Original Research Article

Exploring the predictors of successful learning action cell practices of special education teachers

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ABSTRACT

Learning Action Cells (LACs) have emerged as a powerful tool for fostering professional development among educators. By creating collaborative learning communities, LACs empower teachers to share knowledge, reflect on practice, and implement innovative strategies. This study aimed to explore the factors influencing the effective implementation of LACs among Elementary Special Education (SPED) teachers in Davao City. Specifically, the study investigated the extent of LAC session practices and the level of self-efficacy of SPED teachers. A regression analysis was employed to examine the relationship between these variables. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between LAC session practices and teachers' self-efficacy. SPED teachers demonstrated strong performance in various aspects of LAC implementation, including contextualization, process adherence, and content delivery. Similarly, they exhibited high levels of self-efficacy in classroom management, student engagement, instructional practices, and commitment. These results underscore the effectiveness of LACs in enhancing the professional capabilities of SPED teachers and ultimately improving student outcomes. The study recommends the continued implementation of LACs, with a focus on integrating 21st-century skills and assigning specific roles to team members to maximize their expertise. Future research could explore the long-term impact of LACs on teacher retention, student achievement, and overall school improvement.

Keywords: Learning action cell, professional learning community, collaboration, Philippines

1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers who reported feeling ill-equipped to manage challenging behaviors experienced higher stress levels and more frequent negative interactions with children, and demonstrated less tolerance and fewer interventions for such behaviors. This, in turn, contributed to a more negative classroom climate and an increase in challenging behaviors among students. Conversely, teachers with strong self-efficacy were better able to understand the emotional underpinnings of children's behavior, respond effectively to their emotional needs, and foster a positive classroom environment. This environment was particularly conducive to social-emotional instruction and support, especially for children exhibiting challenging behaviors.

The global movement towards inclusive education has been underscored by key international frameworks, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [1]. Despite the widespread recognition of the need for inclusive education, ensuring equal educational opportunities for all individuals remains a challenge worldwide. This issue persists despite the right of persons with disabilities to access general education and lifelong learning without discrimination [2].

While inclusive education is a global concern, its implementation varies significantly across different countries [3]. In Japan, the government promotes educational reforms that encourage an inclusive approach within its dual regular and special education systems [4]. In

contrast, Finland, despite its success in offering flexible education for all students, continues to face challenges in the implementation of inclusive education, partly due to a lack of strong demand for such reforms, despite legal and curriculum support [5].

Following the publication of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Education Needs (SEN) by UNESCO in 1994, which promoted the goal of "Education for All" through inclusive practices, many national education systems began advancing toward inclusive education [6]. Inclusive education seeks to provide appropriate learning opportunities, fair assessments, and qualifications for all students, ensuring their full and active participation in the learning process [7].

Inclusive education has the potential to promote social transformation by instilling confidence, values, and support among students with disabilities, thereby empowering them to become capable citizens [8]. As such, the wide implementation of inclusive education is both necessary and urgent. Studies have shown that teacher self-efficacy directly influences student performance [9]. For example, students taught by highly self-efficacious teachers report higher levels of academic achievement and better academic adjustment [10]. Teacher self-efficacy not only improves teachers' efforts to enhance their skills but also strengthens their belief in their ability to teach effectively [11]. Consequently, improving teacher preparation is essential, as self-efficacy is crucial to successfully educating both students with and without disabilities in inclusive settings [12].

Moreover, no teacher is an expert in all areas of the curriculum. Collaboration with colleagues enriches teachers' knowledge, skills, and competencies. Ronfeldt et al. [13], found that teachers who collaborate report improved attitudes towards teaching, enhanced teacher efficacy, and a better understanding of student learning. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and other forms of organized teacher collaboration have gained global recognition as effective strategies for improving instructional practices and learning outcomes [14]. Research indicates that building PLCs fosters greater teacher collaboration, which contributes to improved school performance and transformation of school culture [15]. International scholarship further supports the idea that PLCs can build capacity and drive sustainable development, leading to improved student learning outcomes [16].

