

Comparative Perspective on Curriculum Design: The Philippines and Global Educational Systems

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ABSTRACT: Curriculum design shapes national education systems and prepares learners to address global challenges. The Philippine K–12 curriculum, implemented in 2013, aligns with international standards but faces constraints related to flexibility, teacher autonomy, and interdisciplinary learning. This study systematically reviewed and compared Philippine curriculum frameworks with those of Finland, Singapore, the United States, and Japan to identify shared principles, distinctive features, and best practices. Peer-reviewed journal articles, national curriculum documents, and international education reports published between 2000 and 2025 were analyzed through thematic synthesis and comparative evaluation. The findings show that Philippine and global curricula share standards-based, competency-driven frameworks that emphasize 21st-century skills; however, they differ in governance, flexibility, teacher autonomy, and the integration of interdisciplinary learning. While the Philippines excels in contextualization and localization, other systems demonstrate greater adaptability, phenomenon-based learning, and technology-supported instruction. A re-conceptualized curriculum model is proposed that integrates global best practices while preserving local relevance. These insights highlight opportunities to enhance flexibility, empower teachers, promote interdisciplinary approaches, and integrate digital tools, thereby supporting evidence-based reforms and future research toward a globally aligned Philippine education system.

KEYWORDS: Curriculum design; Philippine K–12; comparative education; competency-based framework; global best practices.

1. Introduction

Curriculum serves as the foundation of any educational system because it defines what learners are expected to know, understand, and be able to do. It encompasses planned learning experiences, subject content, instructional strategies, and assessment approaches implemented within schools [1]. Curriculum design, meanwhile, refers to the systematic process of organizing these components to achieve specific educational goals and outcomes. This process involves decisions regarding content selection, sequencing, pedagogy, and evaluation methods that shape learners' academic and personal development. Effective curriculum design plays a crucial role in shaping national education systems because it reflects a country's educational philosophy, socio-cultural values, and developmental priorities. It determines learning standards, the competencies students must acquire, and the overall direction of educational

reform [2]. As countries continue to pursue improvements in educational quality and relevance, curriculum design has become a strategic instrument for promoting workforce readiness, responsible citizenship, and global competitiveness.

In the era of globalization, education systems are increasingly influenced by international standards and benchmarking measures. Large-scale international assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), have encouraged countries to evaluate educational performance and implement reforms aligned with global trends [3]. Consequently, curriculum frameworks are no longer developed in isolation; instead, they are shaped by international best practices, cross-national collaborations, and the growing emphasis on global competencies. Given these developments, comparative curriculum studies have become increasingly important. Examining similarities and differences among national curriculum designs enables educators and policymakers to identify strengths, address gaps, and adopt contextually relevant innovations [4]. Through comparative analysis, education systems can better respond to local needs while remaining aligned with global educational demands. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework used in this study, highlighting the relationship between the Philippine curriculum context, selected global curriculum models, and the points of convergence and divergence identified through comparative analysis. The framework serves as a guide for understanding emerging trends, structural differences, and shared principles in curriculum design across educational systems.

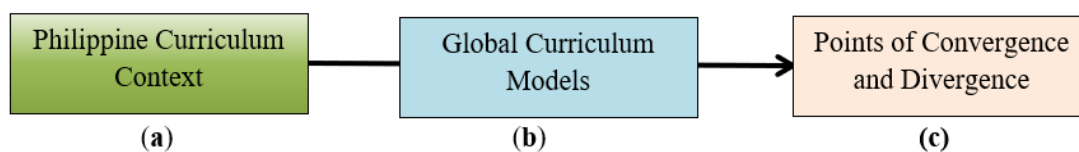


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of curriculum design comparison; (a) National Curriculum Context (Philippines); (b) Global Curriculum Models; (c) Points of Convergence and Divergence

