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Teaching Mathematics under the Matatag curriculum: Challenges and strategies in the Philippine setting

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of Grade 7 Mathematics teachers in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum at Ilocos Norte National High School. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, data were gathered from twelve (12) teachers through open-ended online questionnaires and were analyzed thematically following Creswell's (2013) framework. Findings revealed three major categories of challenges—emotional, social, and physical-mental. Teachers experienced stress, workload pressure, fatigue, and limited resources as they adapted to new instructional expectations and pacing demands. They also faced difficulties in maintaining collaboration and communication among colleagues and parents. Despite these challenges, teachers exhibited strong resilience and professional commitment by employing coping strategies such as effective time management, collaborative lesson planning, contextualized instruction, and maintaining a positive mindset. These strategies reflect their adaptability and creativity in addressing curriculum changes. The study underscores that teacher well-being, continuous professional development, and institutional support are essential factors for successful reform. Strengthening these areas can empower teachers as key agents of change and ensure the effective and sustainable implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum in mathematics education.

Introduction

Mathematics is often described as the "language of logic" because it trains people to think critically, reason systematically, and solve problems in different aspects of life. It is more than numbers and formulas—it builds persistence, creativity, and analytical skills that learners carry beyond school (Anthony & Walshaw, 2018). Wittgenstein (1956) even called mathematics "a method of logic," showing its close connection to the way humans organize thought. This makes mathematics especially important in Grade 7, where students begin moving from basic arithmetic to abstract concepts that prepare them for higher learning.

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The Department of Education introduced the MATATAG Curriculum to resolve long-standing concerns in the K–12 program, including excessive content, limited skill mastery, and the learning gaps that emerged during the pandemic. Its rollout was guided by DepEd Memorandum No. 54, s. 2023, which initiated the pilot implementation, and further reinforced by DepEd Order No. 10, s. 2024, which provided policy guidelines for its nationwide adoption (DepEd, 2023; DepEd, 2024). With MATATAG, competencies were streamlined and foundational skills emphasized. For teachers, however, this meant more than new guides—it required rethinking lessons, adjusting assessments, and managing new expectations. As Reyes and Mendoza (2020) observed, reforms are never just about policy; they directly affect how teachers teach and how students learn.

At the heart of any reform are teachers. They are not only implementers but decision-makers who adapt lessons to their students' needs, often with limited resources. According to Fullan (2007), educational reforms become effective when teachers play an active role in shaping and adapting them to their context. In the Philippines, Caballero, Rivera, and Tabangcura (2025) showed that contextualized and differentiated strategies significantly improve student learning. These findings highlight that teacher creativity and adaptability are central to making MATATAG effective.

For Grade 7 mathematics teachers, the transition is especially challenging. At this level, students must strengthen number skills while being introduced to algebra, equations, geometry, and basic statistics. These topics form the foundation of higher mathematics, yet many learners enter with gaps from elementary school, making it difficult to cope with new lessons. Boaler (2022) noted that struggles at this stage often lead to long-term difficulties and math anxiety. Teachers are tasked with bridging these gaps while meeting MATATAG's goals.

While a growing number of studies have examined curriculum reforms and mathematics instruction in the Philippines, there remains a notable absence of research focusing specifically on the lived experiences of Grade 7 Mathematics teachers implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. Earlier works such as those by Tan (2016) and Bautista (2018) discussed teachers' challenges during the K to 12 reform and emphasized the benefits of contextualized and differentiated instruction, while OECD (2019) and Boaler (2022) presented international perspectives on curriculum change, teacher workload, and pedagogical innovation. More recent publications, including Ennoia-ASSTE Journal (2025) and All Multidisciplinary Journal (2024), explored lesson exemplars and instructional models aligned with MATATAG but limited their scope to evaluating materials and teaching approaches rather than teachers' real-life experiences. These studies contribute valuable insights into curriculum development and policy implementation; however, they do not examine the personal, emotional, social, and physical-mental challenges faced by mathematics teachers as they adapt to the MATATAG framework. This lack of qualitative, teacher-centered research leaves a gap in understanding how educators experience, interpret, and manage the realities of reform. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by documenting the lived experiences and coping strategies of Grade 7 Mathematics teachers as they implement the MATATAG Curriculum in a Philippine public-school setting.

