

# TOWARD POLISHING POLICIES ON BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM CHANGE: FROM THE WISDOM OF THE GRASSROOTS

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## **Abstract**

*Where there are changes in the curriculum, there always arise opposition or resistance among the grassroots and the direct implementers--the teachers themselves--from the micro to the macro level. What brings teachers to their respective stances and what may be done to connect their experiences and school practices to relevant policies is the primary concern of this study. This qualitative research content-analyzed data gathered through interviews of 10 seasoned public elementary school teachers who have rendered 10-30 years of teaching and have been handling all subject areas. Their shared experiences as among those who have witnessed the "evolution" of the basic education curriculum and had directly experienced at least three waves of changes were taken as a sample of what may also be happening in the macro level.*

*Findings show that the participants have experienced difficulties in implementing the changes as mandated primarily because of the lack or absence of mechanisms for the timely dissemination of accurate information and the 'delayed' conduct of orientation and seminars or training. With orientation usually held only during the implementation stage already, the teachers are rushed to learn new methods and content resulting in raw formation of skills and competencies, giving rise to their feeling of inadequacy. What complicates their situation is the usual lack or absence of updated instructional materials such as textbooks and teacher's guides. Their unfavorable circumstances in facing curricular changes implementation led them to appeal for an improved system of information dissemination, timely conduct of orientation and training, and provision of ample budget to enable the Department of Education supply the needed instructional materials and give support to teacher development endeavors. The study concludes that a gap exists between what the policy on curriculum implementation mandates and what is actually experienced by the teachers. Findings and insights are offered as inputs for the rethinking of policies, guidelines and practices in implementing curricular changes, whether it be in the macro or micro level.*

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**Keywords:** Policy, basic education curriculum, teachers, curriculum, curricular change

## INTRODUCTION

Change is inevitable. “Change is the only thing that is permanent in this world,” Heraclitus of Ephesus, a Greek philosopher, stated this known quote on change. Life today is situated in a fast-changing fashion. Innovations as results of changes are being experienced in all facets of life, political, social, economic and cultural. In the ideal sense, a change should lead to progress and growth; if done, it must be for a positive outcome, not for deterioration.

Some changes happen so suddenly while others come through gradual processes. Some examples of changes that one can think of literally are those that take place in politics, such as when new leaders get elected or get designated to replace the old set of officers. These people then eventually come up with new policies where implementation results into reforms.

Changes have their “domino effect”; that is, one small variation can lead to a series of other alterations. Regarding economic issues, inflation and deflation of currencies of different countries establish changes in the livelihood and lifestyle of nations all over the world. Plainly put, when peso gets devalued, for example, prices of commodities rise, services fees soar higher, people clamor for increases in salaries and improvement of the work environment to cope with these economic surges.

Automation and technological improvements are also products of change which may alter the economic conditions of a country. Even the culture that is embedded in the blood vessels of a community may not escape change as a result of constant social interaction and mobility among people. “Change alone is unchanging. The same road goes both up and down. The beginning of a circle is also its end” (Heraclitus of Ephesus, 50 B.C.). This famous line tells that people in the society are all part of its social change because of the constant mingling and interaction with one another.

Reller (n.d) stressed that economic and cultural globalization forced new complexities on all sectors of societies of the world. Social movements of all kinds – economic, social, cultural, political and religious – have developed out of these conditions. Poverty is now being perceived as a huge threat that is enough to gain the attention of the rich and powerful people. Development is becoming a global project. With it comes social change which is a profoundly complicated process. People adapt to the change process in the society to improve condition leading to development.

Meanwhile, results of changes (which are also called “changes”) could either be indicators of progress or problems, but that depends on how changes were instituted and on the purpose for which these were created. In any effected change, people have to face the challenge of being dynamic and adaptive to whatever changes would take place to survive.

In schools where positive changes are expected to spring forth as an outcome of a dynamic process called education, changes in any aspect affect the overall operations and functions of a given school. Most common changes range from change in the leadership (and leadership styles) to alterations/modifications/improvement in the curricula. Periodic adjustment in the curricula is necessary if courses of studies were to be relevant and were to achieve their very purpose—to enable learners to adapt to changes and live life meaningfully. Jorgenson (2006) implied that curriculum is changed as needs, standards, students, teachers, and priorities change. Instructional change is necessary for schools because of an upwelling

of developments featuring research-based, classroom-proven "best practice" teaching strategies, accompanied by pioneering discoveries about learning and learners which are too compelling to ignore. The changing needs of children demand that teachers expand their role beyond being a source of information, facilitators, co-investigators, guides, and coordinators. These changes are taking place rapidly because of today's global development. The emergence of the 21st-century education has been fast taking its center seat in the global educational arena which would undoubtedly post new demands. The curriculum must be designed to make it appropriately and sufficiently prepare students in engaging into positive changes in the society. Emphatically, the curriculum has to be designed to educate children to become more productive members of the community. Education authorities have to recognize these shifting dynamics, figure out how to address them through curriculum change, and then implement meaningful, relevant and sustainable changes.

What is a curriculum? Why is it a critical element in education? A curriculum may be described as everything that happens in, and that is covered by, the teaching-learning process. Reyes (2000) defined it as "the totality of curricular content (subject matter) and learning experiences the learner goes through to achieve intended educational purposes or outcomes against which his progress will be evaluated" (p.1). Curriculum subsumes instruction and all the learning experiences that learners should go through in a specific school year including the statement of the objectives as well as the evaluation of achievement (Egan, 1978).

In a more confined sense, the curriculum may be defined as the set of subjects to be taught with a purpose based on the societal needs. It is an essential tool in education because it is the overview of lessons to be learned in the entire period of study. It serves as a compass that directs the stakeholders to go to the right direction to achieve the goals of the school. Teachers are obliged to do their task of executing the curriculum to their maximum capacity to do their responsibility for they are accountable for the execution of the curriculum. It is mandatory on their part as conductors of the curriculum to teach the whole content of the lesson which is reflected in every learning area for the entire school year. Each learning area consists of the subject matter which have to be learned based on necessity. The lessons are carefully selected and imposed with strategies or methods and the textbooks to be used to achieve the objectives of the subjects, and these transmit the culture, improve the society and realize the potential of every learner (Ornstein, 1998).

The clients (students) are the focus of the curriculum and the center of the education process. Stakeholders have to carefully plan to ensure that the curriculum is aimed for the betterment of the clientele. Ornstein (1998) stated that in developing a curriculum, there are four foundations to be considered. These are the philosophical, historical, psychological and social foundations. The philosophical foundations serve as the starting point of decision-making; these guide curriculum developers and teachers in planning, implementing and evaluating a given curriculum. Such foundations set the entire direction of the curricular processes beginning from objectives setting to identifying instructional strategies and techniques or materials.

Among the philosophical foundations of education that may be used include perennialism, progressivism, essentialism, existentialism, humanism, reconstructionism and behaviorism. These schools of thought have their particular uses, strengths, and limitations that could help shape a curriculum. Since it is an accepted fact that not any one of these

philosophical thoughts is perfect and complete in itself, the current flow of changing demands of the society may call for the combination of these philosophies. The resulting combined model could be called an eclectic model. Saxe (2004) described the eclectic model as the combination of different viewpoints tailored to fit the existing needs and demands. Variety of approaches are also gathered and adapted to suit the abilities of the learners. Furthermore, Jenks, Lee, and Kanpol (2001) added that the concept of the eclectic model is the process of gathering the best practices of every philosophy making it into one great model.

Individually and concisely defined, perennialism, the oldest and most traditional educational philosophy, contends that “education should be the same everywhere, for everyone, across time, because it has the general, common, perennial aims” (Reyes, 2000, p.57). It is a philosophy that believes in the universal view that basically, human beings have the same nature and that they have the same need to be addressed. For example, humans as rational beings have to develop into rational thinkers. It emphasizes that there are real timeless ideas that learners need to know (Wink, 2005). The curriculum that may be formed based on this belief is one that is heavy on humanities and general education with less emphasis on vocational and technical areas (Bilbao, Corpuz, Llagas & Salandanan, 2006). For Ornstein (1998), the curriculum in the perennial thought is constant and focused on classical subjects and literary analysis.

