workload and ideas,” while Participant 3 described collaboration in adapting instructional materials. Participant 2 explained: “When we share strategies with co-teachers, the work becomes lighter and less stressful.” Participant 6 also stated: “It helps emotionally when you realize other teachers are experiencing the same struggles.” Participant 5 further shared: “Working with other teachers gave reassurance that we were learning the curriculum together.” These accounts show that collaboration reduced feelings of isolation and helped teachers emotionally cope with the pressures of implementation. Teachers gradually experienced adaptation as a shared professional journey rather than an individual struggle.

### ***Leadership Support as Stability During Transition***

Teachers also highlighted the importance of supportive school leadership during implementation. Participant 1 noted that school leaders encouraged teachers to openly discuss implementation difficulties. Participant 5 emphasized receiving “clear instructions and encouragement from school heads.” Participant 7 added: “When administrators listen to our concerns, it becomes easier to adjust.” Participant 4 similarly shared: “Supportive leadership gives reassurance that teachers are not facing the transition alone.” Participant 6 also explained: “Clear guidance from administrators helped lessen confusion during the early stages of implementation.” These experiences suggest that leadership support reduced uncertainty and created a stronger sense of stability during transition. Teachers felt more emotionally supported when administrators acknowledged implementation difficulties and remained approachable during adjustment periods.

### ***Resources and Workload Support as Enabling Conditions***

Teachers emphasized that access to materials, a manageable workload, and instructional support significantly affected their ability to implement the curriculum effectively. Participant 7 emphasized the importance of workload reduction, explaining that “teachers need enough time to prepare quality lessons.” Participant 1 also described the importance of having accessible instructional materials. Participant 3 stated: “When resources are available, teachers can focus more on teaching rather than constantly searching for materials.” Participant 5 added: “Support becomes meaningful when it actually helps lessen the pressure of preparation and implementation.” Participant 2 further explained: “Having enough references and materials gives teachers more confidence during discussion.” These accounts reveal that support systems were experienced not only as practical assistance but also as conditions that improved teachers’ emotional readiness, instructional confidence, and sense of preparedness during implementation.

Across participants, support systems were experienced as important sources of stability during curriculum transition. Training, collaboration, leadership support, and workload assistance helped teachers gradually regain confidence in handling the demands of the strengthened curriculum. Teachers experienced support as both emotional and instructional reinforcement, enabling them to continue adapting despite implementation difficulties. The essence of the experience lies in rebuilding confidence through collective and institutional support. Teachers gradually moved from uncertainty toward greater instructional stability through shared effort, guidance, and professional cooperation.

Across the narratives of science teachers, the pilot implementation of the strengthened Senior High School (SHS) curriculum was experienced as an ongoing process of teaching through transition. Teachers initially viewed the curriculum as more focused, relevant, and learner-centered; however, actual classroom implementation exposed

them to uncertainty, increased workload, limited resources, and continuous instructional adjustment. Rather than experiencing reform as a smooth improvement, teachers described a gradual realization that their previous teaching practices were no longer always sufficient for the new curriculum demands. As implementation progressed, they experienced moments of frustration, pressure, and self-doubt, particularly when lesson preparation became demanding, and student readiness did not always align with curriculum expectations.

At the same time, teachers gradually learned to adapt through experience. They modified lessons during classroom discussions, created their own instructional materials, relied on collaboration with colleagues, and participated in training to improve their confidence in handling the curriculum. Through these experiences, adaptation became part of their everyday professional practice rather than a temporary response to change. The phenomenon, therefore, reveals that science teachers experienced curriculum reform not simply as policy implementation, but as a continuous process of professional adjustment shaped by both challenge and persistence. Their experiences show how teachers negotiated curriculum expectations within real classroom conditions while gradually reconstructing their instructional practices, confidence, and understanding of their role as educators. Ultimately, the essence of the experience lies in learning to sustain meaningful teaching despite uncertainty, pressure, and limited support during curriculum transition.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the lived experiences of science teachers in the pilot implementation of the Strengthened Senior High School (SHS) Curriculum reveal a deeply situated process of negotiating educational reform within a constrained yet adaptive professional context. Rather than experiencing the curriculum as a straightforward improvement, teachers in this pilot-site context experienced it as a dual condition of promise and pressure, where curriculum clarity and updated competencies coexist with uncertainty, workload intensification, and resource limitations.

The study highlights that science teachers continuously balance curriculum ideals with the realities of classroom implementation. While they acknowledged the curriculum's potential to promote learner-centered instruction, deeper scientific understanding, and real-life application of concepts, these perceived gains were often disrupted by challenges in lesson preparation, misalignment between competencies and learner readiness, and insufficient instructional materials. In this sense, implementation was not linear but experienced as an ongoing process of adjustment, improvisation, and professional recalibration.

A distinctive finding of this study is the way teacher agency emerged under constraint. Teachers did not passively experience the reform; instead, they actively reconstructed instruction through collaboration with colleagues, self-directed learning, and real-time adaptation during classroom teaching. However, this agency was not purely autonomous—it was shaped by necessity, as teachers responded to gaps in training, resources, and institutional support. Moreover, the pilot implementation intensified the planning and alignment pressure on science teachers, particularly in translating competencies into workable classroom activities under time constraints. This created a lived tension between delivering intended curriculum outcomes and responding to actual student readiness and classroom realities.

It is important to note that these conclusions are drawn from a limited pilot-site context involving seven science teachers at one public secondary school and should therefore be understood as situated insights rather than generalizable claims about all SHS science teachers in the Philippines. Overall, the study contributes to curriculum implementation literature by showing that in this pilot setting, curriculum reform is experienced not merely as policy execution but as a lived professional transformation shaped by tension, adaptation, and constrained agency. The success of such reform, therefore, depends not only on curriculum design but on the interaction of teacher adaptability, institutional support systems, and resource availability in actual classroom conditions.

## Contributions of Authors

**Author 1:** conceptualization, data gathering, data analysis

**Author 2:** title recommendation, data analysis, data gathering

**Author 3:** formatting

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