

Grade one teachers' challenges in implementing the revised K to 12 curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum reform places teachers at the forefront of translating policy into meaningful classroom practice. This study examined the challenges encountered by Grade One teachers in implementing the Revised K to 12 Curriculum in selected public elementary schools in Ilocos Norte, Philippines. Using a descriptive research design, data were gathered from 33 Grade One teachers through a validated researcher-made questionnaire. The instrument measured challenges in six areas: content and understanding of knowledge, instructional planning and preparation, instructional delivery, learning resources and instructional materials, assessment and evaluation, and professional support and training. Open-ended questions were also included to provide deeper explanations of the teachers' experiences and to support the interpretation of the quantitative findings. Weighted means were used to determine the extent of the challenges, while recurring patterns in the open-ended responses were examined thematically. Findings revealed that teachers experienced an overall moderate level of challenge ($M = 2.96$). Learning resources and instructional materials emerged as the most challenging area ($M = 3.10$), followed by professional support and training ($M = 3.04$) and instructional delivery ($M = 3.02$). Lack of adequate instructional materials and heavy teaching and non-teaching workload received the highest individual ratings ($M = 3.27$). Teachers' narratives further highlighted concerns related to limited curriculum-aligned resources, preparation time, learner diversity, assessment demands, and competing professional responsibilities. The findings suggest that the challenges of curriculum implementation are interconnected and require coordinated instructional, material, and professional support.

Keywords: Curriculum implementation, Grade One teachers, instructional challenges, MATATAG Curriculum, Revised K to 12 Curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

Curriculum reform is a continuing response to the changing needs of learners and to the demand for more relevant and effective educational experiences. Yet the success of any curriculum reform does not rest solely on the quality of its written standards or learning competencies. Its success ultimately depends on how teachers understand, interpret, and enact the curriculum in actual classrooms.

In the Philippines, the Revised K to 12 Curriculum, commonly associated with the MATATAG Curriculum, was introduced to address curriculum congestion and strengthen foundational learning. It places greater emphasis on essential competencies, particularly literacy and numeracy, while promoting values formation, learner well-being, and coherent learning progression (Department of Education [DepEd], 2023). Through DepEd Order No. 010, s. 2024, the Department of Education formally provided policy guidelines for the phased implementation of the curriculum, beginning with Kindergarten and Grades 1, 4, and 7 in School Year 2024–2025 (DepEd, 2024).

The implementation of the revised curriculum is particularly important in Grade One. The early primary years provide the foundation for later learning, especially in literacy, numeracy, communication, self-regulation, and social development. Grade One also represents a critical transition from early childhood education to more structured formal schooling. At this stage, children enter the classroom with varying levels of prior experience, school readiness, language proficiency, attention, and foundational skills.

These differences make Grade One teaching especially demanding. Teachers must not only address the required learning competencies but also determine how these competencies can be translated into lessons that are appropriate for young learners. They need to prepare suitable instructional materials, select appropriate teaching approaches, manage classroom behavior, sustain learners' attention, differentiate instruction, monitor individual progress, and provide timely feedback.

Curriculum implementation becomes more complex when these instructional responsibilities are carried out alongside administrative work, documentation requirements, school activities, and other professional assignments. Thus, the challenges experienced by teachers are not necessarily confined to their knowledge of the curriculum itself. They may also arise from limited resources, insufficient preparation time, differences among learners, assessment requirements, and the availability of professional and institutional support.

Fullan (2015) explains that educational change involves more than adopting new curriculum documents. It requires changes in instructional materials, classroom practices, and teachers' understanding of what the reform seeks to accomplish. For meaningful change to occur, teachers must be given adequate opportunities and support to understand new expectations and translate them into everyday practice.

Recent studies on curriculum implementation in the Philippines likewise identify several concerns. Teachers have reported difficulties related to curriculum interpretation, instructional resources, professional preparation, workload, and the alignment of classroom practices with revised curriculum expectations (Abaiz et al., 2025; Fuentes, 2025; Malinao & Miano, 2025). Such findings suggest that implementation is shaped not only by the curriculum itself but also by the conditions in which teachers are expected to enact it.

