TLE TEACHERS AND THE MATATAG CURRICULUM: A CASE STUDY ON IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS

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ABSTRACT: *Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) teachers in the Philippines have consistently grappled with shifting curricular demands, limited resources, and evolving instructional expectations. The introduction of the MATATAG Curriculum in 2023 added a new layer of complexity, coming after the earlier K–12 reform and the disruptions brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. These successive reforms intensified challenges related to content mastery, instructional delivery, and professional workload. Despite these realities, little is known about how TLE teachers navigated the first year of MATATAG's implementation. This study aimed to explore and describe in depth the lived experiences of TLE teachers implementing the Grade 7 TLE Exploratory subject during the curriculum's inaugural year. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research was conducted at a centennial-old secondary school in Misamis Oriental through in-depth personal interviews with five Grade 7 TLE teachers and their department head. Thematic analysis of the data revealed three central themes: (1) navigating the transition, where teachers experienced initial confusion, resistance, and gradual adaptation to the new curriculum; (2) managing heightened workloads and preparation demands, particularly the challenge of creating materials for unfamiliar subject areas; and (3) addressing gaps in expertise through self-directed learning, peer collaboration, and continuous upskilling. The findings underscore tensions between curricular expectations, teacher competencies, and institutional support structures. Despite facing insufficient resources and limited training, participants demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to professional growth through collaborative practices. The study emphasizes the urgent need for systemic, targeted support to better prepare teachers for effective curriculum reform implementation.*

Keywords: Curriculum Implementation, Curriculum Transition, Lived Experiences, MATATAG Curriculum Adaptation, TLE Exploratory

INTRODUCTION

The K to 12 Curriculum was institutionalized in 2012 to align the Philippine education system with global standards and better prepare learners for higher education, employment, or entrepreneurship. However, since its rollout, it has faced several challenges. including content overload, lack of focus on foundational skills, and difficulties in classroom implementation[1].In response to these persistent issues, the Department of Education introduced the MATATAG curriculum in 2023 through DepEd Order No. 054, s. 2023, as part of a broader agenda to improve the quality of basic education[2].

The Department of Education's MATATAG Curriculum, launched in the 2024–2025 school year, seeks to enhance Philippine education by focusing on foundational skills, critical thinking, and competency-based learning [2]. While these reforms aim to address issues from the K–12 program, they have significant implications for Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) teachers, whose lived experiences reveal the complexities of implementing these changes. Under the MATATAG Curriculum, TLE teachers in Grade 7 are expected to cover four specialized areas: Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Agricultural and Fishery Arts (AFA), Family and Consumer Science (FCS), and Industrial Arts (IA) (MATATAG Curriculum EPP and TLE Grade 4 and 7, 2023)[3]. This expansion of content requires teachers to shift their roles and adapt their instructional practices.

The implementation of the MATATAG curriculum shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic introduced additional layers of stress and uncertainty for Department of Education teachers, particularly TLE teachers, who were already grappling with the aftereffects of prolonged school closures, remote learning, and limited training support[4].

The abrupt shift to a new curriculum framework in School Year 2024–2025, which now requires Grade 7 TLE teachers to teach across four specialized areas, placed heavy demands on their time, expertise, and emotional resilience.

This compounded the pressures brought by the pandemic and contributed to feelings of burnout and overwhelming stress, as educators were again expected to adapt rapidly to systemic changes[4]. This experience aligns with Lewin's Change Management Model, particularly the "Unfreezing" stage, where existing structures and routines are disrupted, often leading to resistance or emotional fatigue if adequate support is not provided [5]. As supported by previous studies, such as those by Dayagbil et al.[6] and Oducado et al.[7], Post-pandemic educational reforms without sufficient capacity-building measures can intensify teacher burnout, underscoring the importance of clear guidance and institutional support during the "Change" and "Refreezing" phases to ensure successful and sustainable implementation.

