

Psycho-Social Dimensions of Educational Equity in the MATATAG Curriculum: A Critical Content Analysis of Junior High School Reform Policies in the Philippines

Bryll R. Morales

Gigaquit National School of Home Industries

Email: bryll.morales@deped.gov.ph

ORCID No. 0009-0002-4940-0294

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Abstract

This study examines how educational equity is framed within the MATATAG Curriculum, with particular consideration to its psychosocial dimensions. While current reforms aim to address persistent learning gaps through curriculum restructuring, concerns remain regarding their responsiveness to learners' psychological and social realities. The study aims to analyze how policy documents represent and integrate these dimensions in shaping equitable learning experiences. A qualitative approach was employed, using document analysis and narrative analysis guided by the PRISMA framework to ensure systematic selection and evaluation of sources. The analysis covered official policy documents, government reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, and institutional publications published between 2018 and 2026. Findings reveal four key themes: (1) equity as access to foundational learning, (2) implicit recognition of psychosocial support, (3) limited contextualization of social inequality, and (4) policy discourse that positions learners as passive recipients. These results suggest that while structural aspects of equity are strongly emphasized, psychosocial dimensions remain only partially integrated. The study highlights the need for a more holistic approach to curriculum reform—one that explicitly addresses learners' motivation, well-being, and social context. The findings have implications for policy refinement, classroom practice, and future research aimed at achieving more inclusive and meaningful educational outcomes.

Keywords: Curriculum reform, Educational equity, Inclusive education, MATATAG Curriculum, Policy analysis, Psychosocial dimensions.

1. Introduction

Educational reform in the Philippines has consistently been positioned as a strategic response to persistent learning gaps; however, the extent to which such reforms address deeper issues of educational equity remains a critical concern. The implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum represents a significant shift in basic education, particularly at the junior high school (JHS) level, with its emphasis on decongesting competencies and strengthening foundational skills. While these structural adjustments are necessary, they foreground a more complex issue—whether the reform sufficiently accounts for the psychosocial conditions that influence learners' capacity to access and benefit from education.

Educational equity is not limited to equal access to curriculum content; it is deeply shaped by the psychological and social realities learners bring into the classroom. Factors such as motivation, sense of belonging, and emotional stability significantly influence how students engage with learning tasks and persist in school (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2022). At the same time, socioeconomic conditions and cultural contexts continue to define the boundaries of opportunity, particularly for marginalized groups, including beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program. This suggests, reforms that prioritize content coverage without explicitly addressing these human dimensions risk overlooking the very conditions that determine whether learning is meaningful or merely procedural.

At the junior high school level, these concerns become more pronounced as learners experience critical developmental transitions. Psychological constructs such as resilience, self-efficacy, and identity formation directly shape students' academic trajectories (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000). Simultaneously, sociological

perspectives suggest that schools can either reinforce or disrupt existing inequalities depending on how responsive policies are to learners' lived realities (Bourdieu, 1986; Reardon, 2011). From a practitioner's standpoint, this dual influence is evident in classrooms where students' performance often reflects not just ability, but the weight of their social and emotional circumstances—highlighting the necessity of embedding psychosocial sensitivity within curriculum reforms.

Existing scholarship underscores the importance of integrating socio-emotional and contextual considerations into curriculum design; however, there remains limited analysis of how these dimensions are explicitly articulated within Philippine education policies. Most studies have focused on implementation outcomes rather than interrogating the underlying policy narratives that frame equity. This highlights the need for a critical content analysis that explores how psychosocial dimensions are constructed, emphasized, or omitted in reform documents.

Aim of the study

This study aimed to examine the psychosocial dimensions of educational equity as reflected in the MATATAG Curriculum policies for junior high school. It seeks to analyze how policy texts represent psychological and sociological factors influencing learners' educational experiences.

