In an Educational Kaleidoscope World: Philippine Curricula, Its Problems, and a Proposed Evaluation Framework

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Abstract

Developing a curriculum for a culturally and linguistically diverse nation such as the Philippine archipelago has proven to be difficult. Over the years, many have criticized the curriculum for being over-congested and irrelevant to the issues and demands of the present world. This is compounded by a lack of basic literacy and twenty-first-century skills among basic education learners. Various reforms have been initiated to develop the foundational skills among learners. This includes the K-12 curriculum, which extended the existing ten-year curriculum into a thirteen-year curriculum. However, the K-12 curriculum was proven to be inefficient for many Filipinos who favored the shorter curriculum. Many even deem the curriculum to have failed to prepare students for either work or higher education, both of which were promised by the new curriculum. In the first place, what should have been the goals for a basic education curriculum? This question was front and center as the new Matatag curriculum was crafted early this year. This curriculum aimed to focus on foundational skills and decongestion, yet these solutions have already been proposed in the previous curriculum. Given various solutions to the educational crisis, this paper aims to articulate the problems in previous curricula and compare them with the solutions offered by the curriculum. Moreover, this research seeks to lay the groundwork for research and evaluation of the Philippine curriculum, especially given the novelty of the 2024 Matatag Curriculum.

Keywords: Philippine curriculum, curriculum evaluation, history of education

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Introduction

The Philippine education system has long been plagued with issues in quality and delivery. This has been evidenced by the country's performance in the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings in 2022, where the government has placed seventy-seventh out of eighty-one countries based on the PISA test scores taken by fifteen-year-olds internationally in the subject areas of Mathematics, English, and Science (Ines, 2023). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which conducts the PISA every three years, there is a 120-point deficit between the Philippines and the world averages. This indicates that Filipino students lag six years behind their international peers.

The Philippine educational system's dismal performance has long been criticized and lambasted. This has prompted reform in the academic curriculum in the Philippines. The result is the 2024 Matatag Curriculum (hereafter referred to as the Matatag Curriculum), the first curriculum reform in twelve years since the 2012 K-12 Curriculum, which, in turn, is the first to implement a full thirteen-year curriculum. The Matatag Curriculum had various hallmarks, such as decongesting the curriculum by consolidating and eliminating redundant learning competencies, leaving a focus on foundational skills. In this regard, the Matatag Curriculum was able to decongest the curriculum by 70% according to official figures by the Department of Education (Department of Education, 2023). Given that the K-12 Curriculum was laid out in 2012 with a similar aim of boosting the curriculum's competitiveness, how does the Matatag curriculum differ in this regard? How can the Matatag curriculum go beyond a face-saving measure aimed at salvaging the Philippines' long-existing educational woes? These are among the key questions this research seeks to answer.

This research seeks to contextualize the problem on an international stage. While it does not aim to capture the research field in its entirety, this article seeks to delineate the background of the issue at hand and lay the groundwork for further study to evaluate the current Matatag Curriculum. Specifically, this research aims to establish an evaluation framework to help professionals identify and pinpoint issues in the educational sector. This, in turn, can be used by education decision makers to develop a curriculum that is not only effective but also relevant to the Filipino context. Given the complexity of the Philippine education system, it is essential to create a curriculum that not only considers the steps in the implementation process but also the interactions of the curriculum within individuals and societies. Such is the design of the constructed evaluation framework, which will be further elaborated in the next chapter. The following sections will establish the historical and social rationale for the issue at hand and explain why it is essential to draft an evaluation framework that can adequately assess Philippine curricula, especially the most recent 2024 Matatag Curriculum.

Historical and Policy Context of Philippine Curriculum Reform

A decade ago, the Philippine education system was extended from a ten-year curriculum (ranging from grades one to ten) to a thirteen-year curriculum (ranging from kindergarten to grade twelve), the latter of which has been heralded as the global standard. Before this reform, the Philippines was the last country in Asia to require only ten years of basic education in its standard curriculum. Aside from requiring kindergarten and two more years of high school (termed as senior high school), the curriculum has also marked a shift to that of a mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) curriculum for early education until the end of third grade in place of the bilingual education curriculum, where Filipino is

used as the language of instruction for Filipino, Social Studies, Values Education, Home Economics, as well as Music, Art, Physical Education, and Health (MAPEH), while English is used for English, Science, and Mathematics. However, the bilingual education scheme was retained from fourth grade onwards, with the subjects taught in those respective languages. While this is practiced by all public schools as mandated by the Department of Education, private schools are given more leeway in this regard.

