Indonesian Journal of Education Research (IJoER)
Vol. 6, No. 4, August 2025, pp. 444~455
ISSN: 2722-1326, DOI: 10.37251/ijoer.v6i4.2128

From K-12 to MATATAG: A Systematic Review of the Factors Driving Curriculum Transition

Jelargen D. Cabaya[1], Cloyd Q. Gerios[2], Jeremiah B. Lano[3], Elmelyn B. Valenzuela[4], Gideon S. Sumayo[5]
[1,2,3,4]Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English Students, Department of Secondary Education, University of Southern Mindanao - Libungan Campus, Cotabato, Philippines
[5]Faculty, Department of Secondary Education, University of Southern Mindanao - Libungan Campus, Cotabato, Philippines

Article Info

Article history:

Received Jun 20, 2025
Revised Jul 22, 2025
Accepted Aug 26, 2025
Online First Aug 28, 2025

Keywords:

Curriculum Reform
K–12 Limitations
MATATAG Curriculum
Philippine Education
Systematic Review

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This systematic review examines the shift of Philippine curriculum from K-12 to the MATATAG. It aims to identify the key factors that drive this curriculum change, analyze perceptions from different education stakeholders, and assess how the MATATAG curriculum addresses the limitations found in the previous system.

Methodology: Using the PRISMA framework, 25 relevant studies from 2020-2025 were analyzed thematically.

Main Findings: Results reveal that systemic challenges such as content overload, weak foundational skills, and inadequate teacher training prompted the shift. Stakeholders generally support MATATAG for its streamlined competencies and contextual relevance, although issues in the implementation persist.

Novelty/Originality of this study: Unlike earlier reviews that only describe the K-12 challenges or the policy intent of MATATAG, this study integrates both stakeholder perspectives and thematic analysis across multiple recent studies. By mapping how the MATATAG framework directly responds to previously documented limitations, it provides an evidence-based lens for anticipating long-term effects. This unique synthesis offers actionable insights for curriculum planners, policymakers, and teacher professional development programs seeking to align reforms with ground-level realities.

This is an open access article under the CC BY license

Corresponding Author:
Gideon S. Sumayo
Department of Secondary Education, College of Education, University of Southern Mindanao – PALMA Cluster Campuses, Libungan, Cotabato, Philippines
Email: gideonsumayo@usm.edu.ph

1. INTRODUCTION

The curriculum consists of subject matter, thoughts, experiences, and pedagogies that teachers use as a basis for teaching students some knowledge throughout their education. Sta. Catalina defines curriculum that encompasses all personal learning experiences provided by the school or other educational institutions [1]. This is a crucial aspect in education because, by having a well-designed curriculum, teachers can create lessons that allow students to have a meaningful and engaging learning experience.

In the Philippines, the K-12 curriculum was implemented to align the country's education system with international standards. However, in recent years, it has faced increasing criticism due to issues such as content overload, implementation challenges, and declining academic performance [2], [3]. For instance, teachers struggled to complete all competencies under the K–12 curriculum, while students exhibited poor mastery of essential skills [4]. In fact, in the 2022 PISA results, only 16% of Filipino students met the basic level of proficiency

in mathematics [5]. Teachers also faced capacity and workload issues, including mismatched teaching assignments and heavy administrative tasks [6], [7].

The curriculum was also stressful for both parents and students. Its complexity, along with the added two years in senior high school, caused confusion and frustration. Some students became less interested in learning, while others dropped out of school due to financial problems [8], [9]. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed these problems as many schools lacked digital tools and teachers were not prepared for online teaching, which caused many students to fall behind in their learning [10].

To address these challenges, the Department of Education introduced the MATATAG curriculum in 2023, aiming to strengthen foundational skills and address the gaps of the K–12 framework. It reduced more than 70% of learning competencies and introduced values education, along with a stronger focus on reading, math, and real-life skills [11].

This study is anchored with a post-positivist paradigm, which recognizes that objective knowledge is shaped by human biases, contextual factors, and interpretations [12]. Post-positivism aligns with systematic review methodology, such as this one, as it emphasizes rigorous processes to gather and synthesize evidence from across multiple sources [13]. This paradigm views knowledge as provisional, refining it through critical analysis of empirical data. This makes post-positivism suitable for assessing curriculum reforms, such as the shift from K–12 to MATATAG, where diverse perspectives, data, and policy evaluations require objective yet critical analysis. It also follows Fullan's Change Theory, which highlights that successful education reform needs the support from teachers and other stakeholders [14]. In addition, it uses Curriculum alignment Theory, which emphasizes that lessons, assessments, and learning goals should all match. These theories help guide this review by looking at both the reasons for the change and its effects.

The Philippine educational context aligns with Fullan's Change Theory, which emphasizes stakeholder buy-in for reforms like the MATATAG. Sustainable reform requires more than surface-level changes: it should empower teachers, engage learners, and address challenges like class size and resources. Although the shift was well-intentioned, the framework aims to address this by decongesting content and strengthening foundational skills [15]. While many studies describe the shortcomings of K–12 and outline MATATAG's policy intent, few have systematically analyzed how specific MATATAG features address those problems across stakeholders. This study fills that gap by synthesizing evidence from 2020–2025.

By systematically reviewing existing literature from 2020 to 2025 using the PRISMA framework and presenting empirical findings, this review provides the first integrated picture of why the shift occurred, how it is perceived across stakeholder groups, and whether early design choices in MATATAG plausibly resolve long-standing system frictions. The timing matters because implementation decisions in the next few school years—teacher upskilling, assessment redesign, and resource targeting—will determine whether MATATAG delivers durable learning recovery or reproduces previous bottlenecks [11], [16]. This exploration will contribute to the ongoing conversations about making the curriculum more relevant, high-quality, and responsive in education. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the key factors driving the transition from the K–12 curriculum to the MATATAG curriculum?
2. How do educators, students, and stakeholders perceive the changes in the curriculum?
3. How does the MATATAG curriculum address the limitations or gaps identified in the K–12 system?

