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## Original Article

# Holistic Education: Implementing St. Josemaria's Philosophy of Education in the Philippines

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## Abstract

*This paper recommends and applies the Philosophy of Education of St. Josemaria Escrivá as an enhancing addition for basic education in the Philippines in line with the current reforms of DepEd MATATAG and the K-12 reform. The proposal is not a replacement for the current system but aims to address key implementation gaps in moral formation, teacher readiness, and parent-school collaboration. Integral to St. Josemaria Escrivá's Philosophy are the principles of Formation, Freedom, and Families, which coalesce into an advocacy for holistic student development, which is not just concerned with academic development but includes moral formation as well. Using philosophical analysis and critical evaluation, this paper argues for a new emphasis on parent-teacher collaboration, recognition of parents as primary educators, and comprehensive teacher formation to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical applications of reforms. Moreover, this paper recommends integrating moral formation across all subjects and not just in Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (ESP) to enhance the effectiveness of values education. Finally, this paper concludes with the transformative potential of St. Josemaria Escrivá's Philosophy of Education in promoting a morally and spiritually enriched educational system that can potentially address challenges faced in Filipino society.*

**Keywords:** DepEd MATATAG, Moral Formation, Parent-Teacher Collaboration, Philosophy of Education, St. Josemaria Escrivá

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## Introduction

It has been 13 years since the K-12 reform in Philippine education. Before the implementation of K-12, the Philippines had a 10-year basic education program: six years for elementary education and four years for secondary education or junior high school education. In 2012, the Philippines was the only remaining Asian country with a 10-year basic education program. In the world, the Philippines remained among the three countries with a 10-year basic education program. The other two countries were Angola and Djibouti. With the implementation of RA 10533, the inception of the senior high school levels of Grade 11 and Grade 12 emerged. In conjunction with the additional two years in basic education, high school students are then expected to be ready for work or ready for tertiary education (Alonzo, 2015, p.5)

Concurrently, implementing the DepEd MATATAG Curriculum reinforces the goals of the K-12 reform further, in addition to implementing some additional goals. The DepEd MATATAG curriculum strives to decongest the curriculum, emphasize foundational competencies, articulate 21st-century skills, reduce learning areas, emphasize values education, and be equal to international standards (Department of Education [DepEd], 2023, p. 1).

Decongesting the curriculum aims to reduce the number of competencies and focus on essential competencies. The DepEd MATATAG reduces seven subjects into five: Mother Tongue, Filipino, English, Mathematics, Araling Panlipunan, and Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao are streamlined into Language, Reading and Literacy, Mathematics, MAKABANSA, and GMRC. Additionally, values education is emphasized as a key component of the curriculum.

With the inception of the K-12 curriculum and DepEd MATATAG, current challenges are present in the Philippine education system. As stated by Bolaños (2019), there is a tendency to forget that schools or universities are for the perpetuation of knowledge and character formation. With the focus on decongesting the curriculum to be more competitive on a global scale, the Philippine education system does not prioritize character formation, which is a salient feature of holistic education. The current state of Philippine education is that of a major focus on corporatism to meet the needs of Western neoliberalism (Reyes, 2015, p. 135).

Apart from character and moral formation, the lack of parental involvement is also evident in Philippine Education. According to Bartolome and Mamat (2020, p.187), there is a lack of policies supporting the Early Childhood Education of students. This is a concerning fact in education, as schools alone cannot meet the needs of an evolving society; parents must also play a role in their child's holistic development.

While the Philippine educational system has taken actions to promote parental involvement through policies such as Department of Education Memorandum No. 74, s.1999, challenges persist in ascertaining that parental involvement moves beyond logistical support and actively supports the moral and character formation of the students. As stated by Ochoa and Torre (n.d., as cited in Bartolome et al., 2017, p. 44), Filipinos try to be involved with their children's education, but changing social contexts and evolving family dynamics influence this involvement. Despite these efforts, there is a gap in aligning parental involvement with holistic education, which develops cognitive skills and moral values. This gap

calls for a re-examination of educational philosophy, which emphasizes parental involvement and holistic formation of the person.

