

Professional Advancement Through School Learning Action Cell (SLAC): Insights of Secondary School Teachers

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Abstract: This study aimed to explore the reflections of teachers on the conduct of School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) on their professional development. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the researcher selected ten secondary school teachers from Cateel, Davao Oriental, through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide administered through in-depth interviews (IDI) and a focus group discussion (FGD). Thematic analysis revealed that teachers' reflections highlighted enhanced teaching strategies, strengthened professional collaboration, improved curriculum understanding, and enhanced assessment techniques. Teachers also demonstrated coping mechanisms in time management, communication, and resource management. Additionally, they gained management insights, including collaborative professional development, instructional competence, and leadership skills. The findings confirmed the applicability of Transformative Learning Theory, Situated Learning Theory, and Reflective Practice Theory in understanding teachers' reflections on SLAC. The study emphasized the importance of continuous professional development through SLAC sessions, promoting adaptive teaching practices, and fostering teacher leadership. Recommendations for schools, teachers, and educational leaders were provided to enhance SLAC implementation.

Keywords: School Learning Action Cell, Teachers' Reflections, Professional Development, Coping Mechanisms, Educational Management.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Learning Action Cell (LAC) is a collaborative teacher session designed to address common classroom challenges such as ICT integration, 21st-century skills, assessment, pedagogy, and learner diversity, as per DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016. It provides a reflective space for teachers to share best practices and engage in professional development. While LAC promotes collaborative learning—a proven strategy to improve teacher understanding and prepare them for modern educational demands—teachers still encounter various challenges in effectively implementing it.

Professional development (PD) is widely used worldwide to improve teachers' skills through mentorship, coaching, and formal training, but evidence on its effectiveness is mixed and often limited. Different countries have implemented varied PD programs with varying success, highlighting the challenges policymakers face in designing effective teacher training. In the Philippines, the Department of Education promotes professional development through the Learning Action Cell (LAC), a collaborative teacher group focused on addressing common school challenges. This aligns with national goals to upskill educators under the Sulong Edukalidad program.

However, challenges hinder the effective implementation of LAC sessions, such as lack of clear models, inconsistent scheduling, inadequate evaluation tools, and some teachers' reluctance or lack of awareness about the program. These issues are also reflected among teachers in the Davao Oriental Division. This study aims to explore teachers' positive and negative experiences with LAC sessions, assess the impact of these collaborative learning activities, and identify strategies to improve their implementation. Gathering teachers' perspectives is essential to better understand LAC's effectiveness as a professional development tool and to inform future educational policies and initiatives.

This study aimed to explore and describe secondary teachers' experiences with the School Learning Action Cell (LAC) as a professional development strategy. Focusing on challenges faced and coping strategies used, the research sought to provide insights that can improve LAC implementation and support better curriculum delivery and learning experiences for teachers, school leaders, and students.

The literature highlights that teachers' reflections during School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) sessions are vital for their professional growth, helping them improve instructional practices, classroom management, and teaching competence through peer collaboration and lesson planning. To manage challenges in participating in LAC, teachers use coping strategies like effective time management, improved communication, and resource optimization. Additionally, involvement in LAC enhances teachers' leadership skills, including mentorship and conflict resolution, empowering them to take on greater instructional leadership roles.

This study was grounded in three key theories that emphasize reflection and social learning. Transformative Learning Theory highlights how critical reflection leads to profound changes in teachers' perspectives and practices during SLAC sessions. Situated Learning Theory views SLAC as a community of practice where teachers collaboratively learn and solve problems in a real-world context, making learning meaningful and relevant. Reflective Practice Theory underscores continuous self-evaluation and adaptation, explaining how teachers improve their instructional methods through ongoing reflection in SLAC.

II. METHOD

In this study, the researcher employed a qualitative research design, specifically the phenomenological approach, to explore and understand teachers' lived experiences with the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC). This design was suitable as it allowed for the collection of rich, descriptive data through interviews and observations, capturing the depth of teachers' reflections on how SLAC influenced their teaching practices and professional growth. The phenomenological approach focused on uncovering the essence of teachers' experiences by examining their perceptions, feelings, and interpretations of SLAC participation. This method enabled the researcher to identify core themes and meanings from teachers' insights and challenges, providing a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact on their professional development.

In this phenomenological study on teachers' reflections about the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC), the researcher embraced key philosophical assumptions. Ontologically, reality was seen as subjective, with each teacher's experience shaped by personal context. Epistemologically, knowledge was co-created through respectful, interactive interviews, capturing authentic insights. Axiologically, the researcher practiced reflexivity to minimize bias and ensured ethical standards like confidentiality. Rhetorically, a clear, narrative style using teachers' own words was used to faithfully present their lived experiences, aligning with the study's goal of capturing the essence of their reflections.

In this phenomenological study on teachers' reflections about the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC), the researcher adopted a subjective interpretivist approach, recognizing that knowledge is shaped by individuals' unique experiences and contexts. Rather than seeking one objective

truth, the focus was on understanding the diverse meanings teachers attached to SLAC and how these influenced their professional development. Using in-depth interviews and focus groups, the researcher gathered authentic, personal narratives, actively listening and probing to capture teachers' true voices.

