

# **Experiences, Challenges and Roles of School Heads in the Implementation of School Learning Action Cell**

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**ABSTRACT:** In the Division of Sultan Kudarat, there was no clear study being conducted throughout public schools on the experiences, challenges and roles of school heads when it comes to effect of the LAC to the professional growth of teachers, hence this study was conducted. This study aimed to explore the experiences, challenges and roles of school heads on the implementation of School Learning Action Cell in Esperanza District II. This research study employed qualitative research design using the phenomenological inquiry. The participants of the study were selected school heads and teachers in Esperanza District II. The school heads participants are assigned as Teacher In-charge, Head Teachers or Principals. The teacher participants are all regular teachers with item position as Teacher I-III and Master Teachers. The selected participants using the purposive sampling served as key informants of the study. A total of ten (10) selected school heads and teachers served as key informants.

The findings revealed that the implementation of LAC is their teachers' professional development skills were improved such as teaching pedagogy, using teaching strategy, they could focus on teaching and learning and learning outcomes. Internet connectivity is the most common challenges of school heads and teachers in the implementation of LAC. The LAC sessions have proven to be effective in engaging a group of teachers in collaborating and solving shared challenges. LAC sessions encourage critical reflection amongst teachers which increases the understanding and knowledge of the curriculum and classroom practices. It has a great impact on the professional development skills of teachers. The challenges of school heads in the implementation of learning action cell are limited time allotment and schedules and problem on internet connectivity. . The school heads roles are not limited to facilitating, monitoring, leading, giving technical support and administrative support to the teachers in conducting the LAC.

**Key Words:** *Experiences, Challenges, Roles, School Learning Action Cell*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In line with the implementation of Republic Act 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, the Department of Education issued the policy on the Learning Action Cell (LAC) as a K-12 Basic Education Program School-Based Continuing Professional Development Strategy for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning (DepEd Order # 35 s. 2016).

The Department of Education ensures that lifelong and continuing professional development of teachers are on track because of the changes and development along with curriculum standards. The series of innovations, standardization and time on task, the department need to align the back pack of teachers to enhance their skills and professional knowledge. From RPMS, PPST and the latter LDM courses are cascaded through series of school-based trainings thus, Learning Action Cell (LAC) is the offshoot to make the professional growth meaningful and maximize the technical knowledge of other distinguish teachers.

The advocacy of DepEd implies that every teacher should be properly guided and equipped with know- how of the teaching learning processes through revisiting or reviewing some areas or concerned in performing the duties and responsibilities of an effective and efficient teachers. The ultimate goal of the DepEd is to give teachers enough skills and capacitating them through school-based trainings.

Moreover, teachers should apply the new knowledge acquisition through appropriate teaching strategies that best suit specific objectives and level exit products to enable the process of knowledge transmission. In common practice, many proficient teachers widely applied teacher-centered to transfer knowledge to learner's comparative to student-centered. Teachers play a significant role in the intellectual development of the students using various assessments and teaching strategies to improve the performance of students.

The DepEd institutionalizes Learning Action Cells (LACs) that aim to develop and support successful teachers by nurturing their knowledge, attitudes, and competencies in terms of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in their work stations, improvement of content and pedagogical knowledge and embracing the innovations brought by recent technology.

At the school level, the role of School Head should lead in organizing the LAC and in ensuring that the practice of holding regular LAC sessions is established, maintained, and sustained. The School Head should also take the lead in monitoring school LAC activities and in evaluating their impact on the total school improvement. Likewise, active participation of teachers and involvement in various LAC activities should be captured as an objective in the Individual Performance and Commitment Review Form (IPCRF).

It is expected that school heads or principals will be vital in facilitating and implementing effective LACs within their schools. This function will be included in the performance evaluation of school heads. They will create safe spaces where teachers can engage in dialogue with each other so they may learn from and provide support to one another (Deped Order, 2016).

As one of the key result areas in the educational process, there is a need to strengthen the implementation of the school learning action cell in the school to improve the teacher's competence. Many teachers are still lack of professional development and lot of training needs to improve (Vega, 2020).