These questions align with the systematic review approach, focusing on the challenges, stakeholder perspectives, and improvements. These reflect the nature of phenomenological or qualitative inquiries that deal with lived realities and system-level impacts [17].

This study adds to the global discussion of curriculum reforms, especially in developing countries like the Philippines that are striving to modernize their education systems [18]. It also offers valuable insights for policymakers in education, curriculum developers, and researchers by highlighting the realities of implementing a curriculum and the importance of foundational learning. For Filipino stakeholders, including learners, teachers, school administrators, and communities who are directly affected by the national education reforms, this study provides a relevant social implication. Its results can inform decision-making at the Department of Education, providing data for smoother transitions and better support mechanisms for both educators and students [16]. Local school divisions, teacher education institutions, and curriculum developers can use these findings to improve training programs and policy approaches. Future researchers may use this review as a basis for more localized studies on the impact of MATATAG in classrooms or its long-term outcomes [3], [4].

2. RESEARCH METHOD

In this phase, the authors employed PRISMA or Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses publication standards. This provides an opportunity for the authors to create an in-depth discussion in research question formulation, the methods for identifying, screening, and determining eligible systematic searches, and to add approaches for quality assessment, data collection, and analysis are also given consideration.

2.1. Identification

In choosing a considerable amount or volume of literature relevant to this research, several important phases were involved. In the process of selecting keywords, a search for related terms was conducted through prior research. Search strings for Google Scholar were created, and all relevant phrases were found as presented in the Table 1. The Google Scholar database was used to extract the 302 relevant articles on the issue being addressed in this systematic review.

Table 1. The Search String

Source	Keyword
Google Scholar	Title (“K12 to MATATAG Curriculum Shift” or “Factors driving Philippine Curriculum Shift” or “Gaps Filled by MATATAG Curriculum from K12 Curriculum”) AND PUBYEAR >2020 AND PUBYEAR <2025 AND (LIMIT TO (SUBJAREA “EDUCATION”)) AND (LIMIT TO DOC TYPE) AND (LIMIT TO (LANGUAGE “English”) Date of Access: May 2025

2.2. Screening

In the screening phase, potentially relevant research articles are evaluated to determine if they align with predetermined research questions. One pertinent employed content-related criterion in this stage involves selecting topics with regard to the K-12 to the MATATAG curriculum shift. Duplicate papers were removed from the data set of this research. A total of 108 articles were eliminated due to the publication limit of this study; 89 articles were eliminated due to their inaccessible nature. Additionally, the review was limited to publications in English, which resulted in the elimination of 35 articles.

Table 2. The Selection criterion in searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Languages	English	Non- English
Timeline	2020- 2025	<2020
Subject	Education	Besides Education

2.3. Eligibility

In the third phase, the eligibility assessment, 70 articles were initially collected. During this stage, the titles and main content of the articles were thoroughly reviewed to assess their compliance with the inclusion criteria and relevance to the research objectives. As a result, 45 articles were excluded due to reasons such as being outside the study's scope, having titles of limited significance, abstracts misaligned with the study's aims, or lacking full-text access supported by empirical evidence. Ultimately, 25 articles were retained for the next stage of the review.

This review adhered to the PRISMA 2020 Framework, which provides structured guidelines for examining literatures to ensure rigor and transparency in systematic reviews [13]. Figure 1 below presents the PRISMA flow diagram, which illustrates the four stages in article selection: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. This visual representation increases the transparency by showing how the initial pool of studies was narrowed to the final 25 articles included in this review.

