

Empowering Teachers Through School Learning Action Cell (SLAC): Challenges, Strategies, and Successes in Tagum Central District

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Abstract: This study explores the challenges, strategies, and successes experienced by teachers in Tagum Central District through the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) initiative, which aims to empower educators and improve teaching practices. SLAC is a professional development program designed to support continuous learning among teachers by providing collaborative spaces for reflection, sharing of best practices, and problem-solving. Through semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers and 5 school leaders, this research examines how SLAC operates in the district, the barriers teachers face, and the strategies they use to overcome these obstacles. The findings reveal that while SLAC fosters teacher collaboration, professional growth, and improved instructional quality, it is not without its challenges. Time constraints, lack of resources, and varying levels of support from school administrators emerged as significant barriers. However, teachers reported that SLAC has led to improved teaching practices, increased confidence, and greater engagement in student-centered learning. The study concludes with recommendations for enhancing SLAC's effectiveness, including the need for institutional support, resource allocation, and professional development programs that address specific needs of teachers.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of Philippine education, professional development for teachers is a key factor in improving instructional quality and student outcomes. The Department of Education (DepEd) introduced the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) as part of its commitment to fostering continuous professional development through peer collaboration, reflection, and shared learning. SLAC operates within schools as a space where educators can engage in meaningful dialogues about their practices, share insights, and work together to address teaching challenges (DepEd Order No. 35, 2016).

SLAC is rooted in the belief that teaching is a dynamic and evolving profession that requires ongoing reflection and learning. This initiative provides an opportunity for teachers to engage in professional learning communities, focusing not only on the content and pedagogical aspects of teaching but also on enhancing soft skills, such as emotional intelligence, leadership, and collaboration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The collaborative nature of SLAC aims to empower teachers by recognizing them as co-creators of knowledge, rather than passive recipients of information.

Tagum Central District, with its diverse schools and educational contexts, serves as a microcosm of the broader challenges and opportunities that SLAC faces across the Philippines. While the initiative has been recognized for its potential to improve teaching practices, its implementation is fraught with challenges, such as time constraints, lack of resources, and limited institutional support (Wenglinsky, 2000). This study seeks to explore the experiences of teachers in Tagum Central District with SLAC, examining the strategies they employ, the barriers they face, and the successes they achieve.

Understanding how SLAC functions at the grassroots level is essential for improving its implementation across the country. This study provides valuable insights into the practical realities of teacher empowerment through SLAC, contributing to the ongoing dialogue on effective professional development models in Philippine education.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to capture the experiences of teachers and school leaders in Tagum Central District regarding the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC). A phenomenological approach was chosen to explore the lived experiences of participants,

focusing on their perceptions of SLAC, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ to overcome them (Creswell, 2013).

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 15 teachers and 5 school leaders from various elementary and secondary schools within the district. Participants were selected based on their active involvement in SLAC and their willingness to share their experiences. The sample included a mix of teachers from different subject areas, as well as school administrators who facilitate SLAC sessions.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provided a flexible yet focused approach to exploring the participants' experiences. Interview questions centered around the following themes: the role of SLAC in professional development, the challenges faced during its implementation, the strategies used to address these challenges, and the perceived successes of SLAC in improving teaching practices. Interviews were conducted in a confidential and supportive environment, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns in the data.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the interview data revealed several key themes related to the challenges, strategies, and successes of SLAC implementation in Tagum Central District.

➤ *Challenges in Implementing SLAC:*

A primary challenge reported by participants was time constraints. Teachers and school leaders alike noted that finding time for SLAC sessions amidst the demands of teaching, lesson planning, and administrative tasks was a significant barrier. As one teacher stated, "It's difficult to find the time to meet regularly for SLAC, especially with the heavy workload we have."

