



# PRACTICES, PROBLEMS, AND INSIGHTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEARNING ACTION CELL IN THE DAVAO REGION SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the practices, problems, and insights in the implementation of the Learning Action Cell (LAC) in elementary, secondary, and integrated schools in the Davao Region. Guided by Kotter's Change Management Theory and using a qualitative multiple case study approach, the research aimed to understand how teachers and school heads implement LAC sessions, manage challenges, and apply strategies to improve teaching and learning. Data were gathered from in-depth interviews with 22 participants, including school heads and teachers from 11 school divisions. The results revealed both similarities and differences in LAC practices across school types. Common practices included collaborative planning, needs-based topic selection, teacher-led discussions, reflection, and informal monitoring. However, differences were observed in focus areas: elementary schools emphasized foundational instruction and nurturing environments, secondary schools prioritized subject expertise and academic outcomes, while integrated schools balanced both approaches. Challenges included scheduling conflicts, heavy workloads, lack of trust among teachers, and limited resources. To address these issues, schools adopted strategies such as flexible scheduling, strategic topic alignment, and supportive leadership. The insights of the participants show that the Learning Action Cell (LAC) serves as a vital platform for professional growth, collaboration, and reflective practice, significantly enhancing teaching effectiveness and fostering a culture of continuous learning. The study concludes that effective LAC implementation depends on school leaders' ability to foster collaboration, support teacher needs, and embed professional learning into the school culture. These findings provide practical recommendations for enhancing school-based professional development and improving instructional quality.

**KEYWORDS:** Learning Action Cell, professional development, instructional leadership, Kotter's Change Model, teacher collaboration

## INTRODUCTION

The Learning Action Cell (LAC), as implemented in the Philippine education system, serves as a collaborative platform for enhancing instructional practices and achieving curricular goals (Culajara, 2023). Institutionalized through DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016, LAC is a school-based professional development strategy that gathers teachers under the guidance of a principal or LAC leader to share expertise and address instructional challenges. Rooted in global educational theories on collaborative learning, LAC offers educators opportunities to explore effective teaching strategies, refine curriculum design, and foster collective problem-solving (Sales, 2024). This reflective space allows for continuous learning and adaptation in response to the evolving educational landscape.

The dynamic nature of teaching requires ongoing professional development. Teachers, as instructional leaders, play a vital role in shaping curriculum delivery and must continually refine their instructional models (Arrieta, 2021; Silva, 2021). Through LAC, educators not only deepen their pedagogical knowledge but also adapt to changes within the educational system (Javier, 2021). Given the varying contexts in which LAC operates, an interpretivist approach helps capture the diverse experiences of teachers and school heads. Understanding these perspectives is crucial for tailoring professional learning to meet localized needs and fostering leadership and collaboration within schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Shulman & Shulman, 2004).



Globally, research highlights the importance of collaborative professional development in improving teaching quality and student outcomes (Fullan, 2014; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). In the Philippines, LAC aligns with international best practices while addressing local educational priorities (Binauhan, 2019). It draws inspiration from Japan's lesson study model (Mendoza, 2017) and emphasizes reflective teaching, effective classroom management, and ongoing support for teachers. However, challenges such as limited session time, inconsistent monitoring, and the need for specialized sessions remain (De Vera, 2020). Addressing these issues can help maximize LAC's impact on both teacher competencies and student learning outcomes.

Effective LAC implementation depends significantly on school leadership. Principals and school heads must guide LAC planning, resource allocation, and ongoing evaluation (Musa, 2014; Tomal, 2013). Despite the potential of LAC, gaps in monitoring and evaluation persist, particularly in regions like Davao de Oro, where no standardized system exists to assess its impact (Ganiban, 2023). Purposeful planning and strong instructional leadership are crucial for ensuring that LAC sessions lead to tangible improvements in teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). School leaders must foster a collaborative culture that encourages professional growth while addressing contextual challenges faced by their teachers.