Based on these considerations, this literature review seeks to answer several key questions: What are the dominant curriculum design frameworks shaping global education systems? How is curriculum design structured and implemented in the Philippines? What similarities and differences exist between the Philippine curriculum and selected global models? What policy and pedagogical implications can be derived from the comparative analysis to support curriculum improvement? Accordingly, this study aims to provide a systematic comparative analysis of curriculum design in the Philippines and selected global educational systems. Specifically, it examines the major theoretical foundations underpinning curriculum design in contemporary education and analyzes the structural and pedagogical characteristics of curriculum implementation in the Philippines. The study also compares these characteristics with selected global educational systems to identify patterns of convergence and divergence. Furthermore, it identifies strengths, gaps, and emerging trends that may inform future curriculum development and educational policy reform.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research design.

This study employed a systematic literature review design to synthesize and analyze scholarly works related to curriculum design in the Philippines and selected global educational systems.

A systematic approach was adopted to ensure transparency, rigor, and replicability in identifying, screening, and synthesizing relevant literature. The review followed structured procedures involving database searching, the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, and thematic synthesis of findings. The systematic review design enabled the study to: (1) identify dominant theoretical frameworks in curriculum design; (2) examine the structural features of national curriculum systems; and (3) generate a comparative analysis grounded in peer-reviewed and policy-based evidence. By applying explicit selection parameters, the review minimized bias and enhanced the credibility of the comparative findings.

2.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

To ensure the relevance, reliability, and scholarly quality of the review, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to data collection. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, government-issued curriculum framework documents, and international education reports (e.g., OECD and UNESCO) were included. These sources were selected to ensure both academic rigor and policy relevance. The review covered publications published between 2000 and 2025 to capture contemporary curriculum reforms influenced by globalization, standards-based education, and competency-based frameworks. Studies published before 2000 were excluded to maintain the study's focus on modern curriculum developments and international benchmarking trends.

In addition, the review specifically focused on literature addressing curriculum design frameworks, structures, governance models, and pedagogical foundations. General discussions of education that were not directly related to curriculum design were excluded to maintain analytical precision and coherence. The detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in this study are presented in Table 1. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were designed to ensure the relevance, credibility, and scholarly rigor of the selected sources. By focusing on peer-reviewed studies, official curriculum documents, and international education reports, the study strengthened the reliability and validity of the comparative analysis.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for literature selection.

| Criteria | Inclusion | Exclusion |
|------------------|--|--|
| Publication Type | Peer-reviewed journal articles; government curriculum frameworks; international reports (e.g., OECD, UNESCO) | Blogs, opinion articles, and non-scholarly sources |
| Time Frame | Publications from 2000–2025 | Publications before 2000 |
| Focus | Curriculum design frameworks, structures, governance, and pedagogy | General education topics not directly related to curriculum design |

2.3. Data sources.

Relevant literature was gathered from multiple credible sources to ensure both scholarly rigor and policy relevance. Academic journal articles were retrieved from major databases, including Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar, using keywords such as curriculum design, comparative education, Philippine curriculum, and global education systems. In addition to peer-reviewed studies, official national curriculum documents from the Philippine Department of Education and selected countries were examined to provide primary policy perspectives. International education policy reports from organizations such as the OECD and UNESCO were also included to capture global benchmarks, reform trends, and comparative indicators. The

integration of scholarly and policy-based sources enabled a balanced and comprehensive analysis.

2.4. Data analysis procedure.

The selected literature underwent systematic thematic analysis to identify recurring concepts, curriculum design principles, governance structures, and pedagogical orientations within curriculum frameworks. Key themes were coded and organized to highlight patterns across national and international educational contexts. Subsequently, a comparative framework synthesis was employed to examine similarities and differences between the Philippine curriculum and selected global systems. This process involved aligning curriculum components such as standards, content organization, assessment models, and implementation structures, within a unified analytical matrix. Finally, curriculum design elements were categorized into core dimensions, including theoretical foundations, governance models, instructional approaches, and assessment systems. This categorization facilitated a structured comparison and enabled the identification of strengths, gaps, and emerging trends. The overall literature selection and screening procedure used in this review is illustrated in Figure 2. The literature selection process consisted of four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. The flow diagram demonstrates the systematic procedures used in database searching, duplicate removal, eligibility evaluation, and final study selection, thereby ensuring the transparency and rigor of the review process.

