Embracing the K-12 Curriculum: Accounts of Philippine Teachers and Students

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Abstract. The Department of Education of the Philippines has implemented the K-12 Curriculum to both elementary and high school levels of Basic Education starting the school year 2012-2013. Thus, we can infer that the current curriculum is still in its infancy stage. Along with this stage is the dynamic change in the perceptions, reactions, and realizations of different stakeholders towards the new curriculum. In this facet, the study has examined various accounts of in-service and pre-service teachers and students to gain an understanding of how they approach the modern educational system.

1. Introduction

The year 2012 marks the birth of the K-12 curriculum in the Philippines, after the passage of the Kindergarten Act and the Enhanced Basic Education Act in the same year [1] – [3]. The Department of Education (DepEd) uttered that K-12 “is the most comprehensive basic education reform initiative ever done in the country since the establishment of a public education system.” However, the implementation of the new curriculum has raised several challenges which rooted on the appreciation of the nature of the new curriculum, the additional costs to every family, and the readiness of facilities, infrastructures, instructional materials, and teaching personnel [4] – [6]. Such concerns were undeniable, and the government needs to examine the implementation of K-12 up to the classroom level to lessen curriculum mismatch.

A mismatch frequently happens between the intended, the implemented and the attained curriculum [7]. Policymakers prescribe the proposed curriculum. On the other hand, teachers carried out the implemented curriculum in their classrooms; the one learned by students is the attained curriculum [8] – [10]. Very often, teachers and students work on more limited goals than what was proposed [11], [12], a factor resulting in a mismatch. Other factors affecting curriculum change have been comprehensively discussed by [13] – [16]. [15] listed several of these factors and grouped into three categories: curricular, instructional, and organizational. These factors suggest that curriculum change is a complex process, and should take into account the teachers’ beliefs about the curriculum [17].
With [18], beliefs is considered a “messy construct” having diverse interpretations and meanings. [19] challenge the idea that teacher belief shapes how they perceive and interpret classroom interactions. Nevertheless, literature also pointed out several converging views relating to beliefs. In [20] – [24], belief is a collection of “conceptions, personal ideologies, worldviews and values that shape practice and orient knowledge.” Researchers in [25] – [28] reported that teaching beliefs dominate teachers’ reactions to and implementation of reform-based curricula. In this facet, the study has examined various accounts of in-service and pre-service teachers and students to gain an understanding of how they approach the new educational system.

2. Literature Review
A lot of studies have documented the connection between teacher beliefs and practice [20] – [22], [29] – [31]. Several of these studies also established that such connection appears to be in complex ways [21], [24], [30]. Besides, they explained how teacher beliefs strongly influence the overall nature of practice [22] and teacher's curriculum decision making [18], [32], [33], while it appears that in some cases instructional practice influences teacher's beliefs [34], [35]. Likewise, more than a few factors drives and facilitates the relationship between ideas and practices [21], [24], [36] – [39]. It is therefore evident that the teacher faces a series of barriers when trying to execute either their own beliefs or the ideas underpinning a particular curriculum change [17].

Teacher beliefs create a collection of explanations or goals that can justify a particular action [40]. Some teachers may challenge their assumptions and welcome the reform-based curriculum [25], but this could only happen through intensive professional development extended over time. Thus, having a relatively small set of elements in a teacher's belief system "may mislead prospective teachers into thinking that they know more about teaching than they do and make it harder for them to form new ideas and new habits of thought and action" [41]. With this, teacher candidates or preservice teachers shall form connections between what is possible and desirable in teaching to inform their learning and practice. This forming of relationships unites essential values and goals that will concretize classroom practices.

Teachers give high regards to student evaluation when contemplating the adaption of the new curriculum [42], [43]. Fortunately, in [44], students had admitted the need to engage in more academic rigors for them to be equipped for life’s challenges. Meanwhile, students’ participation in curriculum change allows them to take responsibility on matters that concern them [45]. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child legitimizes the right of the students to express their views. Conversely, [46] has noted problems relating to a lack of active student participation in the implementation of curriculum change. In this note, the study considered the views of the in-service and preservice [prospective] teachers, and students to understand how they are embracing the new curriculum.

3. Methodology
The study used a qualitative research design. The researchers invited the fourth-year preservice teachers majoring in Elementary Education and Secondary Education the University to answer a validated researcher-made questionnaire. The researchers also requested these preservice teachers to interview students and in-service teachers coming from different elementary and high schools in the city and province of Iloilo, the Philippines where they are undergoing their student internship. To inform the purpose of the interview, the researchers prepared a letter of intent. The preservice teachers conducted the interview sessions during the last month of their internship. They also utilized the validated
researcher-made questionnaire as a guide during the structured but informal interview of the in-service teachers and students.

