

**A comparative study of education systems across different countries and cultures:  
Emphasizing the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the similarities and differences among education systems across countries and cultures, with an emphasis on the Philippines' Enhanced K–12 Curriculum. Using a qualitative comparative approach, the research analyzes how global education systems such as those in the United States, Finland, Japan, South Korea, and Australia implement curriculum frameworks that promote 21st-century competencies, digital literacy, and global citizenship. Findings indicate that while the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum in the Philippines shares global goals of lifelong learning and holistic development, its implementation faces challenges related to equity, teacher training, and resource adequacy. The study concludes that successful educational reform depends on cultural relevance, consistent policy support, and the integration of global best practices within local contexts.

**Keywords:** Enhanced K–12 Curriculum, qualitative comparative approach, equity, teacher training, resource adequacy, data mining

Date Submitted: August 15, 2025  
Date Accepted: September 18, 2025  
Date Published: October 16, 2025

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0404525>

Recommended citation:

Padilla, K. J., & Galigao, R. P. (2025). A comparative study of education systems across different countries and cultures: Emphasizing the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum. *Pantao (The International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences)* 4 (4), 5684-5690. <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0404525>

## INTRODUCTION

The complex interaction of historical evolution, cultural beliefs, political priorities, and socio-economic realities shapes education systems worldwide. These factors affect how nations design curricula and define educational success. Some systems value creativity, social responsibility, and lifelong learning, while others value academic rigor and standardization. Comparative education helps educators and policymakers understand how educational systems change in response to globalization, technological advancement, and cultural change, according to Bray, Adamson, and Mason (2020). Researchers can find best practices, contextual challenges, and policy insights by studying how country's structure, implement, and assess their education systems.

One of the most comprehensive educational reforms in Philippine history was the 2013 Enhanced K–12 Curriculum. Before its implementation, the Philippines was one of few countries offering only ten years of basic education. The reform extended basic education to twelve years to meet international standards and address concerns about Filipino graduates' competitiveness in local and global labor markets (DepEd, 2016). The curriculum also refocused education by incorporating 21st-century skills like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy into all subjects. These competencies prepared students for higher education, employment, and active citizenship in a globalized world.

In addition to structural changes, the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum sought to improve curricular coherence and learner-centeredness. It included Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), localized content, and specialized senior high school tracks for academic, technical-vocational-livelihood, sports, and arts and design learners. These features made the curriculum a hybrid of global educational trends and local cultural values. Despite its progressive framework, its efficacy and implementation are questioned. Its implementation in public and private schools has been hampered by inadequate facilities, teacher training, resource inequities, and socioeconomic disparities (Tria, 2020).

Comparing the Philippine K–12 reform to other education systems globally illuminates educational transformation. Finland uses a learner-centered model based on equity and teacher trust, while the US uses a standards-based approach based on accountability and innovation. Discipline, moral education, and technological integration boost academic performance in Japan and South Korea but raise concerns about student well-being and creativity. Australia's inclusive curriculum balances national standards with local autonomy for learning flexibility and adaptability (Sahlberg, 2019; OECD, 2019; DEEWR, 2022).

Analyzing these systems with the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum helps explain how curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment affect student outcomes across cultures and incomes. This shows that while globalization promotes educational convergence, each system must be culturally sensitive and contextual. This comparative lens helps the Philippines identify strategies that meet global benchmarks while preserving local identity, inclusivity, and sustainability. Comparative education reflects the Philippine education system and shows how it can adapt to a rapidly changing world. Analyzing these systems alongside the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum allows for a deeper understanding of how curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment influence learner outcomes across diverse cultural and economic settings. It also highlights that while globalization encourages educational convergence, each system must remain

culturally responsive and contextually grounded. For the Philippines, this comparative lens is essential in identifying strategies that not only align with global benchmarks but also uphold local identity, inclusivity, and sustainability. Thus, comparative education serves as both a mirror and a map reflecting where the Philippine education system currently stands and guiding how it can evolve to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world.

### Statement of the problem

Education systems across the world are shaped by distinct cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts that influence how curricula are designed, implemented, and evaluated. The Philippines' Enhanced K–12 Curriculum was developed to align with global standards and address long-standing gaps in educational quality, equity, and competitiveness. However, despite its progressive intent, challenges persist in its implementation—particularly in areas such as teacher preparation, resource distribution, and contextual responsiveness. A comparative examination of the Philippine system alongside other education models, such as those of Finland, the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Australia, can provide valuable insights into how curriculum frameworks and pedagogical practices contribute to student success, teacher empowerment, and overall educational sustainability. This study seeks to explore the strengths and limitations of the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum by situating it within a broader global context to identify best practices that can inform policy and instructional improvement.