Ultimately, LAC contributes to a culture of continuous professional development and collaborative learning within schools. As emphasized by UNICEF Philippines (2019) and Gamboa (2023), strong leadership and active teacher participation are key to successful LAC implementation. By cultivating inclusive learning environments characterized by trust and respect, school heads can ensure that LAC sessions drive meaningful improvements in instructional practices. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will further enhance LAC's effectiveness, making it a vital component of the Department of Education's efforts to improve teaching quality and student achievement across the Philippine education system.

A key objective of the study is to uncover how the school heads implement LAC sessions in their schools. Specifically, it addressed the following objectives: (1) to describe how is Learning Action Cell (LAC) being implemented in their schools, (2) to know how do teachers and school heads navigate the challenges encountered in implementing LAC Sessions, (3) to know what strategies have been deployed to counter the challenges encountered, (4) how important is the implementation of Learning Action cell in addressing issues and concerns in your school, and (5) to know what are the similarities and differences among each case.

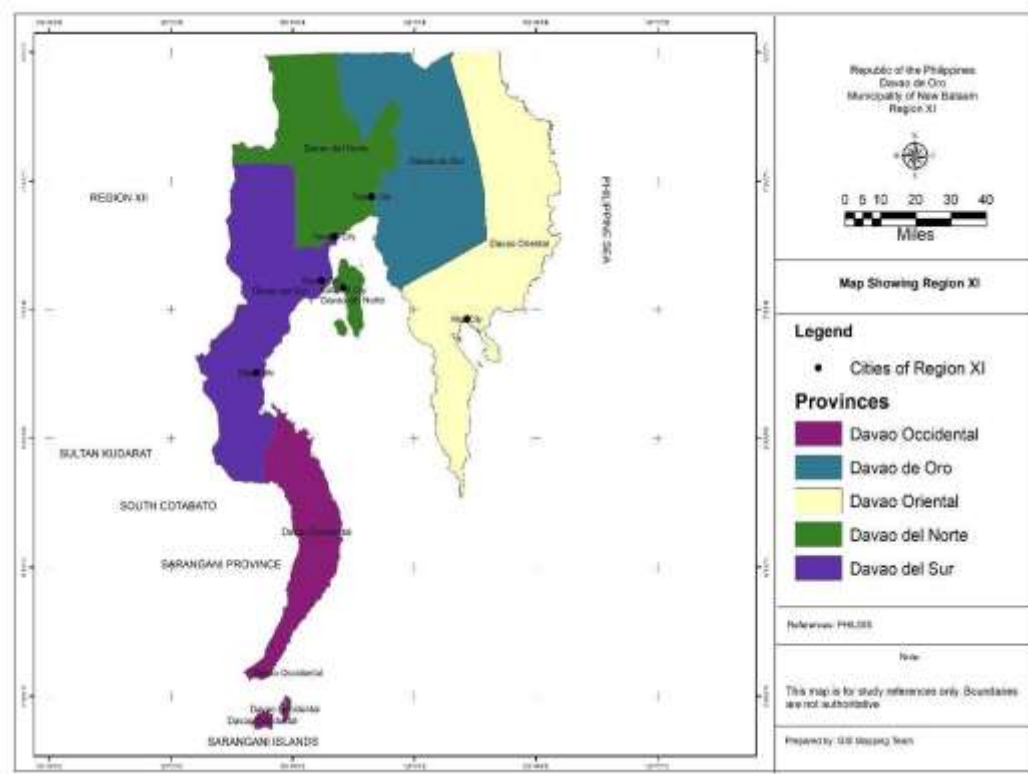
## METHODS

This study was grounded in the interpretivist philosophical perspective, which emphasizes understanding the complex nature of human experiences through qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews (Hallinger, 2016). This approach recognizes that individuals' values, beliefs, and social contexts shape their actions and decisions (Shaw et al., 2019). By immersing in the lived experiences of participants, the research sought to uncover the nuanced realities of educational leadership and supervisory practices. The study employed a qualitative multiple-case design, utilizing interviews and focus group discussions to capture the insights of school heads and teachers, considering their views and experiences as central to the investigation.

