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SCHOOL HEAD'S MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON POLICY CHANGES IN DAVAO CITY: MATATAG CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN FOCUS

Gwen Jelly Bentayao[1], Wenefredo Cagape[2], Cristy Pearl G. Quibod[3]

[1]Professor, Holy Cross College of Davao, Davao City, Philippines
[2]President, City College of Davao, Davao City, Philippines
[3]Teacher, Department of Education Division of Davao City, Davao City, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the MATATAG curriculum has imposed changes in educational policy. It aims to explore a comprehensive understanding of school management practices on policy changes, focusing on implementing the MATATAG curriculum among five (5) Division of Davao City school heads. Hence, this study utilizes qualitative design, specifically a case study. Data was collected through key informant interviews. The results showed similar claims to Lewin's change management theory, which involves unfreezing, changing, and freezing as one example of school management practices in implementing new policies such as the MATATAG curriculum. The general theme formulated is the adaptive transformational education in implementing the new curriculum. Three main themes were identified: transitional challenges and curriculum adoption, strategic support and capacity building, adaptive leadership, and positive implementation. Based on the findings, this study further suggests training and enough preparation for any educational policy are needed before it is implemented. School leaders should be adaptive, provide enough support, and promote positive communication among their teachers to achieve success in the new curriculum.

KEYWORDS: *MATATAG curriculum, policy implementation, school management practices, school heads, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Our educational policies now reflect current changes meant to answer various societal demands such as technological advancements, globalization, and changing workforce requirements and improve diverse aspects of life, including equity, quality of education, and student well-being. New policy implementation falls on school officials, teachers, parents, and all other interested parties. The success of new initiatives or policies depends on the standard practices and efforts of everybody engaged and their leadership. As stated by Moura and Bispo (2021), in Brazil, effective school management policies by the school leaders and the cooperative efforts of all stakeholders help to realize its vision and mission.

Most private school administrators believed that a well-defined financial strategy was crucial to mitigate the transition from the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) to the K-12 Curriculum in the Philippines (Pasia, 2019). Several researchers, like Dizon et al. (2019), found that school administrators and implementation staff needed help with school finances and the national educational budget. These issues included new teaching materials, teacher training, and infrastructural changes. The lack of adequate training for school heads and teachers at the Senior High School level was also a pressing issue (Perez, 2018).

Numerous authors in the countries have also expressed the need to change our curriculum through their studies. Diquito (2024) stated that poor performance at the international and national levels, a congested curriculum, mismatched pre-requisite skills and knowledge, and insufficient time to teach were reasons for curriculum revisions. A more humanized education is aimed as this new curriculum, MATATAG curriculum, is implemented (Estrellado, 2023).

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Like the K–12 adaptation, the new MATATAG curriculum has many challenges. Kilag et al. (2024) state that possible obstacles to program effectiveness include infrastructure, limited funding, evaluation monitoring, teacher preparedness, and school support. Since implementation is still early, we must quickly pinpoint and resolve these issues, which can help school leaders address future problems and avoid setbacks.

Educational reform hinders policy implementation. Directives and deadlines daily can impede school leaders' evaluations. Hence, this study explores a comprehensive understanding of school heads' management practices on policy changes focusing on implementing the MATATAG curriculum.

THEORETICAL LENS

Kurt Lewin's change management model is valuable for comprehending and implementing the MATATAG curriculum policy changes in schools. With the MATATAG curriculum launched in the school year 2024-2025, Lewin's theory provides a comprehensive framework for addressing this significant educational transition.

There are three steps in Lewin's Change Management: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. In his theory, Lewin posits that organizational changes can alter the attitudes and behaviors of its members (Esa et al., 2017). Unfreezing means melting out behaviors, attitudes, or status quo in organizations or individuals to remove change barriers. The first step prepares one for the change. At this stage, a strong desire to change is prompted by the need for specific new modifications or to replace old practices. In the second stage, any impacted organization made progress toward the desired transformation, which affected its role, value, attitude, and reorganization to meet the goal. The organization is restructuring and needs resources and technology to make the changes work. A refreeze establishes a new organizational culture and practices after the latest change is fully incorporated and established. Getting to this stage usually takes time. Kurt Lewin's Model of Change states that the organization transitions from stability to constant and continuing change before returning to stability and reforming its culture (Bezjian et al., 2023). Hence, this theory resonates with this study as it unfreezes the practices management that the school used to, changes its practice to cope with the new policies, and refreezes practices that are beneficial as the MATATAG curriculum implementation advances.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of school heads' management practices regarding policy changes, focusing on the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the predominant problems, issues, and concerns the school has faced in terms of school management practices in implementing the MATATAG curriculum, specifically on the change of school management practices?
2. What effective practices are employed by the school in addressing issues on implementing the MATATAG curriculum?
3. What insights can be drawn on the change of school management practices in implementing the MATATAG curriculum?