This study gives voice to Grade 7 mathematics teachers as they navigate the changes brought by the MATATAG Curriculum. Their experiences show not just the challenges they face, but also the creative and practical strategies they use to help their students learn. As Oledan, Mercado, and Dizon (2025) pointed out, teachers' voices are essential in knowing whether reforms truly work in real classrooms. Through listening to these stories, this research hopes to shed light on how curriculum implementation can be improved and how mathematics instruction can become more meaningful and supportive for both Grade 7 students and Filipino learners as a whole.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to examine the challenges faced and strategies employed by Grade 7 Mathematics teachers in implementing the Matatag Curriculum. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges encountered by grade 7 Mathematics teachers in implementing the Matatag Curriculum?

2. What are the strategies employed by the grade 7 mathematics teachers in implementing the Matatag Curriculum?

Literature review

The purpose of this review is to situate the study within the broader body of knowledge on curriculum reforms, mathematics education, and teacher experiences. Specifically, it focuses on the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum in Grade 7 mathematics and the central role of teachers as both implementers and innovators. By reviewing relevant literature and studies, this section identifies existing challenges, highlights effective strategies, and provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how reforms translate into classroom realities. The review also underscores the gaps in current research, particularly in documenting the lived experiences of teachers, and emphasizes the importance of their voices in shaping meaningful and sustainable curriculum implementation.

Pedagogical theories

Mathematics instruction under the MATATAG Curriculum is anchored on well-established learning theories that recognize students as active participants in constructing knowledge. Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories (1970; 1978) both highlight that learning is an interactive and discovery-oriented process supported by guidance from others. In mathematics classrooms, these theories encourage teachers to go beyond rote memorization by promoting reasoning, exploration, and collaboration (Anthony & Walshaw, 2018). Hiebert and Grouws (2007) further argue that effective teaching requires a balance of conceptual understanding and procedural fluency.

In addition, the study draws on **Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory**, which highlights the social nature of learning. According to Vygotsky, learning occurs through interaction, collaboration, and communication with others within a cultural context. This theory emphasizes the teacher's role as a facilitator who guides students through shared problem-solving and cooperative learning experiences.

These principles are consistent with the MATATAG Curriculum's focus on learner-centered, contextualized, and collaborative approaches to instruction.

In the Philippine context, Bautista (2018) highlighted that contextualized approaches in mathematics education improved student comprehension and engagement, especially when teachers linked lessons to real-life experiences. Internationally, Boaler (2022) emphasized that growth-mindset-oriented pedagogies significantly reduced students' math anxiety and improved achievement over time.

Curriculum structure

The MATATAG Curriculum aims to simplify competencies and reorganize topics to make up for pandemic-related learning losses and reduce content overload (DepEd Order No. 10, s. 2024). At the Grade 7 level, this involves introducing learners to arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and statistics, which serve as foundations for higher mathematics. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that these concepts are sequenced and paced effectively to avoid overwhelming learners. Schmidt et al. (2017) emphasized that coherence and clarity in curriculum design are essential, while Boaler (2022) warned that poor scaffolding of content contributes to long-term struggles and math anxiety.

In the Philippine setting, Tan (2016) reported that teachers often faced difficulties adjusting to curriculum reforms due to time constraints, inadequate resources, and gaps in student readiness. Similarly, OECD (2019) found that teachers in many countries struggle to balance curriculum breadth with mastery, often leading to superficial coverage of topics.

21st-Century skills

Modern education demands that mathematics instruction develop not only computational ability but also 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and financial literacy (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The MATATAG Curriculum integrates these competencies by linking mathematics lessons to real-life contexts—for example, percentages to budgeting or statistics to decision-making. Saavedra and Opfer (2012) noted that embedding these skills in instruction strengthens resilience and adaptability among learners.

In the context of 21st-century education, **Trilling and Fadel (2009)** emphasized that teachers must cultivate adaptability, creativity, and problem-solving skills to prepare students for complex future challenges. Likewise, **Saavedra and Opfer (2012)** asserted that developing these skills among learners requires teachers to adopt reflective practices, innovate pedagogy, and engage in continuous professional learning. These perspectives align with the MATATAG Curriculum's goal of equipping teachers and learners with essential lifelong competencies.

