Lived Experiences of School Administrators in Implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in selected Inclusive Learning Communities

Fabiana P. Peñeda

PhD, Leyte Normal University – College of Education, fabiana.peneda@lnu.edu.ph

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ABSTRACT:
This study addresses the limited studies on the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum by exploring the lived experiences of school administrators in selected inclusive learning communities. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, it determined how school practices, stakeholder involvement, and policy structures influenced administrators' experiences and aligned with SDG 4 that ensure inclusive and equitable quality education. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected administrators directly involved in curriculum implementation during School Year 2025–2026. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method. Findings revealed four major themes: Inconsistent Training Preparedness, Collaborative Implementation Success, Insufficient Learning Resources, and Gradual Teacher Mastery. Administrators encountered challenges such as delayed implementation, resource alignment issues, teacher capacity gaps, and instructional time constraints. They responded through classroom monitoring, resource mobilization, collaborative professional development, and stakeholder partnership support. The study highlights that curriculum implementation requires coordinated systems, ethical leadership, and sustained institutional support. It recommends timely resources, stronger capacity building, logistical assistance, unified policy guidance, and further research in other educational contexts.

Keywords: MATATAG Curriculum, School Administrators, Lived Experiences, Inclusive Learning Communities, Curriculum Implementation.

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine educational system continues to evolve to meet changing societal needs and global standards. In response, the Department of Education introduced the MATATAG Curriculum to strengthen foundational skills, streamline competencies, and better prepare Filipino learners for advanced education and lifelong learning. This reform aligns with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 16, which emphasize inclusive, equitable education,

strong governance, and effective leadership (United Nations, 2020).

Implementing this curriculum requires structural adjustments as well as the cultural sensitivity and ethical leadership of school administrators, who serve as the frontline in translating national reforms into local practice. This study focuses on administrators in a selected Inclusive Learning Community, a school setting that emphasizes equitable access and inclusion for all learners. In the Philippine context, administrators' roles are grounded in legal frameworks: the 1987 Philippine Constitution (Article XIV) mandates quality education; Republic Act 9155 empowers school heads in curriculum leadership; and Republic Act 10533 institutionalized the K to 12 Program, mandating reforms aligned with international standards. Recent issuances, including DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019, and the 2023 Matatag Curriculum Framework, reinforce administrators' responsibility to oversee streamlined competencies and ensure effective curriculum delivery in schools (Department of Education, 2023).

School administrators—whether as school heads, teachers-in-charge, or master teachers—play an important role in guiding an inclusive learning community through curricular transitions, ensuring teachers adapt effectively to new learning frameworks. In Region VIII, where limited resources and unique local contexts present challenges, administrators' leadership within this inclusive environment becomes even more critical. Examining their lived experiences during the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum in School Year 2025–2026 provides insights into how national reforms are enacted at the local level.

Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, this study conceptualizes administrators' experiences as shaped by multiple layers of influence: daily interactions with teachers and students (microsystem), local policies and government support (exosystem), and broader educational reforms such as the MATATAG Curriculum (macrosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 2013). This framework clarifies how administrators navigate the complexities of systemic reform within inclusive learning communities, referring to the selected schools in the study.

Recent literature underscores the importance of administrators in shaping educational outcomes. Bernardo et al. (2021) highlighted their role in contextualizing curriculum reforms in Philippine schools and principals' leadership styles directly affect teacher readiness. Internationally, Terekhin and Aurora (2025) noted that school leaders' experiences influence the successful translation of policy into practice. However, most Philippine studies focus on teachers' or students' perspectives, leaving limited attention to administrators' culturally and ethically grounded lived experiences (Rivera et al., 2025). This study addresses this gap by exploring how school leaders in a Region VIII inclusive learning community cope with and manage curriculum changes.

Challenges faced by administrators are well-documented. Resource constraints, inconsistent policy support, and communication gaps hinder implementation (Perez et al., 2025). This study is significant for multiple stakeholders. For administrators, it highlights strategies for balancing effective implementation with ethical, culturally responsive leadership. For teachers, it provides guidance for aligning classroom practices with policy and local norms. For policymakers and curriculum developers, it identifies support systems necessary for ethical, inclusive, and culturally sensitive implementation. Ultimately, the study grounds national reforms in the realities of those implementing them and supports the broader goal of strengthening Philippine education.

