

Implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in Social Studies: Experiences, Challenges, and Pedagogical Adaptations of Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The MATATAG Curriculum—formally adopted through Department of Education Order No. 013, Series of 2023—represents the most significant revision to the Philippine basic education curriculum since the K-12 reform of 2013, introducing a substantially decongested content framework, restructured Araling Panlipunan scope and sequence, and a strengthened emphasis on foundational competencies and values formation across all grade levels. As MATATAG moved from policy into classroom practice during the 2024-2025 school year, teachers—particularly those in geographically isolated, resource-constrained, and disaster-affected regions such as Eastern Visayas—became the primary mediators of curriculum change, translating ambitious national policy intentions into the daily realities of their classrooms with limited preparation time, uneven professional development support, and instructional material shortages. This qualitative case study explored the experiences, challenges, and pedagogical adaptations of Social Studies teachers implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in Eastern Visayas public secondary schools. Informed by Fullan's (2007) theory of educational change, Ball et al.'s (2012) policy enactment framework, and Shulman's (1986) Pedagogical Content Knowledge construct, the study engaged eighteen (18) purposively selected Social Studies teachers from public secondary schools across the six provinces of Eastern Visayas through in-depth semi-structured interviews, lesson plan document analysis, and focus group discussions. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). Six core themes emerged: (1) navigating the MATATAG transition without adequate preparation; (2) decongestion experienced as liberation and loss simultaneously; (3) the Araling Panlipunan restructuring and its pedagogical implications; (4) resource misalignment between curriculum intent and classroom reality; (5) locally adaptive curriculum enactment strategies; and (6) the MATATAG curriculum and teacher professional identity reconstruction. Implications for curriculum implementation policy, teacher professional development, and Social Studies education in Eastern Visayas are discussed.

Keywords: MATATAG Curriculum, Social Studies education, Araling Panlipunan, curriculum implementation, Eastern Visayas, qualitative case study, curriculum change, pedagogical adaptation, teacher experiences, DepEd Order 013 s. 2023, Fullan, policy enactment

INTRODUCTION

On August 18, 2023, the Department of Education of the Philippines issued Department Order No. 013, Series of 2023, formally adopting the MATATAG K-10 Curriculum—a redesigned basic education curriculum developed in response to sustained critiques of the K-12 curriculum's content overload, the declining academic performance of Filipino students on national and international assessments, and the learning losses compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic (DepEd, 2023a). MATATAG—an acronym standing for "Making the curriculum relevant to produce better graduates, Addressing the learning gaps to accelerate students' performance, Taking steps to make the assessment relevant, Assuring the implementors are equipped in teaching, and Taking good care of the learners and teachers"—represents not merely a content revision but a philosophical reorientation of the Philippine basic education curriculum, emphasizing the development of foundational competencies (literacy, numeracy, and scientific thinking), values formation, and the reduction of subject-matter density to allow deeper, more meaningful engagement with essential concepts.

For Social Studies education—implemented through the Araling Panlipunan (AP) learning area across Grades 1-10 and through specialized Social Studies subjects at the Senior High School level—the MATATAG Curriculum introduced structural changes of considerable significance. The content scope of Araling Panlipunan was substantially decongested, with the previous curriculum's dense enumeration of historical facts, geographic data points, and social science concepts reduced in favor of a smaller set of essential understandings, disciplinary practices, and values-oriented learning outcomes. The Grade 4-6 Social Studies scope was restructured around Philippine regional and national history, while the secondary level AP scope maintained its world history and social science orientation but with significantly reduced content density. Most notably, the MATATAG Curriculum introduced an explicit emphasis on the teaching of Filipino values—including Makabayan (patriotism), Makatao (humaneness), Makakalikasan (ecological consciousness), and Maka-Diyos (faith and spirituality)—as integral dimensions of Social Studies learning rather than as separate subject-matter objectives.

The policy announcement of MATATAG and its phased classroom implementation—beginning with pilot schools in selected DepEd divisions during the 2023-2024 school year and expanding to broader rollout in 2024-2025—placed teachers at the epicenter of curriculum change under conditions of significant uncertainty and uneven preparation. The literature on curriculum implementation consistently demonstrates that the quality of classroom-level curriculum enactment is the primary determinant of whether curriculum reform achieves its intended educational outcomes (Fullan, 2007; Ball et al., 2012; McLaughlin, 1987). Teachers are not passive conduits for curriculum policy but active interpreters, adapters, and co-constructors of curriculum meaning—their existing professional knowledge, pedagogical beliefs, contextual constraints, and institutional support structures fundamentally shape what the curriculum becomes in practice.

In Eastern Visayas—a region comprising the provinces of Leyte, Samar, Eastern Samar, Northern Samar, Biliran, and Southern Leyte—the MATATAG implementation challenge is layered upon a regional educational context of well-documented complexity: persistent material resource constraints in public schools, limited access to curriculum-specific professional development, geographic isolation of many school communities, and an educational recovery process still incomplete from the dual disruptions of Super Typhoon Yolanda (2013) and the COVID-19 pandemic (DepEd RO VIII, 2024). Understanding how Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas are experiencing, navigating, and adapting to the MATATAG Curriculum—what it has changed for them, what challenges it has created, and what pedagogical strategies they are developing in response—is a question of urgent educational policy and research significance that this study directly addresses.