In the Philippines, Bautista (2018) also found that contextualized and differentiated instruction fostered problem-solving skills and increased student engagement. Internationally, Ng (2019) described Singapore's model, where mathematics education emphasizes problem-solving and collaboration, while Sahlberg (2021) noted that Finland's reforms encouraged creativity and autonomy in mathematics classrooms.

Professional development

Curriculum reform cannot succeed without adequate teacher training and continuous professional development. Fullan (2007) emphasized that teachers should be active partners in implementing educational reforms, rather than simply following prescribed changes. Professional development equips teachers not only with updated strategies but also with deeper content knowledge. In mathematics, Ball, Thames, and Phelps (2008) stressed that teachers require subject-specific training to effectively teach complex concepts.

Likewise, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019) emphasized that the successful implementation of curriculum reforms depends on continuous professional collaboration and institutional support. OECD reported that teachers who engage in collegial learning communities are more likely to sustain innovation and adapt positively to change. This aligns with Fullan's (2007) view that reform sustainability requires shared ownership rather than mere compliance.

In the Philippines, DepEd (2023) reported through its MATATAG pilot implementation updates that while orientation seminars were conducted, many teachers expressed the need for sustained support and continuous capacity-building. Internationally, OECD (2019) similarly highlighted that fragmented and insufficient professional development remains a recurring barrier to successful curriculum implementation.

Practical challenges

Despite the promise of the MATATAG Curriculum, teachers continue to face numerous challenges in practice. These include large class sizes, heavy workloads, insufficient instructional materials, and limited teaching time (OECD, 2019). Boaler (2022) stressed that when teachers are overburdened, they often revert to traditional methods, reducing innovation and student engagement.

In the Philippine context, Tan (2016) found that teachers frequently encountered stress, lack of resources, and curriculum pacing issues during K to 12 reforms—challenges that remain relevant in the transition to MATATAG. Similarly, the DepEd (2023) pilot report revealed that teachers experienced difficulties in aligning instruction with new standards due to limited training and material support. Globally, the World Bank (2020) noted that reforms in developing countries often outpace system readiness, leaving teachers to cope with inadequate support structures.

The literature and studies reviewed reveal that curriculum reforms such as MATATAG are shaped by multiple dimensions—pedagogical theories, curriculum structure, integration of 21st-century skills, professional development, and practical challenges. Both local and international research consistently underscores that while reforms can strengthen learning foundations, their success depends largely on teachers' ability to adapt, innovate, and respond to classroom realities.

However, there remains a limited body of research focusing specifically on the voices of Grade 7 mathematics teachers who must simultaneously address foundational gaps and introduce abstract concepts under MATATAG. This gap highlights the importance of documenting their challenges and

strategies, providing insights into how reforms unfold in actual classroom settings. By amplifying teachers' lived experiences, this study aims to contribute to improving curriculum implementation and supporting more effective mathematics instruction in the Philippines.

Challenges in the implementation of grade 7 Matatag

The rollout of the MATATAG Curriculum in mathematics has introduced new directions in content and pedagogy, yet it has also surfaced a variety of implementation challenges. A DepEd guide highlights that the pacing of topics and limited instructional time present difficulties for teachers, particularly in Grade 7, where foundational skills must be reinforced alongside new competencies (DepEd, 2024). Teachers often struggle to balance the curriculum's breadth with the depth needed for mastery.

One significant challenge is the readiness of both teachers and learners. A recent study revealed that mathematics teachers experience time pressure and limited support systems, which affect their capacity to adapt teaching approaches (All Multidisciplinary Journal, 2024). Large class sizes, insufficient resources, and the need for contextualized materials also hinder effective instruction (Ennoia-ASSTE, 2025). Moreover, emotional and mental stressors, such as high workload and continuous reforms, have been observed to impact teacher performance and well-being (Rise Journals, 2025). These findings underscore the systemic and classroom-level barriers teachers face in realizing the goals of MATATAG.

