

Narrative Inquiry on English Teachers' Implementation of K-10 Curriculum in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the lived experiences of English teachers in a private educational institution in Negros Occidental, Philippines, as they implement the revised K-10 Curriculum. Using narrative inquiry and thematic analysis, the research highlights four central themes: a positive shift in perspective due to streamlined competencies; pedagogical burnout fueled by student learning gaps and increased demands; the mismatch between curriculum expectations and students' actual skills, especially in literacy and analysis; and the pressing need for a strong reading foundation in early education. Although the reduced curriculum content offers clarity and focus, teachers face persistent challenges in addressing literacy deficits and aligning instruction with students' readiness levels. The findings underscore the necessity for differentiated instruction, robust teacher support, and early literacy interventions. These insights inform policy and practice by emphasizing that effective curriculum reform requires both systemic support and recognition of teachers' agency and resilience in navigating educational change.

Keywords: K-10 Curriculum, Literacy, Curriculum Reform, English Teachers, Narrative Inquiry, Philippines.

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Introduction

The educational systems throughout the world have been significantly reformed in recent years to meet the demands of the 21st century. English teaching has become central to these changes as English proficiency is widely recognized as a key to global communication (Ashyralyyev et al., 2025), access to information (Harvey & Brazier, 2022), and economic opportunity (Hossain et al., 2025). Countries are trying to equip learners with critical competencies with the education policies increasingly stressing curriculum innovation, teacher development and learner-centred approaches.

The hunger to enhance English language education has been especially high throughout Asia. Many Asian countries have included English in their basic education curricula, seeing it as a means of international competitiveness and integration into global markets. Despite these reforms, teachers across the region still face numerous challenges

including lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms, and the need to balance local and global educational objectives (Heng et al., 2023; Fadilah et al., 2023; Sultana & Imran, 2024).

The recent major curriculum reform in the Philippines is the MATATAG Curriculum. This revised K-10 curriculum launched on August 10, 2023. Its goals are to reduce the workload of the K-12 program, focus on essential skills like language and math, and promote patriotism and good behavior. Phased implementation started in the school year 2024-2025. The aim is to prepare students for jobs and help them face future challenges. According to Sonny Angara, the Department of Education secretary, curriculum reform is not just a policy shift; it is a moral imperative (DepEd, 2025). Teachers are central to our national interest, and their excellence sets off a chain reaction that propels other reforms. However, according to Abduh et al. (2022), the change of curriculum often poses a challenge for English teachers, since they must modify approaches to a

student-centered or technologically integrated practice to accommodate new standards. The educational landscape in Negros Occidental, Philippines, especially in private educational institutions, is unique, as it is shaped by a mix of national mandates and local conditions.

The implementation of the K-10 English curriculum is complicated by the interaction of institutional expectations, student demographics, and community values. Such complexity has led to a closer examination of how English teachers in this context interpret, adapt, and enact curricular change in their daily practice.

Despite the significant body of research on curriculum implementation at the national and regional levels, there is still a lack of knowledge of the lived experiences of English teachers from private schools, particularly in Negros Occidental. Existing literature often ignores the complexities of the on-the-ground realities of the practitioner. In this study, we fill this gap by bringing to the fore the voices and narratives of teachers who work directly with the curriculum in their classrooms.

This narrative inquiry aims to explore and illuminate the lived experiences of English teachers in the implementation of the K-10 Curriculum in a private educational institution in Negros Occidental, Philippines. This study hopes to provide insights that can inform policy, practice and future research by capturing their stories, challenges and strategies to ultimately allow more effective curriculum implementation and teacher empowerment in similar contexts.

Methodology

Research Design. This study employed a qualitative research design with the narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry is described by Clandinin (2022) as a way of knowing experiences through the stories people tell. This method is particularly suitable for exploring how English teachers experience and interpret the K-10 curriculum reform in the Philippines, highlighting professional and personal dimensions of their journey. The research aims to shed light on the complexities, challenges, adaptations and insights that emerge as teachers implement the new curriculum by collecting and reviewing such stories.