Aim of the Study

This study explored the experiences, challenges, and pedagogical adaptations of Social Studies teachers implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in Eastern Visayas, Philippines. Specifically, it addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum, and how do they understand the changes it has introduced to their teaching practice?
2. What specific challenges do Social Studies teachers encounter in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in the resource-constrained, geographically diverse schools of Eastern Visayas?
3. How have Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas adapted their pedagogical practices, lesson planning approaches, and assessment strategies in response to the MATATAG Curriculum's restructured content framework and competency emphases?
4. How do Social Studies teachers interpret and enact the MATATAG Curriculum's values formation dimension—particularly its Makabayan, Makatao, Makakalikasan, and Maka-Diyos emphases—within the specific socio-cultural context of Eastern Visayas communities?

5. What institutional, collegial, and personal resources do Social Studies teachers draw upon in navigating the MATATAG Curriculum implementation, and where do they identify critical gaps in support?
6. What implications do teacher experiences of MATATAG implementation hold for curriculum policy, professional development design, and instructional material provisioning in Eastern Visayas and comparable Philippine regional contexts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The MATATAG Curriculum: Policy Context and Social Studies Implications

The MATATAG Curriculum emerged from a series of policy diagnoses of the K-12 curriculum's limitations, most prominently the persistent decline of Filipino student performance on national and international assessments including the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM), and the National Achievement Test (NAT) (DepEd, 2023b; PSA, 2023). The 2018 PISA results—which placed the Philippines last or near-last among participating countries in reading, mathematics, and science—provided the most visible impetus for curriculum review, with policymakers identifying content overload, misalignment between curriculum aspirations and teacher capacity, and insufficient attention to foundational literacy and numeracy as contributing factors (DepEd, 2023b; World Bank, 2021).

The MATATAG response to these diagnoses in the Social Studies domain involved several structural changes of significance for teachers. First, the decongestion of Araling Panlipunan content: the previous curriculum's extensive enumeration of historical facts, geographic classifications, social science concepts, and cultural information was substantially reduced, with a smaller set of "enduring understandings" and disciplinary practices designated as the curriculum's essential core. Second, the reintegration of explicit values formation as an Araling Panlipunan learning outcome: while Filipino values were addressed in the previous curriculum through the separate *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao* (EsP) subject, MATATAG's Araling Panlipunan framework integrates values dimensions (particularly the four *Maka-* values) as explicit dimensions of Social Studies learning. Third, the restructuring of the Grade 4-6 AP scope around Philippine history and regional identity, making the local and national historical narrative more prominent in early secondary Social Studies preparation.

The academic literature on MATATAG is nascent—inevitably, given the curriculum's recent adoption—with the majority of available commentary consisting of policy analyses, DepEd-commissioned implementation reports, and initial teacher perception surveys rather than empirically rich qualitative studies. Sy and Bautista (2024) conducted a preliminary survey of teacher perceptions of MATATAG in Metro Manila schools, finding broadly positive attitudes toward decongestion but significant concerns about the adequacy of instructional materials and teacher preparation. Alcazar and Domingo (2024) documented early implementation challenges in Visayas Region VII schools, noting particular difficulties with the integration of values formation into subject-specific AP instruction and with the transition from the previous curriculum's competency listing format to MATATAG's more holistic competency framework. The present study contributes a specifically Eastern Visayas perspective to this emerging literature, adding both regional specificity and the depth of qualitative inquiry to a field currently dominated by survey-based approaches.

Curriculum Implementation Theory: Fullan, Ball, and the Teacher as Policy Enactor

The theoretical literature on curriculum implementation has undergone significant evolution since the first-generation fidelity models of the 1970s—which evaluated implementation quality by the degree of correspondence between classroom practice and curriculum prescription—toward more sophisticated understandings of implementation as a complex, adaptive, and professionally mediated process (Remillard, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Ball et al., 2012). Fullan's (2007) seminal framework established the importance of understanding implementation not as a technical delivery problem but as a human change problem: curriculum reform generates uncertainty, professional identity disruption, and emotional resistance in teachers not because

teachers are obstacles to change but because the change demands the reconstruction of established professional identities, knowledge structures, and relational patterns that teachers have invested significantly in developing.

The implementation dip that Fullan (2007) identifies as a near-universal feature of significant curriculum change is characterized by reduced teacher confidence, pedagogical experimentation, increased workload from lesson redesign, and a temporary decline in instructional fluency as teachers transition from the automatized practices of the previous curriculum to the still-developing practices of the new one. Understanding the implementation dip is crucial for supporting teachers through it constructively: administrators who misinterpret the implementation dip as evidence of teacher incompetence or resistance, rather than as a predictable feature of genuine pedagogical learning, risk generating the demoralization and passive resistance that produce superficial rather than genuine implementation.

Ball et al.'s (2012) policy enactment framework advances the implementation literature by foregrounding teacher agency in curriculum interpretation. Policy texts—including MATATAG's curriculum guides and competency frameworks—do not contain fixed, determinate meanings that are simply read off by teachers and deposited into classrooms; rather, teachers actively interpret these texts in relation to their own professional identities, their knowledge of their students, their understanding of the local educational context, and their assessment of what is pedagogically possible given the resources available to them. This interpretive process is shaped by what Ball et al. call the context of policy practice: the material conditions, professional cultures, social relations, and institutional histories within which teachers enact policy. For Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas, the context of policy practice—chronic resource constraint, geographic isolation, post-disaster educational recovery, the Waray-Waray cultural identity of their school communities—is substantially different from the context within which MATATAG was designed, creating systematic interpretive divergences between curriculum policy intent and classroom enactment reality.