Similarly, the **World Bank (2020)** highlighted that during educational reforms, teachers often experience excessive workload and fatigue due to insufficient preparation time and a lack of resource support. The report noted that systemic transitions, such as the MATATAG Curriculum, must be accompanied by comprehensive teacher support programs to prevent burnout and ensure effective implementation.

Strategies in mathematics

Despite these challenges, mathematics teachers have demonstrated resilience by developing strategies that address both pedagogical and contextual demands. Differentiated instruction (DI) has emerged as a widely used approach, enabling teachers to accommodate diverse learner abilities and backgrounds. Studies confirm that DI enhances student engagement and achievement, especially in heterogeneous classrooms (GRDS Publishing, 2023; IJPDLL, 2023).

Other effective strategies include the use of contextualized and real-world applications, which link abstract mathematical concepts to learners' everyday experiences (IJISRT, 2025). Teachers have also adopted collaborative learning and group problem-solving activities to foster peer interaction and reduce math anxiety (Boaler, 2022). Innovations in lesson design, such as the FICS model of teaching mathematics within 45 minutes, have been proposed to maximize instructional efficiency under MATATAG's time constraints (All Multidisciplinary Journal, 2024).

Additionally, the development of inclusive teaching materials, such as validated worksheets for Grade 7 learners, demonstrates teachers' efforts to scaffold learning while addressing gaps (ResearchGate, 2025). These strategies highlight teachers' adaptability and creativity, aligning with Fullan's (2007) view that successful reforms rely heavily on teacher-driven innovation.

Research methodology

This chapter presents the research design, sources of data, which includes the locale of the study, population and sampling, data gathering instrument, and data analysis, including its ethical standards.

Research design

This study employed a **qualitative phenomenological approach**, which is appropriate for capturing the lived experiences of Grade 7 Mathematics teachers in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. Phenomenology focuses on describing and interpreting participants' subjective realities, emphasizing how they perceive, feel, and make meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). This design was chosen because it allows the exploration of both the **challenges**—emotional, social, physical, and mental—and the **strategies** that teachers employ to cope with these challenges while adapting to curriculum reforms.

Locale of the study

The study was conducted in Ilocos Norte National High School, a public secondary school where the MATATAG Curriculum has been rolled out for Grade 7 Mathematics. This locale was chosen because it represents a real setting in which teachers directly experience the effects of curriculum reform while addressing the diverse learning needs of junior high school students.

Population and sampling

The participants of this study were **a total of 12 Grade 7 Mathematics teachers who taught during the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum** in the identified school. This includes teachers who are currently handling Grade 7 Mathematics as well as those who have previously taught it under the MATATAG framework. The researcher employed **purposive sampling**, selecting participants based on their direct experience in teaching mathematics within the new curriculum (Van Manen, 2016). The number of 12 participants is consistent with phenomenological research, which prioritizes **depth of insight over breadth of generalization** (Creswell, 2013). This ensured a comprehensive exploration of individual and shared experiences of mathematics teachers in implementing the reform.

Data gathering instrument

The main research instrument was an open-ended phenomenological questionnaire, developed by the researcher to capture teachers' lived experiences. The questionnaire was anchored on the study's two main problems: (a) the challenges teachers faced in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum, and (b) the strategies they employed to overcome these challenges. Each main question was further broken down into sub-questions addressing emotional, social, physical, and mental dimensions. The instrument underwent content validation by experts in education and research to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives.

Data gathering procedure

The data were collected through online interview questionnaires administered via Google Forms. Each form included an informed consent section, requiring participants to acknowledge their voluntary participation before proceeding to answer the questions.

The link to the questionnaire titled "Teachers' Voices: Experiences of Grade 7 Mathematics Teachers in the MATATAG Curriculum Implementation", along with the QR code, was distributed by the school head through official communication channels, such as school email groups or Messenger group chats. Participants were given two weeks to complete their responses at their convenience.

After the submission period, the researcher downloaded the collected data from Google Forms. The responses were automatically compiled in spreadsheet format for organization, and the qualitative responses were analyzed thematically following Creswell's (2013) framework, which involves reading, coding, and categorizing statements to identify emerging themes.

