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Supporting Teachers in Curriculum Implementation through Targeted and Workplace-Based Professional Learning

Maria Teresa Manicio-Tembrevilla, Vincent Reuben E. Valientes, Irvin Jen P. Imperial, Mike Angel T. Renon, and Brando C. Palomar

Background

Teachers are at the forefront of curriculum reform. With the significant demands on the education sector to strengthen its initiatives to address learners' declining proficiency, the mounting pressure on teachers to meet curriculum expectations becomes daunting. However, the challenges with curriculum change persist, and teachers' limited role in developing the curriculum can encumber its operationalization in the classroom. Supporting teachers requires linking curriculum expectations to professional learning. Such support must be targeted and intentional to build systems that help teachers guide learners to succeed.

To advance this recommendation, this policy note draws actionable insights from the formative process evaluation conducted by the Research Institute for Teacher Quality (RITQ, 2024a; 2024b) of the pilot implementation of the Revised K to 10 Curriculum in 2024. Examining teachers' challenges and successes in implementing the curriculum offers clear guidance on the type of professional development support needed. The evidence points to two priority directions: (1) targeted professional learning on curriculum unpacking;

and (2) workplace-based professional development. Both strategies should be collectively designed and facilitated to establish effective systems within schools.

Recognizing teachers' roles and challenges in curriculum implementation

Curriculum reform places teachers in a demanding position. They are expected to make sense of new curriculum expectations, translate these into classroom practice, respond to learners' varied needs, and do so within time and resource constraints. However, when teachers are not sufficiently supported in understanding the design and intent of curriculum reforms, implementation becomes difficult and uneven. The limited role of teachers in curriculum development further compounds this challenge, as the enacted curriculum in classrooms depends heavily on how teachers interpret, adapt, and deliver what is expected.

In practice, this means that curriculum implementation is not simply a matter of distributing materials or issuing guidance. Teachers need support to interpret the



curriculum, connect competencies to concept development, and make sound pedagogical decisions for learners with varying levels of readiness and background. Without this support, teachers are left to navigate curriculum change on their own, often relying heavily on accessible materials such as lesson exemplars, even when these do not fully address contextual and developmental needs.

Findings of RITQ's Formative Process Evaluation of the Revised Kto10 Curriculum's Pilot Implementation

The RITQ-led formative process evaluation documented the experiences and insights of 392 teachers and school heads in the 35 Department of Education (DepEd) pilot schools across seven (7) regions during the implementation of the Revised Kinder, Grades 1, 4, and 7 Curriculum in SY 2023-2024. The documentation focused on the teachers' use of learning resources and their practices in conducting collaborative sessions to prepare and evaluate lessons. The data included 200 classroom observations with stimulated recall, complemented by interviews with school heads and focus group discussions with teachers on broader concerns in curriculum implementation. Findings were presented at two national summits in 2024 that convened teachers and school heads from pilot schools, as well as a 2025 presentation with the DepEd Office of the Secretary and senior officials. Across these data sources, teachers expressed positive views of the curriculum while also surfacing concrete implementation challenges and adaptive practices.

One major finding concerns the use of lesson exemplars, which became the most accessible enacted form of the curriculum and, in effect, a practical form of curriculum unpacking. Teachers appreciated the availability of these resources, but they also identified important difficulties. Kinder and Grade 1 teachers recognized the developmental task sequence and the integration of values in the lesson exemplars, yet they noted limitations in contextualization. Similarly, Grades 4 and 7 teachers found the preparatory parts of the exemplars easy to follow, but they experienced difficulty with the sections on "Developing and Deepening Understanding." These difficulties were linked to learner differences in background and proficiency level, as well as

concerns about learner readiness for content that appeared new or difficult.

Teachers across Kinder, Grades 1, 4, and 7 also reported challenges in time management. They noted constraints in covering all activities and evaluating learning within a specified period. This was partly rooted in the assumption that all parts and activities in the lesson exemplars had to be completed within a fixed teaching period, even though learners do not progress at the same pace. As teachers observed, learning requires time, and concept development requires sufficient practice opportunities. When teaching is driven by the pressure to finish all activities, there is little room to check progress and make necessary adjustments. These challenges indicate that implementation difficulties are not simply about materials, but about deeper questions of curriculum design, concept development, learner support, and pedagogy.

A second major finding concerns collaborative professional learning in schools. Teachers described Collaborative Expertise Sessions (CES), an iteration of the Learning Action Cell (LAC), as an avenue for addressing challenges and sharing teaching practices for the new curriculum. Some sessions were informal, held during teaching breaks or in the faculty room, while others were scheduled and structured, with teachers alternating as facilitators. Teachers reported that these sessions promoted shared responsibility by allowing them to divide tasks in lesson preparation, discuss implementation challenges, and collaboratively decide on solutions. They also emphasized the need to sustain such collaborative sessions through system support, including efficient scheduling, guidance from content area experts in unpacking complex concepts, and processes for assessing the impact of practices on learning outcomes.