Social Studies Curriculum Reform: Lessons from Philippine and International Experience

The history of Social Studies curriculum reform in the Philippines provides important contextual grounding for understanding MATATAG implementation. The K-12 curriculum reform of 2013—itsself a major structural change introducing Senior High School, the Academic Track strand system, and a revised Araling Panlipunan scope and sequence—generated implementation challenges strikingly parallel to those now emerging with MATATAG: teacher under-preparation, instructional material shortages, resource misalignment, and the difficulty of translating ambitious curriculum aspirations into coherent classroom practice (Talisayon et al., 2022; Tababa et al., 2019). Research on K-12 AP implementation documented that Social Studies teachers in resource-constrained schools routinely enacted the curriculum through a process of selective simplification—implementing the elements of the new curriculum most congruent with their existing PCK and most feasible given available resources, while effectively postponing or bypassing elements requiring resources, training, or pedagogical capacities they did not yet possess.

International research on Social Studies curriculum reform in comparable developing-country contexts provides additional analytical resources. In South Africa's post-apartheid curriculum reform process—which involved a restructuring of the Social Sciences learning area analogous in ambition to MATATAG's Araling Panlipunan restructuring—Jansen and Christie (1999) documented that teachers in under-resourced township schools enacted the new curriculum through what they termed a parallel curriculum: continuing to teach the previous curriculum's content using the new curriculum's language and format, producing a superficial compliance that satisfied administrative monitoring while leaving actual classroom practice largely unchanged. This parallel curriculum dynamic—compliance in form while continuation in substance—represents a predictable risk for MATATAG implementation in contexts like Eastern Visayas where teachers lack adequate preparation and resources for genuine curriculum change.

Research on teacher responses to curriculum change has consistently identified two patterns of adaptation that are relevant to the MATATAG context. Remillard's (2005) concept of curriculum-teacher interaction describes the dynamic, bidirectional relationship between curriculum materials and teacher knowledge: rather than determining teacher practice, curriculum materials provide resources that teachers interact with, interpret, and use selectively based on their professional knowledge, pedagogical beliefs, and contextual constraints. This

framework is particularly relevant for MATATAG, where the quality, availability, and contextual appropriateness of official instructional materials varies enormously across the implementation landscape. Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological framework for teacher agency in curriculum change provides a complementary lens, emphasizing that teacher agency in curriculum enactment is neither unlimited nor purely constrained but is shaped by the iterative interaction among teachers' professional history and dispositions, current contextual conditions (material, relational, and cultural), and future-oriented motivational commitments.

Social Studies Teaching in Eastern Visayas: The Regional Context

Social Studies teaching in Eastern Visayas occurs within a regional context that is distinctive in several educationally significant dimensions. The Waray-Waray cultural identity of the region—characterized by distinctive historical memory (the Leyte Gulf battles, the Balangiga Massacre, the tradition of Pulahan resistance), Waray oral literary traditions (balak, darangan epic poetry), and a communal solidarity culture shaped by recurring typhoon experience—provides a culturally rich context for the values formation and historical consciousness dimensions of the MATATAG AP curriculum. Teachers in the region possess cultural resources for contextualized Social Studies instruction—community histories, oral traditions, locally significant historical sites and events, living examples of bayanihan economic practice—that MATATAG's decongested, values-oriented framework could productively draw upon if teachers are supported in making these connections explicitly.

At the same time, the material conditions of Social Studies teaching in Eastern Visayas create implementation challenges that must be understood in their full specificity. The ongoing shortage of AP-specific instructional materials—textbooks, activity sheets, reference books, and supplementary materials—that has characterized Eastern Visayas schools since Typhoon Yolanda was not resolved by the K-12 reform and has been reactivated by MATATAG's new content framework, which requires new instructional materials that have not yet been widely distributed across the region (DepEd RO VIII, 2024). The region's geography—with dozens of municipalities accessible only by water transport, and schools in island and highland communities far from division-level professional development centers—creates structural barriers to the in-person training and collegial learning that effective curriculum implementation requires. These material and geographic conditions define the specific context of policy practice within which MATATAG enactment by Eastern Visayas Social Studies teachers must be understood.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study research design, following Yin's (2014) guidelines for descriptive and explanatory case study inquiry. Case study is the appropriate design for this investigation because the phenomenon of interest—MATATAG Curriculum implementation as experienced by Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas—is a contemporary, bounded, real-world case whose complexity requires multiple data sources, contextual depth, and interpretive analysis that quantitative approaches cannot provide (Yin, 2014; Merriam, 2009). The study constitutes a collective or multiple case study (Stake, 1995), in which multiple individual teacher cases are examined both in their individual specificity and in their collective patterns, generating a portrait of MATATAG implementation as experienced across the diversity of Eastern Visayas's public secondary Social Studies classrooms.

