

Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Resilience in Implementing the Matatag Curriculum: Insights from Elementary Teachers

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Abstract. This study aimed to explore the challenges, resilience, and coping strategies of elementary educators during the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum. Three teachers from particular Digos City elementary schools participated in the study. This study used a qualitative, phenomenological research approach and was carried out from August to November of 2024. Focus groups and in-depth interviews were used as data collection methods to generate responses. The challenges for elementary teachers in implementing the MATATAG curriculum are resource and material constraints, increased curriculum demands, and the need for enhanced professional development and support. Themes found on the impact of challenges on the resilience of elementary teachers in implementing the new curriculum are mental and emotional stress, doubts about one's ability to cope, and professional identity. Thus, Coping strategies were used with peer and team support, self-motivation, a positive outlook, and professional growth and adjustment. Authorities were advised to invest in supplying the required tools and materials, create professional development plans, and assist educators by creating a creative and encouraging work atmosphere.

Keywords: Challenges; Coping strategies; Elementary teachers; Matatag curriculum implementation; Resilience.

1.0 Introduction

Curriculum reforms require substantial adaptability and resiliency from educators at the forefront of implementation. To raise the caliber of the K-12 curriculum, the Department of Education (DepEd) implemented the MATATAG curriculum, which presented difficulties for teachers in this regard. According to the Department of Education (2023), the revised curriculum emphasizes learning competencies, reading and numeracy, and fewer learning topics. The elementary-level MATATAG curriculum seeks to be implemented successfully. However, this depends on how resilient the elementary teachers are. By emphasizing essential abilities, the MATATAG curriculum aims to lower the board learning competencies compared to the previous curriculum, allowing for more effective learning (David et al., 2023).

Educators' engagement and ability to adapt to new policies influence the curriculum's effectiveness. The study of Flores & Day (2006) concludes that because of changes in curricula, teachers experience stress and workload challenges. These challenges impact mental health and job performance. The study by Albrecht and Saggars (2020)

proposed that teachers adopt new methods and training that enhance professionalism, aligning with the curriculum's practice and instructional methods. The shifting in curriculum gives educators hindrances in implementing diverse students' needs and adapting the restructured contents and instructional methods. However, the approach of the new curriculum, such as MATATAG, aligns with the global trend that highlights depth rather than breadth of learning content (Cohen & Brown, 2021).

In addition, education resilience is educators' capacity to adapt despite challenges such as new policies, classroom diversity, and workloads (Mansfield et al., 2016). the resilience of elementary teachers is vital in transforming new policies and guidelines of the MATATAG curriculum into effective instructional practices. It enables educators to manage their well-being, professionalism, and job satisfaction (Beltman et al., 2011). Resilience is the capacity of teachers to implement crucial curricular reforms, have a positive mindset, practice reflective practice, and use critical thinking (Gu & Day, 2013). Resilience is the dedication of teachers in the face of adversity (Mansfield et al., 2016). Curriculum modifications help teachers deal with stress, professional growth, classroom management, and pressures (Castro et al., 2010).

According to Howard & Johnson (2004), resilient teachers can adapt to curriculum changes and improve student outcomes. To satisfy the new competency standards in the MATATAG curriculum, educators must reassess their current approaches. Teachers' ability to bounce back under duress is essential to curricular achievement (Hong, 2012). Coping strategies that help manage stress and overcome obstacles include student-centered teaching (Patterson et al., 2004). Moreover, the resilience of educators is critical during educational reform times, yet teachers must adapt to new instructional methods, practices, and strategies in teaching and find effective coping mechanisms (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Day and Hong (2016) conclude that teachers are more resilient when receiving support from institutions and peer collaboration. Resources and other organizational support push educators to build resilience (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

In the MATATAG curriculum, educators must reevaluate existing methods to meet new competency standards. Curriculum success depends on teachers' resilience, which allows them to respond under pressure (Hong, 2012). coping strategies like student-centered teaching help people deal with stress and overcome obstacles. Resilient teachers are more able to conceive of interventions, adjust to changes, and safeguard their mental health (Patterson et al., 2004). In order to improve the quality of their instruction, instructors who exhibit signs of stress, sadness, or anxiety should take the same precautions for their mental health that they do for their pupils (Almerez, 2022). Educators at the elementary level show hindrances that affect their teaching performance and resilience, which need coping mechanisms.