This paper argues that the philosophy of education of St. Josemaria Escrivá, specifically his delineation of the role of parents as primary educators and focus on inculcating character and values formation, can be applied as an additional framework in the Philippine education system, with institutions that align with his vision and mission. While there are various institutions with specific spiritual traditions, such as St. John Baptist de La Salle in Lasallian schools or St. John Bosco in Salesian institutions, St. Josemaria Escrivá's emphasis on holistic formation through parental collaboration between teachers and parents offers an invaluable contribution.

This study does not impose St. Josemaria Escrivá's philosophy of education on all institutions, but it only underscores its potential applicability at the basic education level, where its principles are in harmony with schools that embrace similar missions. Public schools may selectively adapt insights such as teacher mentoring and parental collaboration whenever feasible.

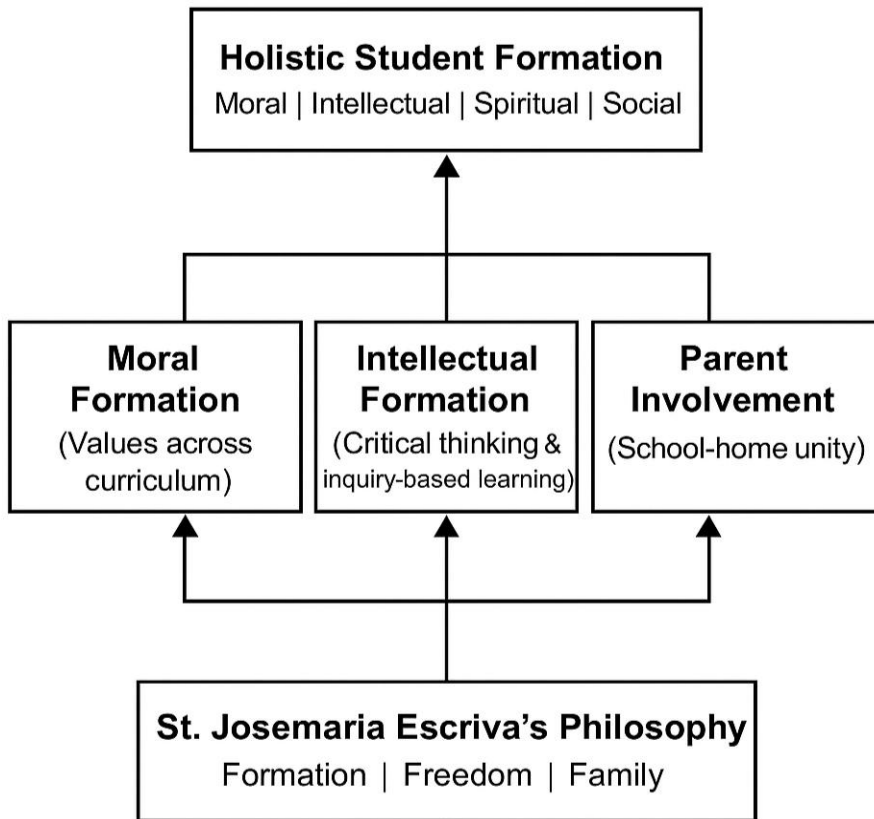
## **Conceptual Framework**

This article responds to the concern that despite the K-12 reform and DepEd MATATAG framework, holistic formation in Philippine education remains weak in practice. MATATAG aspires to produce Filipinos who are intellectually competent and morally upright, but this paper argues that three challenges continue to undermine these goals: (1) shallow moral formation confined to limited values subjects, (2) underdeveloped intellectual formation due to inadequate teacher training, and (3) weak parental collaboration.

To address these challenges, this paper proposes the educational philosophy of St. Josemaria Escrivá as an enriching extension to the current framework. Escrivá's Philosophy, which is rooted in Formation, Freedom, and Families, elucidates on the moral, spiritual, and intellectual development of the whole person. This holistic development is done through shared responsibility among teachers, parents, and students.

The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) consolidates these principles into three domains:

1. Moral Formation – highlighting the integration of values formation across all subjects and proper teacher training for implementing the proposed strategy.
2. Intellectual Formation – focusing on reflective and inquiry-based learning that requires teachers to be formed as lifelong learners.
3. Parent Involvement – based on the idea that parents are primary educators and schools are partners in formation.