Bajar et al. [17] stated, “the era of isolated teachers, working alone to meet the myriad needs of all their students, is neither educationally effective nor economically viable in the 21st century.” Today's educational landscape compels teachers to collaborate to address instructional needs collectively. Effective teacher collaboration involves engaging in regular routines where teachers share classroom experiences to strengthen pedagogical expertise and encourage one another to try new strategies [18]. To enable effective collaboration, teachers must engage in structured routines that allow them to work together on common instructional challenges and collaboratively find solutions [19].

Recognizing this need, the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) issued the DepEd Order, which institutionalizes Learning Action Cells (LACs) as an approach to professional development. This initiative aims to enhance teachers' knowledge, skills, and competencies in curriculum, instruction, and assessment through school-based collaboration. The LAC policy promotes the idea that the locus of teacher learning is in the school, where teachers actively participate in collegial discussions facilitated by a school head or LAC leader. These discussions are designed to address shared challenges and improve teaching quality [20].

In 2017, DepEd reported that only 648 special education (Sped) centers and regular schools had implemented the inclusive education program, covering 471 elementary schools and 177 secondary schools. These schools served approximately 250,000 students with

exceptionalities in elementary schools and around 100,000 in secondary [21]. This highlights the importance of investigating factors that foster the self-efficacy of special education teachers to design programs that build educators' capacity to teach learners with special needs. Furthermore, LAC sessions provide a space for teachers to reflect critically on their teaching challenges and collaboratively devise strategies to address them.

Thus, this study on the predictors of teacher self-efficacy in special education aims to contribute to the improvement of inclusive education at the school level. The researcher intends to disseminate the findings through local, national, and international publications and research summits, ensuring that the results reach a broad audience, from district to division levels, through seminars, training, and meetings.

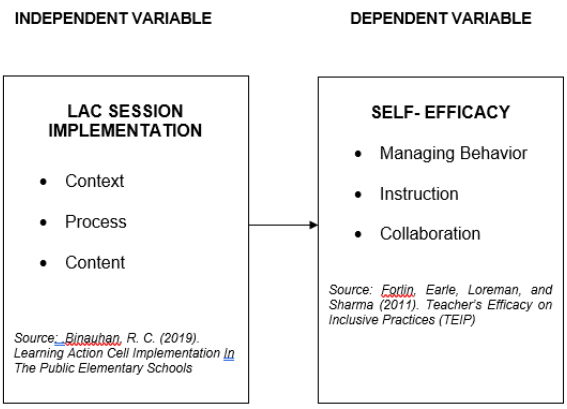

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study made use of the non-experimental quantitative research design utilizing a correlational method. The descriptive correlational method is used to determine the relationship between two or more variables and to ascertain their relationship [22]. More to the point, Mõttus [23] emphasized that this method was used since the study provides a description of individuals and aims to explain the nature of the data. This study was descriptive in nature since it evaluated the LAC session practices and self-efficacy of special education teachers in Davao City.

2.2 Research Respondents

Special Education Teachers in public elementary schools in Marilog District, Davao City, Region XI, were the respondents of the study. A total of not less than 115 public elementary school teachers were selected using the purposive sampling technique because it allowed the researcher to decide what needs to be known and with this, the researcher set out to find people who could and were willing to provide the information by knowledge or experience.

For this study, certain inclusion criteria were implemented to determine the teacher respondents. The primary consideration of this study was to choose teacher respondents

who could provide information to achieve the purpose of this study. Hence, only those full-time SPED teachers who had been teaching in public elementary schools with at least three years in service were selected. Moreover, the study was delimited only to the nature of the problem based on the research questions and thus, it did not consider the rank status and performance ratings of the teachers.

2.3 Research Instrument

Two adapted survey questionnaires were utilized to gather quantitative data. Both tools underwent content validity assessment by a panel of experts and were pilot-tested to ensure reliability. The first part of the instrument consisted of the LAC Session Practices questionnaire, adapted from Binauhan [24].