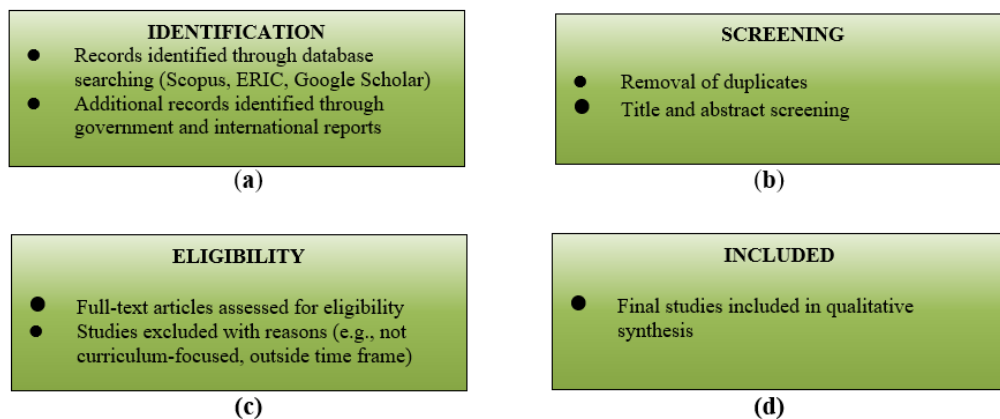


Figure 2. Flow Diagram of literature selection process; (a) Identification; (b) Screening; (c) Eligibility; (d) Included.

3. Results

3.1 Theoretical Foundations of Curriculum Design

Curriculum design is grounded in theoretical models that guide how educational goals are translated into structured learning experiences. Among the most influential frameworks is Tyler's Objectives Model, which emphasizes the systematic alignment of objectives, learning experiences, organization, and evaluation [2]. Tyler proposed four fundamental questions that curriculum planners must address, centering on clearly defined behavioral objectives. This model laid the foundation for standards-based and outcomes-oriented curricula widely adopted in contemporary education systems. Building on this structured approach, Taba's Grassroots Model advocates for a more teacher-centered and inductive process of curriculum development. Taba [5] argued that curriculum should be developed by teachers who are

directly engaged with learners, progressing from specific classroom realities toward broader curricular frameworks. Her model emphasizes diagnosis of learners' needs, formulation of objectives, content selection, organization, and evaluation. This approach strengthens the role of educators in curriculum planning and highlights the importance of contextual relevance.

In response to concerns about superficial content coverage, Understanding by Design (UbD) introduced a backward design framework focused on deep understanding rather than rote learning. Wiggins and McTighe [6] proposed that curriculum planning should begin with identifying desired learning outcomes, determining acceptable evidence of learning, and then designing instructional activities. UbD shifts the emphasis from content delivery to enduring understanding and authentic assessment, influencing curriculum reforms that prioritize critical thinking and transfer of learning. More recently, Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) has gained prominence globally. This approach centers on mastery of specific competencies knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for real-world application [7]. Unlike traditional time-based progression models, competency-based systems allow learners to advance upon demonstrating proficiency. CBC aligns closely with workforce readiness initiatives and 21st-century skills frameworks, making it highly relevant in global education reforms.

Closely related is Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), which focuses on clearly defined learning outcomes that students must achieve by the end of a program or course. Spady [8] emphasized that curriculum, instruction, and assessment should be aligned with explicit performance standards. OBE promotes accountability, measurable results, and learner-centered instruction. Although debated in terms of implementation challenges, it has significantly influenced standards-based reforms in many countries, including the Philippines. As shown in Table 2, these curriculum theories provide complementary perspectives on curriculum design, ranging from objective-based and teacher-driven models to outcome-based and competency-oriented frameworks. Together, they establish a theoretical foundation for analyzing curriculum structures and practices across educational systems.