The evolution of the Philippine education system is often synonymous with its colonial history. It is an understatement that the four centuries of combined Spanish, American, and, for a brief period, Japanese colonization had a profound impact on the Philippine education system. That said, informal education was already established in pre-colonial times, when the heads of *barangays* (villages) taught basic communication skills and weaponry to their constituents (Orata, 1956). Formal education was introduced by the Spaniards in the 16th century, who aimed to emulate the educational system of the West, with education focusing on religion, numeracy, and literacy. That said, however, the education system during this period was still rudimentary throughout the three centuries of Spanish colonial rule, which ended in 1898, with the belief that education should only be reserved for Spanish students, especially in the *colegios,* which did not accept Filipino students until the mid-1800s (Low et al., 2022). At this time, due to the lack of separation between church and state, education was mainly religion-oriented in nature and was heavily controlled by Filipino Catholic churches. This continued until the Spanish ceded the Philippines to the Americans through the Treaty of Paris in 1898 (Low et al., 2022).

One of the hallmarks of American-colonized education was the shift from Spanish to English as the medium of instruction. At the time the Philippines fell under American control, the colonizers rapidly reopened elementary schools in towns and cities while establishing new schools, especially as the Philippine commission mandated the establishment of a high school for every provincial capital- before this, most Filipino students were only expected to attend until elementary school (Casambre, 1982). At the time, seven years of elementary schooling and four years of secondary schooling were required to complete the basic education cycle and enter university.

As part of “an educational experiment to prepare the people for self-government,” the Monroe Commission later suggested a change in the educational system akin to a K-12 set-up seen today. This was done in stages – first, the seventh grade had to be abolished, after which two more years of high school would have been established. However, only the abolition of the seventh grade was achieved, resulting in a ten-year curriculum for decades. This is partly because the experiment was disrupted by the Second World War, as the curriculum was completely revised by the Japanese, whose goal was to eradicate Western influence and hegemony in favor of the spirit of the Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which was conceptualized by Japan just before the Second World War. Though the status quo prevailed after the end of World War II, the system remained a ten-year system until 2016, when grades eleven and twelve rolled out amongst the general population (Orata, 1956).

In 1957, less than a couple of decades after the war, the curriculum was changed to reflect the growing demand for vocational education in the country (Orata, 1959). Prior to this change, the curriculum was designed for students to proceed to higher education; however, schools may choose between a full academic curriculum and one that places a slight emphasis (around 25%) on vocational programs. In the newer curriculum, also known as the 2+2 curriculum, students will take a common curriculum for the first two years of secondary

education, after which students can proceed to focus on either academic or vocational education for the remaining two years of high school. This was fitting considering that the Philippines was undergoing a rapid transition from an agricultural to an industrial nation.

During the Marcos regime, however, there was a change of focus as they placed a higher emphasis on the basic skills – so-called the three R's: reading, writing, and arithmetic. More emphasis was also placed on the principles of the New Society (*Bagong Lipunan*), which aim to echo and justify the authoritarian regime of Ferdinand Marcos (Clarke, 1977). The vocational and academic focuses were temporarily retired for roughly four decades, until the expansion to the K-12 curriculum. In a way, the new expansion revived the academic-vocational split in the last two years of high school; the key difference this time was that the lower division was expanded to four years, which is now known as junior high school today. That said, however, there is already a change in perception on basic education and what its function is in today's society, even during the latter half of the 20th century. What exactly is the purpose of basic education in the Philippine setting? Such a question remains as experts debate on the current and future curricula's purpose.