These concerns become even more significant at the Grade One level because learner readiness varies widely. In one classroom, some learners may already demonstrate emerging reading and numeracy skills, while others may still be developing basic abilities such as recognizing letters, following directions, expressing ideas, or sustaining attention during structured activities. Teachers must therefore respond to different learning needs without losing sight of common curriculum expectations.

Examining these challenges is important because identifying the areas in which teachers experience the greatest difficulty can provide a clearer understanding of the support needed during curriculum reform. Quantitative measures can indicate the relative extent of these challenges, while teachers' own descriptions can provide valuable insight into how such difficulties are experienced in everyday practice.

Statement of the problem

This study therefore examined the challenges encountered by Grade One teachers in implementing the Revised K to 12 Curriculum. It focused on six areas: content and understanding of knowledge, instructional planning and preparation, instructional delivery, learning resources and instructional materials, assessment and evaluation, and professional support and training. Teachers' responses to open-ended questions were also examined to enrich and corroborate the quantitative findings.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research question:

To what extent do Grade One teachers encounter challenges in implementing the Revised K to 12 Curriculum?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a descriptive research design to determine the extent of challenges encountered by Grade One teachers in implementing the Revised K to 12 Curriculum. The quantitative component described the level of challenge experienced by teachers across several areas of curriculum implementation, while open-ended questions were incorporated into the instrument to obtain further explanations of teachers' experiences. These responses were used to provide context to the quantitative findings and to illuminate how the identified challenges were manifested in actual teaching practice.

The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools in Ilocos Norte, Philippines. The specific Schools Division was withheld in the article to maintain institutional anonymity. The participants were 33 Grade One teachers who had experience implementing the Revised K to 12 Curriculum. They were officially assigned to Grade One classes, met the established inclusion criteria, and voluntarily participated in the study.

Data were gathered using a validated researcher made questionnaire developed to measure the challenges experienced by Grade One teachers in implementing the Revised K to 12 Curriculum. The instrument covered six areas, namely content and understanding of knowledge, instructional planning and preparation, instructional delivery, learning resources and instructional materials, assessment and evaluation, and professional support and training. Responses were rated using a four-point scale and interpreted using the following ranges: a range of means of 3.50–4.00 was interpreted as Highly Challenging, 2.50–3.49 as Moderately Challenging, 1.50–2.49 as Slightly Challenging, and 1.00–1.49 as Not Challenging. Open-ended questions were also included to allow teachers to describe the specific difficulties they encountered in implementing the curriculum. These questions explored concerns related to curriculum implementation, lesson preparation, instructional materials and learning resources, assessment of Grade One learners, and the influence of time constraints and workload on teaching.

Weighted means were computed to determine the extent of the challenges experienced by the teachers for each indicator and domain. Responses to the open-ended questions were reviewed and organized according to recurring ideas and patterns, and these qualitative

responses were used to explain and support the interpretation of the quantitative results. In this way, the teachers' narratives provided a richer picture of how the identified challenges were experienced in actual classroom settings. Ethical principles were observed throughout the conduct of the study. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was secured, and the confidentiality of participants' responses was maintained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the extent of challenges encountered by Grade One teachers in implementing the Revised K to 12 Curriculum, drawing on data gathered from the teacher respondents through a structured survey instrument designed to measure perceived difficulty across six domains: content and understanding of knowledge, instructional planning and preparation, instructional delivery, learning resources and instructional materials, assessment and evaluation, and professional support and training. The instrument employed a Likert-type scale from which mean scores were computed and interpreted using descriptive statistical techniques, and these quantitative results were further enriched and contextualized through teachers' open-ended responses. The discussion that follows is grounded strictly in the data gathered from the respondents, and all interpretations are drawn in direct relation to the objectives of the study, particularly the objective of identifying the extent and nature of challenges faced by Grade One teachers in curriculum implementation.