Adopting a qualitative lens enabled a rich exploration of how Learning Action Cells (LACs) impact teachers' professional growth and instructional practices. It facilitated the identification of varying implementation strategies and their effects on educational outcomes. The multiple-case study approach, as supported by Creswell (2013), Creswell and Poth (2016), and Benitez (2019), enabled the collection of comprehensive data from multiple sources—including interviews, observations, and documents—across diverse educational contexts (Shiddike & Rahman, 2020; Plusciak-Deliowska et al., 2023). This method provided a broader understanding of recurring themes and patterns, offering insights that are both contextually grounded and applicable to other educational environments.

The study was conducted in the 11 different school divisions in Region XI, namely Davao City Division, Davao del Norte Division, Davao del Sur Division, Davao Occidental Division, Davao Oriental Division, Davao de Oro Division, Island Garden City of Samal Division, Tagum City Division, Panabo City Division, Digos City Division, and Mati City Division. The DepEd Region XI is taking initiatives to implement the LAC sessions in these different divisions. Region XI is in the southeastern part of Mindanao in the Philippines, composed of five (5) provinces: Davao del Norte, Davao del Sur, Davao Oriental, Davao de Oro, and Davao Occidental. With six (6) cities: Davao City, Tagum City, Mati City, Digos City, Panabo City, and Island Garden City of Samal.

**Figure 1**  
*Map of Davao Region*



### Sampling Procedures

In conducting this multiple-case study, the researchers employed homogeneous sampling, which focuses on providing a detailed understanding of a particular subgroup (Zach, 2006). According to Schoch (2020), a sample size of three to four cases is ideal for comparative purposes in this design. Homogeneous sampling is particularly useful when selecting participants from specialized or hard-to-reach populations (Patton, 1990; Zach, 2006). For this study, participants were selected from elementary, secondary, and integrated schools across the Davao Region, with each participant required to have at least three years of experience in their current position and to be actively engaged in Learning Action Cell (LAC) implementation. School heads without full appointment and teachers without permanent status or insufficient experience were excluded. This sampling ensured that only those with relevant expertise and direct LAC involvement were included.

The study focused on three distinct cases. Case I involved elementary school heads and teachers, emphasizing the development of foundational literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills, particularly through LAC sessions that address differentiated instruction and holistic student growth (Charles & Mkulu, 2020). Case II included secondary school participants, where LAC discussions targeted subject-specific strategies, curriculum alignment, adolescent behavior management, and career readiness. Case III engaged school heads and teachers from integrated schools, aiming to ensure curriculum continuity across grade levels and foster a unified approach to student development. LAC sessions in integrated settings required careful coordination to accommodate diverse teacher schedules while promoting collaborative learning to address the varied needs of both elementary and secondary students. Through these targeted sessions, LAC provided educators with essential strategies for managing the complexities of their teaching environments.

### Research Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-designed interview guide aligned with the research questions, ensuring that discussions remained structured and relevant (Hoffman et al., 2019). This framework allowed the interviewer to maintain focus while providing flexibility to explore key topics in greater depth. The guide was organized around four main research questions, each supplemented by three probing questions to elicit detailed responses. To ensure validity, the interview questions underwent expert review and were pilot-tested in a school outside the study sample. Upon approval of the instrument, the researcher secured formal endorsement from the research committee



chair of Davao del Norte State College and proceeded to seek authorization from the Regional Director's office. Data collection commenced following the receipt of these necessary approvals.

#### Data Gathering Procedure

The study employed Key Informant Interviews (KII) as the primary data collection method (Creswell, 2007), targeting school administrators, LAC facilitators, and experienced teachers with in-depth knowledge of LAC implementation. A researcher-made questionnaire, validated and pilot-tested with expert feedback, guided the interviews of 22 participants. Participants were fully briefed, provided consent, and informed that audio and video recordings would be used. The semi-structured in-depth interviews allowed for the exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The data collection process involved securing permissions from the Dean and school heads, preparing necessary materials, conducting interviews, and recording data for transcription and subsequent thematic analysis.

#### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that identifies and interprets patterns within qualitative data (Creswell, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved familiarization with data through transcription review, coding, theme generation, theme review and refinement, and final report writing. Within-case analysis was performed initially, followed by cross-case analysis to uncover common themes across diverse contexts (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Thematic insights were validated through consistent engagement with the data, open coding, and careful interpretation, ensuring that the analysis accurately reflected participants' experiences and perspectives.

#### Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure trustworthiness, the study addressed credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Evangelio, 2013). Credibility was enhanced through in-depth interviews that captured authentic experiences of school heads and teachers regarding LAC implementation. Transferability was supported by including detailed data analysis documents in the appendix, which allowed for the application of the findings in future studies. Confirmability was established by ensuring that the findings were firmly grounded in the data collected, minimizing researcher bias, and maintaining transparency throughout the research process.

#### Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles outlined by Wong and Hui (2015), emphasizing informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, harm reduction, and cultural sensitivity. Participants were fully informed about the study and retained the right to withdraw at any time (Manti & Licari, 2018). Personal information was safeguarded, with access limited to essential personnel (Dagohoy, 2021). Efforts were made to minimize any physical or psychological harm (Sugarman et al., 2019), and cultural beliefs were respected throughout the research process (Henderson et al., 2014), ensuring a respectful and ethically sound study environment.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Results

#### *Case 1 Elementary Schools*

Five essential themes emerged from the practices of elementary schools in implementing Learning Action Cells (LACs): (1) Collaborative Planning, wherein school heads and teachers jointly planned sessions to ensure alignment with real classroom needs. School leaders empowered teachers to suggest topics based on observed learning gaps and instructional challenges, fostering ownership of the LAC process. (2) Needs-Based Topic Identification, where topics were selected to address immediate student learning needs—such as literacy, numeracy, and classroom management—ensuring the practical relevance of sessions. (3) Teacher-Driven Decisions on Differentiated Instruction, promoting teacher autonomy in selecting strategies that cater to learner diversity and varying abilities, thus enhancing instructional responsiveness. (4) Reflection and Feedback, emphasizing continuous improvement through structured post-session reflections and peer feedback loops that informed future practice. (5) Informal Monitoring, where school heads adopted a supportive, non-intrusive approach to observing LAC sessions, using observational insights and session outputs to guide professional growth.

Despite these efforts, several challenges were identified. First, Conflict of Schedule and Limited Teacher Involvement arose due to the difficulty of aligning LAC sessions with teachers' availability and competing school activities. Second, Workload Imbalance emerged as a significant barrier; instructional and administrative responsibilities often left teachers with limited time and energy to participate meaningfully in LACs. Third, Lack of Trust and Collaboration among teachers sometimes limited the openness of professional exchanges, particularly



in schools with hierarchical or fragmented cultures. Fourth, Insufficient Support and Resources hindered effective implementation, with some schools struggling to provide materials, facilitators, or consistent leadership support for LAC activities.

In response, schools adopted various adaptive strategies. Flexible scheduling was introduced to accommodate teacher availability, while blended learning approaches (integrating online and offline modalities) helped expand access and participation. School heads strengthened leadership support and promoted a culture of trust and openness by modeling collaborative behavior and facilitating safe spaces for teacher dialogue. Additionally, needs-based planning and the integration of teachers' past experiences were emphasized to enhance the relevance and impact of LAC sessions. These practices align with broader best practices in professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) and underscore the potential of LACs as a catalyst for ongoing instructional improvement.