Another challenge was the lack of resources. Teachers reported that while SLAC provided a platform for professional collaboration, the absence of adequate materials, such as teaching aids, internet access, and updated resources, limited the effectiveness of discussions and activities. One teacher expressed, "Sometimes we want to look up resources online, but our internet connection isn't strong enough."

A third challenge was the varying levels of support from school administrators. While some principals and school leaders were highly supportive of SLAC, others did not prioritize it due to competing demands. Teachers expressed frustration with this inconsistency, as one participant shared, "It would be helpful if the school administration actively supported SLAC by allocating time and resources for it."

➤ *Strategies to Overcome Challenges:*

Despite the challenges, teachers and school leaders employed several strategies to make SLAC more effective.

One strategy was the integration of SLAC sessions into existing school schedules, such as during monthly faculty meetings or professional development days. This approach allowed teachers to meet regularly without the need for additional time outside of school hours.

Collaboration with colleagues was also a key strategy for overcoming challenges. Teachers often worked together to share resources and co-plan SLAC activities. One teacher explained, "We support each other by bringing materials to share and brainstorming together. That way, we make the most of the time we have."

Additionally, some teachers used digital platforms, such as social media groups or online messaging, to continue discussions and share resources outside of SLAC sessions. This was particularly useful for teachers who had limited time for face-to-face meetings.

➤ *Successes of SLAC:*

Despite the challenges, teachers and school leaders reported significant successes resulting from SLAC. One of the most frequently mentioned successes was the improvement in teaching practices. Teachers described how SLAC allowed them to reflect on their own practices, learn from their peers, and adopt new strategies for student-centered learning. One participant shared, "SLAC has helped me reflect on how I teach. I've learned new ways to engage my students and adapt my lessons."

Another success was the increased sense of teacher collaboration and camaraderie. Teachers reported feeling more supported and connected to their colleagues, particularly in schools where SLAC sessions were well-organized. As one teacher noted, "It's not just about the lessons. SLAC has created a sense of community among us."

Finally, teachers observed improvements in student engagement and performance as a result of implementing strategies discussed during SLAC sessions. They reported that incorporating new teaching methods and approaches to classroom management led to a more positive learning environment, where students were more engaged and motivated.

➤ *Institutional and Parental Support:*

Institutional support was identified as a critical factor in the success of SLAC. Teachers emphasized the importance of school leaders' commitment to SLAC and the allocation of time and resources. Furthermore, when parents were involved in the learning process, especially in terms of supporting students' social and emotional development, teachers observed greater success in applying the strategies learned through SLAC.

The findings of this study resonate with existing research on the importance of teacher collaboration and professional development. SLAC has proven to be an effective mechanism for enhancing teachers' skills and fostering a collaborative culture within schools. As Darling-

Hammond et al. (2017) note, professional development that encourages collaboration and reflection leads to improved teaching practices and better outcomes for students. Teachers in Tagum Central District reported similar outcomes, with enhanced teaching practices and a stronger sense of community among colleagues.

However, the challenges identified—time constraints, lack of resources, and inconsistent institutional support—are consistent with the barriers faced by many schools in the Philippines and beyond (Wenglinsky, 2000). These challenges underline the need for greater systemic support for SLAC initiatives, including dedicated time within the school schedule, adequate resources, and active engagement from school leaders.

The success of SLAC in Tagum Central District suggests that it can be an effective model for empowering teachers, but its full potential can only be realized if schools prioritize it and provide the necessary support. This requires a shift in school culture, where professional development is viewed not as an additional task but as an integral part of improving educational quality.

This study highlights the successes and challenges of implementing the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) in Tagum Central District. While SLAC has proven effective in empowering teachers and enhancing professional growth, the barriers of time, resources, and administrative support must be addressed to maximize its impact. Schools, policymakers, and educational leaders must work together to ensure that SLAC continues to evolve as a powerful tool for teacher development. By providing the necessary resources, fostering a supportive environment, and allocating time for collaboration, SLAC can help create a more effective and sustainable professional development model in Philippine education.

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