Learning Action Cell Program and Teachers' Functional Competency in Cagayan De Oro City

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ABSTRACT: Learning Action Cell (LAC) program influences teachers' functional competency. It is an integral part of professional development initiatives, which impacts teachers' instructional skills, classroom management, assessment strategies, and professional growth. This study focused on the implementation of LAC program and teachers' functional competency in the Division of Cagayan de Oro City. It sought to determine the relationship between the implementation of LAC and teachers' functional competency and find the level of implementation of LAC and teachers' functional competency. A descriptive-correlational method was used in this study. The respondents were one hundred forty-seven (147) public elementary school teachers. The survey questionnaire was the main instrument used to gather data. The statistical tools used were descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) was employed to determine the relationship between the implementation of LAC and teachers' functional competency.

Findings revealed that the LAC program was well implemented, and the level of teachers' functional competency was outstanding. Hence, there was a significant relationship between the implementation of LAC and teachers' functional competency. It is recommended that LAC coordinators align LAC activities with the school's broader professional development plans. Teachers should also engage in collaborative projects with other educators to share experiences and best practices. School heads should also provide training and support strategies for teachers.

KEYWORDS: Learning Action Cell (LAC) program, teachers' functional competency

I. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education (DepEd) launched the Learning Action Cell (LAC) Program in schools as a professional development exercise to enhance teaching and learning. LAC sessions have been implemented and organized through the initiative of the school principal and the designated coordinators. Most of the topics in LAC are taken from the division or district roll-out. With this, different topics related to teaching and learning were given emphasis. These numerous topics were given to the teachers, assuming that these would work as designed and planned. Professional development programs, such LAC sessions, can only be effective if they result in the improvement of teachers' functional competency.

Having competent educators and fostering their professional growth are crucial for the teaching profession. Through professional development opportunities, teachers can constantly improve their knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and become more proficient at their jobs. It is made lawful and uniform by DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016, titled "The Learning Action Cell as a K to 12 Basic Education Program School-Based Continuing Professional Development Strategy for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning". Facilitated by the school head or a qualified LAC Leader, LAC is a group of teachers that participate in cooperative learning sessions to solve shared difficulties experienced in the school (DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016).

At the heart of every effective educational system are competent, dedicated, and skilled teachers. DepEd admits that the caliber of instruction has a significant influence on the quality of learning. Therefore, it is imperative to have competent teachers and to strengthen their development in the field of teaching. Through teaching knowledge and information, encouraging critical thinking, and motivating students to realize their full potential, teachers play a significant role in forming the future generation. To fulfill these responsibilities, teachers must possess a unique blend of functional competency. Functional competency, including expertise in teaching strategies and content knowledge, forms the anchor of an effective teaching-learning process, and is essential for creating an engaging and supportive learning environment. As the educational landscape continues to develop to

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meet the challenges of the 21st century, the role of teachers has become increasingly significant. The constant advancements of pedagogies, innovations in teaching methodologies, and the ever-changing needs of learners require teachers to adapt and develop their functional competency throughout their professional careers.

Further, the teachers' functional competency involves a collection of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that educators bring to the classroom, influencing the quality of instruction and the overall learning outcomes for students. The implementation of LAC as a professional development program can impact the development of teachers' functional competency. Effective professional development is the bridge that enables teachers to enhance their competencies and, in turn, positively impact student learning outcomes. Improving teacher quality through professional development is paramount for producing competent and responsible learners. Improved teachers' quality will mean enhanced classroom instruction.

As a result, enhanced classroom instruction indicates improved learning outcomes for the students. As a result, the Department of Education stressed how important it is to have educators who are effective and to provide them with professional development opportunities. Relative to this, DepEd introduced the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). In 2017, DepEd released D.O. No. 42, "National Adoption and Implementation of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers", which seeks to implement a defined measure to assess teacher performance, identify needs, and provide support and assistance for professional growth. Additionally, it seeks to clearly outline the standards for educators as well as the various career phases of professional development, from entry-level to highly skilled practice. It aspires to track and assess the performance of the teachers to determine organizational needs to enable continuous improvement and personal growth. It also serves as an approach to ensuring that both teaching and non-teaching personnel focus their working performance on upholding all the departmental policies. To ensure that teachers are capable of implementing the K to 12 programs, PPST serves as the guide to carry out all learning and development activities for teachers.

Specifically, the Division of Cagayan de Oro City, the Southwest I District, is composed of schools that are conducting LAC sessions regularly. The district's school heads are dedicated to raising the caliber of instruction and teacher competency. The researcher believes that the effective implementation of LAC in schools can create significant contributions to the development of the teachers' functional competency.