The researcher selected ten secondary public school teachers from Cateel, Davao Oriental, as participants, with five joining in-depth interviews (IDI) and five participating in a focus group discussion (FGD). This approach allowed for both detailed individual reflections and collective insights on the teachers' experiences with the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) and its impact on their professional development. Using purposive sampling, the researcher intentionally chose teachers who had actively participated in SLAC for at least one academic year and had a minimum of one year teaching experience. Participants were required to be currently employed in public schools in Cateel, willing to share honest reflections, and able to communicate effectively in English or Filipino, ensuring the collection of rich, relevant data aligned with the study's objectives.

The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions to gather detailed reflections from teachers in Cateel, Davao Oriental, about their experiences with School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) and its impact on their professional development. This flexible format allowed for follow-up questions to clarify or expand responses while keeping discussions focused on key topics such as perceptions of SLAC, its influence on teaching, and encountered challenges. To ensure validity, the interview guide was developed based on the study's objectives and literature review, then reviewed by three experts in qualitative research, education, and SLAC implementation.

The researcher conducted the study by first obtaining necessary permissions, including endorsement from the Graduate School Dean, ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee, and approval from the Schools Division Superintendent. Coordination with school principals ensured smooth scheduling and participant recruitment. Ten secondary school teachers from Cateel, Davao Oriental, were purposively selected, with five participating in in-depth interviews and five in a focus group discussion. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online after securing informed consent and assuring confidentiality. The researcher transcribed all recordings verbatim and conducted a thorough thematic analysis to identify key themes related to teachers' reflections on SLAC, coping strategies, and management insights. The findings were then interpreted and linked to relevant literature, with practical recommendations offered to improve SLAC sessions and support teachers' professional development.

This study used data triangulation to strengthen the credibility of findings on teachers' reflections about the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) in Cateel, Davao Oriental. Data were collected through in-depth interviews (IDI) with five teachers and a focus group discussion (FGD) with another five, capturing both individual and group

perspectives. Using a semi-structured interview guide, the researcher explored teachers' experiences, SLAC's impact on teaching, and related challenges. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and thematic analysis was conducted to identify key patterns and themes, ensuring authentic and diverse insights while minimizing bias.

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process, beginning with data familiarization, coding meaningful statements, and grouping codes into broader themes such as collaborative professional development, instructional competence, and leadership skills. Themes were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to accurately reflect teachers' reflections. The final report presented these themes with supporting quotes and linked them to relevant literature, providing a clear, evidence-based understanding of SLAC's role in fostering teachers' professional growth and collaboration.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first section presented the teachers' reflections on the implementation of the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) and its impact on their professional development. These reflections are organized into four main themes: Improved Teaching Strategies, Enhanced Professional Collaboration, Better Curriculum Comprehension, and Advanced Assessment Methods.

The second section highlighted the coping mechanisms secondary school teachers used to address challenges in implementing the Learning Action Cell (LAC) as a professional development program. The main themes include Adaptive Time Management, Strengthened Communication Skills, and Effective Resource Management. Teachers particularly noted that LAC helped them develop practical time management techniques, allowing them to balance their duties and participation in LAC sessions, fostering both personal and professional growth.

The third section presented the management insights that teachers have acquired through the conduct of Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions in secondary schools. The key themes identified are Collaborative Professional Development, Improvement of Instructional Competence, and Development of Leadership Skills.

The findings show that teachers' reflections on the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) reveal notable growth in their professional development. They adopted innovative teaching strategies, improved classroom management, and enhanced their use of learning materials. Teachers also experienced stronger collaboration through peer mentoring, joint lesson planning, and network-building. Their curriculum understanding and assessment skills, including formative and differentiated assessments, were further strengthened.

To overcome challenges in implementing the Learning Action Cell (LAC), teachers used coping strategies such as adaptive time management, prioritizing tasks, setting realistic

goals, and maintaining flexibility. They also improved communication with peers, students, and parents. Effective resource management was evident as they optimized teaching materials, used cost-effective approaches, and integrated digital resources.

Additionally, teachers gained important educational management insights from LAC sessions. They valued collaborative professional development through teamwork and supportive networks. Instructional competence improved with advanced teaching methods and better classroom management. Leadership skills in mentoring, coaching, and conflict management were also developed, boosting their effectiveness as educators and leaders.

Teachers' reflections on SLAC emphasize the need for ongoing professional development through collaborative learning, innovative teaching strategies, strong peer support, and improved curriculum and assessment skills. These changes reflect Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, showing growth through reflection and shared experiences.

To overcome challenges, teachers used adaptive time management, communication, and resourcefulness, supported by a community of practice as described in Lave and Wenger's Situated Learning Theory. Schools should also foster leadership and instructional skills, aligning with Schön's Reflective Practice Theory, which highlights reflection as key to teacher growth.

The study recommended that secondary school teachers continued engaging in reflective practices during SLAC sessions, shared experiences and best practices, adopted effective coping strategies, and took on leadership roles to guide peers. School heads were advised to ensure regular SLAC sessions, support teachers through clear schedules and a positive environment, and use feedback to improve SLAC effectiveness. Students were encouraged to actively participate in class, apply new strategies, provide feedback, and develop a growth mindset. The Department of Education was advised to strengthen SLAC implementation by providing clear guidelines, training, resources, and monitoring, while recognizing schools that excelled. Finally, future researchers were encouraged to explore the long-term impact of SLAC on teaching and learning, study different contexts, and identify challenges and best practices for broader application.

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