### ***Case 2 Secondary Schools***

Secondary schools demonstrated similar core themes in LAC implementation. (1) Purposeful Planning was central, with school heads and teachers collaboratively aligning LAC session objectives with instructional needs, particularly in subject-specific areas such as STEM, language, and technical-vocational education. (2) Topic Selection Focused on Real Problems ensured that LACs addressed authentic classroom challenges—ranging from differentiated instruction to managing adolescent behavior and promoting career readiness. (3) Budget Allocation supported session logistics, including provision of materials, guest speakers, and refreshments, signaling institutional commitment to the professional development process. (4) Evaluation through Reflective Practice was used to foster continuous improvement, with teachers engaging in reflective writing, feedback sharing, and discussions on how LAC insights translated into classroom practice.

Challenges in secondary schools largely mirrored those of elementary settings. Scheduling conflicts remained a persistent issue, exacerbated by the complexity of secondary timetables and extracurricular demands. Workload concerns were also significant, particularly for teachers managing multiple subject loads or advisory roles. However, these challenges were mitigated through collaborative planning, proactive leadership support, and structured reflection practices that promoted teacher ownership and engagement.

Teachers viewed LACs as valuable platforms for professional exchange, particularly in developing differentiated instruction strategies and addressing the complex socio-emotional needs of adolescent learners. This finding supports previous research (Desimone & Garet, 2015) emphasizing the importance of teacher-driven, contextually relevant professional learning. Moreover, school heads' active facilitation and resource provision contributed to fostering a collaborative culture aligned with the broader goals of school improvement.

### ***Case 3 Integrated Schools***

Integrated schools, which span both elementary and secondary education, focused heavily on ensuring curricular continuity across grade levels. (1) Coherent Curriculum Planning emerged as a critical theme, with LACs serving as venues for aligning pedagogical approaches and instructional sequencing between primary and secondary stages. This cross-level coherence aimed to promote smoother learner transitions and sustained academic progression. (2) Cross-Level Collaboration was fostered through mixed-group LAC sessions involving teachers from different grade bands, facilitating the exchange of strategies and fostering shared understanding of learner development. (3) Flexible Scheduling was particularly important, given the diverse roles and time demands of teachers in integrated schools. Efforts were made to structure LACs in ways that respected these constraints while maintaining consistent participation. (4) Supportive Leadership was central to promoting trust, engagement, and a unified professional culture across school levels.

Challenges in integrated schools included balancing time for LAC participation amidst teachers' varied responsibilities, as well as fostering collaboration across traditionally siloed primary and secondary teaching teams. To address these issues, schools adopted blended LAC formats (leveraging asynchronous and synchronous sessions), enhanced leadership guidance, and created shared spaces for dialogue and cross-level planning.

The experience of integrated schools underscores the potential of LACs to serve as bridges across educational stages, promoting not only instructional coherence but also collaborative professional cultures. The importance of institutional support and flexible, teacher-centered design was further reinforced by parallels with the findings of Junsay and Lagura (2024), who observed that graduate students in the Davao Region thrive in flexible, self-directed learning environments when supported by institutional structures and peer collaboration. This reinforces the broader relevance of adaptive, responsive, and collaborative learning systems—like LACs—in fostering both



teacher growth and improved learner outcomes.

### Discussion

This study affirms that LACs serve as a vital mechanism for enhancing professional learning and addressing instructional challenges in Philippine basic education. Across school levels, collaborative planning, needs-based content selection, and reflective practice emerged as key drivers of effective LAC implementation—consistent with best practices in professional learning communities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Fullan, 2014).

Moreover, the adoption of blended LAC strategies further strengthens teacher engagement by offering flexible formats that accommodate diverse schedules and learning preferences. This approach resonates with findings by Junsay and Lagura (2024), who reported that graduate students in the Davao Region thrive in flexible, self-directed learning environments when supported by institutional structures and peer collaboration. This parallel reinforces the importance of fostering responsive, reflective, and collaborative systems—such as LACs—in promoting sustained teacher growth and improving learner outcomes (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

Challenges such as scheduling conflicts, workload imbalances, and limited trust highlight systemic barriers that must be addressed through leadership support and institutional alignment. Strategies such as flexible scheduling, blended learning approaches, and promoting teacher voice were found to empower participation—aligning with Kotter's (1996) model for sustainable change.