Research Questions

Specifically, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How is educational equity conceptualized in the MATATAG Curriculum policy documents for junior high school?
2. What psychological and sociological dimensions are reflected in the policy discourse?
3. To what extent do these policies integrate psychosocial considerations in promoting equitable learning outcomes?
4. What gaps are evident in the representation of psychosocial dimensions within the curriculum reform?

2. Review of Related Literature

Psychological Perspectives on Learning and Equity

Contemporary research consistently frames learning as a psychologically driven process influenced by motivation, cognition, and behavior. Self-determination theory highlights that, students engage more deeply when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Similarly, self-efficacy has been identified as a strong predictor of persistence and achievement, particularly among adolescent learners (Usher & Pajares, 2018). Recent studies also emphasize the role of socio-emotional learning (SEL), showing that students who feel emotionally supported demonstrate higher academic engagement and resilience (OECD, 2021). Cognitive research further underscores the importance of metacognition and self-regulated learning in helping students manage complex academic tasks (Panadero, 2019). However, these psychological processes are shaped by the learning environment, suggesting that curriculum design alone is insufficient without attention to learners' emotional and motivational conditions. From a practical perspective, this aligns with classroom observations where students' performance often reflects not only their abilities but also their psychological readiness to learn.

Sociological Perspectives on Education and Inequality

Sociological literature situates education within broader systems of inequality, emphasizing how social structures influence learning outcomes. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital explains how schooling often privileges learners from more advantaged backgrounds, reinforcing existing disparities (Bourdieu, 1986). Recent studies affirm that socioeconomic status, access to resources, and institutional conditions continue to shape educational opportunities (Reardon, 2019; UNESCO, 2022). In developing contexts, including the Philippines, research indicates that curriculum reforms may unintentionally prioritize standardization over contextual responsiveness (Tarrayo et al., 2020). Cultural and social factors, such as language, identity, and community support, further influence how



learners experience schooling (Banks, 2019). This is particularly evident among disadvantaged groups, including beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, who often face compounded educational challenges beyond the classroom.

Integrative frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for understanding educational equity. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory explains how multiple environmental layers influence learner development (Neal & Neal, 2019), while Social Cognitive Theory highlights the interaction between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Critical Pedagogy further argues that education should actively address social inequalities rather than reproduce them (Freire, 2018; Giroux, 2020). Together, these frameworks emphasize that equitable education requires both individual and systemic considerations.