This questionnaire was designed for teachers to evaluate the established practices of the Learning Action Cell (LAC) Sessions. It specifically focused on how teachers and staff collaborate within the LAC framework, encompassing context, process, and content. The questionnaire included questions regarding whether SPED teachers received the necessary guidance and support through the conduct of LAC Sessions to enhance their professional skills. Additionally, the self-efficacy component comprised a self-made questionnaire aimed at assessing three key areas: managing behavior, instructional practices, and collaboration.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study. The researcher wrote a letter asking permission from the Dean of Graduate School to conduct this research study. Upon the receipt of the letter from the dean of the graduate school, the researcher secured a permit to conduct the study from the Office of the School principals.

Distribution and retrieval of the questionnaire. Upon approval of the permit to conduct the study, the sets of questionnaires were sent to the respondents via Google Forms and through email addresses of the school heads and teachers. The questionnaires were retrieved right after the respondents answered the questions and sent them back through the researchers' email address or messenger.

For some respondents who missed answering the questionnaire, video calls via messenger, Viber, zoom, or Google Meet were used to gather the data or responses of the respondents.

Collation and statistical treatment of the data. The data were collated from the Google forms. It took some time for the researcher to collect all the necessary submitted questionnaires. Some of the submitted data were not complete; thus, they were rejected. Despite the rejected and incomplete forms submitted, the total number of respondents still met the required number to proceed with the statistical data analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis

The following statistical tools were used in the analysis and interpretation of the responses in this study:

Mean. It was used to determine the extent of LAC Session Practices and self-efficacy of SPED teachers in Davao City.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson-r). This statistical tool was used to determine if there is a significant relationship between LAC Session Practices and the self-efficacy of SPED teachers in Davao City.

Simple Linear Regression. This statistical tool was used to determine which domains of LAC Session Practices significantly influence the self-efficacy of SPED teachers in Davao City.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 LAC Session practices of special education teachers

Table 1. *Extent of LAC Session Practices of Special Education Teachers*

No	Statements	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
1	Context	4.28	Very High
2	Process	4.27	Very High
3	Content	4.42	Very High
	Overall Mean	**4.32**	Very High

Table 1 presents the summary of the extent of LAC Session practices of special education teachers. The mean scores of each indicator are shown in a tabular and textual format. The presentation was chronologically arranged from highest to lowest to convey meaning and clarity: Content (4.42), which is described as always manifested; Context (4.28), which is described as Always Manifested and Process (4.27), which is described as always manifested. The overall mean rating on this variable was (4.32) which is described as Always Manifested. This means that the LAC session practices of SPED teachers are always manifested.

This finding supports the study of Reños and Pontillas et al. [25], which emphasized that teachers who engage in regular collaboration and professional development activities, such as LAC sessions, report improved attitudes towards teaching and higher levels of efficacy. Additionally, it aligns with Voelkel Jr and Chrispeels [26], who highlighted that professional learning communities and other collaborative practices lead to improved instructional outcomes. Moreover, Aquino et al. [27] noted that such professional development strategies contribute to sustainable growth in teacher capacity and positively influence student learning outcomes, reinforcing the relevance and effectiveness of LAC sessions in fostering teacher development.

3.2 Self-Efficacy of Special Education Teachers in Public Schools of Davao City

Table 2. *Extent of Self-Efficacy of Special Education Teachers in Public Schools of Davao City*

No	Statements	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent

1	Managing Behavior	4.27	Very Extensive
2	Instruction	4.28	Very Extensive
3	Collaboration	4.34	Very Extensive
Overall Mean		**4.30**	**Very Extensive**

Table 2 presents the summary of the findings on the extent of self-efficacy among special education teachers in public schools in Davao City. The mean scores for each indicator are shown in both tabular and textual formats. The presentation is arranged chronologically, from highest to lowest, for clarity and emphasis: Collaboration (4.34), described as always manifested; Instruction (4.28), described as always manifested; and Managing Behavior (4.27), also described as always Manifested. The overall mean rating for this variable is 4.30, described as always manifested. This indicates that the self-efficacy of SPED teachers is consistently rated as always manifested..