Progressivism came into existence as a protest to perennialism, opposing traditional educational practices which the latter was promoting. It stands on the viewpoint of the late 19th century and the early 20th century that believes that human beings are good and that they can make the best decisions when given the freedom and the opportunity to do so. Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) postulated that in Progressivism, the education should be a form of nourishment to the ability of the learners to interact with the people around them. It views education as a social process centered on the child/learner, promoting democratic and flexible approaches that allow the practice of responsible participation in the society. The school is therefore considered as a little society where such opportunities to practice how to handle responsibilities in the broader community may be simulated. This glory of progressivism as ethos waned in the 1940’s to 50’s as another philosophy took its place – the essentialism (Reyes, 2000).

Essentialism, on the other hand, is a philosophy that concerns itself with the necessary knowledge, values, and skills that should be developed among learners. Gutek (1997) described it as the perspective that all learners have a set of unique values and attitudes that are essential in fulfilling their identity and function in the society. It seeks to “transmit the traditional moral values and intellectual knowledge that students need to become model citizens” (Bilbao, Corpuz, Llagas & Salandanan, 2006, p. 6). The same source states that the emphasis of the curriculum covers the traditional disciplines such as mathematics, natural sciences, history, foreign language, and literature. There is a little emphasis given to students’ interest; teachers and administrators decide for the students as regards the content of what to learn. Under essentialism, mastery of the subject matter and the necessary skills is the core requirement.

The basic skills of the Reading, Writing and Arithmetic (3Rs) and essential subjects such as English, Science, History, Mathematics and Foreign language are emphasized in essentialism. Progressivism values students’ interest, human problems, and affairs. Interdisciplinary in nature with integration and interaction are focused on all the subjects.

Reconstructionism on the other hand deals on national and international issues that are presently experienced as well as the linkages of these present issues that may have a possible link to the future trends. Martin and Van Gunten (2002) reiterated that the role of the educational institution under this philosophy is to promulgate social changes towards the betterment of the society. Above all these philosophies, educational philosophy outweighs the others for it has the most substantial foundation of any curriculum. School heads, teachers, curriculum planners or even evaluators use the curriculum in deciding what to focus to achieve the vision and mission of the school (Ornstein, 1998).

The teaching and learning process is based on the psychological foundation. It gives a focal point that the learner is a human being and that learning elements must be unified to develop its full potential. Activities provided in every learning area are directed toward the learner's total development.

There are three major groups of learning theories that are considered very useful in curriculum development: behaviorist, cognitive and humanistic psychology. Behaviorist psychology stresses that students must achieve their objective successfully in every task executed and for this to happen, the right teaching strategies must be utilized. It points out the importance of conditioning the learners well for them to be motivated to acquire new concepts leading to learning (Carr, 1997).

The process of how the learners focus their attention and how the ideas are formed and processed belongs to cognitive psychology. It is the scientific study of the mind as well as its mental functions including learning, memory, attention, perception, reasoning, language, conceptual development, and decision making (Neisser, 2006). Theorists under cognitive psychology believed that organization and interpretation of these concepts is a logical process of learning. Thinking skills are to be developed during the teaching and learning process. Learning by discovering, reflective thinking and creative thinking are to be practiced in every teaching and learning process.

In humanistic psychology, the full potential of the learner as a human being is developed. Gestalt psychology explained further that the learners are part of the environment for which the problem existed and their ideas are being reorganized by using their perceptions provided in their environment. Reason and Bradbury (2001) postulated that in this way, teachers look at the learners' behavior not only through their eyes as teachers but through the eyes of the learners who are doing the behavior. Here, it is shown that all learners have different ways of perceiving their environment. This individual differences among learners guide the curriculum developers and teachers to select learning areas and allot activities adaptive to the learners' level.

A social foundation is one of the concerns of the curriculum. The school exists because of the people who are naturally sociable. The curriculum is affected and shaped by the people who comprise the society. There is a symbiotic relationship between the society and curriculum. The curriculum reflects the culture and the changes being promulgated by the schools (Bilbao, 2008).

These four foundations of the curriculum are the bases for its development. Stakeholders come up with changes considering all these foundations in mind. These foundations lead them to develop the learners holistically, making all learners useful, literate individuals capable of bringing themselves to excellence in their field of endeavors.

The design of the curriculum is also as important as its foundation. There are three designs of the curriculum stressed in Bilbao (2008): subject-content, learner-centered, and problem-centered design. Tyler (2008) proposed a subject-content curriculum in 1949. It is based on the idea that a curriculum may also emphasize the areas of processes, strategies, and life-skills (Oliva & Pawlas, 2004). Under this idea, the subjects to be taught and the textbooks to be used are also given emphasis. The discipline design is a design co-related to subject-centered design. It is being implemented at the tertiary level. When subjects are linked with the core subject, the model used is a co-relation. With this design, the subjects or courses which are connected still have their own identity. A teacher for each subject is needed in order for them to work as a team in teaching the contents of these subjects. The other variation of subject-centered design is the interdisciplinary and broad-field design. This design integrates the contents that are related into one. An example of this are civics and culture, geography and history and the other are Music, Arts and Physical Education or the Music, Art and Physical Education.

The learner-centered design focuses on the learner. It directs all learning activities toward the fulfilment of the learner's needs. An active human being is capable to see, analyze, interpret and solve problems in the environment where he/she deals with. Cullen, Harris, and Hill (2012) described the role of the teachers in this design as the facilitator and guide for the discovery of new learnings. They allow the learners to explore and discover the things that they have to learn rather than the traditional spoon-feeding process. The experience-centered design uses the experiences of the learner. It centers on the learner; it is a child-centered design. It also refers to how the learners react and respond to all factors such as an emotional and social atmosphere of the classroom where the learning takes place (Diamond, 2011).

Social problems, needs, interests, and abilities of the learners are utilized in the problem-centered design. There are two examples for the problem design curriculum: The life situation design focuses on the experiences of the learners; their previous and recent activities are considered, and the core design which considers general education as its focal point and human activities are also the bases. With these designs of the curriculum, the stakeholders can choose which one is ideal for the present situation of the society for which the curriculum is based.

The foundations and the designs of the curriculum are carefully planned so that its implementation will be a success. Bago (2008) emphasized the three levels of the curriculum. The first level is instructional. It is the primary level for it is where the teaching and learning process takes place. In this level, the curriculum is being handed to the learners. The teachers, the frontliners of any educational institution, have the responsibility to efficiently and effectively teach the content of the curriculum to the learners. As implementers of the curriculum, there is a need for them to carefully plan the activities suitable to the learners so that the process of learning becomes meaningful and at the same time enjoyable. The question now is how highly prepared are the teachers in implementing the curriculum change?

Flores (2005) made a point on how teachers are being affected by the changes in the curriculum. Tensions, as well as ambiguity, are the primary results of such changes. Another study conducted by Duru (2010) stated that the poor efficiency level in the teaching of teachers was due to the lack of training and resources before the implementation of the new curriculum. Because of the changes made in the curriculum, there is a possibility of eliciting more negative

feedback than positive ones. These negative implications may impede educational improvement rather than promote growth.

The following are the strategies for implementing instructional change as noted in Jorgenson (2006). The length of time before the implementation gives adequacy in handling the curriculum to the learners. There should be enough time for preparing the teachers, informing them well and planning the curriculum change conscientiously. Jorgensen (2006) cited some strategies that school leaders have used in different school settings in Hawaii to enable effective changes in curriculum and instruction. He added that the change in curriculum is a step by step process. In Hawaii Preparatory school, as the school expanded its school-based science program at K8 campus, a weeklong training program was given to teachers, administrators, and community members. The seminar about the kit-based science instruction was tried out by an individual on their free will, accepting the new program of science instruction at K 8 campus with eagerness. The seminar had a small crowd as the audience, and they served as the tester of the new program. The success of the program depends on how motivated the participants to accept the change. The time necessary for preparation, training program, pilot testing to a small number of participants and motivation of the participants themselves can assure the successful implementation of the new curriculum. School leaders are expected to be patient in dealing with people for individuals have differences regarding accepting the changes. Constant monitoring of these individuals is employed, and a continuous review of the curriculum is done. Resources are made accessible both to teachers and learners. There should be enough resources to support the total number of learners. There must be a contingency plan to suffice any shortage in case of overpopulation in a school. Planning is a process that must be taken to make sure that the curriculum change is implemented successfully in general.

The second level of the curriculum which is institutional level deals with the procedure, maintenance, assessment and compliance of teachers for whom the school officials and education stakeholders govern. These leaders in educational system make the process for which the teachers are obliged to obey. Policies given must be internalized by teachers. These are being monitored and evaluated by the education authorities. These policies will serve as a guide for the teachers on how to implement the new curriculum.