All of the preservice teachers who responded to the invitation have completed their internship during any of the two semesters of the school year 2017-2018. Beforehand, these preservice teachers were assigned to different schools in the city and province of Iloilo, Philippines because of the existing Memorandum of Agreement of the University with the host school; in effect, these schools have appointed several cooperating teachers, which administered and directed the internship of the preservice teachers. The symbiotic relationship that was developed between these preservice teachers and their students and cooperating teachers during the time of placement becomes their perfect motivation in accessing the natural and earnest accounts of both the cooperating teachers and students towards the new curriculum.

The preservice teachers also seek approval of host schools before the conduct of interview to their teachers and students. Likewise, they also asked for the willingness of the interviewees before conversing with them. Equally important to consider is the careful observance of proper documentation in capturing evidence of such conversation. The process includes the taking of pictures of both the interviewers and interviewees, with consent from the latter. The latter was also asked to affirm their answers by affixing their signatures in any part of the document. Some interviewers brought audio recorders which the interviewees permit them to use. The preservice teachers consolidated and finalized the answers before they turn over the documents to the researchers.

The researchers then tabulated, coded the responses, and culled the keywords out of the given answers. The keywords were collated using a thematic approach in appreciating the answers. On the other hand, they also asked permissions to conduct classroom observations in some host schools. Such comments were made to verify the trueness in teachers' responses during the interview. In the classroom observation, teacher's actual pedagogy was compared with the lesson plan. Nevertheless, the researchers made it clear to the in-service teachers that such observations are kept with confidentiality, and neither a video recording nor a picture taking should happen.

4. Results and Discussions
One hundred eight (108) preservice teachers responded to the invitation of answering the questionnaire and all of them agreed to perform the interview of their cooperating teachers. These preservice teachers came from the three baccalaureate programs under the College of Education of the Iloilo Science and Technology University. About eighty-eight percent (88%) of them are female; the rest are male. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the preservice teacher-respondents. Nevertheless, the number of respondents coming from the three programs were significant with at least twenty-five percent (25%) from each program. The average age of the respondents ranges from twenty (20) to twenty-three (23) years old with a mean of about twenty-one (21) years old.

| Degree Program                        | Male (%) | Female (%) | Total (%) |
|---------------------------------------|----------|------------|-----------|
| Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Biology | 7 (6.5 %) | 31 (28.7 %) | 38 (35.2 %) |
Likewise, about twelve percent (12%) of the interviewed in-service teachers are male, and the rest are female. Table 2a shows this proportion. This proportion is similar to that of the preservice teachers as indicated in the previous table. Also, Table 2b shows that about sixty-five percent (65%) of the in-service teachers have around eleven (11) to thirty (30) years of teaching experience. Furthermore, these in-service teachers came from twenty-five (25) public elementary and high schools located in the city and province of Iloilo, the Philippines as presented in Table 2c. Also, Table 3 shows the profile of student-respondents interviewed by the preservice teachers.

### Table 2a. The demographic profile of the in-service teacher-respondents

| Male (%) | Female (%) | Total (%) |
|----------|------------|-----------|
| 10 (12.2 %) | 72 (87.8 %) | 82 (100.0 %) |

### Table 2b. Teaching experience of the in-service teachers

| No. of years | Frequency (%) |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1 - 10       | 20 (24.4 %)   |
| 11 - 20      | 30 (36.6 %)   |
| 21 - 30      | 23 (28.0 %)   |
| 31 - above   | 9 (11.0 %)    |
| Total        | 82 (100.0 %)  |

### Table 2c. School Profile of in-service teacher-respondents

| ES (%) | HS (%) | Total (%)
|--------|--------|----------|
| 9 (36%) | 16 (64%) | 25 (100%) |

### Table 3. Profile of student-respondents

| Male (%) | Female (%) | Total (%) |
|----------|------------|-----------|
| 26 (27.7%) | 68 (72.3%) | 94 (100%) |

When asked about the K-12 curriculum, the following were some of the responses:

**Question 1: How do you find the new curriculum?**

**In-service 1:** (nanibag-a) syempre 😊 I admit that I am now old for this new curriculum, but as a professional teacher, I must accept any changes because I know it is for the sake of my students...

With the knowledge, experience, and competencies, teachers are central to any curriculum improvement effort and are responsible for the curriculum in and outside of the classroom.
In-service 2: At first, I find the curriculum complicated and unsuitable for my set of learners. However, after attending several lectures, seminars and workshops, I understood the rationale behind this "BIG CHANGE" in Philippine Education.

Preservice 1: When I first heard of it, I thought it was just another burden to both learners and parents. But when I learned its mission, vision, and goals, I understood its benefits to the learners.