This finding corroborates with the study of Sehgal et al. [28], which demonstrated that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are more capable of effectively managing classroom dynamics and collaborating with colleagues. Similarly, the research by Poulou et al. [29] found that teachers with a strong sense of efficacy tend to exhibit more effective instructional practices and classroom management, leading to better student outcomes. Moreover, the study of Wilson et al. [30] supports these findings by showing that teacher self-efficacy is crucial in inclusive educational settings, contributing to improved teaching performance and better educational experiences for students with special needs.

3.3 Significant Relationship between LAC Session Practices and Self-Efficacy of Special Education Teachers in Public Schools of Davao City

Table 3. *Significant Relationship between LAC Session Practices and Self-Efficacy of Special Education Teachers in Public Schools of Davao City*

LAC Session Practices	Dependent Variable	r-value	p-value	Decision
Context	**Self - Efficacy**	0.731	.000	H_o is rejected
Process		0.728	.000	H_o is rejected
Content		0.737	.000	H_o is rejected
Overall		**0.732**	**.000**	**H_o is rejected**

Table 3 illustrates the significant relationship between LAC (Learning Action Cell) session practices and the self-efficacy of special education teachers in public schools of Davao City. The correlation values (R-values) between the different aspects of LAC session practices and teacher self-efficacy are all strong, ranging from 0.728 to 0.737. Specifically, the relationship between context and self-efficacy is reflected by an r-value of 0.731, Process and self-efficacy by an r-value of 0.728, and Content and self-efficacy by an R-value of 0.737. The overall correlation between LAC session practices and self-efficacy is 0.732.

All of these r-values indicate a strong positive relationship, suggesting that the more frequently LAC session practices are implemented, the higher the self-efficacy of SPED teachers. Furthermore, the p-values for each relationship are reported as .000, which is highly significant. This means that there is a statistically significant correlation between LAC session practices and teacher self-efficacy, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho) that there is no relationship between these variables. This implies that LAC session practices are an important factor in enhancing the self-efficacy of SPED teachers.

This finding coincides with the study of Sehgal et al. [28], which also identified a significant positive relationship between collaborative practices and teacher self-efficacy. Similar to the current research, their findings indicated that effective collaboration within professional learning communities enhances teachers' confidence in managing classroom challenges and supporting diverse learners. Additionally, the study emphasizes that when educators engage in structured collaborative practices, such as Learning Action Cells, they are more likely to develop a greater sense of efficacy in their teaching abilities. Thus, this aligns with the notion that the implementation of LAC session practices contributes positively to the self-efficacy of special education teachers.

3.4 Domains of LAC Session Practices that Significantly Influence the Self - Efficacy of Special Education Teachers in Public Schools of Davao City

Table 4. *Domains of LAC Session Practices that Significantly Influence the Self - Efficacy of Special Education Teachers in Public Schools of Davao City*

LAC Session Practices	**Self-efficacy**					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Coefficients			
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**Decision @= 0.05**
Constant	3.891	.205		18.609	.000	
Context	.432	.063	.408	2.821	.004	Reject H_o
Process	.621	.075	1.841	3.913	.000	Reject H_o
Content	.819	.083	.891	4.634	.000	Reject H_o

Dependent Variable: **Self efficacy**

R= 0.859, R^2=0.732, F-ratio=66.844 p-value= 0.000

Table 4 presents the analysis of the domains of Learning Action Cell (LAC) session practices that significantly influence the self-efficacy of special education teachers in public schools in Davao City. The results indicate that all three domains—Context, Process, and Content—have a statistically significant positive effect on teachers' self-efficacy, as evidenced by the p-values (all less than 0.05) and the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho) for each domain.