The third level which is de-facto level concerns with agencies that deals with curriculum matters. It is with this regard that the study is undertaken, aiming to let the education authorities know how teachers adjust to the policies on curriculum change. It is in this part that policies regarding the curriculum change significantly affect teachers. The why's and how's are being analyzed to come-up with better systems that can genuinely help the teachers as being much affected by curriculum change. The sudden imposition of changes in the curriculum brings chaos most especially when the teachers are inadequately prepared for the changes and non-human resources are insufficient to implement the changes in the new curriculum. Teachers have difficulty in delivering instruction because they do not have enough time of preparation regarding training and instructional materials. These factors make them one hundred percent inefficient to teach the content of the curriculum to the best of their abilities.

Curriculum changes may cause ambiguity and tension to teachers based on a study authored by Flores (2005). The research described how Portuguese teachers were affected because of lack of support and proper motivation. Motivating the teachers before the change

process is a critical step in the curriculum change process. Directing their views toward the goal provides significant support to the curriculum implementers. By doing this, a positive picture can be drawn. Dilemmas can be minimized, and challenges can be overcome. Lack of information and training can weaken their capacity to hand the learners the new curriculum. Lack of resources can also affect the teaching-learning process.

Another study about the teachers' efficiency, beliefs and perceptions regarding the implementation of the new Mathematics curriculum in Turkey indicated that pre-service and in-service training leads to higher productivity of teachers. When teachers know how to do their tasks to attain the goal of the curriculum change, the teacher manifests efficiency--which may be achieved through relevant in-service training which is parallel to the goals expected for the teachers in doing their tasks in delivering the curriculum to the learners. The experiences provided to the teachers may introduce them to new approaches and innovative strategies. Effectiveness in doing their job is the product of the training offered. Through this, high achievement, appropriate attitude and growth can be attained (Isler, n.d.).

Furthermore, Ornstein (1998) pointed out that teachers' training provides them the opportunity to study the curriculum imposed for implementation. The training affords ample time for them to prepare their minds to accept the changes even before the implementation. In this way, teachers can fully understand the reason for the change and its implications for classroom instructions. Aside from the training, financial support involved for the change must be extended, textbook and instructional materials must be provided before the curriculum implementation.

It is a must then that education stakeholders follow a procedure in curriculum development. A plan is made to produce an output which are the major areas of concern whenever a curriculum is changed. These are the curriculum design or structure, implementation scheme, and the evaluation procedure. The objective, content organization and evaluation are part of the curriculum structure. To know why and what the curriculum change is for, the subjects or learning areas to be included, the people who are to supervise and implement the new curriculum, and how it is to be assessed regarding effectiveness. Deficiencies that may result in unsuccessful implementation can be determined through pilot testing.

The roles, materials and time schedules are to be ready in the implementation scheme. Policies and guidelines need to be established to ensure compliance by all concerned and the subsequent successful curriculum implementation. The readiness of the resources either human or non-human and proper distribution of tasks among the people-based support is necessary for the attainment of the identified objectives of the curricular design (Bago, 2001).

In evaluating the curriculum, its value, effectiveness, efficiency and adequacy are assessed. How the society accepts it shows its impact to the people. How it is implemented depends on how the learners had used it for their total development and the place where the society is situated are the concerns of the evaluators. As a fundamental step, the new curriculum is tried and tested first before its widespread implementation (Bago, 2001).

Using pilot testing in a small group to evaluate the new curriculum provides data that may be used in making necessary modification and revision. This way, there will be a minimal consumption of time and resources. The pilot testing leads to better curriculum development.



It assesses the teachers' readiness and materials to be used in the implementation. It is a gauge of reliability and validity of the curriculum (Parkay et al., 2010).

During the implementation of the pilot testing, curriculum monitoring is essential to determine its relevance and effectiveness. It is a periodic assessment and adjustment during the try-out period. It is like a formative evaluation. It determines how the curriculum is working such that the monitoring report becomes the basis of a decision on what to improve in the curriculum.

The perfection of the curriculum implementation lies in the policies governing the curriculum change. Procedures established are the guides that lead to its successful implementation. They are carefully formulated and promulgated within the school to ensure that every role and materials are ready for the change process. They unify the efforts of the concerns to a goal to stabilize the change being implemented. They lessen the challenges that teachers have to undertake whenever a curriculum is changed.

Curriculums change implementation in the Philippines is described by Estiko in Bago (2008). Before the Spaniards went to the country, there was no existing formal school. Children began learning through their parents. Training about tasks at home and activities were being taught. The goal of learning then was to prepare the children for household chores, find food for the family and protect the tribes from enemies, either human or animals. It was a process of learning for survival purposes. With the coming of the invaders, the Spaniards established formal schools. Convent schools were offering catechism for the Spaniards had turned the faith from paganism to Christianity. Friars were the first teachers. The friars taught catechism without giving a standard measure of how the learners had achieved. Memorization of prayers is the sole indicator of ones' learning of the catechism lessons. Children were given rewards like a book for a task done successfully. Missionaries were sent to Christianize the society further. The very remote islands were now reached and had held on to their religion. However, the ministers lacked training in the area of teaching. Hence, they were only able to provide informal training to poor villagers. Altbach (1989) described it as an era of religion-based education. During the Philippine Revolution, knowledge was outdated. Only the wealthy villagers were able to go school and study abroad. Many Filipinos were labeled idiots due to the lack of formal education (Paular, 1991).

After the reign of the Spaniards, the Americans came and started to educate every person by establishing public schools in every barrio all over the country. The Thomasites (American teachers) who were sent served as mentors. They focused on primary education or better termed as elementary education. The learners were not graded on their accomplishments. There was no permanent curriculum to be followed, and the American had a trial and error process in implementing a given curriculum. Go (2008) described it as an education that aimed to teach the Filipinos on how to live a democratic way of life ensuring that they master the art and science of self-government. Later, in the year 1904, the General Office in Manila had prescribed and implemented a standard curriculum design for three-year primary education. The learning areas consisted of Language, Arithmetic, Geography, Citizen Training and Body Training (P.E.). Other learning areas were added for primary school and these were Good Moral and Right Conduct (GMRC), Civics, Hygiene and Sanitation, Home Economics, Philippine Geography and Industrial Arts. Thus, it was increased to four years. A three-year intermediate education was introduced after finishing the four-year primary education which was a prerequisite before they can pursue secondary education. The

Americans treated the Filipinos as their “little brown brothers” because they were able to achieve a higher level of literacy rate (Durban & Catalan, 2012, p.62). The development of moral character, personal discipline, civic consciousness, vocational efficiency and good citizenship was given emphasis later during the Commonwealth Period.

The Educational Act of 1940 enabled a major curricular reform in the elementary education that aimed to increase demand for public elementary instruction and at the same time comply with the constitutional mandate on education. In the 1940s, during the Japanese occupation, changes in the curriculum were significant. The calendar year became longer; schools were in operation the whole year; the pupils in every class were 60 in number. Textbooks with American concepts were prohibited to be used in the classroom. Nationalism was ignited due to the use of Filipino language. The Government established an integrated, nationalistic and democratic process of education in 1946. The objectives of education in the succeeding years remained to be those that were adopted from the 1935 Constitution. In 1954, the Republic Act No.1124 approved a new set of objectives that reflected the desire of the nation to mold and develop youth into useful and upright citizens. The system of education became integrated, nationalistic and democracy-inspired. In 1957, the curriculum was modified. Children who were 7-13 years old were mandated to enroll in compulsory primary education. The class size was decreased from 60 to 40 pupils. The use of mother tongue language was instituted in grades one to two. Language, Social Studies, Elementary Mathematics, Science and Health, Music, Arts, Physical Education and Work Education were the learning areas prescribed in the curriculum. Character Education was then a component of Social Studies; later in 1970, it became a separate learning area (Bago, 2008).

In 1982, a four-year development program was conceptualized. The Program for Decentralized Elementary Education (PRODED) was a significant reform which aimed to balance the services rendered and the availability of resources. The change was made to increase the performance level of all elementary pupils in the basic education in all learning areas (Bago, 2001).

