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TEACHERS' IMPLEMENTATION OF COLLABORATIVE EXPERTISE SESSIONS: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

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Teachers play a crucial role in implementing school curricular initiatives; but often face challenges in translating collaborative professional development into sustained instructional practice. This study explored teachers' implementation of Collaborative Expertise Sessions of Sapang Dalaga District, Division of Misamis Occidental under the Enhanced K-12 Curriculum. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews with 11 Junior High School teachers teaching Grade 7 and 8 subjects, four department heads, and one district supervisor as participants of the study. Interview guides were used as instruments to gather data, utilizing Yin's method of analysis. They were identified through purposive sampling based on their direct teaching experience and a minimum of three years in service. Findings revealed three major themes: 1) individual struggles to collective professional growth through collaboration, 2) collective professional growth through shared responsibility, and 3) collaborative expertise for teacher engagement and professional growth. The study concludes that successful implementation of Collaborative Expertise Sessions requires teachers to navigate significant initial strain, but when supported by structured protocols, this struggle transforms into collective professional growth and shared instructional responsibility. Thus, this study recommends the inclusion of Collaborative Expertise Session time in the teachers' class schedule for easy collaboration, provide necessary budgets for resources and technology, train school leaders and establish data-driven frameworks that may connect collaborative sessions directly to classroom practice and improved student learning outcomes.

Keywords: *collaborative expertise, instructional practices, professional development, shared responsibility, trust-based collaboration*

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Introduction

Teachers stand in the center as the main architects of the educational process, and the collective capacity of all teachers would form the cornerstone of any successful curricular reform. In the Philippine context, Tjipto (2025) quoted on the urgent need for collaborative expertise among teachers and is brought up by the Department of Education's endorsement of the New Enhanced K-12 Curriculum, which establishes such structures as Learning Action Cells (LACs) as important instrumentalities for teacher development. The actualization of such collaborative sessions, as promoted by Research Institute for Teacher Quality (RITQ), is fundamentally dependent on active teacher engagement in the translation of policy into actual practice (McLaney et al., 2022; Seeber et al., 2020; and Boltz et al., 2022).

This crucial role has been confirmed through recent scholarship, which has evidenced that collaborative expertise is important to the enhancement of teachers' professional competence and effectiveness in school-based management (Remorosa & Paglinawan, 2024). Besides, effective collaboration is not merely procedural, as it becomes an active transformative process that fosters the necessary innovativeness and creativity to deal with the different challenges in the classroom (Paris, 2025). As indicated for models of inclusive education, so for collaborative frameworks, the real test is to have teachers' cooperation through tangible interventions in the classroom (Basister & Valenzuela, 2021).

It is through DepEd Order No. 014, s. 2023, that collaborative expertise has been formalized in the Philippines. It is an order providing the operational guidelines for the Enhanced K-12 Curriculum that explicitly mandates Learning Action Cells (LACs) as the main vehicle of teacher collaboration. This directive works through the foundational structure provided by DepEd Order No. 035, s. 2016, thereby ensuring a systematic approach to school-based professional development. The major purpose of this policy framework is to move beyond isolated teaching practices and to promote a culture of shared responsibility for curriculum mastery, as per its philosophical underpinnings. As it turns out, such environments have shown themselves through research to be among the most effective modern remedies for powerful pedagogical problems such as out-of-field teaching; they employ the use of collective intelligence (Bajar et al., 2021). These mandated sessions have the final purpose of putting policy into practice and, in doing so, affect directly the quality of educational delivery alongside the new curriculum (Sotto, 2021; Hong et al., 2023).

Collaborative Expertise Sessions (CES), inspired by professional learning communities like Lesson Study in Japan, are organized forums for teachers to investigate and improve their teaching practices. The collaborative-individual learning dynamic established within these groups tends to enhance the critical thinking skills of participants as extended from teachers to their students (Viado, 2023). This setting also creates the essential teacher leadership function that makes possible their guidance of interdisciplinary efforts and better instructional coherence across subjects (Tiongson, 2023). Such continued collaboration, then, is a direct investment to a stronger competent reflective teaching force (Peneyra, 2022).