With the unseating of the Marcos dictatorship, a reform of the Philippine Education system in 1989 followed. By this time, the general subject areas have begun to take shape, resembling the modern-day curriculum. The 1989 New Secondary Education Curriculum and the 1983 New Elementary Education Curriculum features eight core areas: Filipino; Social Studies; Science (Science and Health for grade school students, and Science and Technology for high school students); Mathematics; Music, Art, Physical Education, and Health; Good Morals and Right Conduct (GMRC) or Values Education English; and Technology and Home Economics. In the New Elementary Education Curriculum, however, there is a gradual addition of subjects: in first and second grade, only English, Mathematics, Filipino, and Social Studies (Civics and Culture) are studied. In the third grade, Science and Health, as well as Music, Arts, and Physical Education (MAPE) are added (Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports, 1986. Finally, Home Economics and Livelihood Education (HELE) is added starting in the fourth grade. At this time, character education is embedded across all learning areas in elementary school, with values education being a separate subject in high school.

However, woes still persist within the Philippine education system. With this, the First Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 1) was formed jointly with the Senate and the House of Representatives in order to probe and propose solutions to the educational system's shortcomings (Department of Education, Culture, and Sports, 1993). Some of the solutions include the extension of the school year from a minimum of 185 to 200 school days, with the beginning of the school year moved to the first Monday of June. Moreover, contact time in Science and Technology as well as Technology and Home Economics was increased from 60 minutes to 80 minutes daily.

However, the Philippines' educational crisis continued. More than a decade later, the Philippine Basic Education Curriculum was rolled out, starting in 2002, with an aim to further focus on foundational skills in reading, writing, science, patriotism, and numeracy to improve the literacy rate, with students not being able to read even by the end of elementary school (Department of Education, 2002). Moreover, the curriculum is decongested and further integrated in order to focus on the key areas. Another change was that the areas of Social Studies, Music, Art, and Physical Education, and Livelihood Education were all merged into a subject called Makabayan, which is dubbed to be the "laboratory of life."

Eventually, however, it was realized that the issues could only be solved through further reforming the curriculum by adding two more years. This was thought to have made the Philippine education system more competitive globally. This was materialized through Republic Act 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. As a result, the K-12 Basic Education Curriculum was crafted. The two-year extension of the curriculum is aimed at allowing for the mastery of concepts while preparing students for either career or further education, depending on the goal of the students. The thought of a curriculum that prepares job-ready students was entertained, given the lack of interest in college among most students. This is especially noticeable as only a minority of Filipino students have historically enrolled in further education despite reforms, with only 41% enrolling in college as of 2023 (Mateo, 2023).

Another feature of the K-12 curriculum is the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education System, as mentioned in the earlier section. Instead of the bilingual system adopted in the past, mother tongue was instituted as the medium of instruction from Kindergarten to Grade Three. This has allowed students to move towards a more gradual adjustment from their first language to the bilingual education system in later grades. Given the complexity of the Philippine language framework, however, many problems arose as a result of the system and its lack of proper implementation. As the country has over one hundred languages across the archipelago, there could be potential barriers and inequities, especially if more resources are dedicated towards materials developed in mainstream languages. Moreover, the shift in language is confusing for both teachers, who had to adjust teaching methods and create new materials, and learners, who faced an abrupt change from the mother-tongue-based system in the earlier years to the bilingual-based system starting in the fourth grade. These changes didn't prove to have an effect as well, as evidenced by the latest PISA rankings, as mentioned earlier, where Filipino students lag almost six years behind their peers on average.

The K-12 curriculum at this time also experienced an identity crisis. Many were confused about the rationale for extending the educational system. Was it to prepare students for further education, or was it to prepare students for future jobs? In other curricula across the world, it was probably neither: for the most part, K-12 systems were solely there to strengthen the basic education and formation amongst the youth: preparation for the future came in secondary, but for the most part, it was still about strengthening foundational skills, which is often the hallmark of most basic education curricula. However, the Philippine senior high school system was meant to prepare students for either academic (which is subdivided into Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics; Humanities and Social Science; General Academic; or Accountancy, Business, and Management strands) or vocational fields, depending on their track. Though these two fields are the most sought-after tracks, there were also special tracks for arts and sports students. That said, the senior high school system consisted of a core curriculum consisting of fifteen required subjects taught across both academic and vocational tracks. As a result of the combination of required core subjects as well as the subjects specific to one's specialization, the senior high school curriculum appears to have an identity crisis: what exactly does senior high school prepare students for? What exactly is it meant to do? This question is further compounded by the lack of acceptance of senior high school graduates amongst blue-collar jobs – in the case of the Philippines, most entry-level jobs, such as cashiers and servers, still require college degrees for the most part. Initially, the K-12 promised job-ready graduates after basic education, but in reality, most social institutions and industries did not readily conform to this and took a while to adjust to the K-12 standard, with some still requiring college degrees up to this day. On the academic side, while the skills of students, many professors still lack the confidence in teaching