Research Gaps and Synthesis

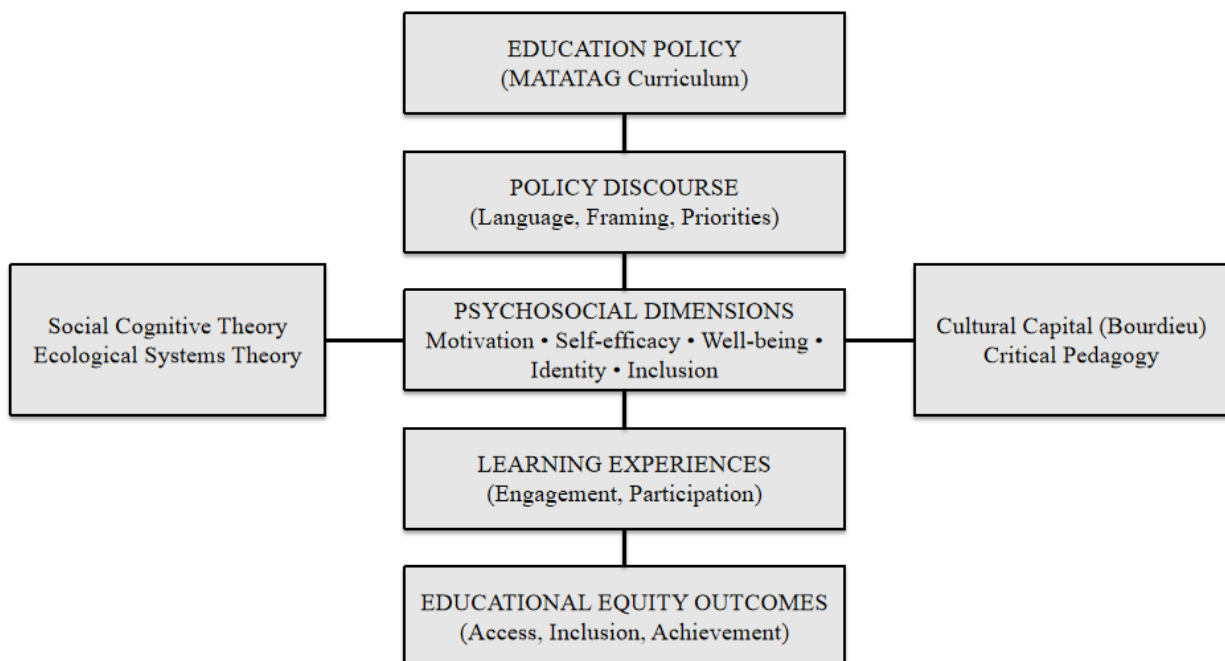
While existing studies affirm the importance of psychological and sociological factors, they are often examined separately, with limited integration in policy analysis. There is also a lack of critical examination of how recent reforms, particularly the MATATAG Curriculum, conceptualize educational equity in psychosocial terms. Moreover, although marginalized learners are frequently studied, their realities are not always explicitly reflected in policy discourse. Overall, the literature establishes that learning is shaped by both internal psychological processes and external social conditions. However, what remains underexplored is how these dimensions are embedded within curriculum policies. This gap highlights the need for critical analysis of reform documents to better understand how educational equity is framed and operationalized in practice.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a psychosocial perspective that examines how educational equity is shaped within the MATATAG Curriculum. It draws on Social Cognitive Theory to explain how learners' motivation, confidence, and engagement emerge through the interaction of personal beliefs, behaviors, and their learning environment. This is reinforced by Ecological Systems Theory, which views learning as influenced by multiple layers of context—from the classroom to wider social and policy structures. Together, these perspectives suggest that students' learning experiences are not determined by instruction alone, but also by the broader conditions and support systems surrounding them.

From a sociological lens, the framework is conversant by Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, which highlights how schooling can advantage learners whose backgrounds align with dominant norms. It is further supported by Critical Pedagogy, which emphasizes the role of education in addressing inequality and promoting inclusion. These perspectives frame educational equity as both a personal and structural concern. Within this view, curriculum policy functions as a key mechanism that shapes learners' psychosocial experiences—particularly their motivation, well-being, identity, and sense of belonging. By using these theoretical lenses, the study seeks to understand how policy not only guides instruction but also influences the conditions that enable or constrain equitable learning opportunities.

Conceptual Framework



the education system. These intentions are translated through policy discourse—the language, framing, and emphasis found in official documents. This layer is crucial because the way policies present ideas such as equity and inclusion influences how they are interpreted and implemented in schools, shaping everyday teaching and learning practices.

At the core of the framework are the psychosocial dimensions, including motivation, self-efficacy, well-being, identity, and social inclusion. These factors directly influence how learners engage with education and are shaped by both individual experiences and broader social contexts. The framework draws from Social Cognitive Theory and Ecological Systems Theory to explain how personal and environmental factors interact, while Cultural Capital and Critical Pedagogy highlight how social structures and inequalities affect learners' opportunities. Together, these perspectives emphasize that learning is not only cognitive but also deeply social and emotional.

These psychosocial conditions then shape learning experiences, particularly in terms of student engagement and participation. When learners feel supported and included, they are more likely to actively engage in the learning process. This, in turn, leads to educational equity outcomes such as improved access, inclusion, and academic achievement. Overall, the framework underscores that achieving equity goes beyond policy design—it depends on how well policies respond to the real psychological and social needs of learners in diverse contexts.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design in exploring how educational equity is expressed and interpreted within policy documents, particularly through a psychosocial lens. This approach was suitable because it allows a deeper understanding of meanings, perspectives, and subtle messages that are often embedded in written policies but cannot be quantified. The study combined document analysis and narrative analysis in examining official materials related to the MATATAG Curriculum, focusing on how ideas such as equity, inclusion, and learner well-being are presented. Document analysis helped identify recurring themes and key concepts, while narrative analysis looks more closely at how the policies are framed—how learners are described, what issues are highlighted, and which viewpoints are emphasized or left out. This integrated approach was appropriate for the study as it went beyond simply identifying what is written, allowing a more meaningful interpretation of how policies reflect the psychological and social realities of learners.