Implications for teachers' professional learning in curriculum unpacking

The evidence suggests that effective curriculum implementation depends not only on the curriculum itself, but also on the quality of professional learning available to teachers. First, the difficulties teachers experienced in contextualization, learner readiness, deepening understanding, and time management indicate that teachers need more than procedural

guidance. Teachers need professional learning to help them make sense of curriculum design, understand how competencies progress, unpack competencies into manageable concepts and skills, and connect content with developmentally appropriate pedagogy (Darling-Hammond et al, 2017; Germuth, 2018; Salo et al., 2024). In short, the “how to teach” cannot be separated from the “what” and “why” of the curriculum.

Second, the findings show that workplace conditions shape teacher learning. Collaborative sessions such as CES are not peripheral activities; they are part of how teachers actively and agentively enact curriculum reform. When teachers work together to interpret curriculum, reflect on practice, address instructional concerns, and share responsibility for lesson preparation, they build school-based support systems that strengthen implementation (Mora-Ruano et al., 2019; Muckenthaler et al., 2020; Pozas & Letzel-Alt, 2023; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). This suggests that professional development should not be confined to one-shot training or externally delivered workshops. It must also be embedded in schools' daily realities and supported as a workplace-based professional learning process.

Third, the findings point to a policy need to recognize teachers as active agents in curriculum design and implementation (OECD, 2025). Teachers' adaptive practices and collaborative efforts show that they are not merely implementers of prescribed materials; they are interpretive professionals whose understanding, judgment, and working conditions directly influence learners' opportunities to succeed. Policy responses, therefore, must move beyond generic training provision and instead invest in sustained, needs-based, and developmentally oriented support systems.

Recommendations on Supporting Teachers in Curriculum Implementation through Professional Learning

Substantiating the key findings from the formative process evaluation provides actionable recommendations for redesigning teachers' professional learning in curriculum implementation. Teachers should be supported through targeted and workplace-based

professional development. Initiatives must be designed and facilitated sustainably to establish effective systems within the schools and promote a culture of collaborative learning.

1. Support teachers through targeted professional learning on curriculum unpacking.

Targeted professional learning on curriculum unpacking offers a direct response to persistent implementation challenges. Research suggests that a strong focus on curriculum knowledge, combined with collaborative learning, can significantly influence teachers' instructional practices (OECD, 2017). Professional learning initiatives on curriculum unpacking should therefore be deliberately designed to deepen teachers' understanding of curriculum design, concept development, pedagogy, and content knowledge. This approach reinforces the findings of the RITQ Teacher Development Needs Study (2017), which identified concerns regarding teachers' pedagogical competencies and content mastery in relation to the cognitive demands of the curriculum. Consequently, the study recommended targeted and closely monitored in-service training focused on content, instructional strategies, and the development of learning materials.

Moreover, professional learning should translate the learning theories and teaching principles underpinning the curriculum into practical classroom applications. Teachers should be supported in analyzing the progression and sequencing of competencies and in breaking these down into manageable subtopics and subskills that promote developmentally appropriate practice. Such support can strengthen teachers' capacity to assess learner readiness, identify prerequisite skills, and redesign lessons that provide appropriate instructional scaffolding. Professional learning should also guide teachers in using lesson exemplars as flexible references rather than prescriptive scripts, thereby enabling responsive pacing, contextualization, and assessment.

Targeted professional learning should therefore not focus only on teaching strategies in isolation, but on the



complementary and constructive relationship among concept development, content knowledge, and pedagogy.

2. Support workplace-based professional learning.

Workplace conditions within schools are a critical and unique factor in effective curriculum implementation. Professional learning becomes more meaningful when it recognizes the dynamic interactions among teachers, students, and the broader school environment (Sutherland et al., 2023). Professional development programs are most likely to impact classroom practice when they are closely aligned with teachers' everyday realities, responsibilities, and teaching contexts. Therefore, creating spaces and systems that enable teachers to share expertise and reflect on teaching experiences is essential.

Schools should consequently be supported in sustaining collaborative professional learning structures, such as CES and other school-based processes. These structures provide opportunities for teachers to discuss implementation issues, reflect on practice, share responsibilities, and collaboratively address challenges. To strengthen the effectiveness of workplace-based professional learning, systemic support is needed in areas such as protected time, efficient scheduling, facilitation, access to content expertise, and mechanisms for examining the impact of instructional practices on learner outcomes. A workplace-based approach also enables teachers to develop context-responsive and needs-based strategies that address learners' realities. More importantly, this form of support fosters a collaborative school culture and reinforces teachers' active and agentive roles in curriculum implementation.

