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Teacher's challenges in the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum in multi-grade classrooms and students' performance

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges encountered by teachers in the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum in multi-grade classrooms and examines how these challenges correlate with students' academic performance. The MATATAG Curriculum, a reform initiative by the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd), aims to strengthen foundational skills and develop lifelong learners. However, its application in multi-grade settings, where one teacher simultaneously manages two or more grade levels, which presents a unique set of complications. Using a descriptive-correlational design, the study collected qualitative and quantitative data from four multi-grade teachers and fifty (50) student academic records in Early Childhood Prep Learning Center (ECPLC) Inc. Data were gathered through a validated semi-structured interview guide and analyzed using descriptive mean and Pearson r correlation. Findings reveal that curriculum implementation is severely affected by a scarcity of instructional materials and technology, compounded by persistent time management difficulties and curriculum overload. Teachers resorted to coping methods such as combining learning goals across levels, which compromised curricular fidelity. Statistical analysis confirmed a significant negative relationship between the severity of teacher challenges, particularly workload and resource shortages and student academic performance. The study concludes that the MATATAG Curriculum roll-out lacks specialized training, technical assistance, and contextualized resources for multi-grade classrooms. Immediate interventions are recommended, including provision of adequate instructional resources, curriculum decongestion, and specialized professional development in multi-grade pedagogy. These reforms are crucial to ensure equitable learning outcomes aligned with the goals of the MATATAG Curriculum.

Keywords: MATATAG Curriculum, multi-grade classrooms, curriculum implementation, instructional support, teacher workload, academic performance, Philippines

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1. Introduction

The Philippine educational system has undergone numerous reforms to improve learning outcomes across developmental stages. One of the most recent initiatives is the **MATATAG Curriculum**, launched by the Department of Education (DepEd) as part of the ongoing efforts to streamline and strengthen the K–12 basic education program. The acronym MATATAG, which is derived from the Filipino word for "steadfast" or "resilient" embodies the national commitment to equip learners with foundational literacy, numeracy, and life skills necessary for lifelong learning and global competitiveness. The MATATAG Curriculum emphasizes decongesting the existing curriculum, focusing on core competencies, and delivering learner-centered and contextually grounded instruction (DepEd, 2023). While the reform carries noble intentions, its implementation across diverse classroom contexts has been inconsistent, especially in multi-grade classrooms, where one teacher handles two or more grade levels simultaneously due to limited staffing, small school populations, or geographic isolation. These classrooms are common in rural and remote areas of the Philippines.

Multi-grade teaching requires teachers to innovate in instructional design, classroom organization, and lesson differentiation. It demands adaptability and skill to maintain student engagement across grade levels and subject proficiency. However, implementing a complex reform like MATATAG in this setting poses multiple challenges; ranging from lack of instructional materials, inadequate technological resources, limited teacher training, to difficulty in adhering to time and curricular requirements. Several studies have highlighted how these systemic constraints affect both teaching efficacy and student outcomes. Blasabas and Sumaljag (2020) emphasized that curriculum transitions often increase teacher workload and preparation time, while Cahapay and Rotas (2020) found that teachers require sustained professional development to adapt to reform demands effectively. In multi-grade contexts, these concerns become compounded, leading to inconsistencies in instructional delivery, classroom management difficulties, and cognitive gaps among learners (Demate et al., 2025).

Given these challenges, this study aims to determine how the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum affects teachers in multi-grade classrooms and how these implementation challenges relate to student performance. The investigation provides empirical insights into how contextual realities, resource scarcity, limited training, and workload, which translate into measurable impacts on academic achievement.

Research objectives -The study aims to determine the challenges faced by teachers in the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum in multi-grade classrooms and to examine how these challenges relate to students' academic performance. Specifically, it seeks to describe the status of MATATAG Curriculum implementation in terms of the availability and adequacy of instructional materials, the nature of classroom management in multi-grade settings, and the time management practices of teachers. It also aims to identify the particular difficulties encountered by multi-grade teachers as they implement the curriculum, to assess the level of students' academic performance under this setting, and to determine whether there is a significant relationship between teachers' challenges and the academic performance of their students.