Ethical considerations

The study upheld strict ethical standards to protect the rights and privacy of all participants. Participation will be entirely voluntary, and respondents will have the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Informed consent will be obtained electronically through the first section of the online form, which will explain the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study. All responses will remain confidential and anonymous; personal identifiers will not be included in the reporting of results. Data will be stored securely in password-protected files and will be used solely for academic purposes. The researcher will respect the time, perspectives, and professional responsibilities of all participants throughout the research process. Furthermore, all related literature and references utilized in he study were properly cited and acknowledged to uphold academic honesty and plagiarism.

Results and discussion

This section presents the experiences of twelve (12) Grade 7 Mathematics teachers from Ilocos Norte National High School regarding the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. Data gathered from the online interview questionnaire were analyzed thematically, resulting in two overarching themes: (1) Challenges Encountered and (2) Strategies Employed. Each major theme includes emotional, social, physical, and mental aspects that reflect the teachers' lived experiences in adapting to the new curriculum.

Problem 1: What are the challenges encountered by grade 7 Mathematics teachers in implementing the Matatag Curriculum?

Table 1. Teachers' challenges in implementing the Matatag curriculum

Themes	Category	Frequency
Theme 1: Emotional challenges	Job dissatisfaction	2
	Stress	9
	Fear of inadequacy	1
	Time-Pressured	1
	Pressured	2
Theme 2: Social challenges	Relationship with students and parents	4
	Relationship with students	3

	Collaboration with colleagues	3
	Collaboration with colleagues and parents	2
	Limited administrative and institutional support	1
Theme 3: Physical and mental challenges	Mental strain	3
	Fatigue	4
	Balancing responsibilities	6
	Workload	3
	Stress	3
	Finances	1
	Uncertainty	1
	Procrastination	1

Note. Data were gathered from open-ended questionnaire responses with twelve mathematics teachers from Ilocos Norte National High School, 2025.

Theme 1: Emotional challenges

This theme focuses on the emotional struggles encountered by Grade 7 Mathematics teachers in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. The most frequently cited emotions were stress, job dissatisfaction, fear of inadequacy, and pressure brought about by the sudden shift in curriculum design. Teachers expressed that the new curriculum, although streamlined, demanded intensive planning, adjustments in teaching strategies, and quick adaptation to new expectations.

"At the beginning of the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum, I was so stressed due to time constraints in the preparation of lessons and having no available materials on hand." (P2)

"I sometimes feel stressed and pressured to quickly adapt to the new changes, but I stay motivated by reminding myself that these adjustments aim to improve learning for my students." (P3)

Some teachers admitted feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration with how the curriculum was rolled out. They noted the mismatch between the intended design and the realities in the classroom.

"The MATATAG Curriculum is not fully followed or implemented due to a lack of resources and localization of the content." (P4)

Others shared emotional exhaustion and a sense of inadequacy: "During this transition period, I sometimes feel uncertain about my effectiveness as a teacher." (P8)

These sentiments echo the findings of Tan (2016) and DepEd (2024), who emphasized that time pressure and pacing issues remain persistent concerns in curriculum implementation. Likewise, Boaler (2022) noted that teachers often internalize these systemic pressures, leading to emotional strain and burnout.

"At first, I felt challenged and stressed adapting to the MATATAG Curriculum. Although the topics seem few, each contains many subtopics that require bridging learning gaps before moving forward." (P10)

"Honestly, I'm not happy with the implementation because the sequencing of topics feels disorderly, and the prerequisite concepts were not fully considered." (P12)

These experiences reinforce the idea that the emotional strain of curriculum change stems not only from instructional adjustments but also from teachers' desire to ensure learning continuity for students. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated persistence and commitment to their learners — reflecting what Fullan (2007) described as the *moral purpose of teaching* — the drive to continue educating despite uncertainty and emotional fatigue.

Theme 2: Social challenges

This theme highlights the social and interpersonal challenges encountered by Grade 7 Mathematics teachers in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. Teachers reported difficulties in maintaining effective communication and collaboration with students, parents, and colleagues. They expressed that while everyone is adapting to the curriculum, differing levels of understanding and expectations sometimes create gaps in cooperation and support.