Student A: The K to 12 curricula is very diverse compared to the old curriculum. For me, the implementation was rushed that it results in an unprepared system of education. There's a lot of lacking such as learning materials and resources… Sadya man but challenging pero ga enjoy man kami keg demo man kami na learn…

Student B: I think the K to 12 curricula is essential… at first, I'm not in favor with this curriculum, but we should look at the positive outcome of the program… This will supply our needs and interest that will mold us to become globally competitive.

Question 2: When was the time that you think you have correctly implemented the K-12 curriculum? What have you done to enhance the implementation?

In-service 3: As a teacher, I must implement the curriculum in my classroom, careful planning, sticking to the plan, and effort such as when it comes to assessing my students and preparing my lessons every day… the time that I have correctly implemented the curriculum is that when I meet my goals for that day and to see my students applying what we have discussed… I do planning to enhance the implementation. Teachers know their students’ needs better than others; collaborate with others to identify the skills needed by students at each level… kinanlan mas magbilibay because the future sang students ang gina istoryahan.

In-service 4: It took us a while to understand and fully implement the new curriculum. There are changes and revisions. There are also flaws in the system especially in its first year of implementation. I think it took me two to three years to correctly implement the curriculum. Personal effort plus positive outlook counts in the changes brought about by the system; continue attending seminars related to the new curriculum, and seek professional growth by visiting graduate studies...

Teachers and students both agreed that the K-12 curriculum envisions to prepare students to quality life, though in the first few years the implementation is quite complicated and challenging. About eighty percent of them claimed that they have no choice but to execute the DepEd order. Nonetheless, understanding its mission and vision, and conservative planning influence teacher beliefs, thereby enhancing their decision making and implementation of the new curriculum. This conforms to the results of [18] and [25]. Likewise, in agreement with [45], students, parents, and the community shall actively participate in the curriculum change. Their proper awareness will help them realize and appreciate their roles for the realization of K-12 goals.

Question 3: What challenges/hurdles have you encountered while adapting the curriculum? How did you deal with these difficulties?

In-service 5: At first nabadlayan pa ko mag-intended if what does it mean kung ma implement and new curriculum and wala pako na anad… Of course, damo ang changes but as the time passes by I now fully embrace the new curriculum and I am starting to immerse myself into the curriculum. Of course, there are lots of challenges… Dealing with these problems, syempre by
taking it slowly but surely. *Dapat* as a teacher if there are changes you need to be more focus on your work…

Preservice 1: K to 12 is difficult because students easily forget the lessons. Also, the content of each unit and module of the books provided is not enough… I follow the mandated curriculum and think of its effects, the advantages and disadvantages of the new curriculum.

Preservice 2: The curriculum is quite challenging to both teachers and students because of lack of preparation, materials, and resources. We have to research to teach our students well. I follow the curriculum guide and embrace it wholeheartedly and do everything to cope up.

Student D: Not all schools already have their senior high school. The difficulty is the lack of facilities for classroom and other resources… Also, students need to find and apply at other schools… We don’t have a choice. The teachers need to educate us [kay ang iban sa amon wala man gyapon kaintindi] of what is K to 12 all about, the benefits and learning that can be acquired from this curriculum.

Student E: Ang iban nga books wala gina padala sa amon sa balay kay hambal sang amon nga teachers kulang ang books kag damo nga gamit, so sa school lang pwede mahulam ang book kag during lang sa time namon sa subjects nga na man mahulam ang books.

Student F: … regarding the new curriculum, we lack resources, a small learning environment, and unprepared student’s interest. I experienced difficulties in adapting to the new teaching strategies, activities, and arrangement of subjects. My simple participation in school programs can contribute to the implementation of the curriculum… I know that we are the participants of this curriculum, so our response and cooperation is critical.

The narratives of the teachers and students clearly showed the lack of materials and resources after several years of curriculum implementation. These accounts have verified the challenges that teachers and students are facing, which conforms to [4] – [6]. Similarly, their answers implied that there still existing in them a lot of misconceptions about the K-12 curriculum. Furthermore, they acknowledge the importance of their contribution and participation in the success of the new curriculum. To fully appreciate and realize the importance of this curriculum change, teachers, students, as well as the community, must have the appropriate knowledge and understanding. This knowledge and understanding enable them to participate in the proper implementation of the curriculum actively.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The K-12 curriculum envisions to produce graduates that are ready to take the challenges of today’s generation. The implementation of the K-12 curriculum, however, bring forth a lot of issues that the government needs to address. The narratives of teachers and students in this study have legitimized the existence of these issues. Nevertheless, a positive outlook in life, as well as careful planning, can help them deal with these challenges. Likewise, the proper awareness and understanding of the new curriculum will enable them to participate in the curriculum change actively. Also, it is worth mentioning that they self-recognized and accepted their roles in the said change. Indeed, teacher beliefs have significantly impacted the teaching practice and played a significant role in embracing the new educational system.
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