Within the case study design, thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) served as the primary analytical procedure. Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis—familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report—was employed as a rigorous, systematic, and transparent analytical framework that is well-suited to the case study's multiple-data-source structure and the study's exploratory-explanatory analytical goals. The study is grounded in a critical realist epistemological stance (Bhaskar, 1989), which acknowledges both the existence of an external social reality (MATATAG curriculum implementation as an actual, consequential process) and the mediation of access to that reality through interpretation, social meaning, and contextual embeddedness. This

epistemological position appropriately balances the study's commitment to understanding the actual experiences and challenges of MATATAG implementation with its recognition that these experiences are meaningfully constructed and contextually shaped rather than transparently observable.

Participants

Eighteen (18) Social Studies teachers participated in the study, selected through purposive sampling guided by the following criteria: (a) currently employed as a regular or permanent Social Studies teacher in a public secondary school in Eastern Visayas; (b) currently implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in Araling Panlipunan (Grades 7-10) as their primary teaching assignment; (c) having implemented the MATATAG Curriculum for at least one semester, providing sufficient implementation experience for meaningful reflection; (d) teaching in a school in Eastern Visayas at the time of data collection; and (e) willing to participate fully in all data collection activities. Sampling sought diversity across teaching experience (early-career to veteran), grade level assignment (Grades 7-10), school setting (urban, rural, coastal, island), and provincial distribution across the six provinces.

All participants are fully anonymized throughout this manuscript using the codes MT-01 through MT-18. No participant's name, specific school, exact grade level assignment, specific municipality, or identifying combination of professional details is disclosed. Aggregate demographic and professional information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Aggregate Demographic and Professional Profile of Participants (Anonymized)

Characteristic	Categories / Range	Frequency / Distribution
Participant Codes	MT-01 to MT-18	n = 18
Sex	Female / Male	11 Female; 7 Male
Teaching Experience	2–24 years	Mean = 10.2 years
Grade Level Assigned	Grades 7–10 (MATATAG AP)	Multiple grade levels: 10 participants; Single level: 8 participants
MATATAG Implementation Semester	1–3 semesters	1 semester (7); 2 semesters (8); 3 semesters (3)
School Setting	Urban / Rural / Coastal / Island	Urban (4); Rural (7); Coastal (5); Island (2)
Province Distribution	All six provinces	Leyte (6); Samar (4); E. Samar (3); N. Samar (2); Biliran (1); S. Leyte (2)
School Designation	Pilot / General Rollout	MATATAG Pilot (7); General Rollout (11)

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Overview of Findings

Thematic analysis of eighteen interview transcripts, two FGD recordings, and twelve lesson plan documents yielded six core themes that together constitute a comprehensive account of how Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas are experiencing, navigating, and adapting to MATATAG Curriculum implementation. Table 2 provides a thematic overview before each theme is elaborated through participant narratives, documentary evidence, and theoretical interpretation.

Table 2 Core Themes, Sub-themes, and Prevalence

No.	Core Theme	Sub-themes	Prevalence (n=18)
1	Navigating the MATATAG Transition Without Adequate Preparation	Abrupt curriculum change notification; Insufficient pre-implementation training; Self-directed curriculum decoding; Reliance on internet communities and unofficial guides	18/18 (100%)
2	Decongestion Experienced as Liberation and Loss Simultaneously	Relief from content overload; Grief over omitted content; Uncertainty about depth versus breadth; The 'essential versus nice-to-have' dilemma	18/18 (100%)
3	Araling Panlipunan Restructuring and Its Pedagogical Implications	Scope and sequence changes; Competency framework reorientation; New content demands; Disciplinary practice integration challenges	17/18 (94.4%)
4	Resource Misalignment Between Curriculum Intent and Classroom Reality	Absence of official MATATAG instructional materials; Teacher-produced substitute materials; Digital resource access inequity; Assessment tool development burden	18/18 (100%)
5	Locally Adaptive Curriculum Enactment Strategies	Community-contextualized MATATAG lessons; Waray cultural values integration; Typhoon Yolanda as MATATAG pedagogical case study; Peer resource sharing networks	16/18 (88.9%)
6	MATATAG and Teacher Professional Identity Reconstruction	Curriculum as identity disruption; Renegotiating teacher expertise; Emerging MATATAG practitioner identity; Renewed professional purpose through values formation	15/18 (83.3%)

Theme 1: Navigating the MATATAG Transition Without Adequate Preparation

Every one of the eighteen participants described the experience of receiving and beginning to implement the MATATAG Curriculum under conditions of inadequate preparation—a finding that is consistent across teaching experience levels, school settings, and provincial locations, suggesting a systemic rather than individual preparation deficit. The experience of inadequate preparation took several related forms: insufficient lead time between curriculum notification and classroom implementation, professional development that was too brief, too general, or too focused on policy rationale to provide practical classroom guidance, and the absence of official instructional materials aligned with the new curriculum framework at the time implementation was required.

MT-05, a teacher with eleven years of experience from a rural Leyte school, described the preparation experience with controlled frustration: "Naabiso kami na gagamitin namin ang MATATAG—pero ang training na natanggap namin ay isa o dalawang araw lamang. Isang araw para sa orientation tungkol sa curriculum, isang araw para sa lesson planning. Pagkatapos, umuwi kami—walang textbook, walang materials, walang konkreong halimbawa kung paano ito gawin sa aming mga klaseng Araling Panlipunan. Kailangan naming mag-imbento ng sarili naming paraan." (We were informed that we would use MATATAG—but the training we received was only one or two days. One day for orientation about the curriculum, one day for lesson planning. After that, we went home—without a textbook, without materials, without concrete examples of how to implement it in our Araling Panlipunan classes. We had to invent our own way.)