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically a single case study. Case study research comprehensively investigates an individual, group, or event to understand a real-life occurrence (Coombs, 2022). Bloomberg & Volpe (2022) said that the objective of case study research is to get a comprehensive and intricate comprehension of the issue under investigation and to produce novel theories or insights.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

Convenience sampling techniques are a concise non-probability sampling strategy used to identify and select the key informants of this study. This technique involves selecting participants from the target population based on their easy accessibility (Golzar et al., 2022). The clarity of this sampling technique and its considerable intrinsic advantages, such as cost-effectiveness and time efficiency, will make the research process more manageable and less daunting for all involved.

Therefore, the key informants, five (5) Division of Davao City school heads, were determined based on inclusion-selection criteria. The key informant must have at least three years of experience as a school head and be actively managing the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum in the current school year 2024-2025. They are school heads of junior high school curriculum level. These criteria were determined to confirm that the selected

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key informants have the necessary experience and are actively involved in implementing the curriculum, making them the most suitable for this study and instilling confidence in the potential outcomes.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

A semi-structured interview guide question was utilized. According to Magaldi and Berler (2020), semi-structured interviews adhere to a predetermined guide and concentrate on the primary concern to build a consistent pattern. Magaldi and Berler (2020) argue that semi-structured interviews enable researchers to delve more into a subject, even when there are predetermined paths of discussion. Therefore, this instrument is hoped to be beneficial for collecting data on school management practices and policy changes related to implementing the MATATAG curriculum.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The data collection was systematically done. The authors have secured permission from the school division's superintendent to conduct the study. Second, research participants received permission letters and informed consent forms for the key informants after obtaining approval from the school's division superintendent. Third, the data was collected by conducting an in-depth interview. Furthermore, the researchers employed thematic analysis to scrutinize the responses of the key informants in the case study. A comprehensive analysis of the emerging patterns was provided, accompanied by thorough deliberations.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data was transcribed. After transcription, the analysis undergoes initial coding and thematic analysis, particularly within-case analysis.

Data was organized and categorized according to study questions during the initial coding analysis. Emerging themes and sub-themes were then developed.

Furthermore, a within-case analysis was conducted using theme analysis. The thematic analysis identifies recurring patterns or themes in qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The approach entails creating a conceptual model of the findings through a sequence of steps, including keyword and quotation selection, coding, theming, interpretation, and model creation (Naeem & Ozuem, 2021). The within-case analysis comprehensively investigates a singular case while considering its intricate context (Zelčāne & Piper, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and discusses school heads' management practices on policy changes, focusing on implementing the MATATAG curriculum. The general theme formulated from the participants' answers is that there is an adaptive transformational education in implementing this new curriculum. An in-depth interview was conducted to answer the research questions. Emerging themes were generated from the responses of the participants. The following are the responses.

Problems, Issues, and Concerns in Implementing the MATATAG Curriculum

The first research question is to unveil the predominant problems, issues, and concerns the school has faced regarding school management practices in implementing the MATATAG curriculum, specifically on changing school management practices. One central theme emerged from the participants' answers: transitional challenges in curriculum adoption. Three (3) significant subthemes have emerged from the data collected: resource limitations, teacher adaptation challenges, and implementation phase and readiness.