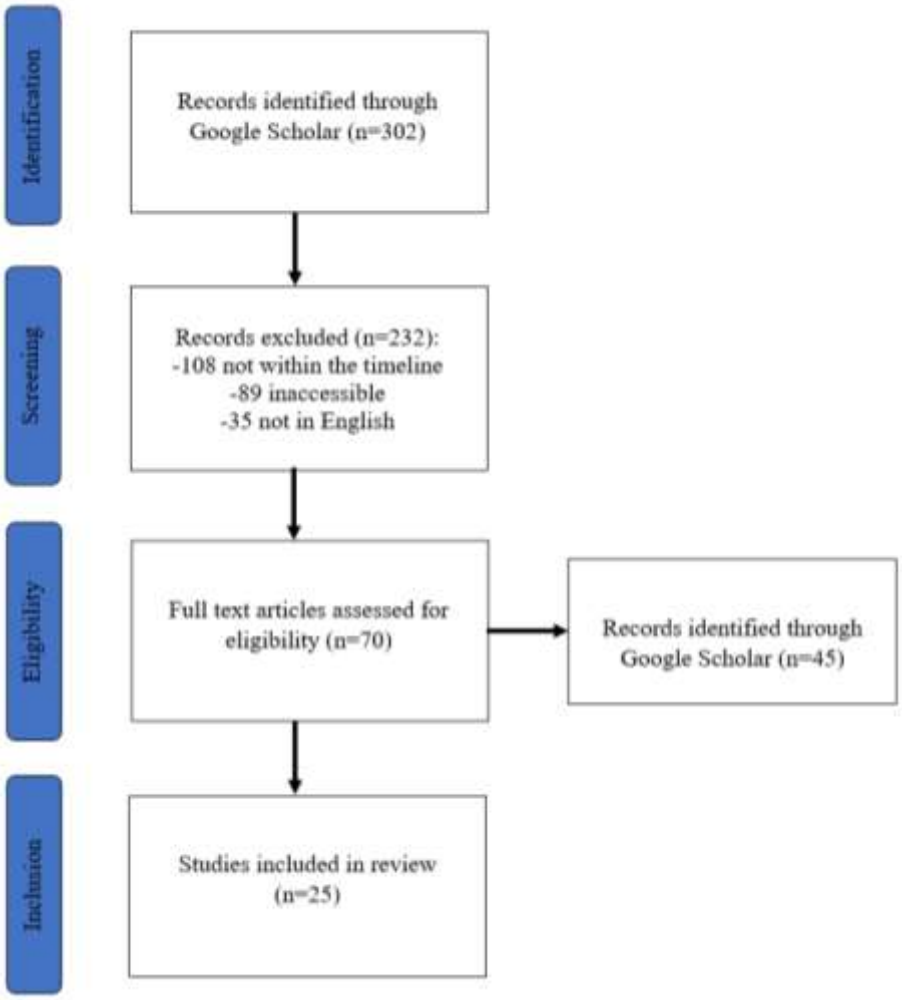

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow of Diagram

2.4. Data Abstraction and Analysis

In this study, qualitative research methods were employed to explore the curriculum transition from the K–12 program to the MATATAG curriculum. The primary objective was to identify relevant themes and sub-themes related to the curriculum shift. The initial phase involved systematic data collection, which laid the foundation for theme development. As illustrated in Figure 1, the authors methodically reviewed a collection of 25 publications, analyzing content and claims pertinent to the focus of the study.

Subsequently, the authors assessed the major existing studies that examined the curriculum shift from the K12 curriculum to the MATATAG Curriculum. The methodologies and findings of each study were critically evaluated.

Using thematic analysis, the authors followed the inductive analysis procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke [19], which involves the following steps: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and finally, (6) producing the report. The findings from this process will be used to support and explain the extracted data by giving specific and accurate themes for each individual argument provided by the dataset.

Finally, the authors cross-checked the identified themes to ensure coherence and consistency. In cases where discrepancies arose, they were addressed and resolved through collaborative deliberation among the authors. This rigorous process, combined with the PRISMA diagram, strengthened the transparency and credibility of the review. Recent studies support that using inclusion steps, appraisal checking, and systematic synthesis increases the trustworthiness of systematic reviews [20]-[22].

2.5. Quality Appraisa

Study quality was appraised by a single reviewer using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists appropriate to each study design. Items were rated as Yes, No, or Cannot tell. A priori, critical items were identified by design. Appraisal was summarized at the study level as low, moderate, or high concerns using predefined rules. Reasons for exclusion and appraisal notes were logged to support transparency.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The review identified three key themes with regard to the curriculum shift from the K12 curriculum to the MATATAG curriculum. These themes were: i) Driving factors for Curriculum shift from K12 to MATATAG (theme 1), ii) Students, teachers, and parents' perception of the MATATAG curriculum (theme 2). iii.) Gaps addressed by the MATATAG Curriculum from K12 (theme 3).

Table 3. The research article findings based on the proposed searching criteria for theme 1.

No.	Authors	Title
1	Alvarado (2023)	Communicative competence in spiral progression curriculum: A study reinforcing the implementation of MATATAG curriculum in the Philippines.
2	Ampang (2023)	Pedagogical Approaches and Challenges among Teachers in the Implementation of the K-12 Curriculum in the Division of Maguindanao I
3	Barrias et al (2024)	Perceptions of Internet Users in The Implementation of the K-12 Curriculum in The Philippines Using Association of Words: Input for Curriculum Enhancement.
4	Blasabas and Sumaljag (2020)	Philippine K to 12 Implementation: Difficulties and Coping Strategies of Public Elementary School Administrators
5	Carvajal et al. (2025)	Future-Proofing Teachers in Reframing Teacher Education Curriculum in the Philippines: Basis for Policy Recommendations. International Journal of Open-access, Interdisciplinary and New Educational Discoveries of ETCOR Educational Research Center
6	Decin Mendoza and Deri (2025)	Real-World Context in Mathematics Teaching: Teachers' Insights.
7	Estrellado (2023)	MATATAG Curriculum; Why Curriculum [Must] Change.
8	Gurobat and Lumbu-an (2022)	Challenges encountered in the implementation of the education program among senior high school students in The Philippines.
9	Lapinid et al. (2024)	Aligning Philippine K to 12 Assessment Policies against International Benchmarks: Implications for Quality Reform.
10	Quijano (2023)	Assessing the K-12 program implementation in the Philippines as an input to school-based policy plan.
11	Ubias (2024)	School readiness, gaps and prospects in the implementation of MATATAG Curriculum in Gonzaga West District: Basis for an intervention plan. ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences,

Table 4. The research article findings based on the proposed searching criteria for theme 2.

No.	Authors	Title
1	Abaiz et al. (2025)	Teach teachers' perspectives on MATATAG curriculum in the Philippines
2	Alvarado (2023)	Communicative competence in spiral progression curriculum: A study reinforcing the implementation of MATATAG curriculum in the Philippines
3	De Los Reyes-Ancheta et al. (2024)	A spirituality-infused curriculum: A basis for a capacity-building program
4	Dicen Mendoza and Deri (2025)	Real-world context in mathematics teaching: Teachers' insights
5	Estrellado (2023)	MATATAG curriculum; Why curriculum [must] change
6	Rojas (2025)	K-12 Curriculum: A kindergarten, Grade I, and Grade IV teachers' voice
7	Saro et al. (2024)	A qualitative exploration on the perceived impact of the MATATAG curriculum on basic education teaching in the School Year 2024-2025
8	Villaver and Kilag (2024)	MATATAG curriculum rollout: Understanding challenges for effective implementation

Table 5. The research article findings based on the proposed searching criteria for theme 3.