The study sought to answer the following research questions: (a). How do school administrators characterize their experiences in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in selected inclusive learning communities? (b). What challenges do school administrators face during implementation? (c). What coping mechanisms do administrators use to address these challenges? and (d). What support do administrators need to implement the MATATAG Curriculum effectively in selected inclusive learning community?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of school administrators implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in selected lnclusive Learning communities in Region VIII, Philippines (Iser, 2022). Phenomenology allowed the researcher to capture how administrators perceive, interpret, and respond to challenges while balancing policy mandates with cultural and ethical responsibilities. This approach provided rich narratives reflecting both practical experiences and the broader social, cultural, and ethical context of curriculum implementation.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected public schools in Region VIII, functioning as inclusive learning communities with diverse urban and rural contexts. These schools often face limited resources, logistical challenges, and varying community dynamics, which influence curriculum implementation. Focusing on this locale allowed the study to examine how administrators navigate real-world conditions while leading inclusive and equitable education reforms.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were ten (10) school administrators, including principals, teachers-in-charge, school heads, or master teachers directly involved in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in selected inclusive learning communities during School Year 2025–2026. They were selected through purposive sampling based on their active roles in curriculum leadership and willingness to participate in one-on-one interviews. Those without administrative functions, direct involvement in implementation, or willingness to participate were excluded, while the final number was determined through data saturation.

Research Instrument

The study used a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide to gather the lived experiences of school administrators in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in selected inclusive learning communities. The guide contained open-ended questions on their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and needed support during implementation. Interviews were conducted through Google Meet, Zoom, or Messenger, depending on the participants' preferred platform.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured approval from the school division office and school heads, then obtained informed consent from participants via an online Google Form detailing the study's purpose, procedures, and rights. One-on-one interviews were conducted through Google Meet, Zoom, or Messenger, lasting 30–40 minutes, with audio recording and field notes used to capture verbal and nonverbal data. All data were securely stored, maintaining confidentiality, and findings may be disseminated through research forums while preserving participants' privacy.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical standards, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect for participants' rights. The research protocol was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, and participants were free to withdraw or skip questions at any time without penalty. Pseudonyms and secure storage were used to protect identities, and participants received certificates of appreciation; results may be shared through academic presentations and summary reports.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method (Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021) to capture participants' lived experiences. Interviews were transcribed, coded for recurring ideas, and organized into categories refined into themes addressing administrators' experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and support needs. Member checking was conducted to validate interpretations, ensuring findings authentically reflected administrators' voices and their navigation of policy, cultural norms, and ethical responsibilities

in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in selected inclusive learning communities.

Trustworthiness

The researcher ensured trustworthiness through careful documentation, systematic coding, and member checking. These processes strengthened the credibility, dependability, and accuracy of the findings.

Reflexivity

The researcher practiced reflexivity by consciously setting aside personal experiences and assumptions to minimize bias. This helped ensure that the findings reflected the participants' actual lived experiences in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in selected inclusive learning communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the lived experiences of school administrators in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in selected inclusive learning communities in Region VIII, Philippines. It highlights the key themes that emerged from participants' narratives, focusing on their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and needed support. By connecting participants' voices with relevant literature, this section explains how administrators navigated the practical, cultural, and ethical demands of curriculum implementation.