**Figure 1.** *Conceptual Framework: Implementing Holistic Education through Escrivá's Philosophy*

## Methodology

This research utilizes philosophical analysis in applying St. Josemaria Escrivá's Philosophy of Education in the Philippines. Concurring with the diverse faith traditions represented among Filipino students, this paper emphasizes universal principles of character and values formation that can be utilized in different educational settings.

To execute this, this paper employs the following approaches:

1. **Conceptual Analysis** – This approach articulates the educational philosophy of St. Josemaria Escrivá, including parental involvement and holistic formation through an emphasis on moral formation. These concepts are articulated and analyzed in the first section of the discussion.
2. **Critical Evaluation** – This approach will analyze current challenges in Philippine education concerning the DepEd MATATAG and K-12 reforms. It evaluates how these policies address (or fail to address) the gaps in holistic formation and explores how Escrivá's philosophy can address them. This will be utilized in the second and third sections of the discussion.

This paper has five (5) parts: First, a delineation of St. Josemaria Escrivá's Educational Philosophy. Second, current challenges in Philippine Education. Third, the application of St. Josemaria Escrivá's Educational Philosophy in Philippine Education. Fourth, a case study of an application of St. Josemaria Escrivá's

Educational Philosophy in the Philippines. Finally, the synthesis of claims leads to a conclusion on the transformative potential of St. Josemaria Escrivá's Educational Philosophy.

## **Results and Discussions**

### *St. Josemaria Escrivá's Philosophy of Education*

The inception of St. Josemaria Escrivá's Philosophy of Education is predicated on the universal call to holiness. For Escrivá, we are called upon by God to be virtuous regardless of our state in life, our profession, or our social standing. The Second Vatican Council echoed this idea. The universal call to holiness has two pertinent aspects: first, everyone is called to holiness, and second, holiness can be found in everyday life with a particular emphasis on work (Evans, 2012, p.164). This is the starting point of the philosophical view of St. Josemaria Escrivá in education, as he sees education as a tool to bring people closer to Jesus Christ and to fulfill the universal call to holiness. In the view of St. Josemaria Escrivá, schools are excellent forms of medium to teach people that God or the universal call to holiness can be seen in everyday life, may it be in a secular setting like a university or a place of labor like a workshop (Escrivá, 1968, p. 114). This universal call to holiness created the three fundamental cores of St. Josemaria's Philosophy of Education: formation, freedom, and family (Evans, 2012, p. 165). Conceptual analysis will examine each concept to elucidate its internal logic and practical implications.

### *Formation*

As one of the core aspects of St. Josemaria's Philosophy of Education, formation does not just refer to academic formation but also character formation in terms of virtues. A conceptual analysis of formation underscores a multifaceted view rooted in intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. For Escrivá, one cannot talk about university education if the transmission of knowledge is divorced from the formation of the people's personalities (Llano, 2000, p. 7).

The vocation of the teachers is to invigorate holistic development in the students in the context of intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual aspects (Murphy, 2003, p. 227). Therefore, the conceptual core of formation is its focus on developing the whole person in line with their vocation to holiness. Generally, his view of the importance of formation is predicated on the fact that ignorance is one of the biggest obstacles to drawing closer to Christ.

It is also important to note that formation is a lifelong endeavor. Conceptually, this indicates that education is not a finite process but continuous. St. Josemaria Escrivá identified several key areas where students should focus their formation: spiritual, religious, professional, and human. Formation is not merely something received but also an activity that requires active participation. It is insufficient for someone only to offer guidance, knowledge, or instruction because formation is a two-way process, which means that a student needs to take responsibility for internalizing, engaging, and taking ownership of the process of growth and formation. St. Josemaria Escrivá uses this point to underscore the importance of the study. In his view, the act of studying and learning is a lifelong process, and it is important information because it has intrinsic value for one's internal life (Evans, 2012, p. 166). For him, everyone in a profession must keep studying and keep themselves updated on the advancements

in their field. In the context of faith, he argues that it is pertinent to extend one's intellectual horizons in that context in conjunction with the development of one's ability to defend and explain it. St. Josemaria asserts that one can do multiple prayers, but if they do not study, then they are useless (Escrivá, 1939, 334).

The final characteristic of St. Josemaria Escrivá's idea of formation is personal tuition. Formation is a personal task, and for students to acquire the faith of the Catholic Church and the other necessary virtues, one must understand that every student is unique and, therefore, personal tuition would be necessary. This is why schools of Opus Dei, such as the University of Navarra, assign a specific mentor to a student. This mentor helps not only the academic formation of the student but also their formation (Sánchez-Tabernero & Torralba, 2018, p. 19).