The overall mean of 2.96, interpreted descriptively as Moderately Challenging, indicates that Grade One teachers experienced a consistent and pervasive level of difficulty in implementing the Revised K to 12 Curriculum. Notably, all six domains fell within the same descriptive category of Moderately Challenging, a pattern suggesting that the difficulties encountered by teachers were not confined to a single dimension of practice but were distributed across multiple facets of curriculum implementation. Among the six domains, learning resources and instructional materials obtained the highest composite mean at 3.10, followed by professional support and training at 3.04, instructional delivery at 3.02, instructional planning and preparation at 2.90, assessment and evaluation at 2.88, and content and understanding of knowledge at 2.84. This ranking reveals an important pattern in the data: the areas of greatest difficulty were not primarily rooted in teachers' comprehension of curriculum content but rather in the conditions necessary to translate curriculum expectations into actual classroom practice, particularly the availability of instructional materials, the management of workload and professional support, and the practical realities of daily instruction. This finding was reinforced by the teachers' open-ended responses, which frequently cited inadequate teaching resources, limited time, insufficient training, diverse learner needs, difficulties in assessment, large class sizes, administrative responsibilities, and the continuous need to adjust to evolving curriculum expectations. Taken together, these results suggest that successful curriculum implementation is shaped by the interaction of multiple factors, such that a teacher may possess adequate understanding of a required competency yet still encounter significant difficulty in its implementation when instructional materials are unavailable, when learners present widely varying levels of readiness, or when preparation time is constrained by competing responsibilities.

Learning resources and instructional materials emerged as the most challenging domain in the study, registering a composite mean of 3.10, which remains within the Moderately Challenging range. Within this domain, the lack of adequate instructional materials received the highest individual mean of 3.27, followed by insufficient textbooks or learning modules at 3.14, the difficulty of developing localized or contextualized materials at 3.07, and limited access to ICT tools and digital resources at 2.93. These figures indicate that access to appropriate learning resources remains a central and pressing concern in the implementation

of the revised curriculum. Because new or revised curricular expectations require instructional materials that clearly reflect the competencies to be taught, the limited or unavailable state of such resources compels teachers to compensate by locating, adapting, developing, or improvising materials on their own. This challenge was made particularly evident in the teachers' open-ended responses, many of which referred to shortages of updated textbooks, teaching materials, activity sheets, digital resources, visual aids, and other resources suited to the revised curriculum, with some respondents noting that even the materials that were available were not fully aligned with the competencies they were expected to teach. Teachers further described how insufficient resources directly influenced classroom practice: when instructional materials were available, lessons were perceived as clearer, more engaging, interactive, and accessible to learners, whereas when materials were limited, teachers reported fewer opportunities for hands-on activities and greater difficulty in addressing different learning styles and ability levels. This concern carries particular weight at the Grade One level, since young learners benefit substantially from concrete, visual, manipulative, and interactive learning experiences, and their understanding of abstract ideas often develops through direct opportunities to see, touch, manipulate, and experience concepts. The responses further revealed that inadequate materials impose an additional burden on teachers, many of whom reported spending considerable time developing or improvising materials, with some even using personal resources to meet instructional needs. The lack of instructional materials is therefore not an isolated resource concern but one that extends into preparation time, workload, instructional variety, differentiation, and learner engagement. This finding supports the observation of Fuentes (2025) that the availability of curriculum-aligned materials remains an important consideration in the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum.