1. What are the defining characteristics, goals, and underlying philosophies of the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum in the Philippines as compared to the curriculum frameworks of Finland, the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Australia?
2. How do these education systems differ in their approaches to pedagogy, assessment, teacher training, and learner development within the framework of 21st-century education?
3. In what ways do socio-cultural, political, and economic contexts influence curriculum design and implementation across the selected countries?
4. What challenges and opportunities arise in the implementation of the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum in the Philippines when analyzed in relation to the experiences of other nations?
5. Based on the comparative findings, what strategies or policy recommendations can be proposed to enhance the effectiveness, inclusivity, and global alignment of the Philippine K–12 education system?

### METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative comparative research design, chosen for its effectiveness in analyzing the similarities and differences among educational systems within various cultural, social, and economic contexts. Creswell and Poth (2018) assert that qualitative research facilitates a profound comprehension of phenomena in their authentic contexts, enabling the researcher to discern meaning and complexity rather than solely quantifying variables. Bray, Adamson, and Mason (2020) talk about the "comparative approach," which is very useful in education because it

helps you find patterns, make connections, and point out contextual factors that affect the development of the curriculum and the implementation of policies.

The design was utilized in this research to examine the comparative analysis of curriculum frameworks and instructional methodologies, particularly those aligned with the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum of the Philippines, against other global education systems. The study aimed to comprehend the ways in which countries with diverse cultural traditions and resource availability organize their educational systems to foster 21st-century learning competencies, digital literacy, and comprehensive student development. The comparative design of the study integrated insights from various educational philosophies and derived implications for enhancing curriculum implementation within the Philippine context.

The study has a global scope, evaluating data from multiple nations to identify the primary factors including a few countries from different continents and educational traditions. The Philippines (Asia), Finland (Europe), the United States (North America), Japan and South Korea (Asia), and Australia (Oceania) were all included. These countries were deliberately chosen because they have well-established curriculum frameworks, regularly take part in international tests like PISA, and are good examples of how to change and improve curricula.

The Philippines was the main focus of the study because it is still using the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum, which aims to bring the country's basic education up to international standards. Finland was used as a model for systems that are fair and give teachers more power; the United States for its standards-based, technology-integrated framework; Japan and South Korea for their strict and high-performing education systems; and Australia for its national curriculum that is open to everyone and focuses on sustainability.

The study was qualitative and comparative, so the respondents included not only individual participants but also key informants and documentary sources. The data were sourced from official education policy documents, governmental reports, and peer-reviewed academic literature. Supplementary insights were obtained via expert consultation with educators, curriculum specialists, and education researchers knowledgeable about the execution of national curriculum frameworks. Their points of view helped to confirm the context and made sure that interpretations of policy documents accurately reflected what was happening on the ground.

The study mainly used document analysis protocols and comparative analysis matrices to collect and organize data. To help people look at official curriculum documents, education policy statements, and national reports in a systematic way, a Document Review Framework (DRF) was created. This framework concentrated on essential variables, encompassing curriculum objectives, instructional design, assessment practices, teacher development, and inclusivity measures.

A Curriculum Comparison Matrix (CCM) was used to group and compare data from each country along five analytical dimensions: (1) curriculum philosophy and goals, (2) instructional approaches, (3) teacher preparation and autonomy, (4) cultural integration, and (5) equity and accessibility. This made it easier to make comparisons. The researcher employed an Expert Interview Protocol (EIP) for virtual consultations with designated education professionals. Questions focused on difficulties with implementation, best practices, and how well they fit with 21st-century learning skills. These tools made sure that the process of collecting and comparing data was consistent and reliable.

Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, a qualitative method that lets us find, organize, and understand patterns in text data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process had several

steps: first, the researcher read and reread all of the materials they had gathered to get a full picture; second, they came up with initial codes based on ideas that kept coming up in relation to curriculum design, pedagogy, and policy; and third, they grouped these codes into larger themes, such as curriculum coherence, teacher empowerment, equity and inclusivity, and global alignment.