The members involved in the formation of the students try to have chats with the students to get to know them, which will help in their formation. Though not obligated, students usually have a chat with the school chaplain at least once during a term. This practice underscores St. Josemaria Escrivá's view that education is not merely concerned with the numerical value in the academe, but it is also a work of friendship that draws parents closer to their child and the professor to his students and the students among themselves (Evans, 2012, p. 168).

### *Freedom*

The second concept subject to conceptual analysis is freedom. Along with formation as a principal attribute of St. Josemaria Escrivá's Philosophy of Education is the idea of freedom. In the previous section, it has been delineated that his view is predicated on the universal call to holiness. The universal call to holiness presupposes that a subject is free; otherwise, there is no sanctity (Evans, 2012, p. 168). In conjunction with this, his view on freedom is based on two aspects: education in freedom and freedom of education. Pope Francis echoes this nature of freedom as he views freedom as one of the inalienable rights of humans (Pyžlak, 2023, p. 2). Escrivá's principal view is that he saw education as a tool for learning how to use one's freedom (Murphy, 2003, p. 225).

Regarding freedom of education, it is pertinent to understand that, in his view, parents are the primary educators of their children. Using conceptual analysis, it is evident that Escrivá prioritizes subsidiarity, which means that states only have a secondary role in academic formation. He cites Pius XI's *Divini Illius Magistri*, in which the encyclical states that the principal right of the parents as first educators is a right that comes directly from God and comes before any type of civil society and State (Evans, 2012, p. 169). This premise is used to criticize the excessive control of the state regarding education.

Escrivá also mentions that the Church could tend to view education erroneously, similar to the criticism regarding the state's monopolization of education. It is unquestionable for Escrivá that the Church has a divine right to establish schools; however, the Church must not forget that they are only secondary in terms of the education of children. Pope Francis echoes this as he affirms the right of parents to educate their children in a way that is consistent with their values (Zengarani, 2023). This argument by St. Josemaria Escrivá remains controversial for most people, as he argued that lay people possessed freedom regarding education: it is up to the parents how they will educate their children because the Church only has a secondary role in educating the children. Only when the parents can no longer serve

their primary duty can the Church step in to take the role. Therefore, St. Josemaria Escrivá's view delineates a sense of freedom in education wherein the parents have the role, responsibility, and freedom of educating their children, with the Church and the State only having a subsidiary role in the education of the children.

### *Families*

The third pillar of Escrivá's educational philosophy is the concept of family. Conceptual analysis would indicate that in Escrivá's view, parents are the primary educators of their children. If parents are the first educators, then the family is the primary school of life. Accordingly, St. Josemaria Escrivá suggests that schools are extensions of the parents' homes, and schools should not be inconsistent with the faith that they try to instill in their children. St. Josemaria Escrivá famously asserted the idea of parents first, teachers second, and students third (Murphy, 2003, p. 227). Fundamentally, this does not purport that students are not important, but it highlights the importance of parents and teachers in forming the child. When all this is taken into consideration, there cannot be an inconsistency regarding the teachings of the parents and the teachers. Learning will be wasted if the student learns some principles in school that are contradicted by their parents when they get home.

A common aspect in schools of Opus Dei is to offer parenting classes to support the education of the child. For example, the PAREF schools in the Philippines, which are schools under Opus Dei, have parenting programs to strengthen parents' parenting skills. These programs include the New Parents Education Program (NPEP) and the Middle Childhood Program (MCP). Moreover, St. Josemaria Escrivá postulates the importance of both parents attending school meetings. Most of the time, parents tend to leave the child's formation to the mother since they tend to be too wrapped up in their work.

### *Challenges in Philippine Education*

Various philosophers of education and experts in pedagogy can delineate some challenges in Philippine education. These challenges are related to general problems in Philippine education, such as remnants of colonialism in Philippine education, overemphasis on professional growth rather than on critical thinking, lack of parental involvement, and ineffective public policies for education. Additionally, some problems highlighted are problems connected to the youth and problems with marginalized languages. Through critical evaluation, this section analyzes the issues in the Philippine education system, particularly the insufficient critical thinking development, inadequate emphasis on character formation, and minimal parental involvement.