Lewin's Change Management Model[8] helps explain this transition by outlining three stages: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. In the context of MATATAG, the "unfreezing" stage involves TLE teachers letting go of established teaching routines under the K–12 system. The "changing" phase represents their efforts to acquire new competencies and adjust to the integrated curriculum. Finally, "refreezing" involves stabilizing new practices and expectations, which depend heavily on institutional support and contextual alignment.

Despite the relevance of these changes, little research has been done on the actual experiences of TLE teachers navigating this transition[9][10]. A closer examination of their day-to-day challenges is essential for crafting realistic and *supportive* policies. Understanding their perspectives is critical to ensuring the success of curriculum reforms like

MATATAG.

This study, therefore, intends to explore the general experiences of TLE teachers in the case school as they implement the MATATAG Curriculum. To better understand these experiences, it draws on the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)[11]. Originally developed by Vygotsky and later expanded by Engeström, CHAT emphasizes the role of social, cultural, and institutional contexts in shaping human activity. In this study, the curriculum serves as a key tool within the teachers' activity system, influenced by elements such as community, rules, and the division of labor. CHAT helps reveal how TLE teachers, particularly in resource-limited schools, adapt to new demands, navigate contradictions between past practices and current expectations, and engage in expansive learning by developing new strategies and knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

To better understand the real-world challenges of implementing the MATATAG Curriculum, this study adopts a qualitative case study approach. Case studies are well-suited for exploring complex issues in-depth within their real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its environment are unclear [12].

This research focuses on a single century-old secondary school in Misamis Oriental. The school's rich history, institutional culture, and limited resources offer a unique context for examining how Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) teachers adapt to the demands of the newly introduced curriculum. This setting provides fertile ground for uncovering insights into how established teaching practices interact with system-wide reforms.

The case study approach allows for a holistic exploration of teachers' lived experiences—capturing the emotional, professional, and logistical dimensions of curriculum implementation. By closely examining this particular case, the study aims to provide meaningful and context-rich insights that may inform broader educational practices and policies[13].

Participants of the Study

This study involved six (6) TLE teachers and one (1) TLE head teacher from a centennial-old secondary school in Misamis Oriental. Using purposive sampling, participants are intentionally selected based on their relevance to the research focus, specifically, their active engagement with the Grade 7 MATATAG Curriculum [14]. Only those currently teaching TLE subjects under the new curriculum and with at least one year of teaching experience were included, ensuring they can meaningfully compare experiences between the K–12 and MATATAG programs.

The researcher selected the participants for this study based on the following criteria: bona fide teachers at the school under study, and teaching Grade 7 TLE subjects under the MATATAG curriculum. Alternately, TLE teachers who are not teaching in Grade 7 were excluded as they are not implementing the MATATAG Curriculum.

Table 1. Demographic and Academic Profile of the Participants

Code	Age	Sex Academic Rank	TLE Area of Specialization	Highest Educational Attainment
FP1	43	Female Teacher	Industrial Education	Bachelor's Degree
FP2	35	Female Teacher	Technology and Livelihood Education	Bachelor's Degree
FP3	40	Female Teacher	TLE-Home Economics	Bachelor's Degree
FP4	45	Female Teacher	Technology and Livelihood Education	Masters (CAR)
MP1	51	Male Teacher	TLE Agricultural Education	Bachelor's Degree
MP2	56	Male Head Teacher	TLE Industrial Arts	Masters
FP5	43	Female Teacher	TLE Home Economics	Masters

Following qualitative research standards, the sample size aims for depth over breadth [15]. Recruitment continued until data saturation was reached, when no new themes emerged from participant responses [16]. This ensures a rich, comprehensive understanding of how TLE teachers adapt to and navigate curriculum change.

Data Collection

The researcher employed personal interviews to explore the lived experiences of Grade 7 TLE teachers implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. Supposedly, case studies should follow data triangulation through multiple methods of data collection such as interviews, observations, and document archiving. These methods would enhance the credibility and validity of qualitative findings [17]. However, during the data collection period, the participants were preoccupied with very tight schedules and tasks such as finalizing school forms, conducting final exams, and submitting various End-of-School-Year (EOSY) documents. Thus, the researcher decided to conduct personal and in-depth interviews with school teachers and school heads with varied teaching experiences to gather as detailed information as possible.