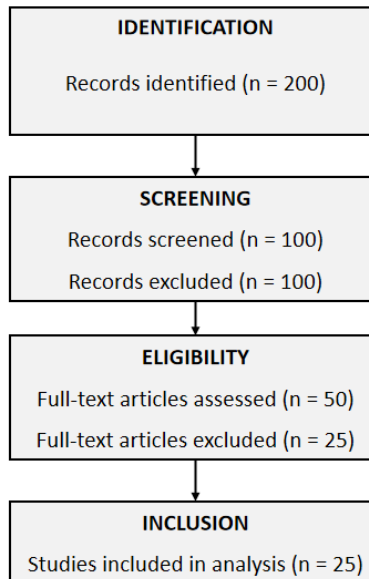
Data Sources

This study utilized a focused set of documents to support a rigorous analysis of educational equity within policy discourse. The data included official policy materials related to the MATATAG Curriculum, alongside selected peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and publications from reputable organizations that discuss curriculum reform and psychosocial aspects of learning. To ensure relevance and quality, only sources published from 2018 onward were included, with priority given to materials that directly address educational equity and demonstrate scholarly or institutional credibility. The scope of the data was deliberately bounded to junior high school policy contexts while incorporating supporting literature that provides broader theoretical and empirical perspectives, allowing the analysis to remain both context-specific and academically grounded.



3.3 PRISMA Procedure

Figure 2. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Policy Document Selection



The selection of sources followed a systematic process as shown in Figure 2 guided by the PRISMA framework to ensure transparency and methodological rigor, in line with the study's objective of examining the psychosocial dimensions of educational equity within the MATATAG Curriculum. The identification stage involved retrieving 200 documents from academic databases, policy repositories, and institutional publications using keywords such as educational equity, psychosocial learning, curriculum reform, learner well-being, and social inequality.

These records were then subjected to title and abstract screening, which refined the dataset to 100 documents after removing duplicates and sources not aligned with the study's focus. The remaining documents underwent full-text eligibility assessment, where each source was evaluated based on relevance to psychosocial and sociological dimensions, theoretical contribution, and analytical depth, resulting in 50 eligible documents. From this pool, a final set of 25 documents was included for in-depth analysis. The determination of this final number was not arbitrary; rather, it was guided by the principles of relevance, credibility, and thematic saturation, wherein no substantially new insights emerged from additional sources. This systematic filtering process ensured that the study is grounded in a focused yet sufficiently robust body of literature, appropriate for qualitative policy analysis and aligned with publication standards.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed a systematic yet interpretive process to ensure a thorough examination of the selected documents. Initially, all materials were read multiple times to establish familiarity with their content, with particular attention to statements related to educational equity, psychosocial factors, and policy intentions within the MATATAG Curriculum. This was followed by a coding process, where relevant words, phrases, and sections were identified and labeled based on their connection to psychological and sociological dimensions such as motivation, well-being, inclusion, and identity. These initial codes were then grouped according to shared meanings, allowing broader categories to emerge. From these categories, key themes were developed by identifying recurring patterns across the documents, especially in how equity and learner experiences were framed. Finally, narrative analysis was applied to interpret how the policies construct meaning—examining the language used, the portrayal of learners, and the emphasis or absence of certain issues. This step-by-step approach ensured that both explicit content and underlying messages were carefully analyzed, providing a deeper understanding of how psychosocial dimensions are embedded within policy discourse.