Participants. This study was participated in by two English-7 teachers in the private educational institution in Negros Occidental, Philippines. Participant 1 is a male with 8 years of experience, a full-time teacher, and teaches 3 classes of English. Participant 2 is also a full-time teacher, and she has been teaching three English classes. Both participants provided rich, in-depth

accounts of their experiences, which are critical lenses to the nuanced realities of curriculum implementation. Instrument. To obtain authentic and detailed narratives from the participants, data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions such as, "What was your first thought or feeling when the new K-10 English curriculum was officially announced or introduced to your school?" and "Could you tell us about the first few months of K-10 English curriculum rollout?" This method allowed flexibility to the participants to describe their experiences in their own words, and at the same time, address the objectives of the research study.

Data Collection Procedure. Permission was obtained from school administrators before data collection. The participants were thoroughly oriented to the purpose and procedures of the study and provided informed consent. Interviews took place face-to-face in the school library and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants were invited to review their transcripts and provide clarifications or corrections (member-checking) to increase accuracy and authenticity.

Data Analysis. The stories were analyzed through Riessman's Thematic Analysis Framework (Kohler Riessman, 2000). This covered the following: understanding the context of each participant's story; recognizing recurring themes, patterns, metaphors, and emotional expressions in the narratives; contextualizing these themes within the participants' broader social, institutional, and cultural environments; and interpreting the resulting themes to construct a collective understanding of the teachers' experiences in relation to the research questions.

Data Trustworthiness. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's criteria. Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with participants and member-checking. The transferability was ensured by providing thick descriptions of the context and participants. Then, dependability was maintained via an audit trail documenting research decisions and processes. Lastly, confirmability was ensured through researcher reflexivity and peer debriefing, reducing personal bias.

Ethical Considerations. The research was carried out in strict adherence to ethical guidelines. Participants were informed of the purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and provided informed consent. The identity of the participants and the name of the institution were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. They were assured that all data would be used only for research purposes.

Result

This study analyzed participants' detailed experiences and observations to explore the key challenges they face as key implementers of the K-10 curriculum. Using the narrative inquiry and thematic analysis, four primary themes were identified, reflecting the participants' lived experiences and journey throughout the study: 1) positive shift in perspective; 2) pedagogical burnout; 3) mismatched curriculum demands; and 4) necessity of a strong reading base. Each theme is demonstrated from the participants' direct narratives, using pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Positive Shift in Perspective

During the initial phase of the K-10 curriculum implementation, teachers expressed optimism toward the streamlined reduction of overcrowded competencies, particularly in the English area. In interviews, participants viewed this as a "blend of emotions" for this expressed both the emphasis on specific competencies that would reduce content overload, and the challenge in adapting teaching methods to meet the diverse learning needs.

Shift from anxiety to relief

Participant 1 (P1), a regular employee of a private institution in Negros Occidental, recalled the confusion he initially felt about the implementation of the new curriculum. He said: *"I initially felt anxious about the implementation of the new curriculum because I had no clear idea about its content. However, I learned that some competencies were reduced by about 70%, and that only essential learning areas, such as language and literacy in the English subject, would be emphasized. That gave me a sense of relief and optimism, knowing that the focus would be on more meaningful competencies."*

The transition period inevitably creates uncertainty. With the reduction of competencies in English, participants can focus more and prioritize essential skills to improve students' learning and teaching outcomes. This was a sentiment expressed often.

The Importance of Clear Concepts

Teachers were expected to prepare lessons to ensure effective student learning. A clear focus on the subject matter allowed for well-designed lesson plans and the adaptation of strategies to meet individual learning needs. Participant 2 (P2) recalled when she attended the seminar on the K-10 implementation. She stated, *"Honestly, the K-10 update gives me mixed feelings. Excited as they trimmed down the congested learning competencies from 11,000 to 3,600. This significant streamlining provides clarity and focuses on designing our lesson plans. I think*

it's clear because we now have specific competencies to observe the vertical and horizontal spiraling of students' performance. However, adapting teaching strategies to implement this curriculum reform is what weighs heavily on me. It demands significant effort and energy to guide students who aren't yet prepared for the content introduced by this reform."