The Revised Basic Education Curriculum (RBEC) was introduced in 2002 and was the restructured basic elementary school curriculum. Learning experiences were used as a tool to acquire lifelong learning skills which served as fundamentals to fit into the working environment and to the needs of the society. It aimed to make all the learners functional to cope with problems which surround them (Bago, 2008). The role of teachers in this curriculum is to remove the authoritarian atmosphere in the classroom environment. The teachers served as facilitators and managers of the interactive class (Romero, 2008).

The New Elementary School Curriculum (NESC) was the result of the reform project PRODED. Guided by the 1970 Revised Elementary Education Program, NESC aimed to prepare the learners to get basic preparation. The NESC is anchored on the belief that if the learners had the basic training, they would have a sound and open mind to grasp the problems. This training was aimed at ensuring the learners' proper behavior at all times. Thus, devotion to one's country, reliance to oneself and fear of God were the critical behavior expected of the learners as an output of NESC. The role of teachers under this curriculum is to inculcate in the learners the two crucial areas that is to uplift the intellectual quality of the Filipino children as well as to reinforce the sense of nationalism (Inciong, 2008).

The NESC served as a direction for a curricular change. It pointed an arrow toward the center which was going back from the basics, that is, the 3 R's: Reading, Writing, and

Arithmetic. This curriculum was implemented gradually in small-scale per grade level. The Grade I level started it in June 1983, and the rest of the other grades followed after each year. This process allowed preparation of instructional materials and orientation of teachers and school heads. Series of training while the curriculum was implemented were set for teachers to attain the necessary teaching skills. The New Secondary Education Curriculum (NSEC) was patterned after the NESC.

Having the goal of formal and informal education to produce learners who were functionally literate, the Basic Education provided a curriculum pattern for the adaption of the learners to the changing environment. "Integrative learning was used in Basic Education curriculum; subjects were grouped" (DepEd Training Manual, 2000, p.32).

Bago (2008) emphasized that the implementation of the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) was an unexpected move. It was piloted widely to public schools. It was difficult to assess its deficiencies as well as its operational problems due to the vast scope of the pilot implementation. The monitoring and evaluation data which could have helped in the adjustments and innovation of the curriculum lacked bases. The training of teachers happened while the new curriculum was already being implemented. Shortage of resources was also one of the observed inadequacies. Bernardo and Mendoza (2009) postulated that the main difficulty in applying this curriculum lies on the hardships and struggles experienced by the teachers in articulating the ideal elements of the curriculum.

The BEC was revised and called Revised Basic Elementary Education (RBEC). It was intended to be a solution to the too compressed learning areas in BEC. There were four main subject areas in Grades I and II namely, Filipino, English with Science integration, Mathematics and Makabayan with Civics and Culture and Character Education as corporate subjects. English had 100 minute classroom interaction because of its integration to Science. There were also five learning areas in Grades III to VI namely, Filipino, English, Science and Health, Mathematics and Makabayan which include Geography, History and Civics, Home Economics, MAPE (Music, Arts and Physical Education) and Character Education. The grading system for Makabayan subject being an integrative learning subject was getting the average of the individual learning areas.

Due to the Global Development Goals, there was a collaboration of efforts of the members of the Steering Committee which was composed of the Department of Education (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and other stakeholders. The curriculum which aimed to improve the quality of Education in the country paved way to the birth of K to 12 curriculum. The 10-year basic education curriculum is designed to be taught in 12 years. This has been affirmed in the study conducted by SEAMO-Innotech where it noted that the Philippine basic education is congested compared to the curriculum of Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore. Allen and Alexander (2012) narrated on his study that partly, the poor quality of education may be attributed to the congestion of curriculum content. Learners are asked to attend all the subjects each and every day, take multiple quizzes, and do multiple homework and at the end, the curriculum expects them to excel equally in all learning areas. Specifically, the SEAMO-Innotech stated that elementary education is congested especially in Mathematics, Languages and Sciences. This was inferred to be the reason why high school graduates are not adequately prepared for the world of work. It was also observed that most of the basic education graduates are too young to legally enter the labor force (below 18). The high school

graduates are not adequately prepared to pursue higher education. They still have to undergo remedial and high school level classes in colleges and universities. In a wider perspective, the 10-year basic education cycle hinders the recognition of Filipino professionals abroad. Just for example, the Washington Accord prescribes 12-years of basic education as an entry to recognition of engineering professionals. The Bologna Process also requires 12-years of education for university admission and practice of profession in European countries. The Philippines is the only country in Asia and among the three remaining countries in the world that has a 10-year basic education cycle (the other two are Singapore and Brunei).

To improve the basic education, the Department of Education with the help of the government and non-government stakeholders has developed the K to 12 Program. The K to 12 means Kindergarten and the 12 years of elementary and secondary education. Kindergarten refers to the 5-year old cohort who undergoes a standardized kinder curriculum. Elementary education refers to primary schooling that involves six years of education (Grades 1-6) while secondary education refers to four years of Junior High School (Grades 7-10 or HS Year 1-4) and two years of Senior High Schools (Grades 11-12 or HS Year 5-6). Universal Kindergarten is offered at the start of the school-year 2011-2012. The Department of Education begins unlogging the basic education curriculum in the School Year 2012-2013. The enhanced 12-year curriculum is implemented starting with Grade 1 pupils of the school-year 2012-2013.

Those who go through the 12-year program will get an elementary diploma (6 years), a Junior High School diploma (4 years) and a Senior High school diploma (2 years). A full 12 years of basic education will eventually be required for entry into tertiary level education (entering first-year students by School Year 2018 - 2019 or seven years). The infrastructure to be used has to be put up by the year 2016-2017. Graduates will possess competency and skills relevant to the job market. They will attain Certificate of Proficiency, Certificate of Competency or National Certification in their areas of specialization. Graduates will be better prepared for higher education. The K to 12 education is at the same time affordable. The additional two years in high school will be cheaper compared to a two-year college education. The potential annual earnings of K to 12 graduates will be higher compared to the earnings of 10-year high school graduates, and most importantly, these graduates will now be recognized abroad.

The K to 12 Curriculum aims to produce holistically developed learners with the 21st-century skills load. It is designed to make learners possess healthy mind and body, solid moral and spiritual grounding, essential knowledge and skills for lifelong learning and self-actualization. It seeks to engage them in critical thinking and creative problem solving to the development of a progressive, just, and humane society. It also aims to strengthen their sense of nationalism and sense of appreciation to the beauty of the country as well as care for the environment for a sustainable future. Kindergarten will be integrated into the basic education system, which is a bold step toward making all Grade 1 pupils as readers. The senior high schools will be aligned with the 21st-century skills and college readiness standards of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). The curriculum will focus on the core subjects, namely, Mathematics, Science and English with electives that are sensitive and responsive to the learners' interest and local industry needs. Graduates will be accredited in their areas of specializations which include Academics, Technical-Vocational, and Sports and Arts. Modules shall be provided as the basic learning resource. These are self-instructional materials that enable students to do independent and cooperative learning. For a school with internet

connectivity, web-based resources and video materials will be encouraged to be used where appropriate. Resources for teachers include teaching guides, prototype lesson plans, lesson exemplars, matrix of existing books, workbooks and modules. There are assessments and rating of learning outcomes.

The assessment shall be done at four levels and shall be weighted as follows: knowledge (15%), process or skill (25%), understanding (30%) and products/performance (30%). The levels are defined as follows: "Knowledge" refers to the substantive content of the curriculum, the facts and information that the students acquire. "Process" refers to cognitive operations that the students perform on facts and information to construct meaning and understanding. "Understanding" refers to enduring big ideas, principles and generalizations inherent to the discipline, which may assess using the facets of understanding. "Products/Performance" refers to the real-life application of understanding as evidenced by the students' performance of authentic tasks.

At the end of the quarter, the performance of students shall be described in the report card, based on the following levels of proficiency: Beginning level--at this level, the students struggle with their understanding; prerequisite and fundamental knowledge and skills have not been acquired or developed adequately to aid understanding. Developing level--at this level, the students possess the minimum knowledge and skills and core understandings but need help throughout the performance of authentic tasks. Approaching Proficiency level--at this level the students have developed the fundamental knowledge and skills and core understanding with little guidance from the teacher and with some assistance from peers, can transfer these understanding through authentic performance tasks. Proficient level--at this level the students have developed the fundamental knowledge and skills and core understanding and can move them independently through authentic performance tasks. Advanced level--at this level the students exceed the core requirements in terms of knowledge, skills, and understanding, and can transfer them automatically and flexibly through authentic performance. The level of proficiency at which the students are performing shall be based on a numerical value which is arrived at after summing up the results of the students' performance on the various levels of assessment. The numerical values are as follows: Beginning (74% and below), Developing (75-79%), Approaching Proficiency (80-84%), Proficient (85-89%) and Advanced (90% and above). What shall appear in the report card is not the numerical value, but the equivalent level of proficiency, abbreviated as follows: B for Beginning; D for Developing; AP for Approaching Proficiency; P for Proficient; and A for Advanced (DepEd Order No.31).