Table 1. Classification of Policy Documents Included in the Analysis

| Type of Document | Source/Institution | Description | Number of Documents (n) |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| National Policy Documents | Department of Education (DepEd), Philippines | Official curriculum frameworks, guidelines, and MATATAG policy issuances | 8 |
| Government Reports | DepEd, UNESCO, World Bank | Reports on education performance, equity, and system-level reforms | 5 |
| Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles | Scopus-indexed journals (Asia-focused) | Empirical and theoretical studies on educational equity and psychosocial learning | 7 |
| Institutional Publications | Research organizations and education agencies | Policy briefs, discussion papers, and program evaluations | 3 |
| Curriculum Support Materials | DepEd and partner institutions | Teaching guides and supporting documents aligned with MATATAG implementation | 2 |
| Total | | | 25 |

Table 1 presents the classification of documents included in the analysis, highlighting a balanced selection of policy texts, scholarly literature, and institutional reports. The majority of sources are drawn from official government documents and peer-reviewed studies, ensuring both contextual relevance and academic rigor. This distribution supports a comprehensive examination of how educational equity and psychosocial dimensions are represented across different types of policy-related materials.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards throughout the research process. All sources used in the analysis were carefully acknowledged through proper citation to ensure academic integrity and respect for intellectual property. Since the study relied solely on publicly available documents related to the MATATAG Curriculum and relevant scholarly literature, no human participants were directly involved, and therefore no personal data were collected. Despite this, ethical responsibility was maintained by ensuring accurate representation of sources, avoiding misinterpretation of policy content, and presenting findings in a fair and unbiased manner. These measures ensured that the study upholds transparency, credibility, and respect for ethical research practices.

4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of policy documents related to the MATATAG Curriculum revealed several interrelated themes that explain how educational equity is framed through psychosocial dimensions. The analysis identified four key themes: equity as access, implicit psychosocial support, social inequality gaps, and policy discourse shaping learners.

Table 2. Thematic Coding Matrix

| Theme | Category | Code | Indicators | Sample Policy Evidence | Interpretation |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Equity as Access to Learning | Policy Orientation | Foundational Skills | Mastery of basic competencies, curriculum decongestion | Policies emphasize strengthening literacy and numeracy as core priorities | Equity is largely framed in terms of academic access and standardized learning outcomes |
| Psychosocial Support (Implicit) | Psychological | Well-being | Learner support, safe learning environment | References to learner-centered approaches and inclusive classrooms | Psychosocial elements are acknowledged but not explicitly defined or operationalized |
| Psychosocial Support (Implicit) | Psychological | Motivation | Engagement, participation, interest in learning | Mentions of active learning and student participation | Motivation is recognized indirectly but lacks structured implementation |
| Social Inequality and Context | Sociological | Inclusion | Participation of diverse learners, equity programs | Policies refer to inclusive education and diverse learner needs | Inclusion is present but general, with limited contextual strategies |
| Social Inequality and Context | Sociological | Cultural Sensitivity | Contextualized learning, responsiveness to local needs | Statements encouraging contextualized teaching approaches | Cultural factors are acknowledged but not deeply integrated into policy design |
| Policy Discourse and Learner Framing | Policy Narrative | Learner Role | Passive vs active learner positioning | Learners described mainly as recipients of instruction | Limited emphasis on learner agency and autonomy |
| Policy Discourse and Learner Framing | Policy Narrative | Equity Framing | Language of fairness, access, inclusion | Use of general terms like "equitable access" without detailed mechanisms | Equity is broadly stated but lacks clear psychosocial grounding |

Table 2 presents the thematic coding matrix derived from the analysis of policy documents. It outlines how key themes were broken down into categories, codes, and indicators, supported by paraphrased policy evidence. The matrix reveals that while the MATATAG Curriculum incorporates elements of equity, these are often framed in structural terms, with psychosocial dimensions remaining implicit. This reinforces the study's finding that educational equity is partially addressed, highlighting the need for stronger integration of psychological and sociological considerations in policy design.