This participant's description—"kailangan naming mag-imbento ng sarili naming paraan" (we had to invent our own way)—was a formulation that, in various phrasings, recurred across participant narratives. The

improvised, self-directed character of MATATAG preparation that teachers in Eastern Visayas described is a textbook manifestation of what Fullan (2007) terms the implementation dip: a period of professional disorientation and heightened workload that results from the collision between the established automaticity of previous curriculum practice and the underdeveloped fluency demanded by the new curriculum's framework. The implementation dip is, in Fullan's analysis, a predictable and potentially productive phase of curriculum learning—but its productive potential is only realized when teachers receive adequate support through it; left unsupported, the implementation dip generates the kind of frustrated improvisation documented across this study's participants.

Participants' self-directed preparation strategies—pursued in the absence of adequate official support—included downloading unofficial MATATAG curriculum summaries shared through Facebook teacher groups, watching YouTube videos produced by fellow teachers explaining their MATATAG interpretation, joining Messenger group chats of Social Studies teachers sharing lesson plans and materials, and consulting MATATAG curriculum documents directly through the DepEd website. MT-10, from an island school in Eastern Samar, described Facebook teacher groups as her primary curriculum preparation resource: "Ang pinaka-malaking tulong sa akin ay hindi ang training ng DepEd—ito ay ang mga kasamahan kong guro sa Facebook. Nagbabahagi sila ng mga lesson plan, mga activity, mga paraan ng pag-interpret ng competencies. Kung wala sila, hindi ko alam kung saan magsisimula." (The biggest help to me was not the DepEd training—it was my fellow teachers on Facebook. They share lesson plans, activities, ways of interpreting competencies. Without them, I would not know where to start.) This reliance on informal, peer-constructed professional knowledge communities—rather than on official DepEd-provided preparation—represents both the resourcefulness of Eastern Visayas teachers and an indictment of the preparation infrastructure that official MATATAG implementation should have provided.

Theme 2: Decongestion Experienced as Liberation and Loss Simultaneously

All eighteen participants described the experience of MATATAG's content decongestion—the substantial reduction in the quantity of required Araling Panlipunan content—as a genuinely double-sided experience: a welcome liberation from the content overload of the previous K-12 curriculum's AP framework and, simultaneously, a grief-tinged sense of loss over historical content, cultural topics, and social science concepts that MATATAG's decongested framework no longer explicitly required. This simultaneity of relief and grief was experienced not as contradiction but as complexity—as evidence that the previous curriculum, despite its acknowledged overload, contained content that teachers valued and that they feared students would now miss.

MT-02, a veteran teacher with twenty-four years of experience from Samar, articulated the double-sided experience with nuance: "Masaya ako sa decongestion—totoo. Dati, ang dami naming tatakbuhan sa isang quarter at hindi namin ito nagagawa nang mabuti. Nagmamadali kami, nag-aaksaya ng mga paksa na dapat ay pinag-aralan nang mabuti. Ngayon, mas maraming oras para sa mas kaunting paksa—ito ay tamang direksyon. Pero may mga bagay na nawala rin—mga bahagi ng kasaysayan, mga detalye ng kultura na mahalaga sa pagkakakilanlan ng mga kabataan. Pakiramdam ko parang nilinis ang bahay—mas malinis ngayon, pero may ilang bagay na ibinigay ko sa labas na ninisipi ko ngayon." (I am happy about decongestion—truly. Before, we had so much to run through in a quarter and we could not do it well. We rushed, wasted topics that should have been studied well. Now, more time for fewer topics—this is the right direction. But things were also lost—parts of history, cultural details important to the identity of young people. I feel like the house was cleaned—it is cleaner now, but some things I gave away that I now miss.)

This participant's house-cleaning metaphor—"pakiramdam ko parang nilinis ang bahay" (I feel like the house was cleaned)—captures the essential phenomenological character of the decongestion experience with notable precision. The liberation of a decluttered professional space is real, and the relief participants expressed about having more instructional time to develop genuine conceptual depth rather than superficial content coverage was consistent and credible. At the same time, the grief over lost content is also real—and the specific content participants reported grieving reveals something important about their professional values and their understanding of Social Studies education's societal function: they mourned not the rote memorization requirements that curriculum overload generates but the substantive historical and cultural content that they believe is essential to students' identity formation, civic consciousness, and regional historical memory.

Several participants raised the specific concern that MATATAG's decongested AP framework had reduced the required coverage of Philippine regional and local history—particularly Visayan and Eastern Visayas historical content—in ways that threatened to further marginalize regional historical identity in the national curriculum. MT-16, from Eastern Samar, articulated this concern with evident passion: "Sa MATATAG, mas maraming pagkakataon para sa mas malalim na pag-aaral—ito ay maganda. Pero kung ang kinakailangan na paksa ay hindi naman nagsasama ng kasaysayan ng Balangiga, ng Leyte Gulf Landing, ng buhay ng mga Waray—kung iyon ay 'optional' na lang—paano nila malalaman kung sino sila? Ang decongestion ay dapat nag-alis ng hindi mahalaga, hindi ng makabuluhan." (In MATATAG, there is more opportunity for deeper learning—this is good. But if the required topics no longer include the history of Balangiga, the Leyte Gulf Landing, the lives of the Waray people—if those are now 'optional'—how will they know who they are? Decongestion should have removed the unimportant, not the meaningful.) This formulation—"ang decongestion ay dapat nag-alis ng hindi mahalaga, hindi ng makabuluhan" (decongestion should have removed the unimportant, not the meaningful)—represents a teacher's curriculum critique rooted in their PCK-grounded understanding of what Social Studies education in Eastern Visayas should accomplish.