"I sometimes find it challenging to maintain open communication and collaboration with colleagues and parents, especially when everyone is adjusting to the new system." (P3)

"Students with low support from their parents or experiencing family problems tend to affect their learning focus." (P4)

Several participants mentioned that while collaboration among teachers is ideal, practical barriers such as workload, time constraints, and scheduling conflicts make teamwork difficult.

"Working with colleagues can be tough because we're all adjusting at the same time." (P6)

Another shared, "It's hard to find time to plan together or share ideas since we have different schedules." (P7)

These challenges extend to relationships with parents. Some teachers shared that many parents remain unfamiliar with the MATATAG Curriculum, resulting in doubts and concerns about the new methods of assessment.

"Many parents are still adjusting to the changes brought by the MATATAG Curriculum, and some of them express worries or concerns about how their children are being taught." (P8)

Another explained, "It becomes challenging to explain these transitions to parents while also gaining their trust." (P9)

Other teachers also identified classroom management as a persistent social concern.

"Students are very hard to control because of the implementation of the child protection policy." (P11)

Such experiences are consistent with the findings of OECD (2019) and DepEd (2023), which stress that collaboration and communication are key elements of successful curriculum implementation. When teachers lack institutional support or shared planning time, reform efforts often lose coherence and momentum. Similarly, the All-Multidisciplinary Journal (2024) noted that the success of educational reforms depends on sustained collegial engagement and administrative backing.

Overall, the teachers' reflections reveal that social challenges during the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum stem largely from limited collaboration, communication gaps, and the struggle to align with community expectations. While these issues contribute to teacher stress, they also highlight the importance of a supportive and unified school culture where collaboration, mutual understanding, and shared accountability are sustained among teachers, parents, and administrators.

Theme 3: Physical and mental challenges

This theme focuses on the physical and mental difficulties faced by Grade 7 Mathematics teachers while implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. Teachers described feelings of fatigue, mental strain, and difficulty balancing their professional and personal responsibilities. The increased workload from lesson preparation, contextualized materials, and administrative tasks contributed significantly to their exhaustion.

"More often, it's the mental strain and fatigue that really affects my teaching. We cannot deny the fact that when we are tired, we cannot concentrate, and definitely the quality of teaching is affected. "(P1)

"I experience fatigue and mental strain from balancing heavy workloads and multiple responsibilities, which sometimes affect my focus and energy in teaching." (P3)

Others reported that unexpected events such as meetings, seminars, and interruptions disrupted their teaching flow.

"Balancing responsibilities—interruptions on teaching such as natural calamities, emergency meetings, and seminars during actual teaching may affect teaching outcomes." (P5)

Teachers also described the struggle of maintaining mental well-being: "Mentally, I feel stressed and pressured as I try to balance teaching, paperwork, and personal tasks. Some days can be overwhelming, but I remind myself to rest, stay positive, and focus on helping my students learn." (P7)

Some teachers, particularly those new to the profession, expressed self-doubt and uncertainty in fulfilling their multiple roles.

"As a novice teacher, there are days when my body feels tired even before class begins—not because I lack passion, but because responsibilities sometimes feel heavier than I expect." (P8)

Another added, "I sometimes question whether I'm doing enough or if my lessons are meaningful and aligned with the MATATAG Curriculum." (P9)

Others shared that the workload has affected their rest and well-being. "I'm not getting enough rest and sleep because of the many things I need to prepare, especially that I teach in both Grades 7 and 8 levels under the MATATAG Curriculum." (P12)

Another teacher mentioned, "Balancing responsibilities while managing mental strain is a challenge. I often struggle with time management, especially when trying to meet various teaching demands alongside personal tasks." (P10)

These findings align with Rise Journals (2025) and the World Bank (2020), which revealed that ongoing educational reforms often increase teacher workload and contribute to burnout when adequate institutional support is lacking. Similarly, Boaler (2022) found that continuous policy changes without sufficient preparation can diminish teacher creativity and mental well-being.

Overall, teachers' responses indicate that the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum has heightened both physical and mental stress. Despite these challenges, many continue to demonstrate resilience and adaptability. Their perseverance under demanding conditions highlights the need for stronger institutional support, manageable workloads, and well-being initiatives to ensure that teachers remain motivated and effective in delivering quality instruction.