3. Align support to schools around curriculum-focused teacher professional learning.

The Department of Education institutionalized LACs in 2016 to establish schools as avenues for teachers to collaboratively reflect on and improve their practice. However, the implementation and impact of LACs on teaching and learning outcomes require closer examination. Despite this initiative, teacher professional development in the Philippines remains largely top-down, with division-wide training programs continuing to dominate over localized and school-based approaches (Prudente et al., 2024).

In this context, institutions responsible for teacher professional development—including the Department of Education, the National Educators' Academy of the Philippines, and teacher education institutions—should strengthen support for schools by investing in professional learning programs directly linked to curriculum implementation, particularly curriculum unpacking and workplace-based learning. These efforts should not operate as isolated initiatives but as part of a coherent and aligned system of support across levels of implementation. Foregrounding teachers' active and agentive roles in curriculum implementation is essential to developing professional learning systems that meaningfully support both teacher growth and improved learner outcomes.

Concluding Remarks

The implementation of the Revised K to 10 and Strengthened Senior High School Curricula is a pivotal opportunity to move beyond instructional practices that prioritize procedural completion over meaningful

concept development. If there is no transition toward targeted and workplace-based professional learning, it risks leaving teachers at the frontline of reform without the capacity to bridge the existing gaps between policy and practice. Ultimately, neglecting teacher support equates to neglecting learner success. By investing in curriculum unpacking and empowering teachers as interpretive professionals, the education sector can ensure that reforms translate into genuine progress. There must be systemic support for those who teach, for only then can the foundation for every learner to succeed be secured.

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AI Disclosure

ChatGPT was utilized to enhance the contextual coherence, organization, and clarity of ideas originally outlined and developed by the authors and the research center. The AI's role was solely to support the refinement of language and structure, ensuring that the content remained faithful to the authors' original concepts and objectives.

Authors

Maria Teresa Manicio-Tembrevilla (manicio.mtl@pnu.edu.ph) is an Associate Professor V at the Philippine Normal University (PNU) Faculty of Languages and Literature. She currently serves as Deputy Director of the Research Institute for Teacher Quality, where she manages research and development projects supporting basic education and teacher education programs and policies. She obtained her PhD in English Language Education from the University of the Philippines - Diliman. She was a former associate dean of the PNU Faculty of Education Sciences. Her research interests are teacher learning and reflective practice.

Vincent Reuben E. Valientes (valientes.vre@pnu.edu.ph) serves as a Research Analyst III at RITQ. He holds a degree in Sociology from the University of Santo Tomas, where his early research engagement involved visual culture, Filipino Catholicism, and creative media. He aspires to enrich discussions on Philippine education further and to support Filipino teachers by exploring the sociology of education, policy research, and innovative methodologies.

Irvin Jen P. Imperial (imperial.ijp@pnu.edu.ph) is a Research Specialist at RITQ. He is a graduate of the Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics at the University of the Philippines. He has extensive field research experience in Linguistics, focusing on language documentation, ethnography, sociolinguistics, and community engagement.

Mike Angel T. Renon (renon.mat@pnu.edu.ph) is a former Research Analyst II at RITQ. He is a student of De La Salle University (DLSU) Manila pursuing the Doctor of Philosophy degree, Major in Science Education with Specialization in Chemistry. He obtained his Master's in Science Teaching with a specialization in Chemistry from DLSU Manila. His research interests are green chemistry integration, the nature of science, writing international large-scale assessment-like items, artificial intelligence in science education, and science communication.

Brando C. Palomar (palomar.bc@pnu.edu.ph) is the Director of RITQ. He is an Associate Professor V specializing in Science Education and Assessment. He served as associate dean of the Faculty of Science, Technology, and Mathematics. He obtained his PhD in education at the Education University of Hong Kong. His research interests comprise science education, assessment, and teacher quality.

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Page 1 📷 : A teacher collaboration activity at the Acao Elementary School, Region I, during a research fieldwork observation.

Page 4 📷 : A teacher collaboration activity at the Cauayan North Central School, Region II, during a research fieldwork observation.



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The Research Institute for Teacher Quality (RITQ), formerly known as the Research Center for Teacher Quality, was established in 2012 through a partnership between the Philippine Normal University and the University of New England, with support from the Australian Government. In 2024, the center transitioned into a research institute and now serves as one of the research arms of PNU, the National Center for Teacher Education.

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Address

2nd Floor, Gusali ng Wika,
Philippine Normal University,
Taft Avenue, Manila, Philippines

Contact

Email ritq@pnu.edu.ph
Telefax +63 2 53369755
Trunkline +63 2 53171768 Local 763

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