ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 10| October 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

WHEN MORE IS LESS: UNPACKING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GRADE 7 TEACHERS AND LEARNERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW SCIENCE CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of new curriculum including science requires teachers and learners to adjust to curricular expectations and classroom practices. This study explored the lived experiences of Grade 7 Science teachers and learners in selected schools of Tagbilaran City Schools Division, Bohol, Philippines. A qualitative phenomenological design was utilized, involving nine Science teachers and nine Grade 7 learners selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through researcher-developed semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. The analysis generated 22 themes across four areas: teachers' lived experiences, learners' lived experiences, insights gained, and challenges and facilitating factors. In response to the fifth research question, participants' recommendations generated eight proposed enhancements of instructional practices in teaching Science. Teachers described familiarizing themselves with the curriculum, shifting toward learner-centered and inquiry-based approaches, and balancing prescribed pacing with learners' understanding and diverse needs. Learners valued experiments, collaborative activities, models, and real-life applications, while reporting challenges related to fast pacing, classroom conditions, and unfamiliar scientific terminology. The findings indicate that meaningful Science learning is supported by responsive teaching, flexible pacing, accessible resources, appropriate scaffolding, collaboration, and contextualized experiential activities. The study concludes that curriculum implementation involves ongoing adjustment shaped by instructional practices and classroom realities. The proposed enhancements offer practical directions for instructional improvement, but their effectiveness requires further implementation and evaluation.

KEYWORDS: *New Science Curriculum; Science Education; Lived Experiences; Curriculum Implementation; Thematic Analysis*

1. INTRODUCTION

The reform of curriculum is intended to enhance the relevance and quality of learning but the implementation of policy expectations in the classroom depends on these policies are realized in the classroom. In the Philippines, the Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 010, s. 2024, providing policy guidelines for the phased implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum in Kindergarten to Grade 10 (DepEd, 2024). Currently the term MATATAG is no longer used but the elements of such curriculum are observed. In this article we use the term New Science Curriculum as this is the theme used by the researcher during his thesis defense.

This study explored the lived experiences of Grade 7 Science teachers and learners in selected schools of Tagbilaran City Schools Division, Bohol, Philippines. It investigated teachers' experiences, learners' experiences, insights gained, and common challenges and facilitating factors. It also suggested improvements in teaching Science based on the findings.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the lived experiences of Grade 7 Science teachers and learners in the implementation of the New Science Curriculum. It also attempted to identify insights gained, common challenges and facilitating factors, and possible improvements of instructional practices in teaching Science based on participants' experiences.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do Science teachers describe their lived experiences in implementing the New Science Curriculum?
2. How do learners describe their lived experiences of Science instruction under the New Science Curriculum?
3. What insights do teachers and learners gain from their experiences?
4. What common challenges and facilitating factors emerge from their experiences?
5. Based on the findings, what enhancements of instructional practices in teaching Science may be proposed?

4. METHODS

Research Design

The study was qualitative in nature and aimed to examine first-hand accounts and the meaning of implementation of the New Science Curriculum among the participants. Interview narratives were analyzed for recurring patterns and shared experiences. Braun and Clarke model (2006) were used to analyze

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the data through six stages of thematic analysis: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, producing the report.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in selected schools within Tagbilaran City Schools Division, Bohol, Philippines. The participants were 18 respondents: nine Grade 7 Science teachers and nine Grade 7 learners. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who fell in the inclusion criteria and had a direct experience of the curriculum. Teacher participants had at least one year of teaching Grade 7 Science in the New Science Curriculum and at least one year of experience in the previous curriculum. Learner participants were Grade 7 students at the end of School Year 2025–2026 who had completed school and were able to share their experience. Learners were selected based on their eligibility and willingness to participate.

Research Instrument and Data Collection

Data was collected using researcher-developed semi-structured interview guides for teachers and learners. The guides were reviewed by two school heads and one master teacher, and were pilot-tested in a school not included in the study. Interviews were conducted face to face or online, depending on the arrangements made with participants. All interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. Permission from the university, education authorities, and school heads was required for data collection.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The researcher reviewed the transcripts, generated initial codes, grouped related codes, and developed themes in relation to the research questions and the full data set. A data analyst reviewed the coded data and provided expert input, while the research adviser reviewed the analysis and write-up. Transcripts were sent back to participants for checking and clarification. These procedures were used to support the accuracy and credibility of the interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

As an ethical consideration, participation was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from teachers, while parental or guardian consent and learner assent were secured for participating learners. Participants were informed about the interviews and the handling of their information. The audio recordings and transcripts were stored in encrypted electronic files, and the participants' identities were kept anonymous in reporting. In addition, the participants were also given an opportunity to review their transcripts.

5. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Science learning involves learning about concepts, asking questions, examining evidence, investigating phenomena and connecting ideas with the world around us. Inquiry-oriented teaching can also provide learners with a chance to ask questions, explain ideas, and contribute in study at the same time as teachers guide our learning process (Shanmugavelu et al., 2020). Experiential learning also emphasizes the importance of experience in understanding (Kolb, 1984). Complex concepts and some of the vocabulary of science can lead to learning demands particularly when we have little time to process information. Cognitive Load Theory also focuses on the cognitive load for learning (Sweller, 1988).

As education is implemented, curriculum implementation is influenced not only by written standards but also by teacher preparedness, the resources available in the classroom, professional collaboration, and the fit of curricular expectations to classroom conditions. Curriculum reform literature acknowledges the processes and conditions that support change (Gouëdard et al., 2020) and the impact of change in learning. Recent studies have looked at the New Science Curriculum for teacher adjustment and resource access, workload and collaboration (Demate et al., 2025; Fuentes, 2025). The general policy discussion, however, does not take into account how teachers and learners understand curriculum change in their everyday experiences in Science classrooms.

A context-sensitive understanding of both teacher and learner perspectives is thus essential. Teachers' accounts could help us to understand how the instructional decisions and professional adjustments are made, while learners' accounts might help us understand how pacing, explanations, resources, peer interaction, and classroom conditions are experienced. By examining both perspectives we may be able to highlight the shared and distinct experiences and consider instructional responses grounded in participants' accounts.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis generated 22 themes for teachers' lived experiences, learners' lived experiences, insights gained, and challenges and facilitating factors of implementation of the New Science Curriculum. In response to the fifth research question, the participants' recommendations informed eight proposed enhancements of teaching Science instructional practices. The themes and their core ideas are summarized in the tables below, followed by discussion grounded in the participants' accounts. These improvements are recommendations, not new themes or new interventions, which have been proven to work well in the past.

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6.1 Teachers' Lived Experiences

Theme	Core idea
Navigating curriculum change and professional adaptation	Teachers reviewed competencies, revised lesson plans, and reconsidered classroom activities.
Reorienting Science teaching toward learner-centered and inquiry-based learning	Teachers created more opportunities for investigation, discussion, and explanation.
Managing prescribed pacing alongside learners' understanding	Teachers balanced competency coverage with sufficient time for meaningful learning.
Responding to learner diversity through flexible and context-responsive teaching	Teachers adjusted explanations, examples, and activities to address differing levels of readiness.

Teachers also described reviewing competencies, rethinking lesson plans and reconsidering the activities they undertook as they started to learn the new curriculum. One teacher explained, *"I had to review the new competencies, revise my lesson plans, and rethink some of my activities"* (T9). In this way implementation is seen as a professional adjustment process in action, not just a continuation of existing routines.

Teachers also described more opportunities for investigation, discussion and explanation among learners. As one teacher said, *"I found myself giving learners more opportunities to investigate, discuss, and explain their ideas"* (T8). This is consistent with inquiry-based approaches that focus on learners as active participants but still maintain the teacher's hand in learning (Shanmugavelu et al., 2020).

Another concern was balancing completed competencies and ensuring understanding. One teacher mentioned that "*completing the competency is not necessarily the same as achieving learning"* (T6). Teachers had to adjust explanations, examples, and activities to meet different levels of readiness. These accounts all indicate that curriculum implementation is not only a matter of professional judgment, but of pacing, instructional approaches, and learner diversity.

6.2 Learners' Lived Experiences

Theme	Core idea
Engaging and experiential Science learning	Experiments, hypothesis-making, demonstrations, models, and participation helped make learning engaging.
Influence of pacing and time allocation on comprehension	Fast transitions between lessons could limit understanding.
Role of classroom and peer conditions	Distractions and peer behavior could affect attention, while peer support could help clarify ideas.
Connections between Science and the real world	Everyday examples helped learners recognize the relevance of Science.
Influence of language and terminology on understanding	Unfamiliar scientific terms could make concepts difficult to understand.

Learners described Science as engaging when they were involved in experiments, hypothesis-making, group activities, demonstrations, models and opportunities to participate. One participant mentioned that *"Making hypothesis was fascinating for me since I was able to predict something"* (L1). This is evidence that practical experience may help students connect scientific notions to observable phenomena.

Pacing also affected students' understanding. One learner said, *"When the teacher moved too fast from one lesson to another, I did not fully understand"* (L1). Learners' accounts also indicated that classroom distractions, peer behavior, and fatigue affect attention and that peer support could help them review and clarify what they were learning. They also valued content connected to everyday life but described unfamiliar scientific terms as difficult. These experiences underscore that learning is influenced by the teaching practice , language used, social, and physical circumstances in which learning interaction occurs.

6.3 Insights Gained by Teachers and Learners

Theme	Core idea
Meaningful learning takes priority over mere coverage	Understanding was viewed as more important than simply finishing competencies.
Active participation builds confidence and self-efficacy	Questioning, investigating, and explaining ideas encouraged participation.
Learner agency and self-directed learning	Review and independent study helped learners take responsibility for learning.
Collaborative experiences expand learning	Working with peers supported discussion and clarification.
Science experiences reshape attitudes and connect Science to meaning	Real-life applications helped participants recognize Science's relevance.