With this, the researcher conducted this study to determine the relationship between the implementation of LAC, based on DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016, and the level of teachers' functional competency, according to DepEd Order 42 s. 2017, in Southwest I District, City of Cagayan de Oro.

II. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive-correlational method was used to gather information on the implementation of Learning Action Cell and the level of functional competency of the teachers. To achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher utilized a quantitative research approach. Focusing on quantifying data gathering and analysis is the main goal of a quantitative method. An extensive survey, using research questionnaires, was conducted to gather data on the implementation of LAC in schools and the level of teachers' functional competency, contributing valuable insights to the field of education.

A. Population and Sample

The respondents of the study were the 147 elementary school teachers in the Southwest I District of the Division of Cagayan de Oro City. It is comprised of Teachers I, II, and III from ten (10) elementary schools. These teachers collectively represent the focal group for evaluating the implementation of LAC and assessing their functional competency. Moreover, the study included new and experienced teachers from various subject areas and grade levels.

B. Research Instrument

In this study, the researcher utilized the major research tool – the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part I included the Implementation of the Learning Action Cell, which was patterned and modified from DepEd Order 35 s. 2016. One of the significant modifications made to the research instrument was revising the indicators, making them more relevant to the implementation of the LAC program. The second part of the questionnaire was related to the level of Teachers' Functional Competency, patterned from DepEd Order 42 s. 2017, known as the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST).

C. Sampling Technique

In choosing the respondents of this study, the researcher used a purposive sampling method. In purposive sampling, the respondents were selected for a specific purpose or objective. Since the indicators in the tool used to measure the level of

functional competency between teachers and master teachers were different; thus, the researcher selected all Teachers I-III of Southwest I District in the Division of Cagayan de Oro City, with a total of one hundred forty-seven (147) respondents.

D. Theoretical Framework

This study was supported by the Communities of Practice (CoP) Theory, developed by social learning theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. This theory specifies a framework for understanding how individuals with shared interests and goals come together to learn from each other through collaboration and collective expertise. There are three required components of CoP, namely domain, community, and practice.

In this study, the domain corresponds to the common interest of teachers to participate in professional learning activities, which contribute to improving their functional competency. Conversely, a community is a collection of individuals who get together frequently to exchange knowledge and have a shared passion or interest. The community, in this study, are the educators who participate in cooperative learning activities to address common problems faced by the school. Lastly, practice refers to shared resources, experiences, and ways of doing things that develop over time among members of a community. In this study, practice is represented by the LAC program, which provides opportunities for continuous problem-solving or cooperative learning in a common professional interest area, as well as self-directed learning, reflective practice that leads to action and self-evaluation and collective competency (DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016).

E. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework highlights the dynamics between the implementation of LAC and teachers' functional competency. The provisions and regulations indicated in the DepEd Order No. 35 s. 2016, referred to as the Learning Action Cell as a K to 12 Basic Education Program School-Based Continuing Professional Development Strategy for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning, and the DepEd Order No. 42 s. 2017, titled National Adoption and Implementation of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers, acknowledges the significance of LAC as well as the development of teachers' functional competency in the context of education.

Through LAC, educators can assist one another in enhancing their material and pedagogical knowledge, practice, skills, and attitudes while also fostering a collaborative and professional spirit among school administrators, teachers, and the wider community (DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016). On the other hand, the PPST will serve as the cornerstone for all programs and initiatives aimed at assisting teachers in being suitably prepared to carry out the K to 12 Program. It describes the expectations of teachers' increasing levels of knowledge, practice, and professional engagement. Simultaneously, the standards allow for teachers' growing understanding, applied with increasing sophistication across a broader and more complex range of teaching and learning situations (DepEd Order No. 42 s. 2017).

The study's schema illustrates how the variables that were employed in the investigation interacted with one another. It shows that the independent variable in the study is the implementation of LAC, which includes Learner Diversity and Student Inclusion, Content and Pedagogy of the K to 12 Program, Assessment and Reporting in the K to 12 Program, 21st Century Skills and ICT Integration in Instruction and Assessment, and Curriculum Contextualization, Localization, and Indigenization. The dependent variables include the teachers' functional competency indicators, which consist of Content Knowledge and Pedagogy, Learning Environment and Diversity of Learners, Curriculum and Planning, Assessment and Reporting, and Community Linkages and Professional Engagement.