Theme 1: Equity as Access to Foundational Learning

A dominant theme across the documents is the framing of educational equity primarily as access to essential competencies and foundational skills. Policies emphasize decongested curricula, mastery of core subjects, and standardized learning outcomes as mechanisms for reducing disparities. This suggests that equity is largely interpreted in structural and academic terms.

However, while this approach aligns with existing literature emphasizing foundational learning as a prerequisite for success, it tends to underrepresent the psychological conditions that enable learners to benefit from such access (OECD, 2021). From a psychosocial perspective, access alone does not guarantee meaningful learning if learners lack motivation, confidence, or emotional support. This finding reflects a pattern where policy prioritizes measurable outcomes while giving less attention to the internal experiences of learners.

Theme 2: Implicit Recognition of Psychosocial Support

Another emerging theme is the implicit acknowledgment of psychosocial factors, particularly in references to learner-centered approaches, inclusive education, and well-being. Although these elements are present, they are often embedded indirectly rather than explicitly defined as central policy priorities.

This subtle inclusion suggests that the policy recognizes the importance of motivation, engagement, and learner support, yet does not fully operationalize these concepts. This aligns with research indicating that many education reforms acknowledge socio-emotional learning but struggle to integrate it systematically into curriculum structures (Durlak et al., 2020). Psychologically, this creates a gap between policy intention and actual learner experience, where support mechanisms may exist but remain underdeveloped.

Theme 3: Social Inequality and Contextual Gaps

The documents also reflect an awareness of inequality, particularly in addressing diverse learners and disadvantaged groups. However, this recognition is often generalized and lacks detailed strategies for addressing specific sociocultural barriers.

From a sociological standpoint, this aligns with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, where policies may unintentionally favor learners who already possess the social and cultural resources aligned with the system. The absence of strong contextualization may limit the policy's ability to respond effectively to marginalized learners, including those from low-income backgrounds. This suggests that while equity is acknowledged, its structural roots are not fully addressed in actionable terms.

Theme 4: Policy Discourse and the Construction of the Learner

The narrative framing of learners within the documents presents them as recipients of instruction rather than active agents in the learning process. While learner-centered language is present, the dominant discourse still reflects a top-down approach to reform.

This has important psychological implications. According to Social Cognitive Theory, learner agency and self-efficacy are critical to academic success. When policies do not strongly position learners as active participants, they may limit opportunities for developing autonomy and engagement. This finding highlights the importance of aligning policy discourse with learner-centered practices that promote ownership of learning.

Table 3. Cross-Theme Analysis: Patterns and Relationships Across Policy Themes

| Themes Compared | Observed Pattern | Nature of Relationship | Psychological/Sociological Insight | Implication for Educational Equity |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Equity as Access ↔ Psychosocial Support | Strong emphasis on access, limited emphasis on internal learner conditions | Imbalanced | Learning is treated as structural provision rather than lived experience | Access alone may not ensure meaningful engagement or success |
| Equity as Access ↔ Social Inequality | Recognition of disparities without deep contextualization | Partial alignment | Structural inequalities are acknowledged but not fully addressed | Risk of reproducing inequality despite reform efforts |
| Psychosocial Support ↔ Learning | Indirect link between well-being and engagement | Implicit relationship | Motivation and well-being influence participation and persistence | Lack of explicit support may weaken student |



| | | | | |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Experiences | | | | engagement |
| Social Inequality ↔ Policy Discourse | Generalized inclusion language without targeted strategies | Surface-level connection | Cultural and socioeconomic realities are underrepresented | Policies may overlook marginalized learners' specific needs |
| Policy Discourse ↔ Learner Framing | Learners positioned as passive recipients | Restrictive framing | Limited promotion of agency and self-efficacy | May hinder development of independent and motivated learners |
| Psychosocial Support ↔ Equity Outcomes | Weak direct articulation of psychosocial impact on outcomes | Underdeveloped link | Emotional and social factors are not fully tied to achievement | Equity outcomes may remain incomplete or uneven |
| All Themes (Holistic View) | Structural focus dominates over psychosocial integration | Systemic pattern | Policy prioritizes measurable outputs over human-centered processes | Calls for a more integrated, psychosocially responsive reform approach |