LAC as a response to active professional learning development faces a lot of concerns and issues among teachers in the public schools. Based on experiences and observations, the implementation of LAC becomes only a requirement among teachers to attend. The transfer of learning from the LAC topics presented were not fully learned by them because of passive attitude and traditional way of developing their professional growth. Some others would resist the innovations to change the avenue of teaching and learning standards.

In the Division of Sultan Kudarat, there was no clear study being conducted throughout public schools on the experiences, challenges and roles of school heads when it comes to effect of the LAC to the professional growth of teachers, hence this study was conducted.

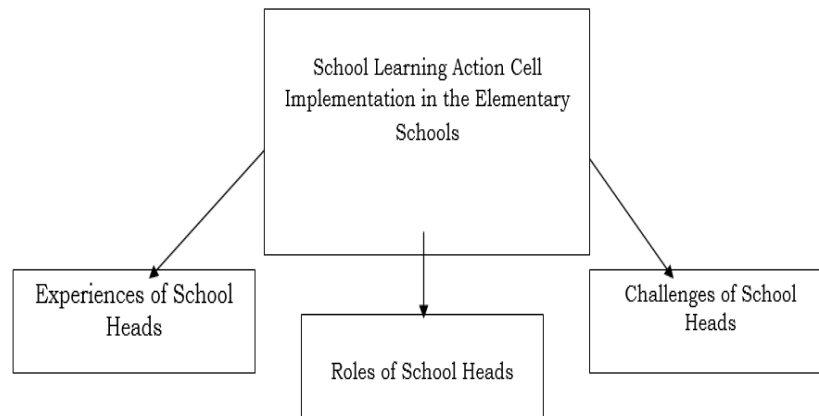
### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

The Department of Education (DepEd) stated that most of the processes to improve teaching were introduced as a top-down method, meaning knowledge is just transferred or shared by an expert in the field and then passed on to teachers. Examples of this are training workshops and lectures during short term courses. However, there are also fewer instances in which the bottom-up method or teacher programs are applied, such as team teaching, collaborative content planning, and conduct of action research as a group. Further, one example that is related to the bottom-up approach is the Learning Action Cell (LAC) session that is already issued by the Department of Education (DepEd) as an enclosed policy to elementary and secondary schools. This concept on LAC is inspired by the structured model of professional development on a lesson study that originated in Japan (Vega, 2020).

The objectives of the LAC is to improve the teaching-learning process that will lead to improved learning among the students; to nurture successful teachers; to enable teachers to support each other to continuously improve their content and pedagogical knowledge, practice, skills, and attitudes; and to foster a professional collaborative spirit among school heads, teachers, and the community as a whole.

This study is anchored to the Theoretical Foundation of Adult Learning as presented by Knowles (2005), in his journal "The Personal Adult Learning Inventory" clearly shows that adult learn based on their needs and personal goals. The process begins from the determination of what they need to learn (Need), creation of strategies and resources to achieve the learning goals (Create), implementation of the learning strategy and utilizing the learning resources (Implement) and finally assessment of the attainment of the learning goals and process of reaching it (Evaluate). Once the last phase is done, the process goes on again based on new felt need and new personal goals to achieve.

In the course of the study, the conceptual framework is all about the experiences, challenges and roles of school heads in the implementation of Learning Action Cell (LAC) among the elementary schools. The schematic diagram showing the conceptual framework employed in this study is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Research Paradigm**

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study aimed to explore the experiences, challenges and roles of school heads on the implementation of School Learning Action Cell in Esperanza District II.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What were the experiences of school heads in the implementation of Learning Action Cell on their respective schools?
2. What were the challenges of school heads in the implementation of Learning Action Cell on their respective schools?
3. What were the roles of school heads in the implementation of Learning Action Cell on their respective schools?
4. How the learning action cell affects the performance of school heads and teachers?
5. What were the insights of teachers on the implementation of Learning Action Cell?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This research study employed qualitative research design using the phenomenological inquiry. Phenomenological inquiry was the most appropriate approach in describing the experiences and challenges, roles and insights of school heads in the implementation of school learning action cell.

In this connection, qualitative phenomenological method was used to lighten the roles of school heads in the new normal of education on how to implement the LAC. Therefore, the phenomenological research emphasized the importance of human experiences as described by the key informants. Through the responses of key informants shared experiences, universal meanings may be discovered along with the basis for the structure of the experience.