Professional support and training obtained a composite mean of 3.04, positioning it as the second most challenging domain identified in the study. Within this domain, heavy teaching and non-teaching workload obtained a mean of 3.27, making it one of the most highly rated individual challenges across the entire study, while insufficient training on the Revised K to 12 Curriculum registered a mean of 3.02. Lack of mentoring or coaching obtained a mean of 2.96, and limited instructional support from school administrators obtained a mean of 2.89. The open-ended responses strongly illustrated the realities underlying these ratings, with teachers repeatedly describing the need to divide their time among classroom teaching, lesson preparation, assessment, preparation of instructional materials, documentation, reports, administrative requirements, school activities, and other responsibilities. These competing demands affected not only the volume of work completed by teachers but also the quality of time available for instruction, with several teachers explaining that they had less time to prepare creative lessons, design differentiated activities, provide individualized support, and assess learners thoroughly. Others noted that time constraints occasionally resulted in lessons being rushed or simplified, suggesting that workload is not merely an administrative concern but one that directly influences the depth and quality of curriculum implementation. This finding becomes especially significant considering that the Revised K to 12 Curriculum seeks to promote deeper learning and mastery, goals that require time for thoughtful planning, meaningful instruction, assessment, feedback, and remediation; when teachers are simultaneously burdened by numerous non-instructional responsibilities, the time needed to achieve these goals may become severely limited. Training also emerged as an important concern, with teachers referring to difficulties in adapting to revised competencies, new instructional expectations, changing guidelines, and assessment requirements, indicating a continuing need for professional support as teachers become more familiar with the curriculum. This suggests that professional development should extend beyond one-time orientation

sessions, with teachers potentially benefiting more from continuing opportunities to work with colleagues through Learning Action Cells, mentoring, coaching, collaborative lesson preparation, demonstration teaching, and assessment-development activities. Such support reflects Fullan's (2015) view that educational change becomes meaningful when teachers are given sustained opportunities to develop new understandings and practices.

Instructional delivery obtained a composite mean of 3.02, also falling within the Moderately Challenging range. Within this domain, maintaining learners' attention during lessons obtained the highest mean of 3.11, followed by managing classroom behavior at 3.05, addressing varied learning abilities in one classroom at 3.04, and implementing learner-centered strategies consistently at 2.88. These findings are understandable within the developmental context of Grade One, where learners differ considerably in attention, self-regulation, language, prior learning experiences, literacy and numeracy skills, confidence, and readiness for formal classroom routines. Teachers' open-ended responses consistently described classrooms composed of learners with different abilities, interests, learning needs, and learning paces, with some learners requiring additional time to understand basic skills while others were ready to proceed to more advanced tasks, making it difficult for teachers to maintain a common instructional pace while ensuring that all learners remained engaged. Maintaining attention proved particularly challenging, as young learners naturally require variation in activities and frequent opportunities for interaction, with their engagement often depending on the teacher's ability to use concrete materials, movement, visual resources, games, stories, and other developmentally appropriate strategies. However, the capacity to implement such strategies is closely connected to two domains already identified in the findings, namely instructional resources and preparation time, since teachers with limited materials and limited time to develop alternatives found it more difficult to maintain consistently engaging learner-centered instruction. These findings therefore highlight the interconnected nature of the challenges under study, as learner diversity creates a need for differentiation, yet differentiation itself requires additional preparation, materials, and assessment information.

Instructional planning and preparation obtained a composite mean of 2.90. Within this domain, managing limited preparation time received the highest mean at 3.02, followed by selecting appropriate teaching strategies for diverse learners and adapting lessons to meet learners' developmental levels, both at 2.86, and preparing lesson plans aligned with the revised curriculum at 2.84. The teachers' responses indicate that instructional planning involves several demanding processes, including the need to interpret or unpack revised competencies, translate these into specific learning objectives, align objectives with activities and assessments, identify suitable teaching strategies, prepare instructional materials, and make lessons appropriate to the developmental levels of Grade One learners. For some teachers, the revised competencies proved difficult to translate into daily lesson objectives, while others expressed difficulty maintaining alignment among competencies, activities, and assessment while simultaneously ensuring that lessons remained engaging and suitable for young learners. The limited availability of updated materials and exemplars further intensified the demands of planning, as teachers who could not readily access appropriate resources were compelled to create or modify materials before implementing their lessons. These findings demonstrate that instructional planning in curriculum reform involves more than mere compliance with a lesson-plan format; it requires teachers to interpret curriculum intentions and make a series of instructional decisions regarding what to teach, how to teach it, how to respond to learner diversity, and how learning will be assessed. For Grade One teachers specifically, this process is particularly complex because curriculum alignment must consistently be balanced with developmental appropriateness.