The Philippine Education system focuses mostly on meeting the needs of Western neoliberalism: it focuses on producing students who are geared towards professional growth for capitalism (Reyes, 2015, p. 135). This is not ideal for nurturing citizens who are excellent critical thinkers. Lipman (2003, p. 9) echoes this judgment as he believes students are not trained to think reflectively. Moreover, in a section authored by Elicor within a collective work, children are exposed, but not Philosophy or reflective thinking because some presume they are at odds with one another (Opiniano et.al.,2022,p.10).

Therefore, some suggest possible solutions to this problem. One solution is to re-examine the current teacher education program's training. With the inception of

the outcomes-based learning model in the Philippines, a necessary skill for teachers is the skill to do philosophical or reflective thinking because philosophical discussion might arise in the learning environment. Since most teachers do not have the training for philosophical discussion, they often fail to stimulate the learners' minds (Manencido-Bolanos, 2018, P. 154). Critically evaluating this orientation reveals a misalignment in curricular goals and the intellectual needs of learners. While the outcomes-based model has been adopted, the lack of teacher training in philosophical or reflective thinking limits its effectiveness. With teachers' lack of skill in reflective thinking, it is suggested that collaboration between pedagogues and philosophers should be practiced, developing philosophical and reflective thinking in basic education (Altez-Albela, 2024, p. 283).

The emphasis on technical and scientific skills in various learning institutions is also reflective of a lack of focus on moral or character formation, which is another challenge in Philippine education. The focus of the implementation of K-12 is to put the Philippines on par with international standards. Moreover, the construction of DepEd MATATAG is to inculcate competence in Filipino learners. However, the area of character or virtue development is seemingly lacking in the Philippines as the education system prioritizes scientific and technical skills over moral education (Bayod, 2019, p. 121). The consequence is a population adept at serving capitalists but failing to be moral agents and democratic citizens. The lack of holistic development precludes Filipinos from developing virtues such as altruism, prudence, and solidarity with the poor. The Department of Education seeks to address this lack of focus on holistic education by including it in the DepEd MATATAG curriculum as a primary goal of the education system. The DepEd MATATAG aims for Filipino learners to be "imbued with strong nationalism and appropriate Filipino values to make them peace advocates." (Department of Education [DepEd], 2024, p. 9)." This aims to inculcate the value of democratic principles, embracing the unique cultural identity of Filipinos, and resolving conflicts in a non-violent way. While these stated goals are commendable, the orientation of the MATATAG curriculum remains shaped by technocratic and utilitarian philosophy. It underscores competencies, efficiency, and measurable outcomes but offers a limited philosophical grounding for moral and character formation. Without a pronounced moral-philosophical foundation, there is a risk that values education will remain a secondary concern rather than a primary learning dimension. This is precisely where St. Josemaria Escrivá's philosophy of education may offer additional depth.

One solution postulated is R.A 11476, the "GMRC and Values Education Act." The law institutionalized GMRC and Values education in the K-12 curriculum. Although the postulation of the law and the various reforms of the Department of Education can be seen optimistically, some challenges are associated with the reforms. The first challenge is in the implementation context: how would value formation be implemented in the classroom? If the presumption is that integrating GMRC immediately addresses the implementation challenge, then that would be erroneous. Through an evaluative lens, it is evident that institutionalizing values education is insufficient as it remains confined to a singular subject. Truly effective education on character formation is woven into all aspects of the curriculum and not just confined to one subject. Fundamentally, this means that it should be applied in other subjects such as English, Mathematics, or Science. The second challenge in successfully implementing values education is possibly the lack of support from



parents, educators, and community members (Kilag et al., 2024, p. 680). It cannot be generalized that all participants would be supportive or would understand the importance of value formation. Admittedly, parents could view it as less important than academic formation. A third possible challenge would be resistance to change. Most educators are already comfortable with preserving the status quo, and it would take enormous time and effort to adjust teaching strategies to fully inculcate value formation. In conjunction with this, some conservatives might challenge the values that are supposed to be taught in the new curriculum (Kilag et al., 2024, p. 680).