The unstandardized coefficients suggest that for every unit increase in the Context domain, self-efficacy increases by 0.432, while an increase in the Process domain results in a 0.621 increase in self-efficacy. The Content domain shows the most substantial impact, with an increase of 0.819 in self-efficacy for each unit increase in Content practices. The standardized coefficients (Beta) indicate that the Content domain has the strongest influence (Beta = 0.891), followed by the Context (Beta = 0.408) and Process (Beta = 1.841) domains.

The overall model demonstrates a strong influence between LAC session practices and self-efficacy, with an R-value of 0.859 and an R-squared (R^2) value of 0.732, indicating that approximately 73.2% of the variability in self-efficacy can be explained by the LAC session practices. The F-ratio of 66.844, with a p-value of 0.000, suggests that the model is

statistically significant. This finding underscores the importance of effectively implementing LAC session practices in enhancing the self-efficacy of special education teachers, particularly emphasizing the critical role of Content practices.

This finding aligns with the study of Reams [31], which demonstrated that effective professional development practices significantly influence teachers' self-efficacy in special education. Their research emphasized that structured collaborative environments, such as Learning Action Cells, not only enhance teachers' skills but also empower them to feel more confident in their instructional abilities. This underscores the critical role that well-implemented LAC session practices play in fostering greater self-efficacy among special education teachers, ultimately contributing to more effective teaching strategies and improved outcomes for students. Additionally, the finding validates the theory that effective professional development practices enhance teachers' self-efficacy in special education, supporting Bandura's Social Learning Theory. This theory posits that individuals develop self-efficacy through observational learning and social interactions, reinforcing the importance of collaborative professional development in building teachers' confidence and competence [32].

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the implementation of Learning Action Cells (LACs) among Special Education (SPED) teachers in Davao City has been highly effective. The extent of LAC session practices, particularly in terms of contextual relevance, procedural adherence, and content delivery, was rated as very high. Similarly, SPED teachers exhibited a high level of self-efficacy in classroom management, instructional strategies, and collaborative practices.

A significant positive relationship was found between LAC session practices and teacher self-efficacy. This indicates that as the quality of LAC sessions improves, so does the confidence and competence of SPED teachers. Specifically, each unit increase in any of the three domains of LAC session practices—context, process, and content—was associated with a 3.891 unit increase in teacher self-efficacy, controlling for other factors.

These findings support the notion that LACs can be a valuable tool for enhancing the professional development of SPED teachers. By providing opportunities for collaborative learning, reflection, and action planning, LACs can empower teachers to improve their instructional practices and ultimately enhance student outcomes.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

To maximize the benefits of LACs, several recommendations are proposed. First, the Department of Education should prioritize the digitization of LAC session processes to enhance efficiency, reduce disruptions, and lower implementation costs. Second, school heads should conduct rigorous assessments of LAC implementation to improve leadership skills and identify areas for enhancement. Third, teachers are encouraged to cultivate a positive work attitude and demonstrate a strong commitment to their duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, a longitudinal study should be conducted to assess the sustained impact of LACs on teacher performance and student outcomes over a longer period. Additional research should explore factors influencing LAC effectiveness, such as leadership, group dynamics, and institutional support. The generalizability of the findings should also be examined across different educational contexts and settings. Finally, future

research should investigate the direct impact of LACs on student learning and achievement, especially for students with special needs. By addressing these recommendations, the potential benefits of LACs can be maximized, leading to improved teacher professional development, enhanced student outcomes, and a stronger overall education system.

CONSENT

In conducting this quantitative study, strict ethical protocols were observed to ensure the privacy and protection of all participants. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, with participants fully briefed on the study's objectives and the confidentiality measures in place. To maintain anonymity, personal identifiers were not collected, and each respondent was assigned a unique code to be used in data analysis. All data were securely stored on encrypted servers, accessible only to the research team. Results were reported in aggregate form, ensuring that individual responses could not be traced back to any specific participant. Additionally, statistical analysis was conducted in a manner that minimized any risk of re-identification, further safeguarding the participants' privacy.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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