Resource Limitations

One of the common issues that the participants confronted was a need for more resources. More resources should provide a new curriculum's smooth transition and implementation. According to Kilag et al. (2024), many schools in the Philippines grapple with inadequate facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient learning materials, which impede the implementation of innovative curriculum initiatives such as the MATATAG Curriculum. Implementing a new curriculum is always a hurdle due to the need for more learning resources leading to teachers and learners. As they accentuated:

"We experience a lack of learning materials for the new decongested curriculum guide." (Participant 3)
"Resource limitations, such as the lack of instructional materials and digital tools, further complicate this process" (Participant 4)
"Availability of resources in the implementation of the revised curriculum." (Participant 3)

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The availability of educational resources in transitioning to a new curriculum enables a school head to facilitate policy changes effectively. According to Okongo et al. (2015), an author they quoted concluded that as they enable the learning of abstract ideas and concepts and inhibit rote learning, material resources significantly affect student accomplishment.

Teacher Adaptation Challenges

Teachers' adaptive challenge in the current curriculum transition is also another issue faced by the school leaders. Contrary to the study of Domingo and Masabpi (2024), teachers were constantly updated and prepared with the new curriculum. The fear of shifting and starting without enough training hinders their full cooperation. As school leaders articulated:

"There is resistance and reluctance of some teachers to the sudden shift of curriculum." (Participant 5)
"One of the biggest hurdles is ensuring that my teachers are thoroughly familiar with the new content, methodologies, and assessment strategies" (Participant 4)
"Teacher resistance to change, inadequate training and support, time constraints, varying levels of technology proficiency among staff" (Participant 1)

As the participants stated, resistance to change and inadequate training and support are just a few factors, at least indicating that teachers are also struggling with the current change in the primary education curriculum. Kilag et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of having a comprehensive training program for teachers and promoting support systems to obtain academic success and quality education. It will also minimize the fear and uncertainties felt by the teachers as they deliver the new curriculum to our learners.

Implementation Phase and Readiness

Another subtheme indicates several significant obstacles in rolling out a new curriculum. School heads voiced that the challenges confronted during the first year of implementation reflect a well-recognized issue in educational reform. Heineken and McTighe (2018) found that the first years of curriculum implementation generally require considerable changes as educators adapt to new content, teaching methods, and evaluation methods. Maintaining a steady educational tempo while supporting all students is a significant pedagogical problem.

Here are the excerpts from the participants:

"1st year implementation would always be challenging like adjustments" (Participant 2)
- "Varying levels of student readiness make it difficult also to maintain a uniform pace of instruction" (Participant 4)
- "At first, hesitant due to the abrupt implementation of the curriculum (grade levels affected)" (Participant 3)

Research shows that rushed curriculum rollouts increase teacher stress and decrease performance. Effective curriculum improvements require a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of people, programs, and processes, according to Haque and David (2022). The authors acknowledge that a delayed rollout helps teachers alter their ideas and practices, minimizing resistance and increasing uptake.

Effective Practices Employed in Addressing Implementation Issues

School leaders employed strategies for the new implementation of the MATATAG curriculum, which is this study's second research question. These reflect their school management practices, summarized through their strategic support and capacity building of their teachers. Three sub-themes emerge from their answers: collaborative learning and support, enhanced communication strategies, and targeted professional development.

Collaborative Learning and Support

School heads said collaborative curriculum creation and evaluation feedback match contemporary studies on collaborative learning environments' benefits. Cloud-supported collaborative learning enhances cognitive involvement, information sharing, and reflective thinking, which is essential for practical knowledge growth (Baanqud et al., 2020). Their peer mentorship observations can enhance teaching and support them in acclimating to the new curriculum. These collaborative methods improve education by harnessing instructors' experience. Here are the answers of the participants:

"Conduct collaborative curriculum development, peer coaching and mentoring and assessment feedback" (Participant 1)
"The strategy I implemented and worked well was peer mentoring, where experienced teachers guided their colleagues through the new curriculum." (Participant 4)

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"Conduct collaborative expertise on the unpacking of Learning Competencies and learning action cell session" (Participant 3)

Participants' emphasis on collaborative expertise in analyzing Learning Competencies and facilitating learning action cell sessions highlights the increasing trend of leveraging collaborative methods to tackle educational issues. Mendo-Lázaro et al. (2022) demonstrated that collaborative learning sessions, such as learning action cells, encourage active involvement and a more profound comprehension among educators, leading to more effective teaching practices. These insights underscore the vital importance of collaborative learning support in improving teaching and learning results, affirming its value in contemporary education.