Another challenge in the Philippine education system is the lack of parental involvement. It is a general truth to postulate that children's first teachers are their parents. Through their parents, they learn the most basic skills in life, such as basic mathematics, reading, and moral virtues. In cases of a misbehaving student, it is the duty of the parents to correct the misbehavior. Generally, parents have a positive view in terms of helping their children with academic work, motivating or inspiring them, and organizing a structure at home in order to help their children succeed academically; however, in the context of socializing academically and collaborating with the teachers, they seem to take an instrumental role regarding this type of parental involvement which reflects some cultural beliefs or in another context, extreme poverty (Garcia & de Guzman, 2020, p. 351). Filipino parents from low-income households view parental involvement in school differently: they consider providing for their children's basic needs as part of parental involvement in school, although educators do not necessarily consider it as parental involvement. Parents with lower social capital than their child's teachers tend to struggle with parental involvement. With insufficient income, it is generally more challenging for the parent to be directly involved in cases such as challenging the authority of the teachers and supporting their child. Parents then shift their focus to instrumental support, such as getting a job and applying for a loan. An analysis of this dynamic highlights how power imbalances between parents and teachers discourage collaboration.

### *Adapting St. Josemaria's Educational Philosophy to the Philippines*

It has been articulated previously that there are intrinsic challenges in the education system of the Philippines. These challenges include little emphasis on the development of critical thinking, weak focus on character formation, and lack of parental involvement. It is important to address these challenges as they are domains that heavily affect the development of the learner. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that focuses on academic achievement and addresses the students' intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation. Accordingly, St. Josemaria's educational philosophy offers an insightful framework for addressing the issues.

St. Josemaria's educational philosophy revolves around three core tenets: formation, freedom, and family. For Escrivá, education is not just limited to the quantitative nature of the academe, but it also includes moral and spiritual formation. Thus, a truly educated person is not just a person who can regurgitate information but a person who possesses traits such as fortitude, humility, and integrity. Analogously, an educated person is not just a person who can parrot and memorize arbitrary facts but can analyze these facts and infer a logical conclusion. Each person also possesses the characteristic of freedom. Aligned with this is the concept of educational freedom, which emphasizes that parents are the primary educators of their children. At the same time, the state and the Church serve only a supplementary

role. Afterward, the discussion highlights the importance of families in the education of children. For Escrivá, parents play an important role in the child's education.

All these factors will be discussed in detail in the next section. First, the paper will assess the state of intellectual formation and suggest improvements. Second, it will discuss the limitations of current moral education and propose integrating values formation across different subjects. Finally, this paper will delineate the challenges in parent-educator collaboration and recommend ways to empower parents as primary educators. These ideas are the application of St. Josemaria Escrivá's Philosophy of Education and shall serve as a complementary guide for educators, parents, and policymakers in education.

### *Intellectual Formation*

The Department of Education, in line with its reform and postulation DepEd MATATAG, aims to develop critical thinking skills and reflective learning. Inquiry-based learning is a fundamental need for further development in critical thinking skills and reflective learning. Although the K-12 Curriculum already articulated its inquiry-based nature, it does not produce the results it should. Critical examination indicates that there is a gap between the theory and practice of inquiry-based learning. With the postulation of inquiry-based learning, one must assess whether teachers can implement inquiry-based learning. Moreover, it should also be examined whether teachers are even open to adjusting their traditional method of teaching.

In the article by Altez-Albela (2024, p.283), she analyzed the course "The Teaching Profession," in which she found that the syllabus was insufficient in fully developing the capacity of teachers to teach critical and reflective thinking to students. Hence, she recommends a dialogue between pedagogues and philosophers for the development of educational techniques. It is vital to understand the importance of teacher training in terms of implementing reforms in the education system since educational reforms will be fundamentally useless if teachers do not apply them. Furthermore, it is paramount to recognize that teachers' resistance to adjusting their teaching methods in line with educational reforms can pose a challenge. Resistance to change from the teachers can result in slower implementation of an educational reform. Empirical findings also suggest that teachers tend to have a moderate level of resistance in terms of change in the delivery of instruction (Gorospe & Edaniol, 2022, p. 2).