No.	Author	Title
1	Alvarado (2023)	Communicative competence in spiral progression curriculum: A study reinforcing the implementation of MATATAG curriculum in the Philippines
2	De Los Reyes-Ancheta et al. (2024)	A spirituality-infused curriculum: A basis for a capacity-building program
3	Gurobat and Lumbu-an (2022)	Challenges encountered in the implementation of the education program among senior high school students in the Philippines
4	Lapinid et al. (2024)	Aligning Philippine K to 12 assessment policies against international benchmarks
5	Po (2025)	Challenges faced by school heads and teachers in the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum and performance of students
6	Saro et al. (2024)	A qualitative exploration on the perceived impact of the MATATAG curriculum on basic education teaching in the school year 2024-2025
7	Ubias (2024)	School readiness, gaps and prospects in the implementation of MATATAG curriculum in Gonzaga West District: Basis for an intervention plan
8	Villaver and Kilag (2024)	MATATAG curriculum rollout: Understanding challenges for effective implementation

3.1. Driving Factors for Curriculum Shift from K–12 to MATATAG

3.1.1. Curriculum Overload and Weak Sequencing

Several studies have highlighted the need to revise the existing K–12 curriculum due to various systemic and classroom-level challenges. The K–12 curriculum was criticized for being congested and unfocused, leading to shallow learning and poor academic performance among Filipino students. The K–12 curriculum consisted of more than 11,000 learning competencies, making it overly ambitious and difficult to implement effectively in classrooms [23]. Teachers found it challenging to cover all the required competencies, resulting in a lack of depth in student understanding and poor mastery of essential skills. Additionally, research noted that the curriculum's complexity led to fragmented learning experiences, which hindered the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities [24].

Curriculum reviews indicated poor sequencing and uneven lesson complexity in the K–12 curriculum, where some lessons were too advanced or too simple for the grade level. The K–12 curriculum failed to foster globally competitive learners due to overloaded content, lack of focus on 21st-century skills, and poor alignment with international standards. DepEd's own curriculum review in 2016 revealed that many learning competencies were not properly sequenced and placed heavy cognitive demands on students, while the Assessment, Curriculum and Technology Research Center (ACTRC) reported that the presence of over 14,000 competencies made the curriculum impractical and difficult to implement effectively [25]. These gaps were further highlighted in international comparisons, where researchers noted that the K–12 framework did not sufficiently integrate critical 21st-century competencies and remained misaligned with global benchmarks such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). This misalignment was also reflected in student outcomes. Assessment results from the 2018 National Achievement Test (NAT) showed that only 36% of elementary learners and 43% of secondary learners in Caraga Region achieved a Mean Percentage Score (MPS) of at least 66–85% [21]. In addition, the 2022 PISA revealed that the performance of Filipino students in international assessments remained alarmingly low, with only 16% of students reaching at least Level 2 in mathematics, indicating minimal proficiency [5].

3.1.2. Teacher Capacity and Workload

Another significant factor that prompted the shift to the MATATAG curriculum was the inadequacy of teacher preparation and support. Many educators lacked proper training and were assigned to teach subjects outside their specialization, resulting in ineffective instruction and low learner engagement. It is said that K–12 curriculum implementation was hampered by the lack of teacher readiness, particularly in delivering inclusive and differentiated instruction [6]. Furthermore, teachers were often burdened with administrative tasks, reducing their capacity to focus on instruction and student support [7]. Many teachers needed more training in using technology, teaching students with special needs, and implementing inclusive practices [10].

3.1.3. Assessment Alignment and Learning Resources

Curriculum reviews revealed that the K–12 curriculum had too many competencies (over 11,000) and lacked proper assessment tools, making it difficult to measure student learning accurately. Teachers faced challenges in aligning their assessments with the intended learning outcomes, leading to inconsistent evaluation

practices across schools. The lack of alignment between the curriculum and national assessments, such as the National Achievement Test (NAT), further complicated the evaluation of student performance. A study also highlighted that the K–12 curriculum did not provide adequate mechanisms to ensure quality and consistency in assessment practices, resulting in gaps in student learning data [26]. The K–12 curriculum implementation was further hindered by inadequate learning materials and resources. Teachers often had to create their own instructional materials, which added to their workload and led to inconsistencies in content delivery. These inconsistencies, such as a lack of textbooks, teaching guides, and learning modules, made it difficult to deliver lessons effectively, particularly in remote and under-resourced schools [27].

3.1.4. Student Workload and Well-Being

From the students' perspective, the K–12 curriculum caused academic and emotional stress due to its demanding content and high expectations. Many students found it difficult to cope with the increased workload and pressure to perform well in various subjects. The additional two years in senior high school were also viewed by some stakeholders as unnecessary and burdensome, especially for those who could not afford to continue their education. Students also experienced fatigue, low motivation, and decreased interest in learning due to the overwhelming nature of the K–12 curriculum [9]. Additionally, learners felt that the curriculum lacked relevance to real-life situations, making it difficult for them to see the value of their education. Based on the report of EdCom 2, students in the K to 12 program in the Philippines spend more time on schoolwork compared to students in other countries. From elementary up to senior high school, they have longer class hours and no clear rules on homework, which makes them overworked [28]. For example, Grade 3 pupils spend about nine extra hours in class each week compared to the international standard, while junior high students stay in school for around 36 hours weekly. Senior high school students carry the heaviest load, with about 55 hours of academic work every week—more than what first-year college students usually have.

3.1.5. Family Engagement, Language Policy, and Pandemic Stress Test

Parents also faced difficulties supporting their children's education under the K–12 curriculum. The complex curriculum structure and the introduction of unfamiliar subjects made it challenging for parents to assist their children with their studies. The lack of clear communication between schools and families further exacerbated this issue. Concerns also arose over the effectiveness of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy, which they believed contributed to confusion among young learners, especially in linguistically diverse communities [8]. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed further weaknesses in the K–12 curriculum. The sudden shift to distance learning highlighted the lack of digital resources, teacher preparedness, and learner support systems necessary for effective remote education. The pandemic revealed the need for a more resilient and adaptable curriculum that could address the diverse needs of learners and ensure continuity of education during crises [10].