Table 2. Major curriculum design theories and their key features.

| Theory | Key Proponent | Core Principle | Design Focus |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Tyler's Objectives Model | Ralph W. Tyler | Curriculum should be organized around clearly defined objectives | Alignment of objectives, instruction, and assessment |
| Taba's Grassroots Model | Hilda Taba | Curriculum should be teacher-developed and context-driven | Inductive design based on learners' needs |
| Understanding by Design (UbD) | Grant Wiggins & Jay McTighe | Backward design centered on enduring understanding | Outcomes-first planning and authentic assessment |
| Competency-Based Curriculum | Mulder | Mastery of specific competencies over time-based progression | Skills development and proficiency demonstration |
| Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) | William Spady | Education structured around clearly defined learning outcomes | Performance standards and measurable results |

3.2. Curriculum design in the Philippines.

The Philippine curriculum has undergone significant reforms over the decades to address evolving educational needs and global competitiveness. Historically, the country followed a 10-year basic education system until the implementation of the K–12 Basic Education Program in 2013, which added two additional years of senior high school to align with international standards [9]. This reform aimed to provide Filipino learners with sufficient time to master competencies, prepare for tertiary education, and develop skills relevant to the workforce and society.

3.3. Curriculum design in selected global educational systems.

Curriculum design in global education systems reflects diverse approaches shaped by national priorities, cultural values, and policy frameworks. Studying these models provides insights for comparative analysis and informs potential improvements in the Philippine context. Finland is widely recognized for its innovative education system, which emphasizes phenomenon-based learning that encourages students to explore interdisciplinary topics and real-world problems [12]. The Finnish national curriculum is flexible, granting schools and teachers significant autonomy to design learning activities that meet local needs and student interests while adhering to broad national learning goals. This approach fosters creativity, critical thinking, and learner engagement, making the curriculum highly adaptable to societal changes. Singapore maintains a centralized, standards-driven curriculum focused on preparing students for the demands of a knowledge-based economy. The curriculum integrates academic rigor with 21st-century competencies, promoting problem-solving, innovation, and digital literacy [13]. Emphasis is placed on structured progression and measurable outcomes, ensuring consistency across schools while supporting future-ready learners. The United States operates a decentralized curriculum system, with authority distributed among state and local education agencies. While curricula vary by state, initiatives such as the Common Core State Standards have introduced nationwide benchmarks in mathematics and language arts to promote consistency and comparability [14]. The decentralized model allows for local adaptation but presents challenges in equity and uniformity across districts. Japan’s curriculum is guided by the National Course of Study, a framework that integrates moral education alongside core subjects to promote social responsibility and character development [15]. Curriculum standards are centrally defined, ensuring consistency nationwide, while schools are encouraged to adapt teaching methods to local contexts. The emphasis on values education reflects Japan’s holistic approach to learner development, balancing academic achievement with ethical formation. Table 3 provides a comparative overview of curriculum design features across selected countries. The comparison focuses on governance structures, curriculum approaches, assessment systems, and distinctive characteristics of Finland, Singapore, the United States, and Japan, offering insights into global curriculum trends and practices.