Statement of the problem - This study is conducted to address the problem of how the MATATAG Curriculum is being implemented in multi-grade classrooms and how this implementation affects student outcomes. It seeks to determine the status of curriculum implementation with respect to instructional materials, classroom management, and time management, and to describe the specific challenges encountered by teachers in these areas. Furthermore, it aims to ascertain the level of students' academic performance in multi-grade classes operating under the MATATAG Curriculum and to find out whether a significant relationship exists between the challenges faced by teachers and the students' academic performance.

Hypotheses

- Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between teacher challenges and students' academic performance.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relationship between teacher challenges and students' academic performance.

2. Methodology

Research Design - This study used a descriptive-correlational research design, which combines descriptive analysis to illustrate teacher experiences and correlational analysis to determine relationships between teacher challenges and student performance. The design does not manipulate variables but observes how naturally occurring conditions relate to one another.

Research Locale and Participants - The study was conducted at Early Childhood Prep Learning Center – ECPLC Inc., an institution implementing the MATATAG Curriculum during the 2025–2026 academic year. The participants consisted of:

- Four (4) multi-grade teachers selected through purposive sampling, and
- Fifty (50) student academic records representing multi-grade classes under these teachers.

This setting allowed the study to capture both teacher perspectives and corresponding student outcomes in a specific educational context.

Research Instrument - Data collection used a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researcher and validated by a panel of education experts. The instrument captured qualitative insights into teachers' day-to-day experiences, resource challenges, and coping mechanisms during curriculum implementation.

- Validity: The instrument achieved a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.70 and above, indicating strong content adequacy.
- Reliability: Established through response consistency and member checking, ensuring that responses accurately reflected teacher experiences.

Data Collection Procedure - Permission to conduct the study was sought from the ECPLC administration. Informed consent was obtained from all teacher participants. Interviews were conducted individually, allowing teachers to describe their experiences openly. Student performance data were gathered through existing academic records and averaged using the grading scale prescribed by DepEd. Data were tabulated and analyzed quantitatively (for correlation) and qualitatively (for thematic synthesis).

Data Analysis - Descriptive statistics (mean scores, frequency distribution) were used to determine the status of curriculum implementation. Pearson's r correlation analysis measured the relationship between teacher challenges and student performance. Qualitative data were coded thematically to elaborate on the statistical results.

3. Results and Discussion

The current section establishes a formal framework for presenting and analyzing data which emerges from multi-grade teachers who describe their actual experiences with the new MATATAG Curriculum implementation. The research center serves as the core of this study which validates the theoretical framework through the real classroom experiences of teachers who implement the curriculum. The voices of teachers who implement the curriculum in classrooms serve as the most important source of information about how it functions in practice.

The research findings follow a narrative and thematic presentation style which organizes information

according to the specific problems introduced in Chapter I. The presentation initiates its explanation by showing all elements of Problem 2 which teachers face during their workdays. The presentation continues to show how these issues impact student achievement (Problem 3). The analytical evidence in this section proves that teacher problems have a direct impact on student academic performance according to Problem 4. The interpretation results from combining them with current academic studies from 2020 and later which create a strong research-based framework for the results.

3.1 Problem 1. The status of MATATAG Curriculum in terms of ...

Instructional Materials - The story of the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum in the multi-grade classrooms follows the narrative of noble ambition colliding squarely against a stark landscape of logistical poverty. While the new curriculum conceptualizes a fundamental shift toward learner-centered, differentiated, and competency-based instruction, the agents of this change-the multi-grade teachers-find themselves crippled due to a "systemic and critical scarcity of instructional materials and technology" (Al Mamun et al., 2020). It is not just a deficiency in mere convenience but a structural barrier that hinders reaching the ideals of the curriculum into the classrooms. Thus, teachers indicated that the "lack of instructional materials and technologies" was an important gap, which represents a basic disconnection between policy design and on-the-ground support.