A validated interview protocol guided semi-structured interviews, ensuring both consistency and flexibility in gathering in-depth data on teachers' experiences, challenges, and support mechanisms [18]. Expert validation was conducted to confirm alignment with the study's objectives, enhancing the reliability and clarity of the instrument [15].

Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis to examine qualitative data, a method that systematically identifies and interprets recurring patterns across participants' narratives[19]. Thematic analysis is appropriate for exploring the challenges, strategies, and perceptions of TLE teachers implementing the MATATAG Curriculum, as it enables deep insight into their lived experiences within a case study context.

To further enhance authenticity, conventional content analysiswas integrated, allowing themes to emerge inductively from raw data rather than from pre-established frameworks—especially relevant given the limited research on the MATATAG Curriculum.[20]

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework: data familiarization, code generation, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and final report writing. This dual-method approach captured both explicit (manifest) and implicit (latent) meanings, yielding a rich, grounded interpretation of teachers' experiences.[19]

Ethical Consideration

This study adhered to key ethical principles in qualitative research. Informed consent was obtained before data collection, ensuring participants were fully aware of the study's purpose and procedures. Confidentiality was strictly maintained through the use of code names in all reports to protect participants' identities[21]. The research ensured no harm would come to participants, safeguarding them from physical, psychological, or emotional risk.

Voluntary participation was emphasized, with participants free to withdraw at any time without consequence. Additionally, the study followed the principle of honesty and transparency, with all data reported truthfully and without manipulation to maintain research integrity.[22]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The General Experiences of TLE Teachers, Within the Case School, in Implementing the MATATAG Curriculum

The implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum marked a significant shift in the teaching landscape for Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) teachers, particularly in a century-old secondary school. This case study reveals how educators navigated the transition, initially facing confusion and adjustment challenges but gradually building familiarity and acceptance of the new system. Teachers described increased demands on their time and effort, citing the need for extensive lesson preparation and the pressure to deliver unfamiliar content. To manage these challenges, many relied on collaboration with colleagues and engaged in self-directed learning to bridge gaps in their subject expertise—especially in highly technical areas like ICT and Agriculture-Fishery Arts. The three themes that emerged during data anlaysishighlight the complex, evolving experience of adapting to a restructured curriculum in a resource-constrained educational environment. Table 2 shows the summary of thematic analysis.

Theme 1: Navigating the Transition and Adapting Over Time

This theme describes how TLE teachers in the centennial-old secondary school initially struggled with the transition to the MATATAG Curriculum but progressively adapted and developed an appreciation for its structure. The categories supporting this theme are Adjusting to Early Challenges and Building Familiarity and Acceptance. Teachers described encountering initial difficulties, such as the complexity of the curriculum, loss of autonomy compared to the previous K to 12 framework, and feelings of information overload. However, over time, they gained familiarity, adjusted their practices, and began to appreciate the perceived compactness and structured sequence of the MATATAG Curriculum. These are the statements of the participants:

FP1 shared, *"At first, I found the MATATAG very difficult, especially when I was still a substitute teacher, because I found the content areas complicated. But gradually, I was able to understand and appreciate it."*

FP2 reflected, *"The transition from K to 12 Curriculum to MATATAG Curriculum hasn't been easy, but I consider the latter as more compact or comprehensive than the previous curriculum. Previously, TLE Exploratory teachers had the freedom to choose their preferred specializations."*

MP1 noted, *"Well, in the MATATAG curriculum, I felt something different compared with the K to 12, especially when it comes to teaching specific areas. Under MATATAG, the teacher has no choice in what areas to prepare to teach, since it is already designed."*

The experiences of TLE teachers adapting to the MATATAG Curriculum reflect the process of *expansive learning* within Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Initial struggles—such as reduced autonomy and information overload—revealed contradictions between past practices and new expectations. Over time, teachers adjusted by developing new strategies and accepting the curriculum's structure, demonstrating how learning emerges from resolving tensions within an activity system. This supports findings by Dayagbil et al.[6] and Oducado et al.[7], who highlight the importance of contextual support and time for teachers to internalize reforms. These insights stress the need for gradual, well-supported transitions during curriculum change.