Meanwhile, to highlight the general principles on curricular development and changes, Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) had emphasized that goals and objectives need to be clarified to guide the curriculum innovation process and the identification of the content. The focus has to be on the learners' total development. Contents of the curriculum are identified. The three levels of the curriculum are considered in the implementation process (Bago, 2001; 2008). In the implementation of the curriculum, Ornstein (1998), Bago (2001; 2008) and Bilbao (2008) suggested some useful procedures. Pilot testing or try-out is important before the curriculum is fully implemented. Monitoring and evaluation are equally important in the implementation for these determine the success or failure of the curriculum. Viewpoints coming from the teachers must be heard; financial support, instructional materials and preparation of other facilities must be provided; orientation of the new policies and teachers' training must be held before the implementation. The different changes in the curriculum as cited in Bago (2001;

2008) stated that the curriculum is never static for the society is dynamic since changes happen from time to time.

In Philippine education, as has been exposed in the previous descriptions, frequent changes in the curriculum have been experienced over the past decades, observed to be affecting not just the content and mode of instruction but also the attitude of the front liners and the most critical human assets –the teachers. It is an observation by the researcher that teachers air out more negative reactions than positive ones when it comes to the changes in the curriculum. While training and seminars are usually provided, there are remaining critical areas that are left unaddressed before the implementation of the curriculum as manifested by teachers' discomfort and conflicts. Questions arise; doubts widely expressed: "Could it be that changes are untimely and uninformed, or are not planned properly, or are simply made for the sake of making changes because of the rise of new leadership in the Department of Education?" One would hear teachers desperately say, "If teachers were valued as the primary implementers, then classroom teachers should be the first and foremost sources of information for whatever changes policymakers may want to introduce and get implemented. But alas, they are never consulted". Hence, it is a common observation that where there are changes in the curriculum, there always arise opposition or resistance among the grassroots and the direct implementers--the teachers themselves--from the micro to the macro level. What brings teachers to their respective stances and what may be done to connect their experiences and school practices to relevant policies is the primary concern of this study.

It is the objective of this study to unveil and present teachers' (referred to as the grassroots) real concerns on the policies regarding curriculum change. Specifically, the study sought to obtain the perspectives of seasoned/experienced teachers as regards the extent of preparation provided by the government to implement changes in the curriculum in the basic education. It also aims to describe the difficulties that the participants encounter in delivering instruction, and their recommendations on the steps that education authorities may consider adopting to win teachers' commitment and achieve successful curriculum change and implementation. Outcomes of this research are hoped to make a difference in the planning, implementation and evaluation of curricular changes not only in the local setting but also in the country, by providing firsthand perspectives from those who are called "the front liners". The present research offers its findings and insights as new evidence-based information that may be used as inputs by education policy makers, curriculum developers, school administrators, teachers and other stakeholders in discerning and rethinking curriculum change processes and implementation. What may be experienced in the micro level may likewise be true in the macro level.

## METHOD

With the primary target of deriving insights from the participants' perspectives and experiences that may be offered as a basis for rethinking policies on curriculum change and implementation in the basic education sector, this study used the qualitative type of research in gathering and analyzing pertinent data. In Corbin and Strauss (2008), qualitative research is described as an approach that affords the researchers to acquire an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences. This method also leads to the discovery of how meanings are arrived at out of the volume of words gathered and make sense of what seems to be a disorganized body of diverse ideas, opinions or points of view. When research questions require explanation or comprehending a given phenomenon, occurrence or process that

possess complexities (and in which quantifying is found inadequate to capture meaning), then qualitative methods are most useful (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Depending on the level of analysis that may be applied, a set of qualitative data could offer more than a story or one meaning as this type of data is inherently rich in meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative methods could allow researchers to see and understand the 'embedded' meaning of people's experiences based on contexts (Barbour, 2001).

In the present study, data were gathered through a face-to-face interview with ten (10) seasoned public elementary school teachers. The select participants are those who have rendered a minimum of 10 years of teaching, who have witnessed and experienced the "evolution of curricula." This "evolution of curricula" refers to the change from one curriculum to another, beginning from the New Elementary School Curriculum (NESC), then to the Basic Elementary Curriculum (BEC), and then to the Restructured Basic Elementary Curriculum (RBEC). Furthermore, the selected seasoned teachers have been teaching all the subjects at the elementary level, have been recognized to be consistently attaining outstanding performance ratings and have at least earned units in a master's degree.

A content-validated interview guide composed of ten questions was used to elicit the participants' rich insights about their experiences on curriculum changes and implementation. The table that follows presents the interview questions validated per specific objective.

Objectives	Interview Guide Question/s
<p>To obtain the perspectives of seasoned/experienced teachers as regards the:</p> <p>(1) extent of the preparation provided by the government to implement changes in the curriculum in the basic education;</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How long have you been in the service?</li> <li>2. How many times have you experienced changes in the curriculum?</li> <li>3. What curriculum have you experienced implementing?</li> <li>4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the curriculum change to your profession as a teacher?</li> <li>5. How did the curriculum change help you as a teacher?</li> </ol>

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>(2) the difficulties they encounter in delivering instruction; and,</p>   | <p>6. What difficulties do you encounter when there is a curriculum change?</p>   |
| <p>(3) their recommendations on the steps that education authorities may consider adopting to win teachers' commitment and achieve successful curriculum change and implementation</p> | <p>7. What are the weaknesses and limitations of the curriculum change in its implementation?</p> <p>8. What are the probable procedures that you can suggest to successfully implement curriculum change?</p> <p>9. How should Education Authorities help you when you implement the policies on curriculum change that they have established?</p> <p>10. What possible interventions should they do to ensure success of the curriculum change?</p> |

When deemed necessary, probing or follow up questions were also asked. With the research being qualitative, data analysis happened in almost every part of the data gathering process. Interview transcripts were prepared for qualitative content analysis. This technique is defined as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The same authors found that the usual by-product of qualitative content analysis is the description of texts or typologies together with the reflection on how the participants view the social world. This process allows the researcher to go beyond word counting, to explore the deeper meaning of physical words, and extend farther than the simple mining of objective content. Qualitative content analysis therefore leads the researcher to read between and beyond lines so that the latent meanings of texts could be discovered within the context of the setting. In the present study, the responses of the participant-teachers were analyzed to inform the preset objectives previously stated. Key terms were extracted from their varied responses in order to identify core meanings. These meanings were further subjected to analysis to derive implications, new values and inputs that may be recommended for rethinking policies and practices in curriculum development and implementation. Such new insights and realizations are expounded and substantiated in the Discussion section.

Responses were coded to preserve the confidentiality of data. For example, Teacher 1 is used to identify responses of the first participant. Thus, Teachers 1 to 10 are set as the pseudo identities of the participants.

The related literature reviewed, as well as findings in similar studies previously made by other researchers, were used to substantiate current discoveries and to compare and contrast data deliberately as attempts to create new ideas.



## FINDINGS

This section presents the significant findings of the study organized according to the sequence of the objectives given in the Introduction: (1) participants' perspectives on the extent of preparation provided for the implementation changes in the basic education curriculum; (2) difficulties encountered in delivering instruction; (3) recommended steps to effect successful curriculum change.