Theme 3: Araling Panlipunan Restructuring and Its Pedagogical Implications

Seventeen of eighteen participants described encountering substantive pedagogical challenges arising from specific structural changes in the MATATAG Araling Panlipunan framework—changes in scope and sequence, competency format, disciplinary practice emphases, and the integration of values formation as an explicit AP learning dimension. These challenges were distinct from the general preparation and resource challenges documented in Themes 1 and 4: they were specifically about the pedagogical demands of the new curriculum's content architecture and competency framework, and they illuminated the specific PCK reconstruction that MATATAG required of teachers whose pedagogical repertoires were built around the previous curriculum's structure.

MT-08, a teacher with seven years of experience from a rural Northern Samar school, described the challenge of the MATATAG competency framework's reorientation: "Sa dati, malinaw ang listahan ng mga competencies—gawin ito, gawin iyon. Sa MATATAG, mas holistic—mas malawak ang competency, mas maraming interpretasyon. Sa una, hindi ko alam kung anong level ng depth ang kailangan, kung anong evidence ang nagpapatunay na natutunan na ng bata ang competency. Kailangan ko munang intindihin ang curriculum bago ko ito maturo, at hindi ito madali kapag walang tulong." (Before, the list of competencies was clear—do this, do that. In MATATAG, it is more holistic—the competency is broader, with more room for interpretation. At first, I did not know what depth was required, what evidence would confirm that the child had already learned the competency. I needed to understand the curriculum before I could teach it, and this is not easy without help.)

This participant's description of the MATATAG competency framework as simultaneously more interpretively open and more pedagogically demanding than its predecessor—"mas holistic" (more holistic) but requiring prior curriculum understanding before effective implementation—captures a widely shared experience of the transition from K-12's behaviorally specific competency listing to MATATAG's more integrative competency framework. From a PCK perspective (Shulman, 1986), the challenge is this: the previous curriculum's specific competency listings, while generating content overload, provided relatively clear pedagogical targets that teachers could operationalize into specific lesson activities and assessment criteria. MATATAG's more holistic competencies require a more sophisticated form of professional judgment—a capacity to interpret the competency's essential meaning, determine appropriate depth of coverage, and design pedagogically valid ways of evidencing competency achievement—a form of professional judgment that requires both deeper curriculum understanding and more sophisticated PCK than the previous curriculum's specificity demanded.

The integration of the four Maka- values (Makabayan, Makatao, Makakalikasan, Maka-Diyos) as explicit dimensions of AP learning generated what nine participants described as a positive pedagogical challenge—an invitation to make explicit the values formation dimensions of Social Studies instruction that had always been implicit but had rarely been systematically addressed. MT-13, from a coastal Leyte school, described the values integration as both demanding and intellectually energizing: "Noong K-12, tinuturo namin ang AP bilang akademikong paksa—history, geography, social science. Ngayon, sa MATATAG, kailangan naming i-

integrate ang pagpapahalaga—ang Makabayan, Makatao—bilang bahagi ng bawat aralin. Ito ay mas mahirap na gawin nang may coherence, pero mas makabuluhan rin. Nagtatanong na ako sa sarili ko: 'Anong halaga ang hinuhubog ng aral na ito?' Hindi lang 'Ano ang matututunan?' (In K-12, we taught AP as an academic subject—history, geography, social science. Now, in MATATAG, we need to integrate values—the Makabayan, Makatao—as part of every lesson. This is harder to do with coherence, but also more meaningful. I now ask myself: 'What value is this lesson forming?' Not just 'What will be learned?')

Theme 4: Resource Misalignment Between Curriculum Intent and Classroom Reality

All eighteen participants described a fundamental misalignment between the curriculum materials and resources assumed by MATATAG's implementation framework and the actual resource conditions of their schools in Eastern Visayas. This misalignment was experienced not as a temporary distribution delay but as a structural gap between curriculum policy design and regional educational reality that, if unaddressed, would systematically compromise the quality of MATATAG implementation throughout the region.

MT-01, from an island school in Biliran, described the materials gap with quiet clarity: "Ang MATATAG ay isang magandang curriculum sa papel. Pero sa aming paaralan, walang textbook pa—hindi pa nakakarating ang mga MATATAG materials. Kaya ang aking pagbabago ay 'curriculum change' sa pangalan lang—sa loob ng aking silid, pareho pa rin ang approach ko dahil walang bagong material na sumusuporta sa bagong approach. Gumagawa ako ng sarili kong worksheets mula sa internet, pero hindi lahat ng aming mag-aaral ay may internet sa bahay para sa research. Ang curriculum ay bago; ang aming katotohanan ay hindi." (MATATAG is a beautiful curriculum on paper. But in our school, there is still no textbook—the MATATAG materials have not yet arrived. So my change is 'curriculum change' in name only—inside my classroom, my approach is the same because there is no new material supporting a new approach. I make my own worksheets from the internet, but not all our students have internet at home for research. The curriculum is new; our reality is not.)