Problem 2: What are the strategies employed by the grade 7 mathematics teachers in implementing the Matatag Curriculum?

Table 2. Teachers' strategies in implementing the Matatag curriculum

Themes	Category	Frequency
Theme 1: Emotional strategies	Maintaining passion for teaching	5
	Motivation- building	2
	Positive mindset	1
	Self-affirmation	1
	Stress management	1
	Talk it out with someone	2
	Organize	1
Theme 2: Social strategies	Strengthening teacher-student relationships	8
	Open communication	4
	Building collaboration with colleagues	3
	Foster a positive school environment	1
Theme 3:	Balancing time/ good time management	7

Physical and mental strategies	Managing workload	3
	Knowing priorities	1
	Maintaining well- being	3

Note. Data were gathered from open-ended questionnaire responses with twelve mathematics teachers from Ilocos Norte National High School, 2025.

Theme 1: Emotional strategies

This theme highlights the strategies used by Grade 7 Mathematics teachers to manage stress, maintain motivation, and stay emotionally resilient amid the demands of the MATATAG Curriculum. Teachers emphasized the importance of maintaining a positive outlook and remembering their passion for teaching as their primary coping mechanisms. Many shared that they keep themselves motivated by focusing on their students' progress and the purpose behind their work.

"I do love teaching from the very start, and so even if there are emotional challenges we face, my passion for teaching will always be the reason why I continue to give my best to my learners." (P1)

"To cope with emotional challenges, I manage stress by staying organized and setting small goals each day. I also make sure to rest and recharge by taking short breaks." (P6)

Other teachers manage stress through self-reflection and emotional support from others.

"I try to remind myself why I chose to teach in the first place. I take short pauses during busy days to breathe, pray, and realign my thoughts. Talking to trusted colleagues and my parents also helps lighten the burden." (P7)

"I maintain my passion for teaching by reminding myself that my effort directly impacts my students' learning. Thinking that if I don't teach my best, my students won't learn their best. This keeps me motivated and focused on my purpose." (P10)

These coping mechanisms align with Boaler (2022), who emphasized the significance of fostering a growth mindset among teachers to sustain motivation despite reform challenges. Likewise, Fullan (2007) described this as the *moral purpose of teaching*, where teachers' internal motivation drives them to persevere.

Overall, the strategies under this theme show that teachers rely on intrinsic motivation, self-care, and supportive relationships to overcome emotional strain. Their ability to find meaning in their profession helps sustain their dedication and resilience in the face of demanding curricular transitions.

Theme 2: Social strategies

This theme focuses on how teachers build and maintain positive relationships with students, parents, and colleagues while implementing the MATATAG Curriculum. Teachers recognized that collaboration and open communication are crucial for addressing social barriers and strengthening teamwork.

"I always see to it that my relationship with my students is strengthened not only inside but also outside the classroom." (P1)

"I address social challenges by maintaining open communication, collaborating with colleagues, and building stronger connections with students and parents through regular feedback and support." (P3)

Other teachers emphasized the importance of teamwork.

"To handle social challenges, I try to communicate and work well with my colleagues. We share ideas and help each other as we adjust to the MATATAG Curriculum." (P5)

"I try to build genuine connections with my colleagues by really listening to their ideas and being open to learning from them. I also make it a point to reach out to parents and students through simple yet meaningful gestures such as short conversations or messages of encouragement." (P7)

"Open communication is key. I regularly collaborate with fellow teachers, especially those with more experience, because I learn valuable strategies and insights from them." (P9)

These strategies reflect the importance of fostering a collaborative culture, as emphasized by OECD (2019) and DepEd (2023). Both highlight that professional collaboration and communication strengthen teachers' capacity to adapt effectively to reforms. Similarly, Bautista (2018) and Caballero et al. (2025) found that collegial relationships enhance teacher confidence and instructional quality.

Teachers actively engage in relationship-building and collaboration as a means to overcome social challenges. Through open communication and teamwork, they cultivate a positive teaching environment that promotes shared responsibility, mutual support, and stronger school-community partnerships.