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Participants' stories highlighted the role of asking questions, investigating, explaining concepts, reviewing lessons, working independently, working with peers and applying scientific concepts to everyday life. These observations indicate that it is important for learners' participation and agency to be part of meaningful science learning. Yet, learner agency does not mean that the teacher is no longer needed. The independent work of learners coupled with their initiative to learn were accompanied by teachers' assistance through explanations, varied examples and modified activities. So, independent learning and responsive instruction can complement one another.

6.4 Challenges and Facilitating Factors

Theme	Core idea
Pacing and time constraints	Limited time affected mastery and completion of learning activities.
Resource constraints	Limited laboratory facilities and materials affected practical Science learning.
Classroom, peer, and learner conditions	The learning environment and learner readiness shaped participation and engagement.
Content complexity and scientific language	Complex concepts and unfamiliar terminology increased learning demands.
Responsive and supportive teaching	Clear explanations and adjustments to learner needs facilitated understanding.
Multimodal and experiential resources	Videos, models, demonstrations, and experiments helped make concepts accessible.
Collaboration and self-regulated learning	Peer review, cooperation, and independent study supported understanding.
Real-life relevance	Connections to familiar experiences made Science more meaningful.

Participants also mentioned limited laboratory space and limited supplies as obstacles to doing some of their practical activities. Teachers would have to improvise or find simpler substitutes, while learners described instances where the group had to share or obtain materials. These accounts show that learning experiences are based in part on access to the resources. Teachers' creative use of low-cost materials might help, but they won't be able to do it without institutional support.

Learners also spoke of working with complex topics and foreign terminology. These experiences point to the importance of clear explanations, vocabulary support, a consistent presentation of concepts and information-sharing and checks for understanding. These strategies are relevant to the cognitive demands of learning complex topics (Sweller, 1988). Responsive teaching, videos, models, experiments, peer review, self-study and real-life examples were considered to be facilitating factors. Taken together the themes show that curriculum implementation is influenced by the interaction of time, resources, learner diversity, classroom environment, teaching approach and relevance of learning activities.

6.5 Proposed Enhancements of Instructional Practices in Teaching Science

Proposed Enhancement	Suggested Practice
Strengthen flexible pacing and time allocation	Check understanding before moving to new concepts and allow additional time for difficult concepts or activities.
Improve access to Science resources and facilities	Support laboratory materials, low-cost or improvised resources, models, and suitable multimedia tools.
Foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment	Establish clear classroom routines, structure group work, and respond to differences in readiness and participation.
Strengthen scientific language and learning scaffolds	Explain unfamiliar terms, use examples and visuals, and break complex concepts into manageable steps.
Strengthen responsive and learner-centered instruction	Use questioning and formative checks to adjust explanations, activities, and support.
Expand multimodal and experiential Science learning	Use demonstrations, investigations, experiments, models, and videos where resources permit.
Promote collaborative and self-regulated learning	Use structured peer learning, review routines, reflection, and independent study.
Strengthen contextualized and real-life Science learning	Connect concepts with familiar objects, daily experiences, and practical situations.

These improvements will translate the participants' experiences and needs into real-world instructional approaches. They could be integrated in lesson planning, assessment, remediation and school-based professional learning rather than as their own program. Learning Action Cell sessions and subject-area meetings could be places where teachers share strategies, evaluate their effectiveness and adjust them to local circumstances. As these recommendations have not been assessed

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as an intervention in this study, their effectiveness should be investigated in the future.

7. CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences of Grade 7 Science teachers and learners in the implementation of New Science Curriculum in selected schools under the Tagbilaran City Schools Division, Bohol, Philippines. The findings show that implementation of the curriculum is an ongoing process and is influenced by teachers' choices and students' experiences in classrooms.

Teachers described their experiences as setting curriculum expectations, adjusting their methods and keeping pace with the learners level of understanding and diversity. Learners valued experiential, inquiry-oriented, collaborative and real-life connected science activities and were challenged by the pace of the curriculum, classroom conditions, new concepts, and insufficient resources.

The findings suggest that meaningful Science learning is supported by responsive teaching, flexible pacing, appropriate scaffolding, accessible resources, collaboration, and contextualized experiential activities. Eight proposed enhancements of instructional practices were developed from the findings and participants' recommendations. These provide practical directions for instructional improvement, but their effectiveness requires further implementation and evaluation.

Because the study involved 18 purposively selected participants from selected schools in one schools division, the findings provide contextual insights rather than statistical generalizations to all teachers and learners. Nevertheless, the study highlights the value of considering both teacher and learner perspectives when developing instructional practices responsive to classroom experiences and needs.

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