Reforms in neighboring systems echo the same drivers behind MATATAG—content decongestion, foundational skills, and alignment. In Indonesia, early evidence on Kurikulum Merdeka shows a policy pivot to streamline content and promote project-based learning, but also flags teacher-capacity and material constraints during rollout [29]-[32]. In Vietnam, the 2018 General Education Curriculum (GEC) moved decisively to a competency-based model, with studies emphasizing the need for teacher upskilling and staged implementation [33], [34]. In Malaysia, KSSR/KSSM reforms highlighted higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) to counter shallow coverage—again surfacing classroom-level implementation challenges [35], [36].

3.2. Parents, Teachers, and Students' Perceptions of the MATATAG Curriculum

3.2.1. Teacher Views: Strengths and Challenges

Teachers' perceptions of the MATATAG curriculum have been largely positive, with many educators appreciating its streamlined structure and focus on essential learning competencies. Teachers found that the reduced number of competencies allowed for deeper learning and better student engagement [37]. The focus on foundational skills in reading, math, and values education was seen as a significant improvement over the overly ambitious K–12 curriculum. The MATATAG curriculum emphasizes foundational skills and real-life applications that help students make meaningful connections between their lessons and everyday experiences [38].

However, teachers also reported challenges in the implementation of the new curriculum. Reports found that educators encountered difficulties in adjusting to the revised content and pedagogical approaches, particularly due to limited training and resources [39]. Some teachers expressed concerns about the lack of clarity in the curriculum guide and the need for more contextualized teaching materials. Despite these challenges, many teachers viewed the MATATAG curriculum as a step in the right direction, especially in promoting inclusive education and learner-centered practices. Many educators welcomed the curriculum's emphasis on differentiated instruction and the integration of Good Manners and Right Conduct (GMRC) to address the decline in students' socio-emotional development [40]. However, the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum also faced resistance from some educators who were hesitant to adopt new teaching methods and felt that their professional autonomy was being undermined. Some teachers were skeptical about the effectiveness of the curriculum reforms and expressed doubts about their ability to deliver the new content effectively [41]. There were also concerns about

the lack of support for assessing values-based outcomes and the need for more comprehensive teacher training programs.

Reports from Indonesia's Merdeka rollout describe broadly positive views of decongested content but persistent needs for training, clear guides, and classroom resources [29]-[31]. Vietnam's GEC similarly underscores teacher professional learning and phased support as key to uptake [33], [34]. These patterns suggest that MATATAG's acceptance will hinge on comparable investments in teacher development and implementation supports.

3.2.2. Parents and Students: Support and Adjustments

Parents generally expressed cautious optimism about the MATATAG curriculum. Many appreciated the curriculum's renewed focus on core subjects and values education, which they believed were essential for their children's holistic development. Parents were particularly supportive of the reduced curriculum load, which they felt would alleviate student stress and improve learning outcomes [23]. However, some parents remained concerned about the practical implementation of the curriculum and the availability of resources to support their children's education. From the students' perspective, the MATATAG curriculum was seen as more manageable and engaging. Learners reported that the lessons were easier to understand and more relevant to their daily lives. A study showed that students have an increased interest and participation in class activities, particularly in subjects that emphasized real-life application and critical thinking [5]. Nonetheless, there were still challenges related to adjusting to new learning materials and assessment methods, especially among older students who had experienced the previous K–12 curriculum. Comparable parent/student reactions—relief at lighter loads but concern over practical supports—are also noted in Indonesia and Vietnam during early reform phases [32], [34].

3.2.3. Equity and Implementation in Disadvantaged Contexts

The MATATAG curriculum also received support from education stakeholders for its emphasis on localized and contextualized learning. The inclusion of culturally relevant content and the reinforcement of Filipino values were seen as important steps in promoting national identity and social cohesion. The integration of peace education, gender equality, and disaster risk reduction in the curriculum was well-received by stakeholders, who viewed these elements as crucial for fostering responsible citizenship [15]. However, concerns remained about the curriculum's implementation in marginalized communities. Schools in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas faced significant barriers, such as a lack of infrastructure, limited access to technology, and inadequate teacher training [42]. These challenges raised questions about the equitable delivery of the MATATAG curriculum and the need for targeted support for vulnerable learners.

3.3. Gaps Addressed by the MATATAG Curriculum

3.3.1. Decongestion and Focus on Essentials

The MATATAG curriculum was designed to address several critical gaps identified in the K–12 program. One of the most significant changes was the reduction of learning competencies by more than 70%, from over 11,000 to approximately 3,600. This streamlining aimed to focus on essential skills and allow for more in-depth learning experiences, helping students' understanding and retention [38].

MATATAG's decongestion and foundational-skills focus align with Indonesia's streamlining plus project-based learning under Merdeka [30], [32] and Vietnam's competency-based GEC with coherent sequencing and diversified materials [33], [34]. These choices reflect broader competency frameworks adopted across the region.

3.3.2. Coherent Progression and Foundational Skills

The MATATAG curriculum also introduced a more structured and coherent sequence of topics across grade levels. Subjects were aligned to ensure progression of skills and knowledge, with science education introduced at Grade 3 instead of Grade 1 to allow for better cognitive readiness among learners. The curriculum emphasized the development of literacy, numeracy, patriotism, and values, with a particular focus on Good Manners and Right Conduct (GMRC), which helps address concerns about the decline in student discipline and socio-emotional development [37].

3.3.3 Assessment Shifts and Classroom Pedagogy

In terms of assessment, the MATATAG curriculum promoted the use of open-ended tasks, performance-based assessments, and other alternative assessment strategies that aligned with global standards. These appropriate assessment tools allow teachers to better evaluate students' higher-order thinking skills and real-world problem-solving abilities [9]. The MATATAG curriculum also emphasized the use of inclusive pedagogical approaches, encouraging differentiated instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners. Teachers were trained to implement varied teaching strategies, including the use of technology, real-life exemplars, and learner-centered activities. This approach encourages more active participation and develops critical thinking skills [26]. Parallel reforms emphasize performance-based assessment and active learning: analyses of Japan's curriculum changes link policy shifts to classroom practices that target higher-order competencies [43], [44].