### **Participants' Perspectives on the Extent of the Preparation Provided for the Implementation of Changes in the Basic Education Curriculum**

Almost all of the participant-teachers commented on the observed less adequate preparation provided before the actual implementation of the changes in the curriculum. The lack of seminars, training and orientation on curricular changes made teachers less informed. This condition, according to the participants, is indicated by the confusion among teachers and administrators, the casting of many unresolved questions, and the subsequent negative reception of seemingly vague changes. Overall, they expressed lack of awareness of and uneasiness with the changes that are implemented. The actual responses of the participants that directly reflect these data are:

*There is lack of information for the new curriculum. There is not enough orientation about it. (T1)*

*There is difficulty in following the curriculum. (T3)*

*Provide enough information about the curriculum change. (T4)*

*No knowledge about in coming curriculum, lack of school/classroom and Teachers and no books for the next curriculum are the weaknesses. (T6)*

*No information different and wrong information and information is from media first. (T7)*

*Teachers are not yet ready for the new curriculum because they are not aware of the new curriculum. (T8)*

*Teachers are not yet ready for the new curriculum because they are not aware of the new curriculum. Information is through the media. (T9)*

*There is lack of information and dissemination. There are confusions on the different procedure or policies. (T10)*

Additionally, participants see that there is little time provided between preparation and implementation and that orientations and seminars organized for the introduction of changes are inadequate. While seminars and workshops may be conducted for orientation purposes, participants find the timing quite late as these seminars are held during, not before, the implementation period. Participants deemed the period as too short to make everyone internalize and later on carry out the changes proposed for implementation and win the teachers' cooperation when the changes get implemented, as shown in the following responses:

*The Education Authorities should give us the seminars and workshops before they make us obey their policies. (T1)*

*The seminar gives professional growth. Training manuals should be prepared. Give seminar about the change. (T2)*

*Teaching strategies are one of the problems. Check the seminars that would help in teaching and learning. Conduct seminar before the implementation of the curriculum. (T3)*

*There is not enough training to help in teaching. Upgrade in terms of Professionalism. There is not enough training to help in teaching the learning areas. (T4)*

*Knowledge are gained from the seminars given during the implementation of the curriculum. Provide seminars before the implementation of the curriculum. More training should be given. (T5)*

*Seminars are given during the implementation. (T7)*

*The seminar workshops are effective. Seminars are given after the introduction of the curriculum. (T8)*

*Improved competencies in teaching, new strategies in teaching were being introduced in the seminars given. Lessons are easier because of the strategies and team teaching. They should have seminars before the implementation of the curriculum so that the teachers will have a better understanding of the said curriculum. Equip teachers' trainings based on the curriculum. (T9)*

*There was lack of seminar before the introduction of the curriculum. (T10)*

### **Difficulties Encountered in Delivering Instruction**

As for the difficulties encountered in delivering instruction, the participants expressed their problems in bringing the new curriculum in their respective classrooms. Most of them cited about the insufficiency of instructional materials such as teaching manuals which are used as guides for the new curriculum. Textbooks are not updated and moreover, not enough to facilitate effective and efficient instruction. It is also observed that the curricular changes had already been instituted but the instructional materials such as textbooks and teaching guides in some subject areas remained outdated or are still about the previous curriculum. Hence, teachers are left to search for their respective materials and to rely on their own resourcefulness to deliver the instruction as required by the new changes. The following were the comments related to concerns on instructional materials:

*Materials needed like textbooks... the same manuals and books are used, teaching devices are not provided seminars and workshops are given when the curriculum is undergoing its implementation. (T1)*

*No revisions of books and unequipped supply of instructional devices like books and visual aids. (T4)*

*Not enough textbooks and seminars are given during the implementation of the curriculum. Only English textbooks were changed. (T5)*

*Some books were changed. The competencies were shuffled, the books and manuals jibe [sic] but if I will follow the competencies prescribed pupils will have hard time sorting the pages of the lessons in the books. If I stick on the book I will have wider knowledge, all I do is teach. They change the books in Science and Health and during this time it is given an hour in teaching it. Lack of school/classroom and teachers and no books for the next curriculum are the weaknesses. (T6)*

*Actually, some books are still in the NESC PRODED. Some books are changed in English and Mathematics. Seminars are given during the implementation. Books are not enough for 1 to 1 ratio. Books are helpful to me in my teaching. The workbooks in Mathematics makes Math easier. (T7)*

*There are no changes in manuals or teaching guides. Lack of books in Filipino and Mathematics... Books have little exercises. (T8)*

*There are not enough books and teaching guides. Books should be provided to pupils one is to one, instructional materials and other reference books in teaching the subject. (T9)*

*There are not enough books and different teaching aids and manual. Budget is not enough for the books teachers and other facilities. (T10)*

Others stated that the long hours of teaching greatly affect their teaching styles in handling their classes as reflected in the following responses:

*Time management of teachers' long hours of teaching loads, insufficiency of textbooks and instructional devices and teaching strategies adoptive [sic] to make teaching and learning successful. (T1)*

*I have difficulties in preparing teaching materials and teaching strategies. Pupils become noisy because of long time. (T2)*

*More teaching hours for re-teaching and remedial, less non-readers, zero non-numerate are the advantages for me. (T4)*

*Long hours are given in teaching. (T5)*

The participants also shared their insights on the difficulties encountered during class sessions and their self-assessed inadequate skill to implement the curriculum. At least six of them expressed this.

*Teaching strategies help me. I have difficulties in preparing teaching materials and teaching strategies. (T2)*

*Teaching strategies are one of the problems. (T3)*

*Upgrade in terms of professionalism. (T4)*

*The competencies were shuffled, the books and manuals jibe [sic] but if I will follow the competencies prescribed pupils will have hard time sorting the pages of the lessons in the books. If I stick on the book I will have wider knowledge, all I do is teach. (T6)*

*It is a challenge because it is not routinary, routinary [sic] will not make you grow. (T8)*

*I learned how to adjust, follow the curriculum although I am used to the old one. I have to comply with the new curriculum. (T10)*

### **Recommended Steps to Effect Successful Curriculum Change**

Along with their narrative on the difficulties encountered were their shared thoughts on how to implement a new curriculum and win the cooperation of teachers. Topping the list of what they thought could have been done is informing teachers adequately about the curriculum before its full implementation. Some insights are thus stated:

*I believe that the new curriculum should be disseminated to teachers first. Trial and error should be done, the new curriculum should be used first by certain schools, proper monitoring and effective evaluation should be administered to make sure that it's going to be successful. They should make the curriculum change known to teachers. They should be informed first because parents often ask them about [sic]. They can help make parents understand the changes made in the curriculum. (T1)*

*Provide enough information about the curriculum change. (T4)*

*No knowledge about in coming curriculum. (T6)*

*I have confusion on the different procedure or policies. (T10)*

Most of the participants felt the need for upgrading their respective teaching skills to be attuned to the demands of the new curriculum. However, they expressed that if seminars or workshops for the updating of their knowledge and skills about relevant strategies were to be provided, such should have been adequately planned and conducted before the new curriculum implementation. The following responses reflect this:

*Seminars and workshops should be well planned before the curriculum change. (T1)*

*Training manuals should be prepared. (T2)*

*Check the seminars that would help in teaching and learning. (T3)*

*Facilitate more seminars. (T4)*

*Give seminars before the implementation. Facilitate more seminars before the implementation. (T6)*

*Give trainings also in using the new technology. (T9)*

*I am asking for effective seminar, adaptive to the strategies. (T10)*

Five participants added that the instructional materials and facilities are necessary to be prepared before the new curriculum implementation. Quotes relevant to this follow:

*Training manuals should be prepared. (T2)*

*Provide...the instructional materials like textbooks and visual aids teachings manuals in all learning areas. (T4)*

*Provide textbooks before the implementation of the curriculum. (T5)*

*Give teaching devices before the implementation. (T6)*

*...check if materials are ready because there many materials needed... textbooks, and seminars before the curriculum [implementation]... (T7)*

Five of them specifically described their insights on how education authorities can help them during the curriculum implementation. Half of them commented about the need for a pilot testing of the curriculum before its full implementation:

*Try to have the curriculum in one of the schools and compare the learning outcomes if the new curriculum is more effective than the last one. (T10)*

*Experimental testing of the curriculum should be done. (T6)*

*Have a dry –run. Have a feasibility study, dry-run. (T7)*

*Through the dry-run, they will start to improve the weaknesses of the curriculum. (T9)*

*Sampling can be done to model schools. (T10)*

At least four of them took note of the need for the education authorities to ensure that the budget is available for use in the implementation, particularly in procuring instructional materials, in funding training and seminars, in providing well-equipped classrooms, and for use in teacher development. These four participants expressed:

*Prepare the budget before they execute it. (T6)*

*Check the budget for books, classrooms, and teachers... (T7)*

*...Ask for budget. (T8)*

*Give information and prepare the budget for teachers, books and other facilities. (T10)*

Three participants suggested for the evaluation of the curriculum through the teachers' and pupils' performance:

*Observation and critiquing would help me. (T4)*

*Check the capabilities of the teachers if they are capable of doing their job in implementing the curriculum including their moral values. (T9)*