After this, the themes were looked over and improved to make sure they accurately showed both the similarities and differences between the education systems that were looked at. The results were then put together into narrative comparisons, which were backed up by a comparative matrix that showed the main differences and similarities in a visual way. To boost credibility and trustworthiness, triangulation was used by comparing data from different sources, such as official government frameworks, peer-reviewed journals, and expert opinions. We made sure that the interpretations were correct and real by checking them with members and experts.

The analysis yielded a thorough comprehension of how curriculum frameworks in various nations embody overarching socio-cultural priorities, and how insights from these systems could guide the ongoing improvement of the Philippine K–12 Curriculum. The methodology integrated systematic document analysis with comparative interpretation to attain depth, rigor, and contextual sensitivity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Philippines.** The Enhanced K–12 Curriculum emphasizes holistic development, functional literacy, and lifelong learning. It integrates 21st-century competencies such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and digital literacy. However, gaps remain in implementation due to insufficient resources, large class sizes, and uneven teacher readiness (Tria, 2020).

**Finland.** Finland’s education system is globally recognized for its learner-centered approach, minimal standardized testing, and strong teacher autonomy. Its National Core Curriculum fosters creativity, social participation, and equity. Unlike the Philippines, Finland places greater trust in teachers’ professional judgment and provides robust state support for educational equity (Sahlberg, 2019).

**United States.** The U.S. K–12 system emphasizes standards-based education and accountability, guided by state curricula and federal policies such as Every Student Succeeds Act. While it promotes digital learning and differentiated instruction, disparities in school funding often led to unequal educational outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

**Japan and South Korea.** These East Asian systems emphasize discipline, moral education, and academic excellence. Japan’s curriculum focuses on holistic education and social harmony, while South Korea prioritizes technological integration and innovation-driven learning. Both systems achieve high performance through rigorous standards, but they also face issues of student stress and limited creativity (MEXT, 2020; OECD, 2019).

**Australia.** The Australian Curriculum promotes intercultural understanding, sustainability, and ICT literacy across all subject areas. It balances standardized content with flexibility for states and schools to adapt lessons to local needs (DEEWR, 2022). Compared to the Philippines, Australia’s education system benefits from greater funding and systemic support for teacher professional development.

## Discussion

The comparative analysis reveals that while all countries aim to prepare learners for a rapidly changing world, differences in educational philosophy and governance shape outcomes. Developed systems like Finland and Australia emphasize teacher autonomy and equity, ensuring quality learning experiences regardless of socio-economic status. In contrast, developing systems such as the Philippines face systemic challenges that hinder full realization of K–12 goals, including infrastructure limitations, resource constraints, and uneven teacher competence (UNESCO, 2022).

Culturally, the Philippine K–12 Curriculum integrates values education and local culture more explicitly than Western systems, aligning with collectivist traditions that value community and moral development. However, countries such as Japan and South Korea illustrate how integrating global skills with cultural heritage can enhance both national identity and global competence. The study suggests that the success of curriculum reform depends not only on structure but also on localized implementation, teacher empowerment, and sustained investment in educational equity.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum of the Philippines reflects the country's alignment with global educational aspirations aimed at producing 21st-century learners who are critical thinkers, problem solvers, and lifelong learners. However, despite its alignment with international standards, the curriculum requires further strengthening, particularly in the areas of teacher training, digital infrastructure, and contextual adaptation to the local educational landscape. Comparative insights drawn from other countries offer meaningful directions for improvement. Finland's trust-based education system highlights the importance of empowering teachers as professionals through autonomy and continuous development. The United States' emphasis on creativity and innovation underscores the need to foster adaptable learning environments that respond to technological and societal shifts. Meanwhile, Japan's holistic and values-based approach demonstrates the value of integrating moral, cultural, and community-oriented dimensions into formal learning.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Philippines strengthen teacher capacity through sustained professional development programs and incentives that encourage pedagogical innovation. Equally important is the need to ensure equitable access to educational resources, digital tools, and learning support systems across regions, especially in geographically disadvantaged areas. Furthermore, localizing global practices by adapting international educational models to the unique cultural, social, and economic realities of the Philippines will help make reforms more relevant and sustainable. These measures collectively aim to create an education system that is globally competitive yet locally grounded.

Future research should extend this inquiry by examining the long-term impacts of the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum on learners' college readiness, career pathways, and employability outcomes. Additionally, exploring how cultural values, community dynamics, and local educational contexts influence the implementation and effectiveness of curriculum reforms in developing nations would provide deeper insights. Such investigations will contribute to shaping

evidence-based policies and practices that advance equitable, inclusive, and transformative education in the Philippines and beyond.

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