MATATAG curriculum is well-structured, but implementation brings hindrances to elementary teachers. As the DepEd mandates the new curriculum, elementary educators have obstacles that hinder their resilience, and their coping strategies should be shared with others. In Digos City, teachers are experiencing obstacles, and their stories of challenges and strategies used to overcome these circumstances have not been disclosed yet. Thus, this research investigates the educators' experience with the promptly implemented curriculum, specifically for the elementary teachers of selected schools in Digos City.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study used a descriptive-phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers who encountered difficulties with the MATATAG Curriculum.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected elementary institutions in Digos City, Davao del Sur, where teachers implement the new curriculum.

2.3 Research Participants

According to Creswell & Poth (2018), the number of participants in phenomenological research includes 3-10. Through purposeful sampling, approximately three teachers from diverse educational backgrounds will be selected to participate in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Participants are teachers who teach at

the elementary level in Digos City. These teachers are specifically teaching in the present academic year in either of these three grade levels: kindergarten, grade 1, or grade 4.

2.4 Research Instrument

This study used interview guide questions. The interview guide questions were evaluated by experts before the data gathering. This was to ensure that the questions asked were appropriate for the study.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

Several procedures were used to obtain the necessary data for this investigation. Before the actual interview, participants were aware of what the research was all about. After the orientation, researchers set schedules based on the participants' vacant time. Then, an in-depth interview allowed participants to talk about their shared experiences and viewpoints. The data-collecting period was spread over a predetermined time to accommodate participants' schedules. Thematic analysis was applied to the interviews in verbatim transcriptions. Peer debriefing, member checking, and including detailed descriptions in reporting all help preserve rigor and trustworthiness.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical factors put into account guarantee reflexivity. Throughout the study, strict adherence to informed consent and confidentiality was maintained. Accurately conveyed the essence of teachers' resilience in the new curriculum; the findings were provided with detailed explanations and direct quotes.

3.0. Results and Discussion

3.1 Challenges Faced by the Elementary Teachers in Implementing MATATAG Curriculum

The MATATAG curriculum is the current trend. The updated curriculum, as mandated by DepEd, has caused problems for elementary teachers in implementation. Table 1 presents the challenges elementary teachers face in implementing the MATATAG curriculum.

Resource and Material Constraints

The theme 'Resource and Material Constraints' captures the frequent challenge of insufficient materials, which hampers teachers' ability to implement project-based learning effectively. A critical challenge in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum is the lack of sufficient resources and materials, which limits teachers' ability to deliver hands-on, engaging, and practical learning experiences. Many classrooms lack essential teaching aids, equipment, and basic materials, preventing teachers from fulfilling the curriculum's project-based requirements. Studies have shown that resource limitations are widespread in curriculum implementation, particularly in public schools with constrained budgets, where large class sizes compound the difficulty of providing individualized support (Al Mamun et al., 2020; Brown & Weber, 2022). Teachers frequently have to use their creativity when resources are limited, sometimes making their materials or buying things with their funds, which can lead to dissatisfaction and fatigue. Since student's experiential learning is essential to the objectives of the MATATAG Curriculum, a lack of sufficient resources eventually impacts both teaching quality and student engagement (Heckman & Sarti, 2023).

Lack of enough tools and materials is one of the main issues elementary teachers have while implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes experiential and project-based learning, which calls for specialized teaching tools, learning resources, and classroom supplies, which are frequently scarce. Teachers sometimes need help accomplishing curricular goals when classrooms lack essential resources, such as science experiment kits, technology tools, or art supplies. This restriction is especially problematic in large-class institutions where students need individualized attention and various resources to succeed. According to research, teachers frequently modify lessons or look for alternate resources when schools lack resources, increasing their workload and stress levels.

Increased Curriculum Demands

Teachers are also struggling with 'Increased Curriculum Demands' focusing on project-based and interactive learning; the MATATAG Curriculum offers more extensive and complex content. As a result, teachers must be more prepared and employ more effective classroom management and instructional practices. Because teachers must create and execute lessons beyond conventional approaches to involve students in active and hands-on

learning experiences, these increasing demands escalate the workload. However, instructors may feel overburdened in the absence of adequate time, resources, or extra support, impairing their ability to teach effectively and raising their risk of burnout (D'Addiego & Best, 2023; Weber et al., 2023). It is not easy to achieve all expectations when instructors face curriculum intensification. They frequently find it difficult to reconcile these demands with their current duties, such as managing large classrooms and administrative duties (Singh & Sajitha, 2022). These requirements must be met to ensure the curriculum's objectives are met without jeopardizing the instructors' health.