This participant's formulation—"ang curriculum ay bago; ang aming katotohanan ay hindi" (the curriculum is new; our reality is not)—encapsulates with striking concision the structural gap between MATATAG curriculum policy and Eastern Visayas classroom reality. From Ball et al.'s (2012) policy enactment perspective, the absence of MATATAG-aligned instructional materials fundamentally limits what teachers can enact from the new curriculum, creating exactly the conditions under which Jansen and Christie's (1999) parallel curriculum dynamic emerges: teachers use MATATAG language and format while continuing the substance of their previous practice, not from resistance to reform but from the structural impossibility of implementing a curriculum for which no supporting materials exist.

The teacher-produced material burden—the labor of creating MATATAG-aligned worksheets, activity sets, lesson plans, and assessment tools from scratch, in the absence of official materials—was described by all eighteen participants as their most significant time and energy cost of MATATAG implementation. MT-07, from a rural Samar school, estimated spending four to six hours per week creating MATATAG materials beyond their normal preparation time—time extracted from family life, rest, and professional development, and contributing materially to what several participants described as emerging MATATAG-related professional burnout. This teacher-produced material burden is not merely an individual inconvenience but a systemic policy failure: it represents the displacement of curriculum development costs from the institution that designed the curriculum (DepEd) to the individual teachers who were tasked with implementing it, without additional compensation, reduced workload, or extended preparation time.

The assessment design challenge was a specific dimension of resource misalignment described by thirteen participants. MATATAG's reorientation toward competency-based, formative assessment—replacing the previous curriculum's heavily summative, written examination emphasis—required teachers to develop new assessment tools (rubrics, performance tasks, observation checklists, portfolios) for which official DepEd models had not been widely distributed. MT-14 described the assessment design burden: "Palagi akong lumilikha ng bagong assessment tools. Sa dati, ang rubric ay ibinigay na—mga standardized forms mula sa division. Sa MATATAG, kailangan naming lumikha ng sariling tools, na aligned sa mga bagong competencies, na valid at reliable pa rin. Hindi ito training na natanggap ko—ginagawa ko ito nang mag-isa sa

gabi." (I am always creating new assessment tools. Before, the rubric was already given—standardized forms from the division. In MATATAG, we need to create our own tools, aligned with the new competencies, that are still valid and reliable. I did not receive training in this—I do this alone at night.)

Theme 5: Locally Adaptive Curriculum Enactment Strategies

Sixteen of eighteen participants described developing deliberate strategies for enacting the MATATAG Curriculum in ways that were locally adapted—specifically calibrated to the cultural, historical, material, and community contexts of Eastern Visayas—rather than following a generic national implementation template. These locally adaptive strategies represent the most instructionally productive dimension of the MATATAG implementation experience documented in this study: the active, creative, and culturally grounded form of policy enactment that Ball et al. (2012) describe as the best case of teacher curriculum interpretation.

MT-03, from a coastal Eastern Samar school, described using the Typhoon Yolanda experience as a MATATAG AP pedagogical case study for integrating the Makabayan and Makatao values: "Sa aking aralin tungkol sa kalamidad at lipunan, ginagamit ko ang Yolanda bilang case study. Hindi lang ito halimbawa ng natural disaster—ito ay aral ng bayanihan, ng katatagan, ng kapwa, ng pag-asa. Ang mga bata ay may personal na koneksyon dito—marami sa kanila ay ipinanganak pagkatapos ng Yolanda, ngunit ang kanilang mga pamilya ay nakaranas nito. Kapag tinuturo ko ang Makabayan at Makatao sa pamamagitan ng Yolanda, hindi ito abstract na pagpapahalaga—ito ay ang kasaysayan ng kanilang komunidad." (In my lesson about disaster and society, I use Yolanda as a case study. This is not just an example of a natural disaster—it is a lesson of bayanihan, resilience, kapwa, hope. The children have a personal connection to this—many of them were born after Yolanda, but their families experienced it. When I teach Makabayan and Makatao through Yolanda, these are not abstract values—they are the history of their community.)

This teacher's pedagogical deployment of Typhoon Yolanda as a MATATAG case study is a quintessential example of locally adaptive curriculum enactment: the teacher uses a curriculum framework (MATATAG's Makabayan and Makatao values) as a lens for examining a locally significant historical and community experience (Yolanda's impact and the community's response), producing an instructional encounter that is simultaneously curriculum-aligned, culturally relevant, and pedagogically powerful. This approach embodies precisely the form of curriculum enactment that Ball et al. (2012) theorize as policy enrichment—where teachers bring their contextual knowledge to bear on curriculum frameworks in ways that produce richer, more locally meaningful learning than the generic curriculum text alone would generate.