Theme 2: Managing Increased Demands on Teacher Effort and Preparation

The second theme captures the intensified workload, and preparation demands teachers faced under the new curriculum. The categories supporting this theme are Managing Heightened Workload and Adapting Teaching Strategies through Collaboration. Teachers spoke about needing more time for lesson planning, customizing materials, and balancing various tasks, often leaning on peer collaboration to adapt strategies effectively.

FP4 reported, *"There is a whole lot of preparation because teachers are used to working under K to 12. Since everything is new, ample time for tasks like creating PowerPoint presentations is needed."*FP5 added, *"I have to research and study these components very well. For example, in the ICT component, there are a lot of unfamiliar lessons. I have to be more resourceful to deliver these lessons effectively."*FP4 emphasized the role of teamwork, stating, *"We trust our peers for collaboration since its implementation is a team effort."*

The increased workload and preparation demand brought by the MATATAG Curriculum reveal key tensions within the teachers' activity system, as explained by Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Teachers faced contradictions between the new curriculum tools and existing resources, time, and role expectations. To manage these challenges, they engaged in *expansive learning* by adapting strategies and relying on peer collaboration, highlighting the importance of the community and division of labor elements in CHAT. This aligns with findings from Bautista et al. [23] and Oducado et al. [7], who emphasize that teacher collaboration is essential in managing curriculum-related stress and facilitating effective implementation. Thus, schools and policymakers must support collaborative structures and provide sufficient preparation time to ease the demands of reform and enable sustainable change.

Theme 3: Addressing Gaps in Expertise

This theme centres on the mismatch between teachers' expertise and the new content they were required to deliver, especially in specialized areas like ICT and Agriculture-

Fishery Arts. The supporting categories are Bridging Subject Knowledge Gaps and Engaging in Self-Directed Learning. Teachers had to compensate for limited prior training by engaging in self-study, research, and upskilling to meet curriculum demands.

FP3 shared, *"I remember I had a learner with special needs who was very curious and kept on asking questions in ICT. To be honest, I struggled to find answers since I'm not an expert in ICT."* MP1 reflected, *"There were some terminologies and concepts that were very hard to comprehend, like blockchain technology and big data, which required ample time for research."* FP5 admitted, *"Although I am computer-literate now, I am far from being adept at using it and far more in teaching it. I had to research independently to catch up."*

The gap between TLE teachers' expertise and the specialized content required by the MATATAG Curriculum, particularly in ICT and Agriculture-Fishery Arts, reveals contradictions between curriculum demands (*tools*) and teachers' existing knowledge base (*subjects*) within the CHAT framework. To bridge these gaps, teachers engaged in self-directed learning, reflecting *expansive learning* as they reconstructed their roles and developed new competencies. This aligns with Engeström's view that learning occurs when individuals resolve tensions within an activity system[11]. Previous studies, such as those by Oducado et al. [7], affirm that when formal training is lacking, teachers often turn to independent learning to adapt. These findings highlight the urgent need for targeted professional development and content-specific training to support teachers in meeting new curricular expectations.

The three themes—navigating the transition, managing increased workload, and addressing gaps in expertise—are closely connected and together reveal how TLE teachers in the centennial-old school experienced and responded to the changes brought by the MATATAG Curriculum. Most of the participants were experienced teachers who had grown comfortable with the flexibility of the K to 12 system. With MATATAG, they suddenly had to teach unfamiliar content, follow a more structured program, and meet higher expectations, all with limited support. These changes made their workload heavier and pushed them to find ways to cope, often through teamwork and self-study. Using Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), we can see that the difficulties they faced were not just personal struggles but signs of a bigger mismatch between the new curriculum, their existing skills, and the resources in their school. Still, these challenges led many teachers to grow professionally as they learned new skills and adjusted to new demands. Together, the themes show that successful curriculum reform depends not just on changing what is taught, but also on supporting how teachers learn, work together, and adapt within their school environment.