3.3.4. Socio-Emotional Learning, Cultural Relevance, and Global Alignment

Another key gap addressed by the MATATAG curriculum was the integration of socio-emotional learning and peace education. The curriculum promoted empathy, resilience, and collaboration through its values education component. These elements were vital in fostering a safe and inclusive learning environment [15]. The curriculum also emphasized the importance of cultural responsiveness, allowing for the inclusion of local contexts and indigenous knowledge in classroom instruction. Furthermore, the MATATAG curriculum aimed to align the Philippine education system with international standards, such as those set by the OECD's Education 2030 framework, by incorporating digital literacy, AI tools, and 21st-century skills to prepare learners for the demands of the global economy [44]. Initiatives such as Project ReCOUNT were introduced to improve numeracy skills among students, particularly in regions with low learning outcomes [44].

The MATATAG curriculum also prioritized the professional development of teachers. Continuous training programs were implemented to help educators adapt to the new curriculum and improve their instructional practices. Creating a collaborative professional learning community allows teachers to share ideas and receive ongoing support from each other [20]. Additionally, the curriculum promoted equity in education by providing targeted interventions for marginalized learners, including indigenous communities and students with special needs. Inclusive education initiatives were expanded to ensure that all learners had access to quality education and support services [42]. Overall, the Philippine trajectory is consistent with Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia—reducing content load, strengthening early-grade foundations, and embedding competencies—while outcomes depend on teacher preparation, classroom materials, and phased implementation [29], [33], [35].

The results of this systematic review offer a clear understanding of the core reasons behind the transition from the K to 12 curriculum to the MATATAG curriculum, as well as how the reform is perceived and implemented across the educational contexts in the Philippines.

In relation to the key factors that prompted the curriculum shift, the reviewed studies consistently emphasized that the K to 12 curriculum had become overly ambitious and impractical. With more than 11,000 learning competencies, it placed excessive pressure on both teachers and students. Teachers struggled to deliver all the required content, especially in schools with limited training and teaching materials. Low performance in national assessments such as the NAT and international benchmarks like PISA further revealed that learners were not mastering foundational skills. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted additional vulnerabilities in the system, particularly the lack of preparedness for flexible or distance learning. These interconnected issues signaled that a significant reform was needed to improve curriculum focus, clarity, and adaptability.

Regarding stakeholder perceptions of the MATATAG curriculum, the review found that the shift was generally welcomed by teachers, students, and parents. Teachers appreciated the reduced number of competencies, which enabled deeper instruction and allowed them to focus on key learning outcomes. They also responded positively to the integration of values, education, and life skills. Students found the lessons easier to follow and more relatable to real-life experiences, while parents noticed decreased stress levels among their children. Despite these positive perceptions, stakeholders also reported ongoing challenges in implementation, particularly in marginalized or under-resourced schools. Limited training opportunities, vague instructional guides, and a lack of materials were among the most commonly cited barriers to successful implementation.

In terms of how the MATATAG curriculum addresses the gaps in the K to 12 system, the reviewed literature pointed to several improvements. The curriculum has decongested content by more than 70%, improved sequencing to match learners' cognitive development, and introduced inclusive and contextualized instruction. There is also a stronger emphasis on foundational literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional development, including the formal integration of Good Manners and Right Conduct (GMRC). Studies have shown that these changes have led to improved learner engagement and higher mastery of essential competencies in pilot schools, demonstrating the curriculum's potential effectiveness. While these are significant advancements, the studies also warned that gaps remain, especially in teacher readiness, infrastructure, and monitoring mechanisms. Without strong support systems, the intended benefits of the MATATAG curriculum may not be equally realized across all learning environments.

3.4. Limitations of the Study

While this systematic review offers valuable insights into the transition from the K–12 curriculum to the MATATAG curriculum, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study exclusively relied on existing literature published between 2020 and 2025. As such, it may not fully capture the most recent developments, policy adjustments, or emerging challenges following the initial rollout of the MATATAG curriculum. Given the evolving nature of curriculum reform, findings are limited to what was available at the time of review.

Second, the study did not involve primary data collection. This means that all conclusions and thematic insights were drawn from secondary sources, such as journal articles and government reports. While these sources were critically selected and reviewed, the absence of direct perspectives from teachers, students, or school administrators in specific regions, provinces, and/or municipalities may have limited the depth and immediacy of the findings.

Third, the review primarily focused on the national education context. Although some articles included localized data, the study was not designed to comprehensively analyze regional or community-level variations, particularly in remote or marginalized areas. As a result, the unique experiences and challenges of schools in geographically isolated or under-resourced communities may not be fully represented. Fourth, because appraisal was completed by a single reviewer, the synthesis may be more vulnerable to selection and coding bias, although the use of a predefined CASP checklist, explicit criteria, and documented reasons for exclusion helped manage this risk.

Lastly, the review included only articles published in English. Potentially relevant literature written in local languages was excluded, which may have limited the cultural breadth of perspectives analyzed. This language filter could have unintentionally narrowed the diversity of stakeholder experiences and regional insights reflected in the study.Despite these limitations, the study offers a strong foundation for understanding the rationale, reception, and early outcomes of the MATATAG curriculum. Future research involving field-based studies and more localized contexts will be essential to deepen and expand these initial findings.