In this study, the researcher aimed to find out if there was a significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables, presuming that a successful implementation of LAC in schools would improve the functional competency of teachers.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Summary Distribution of the Respondents' Level of Implementation of the Learning Action Cell

Variables	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Learner Diversity and Student Inclusion	3.73	0.44	Well Implemented
Content and Pedagogy of the K to 12 Basic Education Program	3.66	0.49	Well Implemented
Assessment and Reporting in the K to 12 Basic Education Program	3.61	0.52	Well Implemented
21st Century Skills and ICT Integration in Instruction and Assessment	3.66	0.50	Well Implemented
Curriculum Contextualization, Localization, and Indigenization	3.57	0.55	Well Implemented
Overall	**3.65**	**0.50**	**Well Implemented**

Legend:	3.26-4.00 At All Times/Well Implemented	1.76-2.50 Sometimes/Partially Implemented
	2.51-3.25 Most of the Time/Implemented	1.00-1.75 Never/Not Implemented

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Table 1 summarizes the respondents' level of implementation of the Learning Action Cell with an overall mean is 3.65 (SD=0.50), interpreted as Well Implemented. This means that teachers implemented the Learning Action Cell consistently. This implies there was a consistent effort among teachers to integrate the program into their teaching practices, ensuring continuous improvement in various aspects of education delivery. Teachers can share ideas, learn from one another, and approach problems in the classroom as a group by participating in cooperative talks and activities like LAC. Participation in LAC exposes teachers to research-based practices, pedagogical innovations, and effective teaching strategies that enhance their professional growth. The results resonated with the study of Fatih (2020) and Basco et al. (2022), which highlights the importance of professional development in enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills. Continuous education, through the Learning Action Cell, allowed teachers to constantly refine their pedagogical approaches and contribute to sustainable improvements in the education system.

The variable, Learner Diversity and Student Inclusion, obtained the highest mean of 3.73 (SD=0.44), interpreted as Well Implemented. This means that teachers were particularly adept at addressing the diverse needs of students and ensuring their inclusion in the learning process. This implies there was a solid commitment to creating inclusive learning environments where all students felt valued and supported, fostering better learning outcomes for everyone. Teachers who prioritize inclusion recognize and honor students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and identities, promoting a sense of belonging and respect within the classroom. This suggests that teachers need to focus on learner diversity and student inclusion to create inclusive, supportive, and enriching learning experiences that empower all students to reach their full potential. Embracing diversity promotes equity, fosters cultural responsiveness, enhances collaboration, and prepares students to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world. The support study further highlighted the importance of addressing learner diversity and inclusion in professional development programs, emphasizing the role of such initiatives in creating positive and caring learning communities (DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016; Cartilla & Rondina, 2020).

However, the variable, Curriculum Contextualization, Localization, and Indigenization, got the lowest mean of 3.57 (SD=0.55) interpreted as Well Implemented. This means that there may have been room for improvement in integrating local and indigenous contexts into the curriculum. This implies that further efforts could enhance the relevance and cultural sensitivity of the education provided, promoting a deeper connection between students and their learning experiences. Contextualized and localized curriculum content captures students' interest and engagement by making learning more relatable and meaningful. Teachers can use familiar examples, contexts, and references that resonate with students' everyday experiences, increasing their motivation to learn. This finding is supported by the study of Dunn et al. (2018), which emphasized the importance of aligning professional development topics, such as those discussed in Learning Action Cell sessions, with key features of the education system, including curriculum contextualization and localization. This alignment ensured that teachers addressed critical aspects of education that contributed to improved learning outcomes for students.

Table 2. Summary of the Level of Teachers' Functional Competency

Variables	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Content Knowledge and Pedagogy	4.84	0.37	Outstanding
Learning Environment and Diversity of Learners	4.88	0.28	Outstanding
Curriculum and Planning	4.90	0.28	Outstanding
Assessment and Reporting	4.73	0.44	Outstanding
Community Linkages and Professional Engagement	4.84	0.38	Outstanding
Overall	**4.84**	**0.35**	**Outstanding**

Legend: 4.21-5.00 Always/Outstanding   1.81-2.60 Rarely/Unsatisfactory
        3.41-4.20 Very Often/Very Satisfactory   1.00-1.80 Never/Poor
        2.61-3.40 Sometimes/Satisfactory

Table 2 summarizes the level of Teachers' Functional Competency with an overall mean score is 4.84 (SD=0.35), interpreted as Outstanding. This means that the teachers consistently demonstrated high competency levels across all indicators. This implies that there is a strong foundation in teaching skills and practices among educators, producing a conducive learning environment for students. This also suggests that the district's educational system seemed to prioritize and effectively support the development of teachers' competencies. This finding is aligned with studies of Fatih (2020) and Heasly et al. (2020) on professional development emphasizing its crucial role in enhancing teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, ultimately contributing to improved teaching practices and student outcomes.