The expanded requirements of the MATATAG Curriculum demand teachers to adapt to more complex teaching practices that go beyond traditional teaching methods, such as project-based learning and interactive, real-world problem-solving. Although these methods increase student engagement, they necessitate much teacher planning and preparation. Teachers are increasingly asked to create classes that meet higher learning criteria, frequently needing more time or advice on how to do so successfully. The extra effort can make teachers feel overburdened, which impairs their capacity to present the curriculum uniformly across all subject areas. Teachers may become frustrated and burn out due to the pressure to reach high curriculum standards without sufficient support. Some of these demands may be reduced by providing flexible lesson plans, streamlining curricular requirements, or guaranteeing sufficient support, making it more straightforward for teachers to carry out the curriculum successfully.

Need for Enhanced Professional Development and Support

One major obstacle is the 'Need for Enhanced Professional Development and Support'. The MATATAG Curriculum implementation requires ongoing professional development and organized assistance. Teachers must embrace new pedagogical approaches to effectively deliver this curriculum, necessitating continuous training in techniques supporting project-based, active learning. Research shows teachers need help understanding and applying complex curriculum frameworks using standard, one-time training sessions (Blake et al., 2021). Ongoing professional development that involves coaching, follow-up meetings, and chances to talk about obstacles and achievements in curriculum implementation is most beneficial to teachers (Smith & Hoy, 2021). Teachers may feel unprepared and unconfident in their skills if they do not receive enough assistance, which can increase stress and lower motivation. Educational institutions and authorities must promote ongoing professional development programs and offer mentorship and classroom support to assist educators in efficiently adjusting to the curriculum's requirements (Lee & McCaffrey, 2023).

To meet the MATATAG Curriculum's goals, teachers require ongoing professional development and in-class support, which are often unavailable. Teachers may experience tension and uncertainty as they attempt to anticipate the curriculum's increasing demands. More than a single training session is needed for effective curriculum implementation; teachers must have access to ongoing, focused professional development opportunities that give them the tools they need to handle particular curriculum requirements, such as project-based assessments or digital literacy. Educators can greatly benefit from in-class support, including classroom aides, coaching, mentorship, and professional development, to address their daily practical challenges more effectively. Teachers may experience isolation without this support, perhaps diminishing their self-esteem and general resilience. The ability of teachers to adapt to the new curriculum would be significantly improved if professional development were accessible and tailored to their needs.

3.2 Challenges Affect Elementary Teachers' Resiliency in the Implementation of New Curriculum

Implementing the MATATAG curriculum presents challenges for elementary teachers. These difficulties impact their ability to adapt to the new curriculum.

Emotional and Mental Strain

Elementary teachers experience severe 'Emotional and Mental Strain' as shown in Table II above, when implementing the MATATAG Curriculum because of the increased workload, scarce resources, and requirement to reach higher curriculum standards. The frequent encounter of stress from managing large class sizes and facilitating hands-on, project-based learning without sufficient materials often leads to exhaustion and emotional fatigue. The ongoing need to perform under these challenging conditions contributes to teachers' anxiety, affecting their mental health and overall resilience. According to numerous studies, instructors who face excessive demands

without sufficient support lose their efficacy and develop burnout and a diminished ability to cope with work-related stressors (Blake et al., 2021; D'Addiego & Best, 2023). In order to address this issue and minimize long-term emotional strain, a supportive work environment and access to mental health resources are necessary (Weber et al., 2023). Given the role of emotional well-being in sustaining teacher resilience, it is critical to provide teachers with tools to manage stress and strategies to balance their responsibilities, thus fostering a more resilient workforce.

Implementing the MATATAG Curriculum has placed significant emotional and mental stress on elementary teachers, primarily due to the heightened demands of the curriculum alongside insufficient support and resources. Instructors must provide interactive, hands-on sessions that require more planning, resources, and time. Teachers may feel more stressed and inadequate as they work to fulfill these high expectations, particularly if they lack the ability to meet each student's unique learning needs. If such stress is not addressed, it might eventually reduce teachers' passion, job satisfaction, and capacity for sustained dedication.