university-level material to high school graduates. Moreover, there seems to be redundancies between senior high school and college – for example, students in STEM take general chemistry twice, once in senior high school and once in college. This is due in part to the lack of confidence among Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the Commission of Higher Education (CHED), both of which work to prescribe the curriculum for university students. It is safe to say that there is a lack of coordination between the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education in this case. This raises another important question: if the goal of senior high school is to prepare work-ready or college-ready students, why is senior high school under the supervision of the Department of Education rather than the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority and the Commission on Higher Education? Regardless if the K-12 aimed to prepare students for university or career, or whether it aimed to strengthen skills and knowledge in basic education instead, the K-12 does not seem to address any of those goals.

With these issues, acceptance of the K-12 curriculum has gradually waned, with legislators proposing a K+10+2 model, as suggested by Former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who wanted to require only college-bound students to study 13 years of basic education, with vocational students ready to graduate after 11 years (Chi, 2023). Many believe that the extra two years of the curriculum are a waste of time and money, when senior high school students could already be in college.

At one end, the curriculum aimed to improve the readiness of Filipino students for work or further education, depending on their goal. It, however, failed to address the qualms of many with previous curricula. As noted by the present Department of Education, the curriculum is still overloaded with redundant competencies. This has led to the institution of the Second Philippine Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2), which has sought to address the Philippines' long-standing educational crisis.

Persistent Systemic Issues in Philippine Basic Education

In order to address the ongoing challenges with the present education system, the Department of Education in 2023 released the Matatag Agenda, which sought to review the curriculum based on the deficiencies highlighted by the PISA Assessment Rankings as well as feedback from various stakeholders (Department of Education, 2023). Given that this shows a strong correlation with the Basic Education Exit Assessment, where low proficiency levels were observed in Problem Solving, Critical Thinking, and Information Literacy Skills. A thorough review of the curriculum was conducted, where it was found that despite the curriculum being decongested multiple times, it was still overloaded with competencies, some of which were misplaced or redundant; thus, recommendations were made to decongest and restructure the competencies in the curricula. Beyond the curriculum, there were also other factors that perpetuated the educational crisis, especially as some teachers lack adequate time or preparation to teach all competencies in the curriculum, with only 20% of the teacher population being able to complete all competencies in a school year.

Again, with previous curricula, the Matatag Curriculum aims to focus on foundational skills such as language, literacy, numeracy, and patriotism. This time, however, the learning areas in grade one have been changed: in the first grade, Reading, Language & Literacy, Mathematics, Good Morals and Right Conduct, and *Makabansa* are taken up by students. The latter is a new subject area more akin to the *Makabayan* subject area of the RBEC in 2002. It still aims to combine social studies with music, art, and physical education- this time,