3.5. Future Research Directions

Future research should focus on how the MATATAG curriculum is being implemented at the classroom level, particularly in diverse and under-resourced school settings. Studies that explore its practical effects on teaching strategies, student engagement, and learning outcomes are essential. There is also a need for localized research that captures the experiences of schools in remote and marginalized areas, where access to resources and training may be limited. Longitudinal studies tracking the progress of students under the new curriculum would help assess its long-term impact on foundational skills and overall academic performance. Equally important is evaluating the effectiveness of teacher training programs and how well these prepare educators to adapt to the revised curriculum. Research on the actual use of performance-based and alternative assessments can also shed light on whether these tools are effectively promoting critical thinking and real-world application. In addition, future studies should explore how the curriculum responds to crises, such as natural disasters or health emergencies, and supports flexible learning. Finally, examining the roles of parents, communities, and other stakeholders in the curriculum transition can provide deeper insights into how collective support influences implementation success.

4. CONCLUSION

The shift from the K–12 to the MATATAG curriculum reflects a significant response to long-standing issues within the Philippine education system. This systematic review found that the previous K–12 program, despite its initial promise, became too heavy for both learners and educators. With over 11,000 learning competencies, it resulted in fragmented instruction, shallow learning, and limited mastery of essential skills. Low student performance in national and international assessments further emphasized the urgency for change. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic also revealed the system's lack of preparedness for flexible and inclusive learning, exposing weaknesses in infrastructure, teacher readiness, and digital capacity.

Findings from the review also highlighted how educators, students, and parents view the MATATAG curriculum. Teachers expressed appreciation for the reduced number of competencies, which allowed them to focus more on foundational skills and learner engagement. Students found the lessons more manageable and meaningful, while parents welcomed the lighter academic load and renewed emphasis on values education. Despite these encouraging perceptions, concerns remain regarding the availability of learning resources, the clarity of curriculum guides, and the adequacy of teacher training, particularly in underserved and remote areas.

The MATATAG curriculum introduces several key improvements. It significantly reduces content congestion, improves sequencing across grade levels, and emphasizes foundational literacy, numeracy, and character development. The inclusion of culturally responsive content, differentiated instruction, and 21st-century skills also reflects a stronger alignment with global education standards. Moreover, efforts to build inclusive and values-based learning environments show promise in promoting not only academic growth but also socio-emotional development among Filipino learners.

While the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum by the Department of Education marks an important step forward, its success depends largely on consistent support across all levels of implementation. Strengthening teacher capacity, ensuring the availability of appropriate learning materials, and maintaining close coordination with education stakeholders are all essential. More importantly, the reform must be adaptive and inclusive so that no learner is left behind. The path to meaningful and lasting change in education is complex, but with sustained commitment and collaborative effort, the goals of the MATATAG curriculum can be achieved in practice, not just on paper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the University of Southern Mindanao – Libungan Campus for its academic support and their families for their unwavering encouragement throughout the completion of this study.

REFERENCES

[1] A. R. Sta. Catalina, *Curriculum development and instructional planning.* Manila, Philippines: Educational Publishing House, 2014.

[2] M. A. Llego, "Problems and issues in the implementation of the K to 12 curriculum," *TeacherPH,* 2017.

[3] M. Tan, "Quality issues in the K–12 basic education curriculum," *Asia-Pac. J. Curric. Stud.*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 74–89, 2020.

[4] J. Arrogante, "Challenges in implementing the K–12 curriculum," *J. Educ. Res. Stud.*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 44–51, 2019.

[5] J. E. D. Mendoza and R. A. Deri, "Real-world context in mathematics teaching: Teachers' insights," *Int. J. Innov. Sci. Res. Technol.,* vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 2228–2239, 2025, doi: 10.38124/ijisrt/25mar1723.

[6] A. D. Ampang, "Pedagogical approaches and challenges among teachers in the implementation of the K-12 curriculum in the Division of Maguindanao I," *Randwick Int. Educ. Linguist. Sci. J.*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 443–450, 2023, doi: 10.47175/rielsj.v4i2.722.

[7] G. Quijano, "Assessing the K-12 program implementation in the Philippines as an input to school-based policy plan," *J. Educators, Teachers Trainers*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 248–266, 2023, doi: 10.47750/jett.2023.14.01.022.

[8] A. S. Barrias et al., "Perceptions of internet users in the implementation of the K-12 curriculum in the Philippines using association of words: Input for curriculum enhancement," *Pak. J. Life Soc. Sci*., vol. 22, no. 1, 2024, doi: 10.57239/PJLSS-2024-22.1.00372.

[9] P. M. N. Gurobat and J. D. Lumbu-an, "Challenges encountered in the implementation of the education program among senior high school students in the Philippines," *Indones. J. Educ. Res. Technol.*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 65–70, 2022, doi: 10.17509/ijert.v2i1.41225.

[10] A. L. P. Carvajal et al., "Future-proofing teachers in reframing teacher education curriculum in the Philippines: Basis for policy recommendations," *Int. J. Open-access Interdiscip. New Educ. Discov. (ETCOR),* vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 235–252, 2025, doi: 10.63498/nxz2st271.

[11] DepEd, *MATATAG Curriculum Overview*, DepEd, Philippines, 2023.

[12] J. W. Creswell and C. N. Poth, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches,* 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: SAGE, 2018.

[13] M. J. Page et al., "The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews," *BMJ,* vol. 372, Art. no. n71, 2021, doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71.

[14] M. Fullan, *The new meaning of educational change,* 5th ed. New York, NY, USA: Teachers College Press, 2016.

[15] Department of Education, *MATATAG Curriculum Guide,* DepEd, Philippines, 2023.

[16] D. Santos and P. Javier, "Teachers' and parents' reactions to MATATAG implementation," *Philipp. J. Educ. Reform,* vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 88–101, 2024.

[17] J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods Approaches,* 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: SAGE, 2018.

[18] UNESCO, *Reimagining Education: Towards a Post-COVID Learning Recovery*. Paris, France: UNESCO, 2021.

[19] V. Clarke and V. Braun, "Thematic analysis," *J. Positive Psychol.*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 297-298, 2016, doi: 10.11080/17439760.2016.1262613.

[20] E. C. Po, "Challenges faced by school heads and teachers in the implementation of the MATATAG curriculum and performance of students," *Int. J. Adv. Multidiscip. Stud.*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 88–98, 2025.