Questioning of Professional Identity and Resilience

Some educators have begun to doubt their resiliency and professional identity due to the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. Teachers frequently feel insecure and inadequate when confronted with new teaching techniques and heightened curricular requirements, undermining their self-esteem and established professional responsibilities. Teachers often experience professional dissonance as they attempt to balance the principles of successful teaching with the realities of scarce resources and heightened administrative demands, leading to this identity question. According to studies, teachers in these situations frequently doubt their abilities, which has a detrimental effect on their motivation and resilience (Smith & Hoy, 2021; Weber et al., 2023). To maintain a strong professional identity amidst these challenges, teachers need access to professional support systems that validate their efforts and reinforce their sense of purpose. Providing opportunities to reflect and reinforce core teaching values can help rebuild teachers' confidence and resilience, allowing them to align their professional identity with new curriculum requirements.

The challenges in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum have also led teachers to question their professional identity and capability. As they struggle to meet the curriculum's demands without sufficient support, some teachers doubt their competence, skills, and commitment to teaching. Educators who question their ability to perform effectively may experience self-doubt and diminished professional identity. Teachers may experience disengagement from their mission and enthusiasm for teaching due to doubts over their professional identities, affecting their resilience. The confidence and resilience of teachers diminish with time without reinforcement of their values and skills, complicating their ability to adapt and endure difficult circumstances. Supportive initiatives, including mentorship, validation, and professional development, are essential for assisting teachers in preserving a robust sense of identity and resilience among curriculum obstacles.

3.3 Coping Mechanisms Applied by Elementary Teachers to Address Challenges and be Resilient

During the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum, teachers faced challenges that affected their resiliency. However, they applied coping mechanisms to conquer the said problems.

Collaborative and Peer Support

'Collaborative and Peer Support' is crucial in helping elementary teachers cope with the challenges of implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. Peer cooperation offers teachers professional and emotional support as they navigate the many pressures, from adjusting to new pedagogical frameworks to managing resource constraints. According to studies, teachers participating in collaborative networks report feeling more resilient and satisfied with their jobs. Teachers can lessen feelings of loneliness and foster a sense of community by exchanging resources, ideas, and instructional techniques. This is crucial for stress management and conquering obstacles (Harrison & Westwood, 2020). Peer support also enables educators to collaboratively solve problems and create creative solutions for real-world classroom challenges like a lack of resources or big class numbers. This support system can be very beneficial in demanding educational settings, where more than individual efforts might be required to satisfy the expectations of curricular revisions (Jordan & Garcia, 2022). Peer cooperation has been shown to improve classroom practices, foster long-term professional growth, and boost teachers' confidence in handling the challenges of curriculum changes (Harrison & Westwood, 2020).

Research has shown that such collegiality boosts teachers' morale and resilience, making them more capable of adapting to the demands of new educational reforms. Peer and collaborative support is one of the best coping strategies elementary teachers may use to deal with the difficulties presented by the MATATAG Curriculum. This emphasizes how teachers' supporting ties with their peers give them perseverance and strength. Teachers support one another in handling the increased curriculum demands, which strongly emphasizes project-based and interactive learning activities, by exchanging resources, tactics, and insights. They can discuss adjusting to resource constraints, share workable solutions for classroom problems, and offer emotional support to one another in this environment. Educators feel less alone and more united because of this network of support for one another, which also improves the work environment.

Positive Mindset and Self-Motivation

A positive mindset and strong self-motivation are foundational to teacher resilience, especially when coping with the pressures of the MATATAG Curriculum. Despite obstacles like a lack of resources or an increased workload, teachers with a positive outlook are more likely to concentrate on attainable objectives and find meaning in their profession. Despite challenging conditions, research has consistently demonstrated that instructors who retain a positive outlook can overcome failures, remain motivated, and continue to improve (Robinson et al., 2021). Educators can proficiently mitigate stress and sustain motivation by employing reflective strategies, such as focusing on tiny student achievements or establishing personal goals (Lee & McCaffrey, 2023). Additionally, self-motivation helps educators manage curricular standards autonomously and actively seek solutions to challenges in the classroom. The link between resilience and optimistic thinking highlights the importance of establishing a mindset that views setbacks as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable barriers (Smith & Hoy, 2021). This kind of thinking supports teachers' long-term job satisfaction and retention in addition to helping them deal with current challenges.

A positive mindset and strong self-motivation are essential personal strategies that help teachers cope with the challenges posed by the MATATAG Curriculum. Teachers who maintain a constructive outlook and focus on incremental successes – such as student progress or small wins in lesson delivery – are better equipped to handle stress and adapt to curriculum demands. This optimistic outlook increases their resilience by keeping them concentrated on their objectives. Self-motivated teachers are more likely to persevere through challenges, especially in the face of increased workloads or a lack of resources. To stay motivated and remind themselves of the importance of their profession, many educators engage in reflective techniques like goal-setting for themselves or acknowledging little successes in the classroom. This mindset enables educators to face obstacles and uncertainty head-on by cultivating a feeling of fulfillment and purpose. Research on resilience shows that self-motivation and a positive mindset are essential for avoiding burnout because they enable educators to cope with stress and stay dedicated to their student's education.