Assessment and evaluation registered a composite mean of 2.88. Within this domain, assessing learners with varying reading and comprehension levels obtained the highest mean at 3.00, followed by designing assessments aligned with the revised curriculum at 2.91, providing individualized feedback to all learners at 2.86, and recording and interpreting assessment results at 2.75. The teachers' open-ended responses provide further explanation for these results, describing Grade One learners with markedly different levels of reading, writing, numeracy, language proficiency, comprehension, and attention, with some learners still unable to read instructions independently while others required continuous guidance in completing assessment tasks. For this reason, teachers recognized that conventional written assessments were not always appropriate, and many emphasized the importance of using observation, oral assessment, performance-based tasks, formative checks, and other child-friendly strategies. While these alternative forms of assessment may provide more appropriate evidence of young learners' progress, they also require considerable teacher time, as individual monitoring, observation, feedback, and documentation become particularly demanding when learners have differing needs or when class sizes are large. Teachers likewise reported difficulty designing assessments that were simultaneously aligned with revised competencies, suitable for young learners, and sensitive to varying levels of readiness. These findings indicate that assessment challenges arise not simply from the construction of assessment tools but from the developmental characteristics of the learners being assessed, underscoring that Grade One teachers require assessment approaches that recognize children may understand concepts even when they are not yet able to demonstrate this understanding through conventional written formats. Providing adaptable assessment exemplars, observation checklists, rubrics, performance tasks, and progress-monitoring tools may help teachers assess learners more efficiently while maintaining developmental appropriateness.

Content and understanding of knowledge obtained the lowest composite mean among the six domains at 2.84, although this value nonetheless remained within the Moderately Challenging range. Within this domain, integrating values and 21st-century skills required by the curriculum obtained a mean of 2.86, understanding the revised learning competencies for Grade One obtained a mean of 2.84, and both interpreting the competencies in the Revised K to 12 Curriculum and aligning lesson objectives with the revised curriculum obtained a mean of 2.82 each. This comparatively lower mean suggests that teachers found curriculum content and competency understanding somewhat less challenging than concerns related to resources, workload, instructional delivery, and planning. Nevertheless, teachers' responses revealed continuing difficulties in adjusting to revised competencies and interpreting how these competencies should be translated into classroom activities, with some referring to frequent curriculum changes and the need to become familiar with updated guidelines, while others described difficulty aligning revised competencies with existing instructional practices. This distinction is important, as it suggests that teachers may understand the general direction of the curriculum while still encountering difficulty converting curriculum statements into meaningful instructional experiences. Curriculum understanding should therefore be supported not only through orientations about policy provisions but also through practical professional learning, such as collaborative competency unpacking, lesson design, demonstration teaching, preparation of exemplars, and assessment development, which can help teachers move from understanding curriculum expectations to implementing them confidently and consistently.

The integration of the quantitative findings with the teachers' open-ended responses reveals a consistent and coherent picture of curriculum implementation, one in which the challenges experienced by Grade One teachers are closely interconnected rather than isolated or unrelated. One clear pattern concerns the relationship between instructional resources and