The integration of Waray-Waray cultural values into MATATAG's values formation framework was described by twelve participants as a natural and productive local adaptation. MT-09, from a rural Samar school, described connecting the Maka-Diyos dimension of MATATAG to local Waray spiritual traditions: "Ang Waray ay may malalim na pananampalataya—sa Diyos at sa komunidad. Kapag tinuturo ko ang Maka-Diyos sa MATATAG, hindi ko kailangan ang abstraktong halimbawa. Itinuturo ko ang mga pamana ng aming komunidad—ang mga prusisyon, ang pagdamay sa pag-aasawa at kamatayan, ang tiwala na 'kung ano ang ipag-aatubili ng Diyos ay mapapagaan ng komunidad.' Ito ang cultural na pagpapahalaga ng Waray, at ito ay perpektong akma sa Maka-Diyos ng MATATAG." (The Waray have a deep faith—in God and in community. When I teach Maka-Diyos in MATATAG, I do not need abstract examples. I teach the heritage of our community—the processions, the communal support in weddings and deaths, the trust that 'what God makes difficult, the community can lighten.' These are the Waray cultural values, and they fit perfectly with MATATAG's Maka-Diyos.)

Peer resource sharing networks—informal, teacher-organized communities of practice for sharing MATATAG materials, lesson plans, and implementation strategies—were developed independently by teachers across multiple provinces and were described by fourteen participants as their most practically valuable implementation support. These networks, operating primarily through Facebook groups, Messenger group chats, and WhatsApp communities, represent a form of grassroots professional development that teachers constructed in the absence of adequate official support—a pattern consistent with the literature on teacher-generated professional learning communities (Bryk et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Theme 6: MATATAG and Teacher Professional Identity Reconstruction

Fifteen of eighteen participants described the MATATAG implementation experience as generating a process of professional identity reconstruction—a period of disruption, uncertainty, and eventually reconstructed professional self-understanding that involved not only the adoption of new curriculum content and pedagogical strategies but a renegotiation of their fundamental self-concept as Social Studies teachers. This identity dimension of curriculum change—theorized by Fullan (2007) as among the most significant and least appreciated aspects of major curriculum reform—was expressed by participants in terms that revealed its emotional depth and its eventual potential for professional renewal.

MT-17, a teacher with fifteen years of experience from Leyte, described the professional identity disruption of MATATAG's early implementation phase: "Sa loob ng sampung taon, natutunan ko kung paano magturo ng AP nang maayos. Alam ko ang mga paksa, alam ko kung paano i-explain ang mga ito, alam ko ang mga tanong na maaaring itanong ng mga bata. Pagdating ng MATATAG, parang nagsimula ulit ako. Ang ilang bagay na matagal ko nang ginagawa ay hindi na angkop—o kailangan ng pagbabago. Naramdaman ko na ako ay isang baguhan muli. Hindi ito comfortable, pero naintindihan ko na mahalaga ito—na ang pag-aaral ay hindi nagtatapos kahit matagal ka nang nagtuturo." (For ten years, I learned how to teach AP well. I knew the topics, I knew how to explain them, I knew the questions the children might ask. When MATATAG came, it was as if I started again. Some things I had done for a long time were no longer appropriate—or needed to change. I felt like a beginner again. This is not comfortable, but I understood that it is important—that learning does not stop even when you have been teaching for a long time.)

This participant's description—"naramdaman ko na ako ay isang baguhan muli" (I felt like a beginner again)—captures the professional identity disruption dimension of the implementation dip that Fullan (2007) identifies as one of its most significant and underappreciated features. Experienced teachers who have developed well-functioning professional identities around established curriculum knowledge and pedagogical fluency experience major curriculum change as a form of expert de-skilling: the established competencies that constituted their professional identity are suddenly rendered partially inadequate, requiring a return to the uncertainty and effortfulness of professional learning that beginning teachers experience—a return that is both humbling and, for those who navigate it productively, ultimately growth-generating.

The values formation dimension of MATATAG—the explicit emphasis on Makabayan, Makatao, Makakalikasan, and Maka-Diyos as AP learning outcomes—was described by twelve participants as the dimension most productive of positive professional identity reconstruction. Teachers who found genuine pedagogical traction in MATATAG's values formation framework described a renewed sense of professional purpose: the recognition that their Social Studies teaching is not merely content delivery but moral and civic formation—an insight that MATATAG's framework made explicit in ways that the previous curriculum's competency listing format obscured. MT-11 articulated this renewal: "Nagtuturo ako ng AP nang maraming taon, pero madalas ay nararamdaman ko na tagapaghatid lang ako ng impormasyon. Sa MATATAG, naintindihan ko na ang aking trabaho ay hindi lang magturo ng kasaysayan—ito ay humubog ng isang mamamayan. Iyon ang nagbago sa aking tingin sa aking sarili bilang guro." (I have taught AP for many years, but often I felt I was just a deliverer of information. In MATATAG, I understood that my job is not only to teach history—it is to form a citizen. That is what changed my view of myself as a teacher.)

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum in Eastern Visayas is marked by both significant challenges and strong teacher adaptability. Social Studies teachers continue to navigate curriculum reforms despite limited preparation, insufficient instructional resources, and increased professional demands. These conditions risk reducing implementation to procedural compliance rather than meaningful pedagogical transformation.

At the same time, teachers demonstrate considerable innovation by contextualizing MATATAG objectives through local histories, cultural traditions, and community experiences. Such adaptations enrich learning and highlight the value of culturally responsive Social Studies instruction. The curriculum's emphasis on values

formation also appears to foster renewed professional purpose among teachers, strengthening their commitment to educational and civic development.

Overall, the success of MATATAG implementation depends on sustained institutional support through adequate resources, continuous professional development, and recognition of teachers' contextualized practices. Strengthening these areas will help translate curriculum goals into meaningful classroom outcomes and support the long-term realization of MATATAG's educational vision.

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