Table 3 presents a cross-theme analysis that highlights the relationships among the identified themes. The findings reveal a consistent pattern where structural aspects of equity, particularly access to learning, are strongly emphasized, while psychosocial dimensions remain less explicitly integrated. The relationships suggest that although policy acknowledges inclusion and learner diversity, these are often addressed at a surface level without fully engaging with the psychological and sociological realities of learners. This imbalance indicates that achieving true educational equity requires a more holistic approach that connects access, learner experience, and contextual realities within policy design.

Research Question 1: How is educational equity conceptualized in the MATATAG Curriculum policy documents for junior high school?

The analysis shows that educational equity within the MATATAG Curriculum is primarily conceptualized as equitable access to foundational learning competencies. Policy documents consistently emphasize curriculum decongestion, mastery of essential skills, and standardized learning outcomes as key strategies for reducing disparities. Equity is framed in terms of ensuring that all learners are given the same opportunity to acquire core academic knowledge.

However, this conceptualization is largely structural in nature, focusing more on what is provided rather than how it is experienced by learners. While this aligns with global reform trends that prioritize foundational learning, it tends to overlook the varied psychological and social conditions that influence learners' ability to benefit from such access. As a result, equity is presented more as a system-level provision than as a holistic learner-centered experience.

Research Question 2: What psychological and sociological dimensions are reflected in the policy discourse?

The findings indicate that both psychological and sociological dimensions are present in the policy discourse, though often in an implicit and less developed manner. Psychological elements such as motivation, engagement, and learner well-being appear through references to learner-centered approaches, inclusive classrooms, and active participation. These suggest an underlying recognition of the importance of socio-emotional factors in learning. Sociologically, the documents acknowledge diversity and inequality by highlighting inclusive education and the need to support varied learner groups. However, these references are generally broad and lack detailed articulation of how social realities—such as socioeconomic status, cultural background, and community context— affect learning experiences. This indicates that while psychosocial dimensions are acknowledged, they are not consistently foregrounded or systematically integrated into the policy framework.

Research Question 3: To what extent do these policies integrate psychosocial considerations in promoting equitable learning outcomes?

The integration of psychosocial considerations within the MATATAG Curriculum can be described as partial and indirect. While there are clear efforts to promote inclusive and learner-centered education, these are not fully translated into concrete mechanisms that address learners' psychological and social needs.

The policy emphasizes structural reforms—such as curriculum simplification and improved learning delivery—without equally strong emphasis on supporting learner motivation, identity development, and emotional well-being. This creates a disconnect between policy intentions and actual learner experiences. In practice, psychosocial factors function more as supporting ideas rather than as central components of the reform. This limited integration may reduce the effectiveness of the curriculum in addressing deeper forms of educational inequality.

Research Question 4: What gaps are evident in the representation of psychosocial dimensions within the curriculum reform?

Several critical gaps emerge from the analysis. First, there is a lack of explicit articulation of psychosocial constructs such as self-efficacy, resilience, and identity, despite their known importance in learning. Second, policy discourse tends to position learners as recipients of instruction rather than as active agents, limiting the emphasis on learner autonomy and engagement.

Third, while inequality is acknowledged, there is insufficient attention to how specific social and cultural contexts shape educational experiences. The absence of detailed strategies for addressing these contextual differences suggests that policies may not fully respond to the needs of marginalized learners. Overall, these gaps indicate that the reform, while structurally sound, requires a more deliberate integration of psychosocial dimensions to achieve truly equitable outcomes.