*Evaluate both the learners and the teachers to improve the curriculum. (T10)*

Aside from evaluation, participants suggested that education authorities should monitor the curriculum during its implementation:

*Proper monitoring should be administered to make sure that it's going to be successful. (T1)*

*Monitor each school to insure the success. (T2)*

*Correct evaluation and monitoring would make sure that it is successful. (T3)*

*Facilitate more seminars. Conduct reliable evaluation. Review the policies and monitor the curriculum change by visiting. (T4)*

*Conduct proper monitoring and evaluate the curriculum properly. (T5)*

*Evaluate pupils' credible evaluation. Check teachers if there are and even rooms allotted for that grade. Experimental Testing of the curriculum should be done. (T6)*

## DISCUSSION

Teachers' concerns about curricular changes and implementation have been among the primary issues that have not been fully resolved over the past decades, may it be in the macro or in the micro level, a situation which this study took advantage of to contribute to shedding light to it. With the primary aim of deriving inputs that may be recommended to policy makers and curriculum developers, the research reflected on the insightful responses of the participant-seasoned teachers in a micro level. Their expressed opinions, shared experiences and recommendations as among those who have been the direct witnesses of the evolution of curricula in the basic education are found to offer substantive bases for consideration in rethinking policies (and practices) governing curriculum changes and implementation both in the micro and macro levels.

The discussion of findings is organized following the sequence of the specific objectives stated in earlier sections as reiterated herein: description of the participants' perspectives on the extent of preparation provided by the government to implement changes in the basic education curriculum; the difficulties they encountered in delivering instruction; and their recommended steps that education authorities may consider adopting to win teachers' commitment and achieve successful curriculum implementation.

Firstly, on the extent of preparation provided, it was experienced that the implementation of a new curriculum replacing the existing one is found to be so sudden in the

sense that the period between the preparation and actual implementation was found too short for the necessary preliminary steps to be carried out. These steps, as viewed by the participants, cover planning based on the outcomes of the evaluation of the existing curriculum, series of orientation among teachers and administrators, pilot testing, preparation of resources such as textbooks and teachers' guide, training, seminars and workshops. What they have observed is that the orientation and training are usually held during the implementation period already. Such observations and experiences seem to be contrary to what the experts in curriculum development stand for and recommend.

Bago (2008), for example, posited that stakeholders and education authorities manage the procedure for implementation. Such management covers planning, establishing and maintenance of systems, and encouragement of compliance among teachers to implement curricular changes as planned. In planning, objectives and goals are set first, then the strategies to be used, and finally the evaluation process. A directed goal can be successful if it is given focus in the sense that every detail is well thought of for successful curriculum implementation. Reyes (2000), an expert educator and curriculum consultant herself, contends that any curriculum, no matter how well planned, may not achieve its purposes if it is not implemented as planned. She clarified her stance by defining curriculum implementation as a process of ensuring that the curriculum as designed is what is delivered in classes. She further cited as an example that the failures of some curricula introduced in the Philippines are traced at the teachers' inappropriate implementation.

Curriculum implementation, in its most literal sense, focuses on the "how," that is, how the preset objectives and the lined up subject content translate into learning outcomes. If implementers are not well-equipped and well-prepared, chances are greater on the side of failure. Reyes (2002) is thus quoted, "...because in the hands of uncommitted and ineffective teachers, the best-designed curriculum is doomed to fail" (p.1). What the literature and reality show in unison is that the prime curriculum implementers are no other than the teachers—who are referred to as the "grassroots" in the current study. Hence, grounded on the findings, reviewed literature and insights of this study, the first input is offered: that authorities and leaders of curriculum designing and implementation may consider allotting reasonable period for the legitimate front-liners—who are the teachers—to get relevant orientation, re-orientation, training or re-training before any actual and large-scale discharge of their new tasks or renewed roles. The teachers' training and preparation may also include equipping them with the skills in doing formative evaluation and reflection of their practices to determine emerging needs and corresponding steps to address spotted needs during the early and middle stages of the curriculum implementation. Also, a substantive aspect of the training could be that which make them competent in maximizing the use of accompanying instructional materials.

According to Flores (2005), it is essential that teachers are supported and made to understand how they interpret and deal with the change process through an orientation, which means making them first intellectually prepared and equipped. The teachers' mindset is an important factor in bringing curriculum change in the classroom level. Saban (2010) posted the concept of mind-setting as a highly effective driving force for teachers to fulfill all their roles in the educational system. Teachers must acquire adequate and quality professional development which requires long-term engagement (Salana, 2008). Hence, it is more than just informing them about the changes; it is educating them about these changes. A training program, which is a series of quality and relevant sessions, need to be given to teachers

before the curriculum is implemented. This process will ascertain that the teachers shall gain the confidence in executing their role as direct implementers.

Apart from the equipping of the teachers with the needed competencies and other preparatory activities that may need to be rethought related to the implementation aspect, the present study seeks to propose the rethinking of the processes by which curricula are developed. Perhaps, curriculum development needs to shift from highly technical procedure governed by the “technical panel” who often may not have been experienced teachers, into a collaborative endeavor spearheaded by the legitimate stakeholders –expert and practicing teachers and educational leaders—who would connect the curriculum to the existing and projected needs of the students in particular, and of the society in general. This idea is grounded on the training tool designed by the IBE (n.d.). The outcome of such collaboration of stakeholders is a consensus-based curriculum from optimized resources and inputs that directly address students’ needs.

Then there is this real pressing concern on the apparent resistance among teachers on the curricular changes that are being enforced. According to the participants of this study, the lack of appropriate and timely seminars, orientation and training made them less informed and thus unprepared to embrace whatever curricular changes they are tasked to implement. Some of the teachers were even caught by surprise. Curriculum experts are one in saying that “curriculum development is a participative process” (Ornstein & Hunkins, and Beauchamp as cited in Reyes, 2000, p. 121). The same contention holds true when it comes to the implementation where teachers’ direct involvement is higher. Often, teachers’ resistance to curricular changes stems from their lack of understanding of the rationale of the changes. Here is where the role of educational leaders and administrators come in. Bago (2001) contends that the success of the implementation of curricular changes largely depends on the creativity and resourcefulness of the school heads on winning the teachers’ cooperation and willingness to bring to the classroom level the learning experiences based on the curriculum design.

It is also recalled that participant-teachers had many questions about the changes that were left unanswered even in the middle of the implementation. Such is understood to be a natural outcome of the missed conduct of orientation prior to the actual carrying out of the changes. The direct implementers have the right to have a working understanding of their tasks because the lack of knowledge brings with it other complications such as adverse attitude and bad teaching.

In the event that teachers were not made part of the planning process, Reyes (2000) suggests that an intervention may be necessary such as in-service training to develop teachers’ competencies in accomplishing their roles aligned to the curricular changes. She further recommends that in the course of the implementation, educational leaders may promote openness and mitigate the teachers’ doubts and fears of the possible outcome of the changes by welcoming questions, concerns and apprehensions. Assuring teachers of the availability of administrative support and assistance will also help prevent unnecessary conflicts and oppositions.

The second set of concerns which this study attempted to analyze were the difficulties the participants encountered in delivering instruction as consequences of the curricular changes. Topping the list of the expressed concerns is the inadequacy of needed instructional materials. These materials include teaching manuals which are used as guides in bringing the



lessons to the classroom level. Compounding the necessities are the outdated textbooks and the unavailability of the updated ones. In the real setting, as disclosed by the participants, if there were textbooks, these were not proportionate to the number of students in a class which consequently impacts the efficiency of the teaching-learning process. The availability of appropriate and updated textbooks could be one strong aid that teachers can draw strength from to make their preparation for the lesson less taxing and less difficult. There may be today the internet to the rescue, but such technology may not be readily available to teachers and students in the remote areas.

Participants also noted that the curricular changes had already been instituted but the instructional materials such as textbooks and teaching guides in some subject-areas remained outdated or are still about the previous curriculum. Hence, teachers are left to search for their respective materials and to rely on their resourcefulness to deliver the instruction as required by the new changes.

It is an ideal procedure that textbooks and other instructional materials be prepared ahead of the implementation so that teachers are helped in the delivery of instructional content and development of skills among the learners. These materials can be discussed during the seminar or workshop before the actual curriculum take-off. The lack or absence of these necessary tools complicates teachers' adjustment to the new curriculum. The scarce resources deters the execution of effective and efficient teaching and learning process (Pangilinan, 2011). Meanwhile, teachers' expertise on the curricular content may also be tapped to contribute to the preparation of the instructional materials, and these may be accomplished during the preparatory seminar/workshops.

