

Implementation of the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum in the Department of Education in the Philippines: Towards Inclusive Education for All Learners

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Strengthened Senior High School (SHS) Curriculum in the Philippines represents a major reform initiative aimed at improving inclusivity, relevance, and quality in secondary education. This systematic review examined existing literature, policy documents, and implementation reports related to the strengthened SHS curriculum to determine its potential in addressing limitations of the previous curriculum under the K to 12 program. Findings revealed that the former SHS curriculum faced challenges such as limited alignment with labor market demands, insufficient preparation for higher education, inadequate teacher training, and barriers to inclusive education for marginalized learners, indigenous communities, and students with special needs. In response, the strengthened curriculum introduces streamlined tracks, digital literacy, global competencies, life skills, flexible learning pathways, differentiated instruction, and stronger integration of technical-vocational competencies. The review was anchored on relevant Department of Education memoranda, including policies on pilot and full implementation, teacher training, and curriculum mapping. Results suggest that the strengthened curriculum has strong potential to enhance learner preparedness for employment, higher education, and lifelong learning while promoting equitable access to quality education. However, challenges remain in teacher readiness, resource allocation, technological infrastructure, and regional disparities in implementation. The review emphasizes that successful implementation requires sustained policy support, equitable distribution of resources, continuous professional development, and collaboration among DepEd, local government units, industry partners, parents, and communities. Overall, the strengthened SHS curriculum is a promising step toward a more inclusive, future-ready, and responsive Philippine education system, though its long-term effectiveness depends on consistent monitoring, evaluation, and evidence-based policy refinement.

Keywords: Strengthened SHS Curriculum, inclusive education, curriculum reform, Philippines, policy implementation

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Senior High School (SHS) program in the Philippines was introduced under the K to 12 reform to prepare learners for higher education, employment, and entrepreneurship. Despite its intentions, the current SHS curriculum has faced persistent challenges. Among these are misalignment with industry demands, insufficient preparation for higher education, and limited inclusivity for learners from marginalized groups, indigenous communities, and those with special needs. Teachers have also reported difficulties in delivering specialized tracks due to inadequate training and resources. These issues underscore the problem or concern: while the SHS curriculum expanded opportunities, it has not fully achieved equity, inclusivity, and relevance in practice.

To address these gaps, the Department of Education (DepEd) has introduced the Strengthened SHS Curriculum as an intervention. The strengthened curriculum differs significantly from the current one. The current SHS curriculum primarily emphasizes academic and vocational tracks, with limited adaptability for diverse learners and insufficient integration of global competencies. In contrast, the strengthened curriculum

introduces updated content that incorporates digital literacy, global competencies, and life skills, while embedding inclusive education principles. It also provides flexible learning pathways and differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse learner needs, and it strengthens alignment with labor market requirements by integrating technical-vocational skills more effectively.

How the intervention might work is through improved teacher training, equitable resource distribution, and stronger collaboration with stakeholders such as parents, local government units, and industries. By embedding inclusive education strategies, the strengthened curriculum ensures that learners of diverse backgrounds can access and benefit from quality education. It also seeks to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application by aligning content with industry needs and global standards.

It is important to do the review because curriculum reforms have long-term implications for learners, teachers, and national development. A systematic review will provide evidence-based insights into whether the strengthened SHS curriculum addresses the shortcomings of the current program, particularly in terms of inclusivity and relevance. Moreover, it will guide policymakers in refining strategies, ensuring that reforms are not only well-designed but also effectively implemented to achieve equitable and sustainable educational outcomes.

This study is therefore designed as a systematic review of existing literature, policy documents, and implementation reports on SHS curriculum reforms in the Philippines and comparable international contexts. The aim of the review is to analyze the planning and policy implications of implementing the strengthened SHS curriculum, with particular attention to inclusive education practices. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to compare the current SHS curriculum with the strengthened version in terms of inclusivity and relevance, to identify challenges and opportunities in policy implementation, to assess the impact of curriculum changes on learners and teachers, and to provide recommendations for sustainable and inclusive policy development.