In this study, key-informant interview and Focus-Group Discussion (FGD) was used to gather the data. The aim of using interview was to draw concrete conclusions about the key informants. Furthermore, through interview of key informants was used to explore the lived experiences and challenges of school head prompting the implementation of LAC. Focus-Group Discussion (FGD) was used to validate the description and responses of the key informants.

### **Locale of the Study**

This study was conducted in the Second District of Esperanza located in the Municipality of Esperanza, Province of Sultan Kudarat Area of Central Mindanao. The second district of Esperanza commonly known as Esperanza District II was characterized and claimed to be shining district under the new leadership of the District supervisor. The district is composed of 9 schools where the study was administered.

### **Respondents of the Study**

The participants of the study were selected school heads and teachers in Esperanza District II. The school heads participants are assigned as Teacher In-charge, Head Teachers or Principals. The teacher participants are all regular teachers with item position as Teacher I-III and Master Teachers.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

The researcher was provided a structured interview guide for the key informants. Interview questions were crafted using the questions stipulated in line with the dealing with the experiences, challenges and roles of key informants.

In the qualitative method, the researcher developed and validated instruments by the experts, this was employed 2 to 3 research questions with question guide for each research questions also the interview guide questionnaire that express this way; the research questions, the main questions and probing questions. Validity is the most critical criterion and indicates the degree to which an instrument measures what was intent to measure. First, the questionnaire was pre tested to check whether there was ambiguity which may have multiple interpretations also to get the point of view of the target participants on the relevant field hence it was understood and administered as it provides detailed responses of the themes.

### **Sampling Technique**

The selected participants using the purposive sampling served as key informants of the study. This type of sampling is a technique of selecting elements of a studied in which the researcher selects elements purposefully because they possess important information for the study. In purposive sampling, sample elements judged typical or representative were chosen from the population. A total of ten (10) selected school heads and teachers served as key informants.

## **DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND REFLECTION**

Action research questions were categorically answered by the following tables. Systematic analysis and comprehensive interpretation for each table were presented to provide good implication and finally to seek answer to the main problem of the research.

### **Experiences of School Heads in the Implementation of Learning Action Cell**

Based on the qualitative analysis, the following were the perspectives of the experiences of school heads in the implementation of learning action cell. It is categorized on the following themes based on the transcription and coding of responses using Thematic Content Analysis. These are professional development skills and virtual or online implementation.

On the experiences of the school heads on the professional development skills, the responses of the participants are as follows:

*“When the class are on normal situation where face to face learning interaction is allowed. Administering School LAC session was thoroughly carried out successfully by assessing the priority improvement based on COT. Individual Teacher priority improvement areas, through the RPMS tool and E-SAT. With this basis, the school and subject coordinator, or other coordinators would craft the training matrix of activities with designed timeline for smooth implementation of the SLAC program of the school. Its purpose is to help the teachers improve in their difficult areas or find more strategies to improve relationship with co-teachers and stakeholders” (KII: FGD-SH1).*

*“Almost everything that confronts the school teachers, learners and teachers could be topic or subject in the LAC session. LAC session is design to serve school-based continuing professional development strategy for the improvement of teaching-learning outcomes. In school prior to the new normal LAC is scheduled every second and fourth Friday of the month” (KII: FGD-SH4).*

*“It is for the improvement of teaching-learning. As we implementing the program of DepEd since 2016 almost 5 years that the focus is in the learner. These programs provide the teacher to improve their professional skills especially in teaching pedagogy and strategy. This LAC, we give our teachers*

and school head to learn and to consider that focus on teaching and learning process in the school” (KII: FGD-SH5).

The above responses indicates that school heads experiences on the implementation of LAC is their teachers’ professional development skills were improved such as teaching pedagogy, using teaching strategy, they could focus on teaching and learning and learning outcomes. This conclude that LAC session has a great impact on the professional development skills of teachers as they are the focused in conducting the LAC.

The responses of the participants on their experiences about the conduct of virtual or online LAC are:

“In the time of pandemic crisis when we do communicate via online platform and that communication is limited and mostly of our SLAC activities is limited because the training matrix of activities should be approved by NEAP- Region before conducting the activity and it takes a long process that’s why as early as opening of classes, the school should prepare handful write ups and select authorize facilitators which are approved by NEAP-Region in their field of expertise” (KII: FGD-SH1).