Table 3. Comparative overview of curriculum design features across countries.

| Country | Governance | Design Approach | Assessment System | Unique Feature |
|---------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Finland | Centralized with local flexibility | Phenomenon-based, interdisciplinary | Teacher-led, formative assessment | High teacher autonomy, flexible curriculum |
| Singapore | Centralized | Standards-driven, future-ready | National exams, standardized tests | Focus on 21st-century skills and workforce readiness |
| United States | Decentralized | State-led, flexible | State assessments, Common Core alignment | Local adaptation with nationwide benchmarks |
| Japan | Centralized | National Course of Study | National exams, teacher assessment | Integration of moral and character education |

3.4. Comparative analysis.

A comparative examination of curriculum design between the Philippines and selected global educational systems reveals both convergences and divergences in approach, governance, and implementation strategies. This analysis highlights shared principles that align with global trends as well as distinctive features shaped by national contexts. One notable similarity across

the Philippine and global curricula is the adoption of standards-based frameworks. Both the Philippine K–12 curriculum and curricula in countries such as Singapore, Finland, and Japan emphasize clear learning outcomes, grade-level standards, and measurable competencies [9, 12, 13]. These frameworks provide clarity for teachers, learners, and policymakers, ensuring accountability and consistency in educational delivery. Another common feature is the emphasis on 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and digital literacy. Curricula in Finland, Singapore, and the Philippines explicitly integrate competencies that prepare learners for global challenges, technological advancement, and workforce readiness [6, 9, 13].

Finally, competency-based progression is evident in both local and global contexts. In the Philippines, students advance by demonstrating mastery of specific competencies, reflecting global trends seen in Finland’s phenomenon-based learning and Singapore’s skills-oriented curriculum [7, 12]. This approach shifts the focus from time-based progression to mastery of defined skills and knowledge. Despite these shared principles, the degree of centralization in curriculum governance varies. The Philippines and countries such as Singapore and Japan maintain centralized standards, whereas the United States operates a highly decentralized system where states and local districts exercise significant control [14]. Centralized systems provide uniformity, while decentralized models allow localized adaptation but may create inconsistencies.

Flexibility in implementation also differs. Finnish schools enjoy considerable autonomy to design classroom activities and adapt content to student interests and local context, whereas Philippine schools follow structured curriculum guides with prescribed content and pacing [9, 12]. Teacher autonomy is another point of divergence. Finnish and Japanese educators have substantial discretion in instructional strategies and assessment, promoting creativity and learner-centered approaches [12, 15]. In contrast, Philippine teachers often adhere closely to DepEd-prescribed lesson plans and assessment guidelines, limiting flexibility in pedagogical decision-making. The integration of interdisciplinary learning also varies. Finland’s phenomenon-based approach encourages cross-subject exploration, whereas the Philippine curriculum, while incorporating some interdisciplinary elements, remains primarily subject-based [9, 12]. Figure 4 highlights the shared and unique curriculum design elements between the Philippines and selected global systems. It identifies common features such as standards-based frameworks and competency development while emphasizing differences in governance, teacher autonomy, flexibility, and interdisciplinary learning approaches.

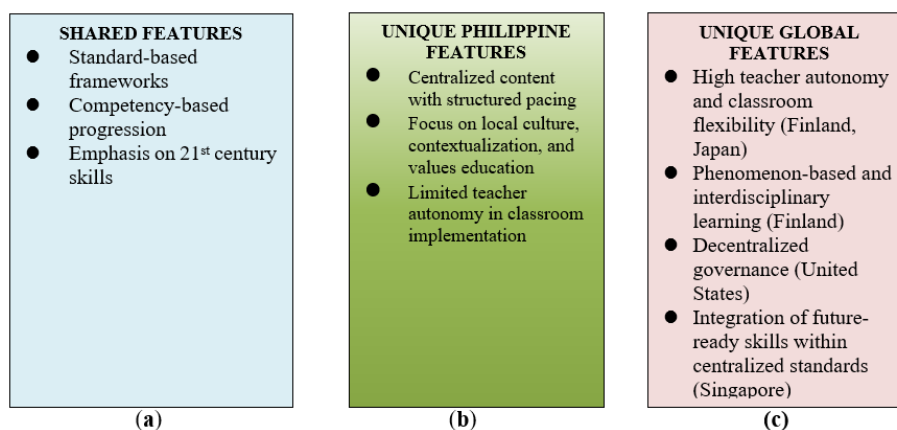


Figure 4. Shared and unique curriculum design elements between the Philippines and global systems; (a) Shared Features; (b) Unique Philippine Features; (c) Unique Global Features.