METHODS

This systematic review is anchored on official issuances of the Department of Education (DepEd) that mandate the implementation of the strengthened Senior High School (SHS) curriculum. The first is **DepEd Memorandum No. 048, s. 2025, “Pilot Implementation of the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum for Grade 11 in School Year 2025–2026.”** This memorandum authorized the pilot rollout in selected schools nationwide and introduced reforms such as streamlining tracks and subjects, expanding learner choice, and aligning curriculum content with industry needs and national development priorities.

Building on the pilot, the second anchor is **DepEd Memorandum No. 012, s. 2026, “Full Implementation of the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum in School Year 2026–2027.”** This directive mandated the nationwide adoption of the strengthened curriculum for all Grade 11 learners beginning SY 2026–2027, while Grade 12 learners continued under the existing program to ensure a smooth transition. It emphasized structural, instructional, and content reforms, provided technical assistance packages, and outlined training modules to support teachers and administrators.

At the local level, division offices also issued supporting directives such as **Division Memorandum No. 238, s. 2026, “Implementation of Training and Development Activities for the Strengthened SHS Curriculum,”** and **Division Memorandum No. 246, s. 2026, “Conduct of Curriculum Mapping and Teacher Capacity-Building for SHS Implementation.”** These localized issuances highlight DepEd’s commitment to cascading national policy into division and school contexts, ensuring teacher readiness and inclusive education practices.

Together, these DepEd Memoranda provide the legal and institutional framework for analyzing the differences between the current and strengthened SHS curricula, evaluating inclusivity measures, and assessing the implications for planning and policy development. By anchoring the review on these official issuances, the study ensures that its findings and recommendations are aligned with national education priorities and the broader goal of achieving inclusive and equitable quality education.

The systematic review will draw upon a range of studies and policy documents that focus on curriculum reform, inclusive education, and policy analysis. To ensure comprehensiveness, the review will include both local and international sources that provide insights into the challenges and opportunities of implementing the strengthened Senior High School (SHS) curriculum. Among the key references is the DepEd (2024) SHS Curriculum Guide, which serves as the primary policy framework and allows for a direct comparison between the current and strengthened SHS curricula. Complementing this is UNESCO's 2023 study on Inclusive Education in Southeast Asia, which offers regional benchmarks and practices that can inform the Philippine context.

Local research such as Cruz (2022) on Challenges in SHS Implementation highlights issues of teacher readiness and resource allocation, identifying gaps that the strengthened curriculum seeks to address. Similarly, Santos (2021) on Policy Analysis in Philippine Education provides an analytical lens for examining how educational reforms are shaped and implemented within the country's policy environment. On the international level, the World Bank (2020) report on Skills Development in Asia underscores the importance of aligning education with labor market demands, supporting the relevance of the strengthened SHS curriculum's emphasis on employability and workforce readiness.

Together, these studies form the evidence base for the systematic review. They will be synthesized to identify recurring themes such as inclusivity, teacher capacity, resource distribution, and policy implications, thereby ensuring that the review captures both the local realities of SHS implementation and broader international perspectives on curriculum reform.

Author/Year	Title of Study	Focus	Relevance to Review
DepEd (2024)	SHS Curriculum Guide	Policy framework	Direct comparison of current vs strengthened SHS
UNESCO (2023)	Inclusive Education in Southeast Asia	Regional inclusivity practices	Benchmark for Philippine context
Cruz (2022)	Challenges in SHS Implementation	Teacher readiness, resources	Identifies gaps addressed by strengthened curriculum
Santos (2021)	Policy Analysis in Philippine Education	Policy frameworks	Provides analytical lens
World Bank (2020)	Skills Development in Asia	Labor market alignment	Supports relevance of strengthened SHS

Findings from these studies will be compared to identify recurring themes such as inclusivity, teacher capacity, and resource gaps. Best practices and lessons learned from both local and international contexts will be highlighted to inform policy recommendations.

