

PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND THE MATATAG CURRICULUM

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The Department of Education (DepEd) has introduced the "Matatag" curriculum, which emphasizes holistic development, including physical education (PE) as a critical component of student well-being. PE is no longer just about physical fitness but also about fostering life skills, teamwork, and discipline. The new curriculum framework encourages schools to balance academics with physical activity to promote better learning outcomes. Studies have shown that physical activity enhances cognitive performance, which positively impacts academic achievement (Smith, 2023). Integrating PE into the school day provides students with the opportunity to relieve stress, improve mental health, and build social relationships.

Furthermore, the Matatag curriculum adopts a learner-centered approach to PE, focusing on inclusivity and ensuring that all students, regardless of their physical abilities, can participate in and enjoy physical activities. By catering to individual strengths and weaknesses, PE programs under Matatag aim to develop a lifelong love for fitness in students (Martinez, 2022). DepEd also encourages schools to use local sports and games in PE classes, promoting Filipino culture and physical development simultaneously.

In addition to the academic and physical benefits, the Matatag curriculum places emphasis on inclusivity in physical education. All students should be provided with opportunities, regardless of their physical capacity. Teachers can then adopt this learner-centered approach to carry out activities that suit each student's strengths and needs. For instance, modifications in games or fitness challenges can be made to accommodate

students with disabilities and still engage the entire class. As Martinez (2022) observes, inclusive PE programs help learners feel a sense of belonging and confidence, which in turn encourages all learners to be active.

A unique feature of the Matatag curriculum is its focus on using sports and traditional games as a means of promoting Filipino culture. The inclusion of indigenous games such as sipa and patintero in PE lessons not only develops physical skills but also helps learners develop cultural awareness and national pride. Learning traditional games can also connect the students with their heritage while experiencing a dynamic classroom setting that may be physically interactive. The program ties in with the overall objective of DepEd-awarding Filipino identity and value through learning.

Beyond the walls of the classrooms, the Matatag curriculum perceives physical education as a means of teaching the 21st century to become enduring, strong, and resilient in life. From sports and other physical activities, developing appropriate habits, cooperation, leadership, and resilience are fostered. For example, in team sports, students learn to work effectively with others, to communicate with classmates, and how to handle disputes, which will be helpful to them both at school and on the job. According to Garcia (2024), an education anchored on PE prepares students to become more socialized and emotionally hardened, thus making them better prepared to face challenges of life.

Matatag's curriculum also incorporates mental health issues, which is currently one of the pressing issues faced by most students. Exercises are known to reduce stress and anxiety and induce the release of endorphins and offer better sleep patterns. Classes in physical education provide a safe environment where students can identify with and express themselves, form social connections, and experience the joy of movement. The holistic approach to the promotion of mental and emotional well-being further resonates with the goal of producing resilient individuals in the Matatag curriculum.

Despite such benefits, there remain several challenges towards implementing the Matatag curriculum. For one, schools in rural or disadvantaged regions may not have the facilities and equipment to host PE classes properly. Teachers will have to innovate with limited resources, which would undermine the success of the program. Professional development for PE teachers is also a must to ensure they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to deliver inclusive, culturally relevant, and impactful lessons. Investments in teacher training and infrastructure are essential to the success of the curriculum's PE component.

One challenge would be a change in attitudes from the general society regarding physical education. Parents and most students perceive PE as secondary and less essential compared to math and science, core subjects. This would call for more advocacy and awareness programs aimed at communicating long-term benefits in terms of academic growth, among others.

The Matatag curriculum recognizes that a well-rounded student is physically active and healthy. Therefore, PE is given equal importance alongside academic subjects. It instills the value of physical health and introduces leadership, discipline, and resilience through sports and physical activities. According to Garcia (2024), a PE-centered education results in more engaged students who perform better in all areas of life.

References:

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