Reform in the curriculum is designed to better prepare students for the demands of the 21st-century workforce. Many countries have streamlined their curricula to focus on core competencies such as literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving. The Philippines reduced its curriculum content to give emphasis on skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and communication.

Pedagogical Burnout

A significant factor contributing to teacher exhaustion is not solely the adoption of new teaching strategies or the increased workload; instead, it stems from managing student frustration and learning difficulties. Teachers are often inspired and motivated by students actively engaged in class discussions, demonstrating a clear willingness to learn. However, what happens when teachers encounter the opposite scenario? This reflects the experiences of the participants as key agents in the K-10 curriculum implementation.

Students Preparedness

Learning deficits have been a persistent issue, particularly since the onset of the pandemic. The challenges students face are attributed to that period by parents and teachers. P1 described his experience after a few months of implementing the K-10 curriculum. He recounted: *"During my first month of teaching the new curriculum in English 7, I felt completely exhausted. I vividly remember presenting the first topic on the literary elements of poetry. After discussing it, and asked them, my students seemed blank, as in wala gid (nothing). Even though the elements were written on the board, they could not respond when asked to. Out of frustration, I pointed to the board and said, "class, I have written them here. You still don't know? You don't know how to read?" I was speechless, and the class fell silent for a minute."*

This has been the real challenge for us teachers as key drivers in implementing the curriculum. P2 shared the same observation, recalling a similar experience: *"The first few months of implementing the K-10 Curriculum have been exhausting, both in teaching and adapting the reform. I feel utterly drained not only by the demands of the new curriculum, but also by the realization that many of my students are struggling to grasp the materials. It's disheartening to see their confusion, and I often question*

whether the pace of this reform aligns with their readiness. The pressure intensified. After two weeks of discussions, I developed a fever and the flu, which I can only attribute to the physical and emotional toll of this translation.”

Mismatched Curriculum Demands

The new curriculum mandate aims to cultivate essential competencies in students that focus on skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and communication. These 21st-century skills are designed to prepare learners for global competitiveness. The Grade 7 English Language Arts focuses on developing students' abilities to analyze and compose poems or short stories to fulfill the objectives of K-10 curriculum reform. However, a significant need I observed is the lack of basic literacy skills for most of the grade 7 learners.

A Gap Exists Between Curriculum Demands and Students' Current Skills

Besides teaching English 7, the participants also teach 21st-century literature and creative writing. The competencies in these senior high school subjects are similar to those of grade 7 English, though presented differently. This is the common observation of the participants. P1 shared:

“I noticed that some learning competencies in Grade 12's 21st Century Literature subject overlap or are the same as those in English 7, but in a different approach, which shows how high the standards of the new curriculum are. It may be a way of preparing the students to be globally competitive. Ideally, the students should already know how to analyze a text since that is one of the essential competencies in English 7 under the new curriculum. However, to be honest, many students were not yet ready. When I reviewed their exam results, especially in poetry analysis, only one out of 42–45 students passed in 2 sections. On the brighter side, they performed well in identifying and classifying basic literary elements. This improvement may have been due to our constant review and recall of the lessons. Although their analytical skills were still developing, I felt that the K–10 curriculum encouraged me to focus more on comprehension and critical thinking.”

P2 had the same experience as she stated:

“The grade 7 English curriculum, under the K-10 program, seeks to develop students' skills in analyzing and creating texts. However, few students seem to perform these skills, suggesting that the curriculum's goals may not match their learning abilities. Additionally, the skills expected in Grade 7 are similar to those in grade 11 English competencies especially in creative writing subject. This indicates that the curriculum may have overly high expectations for grade 7 learners.”

Faced with this challenge, I found it necessary to modify my teaching methods and create activities focused on building foundational literacy skills.