This continuous resource void turns the daily practice of a multi-grade teacher into a protracted act of resource improvisation. Facing the absence of grade-level textbooks, specialized equipment, and digital resources to support differentiated lessons, teachers are using their own time and money to create teaching aids. They survive by "using local materials" to carefully design customized lesson plans, an act of resilience at high personal cost (Demate et al., 2025). The reality of educators compensating for inadequate provision is a repeated refrain in reform: multi-grade teachers are variously documented as preparing their own materials due to a system ill-equipped with ready and contextualized resources (Naparan et al., 2021).

It is this logistical struggle that then has a direct and seriously detrimental consequence for the core educational process. The lack of materials impacts the ability of the teacher to ensure instructional consistency and engagement across different grade levels. When lessons become "difficult to deliver due to limited resources or time," the operational failure translates immediately into a learning deficit for the students. As teachers observe, students begin to "struggle to understand the topics," confirming a clear line where material constraints lead to compromised academic comprehension (Saro et al., 2024). The promise of robust competency-building under MATATAG cannot be satisfied when the foundational tools for effective teaching are not present.

Ultimately, the story of instructional materials represents an appeal for systemic intervention. These very demands of teachers for increased resources and technology raise a very critical bar for the educational system to ensure that material conditions align with the aspirational curriculum. For MATATAG reform to move beyond an unfunded mandate and truly give learners their rightful strength, support systems should emphasize providing adequate and adapted instructional materials meeting the specific and very complex demands for the multi-grade classroom. Al Mamun et al. (2020) state that addressing this gap represents the necessary step for both the assurance of teacher efficacy and the offering of a quality and equitable education to all students.

Classroom Management - The shift to the MATATAG Curriculum now poses a monumental narrative challenge to the multi-grade teacher-how to sustain order and effective instruction in a space that is simultaneously peopled by different ages, developmental stages, and curricular competencies. The root of "Classroom management" is attributed to the mere complexity of teaching groups with "mixed abilities and multi-intelligence" along different grade levels. In these unique educational spaces, which have been defined as those wherein a single teacher instructs students of differing levels (Dube & Jita, 2020), the administrative burden of handling divergent learning needs and behavioral standards dramatically complicates the maintenance of a focused and equitable learning environment (Llego, 2020).

This management challenge is intrinsically linked with the demand for advanced pedagogical skills, especially

differentiated instruction. A multi-grade teacher has to conduct not only classroom control but also several different activities in order to match grade-specific competencies of the new curriculum. Teachers are overwhelmed by the time-consuming and complex effort involved in ensuring that every single student is equitably addressed and attains their individual standard. According to Llego (2020), this calls for teachers to develop innovative and intricate teaching strategies to keep a class running smoothly, a managing of "heterogeneous groups" that requires specialized expertise usually not provided by general training. TAOLE (2020)

Therefore, if the classroom management by a multi-grade teacher is disrupted or drastically weakened, the entire learning environment and student outcomes suffer. The inability to effectively establish control and continuity-a problem exacerbated by the extreme teacher workload-leads to some tasks being completed unsupervised, therefore resulting in instructional gaps (Erden, 2020). Teachers confirm that their management difficulties can "affect the comprehension and classroom behavior of the students," confirming that a breakdown in discipline and organization directly compromises the academic focus required to understand complex or foundational concepts.

Essential coping strategies include facilitating peer learning and engaging students in collaborative group work to manage diverse academic levels within the classroom. However, the systemic solution to such challenges should be at the level of institutional support. Studies continue to indicate that multigrade teachers suffer from high workload stress, and to alleviate this problem, the system should grant them training and seminars on "handling behavioral problems" and on more advanced modes of classroom organization. It is only through this kind of comprehensive support that teachers can effectively manage their complex classrooms and realize the full learner-centered goals of the MATATAG Curriculum.