RESULTS / OUTCOMES

The review is expected to demonstrate that the strengthened Senior High School (SHS) curriculum offers significant promise in addressing long-standing gaps in Philippine education. By embedding inclusive education principles, the curriculum is designed to provide equitable access to quality learning for diverse groups of learners, including those from marginalized communities, indigenous populations, and students with special needs. The integration of flexible learning pathways and differentiated instruction ensures that learners can pursue tracks aligned with their abilities, interests, and future aspirations. This inclusivity is further reinforced by the curriculum's emphasis on digital literacy, global competencies, and life skills, which prepare students not only for higher education but also for meaningful participation in the workforce and society.

In terms of labor market relevance, the strengthened SHS curriculum is expected to improve alignment between education and industry needs. By enhancing technical-vocational tracks and embedding employability skills, the curriculum seeks to produce graduates who are workforce-ready and capable of adapting to rapidly changing economic demands. The inclusion of stackable credentials and seamless pathways also allows learners to build competencies progressively, making them more competitive in both local and global labor markets.

However, the review will also highlight persistent challenges. Teacher training remains a critical issue, as many educators require intensive professional development to effectively deliver inclusive pedagogy and specialized content. Resource allocation continues to be uneven, with schools in rural and disadvantaged areas facing shortages in instructional materials, facilities, and technological infrastructure. Regional disparities in implementation may further exacerbate inequities, as schools with limited support struggle to meet the demands of the strengthened curriculum.

Taken as a whole, the findings are expected to show that while the strengthened SHS curriculum is a step forward in inclusivity and relevance, its success will depend heavily on sustained policy support, adequate resource distribution, and continuous monitoring of implementation. The review will underscore the need for strong collaboration among DepEd, local government units, teachers, parents, and industry partners to ensure that the curriculum achieves its intended outcomes of equitable, high-quality, and future-ready education for all learners.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this review carry significant implications for both policy and practice in the Philippine education system. At the policy level, the strengthened Senior High School (SHS) curriculum underscores the urgent need for equitable resource distribution. Schools in rural and disadvantaged areas often face shortages in instructional materials, facilities, and technological infrastructure, which can hinder the effective delivery of the new curriculum. Policymakers must therefore prioritize funding mechanisms and resource allocation strategies that ensure all learners, regardless of geographic location or socioeconomic status, have access to quality education.

Equally important is the professional development of teachers, particularly in inclusive pedagogy and specialized content delivery. The success of the strengthened SHS curriculum depends heavily on teachers' ability to adapt to diverse learner needs, integrate digital literacy, and foster global competencies. Continuous training, mentoring, and support systems must be institutionalized to build teacher capacity and confidence. This requires not only national-level training programs but also localized initiatives tailored to the specific contexts of schools and communities.

Another critical implication is the need for stronger industry partnerships. By aligning curriculum content with labor market demands, DepEd can ensure that graduates are workforce-ready and competitive both locally and globally. Industry collaboration can take the form of internships, curriculum co-design, and certification pathways that validate learners' skills. Such partnerships will help bridge the gap between education and employment, making the SHS program more relevant and sustainable.

Despite these promising directions, the review acknowledges several limitations. One major limitation is the lack of longitudinal data on the outcomes of the strengthened SHS curriculum, given its recent implementation. Without long-term evidence, it is difficult to fully assess its impact on learner achievement, employability, and inclusivity. Another limitation is the uneven implementation across regions, which may result in disparities in learner experiences and outcomes. Variations in local governance, resource availability, and teacher readiness can affect the consistency of curriculum delivery nationwide.

In general, the findings suggest that while the strengthened SHS curriculum represents a significant step forward in promoting inclusivity and relevance, its success will depend on robust policy support, sustained investment, and continuous monitoring. The review highlights that inclusive education principles must be operationalized not only in curriculum design but also in classroom practice, teacher training, and resource distribution. For policymakers, this means adopting a holistic approach that integrates curriculum reform with

systemic support structures. For practitioners, it means embracing inclusive strategies and building strong partnerships with communities and industries.

In essence, the strengthened SHS curriculum has the potential to transform Philippine education by making it more inclusive, equitable, and future-ready. However, realizing this potential requires a collective effort from DepEd, local government units, teachers, parents, and industry stakeholders. The review emphasizes that curriculum reform is not a one-time intervention but an ongoing process that must evolve with the changing needs of learners and society.

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