The application of collaborative expertise does not happen by itself but is rather faced with crucial impediments, including time, different levels of engagement among participants, and the facilitation skills that are needed for their successful achievement—as shown in studies of collaborative research and practice (Durante, 2022). The strength of the sessions is determined by instructional leadership at the school heads who create a supportive and trusting environment for open dialogue and risk taking (Jadie, 2025). As Markham (2025) has pointed out, lived experiences of teachers indicate that the change to a new curriculum could be a daunting experience, which makes the role of collaboration as a supportive factor even more important. Under these conditions, collaborative expertise serves the cause of teacher support in addressing their specific professional development needs while upgrading key behavioral competencies, linked to overall instructional performance enhancement. This is how the policy mandate translates to real and sustainable professional practice.

The policy that warrants co-expertise and the thickening base of evidence on its advantages leave much still unexplored as to the specific processes and conditions that facilitate or obstruct effective implementation in the unique, high-stressed environment of a national curriculum reform like the enhanced K-12 curriculum. To date literature on educational collaboration has undercut the analysis regarding "process expertise"; the designing and managing of collaborative action that is inherently critical in complex policy settings (Molinengo et al., 2021;

Paires and Mandal, 2023). Research in other fields affirms that collaboration invariably hinges on power dynamics, trust, and shared vocabulary, but unfortunately, these themes rarely show up in the day-to-day reality of teachers implementing an entirely new curriculum. Often, the hocus focus centers on what to do in the collaborative coordination even (e.g., LACs) and rarely on how or lived-procedural experience through which teachers co-construct meaning, navigate conflicts, build the collective capacity of transforming the Enhanced K-12 framework into lived classroom practice, and involve processes as intricate as implementing project learning in new contexts (Almazroui, 2023). Thus, this study aims to explore the lived experiences and procedural details regarding collaborative expertise as enacted by teachers in the field to fill this gap.

This study used the deployment of collaborative expertise among teachers who are navigating the Enhanced K-12 Curriculum in the Philippines, which is based on DepEd Order No. 011 and 013, s. 2024. It is an account, however, which moves beyond the structural framework of policy and attempts to delve into the everyday actual lived experiences of teachers mandated to collaborative session attendance, essentially through Learning Action Cells (LACs) as per the DepEd Order No. 035, s. 2016. More specifically, the study seeks to detail the context of processes, enabling conditions, and constraints shaping these collaborations-the presumed to ascertain not just whether teachers are collaborating, but also how they are creating shared understanding, co-developing instructional materials, and operationalizing curricular goals into practice. Investigating such would hopefully illuminate the focus on what is often the most unnoticed "process expertise" needed for effective collaboration and cover a critical space where policy intention and practical execution meet, providing practical application towards sustaining professional growth and, ultimately, within realizing the curriculum's aims (Bajar, et al., 2021; Carvajal et al., 2025; Hong et al., 2023).

The outcomes of collaborative expertise have been widely recognized identified as pivotal in advancing school improvement and student achievement. Recent studies affirm that professional learning among educators – particularly within structured environments such as professional learning communities (PLCs) has a significant positive impact on teaching practices and learning outcomes. Collaborative engagement enables teachers share evidence-based practices, reflect on instructional strategies and collectively improve student learning (Hudson, 2023). Furthermore, contemporary research highlights that sustained collaboration, including feedback, reflection and experimentation, strengthens teachers' professional growth and leads to more effective instructional practices (Vangrieken et al., 2021). In addition, emerging models such as networked professional learning communities further emphasize the role of collaboration in fostering both individual and collective learning among educators (Denee, 2024)

Despite the growing body of literature on collaborative practices, a notable gap persists, as much of the existing research has predominantly focused on well-resourced urban contexts. There remains limited in-depth, context-sensitive research examining how collaborative expertise is perceived, implemented, and sustained in rural or resource-constrained settings. This gap is significant, considering that contextual factors such as geographic isolation, limited resources, and diverse socio-cultural conditions shape the dynamics of collaboration in these environments. Recent studies suggest that while collaborative models such as PLCs and communities of practice are effective, their success depends heavily on contextual adaptation, leadership support, and the presence of trust, shared purpose, and ongoing reflective inquiry among educators (Voelkel et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023). Moreover, the sustainability of collaborative practices is influenced by structural and organizational conditions that support teacher engagement and continuous professional learning (Liu et al., 2023).