Professional Development and Adaptation

'Professional Development and Adaptation' is one of the coping strategies applied by educators, which is crucial for teachers to successfully implement the MATATAG Curriculum because it gives them the skills and knowledge needed to adjust to changing educational demands. When presented with innovative teaching strategies like project-based learning or competency-based assessments, instructors who engage in ongoing professional development are better equipped to maintain their confidence and flexibility. According to recent research, continuous training improves teachers' pedagogical abilities and builds resilience by increasing teachers' self-efficacy and decreasing feelings of inadequacy (Singh & Sajitha, 2022). Teachers who participate in professional development activities regularly are better equipped to handle classroom issues and adjust to the requirements of the MATATAG Curriculum. Furthermore, by offering coping mechanisms for stress, burnout, and workload demands, professional development can help educators build emotional resilience (Lee & McCaffrey, 2023). A resilient and productive teaching workforce largely depends on teachers' capacity to modify and improve their methods through professional development as curriculum reforms continue to take shape.

Building resilience in teachers adopting the MATATAG Curriculum requires professional development and the capacity to adjust to changing circumstances. Teachers benefit from frequent and focused training that helps them adjust to the intricacies of this curriculum, which calls for creative teaching strategies and practical skills for successful delivery. From project-based learning approaches to classroom management practices, professional

development workshops can cover various tactics, giving educators the skills and assurance they need to fulfill new standards. Additionally, ongoing education keeps educators abreast of best practices, enabling them to adapt their methods in response to criticism and difficulties. This theme underscores that professional development is not just about skill-building; it also enhances teachers' adaptability and self-assurance, which are crucial in facing the evolving demands of curriculum reforms. By supporting teachers' professional growth, educational institutions empower them to implement the MATATAG Curriculum more effectively, fostering a resilient workforce capable of navigating curriculum changes.

4.0 Conclusion

From this study's results, the absence of resources and materials draws attention to a crucial weakness that may restrict the curriculum's ability to have the desired effect on students' learning. Classrooms are under-resourced without the essential teaching aids, especially for the MATATAG Curriculum's hands-on, project-based learning. In order to ensure that all schools, particularly those in locations with limited resources, have enough supplies to meet curricular standards, policymakers must place a high priority on fair resource distribution. Teachers' resilience, general dedication, and mental health are all impacted by the difficulties presented by the MATATAG Curriculum. The results also highlight the necessity of consistent, continuous professional development adapted to the curriculum's requirements. Teachers who get inadequate or one-time training feel unprepared and unsupported, which impacts the quality of curriculum implementation. These problems significantly impact teachers' resilience and well-being, manifesting as emotional and mental strain and a reevaluation of professional identity. Teachers exhibit considerable resourcefulness through collaboration and peer support, the preservation of a positive attitude towards self-motivation and professional development, and adaptability as coping strategies.

Some recommendations could be taken based on the study's findings. First, educational authorities must invest in supplying the resources and tools required by the MATATAG Curriculum. A thorough plan for allocating resources should be created to guarantee that all schools have the necessary supplies, particularly for areas like science and technology requiring specialized equipment. In addition, the education department should provide professional development programs that extend beyond initial implementation training to meet the curriculum's expectations. These should concentrate on particular subject areas, classroom management approaches, and creative teaching methods that complement MATATAG's focus on project-based and active learning. Furthermore, school leaders should also actively assist teachers by creating a helpful and encouraging work environment where teachers can voice concerns and offer solutions at regular feedback sessions with administrators. Lastly, the researchers suggested that more research should be done on the conditions of elementary teachers in the MATATAG Curriculum.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The authors of this research collaborated to ensure the study's completeness and integrity. Author WRJ played an integral part in the study, considerably contributing to editing, writing, supervision, data analysis, and encoding. This entailed enhancing the paper, supervising the study advancement, doing comprehensive data analysis, and guaranteeing precise encoding for reporting purposes. Conversely, Author T/JL concentrated on fieldwork and compliance with research ethics, overseeing data collection, transcribing the gathered material, and adhering to ethical guidelines throughout the study. These complementary contributions underscore the collaborative endeavors and mutual obligations to generate a thorough and ethically robust research output.

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