The Necessity of a Strong Reading Base

Learning to read and reading to learn are distinct yet complementary skills. While learning to read focuses on decoding and understanding written text, reading to learn involves extracting knowledge and insights from what is read. By grade 7, students are expected to transition from primarily learning to read to using reading as a tool for acquiring new information. However, many grade 7 students struggle with this transition.

Boost Elementary Reading Skills to Ensure Secondary Success

One significant challenge that participants experience is the emotional toll of implementing the new curriculum mandate due to students' learning deficits, particularly in basic literacy skills. P1 recounted: *“Uhm! Siguro, it will be better pa gid if elementary schools, both in private and public will require every pupil to demonstrate foundational reading competency as a prerequisite for graduation. Also, the curriculum should be changed by adding a competency, especially in reading and comprehension. In that way, they will be ready for Junior High, meeting the competency of analyzing various contexts in Literature.”*

Beyond heartfelt dedication, teachers should prioritize equipping students with essential knowledge. To ensure students thoroughly understand each skill before moving on to more advanced topics, building a strong base for future learning. This the common sentiments that the participants shared.

The Need to Revive the “No Read No Move” Policy

P1 shared the disappointing experience with the students' poor reading skills: *“It is disheartening for us high school teachers to teach lessons knowing that almost half of our students are not prepared for the grade 7 material due to their weak reading and writing skills.”* P2 had a similar experience as she shared: *“I was also a product of the public school system. I vividly remembered during my elementary years, our teachers emphasized that we couldn't proceed to the next grade level unless we knew how to read. This was under the DECS era in the 1980s and 1990s with its “No Read No Move” policy. This policy will ultimately and effectively address the critical gaps in reading proficiency.”* This observation reflects a deeply felt need to formally acknowledge the ongoing national literacy crisis. A sentiment often expressed by the participants.

Discussion

The findings of this narrative inquiry explore the complex realities of English teachers as key implementers of the K-10 curriculum in the Philippines. Four primary themes emerged: positive shift in perspective, pedagogical burnout, mismatched curriculum demands, and the necessity of a strong reading base. These themes represent both the promise and the persistent challenges of curriculum reform. The results are in line with the recent literature and with relevant educational theories, which are further elaborated.

Positive Shift in Perspective

The optimism that the teachers in this study initially expressed after the competencies were streamlined is indicative of a major global trend in curriculum development known as curriculum rationalization (Burns, 2024). Globally, there has been a concerted effort to reduce curriculum overload so that teachers and students can spend more time focusing on key skills and concepts. This approach, as pointed out by Thornby et al. (2023) and the OECD's Education 2030 Framework (Taguma & Frid, 2024), makes the curriculum lean and emphasizes those competencies – critical thinking, communication, creativity and problem-solving – that are most important for learners to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

The participants appreciated the reduction in the number of competencies, especially in English, and felt a new sense of relief and purpose. The shift from a content-heavy curriculum to one that prioritizes depth over breadth enabled them to develop more purposeful, responsive lessons to student needs. This aligns with the principles of Fullan's (2007) Change Theory, which suggests that educational reforms are more likely to be successful when teachers have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and when the goals set before them are within reach and meaningful. Clear curriculum objectives make the transition easier when change occurs by reducing ambiguity and opposition.

Further, the emphasis on fewer, bigger competencies enabled teachers to concentrate more on student engagement and mastery rather than simply covering content. This aligns with recent research (Xu et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024; Banihashem et al., 2025) indicating that deep learning and skill development are optimally supported through targeted instruction and continuous formative assessment. Teachers in this study noted that the more focused curriculum gave them space to adapt teaching strategies, to better differentiate instruction, and to address students' diverse learning needs, all of which are needed for improved educational outcomes.

The positive shift in perspective is essentially a proof of concept that thoughtful and well-articulated curriculum changes can empower teachers to be more effective facilitators of learning and help students gain the skills needed for lifelong success.