Ultimately, LACs foster a culture of collaboration and continuous professional growth, enhancing both teacher capacity and student outcomes. Sustained leadership commitment, resource support, and responsive planning are essential to embedding LACs within the fabric of school improvement.

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study examined the implementation of Learning Action Cells (LACs) across elementary, secondary, and integrated schools, revealing that while LAC practices generally aligned with Department of Education guidelines, their structure and impact varied significantly across different contexts. Success depended heavily on school leadership, teacher engagement, and the cultivation of a collaborative school culture.

In Case 1 (elementary schools), LACs emphasized collaborative, needs-based planning, with sessions addressing foundational skills such as literacy, numeracy, and classroom management. Teachers played an active role in shaping content, with differentiated instruction and learner-focused interventions emerging as key practices. Reflection and informal monitoring supported continuous improvement. However, challenges included time constraints, limited facilitators, and inconsistent participation. Schools responded with flexible scheduling, supportive leadership, and alignment of LAC content with teachers' instructional realities.

In Case 2 (secondary schools), LACs focused on subject-specific concerns, curriculum alignment, and pressing student issues (e.g., absenteeism, early pregnancy). Schools allocated resources strategically and incorporated school-based research and reflective evaluations to sustain engagement. Despite workload pressures, collaborative planning and the production of action papers fostered evidence-based practice and sustained teacher motivation.

In Case 3 (integrated schools), LACs required adaptive approaches to bridge elementary and secondary contexts. Planning was inclusive, fostering cross-level collaboration and addressing broad instructional concerns. Blended LAC formats and flexible arrangements mitigated challenges related to varied teacher schedules and dual instructional roles. LACs in this setting served as cohesive platforms for unifying diverse professional development needs under a shared vision.

Across cases, common themes included purposeful planning, teacher-driven content, reflective evaluation, and leadership support. Key barriers—such as scheduling conflicts, heavy workloads, and resource limitations—were mitigated through adaptive leadership, flexible formats, and collaborative school cultures. Ultimately, LACs contributed meaningfully to instructional improvement, professional collaboration, and school-specific problem-solving.

### CONCLUSION

The implementation of LACs across elementary, secondary, and integrated schools demonstrates a structured yet flexible professional development model grounded in collaborative planning and teacher leadership. Sessions were consistently aligned with authentic instructional needs, promoting differentiated instruction, reflective



practice, and learner-focused interventions. Leadership played a pivotal role in fostering engagement and sustaining LAC effectiveness, particularly through adaptive strategies such as flexible scheduling, inclusive participation, and mentoring support.

While challenges such as time constraints and workload imbalances were present across all settings, schools with supportive leadership and collaborative cultures reported more meaningful participation and stronger instructional outcomes. The findings underscore that the success of LACs depends on their responsiveness to school contexts and on leadership practices that prioritize teacher empowerment and sustained reflection.

Moreover, this study supports prior evidence (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Fullan, 2014) that collaborative professional learning fosters continuous improvement and enhances teaching quality. The experience of integrated schools further highlights the value of adaptive, flexible professional development structures—an insight reinforced by Junsay and Lagura (2024), who found that graduate students thrive in self-directed, collaborative learning environments supported by institutional structures. These parallels suggest that responsive, reflective, and collaborative approaches—such as those embodied in LACs—are essential for fostering teacher growth and improving student outcomes.

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### Authors Contribution

Study conceptualization, R.D.R.; methodology design, R.D.R.; data collection and organization, R.D.R.; data analysis, P.L.D.P.; result interpretation, P.L.D.P.; conclusion formulation, P.L.D.P.; writing—original draft preparation, R.D.R.; writing—review and editing, R.D.R. and P.L.D.P.; final manuscript approval, R.D.R. and P.L.D.P.

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### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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