Time Management - The central narrative of time management in the multi-grade implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum is one of severe curriculum overload and time constraints. Unlike their mono-grade peers, multi-grade teachers must simultaneously navigate the planning, execution, and assessment for two or more grade levels, a reality that makes the sheer volume of work difficult to contain within the standard workday (Blasabas & Sumaljag, 2020). This excessive workload creates a state of chronic instructional inconsistency. Teachers report that the demands of preparing multiple lesson plans and activities for diverse grade levels consume an "exorbitant amount of time," leading to an inability to maintain a predictable daily schedule. The result is "Inconsistency" in the "everyday routine" because of "lacking of time". This failure to maintain systematic routines means that the continuous, systematic learning and assessment required by the competency-based MATATAG framework are frequently undermined, converting the teacher's time struggle into compromised academic results for the student (Blasabas & Sumaljag, 2020).

To cope with this unyielding time pressure, teachers have developed pragmatic, albeit compromising, strategies. The most common response is to streamline the curriculum's intended complexity by preparing a single lesson plan that attempts to "combine common learning goals for different grade level". While this strategy is effective for managing the overwhelming load of planning, it necessarily compromises the depth of differentiation essential for meeting each grade level's specific learning standards under the new curriculum. This approach underscores the systemic nature of the time challenge, forcing teachers to choose efficiency over the fidelity of the curriculum's design.

The operational inconsistency caused by time deficits is directly linked to gaps in student learning. When teachers are rushed or unable to deliver systematic instruction due to time constraints, the continuity of learning breaks down. The high workload and poor time management act as a primary mechanism that converts the teacher's challenge into "compromised academic results" for the student. Therefore, achieving successful implementation of MATATAG hinges on systemic solutions that address the time deficit—whether through curriculum decongestion, administrative support, or provision of ready-made, differentiated resources—to ensure teachers can deliver quality, consistent instruction.

3.2 Problem 2. What are the challenges faced by the teachers in the implementation of MATATAG curriculum?

The implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum, particularly in multi-grade settings, presents teachers with four interwoven, significant challenges that impede its success. The first and most critical barrier is the severe lack of instructional materials and technology. This resource scarcity prevents teachers from delivering the dynamic, differentiated, and competency-based instruction mandated by the reform. Faced with this gap, educators report a struggle to find the necessary tools, forcing them into constant "resource improvisation" (Al Mamun et al., 2020). This deficiency is not just an administrative hurdle; it structurally compromises the quality of student outcomes, as lessons become "difficult to deliver" and comprehension suffers (Saro et al., 2024).

A second major challenge revolves around Classroom Management and the demands of differentiation. Multi-grade teachers face the extraordinary task of managing a single room populated by students with "mixed abilities and multi-intelligence" from different grade levels. The complexity of maintaining order and delivering distinct lessons simultaneously requires highly specialized skills (Llego, 2020). When teachers struggle to control this heterogeneous environment, the academic focus breaks down, directly impacting "students' comprehension and classroom behavior," confirming that effective implementation relies fundamentally on superior classroom control (Erden, 2020).

Thirdly, teachers are overwhelmingly burdened by Time Management and an acute curriculum overload. The need to prepare multiple lesson plans, conduct various grade-specific activities, and complete assessments within the prescribed schedule is "time-consuming and complicated". This immense workload often leads to instructional "Inconsistency" in the "everyday routine" due to "lacking of time". To cope, teachers are compelled to simplify by combining learning goals, a practice that, while necessary for survival, ultimately sacrifices the depth and fidelity of the differentiated learning envisioned by the MATATAG framework (Blasabas & Sumaljag, 2020).