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The variable, Curriculum and Planning, obtained the highest mean score of 4.90 (SD=0.28), interpreted as Outstanding. This means that teachers excelled in designing effective curriculum frameworks and lesson plans, ensuring alignment with educational objectives and student needs. This implies that the district placed significant emphasis on curriculum development and strategic planning, which likely contributed to the overall high competency levels observed. By carefully designing a curriculum, teachers can map out what students need to learn and how to achieve those outcomes through well-organized planning. This finding resonated with the importance of professional development programs that focused on curriculum design and instructional planning, as they were crucial for enhancing teaching effectiveness (Dilshad et al., 2019).

However, the variable, Assessment and Reporting, got the lowest mean of 4.73 (SD=0.44), interpreted as Outstanding. This means that the teachers were proficient in conducting assessments and reporting student progress, but there were opportunities to further refine assessment strategies and reporting mechanisms. This implies that investing in continuous professional development in assessment practices could lead to even greater improvements in student learning outcomes. Assessment data guides instructional decisions by helping teachers identify which instructional strategies are effective and which areas require additional support. By analyzing assessment results, teachers can modify their teaching methods to better meet students' learning needs. This finding is supported by the study of Basco et al. (2022) and Reazo (2021) that underscored the importance of ongoing professional development initiatives like Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, which provided opportunities for teachers to enhance their assessment practices and share best practices with colleagues.

Table 3. Relationship between the Implementation of the Learning Action Cell (LAC) and Teachers' Functional Competency

Level of Implementation of the Learning Action Cell		Content Knowledge and Pedagogy	Learning Environment and Diversity of Learners	Curriculum and Planning	Assessment and Reporting	Community Linkages and Professional Engagement	Over-all Level of Teachers' Functional Competency	Interpretation
				Level of Teachers' Functional Competency				
Learner Diversity and Student Inclusion	r	0.621	0.339	0.252	0.588	0.365	0.590	**Significant**
	P	<0.001	<0.001	0.002	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Content and Pedagogy of the K to 12 Basic Education Program	r	0.160	0.271	0.319	0.356	0.426	0.422	**Significant**
	P	0.050	0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Assessment and Reporting in the K to 12 Basic Education Program	r	0.442	0.239	0.141	0.470	0.116	0.376	**Significant**
	P	<0.001	0.004	0.088	<0.001	0.160	<0.001	
21st Century Skills and ICT Integration in Instruction and Assessment	r	0.127	0.176	0.351	0.399	0.401	0.402	**Significant**
	P	0.124	0.032	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
Curriculum Contextualization, Localization, and Indigenization	r	0.455	0.328	0.293	0.602	0.272	0.524	**Significant**
	P	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	0.001	<0.001	

Legend: r = Pearson r correlation; P = probability value; Significant at 0.05 level; P < 0.05 (Significant); P > 0.05 (Not Significant)

Table 3 presents the relationship between the level of implementation of the Learning Action Cell (LAC) and the level of teachers' functional competency which obtained a Pearson r of 0.590 (p-value<0.001), interpreted as Significant. This means that when teachers actively participated in implementing the LAC with a focus on addressing learner diversity and fostering student inclusion, they tend to exhibit higher levels of functional competency. This implies that catering to diverse student needs and

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fostering inclusive environments positively influenced teachers' effectiveness and competence. This underscores the importance of targeted interventions and support for teachers in implementing strategies related to learner diversity and inclusion, which could positively impact their overall functional competency, thereby enhancing teaching effectiveness and improving outcomes for all students. This finding was consistent with research of Fatih (2020) and Heasly et al. (2020), indicating that ongoing professional development, such as through the Learning Action Cell (LAC), contributed to teachers' ability to adapt to changes in education, refine their pedagogies, and improve their overall competence.

Moreover, the Level of Implementation of the LAC considering Assessment and Reporting in the K to 12 Basic Education Program and the Level of Teachers' Functional Competency, got a Pearson r of 0.376 (p-value<0.001), interpreted as Significant. This means that when teachers engaged more with LAC in Assessment and Reporting, they tend to show higher competency levels in these areas. This implies that the teachers are engaged in the aspects of assessment and reporting and have contributed to enhancing their overall competence. Effective strategies to integrate assessment and reporting practices enhance teachers' competency level and instructional practices. This also suggests that a structured approach to collaborative learning and professional development, such as LAC, could positively impact teachers' abilities in specific domains of teaching. This finding aligned with the understanding that effective professional development, such as through these sessions, should encompass all learning opportunities that enable teachers to adapt to changes in the educational system and improve their competence (Dilshad et al., 2019).