Pedagogical Burnout

The K-10 curriculum reform gave rise to early optimism; however, teachers' narratives depict a continued struggle with pedagogical burnout as teachers struggle with students' persistent learning deficits and adapting to new instructional strategies. This is not a unique phenomenon in the Philippine context. Studies across various settings, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, have documented a sharp increase in teacher stress, fatigue, and attrition due to rapid changes in education and increased responsibilities (McKay et al., 2022; Devers et al., 2024; Creagh et al., 2025; Wang, 2025).

The participants in this study described how their excitement was soon tempered by the reality of students' lack of preparation, particularly in basic literacy skills. The challenge to close these gaps while at the same time learning and applying new curriculum approaches led to frustration, emotional drain, and reduced professional gratification. Burnout Theory, as defined by Maslach and Leiter (2016), is a chronic imbalance between job demands and the resources or support available to meet those demands. This imbalance is reflected in the teachers' lived experiences of fatigue, illness and self-doubt. The teachers found it difficult to reconcile the high expectations of the curriculum with the real readiness of their students.

Also, the emotional toll of watching students struggle can erode a teacher's sense of efficacy and motivation, which can contribute to burnout. Nevoenna et al. (2025) argue that ongoing professional support, mentoring, and collegial collaboration are critical in buffering the adverse effects of reform-induced stress. The findings of this study point to the urgent need for policy-makers and school leaders to offer continued professional development, psychosocial support, and realistic workload management for teachers. Without these supports, even the best-intentioned curriculum reforms risk undermining teacher well-being and, in turn, student outcomes. The long-term success and sustainability of educational innovation are critically dependent on providing tools and support to teachers.

Mismatched Curriculum Demands

This study points to a key challenge in the gap between the requirements of the new curriculum and students' real preparedness, especially concerning basic literacy and analytical abilities. Both participants noted a common observation that the competencies expected of Grade

7 learners, such as analyzing literary texts and writing original pieces, often presuppose a level of proficiency that many students have not yet attained. This disconnect leads to student disengagement, frustration, and ultimately the need for teachers to constantly adapt lesson plans and teaching strategies.

This result is highly consistent with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Lambright, 2024), which posits that optimal learning occurs when students are pushed just beyond their current capabilities and supported by scaffolding and guided instruction. As described by the participants, when curricular expectations exceed students' readiness, learners often have difficulty keeping up, and gains in critical skills can be limited. This is a concern that has been raised in more recent studies on curriculum implementation (Khelifi & Hamzaoui-elachachi, 2024; Poole & Li, 2025), which argue that one-size-fits-all reform efforts tend to overlook the diversity of students' backgrounds, prior knowledge, and learning paces.

In addition, de Almeida and Viana (2023) implied that curriculum designers sometimes do not take into account the great diversity of student abilities in real classrooms, particularly in socio-economically diverse contexts where there is unequal access to early education. This can lead to an unrealistic expectation, from both students and teachers who have to fill the gap, often with no resources or institutional support.

The findings of this study underscore the need for differentiated instruction and localized curriculum adaptation, methods that enable teachers to customize content and strategies to the specific needs of their students. By recognizing and addressing differences in learner readiness, educators can create more effective and inclusive learning environments. Teachers require continual training and flexible curricular guidelines to bridge the gap between curriculum intent and classroom reality. This will be the key to helping students move confidently and competently through the K-10 framework.

The Necessity of a Strong Reading Base

The participating teachers in this study are very vocal in their affirmation of the importance of building solid foundational reading skills at the elementary level. Both participants kept returning to the weak reading skills of incoming grade 7 students as the major obstacle to the successful implementation of the higher-order goals of the K-10 English curriculum, such as textual analysis and creative composition. This is not an isolated observation; decades of research in early literacy development point to it as a key predictor of later academic achievement and lifelong learning (Sucena et al., 2023; Erdogdu & Erdogdu, 2025).