Echoing St. Josemaria Escrivá's philosophy of Education, this paper argues that formation should come first before reforms. Fundamentally, this means that the teacher must be at least equipped with the intellectual, moral, and spiritual competence to properly apply educational reforms. Rather than seeing educational changes as burdens, educators should see them as opportunities to enhance their vocation. Additionally, St. Josemaria Escrivá emphasizes that educators should be lifelong learners in the context of professional growth. As Mancenido-Bolaños, 2018, p.154) mentioned, following John Dewey, progress will remain distant until teachers become open to change and until they develop competence in subjects like philosophy, history, and science.

According to Manalu et al. (2024), an open attitude is one of the most crucial attributes for educators since it empowers them to welcome and adjust to changes. As agents of change, teachers need continuous training, sufficient professional development, and adequate resources to build the proficiency necessary to adapt to

an evolving educational environment. Teachers may struggle to acclimate to educational changes without this support, resulting in a gap between theory and practice.

### *Moral Formation*

With the K-12 reform, we saw the inception and integration of “Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao.” This strives to develop virtuous students who are well-equipped to become democratic and empathetic citizens. Concurrently, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao is only taught two times a week at the Junior High School Level: one hour each day and two days per week. This substantiates that Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao is less than core subjects (Dela Cruzü, 2019, p. 2). Using thorough analysis, it is evident that although DepEd tries to integrate moral formation through this subject, it remains insufficient in truly inculcating values since it is a subject that students only tackle twice per week. Moreover, as stated previously, some teachers are not as equipped to teach philosophical and moral theories, which will be present in Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao. To address some of these problems, educators and policymakers need to recognize that moral formation is equally important to intellectual formation. Following St. Josemaria Escrivá, Philippine education must teach students to be logical and holistically form them and help them develop as moral agents. Thus, greater emphasis should be placed on moral formation rather than exclusively focusing on technical skills that benefit capitalism.

After recognizing the relevance of moral formation, schools should integrate moral formation across the curriculum. As stated previously, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao is only a subject taken twice per week, which will diminish its effectiveness. To bolster its effectiveness in morally forming students, teachers should integrate moral education into their lessons in subjects such as literature, history, and science. For example, in the English curriculum in Grade 10, which has the story “Pride and Prejudice,” the English teacher can inculcate moral values in the students by asking moral questions regarding the story. In Social Studies, the teacher can stimulate the learners’ moral compass by citing different historical figures and asking the students about the morality of their actions.

The moral formation of students is a work in progress. The first step pedagogues should take is to recognize the importance of holistically educating the students and not just focusing on cognitive development. Afterward, the implementation of integrating values formation across the curriculum will follow.

### *Parent-Teacher Collaboration*

Parent-teacher collaboration is perhaps one of the most vital domains to consider in the education of students. Empirical evidence shows that parental involvement is linked to the academic achievement of the learner (Garcia & de Guzman, 2020, pp. 343–354). Moreover, one cannot stress the importance of parental involvement in the formation of the child since, as primary educators of the children, it is the parents who first inculcate values in the child. The lack of parental involvement is a challenge in the Philippines. The literature on pedagogy shows that parents’ importance is not recognized (Bartolome & Mamat, 2020, p. 172). Furthermore, parents seem to allocate responsibilities such as academic socialization to the teachers (Garcia & de Guzman, 2020, p. 351, quoting Denessen et al., 2001).

Although K-12 reforms and the postulation of DepEd MATATAG aim to cognitively or possibly morally develop the learners, pedagogues can gather insights from St. Josemaria Escrivá on the role of parents as primary educators of the students. This underscores the importance of parents in terms of the education of the child. Pedagogues must acknowledge that, as St. Josemaria Escrivá has said, they play a subsidiary role in the education of the child. If, for instance, the parent is entirely indifferent to the intellectual and moral education of the child, then academic success will be more challenging because a lack of parental involvement leads to low school success. (Lemessa et al., 2023, p. 3).

Parental involvement is also woven into the intellectual and moral formation of the child since it is the job of the parents to teach moral virtues and help their children learn fundamentals in subjects such as English, Mathematics, and Science. Therefore, it is paramount that pedagogues and parents focus on collaboration for the education of the learners.