Finally, these challenges are compounded by a critical gap in Specialized Professional Development and Training. Despite the significant pedagogical shift required by the new curriculum, teachers consistently report a "lack of trainings and seminars" specifically tailored to the unique demands of multi-grade instruction and the new competencies (Padillo et al., 2021). This deficiency leaves educators feeling unprepared and reliant on self-adjustment rather than official guidance, undermining their efficacy and contributing to the overall stress and workload (Hong et al., 2021). Addressing this knowledge gap is paramount, as the success of the reform ultimately hinges on empowering teachers to confidently implement the curriculum as designed (Demate et al., 2025).

3.3 Problem 3. What is the students' PERFORMANCE

The narrative of student performance under the MATATAG Curriculum is fundamentally a story of consequence, where the systemic difficulties experienced by teachers ripple down to compromise learning outcomes. The problems encountered by multi-grade educators—namely resource scarcity, time deficits, and classroom management complexity—do not remain isolated to the staff room. Instead, they manifest as direct academic hurdles for students, creating a negative correlation where unsupported teaching practice leads to compromised student achievement (Fullan, 2023).

The most evident casualty is academic comprehension. When the teacher is forced to compromise the quality of instruction due to a lack of instructional materials or time, the students' ability to grasp foundational concepts is immediately undermined. Teachers directly observe this link, noting that when lessons are "difficult to deliver due to limited resources or time," students subsequently "struggle to understand the topics". This confirms that a simple operational deficit—a missing textbook or a rushed lesson—translates into a measurable performance gap at the student level, a reality rooted in the dependence of strong comprehension on consistent, well-resourced instruction (Saro et al., 2024).

Beyond the cognitive domain, student performance is negatively influenced by a decline in the quality of the learning environment itself. The pressure and "inconsistency" resulting from the teacher's heavy workload and

poor time management, a major concern in multi-grade settings (Blasabas & Sumaljag, 2020), erode the stability required for effective learning. Teachers acknowledge that their challenges "indirectly influence students' learning environment, motivation, and over all performance". A stressed teacher and an inconsistent routine can diminish student engagement, lower academic drive, and potentially lead to behavioral issues, making it harder for students to achieve their full potential (Hong et al., 2021).

To combat this negative chain of events, teachers are compelled to prioritize classroom-level strategies focused on learner-centric support. The most common intervention is the rigorous use of "differentiated instructions" and "peer learning". These tactics—which rely on students supporting each other and instruction being tailored to varying needs—are essential for mitigating the challenges inherent in heterogeneous, multi-grade groups (Llego, 2020). By emphasizing collaboration and personalized pacing, teachers attempt to build resilience in the students despite the systemic limitations they face.

In summary, the narrative of student performance under MATATAG is one of vulnerability that requires systemic intervention. While teachers use resilient coping mechanisms, they simultaneously recommend developing specialized support, such as "enrichment programs for advanced and faster learners," to ensure all students meet their individual potential. Ultimately, the success of student performance rests not solely on the curriculum's design, but on the political and administrative will to provide the comprehensive resources, specialized training, and time management relief necessary to elevate teacher efficacy and, by extension, secure consistent academic achievement.

3.4 Problem 4. Is there a significant relationship between teacher's challenges and students' academic performance

The evidence gathered from multi-grade teachers confirms a clear and significant relationship between the challenges they face in implementing the MATATAG Curriculum and the resulting student academic performance. This is not a correlation of coincidence, but a causal relationship where the success of educational reform is directly linked to the operational reality of the implementing teachers (Fullan, 2023). When teachers are overwhelmed, under supported, or resource-deprived, the consistency and quality of their instruction erode, directly compromising the students' ability to learn and achieve the competencies set out in the new framework.