[21] H. Moosapour, F. Saeidifard, M. Aalaa, A. Soltani, and B. Larijani, "The rationale behind systematic reviews in clinical medicine: A conceptual framework," *J. Diabetes Metab. Disord*., vol. 20, pp. 919-929, 2021. doi: 10.1007/s40200-021-00773-8.

[22] M. Ringsten, K. Färnqvist, M. Bruschettini, and M. Johansson, "Inclusion, characteristics and methodological limitations of systematic reviews in doctoral theses: A cross-sectional study of all universities in Sweden," *Cochrane Evid. Synth. Methods*, vol. 3, pp. 1-9, 2025, doi: 10.1002/cesm.70015.

[23] C. J. P. Estrellado, "MATATAG curriculum: Why curriculum must change," *J. Interdisc. Perspect.*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 6–10, 2023, doi: 10.5281/zenodo.10336930.

[24] C. C. P. Alvarado, "Communicative competence in spiral progression curriculum: A study reinforcing the implementation of MATATAG curriculum in the Philippines," *J. Humanit. Educ. Dev*., vol. 5, no. 6, pp. 11–29, 2023, doi: 10.22161/jhed.5.6.3.

[25] J. K. de la Fuente, "Curriculum issues affecting student learning outcomes in the Philippines", *TeacherPH,* 2022.

[26] M. R. C. Lapinid et al., "Aligning Philippine K to 12 assessment policies against international benchmarks: Implications for quality reform," *Philipp. J. Sci.*, vol. 153, no. 6B, pp. 2375–2392, 2024.

[27] R. J. Blasabas and M. V. Sumaljag, "Philippine K to 12 implementation: Difficulties and coping strategies of public elementary school administrators," *SLONGAN*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 63–87, 2020.

[28] M. F. C. L. Dabbay and G. L. Largoza, "Are K to 12 students in the Philippines overworked – by design?," *Research Paper Series No. 006,* Second Congressional Commission on education (EDCOM II), Pasay, Philippines, 2024.
[29] J. Tomasouw, "The challenges of the Kurikulum Merdeka Implementation," in *KnE Soc. Sci.: Proc. Int. Conf, Soc. Sci. 2024 (ICSS 2024)*, vol. 11, pp. 456–465, 2024.
[30] T. Wulandari, "Project-Based Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools: A systematic literature review," *Edukasia: J. Penelit. Pendidik. Islam*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 220–232, 2024.
[31] D. F. Astuti, "The challenges teachers and students face in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum," *Edukasia: J. Penelit. Pendidik. Islam*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 45–56, 2024.
[32] H. Hunaepi, M. I. Ibrahim, and L. Fitriani, "Transforming Education in Indonesia: The impact and challenges of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum," in *Politics and Governance in Indonesia: Trends and Transitions*. Yogyakarta: Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta Press, 2024, pp. 112–129.
[33] B. H. Duong, *Complexities in Teaching Competencies: Vietnam's Competency-Based Curriculum Reforms,* RISE Programme Working Paper, no. 22/094, pp. 1–35, 2022.
[34] N. T. Liên, "Vietnamese teachers' career adaptability in implementing the 2018 general education curriculum," *Cogent Education*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 1–17, 2025, doi: 10.1080/2331186X.2025.2384923
[35] T. C. Chun, "The teaching of higher order thinking skills (HOTS) in the Malaysian education context," *Malays. Online J. Educ. Manag.*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 1–18, 2019.
[36] M. A. Zakaria, "Higher order thinking skills (HOTS): Acting method as approach of critical pedagogy in education culture," *Int. J. Acad. Res. Bus. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 11, no. 5, pp. 123–134, 2021.
[37] J. M. Saro, C. B. Montejo, J. A. Sucong, M. F. O. Bustamante, and J. B. Perez, "A qualitative exploration on the perceived impact of the MATATAG curriculum on basic education teaching in the school year 2024–2025," *Int. J. Adv. Multidiscip. Res. Stud.*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 952–966, 2024.
[38] M. C. Abaiz, J. R. Baluro, D. M. Dolotallas, L. M. Gimeno, M. J. Pomasin, and A. Cabanilla, "Teachers' perspectives on MATATAG curriculum in the Philippines," *J. Humanit. Educ. Dev.*, vol. 5, no. 6, pp. 11–29, 2025.
[39] J. J. Rojas, "K-12 curriculum: A kindergarten, grade I, and grade IV teachers' voice," *Ignatian Int. J. Multidiscip. Res.*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 701–708, 2023, doi: 10.17613/f705c-pgc75.
[40] D. B. Aberde Jr., M. G. P. Aracillo, L. S. Gadian, C. B. Serilo, and I. G. C. Balbon, "Practitioners' perspective in teaching GMRC in MATATAG curriculum," *United Int. J. Res. Technol.,* vol. 6, no. 6, pp. 98–106, 2025.
[41] O. K. Kilag et al., "MATATAG curriculum rollout: Understanding challenges for effective implementation," *Int. Multidiscip. J. Res. Innov. Sustain. Excellence*, vol. 1, no. 5, pp. 172–177, 2024, doi: 10.5281/zenodo.11183037.
[42] A. Arimoto, "Efforts to institutionalize active learning in Japanese Higher Education," *SAGE Open*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 1–11, 2016, doi: 10.1177/2158244016644948
[43] H. Ito, "The Demise of Active Learning Even Before Its Birth in Japan," *Educ. Inquiry*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 48–62, 2022, doi: 10.1080/20004508.2021.1880327
[44] D. Villasoto, "PROJECT ReCOUNT: Improving numeracy levels among KS2 learners in Lopez West District," *Psychol. Educ.: A Multidiscip. J.*, vol. 31, no. 7, pp. 794–798, 2024, doi: 10.5281/zenodo.14823754.