The teachers' push for policies like "No Read, No Move," which requires students to show reading competency before promotion, is a practical approach to fight what Stanovich (2009) called the "Matthew Effect" in reading. This theory suggests that students who acquire strong reading skills at an early age are rewarded with cumulative advantages, while students who fall behind face compounding difficulties each year of school. The growing achievement gap is particularly worrisome in places where literacy instruction is not consistently reinforced or monitored in the early grades.

Furthermore, recent research in the Philippines (Ferolino, 2023; Abejuela et al., 2025; Reapor, 2026) underscores an ongoing national literacy crisis in which many elementary students are unable to attain grade-level reading standards. The implications for the secondary level impact directly on teachers who have to teach complex content to students who may not have yet mastered the basics of reading comprehension and fluency. As participants noted, this disconnect necessitates a great deal of time spent on remediating foundational skills, often to the detriment of engaging with higher-order curriculum outcomes.

The findings highlight the need for systemic measures such as early literacy screening, targeted reading programs, continuous teacher training and school-level policies that ensure every child can read proficiently before moving on to more advanced content. Ensuring foundational reading skills is not just an academic policy, but a prerequisite for equity, access and long-term effectiveness in the K-10 curriculum and beyond.

The experiences of English teachers implementing the K-10 curriculum are a mixture of optimism and challenge: while streamlined competencies offer focus and clarity, teachers are grappling with significant burnout from addressing long-standing student learning gaps and adjusting to new demands. The clear disconnect between the curriculum and student readiness, especially in literacy, underscores the importance of differentiated instruction and foundational reading interventions. Achieving a successful curriculum reform ultimately depends on the confluence of teacher support, tangible classroom strategies, and system-wide literacy development to close the policy-practice gap.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the complex realities confronting English teachers as they implement the K-10 curriculum in a private institution in Negros Occidental, demonstrating that educational reform is not just a technical adjustment but a profoundly human endeavor. The stories of optimism, fatigue and the ongoing struggle with student readiness point to a fundamental truth: successful curriculum

change is not only about clear policies or streamlined competencies, but about the lived experiences, resilience, and agency of teachers who enact these reforms. As their stories show, educational progress cannot be measured simply by new standards or assessment frameworks, but by the extent to which reform enables meaningful, equitable learning for all students.

Philosophically, these findings urge us to reconsider the very purpose and nature of curriculum reform. True transformation in education must engage both heart and mind – honoring the complexities of teaching, the diversity of learners, and the foundational importance of literacy as a vehicle for empowerment. These teachers' journey tells us that without strong support, authentic collaboration, and the humility to adjust to real classroom conditions, no policy is complete. In the end, the road to educational excellence is a collective, ever-changing journey that requires ongoing reflection, compassion, and dedication to equity at all levels.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have important implications for educational policy, practice and future research. Curriculum reform cannot be merely structural, but must include a sustained investment in teacher support, differentiated instruction and early literacy interventions to be successful. "Listening to teacher voices and lived experiences in decision-making processes is paramount to ensure that reforms are relevant and practical. Bridging the gap between the rhetoric of policy and the reality of the classroom, and leading to more equitable and meaningful learning outcomes for all students, will require addressing foundational literacy gaps and providing strong psychosocial and professional resources to teachers.

Limitations and Directions For Future Study

The study is limited to a small number of participants, that is, only two English teachers coming from one private institution in Negros Occidental. Thus, the results might not adequately reflect the varied experiences of teachers in the Philippines based on region, school type, or educational setting. Also, the narrative inquiry approach is based on self-reported experiences that may be subject to personal biases or selective memory.

Future research needs to be conducted with a larger and more diverse sample of teachers from various regions and school settings so that a wider range of experiences can be covered. It would be interesting to compare public and private institutions and also to do a quantitative study on the students' outcomes under the K-10 curriculum. Further research into effective literacy interventions and support

systems for teacher wellbeing would also be useful in informing policy and practice.

AI Use Disclosure

Artificial Intelligence (AI) was used solely for sentence refinement and grammar correction in the preparation of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the design, conduct, analysis, and interpretation of the study.

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