Lived Experiences of School Administrators in Implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in Selected Inclusive Learning Communities

Theme 1: Inconsistent Training Preparedness

School administrators in selected inclusive learning communities reported varied experiences in their training for the MATATAG Curriculum. While some received clear, timely, and comprehensive orientations, others experienced delays, incomplete sessions, or conflicting information across training batches. These inconsistencies created feelings of unpreparedness and uncertainty, affecting their ability to guide teachers and support effective curriculum implementation. These findings align with Maxwell (2024), who emphasized that consistent capacity-building is essential for effective and culturally responsive curriculum implementation. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "Some teachers couldn't attend the Matatag training." (P4, L37)

Significant response 2: "Training batches had inconsistent interpretations." (P7, L37)

Significant response 3: "Short trainings made implementation difficult." (P5, L26)

Theme 2: Collaborative Implementation Success

Collaboration among school administrators, teachers, and stakeholders in selected inclusive learning communities contributed to the successful implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. Administrators shared that teamwork, shared responsibility, and mutual support helped maintain instructional quality despite limited resources and policy adjustments. This finding Bush and Glover (2021), who emphasized that collaborative school cultures strengthen instructional improvement and curriculum implementation. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "The success really came from the dedication of the teachers and stakeholders' support."

(P_1, L_{15-16})

Significant response 2: "The collaborative approach created a positive learning environment." (P_2, L_{19})

Significant response 3: "I did class observations and provided technical assistance." (P_4, L_{23-24})

Theme 3: Insufficient Learning Resources

School administrators in selected inclusive learning communities reported that the lack of adequate learning materials—such as textbooks, modules, and other instructional resources—posed a major challenge to implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. The unavailability of essential materials pressured schools to reproduce or improvise content, potentially affecting instructional consistency and quality. Hallinger et al. (2025) and Kennedy (2025) emphasize that timely and sufficient resources are critical for effective curriculum delivery. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "Most learning resources weren't available yet." (P_3, L_{20-21})

Significant response 2: "Books weren't ready, so teachers printed everything." (P_1, L_{33})

Significant response 3: "Limited resources made implementation difficult." (P_5, L_{25-26})

Significant response 4: "Struggles because learning resources weren't available immediately." (P_7, L_{29})

Theme 4: Gradual Teacher Mastery

School administrators in selected inclusive learning communities initially faced challenges in guiding teachers to unpack competencies and deliver lessons aligned with the MATATAG Curriculum. Through supervision, continuous practice, and structured exposure, teachers gradually developed confidence and competence in curriculum implementation. This supports Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which explains that mastery develops through practice, observation, and guided experience (Rumjaun & Narod, 2025), and Shvorin's (2024) view that professional competence grows through experience and contextual understanding.Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "Teachers eventually mastered the unpacking of competencies." (P6, L40)

Significant response 2: "Competencies were already unpacked."

(P3, L21)

Significant response 3: "It was burdensome at first, like any new curriculum." (P6, L27)

Challenges Encountered by School Administrators in Implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in Selected Inclusive Learning Communities

Theme 1: Delayed Curriculum Implementation

Administrators reported significant delays in the rollout of the MATATAG Curriculum, including late training sessions, overlapping schedules, and incomplete preparatory phases. These delays disrupted planning, teacher readiness, and lesson pacing, making it challenging to deliver the curriculum effectively. Soriano (2025) highlights that timely implementation is critical for instructional effectiveness, while Herman et al. (2022) note that delays compromise curriculum fidelity. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "The biggest challenges were the late implementation." (P_1, L_{32})

Significant response 2: "The implementation overlapped with other activities." (P_8, L_{67-66})

Theme 2: Resource Alignment Issues

Challenges in aligning resources with curriculum competencies emerged as a major barrier. Administrators reported outdated or incomplete materials, misaligned resources, and insufficient support tools. Salgado (2024) emphasizes that proper resource alignment is essential for effective instruction and it enhances teacher clarity, confidence, and quality. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "Books weren't ready; teachers printed everything." (P_1, L_{33})

Significant response 2: "We struggled with resource allocation." (P_2, L_{34})

Significant response 3: "Curriculum-resource alignment concerns." (P_5, L_{38})

Theme 3: Teacher Capacity Gaps

School administrators in selected inclusive learning communities reported uneven teacher readiness as a major challenge in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. Some teachers lacked training, struggled to unpack competencies, or interpreted curriculum guidelines inconsistently, affecting instructional delivery and student learning outcomes. Teacher competence is critical for successful curriculum implementation, and Perkins (2024) note that capacity gaps can undermine instructional quality and curriculum fidelity. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "Some teachers couldn't attend training." (P_4, L_{37})