workload, wherein the unavailability of appropriate materials compels teachers to spend additional time searching for, developing, adapting, or improvising resources, thereby transforming a shortage of materials into an added preparation burden. A second pattern concerns the relationship between learner diversity and instructional demands, as differences in literacy, numeracy, language, attention, readiness, and learning pace require teachers to differentiate instruction and provide additional support, adaptations that in turn require time, appropriate materials, and continuous assessment. A third pattern involves time as a cross-cutting constraint that permeates nearly every dimension of curriculum implementation, affecting lesson preparation, material development, classroom instruction, assessment, feedback, remediation, and individualized support, such that workload influences virtually every aspect of the implementation process. Finally, the findings highlight the enduring importance of continuing professional support, as teachers' concerns regarding revised competencies, instructional alignment, assessment practices, and learning resources indicate that curriculum implementation is best understood as an ongoing process of adjustment and professional learning rather than a single event. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that curriculum implementation does not depend on any single teacher-related factor but is instead shaped by the combined and interacting influence of curriculum expectations, instructional resources, learner diversity, workload, preparation time, and professional support, an interconnected dynamic in which limited resources increase workload, workload reduces preparation time, limited preparation affects differentiation and assessment, and learner diversity further intensifies the demand for individualized instruction. This interconnected pattern stands as one of the most significant findings of the study, directly addressing the research objective of identifying the extent and nature of challenges encountered by Grade One teachers in implementing the Revised K to 12 Curriculum, and it underscores the need for coordinated, multifaceted support systems that address resource provision, workload management, professional development, and assessment capacity simultaneously rather than in isolation. These insights not only deepen the understanding of curriculum implementation at the Grade One level but also provide a substantive empirical foundation for the recommendations and implications to be presented in the succeeding chapter of this study.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that Grade One teachers experienced a moderate level of challenge in implementing the Revised K to 12 Curriculum, with an overall mean of 2.96. All six areas examined were rated moderately challenging, indicating that teachers encountered difficulties throughout different stages of curriculum implementation.

Learning resources and instructional materials emerged as the most challenging domain, followed by professional support and training and instructional delivery. At the individual indicator level, lack of adequate instructional materials and heavy teaching and non-teaching workload received the highest ratings.

The teachers' open-ended responses strengthened these findings by showing how the challenges were experienced in daily teaching. Teachers described shortages of curriculum-aligned resources, additional time spent developing materials, difficulty addressing varied learner readiness, challenges in maintaining attention, demanding assessment requirements, insufficient preparation time, and competing teaching and non-teaching responsibilities.

The findings further show that these difficulties are not isolated from one another. Limited instructional materials contribute to heavier preparation demands. Diverse learner needs require differentiation and individualized assessment. These practices require additional time and resources, while teachers' workloads reduce the time available for careful planning, assessment, and learner support.

Thus, the challenges encountered by Grade One teachers should not be viewed solely as difficulties in understanding or applying the curriculum. They reflect the broader instructional and organizational conditions within which curriculum reform is implemented.

For the Revised K to 12 Curriculum to achieve its intended goals, teachers need more than knowledge of curriculum expectations. They need sufficient instructional resources, manageable workloads, developmentally appropriate assessment support, opportunities for collaboration, and sustained professional development.

Supporting teachers in these areas can help transform curriculum reform from policy expectations into meaningful classroom experiences for young learners.

Based on the findings, schools and education authorities should prioritize the timely provision of sufficient, updated, and curriculum-aligned instructional materials for Grade One. These may include textbooks, learner materials, lesson exemplars, activity sheets, visual aids, manipulatives, contextualized resources, digital materials, and assessment tools.

Schools may also establish organized resource repositories where Grade One teachers can access, adapt, and share validated instructional materials. Such mechanisms can reduce duplication of effort and lessen the amount of preparation time spent creating resources independently.

Professional development should be continuing, practical, and closely connected with actual classroom implementation. Learning Action Cells, mentoring, peer coaching, collaborative lesson planning, curriculum clinics, and demonstration teaching may be used to strengthen competency unpacking, differentiated instruction, learner engagement, contextualization, and assessment practices.

Attention should likewise be given to teachers' workloads. Where feasible, administrative and documentation requirements may be streamlined so that teachers have sufficient time for instructional planning, preparation of materials, assessment, remediation, and individualized learner support.

Grade One teachers should also be provided with adaptable assessment resources suited to young learners. Observation guides, formative assessment tools, oral and performance-based tasks, rubrics, and progress-monitoring templates may help teachers assess learners with varied literacy, numeracy, language, and readiness levels.

Finally, future studies may examine how teachers' challenges change as implementation of the Revised K to 12 Curriculum progresses. Similar studies may also be conducted in other grade levels and educational settings to determine whether the challenges identified in this study remain consistent across different contexts.

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