4. Discussions

4.1. Interpretation of findings.

The comparative analysis indicates that the Philippine curriculum demonstrates considerable alignment with global educational standards, particularly in its adoption of standards-based and competency-driven frameworks [7, 9]. The K–12 curriculum emphasizes measurable learning outcomes, 21st-century skills, and competency progression, mirroring global trends observed in Singapore, Finland, and Japan. These features reflect the country's commitment to equipping learners with the knowledge and skills necessary for higher education, workforce readiness, and international competitiveness.

However, the review also reveals areas where the Philippine curriculum both excels and faces limitations. While the Philippines is strong in contextualizing learning to local culture and values, it shows limited flexibility in classroom implementation and restricted teacher autonomy compared to Finland and Japan [12, 15]. Additionally, the integration of interdisciplinary and phenomenon-based learning remains less developed, potentially limiting opportunities for students to engage in deeper critical thinking and problem-solving.

4.2. Implications for policy and practice.

The findings underscore several implications for curriculum reform in the Philippines. First, there is a need for curriculum flexibility, allowing schools and teachers greater discretion to adapt instructional strategies and content to local needs, thereby enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes. Second, strengthening teacher autonomy is essential, as empowering teachers in pedagogical decision-making encourages innovative teaching methods, supports differentiated instruction, and promotes professional ownership of curriculum implementation. Third, the integration of interdisciplinary approaches should be enhanced by incorporating cross-subject learning, project-based instruction, and real-world problem solving to foster deeper understanding and knowledge transfer. By addressing these areas, policymakers can enhance the responsiveness, inclusivity, and effectiveness of the Philippine education system.

4.3 Emerging Global Trends

Global education systems are increasingly integrating advanced tools and approaches to enhance learning. Digital curriculum integration is becoming more prominent, with online learning platforms, interactive resources, and blended learning models shaping more flexible and accessible educational experiences. AI-supported learning design is also emerging as a significant trend, where artificial intelligence is used to enable adaptive instruction, personalized learning pathways, and data-driven learning analytics. In addition, sustainability education is increasingly embedded in curriculum frameworks worldwide, incorporating environmental literacy, climate education, and the principles of sustainable development goals. Another key trend is the adoption of competency-based global standards, where international benchmarking emphasizes mastery of core competencies to ensure that learners are adequately prepared for global challenges and future workforce demands. These emerging global trends, when aligned with the implications for Philippine curriculum reform summarized in Table 4, highlight the importance of strengthening curriculum flexibility, enhancing teacher autonomy, expanding interdisciplinary learning, and integrating advanced technologies. Integrating these

trends into Philippine curriculum planning can therefore strengthen alignment with global best practices while maintaining local relevance and contextual appropriateness.

Table 4. Implications of comparative findings for Philippine curriculum reform.

| Focus Area | Current Philippine Practice | Implications for Reform | Potential Benefits |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Curriculum Flexibility | Prescribed pacing and content | Grant schools' discretion in implementation | Increased learner engagement, adaptive teaching |
| Teacher Autonomy | Limited classroom discretion | Empower teachers in planning and assessment | Innovation, professional ownership |
| Interdisciplinary Learning | Subject-specific focus | Promote cross-subject and project-based learning | Critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity |
| Technology Integration | Basic ICT integration | Expand digital platforms and blended learning | Access, engagement, 21st-century skills |
| Emerging Global Competencies | Standards-based and competency-driven | Align with AI-supported, sustainability-oriented frameworks | Global readiness, skill mastery |

4.4. Proposed reconceptualized comparative curriculum model.

Based on the comparative analysis, a reconceptualized curriculum model is proposed to enhance the Philippine education system by integrating global best practices while retaining local relevance. The model emphasizes a balance between standards-based and competency-driven frameworks and incorporates flexibility, interdisciplinary learning, and teacher autonomy observed in high-performing global systems such as Finland, Singapore, and Japan. Figure 5 presents the proposed enhanced curriculum design framework integrating global best practices into the Philippine educational context. It illustrates the integration of standards and competencies, community-based learning, and global competencies with sustainability education, alongside flexible instructional approaches to support a more adaptive, inclusive, and future-ready curriculum framework.