In support of the recommendation as mentioned earlier, Flores (2005) stated that resources allocation should be adequate to have quality teaching. Teaching and learning are made easy with updated textbooks. If enough updated books are provided (in the public schools), students may bring these home responsibly and do an advance reading or personal enhancement. Meanwhile, it is not just about the number, but also (and more importantly) about the quality of the textbooks provided that must be considered. For developing countries, books/ textbooks in the public schools could be the second most important sources of knowledge for the students, the first one being their teachers. The textbooks may also be the sole sources of knowledge for teachers since these are usually aligned with the content and design of a particular curriculum. Hence these should be accurate, of high quality and easily accessible (IBE, n.d.).

With respect to other difficulties noted, participant-teachers identified long hours of continuous teaching that unfavorably impact their effectiveness. Based on their actual practice, the extra teaching hours are usually spent for remedial sessions and re-teaching, leaving them no time or less time to prepare their instructional devices. In addition, they expressed their self-assessed inadequacy to implement the new curriculum in the classroom because they only had minimal training time. These inadequacies range from the lack of knowledge and skill in preparing the necessary instructional tools to difficulty in adopting new methodologies necessary to carry out the requirements of the new curriculum. The 'long hours of teaching' and the 'feeling of inadequacy' could be traced back to the "unpreparedness" of the teachers to bring to the classroom level the new mandates and changes in the curriculum. Here could be seen that ill-start could bring with it a domino-effect. To have a clearer picture of the participants' scenarios and experiences, it may be recalled that they were qualified as

participants of the present study because, aside from being seasoned teachers, they have been assigned to teach all the subject areas at the elementary level and yet are consistently obtaining high performance rating. Thus, "long hours of teaching" is but a legitimate concern of the participants.

School leaders may need to consider the well-being of the teachers as they encourage the latter's cooperation to adhere to curricular changes. At this point, it may be said that the support that teachers' need is not just about instructional or academic but more so about care and concern for their mental, physical and emotional wellness. To respond to this, educational leaders may strategically map a teaching schedule that strikes a balance between rest and work. Prolonged and continuous hours of teaching may cause the degeneration of the quality of instruction as the teacher nears the later periods. Any human resource or health book would agree with this natural tendency of the human body. Perhaps, too, 'sharpening the saw' as suggested in Covey's (1989) may add applicable tips for educational managers on how to take care of the prime implementers of curricular changes.

In the area of instructional delivery and preparation of instructional materials, as cited in Bago (2008), the instructional level is the primary level of the curriculum. Therefore, it should be given the most percentage of allotment in the budget. A reasonable portion of the budget may be invested in the formation of the teachers. The seminars or training are meant to enhance the instructional competence and boost the teaching prowess of teachers. Such is reiterated by other researchers like Duru (2010) and Flores (2005) in their respective studies. They contend that training or seminar-workshops are ways of improving teachers' efficiency and subsequently raise their confidence level as curriculum conductors and lessen their apprehensions about the changes that they may encounter in their work. The skills they gain through these training could help them overcome the anxieties that may come along with the uncertainties of the outcomes.

The last data sets which this study dealt with are those that pertain to the participants' recommendations to help improve their current situations as the mandated implementers of curricular changes. Within the span of ten years, the participants were able to experience three waves of curricular changes, and as such, they are deemed credible sources of insights that may serve as useful inputs for the improvement of curriculum development and implementation policies and practices. When asked about their perspectives, they were straightforward in expressing their concerns and experiences and they were also sincere about drawing out suggestions for the advancement of processes employed in the implementation of curricular changes.

Interview transcripts reveal that along with the narration of difficulties encountered, they shared thoughts on how to implement a new curriculum with winning of the cooperation of teachers. It is interesting to note that literature reviewed agrees with their suggestions. Topping the list of what they thought could have been done is informing teachers adequately about the new curriculum before its advent. Their problematic experiences of not having been prepared and equipped to embrace changes led them to an almost unanimous recommendation of reinforcing information dissemination mechanisms and providing timely orientation and training for teachers prior to any scale of compelling changes in the curriculum. The lack of proper orientation and appropriate training was for them the primary culprit for their inadequacy to effectively do their tasks and contribute to the attainment of the purposes of the

new curriculum. The accuracy of information disseminated needs to be ensured. Ornstein (1998) contends that precise information is crucial in implementing curriculum change.

The participants also saw the need to pilot-test first the intended change before its full scale implementation. Literature defines pilot-testing as an empirical try-out or a mechanism of analyzing and assessing the curriculum being tried-out in order to identify the problems and deficiencies that may need to be corrected before the full blown implementation. According to Bilbao (2008), pilot testing in a small-scale group is a process of knowing how useful, relevant, reliable and valid the curriculum being tested. It gives data for what needs to be modified or revised prior to a large scale swing. Successful curriculum change implementation is the one which has been tested or piloted (Bago, 2001; IBE, n.d.; Reyes, 2000). Innovations are created after its pilot testing to ascertain its successful implementation.

Another action which the participants deemed highly necessary is the provision of updated instructional materials. These materials that include textbooks, teacher's guides/curriculum guides, among others, either digital or printed, have to be well-designed and must be attuned to the intended curriculum changes. These learning materials serve as tools that aid teachers in the crucial period of adjustment from the old curriculum to the new one (McKernan, 1993). How to use these materials may be made part of the teachers' training to maximize utility of the same.

Next, it is recalled that the participants suggested the need for the monitoring of the curriculum being enforced. Monitoring, as described in Bilbao (2008), determines how relevant and effective the curriculum is. It is assessed and adjusted during the pilot-testing. Monitoring evaluates the curriculum while still on its implementation stage and to determine whether there is any need to do immediate addressing of concerns or to keep its original design.

Pilot-testing and monitoring are the assessment mechanisms that may yield useful data to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum. The teachers, being the front liners, are to be consulted in its modifications. They are in a better position to recommend doable solutions to problems that arise in the implementation of a curriculum. Suggestions from them are to be considered.

Meanwhile, participants also added recommending for the evaluation of the curriculum through the performance of both teachers and learners. Curriculum evaluation can be accomplished successfully through the use of valid instruments that could gauge performances of the teachers and the learners. The teachers' competence can be determined through the learners' achievement in all the subjects in the curriculum (Walker, 2003). Reliable testing materials are to be constructed in order to obtain accurate measures of the achievement of the learners which in turn reflects the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the implemented curriculum. In addition, the day to day experiences of teachers are solid pieces of evidence that may be used in developing the curriculum further (Skager & Dave, 1977).

The lack of funding was sensed by the participants. At least four of them suggested that educational authorities take measures to ensure that there is enough budget allocation to fund teacher development activities and provision of necessary instructional materials. Literature states that analysis of the projected budget or funding is a pivotal strategy because this will determine the provision of all the other needed resources. Shortfall in budget is

something that should be avoided (Munter & Reckers, 2010). The budgetary allocation itself should be ascertained even before the curriculum planners sit down.

“Quality education is a function of instruction” (Reyes, 2002, p.1), and instruction is the primary function of the teachers, and taking care of the teachers is the primary function of education leaders. School leaders are responsible for providing support to the teachers to enable them perform their duties effectively (IBE, n.d.). As leaders, they are the prime shapers of the school culture and work environment, hence they impact how teachers perform as curriculum implementers and how the learners achieve as students (Oreg & Berson, 2011). Covered too in their set of roles is seeing to it that policies and practices match; that necessary foundations are well-established before the implementation of any policy that institutes new changes.

To synthesize, the data gathered from credible sources--the seasoned teachers themselves--about three successive waves of implementation of curricular changes in the basic education provided scenarios in a micro level which shows a sample of what happens when changes in the curriculum are handed down to the local schools. The teachers' responses and experiences particularly in the provinces away from the central offices of the Department of Education are also worth the attention of higher authorities. These deserve serious notice like how the macro circumstances in schools are viewed. Based on the data gathered, the study concludes that a gap exists between what the policy on curriculum implementation mandates and what is actually experienced by the first-line implementers--the teachers. It is hoped that the participant-teachers' recommendations, along with the reflections arrived at, may be used as substantive inputs for the much needed rethinking of policies as well as of the guidelines and practices in implementing curricular changes, whether it be in the macro or micro level.

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