Such a study is significant in several ways. First, it holds practical significance for the participating school and district, as it may provide an evidence-based analysis of their collaborative practices, thereby informing localized policy decisions and the design of more responsive professional development initiatives. Recent research highlights that professional learning communities (PLCs) and collaborative teacher practices enhance instructional effectiveness and student outcomes when grounded in reflective inquiry and shared practice (Hudson, 2023). Furthermore, collaborative engagement among teachers fosters the exchange of knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary for continuous professional growth and improved teaching practices (Khotta et al., 2023). Second, the study has theoretical significance, as it may contribute to the refinement and contextualization of existing frameworks of collaborative expertise in under-researched settings. Contemporary studies emphasize that collaborative models such as PLCs are not universally transferable but require adaptation to specific contexts, particularly in resource-constrained or non-Western environments (Nguyen et al., 2023). By examining

collaborative expertise within a rural Philippine context, this study contributes to the growing body of literature that calls for more diverse and context-sensitive evidence on teacher collaboration and professional learning. Finally, this study has policy implications. Its findings may serve as a valuable reference for policymakers at both regional and national levels in the Philippines by providing empirically grounded insights into the realities of implementing collaborative expertise in rural schools. Recent evidence underscores that the success and sustainability of collaborative practices depend on supportive leadership structures, shared vision, and organizational conditions that enable teacher engagement (Voelkel et al., 2023; Denee, 2024). These insights may inform the development of more context-responsive and effective policies that promote teacher collaboration and strengthen school-based management practices in geographically isolated and resource-limited settings.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of collaborative expertise among Junior High School teachers in a public secondary school in Sapang Dalaga, Misamis Occidental. Through purposive sampling, eleven Grade 7 and Grade 8 teachers, four department heads, and one district supervisor were selected to provide comprehensive insights into collaborative practices within a resource-constrained rural school setting. Data were gathered using validated semi-structured interviews, conducted beyond official office hours to accommodate participants' schedules and ensure rich, in-depth responses. Ethical standards were strictly observed through informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and approval from the appropriate research and ethics authorities. Data were analyzed following Yin's (2018) five-phase case study approach—*assembling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding*—to systematically identify themes, triangulate perspectives, and generate meaningful conclusions regarding the experiences, challenges, and strategies associated with collaborative expertise in implementing the Enhanced K–12 Curriculum.

Results and Discussions

Teachers' Lived Experiences During the Initial Implementation of Collaborative Expertise Sessions: Challenges Encountered and Adaptive Strategies Developed

The findings revealed that teachers experienced a complex transition during the initial implementation of Collaborative Expertise Sessions (CES), characterized by both professional challenges and opportunities for growth. Participants described difficulties related to time constraints, competing professional responsibilities, reluctance to share instructional weaknesses, and adjustment to collaborative work after years of independent teaching practice. Despite these challenges, teachers developed adaptive strategies that enabled them to engage meaningfully in collaborative professional learning.

The theme “Evolving from Individual Strain to Collective Professional Growth through Structured, Trust-Based Collaboration” emerged as the dominant representation of these lived experiences. Teachers reported that balancing classroom responsibilities with collaborative activities often created scheduling conflicts and increased workload. Similar findings were reported by Baluyos et al. (2024), who found that teacher collaboration initiatives frequently encounter challenges related to time allocation and competing professional demands. Likewise, the district supervisor noted that chronic scheduling conflicts and insufficient protected time hindered deeper collaborative engagement, supporting the findings of Kong and Lai (2023), who emphasized the importance of dedicated collaborative time in sustaining teacher professional development.

Beyond logistical barriers, participants described emotional challenges associated with collaboration. Many teachers initially felt uncomfortable sharing instructional difficulties and unsuccessful classroom experiences with colleagues. Teacher participants admitted that exposing professional weaknesses created feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty. This finding aligns with Basister and Valenzuela (2021), who argued that psychological safety is a prerequisite for meaningful collaboration because it encourages teachers to engage in open professional dialogue without fear of criticism or judgment.

To address these challenges, participants adopted several adaptive strategies, including the use of structured agendas, clearly defined roles, focused discussions, collaborative reflection, and trust-building activities. Teachers emphasized that these structures provided direction and reduced uncertainty during collaborative sessions. These findings support Janssen and Kirschner's (2022) assertion that structured collaboration enhances

participation by providing clear expectations, procedures, and opportunities for shared learning. Similarly, Boltz et al. (2022) emphasized that collaborative success depends on carefully designed processes that facilitate communication and trust among participants.