Enhanced Communication Strategies

Effective communication techniques are paramount for creating a transparent and cooperative atmosphere in educational settings. Participants highlighted that using several channels, communicating clearly and succinctly, and ensuring that transparency and accountability are maintained align with recent research emphasizing the significance of these components in educational leadership. For example, studies have demonstrated that good communication techniques, such as frequent updates and the utilization of many channels, significantly increase stakeholder confidence and participation (Salamondra, 2021). Another study reveals that regular meetings and updated online platforms can help educators and stakeholders share information and resources (Karasova & Kleckova, 2020). Participants' answers are as follows:

"Use clear and concise communication, use variety of communication channel to tap stakeholders, two-way communication and transparency and accountability" (Participant 1)
"I established regular meetings and created a dedicated online platform for updates and resources" (Participant 4)
"Conduct series of information dissemination to all stakeholders through orientation, meetings, FGD, use media (school FB page, GCs, print)" (Participant 3)

Participants' employing many media channels to organize information-sharing sessions shows the growing trend of using numerous communication means to reach all stakeholders. Mahdi (2023) found that social media, group messaging, and print materials like school leaders' can boost information-sharing efforts. Parents, teachers, and students themselves are guaranteed informed knowledge and active participation in the MATATAG curriculum implementation by this multi-channel approach.

Targeted Professional Development

The results of Germuth's (2018) research highlight how well-focused professional development initiatives provide educators with the required skills and competencies to negotiate curriculum revisions effectively. Teachers who give continuous training and assistance can improve their educational approaches and, importantly, adapt to changes in the curriculum, thereby efficiently meeting the requirements of their students. As the responses of the participants are noted, this sub-theme combines the following:

"They have provided us trainings that strengthen the understanding of how to unpack Learning competencies across all areas." (Participant 3)
"Hands-on workshops, it focuses on practical application of the new methodologies and assessment strategies." (Participant 4)
"The division training for the MATATAG curriculum. However, there are things discussed during the training that are experienced first hand by the teachers." (Participant 5)

School leaders stress the need for training that enhances comprehension and breaks down all learning competencies. Recent research has shown that instructors need extensive professional development to improve instruction and content knowledge (Ahmed et al., 2021). The authors advised that training programs focus on projects to inspire teachers to assist pupils in learning rather than traditional discussion approaches. Like the school heads, educators should be confident that they will receive adequate training to execute the MATATAG curriculum and gain confidence in their teaching skills.

Insights on the Change of School Management Practices

Consolidating the insights learned by the school heads in the newest implemented curriculum is the third research problem of this study. The central theme was identified from their insights: the school's adaptive leadership and progressive implementation. Three sub-themes were generated to discuss further their responses: curriculum flexibility and teacher autonomy, gradual implementation and preparation, and positive mindset and adaptability.

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Curriculum Flexibility and Teacher Autonomy

According to school heads, curriculum flexibility, including class schedule adaptation, has been shown to increase teacher autonomy and support teachers in adapting to the 45-minute challenge schedule. This flexibility allows teachers to modify their lessons and schedules to the needs of the learners, resulting in more personalized and successful learning experiences. Curriculum flexibility and autonomy can empower teachers and school administrators to meet varied educational needs and settings, according to the OECD (OECD, 2020). Teachers can simplify their administrative tasks by customizing class timetables. Participants responded as follows. :

"Curriculum flexibility that allows tailoring class schedules, that enhanced teacher autonomy and reduced teaching workload." (Participant 4)
"The work has been easier in terms of monitoring teachers." (Participant 5)
"Alignment of Learning Competencies in assessment to be monitored in affected Grade levels" (Participant 3)

As school heads noted, aligning learning abilities with assessments enables consistent monitoring and accomplishment of educational goals across grade levels. This alignment is crucial for maintaining educational standards and ensuring students satisfy competencies throughout their schooling. Studies suggest that well-defined learning competencies and evaluations improve educator and student monitoring and assistance (Sharpe et al., 2020). This methodical technique helps identify student needs and enhances education quality, according to Beetham and Sharpe (2020). By aligning learning abilities with assessments, we can provide focused interventions that significantly improve student learning , giving us all a reason to be optimistic and motivated.