“Mostly of our virtual LAC was administered by Division office especially to address the present situation like ICT training, health and safety measures and limited to teaching strategies” (KII-FGD-SH2).

“In conduct of LAC most especially in this time of pandemic their different experiences that the school, teachers and the school heads may encountered. First, as we all know that LAC as of this time must be done through online interaction, we can simply notice that there is poor internet in our place. So, because of that poor internet connection this will hinder the total delivery of the discussion that is being happened in the LAC” (KII: FGD-SH4)

This means that school heads experiencing the conduct of LAC suing virtual mode. Due to limited and disallowing the conduct of face-to-face LAC sessions, virtual mode is an alternative way to implement the LAC for teachers. This implies that virtual LAC session to the teachers is also applicable.

### **Challenges of School Heads in the Implementation of Learning Action Cell**

Based on the qualitative analysis, the following were the perspectives of the challenges of school heads in the implementation of learning action cell. It is categorized on the following themes based on the transcription and coding of responses using Thematic Content Analysis. These are limited time allotment and schedules and problem on internet connectivity.

On the challenges of the school heads on the limited time allotment and schedules, the following were the responses:

“We have also challenges for the part of all the limited time given to us. As we all know that the public elementary school teachers are bombarded with the many works, many reports so I think that are another challenge for the teachers, school heads on how we are going to make a way in order to properly conduct on the LAC with a complete learning to everyone” (KII:FGD-SH1).

“The most challenging moment in the implementation of LAC session is the unwillingness of teachers to be the resource person of the identify topic and most of the time because of the needed time to prepare and they prefer me to be the one to discuss with them” (KII: FGD-SH3).

This means that school heads have confronted challenges on the limited time and schedules when implementing the LAC in school. The preparation of LAC is important to have a successful implementation. The schedules should not be overlapped to the other workloads and assignments of teachers. This implies that time allotment and schedules of activities are important determinants in the implementation of LAC.

On the other hand, the challenges of school heads on the problem on internet connectivity reveal that;

“The handful write-ups and approval of it hampers the implementation of SLAC Program and internet connectivity” (KII: FGD-SH2).

“In the observance of the Alternative Work Arrangement (AWA), LAC session usually done through virtual however due to problem internet connection sometimes this was not followed also. As remedy unfinished discussion and agreements are done every Monday in school. Since, the school has only seven teachers it is allowed by the local IATF to convene provide minimum health protocols are followed” (KII: FGD-SH4).

This means that internet connectivity is the most common challenges of school heads and teachers in the implementation of LAC. The internet connectivity is needed when LAC session are conducted virtually.

### **Roles of School Heads in the Implementation of Learning Action Cell**

Based on the qualitative analysis, the following were the perspectives of the roles of school heads in the implementation of learning action cell. It is categorized on the following themes based on the transcription and coding of responses using Thematic Content Analysis. These are identify resources needed, facilitating and monitoring of LAC and providing technical assistance.

The responses of the participants in identifying the resources needed in the implementation of LAC are:

“The role of the school head in the LAC session is the leader however I am also the one identify the role of the teachers involved in the activity. Likewise, I am also an in-charge to identify the needed resources and ensuring the availability of necessary things related to the LAC activity” (KII: FGD-SH3).

The responses of the participants in facilitating and monitoring of LAC are:

“The school head should lead in organizing the LAC and in ensuring that the practice of holding regular LAC session is established, maintained, and sustained. The school head should also take the lead in monitoring school LAC Activities and evaluating their impact on the total school improvement. Likewise, active participation of teachers and involvement in various LAC Activities should be captured as an objective in the IPCRF” (KII: FGD-SH3).

The responses of the participants in providing technical assistance are: “As school head, along the way I need to check the improvement of teacher’s content knowledge, pedagogical skills and of course the professional ethics of the teachers. And the result of that is about the student learning and holistic development, that is the purpose of LAC session” (KII: FGD: T1).

This means that school heads roles in implementing the LAC are very comprehensive. They should be knowledgeable to lead the sessions and things should be needed. This implies that school heads roles are not limited to facilitating, monitoring, leading, giving technical support and administrative support to the teachers in conducting the LAC.