Leadership emerged as a critical factor in facilitating teachers' transition from individual practice to collective professional growth. Participants consistently highlighted the role of supportive leaders in creating psychologically safe environments where teachers felt comfortable sharing experiences and seeking support. This finding is consistent with Jadie (2025), who found that school leaders significantly influence collaboration by fostering trust, inclusion, and professional engagement among teachers. The supportive leadership observed in this study enabled teachers to overcome hesitation and participate actively in professional dialogue.

The findings are strongly supported by Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which posits that learning occurs through social interaction and collaborative knowledge construction. Through CES, teachers engaged in collective problem-solving, shared expertise, and reflective discussions that expanded their professional competencies (Vygotsky, 1978). Wenger's Communities of Practice Theory further explains how participants gradually developed a sense of mutual engagement, shared responsibility, and collective identity through sustained collaboration (Wenger, 1998). Collectively, these findings suggest that successful implementation of collaborative expertise requires structured support systems, trusting professional relationships, and leadership practices that promote psychological safety and collaborative learning.

Perceived Impact of Collaborative Expertise Sessions on Teaching Practices and Student Learning Outcomes

The findings revealed that teachers perceived Collaborative Expertise Sessions as impactful because they transformed teaching from an individual activity into a shared professional endeavor. Participants described CES as a valuable platform for exchanging instructional strategies, receiving feedback, and collaboratively solving classroom challenges. Through these interactions, teachers developed greater confidence, improved instructional competence, and enhanced their ability to respond to learners' needs.

The theme "Collective Professional Growth Through Shared Responsibility" explained why participants viewed CES as highly beneficial. Teachers reported that collaborative sessions provided opportunities to learn from experienced colleagues and adopt effective instructional practices. Similar findings were reported by Kelley et al. (2021), who found that participation in collaborative communities of practice significantly increased teachers' instructional confidence and professional efficacy. The collaborative exchange of ideas enabled teachers to design more intentional, learner-centered lessons and to apply evidence-based instructional approaches in their classrooms.

Participants further reported substantial improvements in instructional practices and lesson planning. Teachers described becoming more reflective practitioners who regularly incorporated peer feedback into their instructional decisions. School leaders observed that lesson planning became increasingly data-driven and focused on student-centered learning strategies. These findings are consistent with Lee et al. (2021), who found that collaborative planning promotes instructional improvement by enabling teachers to refine teaching materials and instructional approaches through collective reflection and shared expertise.

Most importantly, teachers perceived CES as impactful because of its positive influence on student engagement and learning outcomes. Participants reported higher levels of student participation, increased learner confidence, improved academic performance, and greater mastery of competencies. These findings support Markham's (2025) assertion that collaborative professional development strengthens teachers' capacity to implement instructional practices that positively affect student achievement. Similarly, Remorosa and Paglinawan (2024) found that collaborative expertise significantly predicts professional competence and effective implementation of educational initiatives.

The findings also corroborate the observations of the district supervisor, who reported measurable improvements in student proficiency indicators resulting from enhanced collaboration among teachers. This supports the work of Paires and Mandal (2023), who concluded that collaborative teaching practices contribute directly to improved learning outcomes and inclusive educational environments.

Theoretically, Wenger's Communities of Practice Theory explains these findings by emphasizing that professional learning occurs through participation in communities where members share experiences, knowledge, and responsibilities (Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, Knowles' Adult Learning Theory suggests that adults are motivated to engage in professional learning when it addresses immediate workplace concerns and generates observable benefits (Knowles, 1980). The improvements in teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes reported by participants demonstrate the practical relevance and value of collaborative expertise as a professional learning approach.

Developing Sustainable Support Mechanisms and Strategic Frameworks for Long-Term Teacher Engagement in Collaborative Expertise

The findings revealed that sustaining teacher engagement in Collaborative Expertise Sessions requires a combination of structural support, effective leadership, psychological safety, and systematic collaborative frameworks. Participants emphasized that collaboration should be embedded within institutional systems rather than relying solely on teacher commitment or personal initiative.