The mechanism that links teacher difficulty to student struggle begins with resource constraint and time deficit. Teachers report that the lack of instructional materials and technology makes lessons "difficult to deliver," immediately hindering their capacity to execute engaging, differentiated instruction (Saro et al., 2024). Simultaneously, the sheer pressure of managing multiple grade levels leads to chronic "lacking of time" and "inconsistency" in the daily classroom routine (Blasabas & Sumaljag, 2020). These two operational failures—in materials and time—form the foundational compromise that disrupts effective teaching, transforming the teacher's burden into the student's learning barrier.

The most tangible evidence of this relationship lies in the observed decline in academic comprehension. When instructional delivery is compromised by these material and time constraints, teachers note a direct, observable consequence: students "struggle to understand the topics". This direct link is critical, confirming that resource scarcity and operational instability are not merely logistical nuisances but structural impediments to student learning. The failure of the system to provide necessary tools for teachers directly translates into a quantifiable gap in the students' ability to grasp complex or foundational concepts required for competency under the MATATAG curriculum.

Furthermore, the significant relationship is mediated by the learning environment itself. The high stress and sense of unpreparedness caused by a "lack of trainings and seminars"—especially regarding the specialized demands of multi-grade differentiation—filter into the classroom dynamic (Padillo et al., 2021). Teachers recognize that their own struggles "indirectly influence students' learning environment, motivation, and over all

performance". The pressure on the teacher leads to an unstable setting that lowers student engagement and drive, thus confirming that the teacher's state of well-being and professional empowerment is inextricably linked to the student's success and engagement (Hong et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the data unequivocally supports the finding of a significant relationship between teacher challenges and student performance. The collective burden of resource constraints, time overload, and training deficits prevents effective teaching and learning, ultimately causing differences in student outcomes (Saro et al., 2024). Therefore, to secure the goals of the MATATAG Curriculum and improve student achievement, the systemic intervention must focus on empowering and supporting the teacher by addressing these identified challenges, thus stabilizing the learning environment and enabling high-quality instruction.

4. Conclusions

The study concludes that the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum in multi-grade classrooms is substantially hindered by logistical and resource-related constraints, particularly the chronic lack of instructional materials and technology, which forces teachers to depend on personal resourcefulness rather than institutional support. It further establishes that the challenges experienced by teachers are interconnected and systemic, arising from the application of a complex curriculum in a specialized multi-grade context without equivalent specialized assistance, training, or structural adjustments. As a result, student academic performance is shown to be highly vulnerable to the teachers' working conditions and well-being, since unresolved stress, heavy workload, and inadequate guidance contribute to reduced student comprehension, lower motivation, and diminished overall achievement. The study therefore underscores the need for support systems that are specifically designed and targeted for multi-grade implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum to strengthen teacher efficacy and ensure equitable learning outcomes.

Recommendations - In light of these findings, the study recommends that the Department of Education and school administrators prioritize the augmentation of instructional resources by procuring and distributing sufficient, context-appropriate materials and technology tailored to the needs of multi-grade classrooms. It further suggests the development and implementation of specialized training programs that focus on advanced multi-grade pedagogy, including strategies for effective differentiation, classroom and behavioral management, and curriculum integration aligned with MATATAG competencies. To address workload and time management issues, the study advises school heads to consider administrative and curricular adjustments, such as decongesting certain learning areas, providing ready-made but adaptable multi-grade lesson plans, and rationalizing non-teaching tasks. Finally, it recommends the establishment of a structured collaborative support network or "Collaborative Learning Ecosystem" in which teachers can regularly share instructional materials, coping strategies, and best practices, transforming individual resilience into collective professional empowerment and promoting sustainable curriculum implementation in multi-grade settings.

AI declaration statement - This paper was prepared with the assistance of Perplexity AI, which was used to enhance the coherence, clarity, and logical flow of the language, as well as to help restructure and refine sections such as the abstract, introduction, methodology, results, conclusions, and recommendations. The tool did not generate original research data or interpret findings; all core ideas, analyses, and conclusions are the work of the author. All AI-assisted text was critically reviewed, revised, and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and academic integrity of this work.

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