Some scholars may argue that the lack of parental involvement is a socioeconomic issue rather than a cultural issue. It is acknowledged that low-income parents struggle to be involved in their children's education due to limited financial resources. Some parents in poverty might lack the necessary educational background for productive collaboration with teachers (Garcia & de Guzman, 2020, p. 351). While socioeconomic status contributes to a lack of parental involvement, it is not the sole reason since cultural factors can contribute to it. In some cultural groups, parents tend to defer responsibilities to the teachers since they believe that education is the sole responsibility of the teachers (Lansford, 2022, p. 7). This mindset persists across public and private schools, underscoring the need for a shift in perception that encourages parents, regardless of socioeconomic status, to take a more active role in their children's education. Hence, while financial constraints and educational background may influence parental involvement, cultural practices also influence the level of parental involvement.

Some mechanisms constructed by the Department of Education for the intellectual formation of the students can be commendable when properly applied. However, through critical analysis, it is apparent that focusing mostly on what educators ought to do is not enough: there have to be policies to strengthen parent-teacher collaboration since it is an integral part of the education of the learner, and the first step is to recognize that parental involvement cannot be divorced from the holistic formation of the learner.

### *Practical Application of St. Josemaria Escrivá's Philosophy*

This section shall explore cases where the educational philosophy of St. Josemaria Escrivá has already been applied in primary and secondary schooling. Various universities adopted the educational philosophy of St. Josemaria Escrivá; for example, the University of Navarra in Spain and the University of Piura in Peru are institutions that are deeply influenced by St. Josemaria Escrivá (Evans, 2012, p. 171). In the Philippines, the University of Asia and the Pacific is a university of Opus Dei (Evans, 2012, p. 178).

In primary and secondary education, the most well-known schools that are members of Opus Dei and institutions that adopted the educational philosophy of St. Josemaria are the PAREF schools in the Philippines. In the PAREF Schools, they value academic education and character formation equally: one is not valued over the

other. The PAREF schools are substantiated here not as a prescriptive model for the entire educational system of the Philippines but as an example of how aspects of St. Josemaria Escrivá's educational philosophy can be effectively applied. The intention is to encourage reflection on these principles, which public and private schools may adapt according to their missions and visions.

Each student is paired with a mentor who will offer personalized guidance to support their character development. These mentors hold regular one-on-one chats with their mentees to help their character formation. Mentees can advise the students and help them set academic goals and other areas, such as spiritual domains. Following St. Josemaria Escrivá, this is the practical application of the emphasis on holistic education rather than academic formation only since mentorship aims to develop the students' characters in a moral and spiritual context.

In the context of parental involvement and parents being the first educators of the students, PAREF regularly conducts seminars for parents; for example, the New Parents Education Program (NPEP) is a program for parents that teaches parents ideas such as parenting, home-school collaboration, child development, and family environments. Ultimately, it is a course to help parents become better parents for their children. Another program that PAREF has for parents is the Middle Childhood Parenting Course (MCPC), which aims to educate parents on how to guide their children in the middle childhood stage. The importance of strengthening home-school collaboration echoes the educational philosophy of St. Josemaria Escrivá, who postulated the importance of parental involvement in the formation of the child. In the real-world context, St. Josemaria Escrivá's philosophy of education is not purely theoretical, as we can see empirical evidence of it being applied in primary and secondary schools.

## Conclusions

The Philippine education system continues to face challenges in integrating moral formation and parental involvement into its framework. Although policies such as the MATATAG curriculum aim to develop critical thinking and enhanced learning competencies, there is a gap between policy and practical implementation. This is due to insufficient teacher formation or preparation, a lack of focus and support on values-based pedagogy, and ineffective parent-school collaboration.

Regarding these challenges, this paper recommends St. Josemaria Escrivá's educational philosophy as an addition that can enhance holistic education. His focus on moral and character formation and active collaboration between parents and teachers provides valuable insights for educational institutions that share a similar vision. In contrast to postulating a uniform approach, this educational philosophy offers guidelines that schools may modify based on their missions and visions.

To foster effective education, pedagogues and parents must be cognizant that academic achievement alone is insufficient. Education must also develop values that persist beyond the classroom. This demands a change in perspective: one that regards parents as primary educators rather than passive supporters.

The integration of Escrivá's educational philosophy into aligned institutions is not just a theoretical proposition but a call to reimagine education as a character-building and collaborative undertaking. Through direct efforts in teacher formation and parent-teacher collaboration, the Philippine system can move closer to its goal of

holistic development. The example of PAREF schools is mentioned not as a model to be universally adopted but as a practical illustration of how these principles may enrich educational practice in varied settings.

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