### **Effects of LAC to the Performance of School Heads and Teachers**

Based on the qualitative analysis, the following were the perspectives of the effects of LAC to the performance of school heads and teachers. It is categorized on the following themes based on the transcription and coding of responses using Thematic Content Analysis. These are competitive and performing school and improvement of teaching-learning process. The following are the responses of the participants:

“Learning Action Cell (LAC) to the performance of school heads and teachers. For School Heads, since the school heads are in-charge in determining the needed resources and make sure the availability and sustainability the following are the effects to increase the achievements of the school in all aspects especially in academic, prepared the school to be competitive and best school, managed and solved school problems quickly even in this new normal situation through virtual LAC sessions” (KII: FGD-T3).

“Updated issues and concerns of her/his teachers, produced motivated teachers who continually improve instructions or strategies for the improvement of teaching and learning process, planned activities or programs that can help develop the potentials of teachers, stakeholders, learners and community as a

*whole and develop harmonious relationship that can promote moral values and commitment for progress of the school especially the learners” (KII-FGD-T4).*

This means that implementation of LAC has significant effects not only to the teachers but to the performance of the school as a whole such as the learning outcomes, teaching and learning process, being competitive and high performing. The LAC sessions have proven to be effective in engaging a group of teachers in collaborating and solving shared challenges. LAC sessions encourage critical reflection amongst teachers which increases the understanding and knowledge of the curriculum and classroom practices.

### **Insights of Teachers on the Implementation of Learning Action Cell**

Based on the qualitative analysis, the following were the perspectives of the insights of teachers on the implementation of Learning Action Cell. It is categorized on the following themes based on the transcription and coding of responses using Thematic Content Analysis. These are collaborative learning sessions and sharing of ideas. The following are the responses of the participants:

*“The School Learning Action Cell is a great opportunity for teachers to come together as a group to do collaborative learning sessions. It is an avenue for us to share ideas and information on the different programs implemented by the Department of Education. It also allows teachers to discuss problems and issues and provide solutions to us. The LAC sessions done twice a month is really a big help for teachers to improve teaching-learning process” (KII-FGD-T1).*

*“Through the trainings the teachers could share and develop different skills that could enhance their skills” (KII-FGD-T3).*

This means that teachers believe through LAC, teachers have a great time to come together to have a collaboration with members and LAC leader. Sharing of ideas and discussions of topics prospered to develop the performance of the teachers. This implies that teachers insights about the LAC focused on collaboration and sharing of ideas.

### **CONCLUSION/REFLECTION**

The experiences of school heads in the implementation of Learning Action Cell are professional development skills and virtual or online implementation. The LAC session has a great impact on the professional development skills of teachers. Due to limited and disallowing the conduct of face-to-face LAC sessions, virtual mode is an alternative way to implement the LAC for teachers.

The challenges of school heads in the implementation of learning action cell are limited time allotment and schedules and problem on internet connectivity. The time allotment and schedules of activities are important determinants in the implementation of LAC. The internet connectivity is needed when LAC session are conducted virtually.

The roles of school heads in the implementation of learning action cell are identify resources needed, facilitating and monitoring of LAC and providing technical assistance. The school heads roles are not limited to facilitating, monitoring, leading, giving technical support and administrative support to the teachers in conducting the LAC.

The effects of LAC to the performance of school heads and teachers are being competitive and performing school and improvement of teaching-learning process. The LAC sessions have proven to be effective in engaging a group of teachers in collaborating and solving shared challenges. LAC

sessions encourage critical reflection amongst teachers which increases the understanding and knowledge of the curriculum and classroom practices.

The insights of teachers on the implementation of Learning Action Cell are collaborative learning sessions and sharing of ideas. Sharing of ideas and discussions of topics prospered to develop the performance of the teachers. The teachers' insights about the LAC focused on collaboration and sharing of ideas.

### RECOMMENDATION

1. The school should provide at least minimum internet connections if internet network is accessible in the local area.

2. Sustain the implementation of LAC through diverse topics by maximizing the potentials of every teacher.

3. The school heads should provide calendar of activities and organizational staffing to avoid overlapping of activities.

4. Lessen the ancillary services of teachers so that they could focus on classroom related works.

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