In addition, the Level of Implementation of the Learning Action Cell (LAC) in terms of Content and Pedagogy of the K to 12 Basic Education Program and the Level of Teachers' Functional Competency, obtained a Pearson r of 0.422 (p-value<0.001), interpreted as Significant. This means that the implementation of the K to 12 program's content and pedagogy contribute to the level of teachers' functional competency. This implies that the level of a teacher's functional competency is directly influenced by their mastery of content and pedagogical knowledge. Teachers who possess deep content knowledge but lack effective pedagogical skills may struggle to engage students or convey complex concepts clearly. Conversely, teachers with strong pedagogical skills but limited content knowledge may struggle to provide accurate and meaningful instruction. This finding resonated with the research on Teachers' Professional Development Through Learning Action Cell (LAC), which underscored the significance of continuous education in refining teachers' competencies (Fatih, 2020). The implementation of LAC sessions, designed to foster collaborative learning environments and address specific pedagogical challenges, aligned with the notion of ongoing professional development as essential for enhancing teaching quality and, consequently, student outcomes.

Further, the Level of Implementation of the Learning Action Cell (LAC) in terms of 21st Century Skills and ICT Integration in Instruction and Assessment and the Level of Teachers' Functional Competency, got obtained a Pearson r of 0.402 (p-value<0.001), interpreted as Significant. This means that when teachers actively incorporated 21st Century Skills and ICT into their teaching practices, they tend to excel in creating inclusive learning environments, effectively planning curriculum, assessing student progress, and engaging with the community professionally. This implies that prioritizing the integration of these skills and technologies could contribute positively to overall teaching effectiveness and professionalism. Incorporating advanced skills and technology into teaching is beneficial for various aspects of teaching competence. The 21st-century skills include critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, digital literacy, problem-solving, adaptability, and more. Teachers need to understand and prioritize these skills to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the modern era. This finding resonated with the study of Dilshad, M. et al. (2019), Dunn et al. (2018) and Tyagi (2021) that effective professional development should encompass both technological advancements and traditional pedagogical knowledge.

Furthermore, the Level of Implementation of the Learning Action Cell (LAC) considering Curriculum Contextualization, Localization, and Indigenization and the Level of Teachers' Functional Competency, got obtained a Pearson r of 0.402 (p-value<0.001), interpreted as Significant. This means that when teachers effectively incorporate local context, culture, and indigenous knowledge into their teaching practices, they tend to demonstrate higher levels of functional competency. This implies that acknowledging and integrating local culture and context into the curriculum could enhance teachers' abilities to meet the diverse needs of learners, plan curriculum effectively, assess student learning, engage with the community, and create an inclusive learning environment. Teachers with a high functional competency level in curriculum contextualization, localization, and indigenization understand and respect diverse cultural backgrounds, values, and perspectives, enabling them to create inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. They can adapt instructional strategies, materials, and assessments to meet the needs of diverse learners within specific cultural contexts. This underscores the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems in education, which could contribute to more effective teaching and learning outcomes. These findings were consistent with a support study conducted by Khumalo (2019) and Hersly et al. (2020), which emphasized the significance of professional development, such as through Learning Action Cells (LAC), in enhancing teachers' competencies and improving the quality of education.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that Learning Action Cell (LAC) program is well implemented. LAC provides a platform for teachers to discuss and develop customized teaching strategies and equips them with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to create an inclusive learning environment where all students can thrive. The level of teachers' functional competency is outstanding across all domains. Specifically, the teachers have a strong foundation in designing effective curriculum frameworks and lesson plans, ensuring alignment with educational objectives and student needs. The significant relationship between the variables shows that the LAC program contributes to enhancing the functional competency of the teachers. It provides a structured framework for professional development and collaboration among teachers, leading to improvements in content knowledge and pedagogy, learning environment and diversity of learners, curriculum and planning, assessment and reporting, and community linkages and professional engagement.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has contributed to assessing the implementation of LAC and the functional competency of teachers. The recommendations are as follows:

1. LAC coordinators should align LAC activities with the broader professional development plans of the school. This integration ensures that LAC sessions contribute directly to the ongoing professional growth of teachers.

2. Teachers should engage in collaborative projects with other educators to share experiences and best practices. Seeking out mentorship opportunities helps teachers to enhance language instruction, foster an inclusive classroom culture, implement differentiated instruction strategies, and utilize innovative assessment techniques.

3. School heads should provide training and support strategies for teachers. Professional development programs and activities that focus on integrating assessment and reporting practices need to be prioritized to genuinely enhance teachers' competence and instructional practices.

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