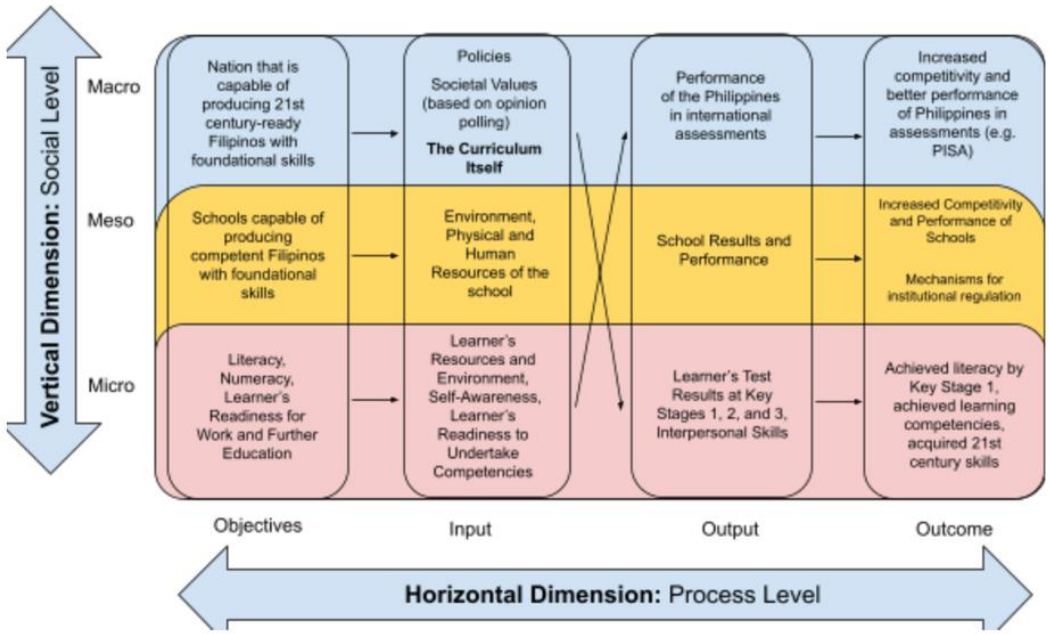
however, the competencies are integrated as one subject rather than multiple sub-areas. English and Filipino have been replaced with Reading and Language subjects, which aim to boost literacy amongst first graders- these are both taught in the common language of the students. Thereafter, students will start learning English and Filipino in second grade, as well as Science starting in third grade. In fourth grade, *Makabansa* is now split into social studies and music, art, physical education, and health (MAPEH). At this stage, technology and livelihood education are also introduced. By this time, students have eight subject areas from grades four to ten, namely Filipino, English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Music, Art, Physical Education, and Health (MAPEH), and Technical and Livelihood Education (TLE). In an effort to decongest the curriculum, the mother tongue was removed, and the medium of instruction was changed back to the bilingual method. While the subjects' competencies are decongested, the contact time remains unchanged from the K-12 curriculum, giving teachers more time to deliver the competencies. Given that the Matatag Curriculum was rolled out this year, only time will tell whether or not the adjustments made will be successful.

With the various changes in each curriculum, the same pattern emerges: the curriculum is found to be too saturated, then reforms are made to decongest it and focus on the key areas. Various innovations were also introduced, such as merging subjects and introducing new ones, such as mother tongue education. However, the same woes exist despite these changes. What makes the recent changes to the curriculum different from the innovations and policies that preceded it? How can one be so sure that these policies will work this time around? These are the questions this research aims to provide a framework for.

A Two-Dimensional Evaluation Framework for Curriculum Reform

This research aims to produce a literature-based multi-dimensional evaluation tool that will evaluate curricula, such as the current curricula, in order to ascertain whether these curricula have succeeded in their goals. This chapter will revisit evaluation models in related literature in order to construct an evaluation tool for curricula within the Philippine context. Moreover, the constructed evaluation tool may also be used to evaluate and compare various curricula, which will be tested in case studies. This evaluation tool uses the learner as the frame of reference, given that outputs and outcomes directly concern the learner’s attitude and performance. The overall evaluation tool is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
A Proposed Two-Dimensional Evaluation Framework for Philippine Curriculum



As mentioned, two forms of program logic will be employed. The horizontal evaluation model can also be defined as a goal-oriented approach, which defines the inputs put towards a goal, the output that results from it, and the resulting outcome that arises. Beyond the curriculum itself, there are also factors, especially in the implementation, that hinder the curriculum from achieving its goals. To effectively troubleshoot and identify the sources of problems in the curriculum, a holistic analysis must be incorporated into the evaluatory framework. Given the lack of involvement of resources as well as various extrinsic and intrinsic factors in the curriculum analysis frameworks mentioned in the previous section, this evaluation tool aims to fill in the gap by studying the interactions of various factors within the self (micro level), group (meso level), or society (macro level), which will be further elaborated in the coming sections.

The horizontal program logic is adopted from the regulatory benchmarking model devised by Vilela and Ahn, where the researchers were able to use benchmarking as a form of evaluation of monopolistic energy operators in Brazil, which are aimed at reducing regulatory costs and the establishment of external goals for monopolistic firms (Emans, 1966). The researchers proposed a goal-oriented approach to ensure that benchmarks are met. The outcomes set forward by the framework are, in turn, governed by metrics that were set accordingly, which in turn correspond to the input at the start of the process.