Table 2. Narratives, Codes, Categories and Themes of Data Analysis

Narratives	Codes	Categories	Themes
FP1: Found MATATAG initially difficult, especially as a substitute	Initial Curriculum Difficulty	Adjusting to Early Challenges	Theme 1: Navigating the Transition and Adapting Over Time
FP2: The Transition was not easy	Challenging Curriculum Transition		
FP3: Transition is difficult due to reduced teacher freedom	Loss of Instructional Autonomy		
FP2: Initial overload but eventual appreciation	Overcoming Initial Overload	Building Familiarity and Acceptance	
FP1: Gradually understood and appreciated it	Gradual Curriculum Appreciation		
FP2: MATATAG seen as more compact/comprehensive	Perceived Curriculum Compactness		
FP4: Eventual adjustment to new demands	Progressive Adaptation to Demands		
MP1: Acceptance of structured sequence	Acceptance of Structured Sequence		
FP4: Extensive preparation needed; extra time for tasks	Increased Preparation Demands	Managing Heightened Workload	Theme 2: Managing Increased Demands on Teacher Effort and Preparation
FP5: Heavy preparation demands; customizing materials	Heavy Lesson Preparation		
MP1: Balancing lesson planning efforts	Balancing Preparation Load		
FP2: Adapting teaching methods for new learner needs	Adapting Teaching Strategies	Adapting Teaching Strategies through Collaboration	
FP4: Trusting peers and collaborating as part of adapting	Relying on Peer Collaboration		
FP3: Unfamiliarity with ICT topics	ICT Knowledge Gap	Bridging Subject Knowledge Gaps	Theme 3: Addressing Gaps in Expertise
FP5: Teaching outside specialization	Teaching Beyond Specialization		
MP1: Learning new ICT terms and concepts	Expanding ICT Competence		
MP2: Facing mismatch between expertise and assigned topics	Expertise-Assignment Mismatch		
FP3: Needed more ICT training and support	Need for Targeted Training	Engaging in Self-Directed Learning	
FP5: Felt compelled to research independently on topics outside specialization	Independent Teacher Learning Efforts		

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has revealed crucial insights on the general experience of Grade 7 TLE teachers in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum, as revealed through three key themes, reflect a process of gradual adaptation amid systemic challenges. Initially, teachers faced confusion, increased workload, and gaps in subject expertise, particularly in specialized areas like ICT and Agriculture-Fishery Arts. Despite limited resources and support, they gradually adapted by collaborating with peers and engaging in self-directed learning. These findings highlight that successful curriculum reform requires not only changes in content but also robust support systems, targeted training, and opportunities for collaboration. Ultimately, the resilience and adaptability of teachers are crucial, but sustained success depends on providing the necessary resources and professional development to help educators meet new curricular demands.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to the Department of Education (DepEd) and other educational stakeholders.

First, it is recommended that DepEd, in coordination with local education units, develop and distribute instructional materials specifically aligned with the MATATAG Curriculum and adaptable to local contexts. This addresses the lack of ready-to-use teaching aids, one of the key barriers faced by teachers in implementing the curriculum.

It is further recommended that DepEd design a structured and continuous training program that equips teachers with practical strategies for delivering the MATATAG Curriculum, especially in TLE. This includes orientation for newly hired teachers, refresher courses for existing staff, and workshops on contextualizing learning competencies to suit resource-limited environments.

Finally, given that this study focuses only on Grade 7 TLE teachers' experiences and perspectives from a single division, future research may explore a broader scope, including different grade levels, regions, and other learning areas under the MATATAG Curriculum. Comparative studies could provide insights into regional variations and system-wide implementation gaps, which would be beneficial in informing future curriculum refinements.

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