The theme "Collaborative Expertise for Teacher Engagement and Professional Growth" highlighted the essential support mechanisms needed for sustainability. Teachers consistently identified protected collaborative time, adequate financial resources, access to technology, ongoing professional development, and leadership support as critical components of successful long-term implementation. These findings are consistent with Meneses et al. (2023), who argued that sustainable professional learning requires structured pathways, dedicated resources, and organizational support that enable teachers to develop adaptive expertise over time.

Participants also emphasized the importance of trust and psychological safety in maintaining engagement. Teachers reported that they were more willing to participate actively when leaders created supportive, non-judgmental environments that encouraged open communication and collaboration. Similar findings were reported by Monnier et al. (2023), who found that trust-building and psychological safety are essential conditions for sustained participation in collaborative professional learning communities.

Another significant finding involved the need for clearly structured collaborative frameworks. Teachers advocated for regular schedules, clear objectives, defined roles, established protocols, and systematic monitoring processes. These findings align with Nguyen et al. (2020), who emphasized that effective collaboration requires carefully designed frameworks that establish clear expectations and support productive interactions among participants. Likewise, Paires and Mandal (2023) noted that structured collaborative systems contribute to more effective implementation and sustainability of professional learning initiatives.

School and district leaders further emphasized the importance of implementation support, data-driven discussions, and protected collaborative time. The district supervisor highlighted that institutionalizing collaboration through professional learning communities and shared planning structures promoted consistency and collective ownership of educational reforms. These findings support Wenger's (1998) assertion that communities of practice require organizational support, shared goals, and opportunities for sustained interaction to remain effective and productive over time.

From a theoretical perspective, Wenger's Communities of Practice Theory provides a strong explanation for the sustainability of collaborative expertise. Communities become sustainable when members engage regularly, share a common purpose, and develop collective practices that support professional growth (Wenger, 1998). Similarly, Knowles' Adult Learning Theory emphasizes that adults remain engaged in learning when opportunities are relevant, supported, and responsive to professional needs (Knowles, 1980). Together, these theories suggest that sustainable collaborative expertise requires both structural support and relational conditions that foster ongoing participation and professional engagement.

Conclusions

The findings of the study conclude that Collaborative Expertise Sessions serve as a powerful mechanism for fostering teacher professional growth, improving instructional practices, and enhancing student learning outcomes when implemented within a supportive and structured environment. Although teachers initially experienced challenges such as time constraints, scheduling conflicts, and hesitation in openly sharing

professional struggles, these barriers were gradually overcome through the presence of clear collaborative structures, supportive leadership, trust, and psychological safety. The sessions transformed professional development from an isolated practice into a collective endeavor characterized by shared responsibility, reflective dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving. As teachers engaged in co-planning, peer feedback, and the exchange of effective instructional strategies, they improved lesson delivery, assessment practices, and responsiveness to learners' needs, leading to increased student engagement, confidence, and academic achievement. Furthermore, the sustainability of Collaborative Expertise Sessions depends on the institutionalization of essential support mechanisms, including protected collaborative time, structured protocols, adequate resources, strong leadership, and district-level commitment. Together, these elements create enduring professional learning communities that cultivate collective efficacy, continuous improvement, and a shared commitment to student success.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that the Department of Education (DepEd) strengthen the implementation of Collaborative Expertise Sessions by institutionalizing protected collaborative time within the official school calendar, allocating adequate financial and technological resources, and streamlining administrative requirements to minimize barriers that limit teacher participation. School heads and district supervisors should establish structured collaborative frameworks through clear protocols, defined roles, and continuous facilitation training for teacher-leaders to ensure that collaborative discussions are focused, reflective, and directly linked to instructional improvement. Teachers and educational leaders are likewise encouraged to adopt data-driven collaborative practices by engaging in co-planning, shared analysis of student performance data, collaborative lesson design, and regular monitoring of student learning outcomes to maximize the impact of collaborative expertise on classroom instruction. Furthermore, future researchers may expand this line of inquiry by examining the long-term sustainability of Collaborative Expertise Sessions in diverse educational contexts, exploring the potential of artificial intelligence and digital technologies in supporting teacher collaboration, and investigating leadership practices that effectively foster trust, psychological safety, and sustained engagement within professional learning communities.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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