In the case of the goals for the curriculum evaluation tool, it is imperative that these goals be based on the shaping paper of the said curriculum, which explains not only the specific goals targeted by the curriculum, but also outputs and metrics that correspond to the goal. While the primary goal of the new curriculum is to "equip Filipino learners with the necessary skills and competence to prepare them to take on the challenges of the 21st century,"19 The goals are further subdivided into subject areas. For example, the primary goal for the mathematics curriculum is to "become mathematically proficient and critical problem solvers," while that of the first-grade reading and literacy curriculum is for learners to "demonstrate basic literacy in their first language." In the shaping paper, these goals are quantified using an assessment,

feedback, and reflection mechanism – all of which aim to measure the student's proficiency and performance with regard to the concerned learning competencies. These are complemented by nationwide exams such as the Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Assessment (ELLNA) assessment taken at the end of third grade, as well as the National Achievement Test (NAT), which tests for mastery of the expected learning competencies at the end of grades six, ten, and twelve. These long-standing indicators will continue to be used to measure the mastery of students. In the past, the 2017 ELLNA results were used as a springboard for the new curriculum, given the students' deficiencies in language (across Mother Tongue, Filipino, and English) as well as numeracy. In the same vein, the 2018 Basic Education Exit Assessment (now the Grade 12 NAT) pointed out the students' deficiencies in not only foundational skills, but also in twenty-first-century skills such as problem solving, information literacy, and critical thinking skills. Given that these outputs are strong indicators of the goals laid out by the curriculum, it is still important to use these metrics in the new curriculum. The inputs in this model refer to the resources as well as other factors that contribute towards an output through a process. In the case of this model, inputs involve aspects concerning intrinsic factors relative to the learner, as well as extrinsic factors such as the learner's environment. This is especially important given the integration of the goal-input-output-outcome process logic with the micro-meso-macro level, wherein there are interactions between the self as well as their environment, which will be discussed in succeeding sections.

In Vilela and Ahn's goal-based model, the goals, outputs, and inputs were accordingly classified according to the type and level of stakeholdership. For example, institutional stakeholders were grouped according to their role in the electricity transmission sector. Moreover, operational stakeholders were further subdivided into supply chain, secondary resources, and the environment (Vilela et. al. 2022). In a way, such goal-based analysis as done by Vilela and Ahn can be complemented by a vertical model, in the form of a micro-meso-macro analysis. Nelhans argues that metrics must also be seen within such a social model to properly qualify and describe quantitative measures, especially as indicators and metrics should be distinct, unobtrusively collected, and should not be directly affected by the measurement tool (Nelhans, 2022).

Nelhans was able to investigate the performance-based research allocation models for researchers at the micro, meso, and macro levels. At the micro level, performance-based research models were also used among individuals, where researchers were evaluated individually, a system that was in use in Umeå University since 2008. As a result of this individual evaluation, researchers feel stress at the individual level, given the competition to publish in order to gain incentives, which in this case is funding for the investigator. This feeling also resonates with students who experience the same phenomenon at the basic education level. With this, it is imperative to integrate the intrinsic and extrinsic factors even at the individual level. In such a case, factors belonging to the macro level, such as policies, can determine the outcome and consequently indicate whether the goal is met. In the case of the goals of the curriculum, all three levels (micro, meso, and macro) share the same goals, but only differ in the societal impact – given that micro is limited to the individual, it is limited to the self's competencies, on the other hand meso and macro levels are concerned with the greater populations – namely the school and the society as a whole.

Conclusion

Over the decades, Philippine education has been shaken and reshaped many times. Each reform brought new arrangements of color and structure, but the pieces inside the tube often remained the same. Those pieces: the systemic issues, the resource gaps, the misalignments, and the uneven learning conditions, are precisely what continue to limit the impact of every new curriculum. Curriculum reform alone cannot fix what is fundamentally systemic. One can revise competencies, restructure learning areas, or extend the number of years in basic education, but unless the very conditions in which these reforms are implemented are addressed, very little changes at the level that matters most: the learner. This is precisely why an evaluation framework is needed not only to identify whether goals, inputs, outputs, and outcomes are aligned, but also to evaluate not just the learner, but the school cultures, the environment, as well as the national structures that shape educational possibilities. Only if there is a more grounded, realistic, and learner-centered approach to understand educational reform can our curriculum evolve into something stronger, more coherent, and truly transformative for Filipino learners.

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