Theme 3: Physical and mental strategies

This theme centers on teachers' strategies to manage workload, maintain well-being, and balance their professional and personal responsibilities. Many teachers recognized time management as their primary approach to coping with physical and mental strain.

"We need to have good time management to overcome physical and mental challenges." (P1)

"I manage physical and mental challenges by organizing my tasks, setting priorities, and taking short breaks to rest and recharge for better focus and well-being." (P3)

"To overcome physical and mental challenges, I try to manage my time wisely by setting priorities and creating a daily schedule. I also make sure to balance work and rest so I don't burn out." (P6)

"When I start to feel physically tired or mentally drained, I remind myself to take things one step at a time. I try to manage my workload by setting small, achievable goals instead of pushing myself to do everything all at once." (P8)

"Balancing time is very important, especially with the amount of work required in both teaching and administrative tasks." (P12)

These approaches mirror Trilling and Fadel (2009) and Saavedra and Opfer (2012), who emphasized that 21st-century educators must be adaptable, reflective, and capable of balancing multiple responsibilities effectively. By exercising time management and prioritization, teachers preserve their mental health and teaching quality despite the pressures of reform.

Teachers cope with physical and mental strain through effective time management, prioritization, and self-care practices. These adaptive behaviors demonstrate their resilience and professional maturity, underscoring the importance of institutional policies that promote teacher well-being and balanced workloads.

Conclusion

This part of the study brings together the voices and experiences of Grade 7 Mathematics teachers as they adapt to the MATATAG Curriculum. It highlights the everyday realities of teaching mathematics—the pressures, adjustments, and creative efforts teachers make to ensure that learning remains meaningful despite the many changes in the curriculum.

One of the major challenges identified is the emotional strain brought about by curriculum adjustments, high expectations, and limited preparation time. Teachers often experience stress, pressure, and self-doubt as they try to meet the demands of the new competencies while addressing students' learning gaps. Socially, they struggle with communication and collaboration among parents, students, and colleagues, especially when everyone is still learning to navigate the new system. Physical and mental challenges also persist as teachers balance lesson preparation, administrative tasks, and personal responsibilities.

Despite these difficulties, teachers continue to show resilience, professionalism, and deep commitment to their work. They manage emotional challenges through maintaining their passion for teaching, fostering a positive mindset, and finding motivation in their students' progress. They strengthen social relationships by keeping open communication and collaboration with colleagues, students, and parents. To cope with physical and mental strain, they practice effective time management, organization, and self-care to sustain their energy and productivity.

The findings of this study point to the need for stronger institutional and administrative support. Teachers expressed that consistent training, sufficient materials, and collaborative opportunities are essential to make the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum more effective and less burdensome. Their perseverance and adaptability reflect the moral purpose of teaching—continuing to serve and educate despite uncertainty and reform-related challenges.

In the end, the effectiveness of the MATATAG Curriculum depends less on its policy framework and more on how motivated, supported, and empowered teachers are to bring it to life in the classroom. Their experiences highlight that with proper guidance, collaboration, and care for their well-being, they can continue to deliver meaningful mathematics learning that builds students' understanding, confidence, and love for the subject.

Limitations of the study

This research focused solely on Grade 7 Mathematics teachers in one public high school, limiting the generalizability of its findings to other contexts or subject areas. The use of self-reported qualitative data may also have introduced subjectivity or bias in participants' responses. Furthermore, since the study was conducted during the early stages of MATATAG implementation, it captures only the initial phase of adaptation and not the long-term effects of the reform.

Recommendations for future research

Future studies may expand this inquiry by:

1. Including participants from multiple schools and regions to obtain broader perspectives.

2. Using mixed-method designs to integrate quantitative measures such as teacher stress levels, instructional effectiveness, and student performance.

3. Conducting longitudinal studies to explore how teachers' strategies evolve as the MATATAG Curriculum matures.

4. Examining administrative and policy-level supports that directly influence teacher adaptation and curriculum sustainability.

By exploring these dimensions, future research can contribute to more comprehensive policy recommendations and ensure that teachers are genuinely empowered as central agents of curriculum reform.

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