Synthesis of Findings

Across all themes, a clear pattern emerges: the MATATAG Curriculum demonstrated a strong commitment to improving access and academic quality, yet its integration of psychosocial dimensions remains partial and implicit. While elements of motivation, inclusion, and well-being are present, they are not consistently foregrounded as central to achieving equity. This reflects a broader tension between technical reform and human-centered education. The findings reinforce existing literature that emphasizes the need to integrate psychological and sociological considerations into policy design. Without this integration, reforms risk addressing surface-level disparities while leaving deeper inequities unresolved. In this context, the study highlights the importance of viewing educational equity not only as a structural goal but as a lived experience shaped by both internal and external factors.

5. Implications

The findings of this study offer several important implications for practice, policy, and future research.

In terms of teaching and learning, the results suggested the need to move beyond content delivery toward more responsive and supportive classroom practices. Teachers play a critical role in translating policy into practice, and thus must be equipped to address learners' motivation, well-being, and sense of belonging. Integrating socio-emotional learning strategies and inclusive practices can help ensure that all learners are able to engage meaningfully with the curriculum.

For educational policy, the study highlighted the importance of making psychosocial dimensions more explicit within reform frameworks. Policies should clearly articulate how factors such as motivation, identity, and social inclusion will be supported, rather than assuming these will emerge naturally from curriculum changes. Strengthening this aspect can help bridge the gap between policy intentions and actual learner outcomes.

In terms of research and development, the study pointed the need for further investigation into how psychosocial factors are implemented in practice. Future studies may explore classroom-level applications, teacher experiences, and student perspectives to better understand how policy translates into lived realities. Additionally, there is a need to develop more context-sensitive models that address the specific needs of marginalized learners.

Overall, the findings can be applied to enhance both policy design and instructional practices, ensuring that educational reforms are not only academically sound but also socially and psychologically responsive.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how educational equity is framed within the MATATAG Curriculum, with a particular focus on its psychosocial dimensions. While the reform demonstrates a strong emphasis on improving access to foundational learning, the findings revealed that psychological and sociological factors are only partially integrated into policy discourse. Key results show that while elements such as learner support, inclusion, and well-being are



present, they are often implicit and lack clear operationalization. This creates a gap between policy design and the lived experiences of learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The study contributes to the field by offering a more nuanced understanding of educational equity, emphasizing that it is not solely a matter of access but also of experience. By highlighting the importance of psychosocial factors, the research underscores the need for more holistic and context-sensitive approaches to curriculum reform.

7. Recommendations

To strengthen the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum, it is recommended that psychosocial dimensions—such as motivation, well-being, and learner inclusion—be made more explicit in policy design. Rather than treating these as secondary elements, policies should provide clear guidance on how they can be integrated into teaching and learning processes.

At the classroom level, teachers should be supported in adopting more learner-centered and inclusive practices that address both academic and emotional needs. This includes fostering positive learning environments, encouraging student participation, and recognizing diverse learner backgrounds. At the same time, schools should strengthen support systems, particularly for disadvantaged learners, to ensure that learning opportunities are both accessible and meaningful.

For future research, there is a need to explore how these psychosocial elements are applied in actual classroom settings. Overall, improving educational equity requires moving beyond access to learning and ensuring that policies respond to the real experiences and needs of learners.

Declarations

Funding

This study was conducted without financial support from any external funding agency. All stages of the research were independently carried out by the author.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

The author was solely responsible for the development of the study, including conceptualization, selection and review of documents, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and the writing and refinement of the manuscript.

Ethical Statement

This research complied with established ethical standards in academic inquiry. It relied exclusively on publicly accessible documents, including policy materials related to the MATATAG Curriculum and relevant scholarly literature. No human participants were involved, and no personal or sensitive data were collected.

Declaration of Interests

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct or outcomes of this study.

Data Availability Statement

All data used in this study are drawn from publicly available documents and published sources. These materials are fully accessible through the references cited within the article.

AI Usage Disclosure

AI-assisted tools were utilized to support language refinement, organization, and clarity of presentation. All outputs were carefully reviewed, validated, and substantially revised by the author to ensure accuracy, originality, and alignment with academic standards.

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