Significant response 2: "There was confusion about how to correctly unpack competencies." (P_6, L_{40})

Significant response 3: "Teachers who attended different training batches had inconsistent interpretations." (P_7, L_{30})

Theme 4: Instructional Time Constraints

Administrators in selected inclusive learning communities reported insufficient instructional time as a major challenge in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum, limiting teachers' ability to cover all required competencies and address diverse learning needs. Limited contact time disrupted lesson pacing and reduced opportunities for differentiated instruction, which is critical for equitable learning outcomes. He et al. (2024) emphasizes the importance of adequate instructional time for effective curriculum delivery and that time shortages can weaken competency development. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "Time allotment per subject was not enough for essential content." (P_3, L_{36})

Significant response 2: "We struggled in addressing different learning styles was difficult." (P_2, L_{34})

School Administrators' Coping Mechanisms in Implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in Selected Inclusive Learning Communities

Theme 1: Enhanced Classroom Monitoring

Administrators in selected inclusive learning communities implemented enhanced classroom monitoring, intensifying observations, coaching, and technical assistance to support teachers during the MATATAG Curriculum rollout. This proactive supervision improved teaching quality, ensured curriculum fidelity, and allowed real-time problem-solving. Thessin and Louis (2019) note that consistent supervision strengthens instructional practices and feedback's role in professional growth. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "I monitored classes and provided technical help." (P_1, L_{42})

Significant response 2: "I did class observations and provided assistance." (P_4, $L_{23\text{-}24}$)

Theme 2: School Resource Mobilization

School administrators in selected inclusive learning communities demonstrated resourcefulness by creatively utilizing limited materials, procuring necessary equipment, and producing localized instructional resources to support the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. These strategies enabled schools to maintain continuity and quality of instruction despite material and logistical constraints. Bryan and Clegg (2019) emphasize that resourcefulness strengthens curriculum resilience, and effective leaders mobilize available resources strategically to overcome challenges. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "Teachers printed needed materials and used available resources." (P_1, $L_{42\text{-}43}$)

Significant response 2: "We purchased printers for learning materials." (P_3, L_{46})

Significant response 3: "We encouraged localized materials." (P_4, L_{47})

Theme 3: Collaborative Professional Development

School administrators in selected inclusive learning communities highlighted the importance of peer mentoring, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, and shared learning as strategies to support teachers during the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. Collaborative professional development enabled teachers to clarify curriculum guidelines, share instructional strategies, and improve lesson delivery, fostering both confidence and competence. Zhao (2024) emphasizes that collaborative learning is essential for professional growth and the value of cooperative leadership development in strengthening school-wide practices. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "We strengthened professional development." (P_2, L_{44})

Significant response 2: "Trained teachers assisted untrained colleagues." (P_4, L_{47})

Significant response 3: "We held continuous LAC sessions, ensured consistency." (P_6, L_{49})

Significant response 4: "Support from peers and continuous adaptation helped us." (P_5, L_{48})

Theme 4: Stakeholder Partnership Support

School administrators in selected inclusive learning communities recognized the vital role of parents, community partners, local government units, and other stakeholders in supporting the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. These partnerships provided essential resources, active involvement, and encouragement, enabling schools to address challenges and sustain effective instructional practices. Sahlin (2020) emphasizes that strong external partnerships enhance school initiatives and stakeholder support is critical for the success of educational reforms. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "We built community partnerships." (P_2, L_{44-45})

Significant response 2: "Stakeholder support helped with implementation." (P_1, L_{15-16})

Supports Needed by School Administrators to Improve the Implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum in Inclusive Learning Communities

Theme 1: Timely Material Provision

This theme highlights the support needed for early and complete distribution of textbooks, teacher guides, and other learning resources in selected inclusive learning communities to effectively implement the MATATAG Curriculum. Administrators noted that delays in providing materials disrupted lesson delivery, increased teacher workload, and affected instructional quality. Fasinro et al. (2024) emphasize that timely access to materials is essential for successful curriculum implementation, and the need for equitable resource provision to ensure all students receive the same learning opportunities. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "Immediate delivery of learning materials, especially books." (P_1, L_{51})