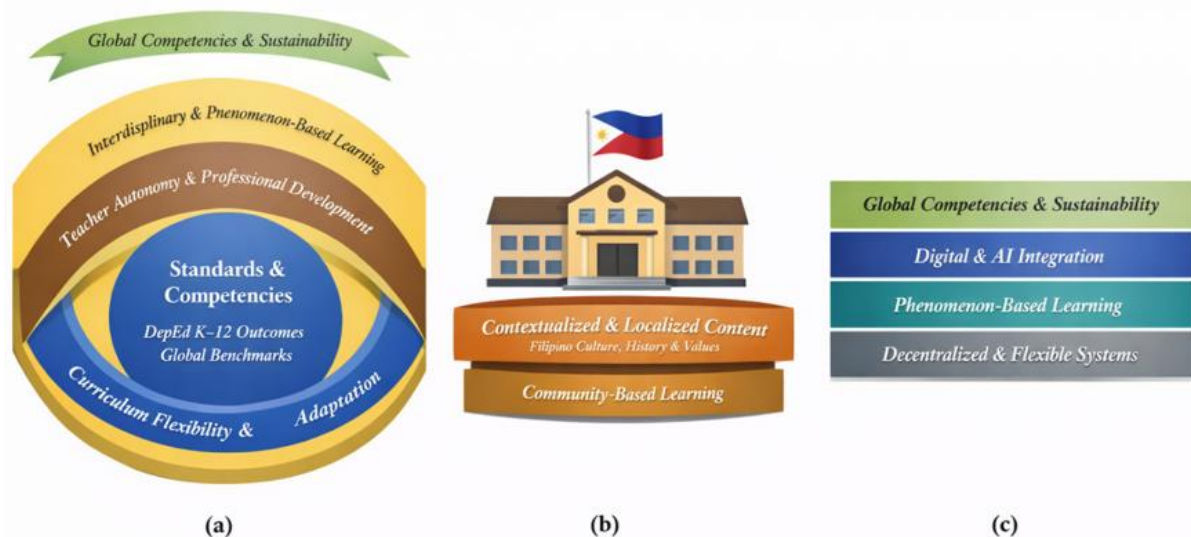


Figure 5. Proposed enhanced curriculum design framework integrating global best practices into the Philippine context; (a) Standard & Competencies; (b) Community-Based Learning; (c) Global Competencies & Sustainability.

5. Conclusions

This literature review highlights key comparative insights into curriculum design, revealing that while the Philippine K–12 curriculum aligns with global standards through its competency-

based and standards-driven framework, it differs in flexibility, teacher autonomy, and interdisciplinary integration compared to high-performing systems such as Finland, Singapore, and Japan. The study contributes to curriculum scholarship by synthesizing theoretical foundations, local practices, and international models, providing a basis for evidence-informed curriculum reform in the Philippines. However, the review is limited by its reliance on published literature and policy documents, which may not fully capture classroom realities or recent innovations. Future research is recommended to include empirical studies, teacher perspectives, and the impact of emerging trends such as digital integration and AI-supported learning to further inform adaptive and globally responsive curriculum design.

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Author Contribution

The author assumes full responsibility for all aspects of this study to ensure transparency and accountability. Contributions include conceptualization (development of the research idea), methodology (design of the research approach), data collection (gathering and organizing data), data analysis (interpreting the results), writing (drafting and revising the manuscript), supervision (overseeing the research process), and funding (securing resources necessary for the study).

Competing Interest

The author declares that there are no competing interests related to this study.

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