Gradual Implementation and Preparation

Successful curriculum implementation needs careful planning and gradual execution, allowing educators and students to adjust to the changes effectively. School heads' recommendation for advanced training underscores the significance of preparing teachers for the demands of a new curriculum. Research supports this method, showing that professional development and training are critical to effective curriculum implementation (Gouëdard et al., 2020). The participants have mentioned the following:

"If we are to go back before implementing this curriculum I would say, we should have train ahead of time" (Participant 3)
"I would have to implement it step by step, gradually and focusing on each grade level first." (Participant 5)
"We should also consider implementing the changes gradually -- start with Kinder and Grade 1" (Participant 3)

Dela Cruz (2024) suggested that providing educators with essential skills and knowledge before curriculum introduction can reduce impediments and improve implementation. According to participants, a gradual, grade-specific strategy that follows curriculum reform best practices should be implemented gradually to allow for first feedback-driven changes.

Positive Mindset and Adaptability

Positive attitudes and adaptability help school administrators adopt new rules and prepare teachers. School heads unanimously stressed the importance of positivity and responsiveness to policy changes. An adaptive leadership strategy and basic leadership concepts can help school leaders manage unexpected educational contexts (Bagwell, 2020). School leaders adopt the new curriculum policy optimistically. Consequently, they claimed:

"I also needed to imbibe a positive outlook and attitude so teachers could also be infected with the same energy." (Participant 5)
"My humble advice, will be positive attitude and be resourceful" (Participant 3)
"It's always embracing changes. We are in a system where it almost always changes. It can be hard and challenging, but change is necessary for us to grow." (Participant 5)

Educational leaders must be hopeful and flexible to manage policy changes. These qualities make leaders more effective and create a collaborative learning environment. With proper attention and direction, staff collaboration creates a good climate where educators can exchange successful student-centered methods (Dinsdale, 2017). Thus, principals can effectively shape school culture through collaboration tactics. Culduz (2023) also stressed that educational leaders must create a vision for the school and foster a positive, inclusive culture that promotes student learning and growth. Through leadership, they create standards, implement successful procedures, and advise educators and staff.

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CONCLUSION

MATATAG's implementation marked a significant change in Philippine education. It shows educational policy changes and the potential problems school leaders may face when implementing the new curriculum.

The data show that transitional obstacles are the biggest issue for school heads with MATATAG curriculum implementation. Transition challenges include limited resources, teacher adaptation, implementation pace, and preparation. More funding and teacher preparation are needed to improve education. Innovative problem-solving and financial allocation are crucial to school management. Teachers are key to curriculum reform. MATATAG curriculum demands ongoing professional development, making implementation challenging. Leaders must promote continuous learning and teach instructors new techniques. MATATAG curriculum implementation velocity depends on school adaptability to policy changes, with some schools advancing quickly and others suffering, producing educational divisions. School readiness evaluation and modification require careful planning and implementation. These obstacles make it hard for school leaders to adopt the new curriculum. Management involves careful planning and gradual implementation to assess and enhance school preparedness. These impediments can impede curricular change. Despite their limitations, school heads have successful ways to execute the MATATAG curriculum. Strategic support and capacity building in school management practices are needed to solve implementation challenges. This strategic support and capacity building emphasizes collaborative learning, improved communication, and focused professional growth. Teachers and administrators can use MATATAG to work collaboratively in learning and support. Educational leaders can encourage teachers to collaborate on problems and solutions. School administrators can foster professional relationships and implement new curriculum-aligned teaching methods. Communication helps everyone establish a pleasant learning and supportive atmosphere. In MATATAG curriculum implementation, better communication would help teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders understand each other. MATATAG curriculum requires specialized teacher training. Personal needs and challenges should be covered in school instruction to build instructor confidence. Faculty will receive support and training to implement the new curriculum and assist students in achieving it. The study showed how school management changed to apply the MATATAG curriculum. Schools have flexible leadership and gradual implementation. Leadership can help teachers fulfill student needs by supporting curriculum flexibility and instructor autonomy. Gradual implementation and good preparation enable intelligent adaptation, while positive leaders' mindsets build change resilience. Focusing on these elements will simplify the transition and improve education for all. It is also recommended that future researchers use multiple case studies or different designs to dig deeper into the newest curriculum implementation.

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