Significant response 2: "Timely distribution of teachers' guides and learning materials." (P_4, L_{55})

Significant response 3: "Many students don't have gadgets." (P_1, L_{52})

Theme 2: Strengthened Capacity Building

This theme highlights the support needed for additional training, workshops, and continuous professional development in selected inclusive learning communities to address gaps in understanding and implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. Administrators noted that ongoing capacity-building initiatives are essential for enhancing teacher guidance, curriculum supervision, and overall school leadership effectiveness. Sustained capacity building strengthens curriculum implementation and Nooruddin and Bhamani (2019) emphasize the importance of continuous learning for school leaders to ensure informed and adaptive decision-making. In Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "My teachers and I need enhanced training." (P_2, L_{52})

Significant response 2: "Our school needs continuous professional development." (P_5)

Significant response 3: "We need technical support to remain essential." (P_{10}, L_{84-85})

Theme 3: Financial and Logistical Support

This theme highlights the support needed for enhanced financial and logistical resources in selected inclusive learning communities to ensure the effective implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. School administrators emphasized the need for increased MOOE funds, printing facilities, instructional equipment, and infrastructure improvements to support curriculum delivery. Subowo et al. (2019) emphasize that institutional investment is vital for curriculum implementation wnr the importance of logistical support in strengthening instructional systems. Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "Our school needs additional MOOE, printers, bond papers, and computers." (P_3, L_{54})

Significant response 2: "Our school needs financial, technical, and logistical support." (P_6, L_{57})

Theme 4: Unified Policy Guidance

This theme highlights the support needed for clear, consistent, and standardized policy guidance in selected inclusive learning communities to improve the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. Administrators reported that inconsistent interpretations of policy directives caused confusion among school leaders and teachers, affecting instructional planning and curriculum fidelity. Leach (2024) emphasizes that coherent policies are essential for effective leadership and curriculum implementation and supports unified guidance in maintaining system-wide coherence. In Below are the participants' significant responses.

Significant response 1: "In our school, regular monitoring is needed." (P_2, L_{52})

Significant response 2: "We also need policy support." (P_5, L_{56})

Significant response 3: "Our school needs unified references for implementation." (P_9, L_{81-82})

The findings indicate that school administrators in Region VIII experienced both facilitating and challenging conditions while implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in selected inclusive learning communities. They encountered uneven training, delayed materials, limited resources, and teacher adjustment to new competencies. Despite these challenges, administrators sustained implementation through enhanced classroom monitoring, collaboration, resource mobilization, and continuous professional development. Stakeholder engagement with parents, community members, and local government units further supported culturally and ethically responsive leadership. Thus, the findings highlight the need for timely materials, stronger capacity building, financial and logistical support, and unified policy guidance to ensure consistent, equitable, and effective curriculum implementation.

Conclusions

Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the findings show that the lived experiences of school administrators in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in selected inclusive learning communities were shaped by interconnected school, policy, resource, and community factors. The themes revealed that administrators faced challenges such as inconsistent training, insufficient resources, delayed implementation, teacher capacity gaps, and instructional time constraints, but they responded through classroom monitoring, resource mobilization, collaborative professional development, and stakeholder partnership support. Overall, the study concludes that effective MATATAG Curriculum implementation requires coordinated support, timely resources, strengthened capacity building, financial and logistical assistance, and unified policy guidance to ensure equitable, culturally responsive, and ethically grounded learning in selected inclusive learning communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, training for school administrators and teachers in selected inclusive learning communities should be timely, consistent, and standardized. Schools should receive complete learning materials, stronger professional development, and adequate financial and logistical support. Stakeholders should continue supporting curriculum implementation, while future studies may include more schools, teachers, and learners to further examine the MATATAG Curriculum.

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Conflict of Interest

The researcher declares that there is no conflict of interest in the conduct of this study. All research procedures, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions were carried out objectively and independently.

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