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Bridging Theory and Practice in Basic of Educational Management Course: An Action Learning–Based Module to Develop 21st Century Skills

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ABSTRACT

Objective: *This study aims to design and evaluate an action learning–based instructional module to address the persistent gap between theoretical understanding and practical competence in basic of educational management course. The study also seeks to answer the research question of how a systematically developed action learning module can enhance student engagement, learning outcomes, and the development of 21st century skills in undergraduate educational management courses.* ***Method:*** *A research and development approach was employed using the ADDIE model, encompassing analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation stages. Data were collected through expert validation, student surveys, classroom observations, and pre-test and post-test assessments to examine the module's validity, practicality, and effectiveness.* ***Results:*** *Indicate that the instructional module demonstrated high validity and practicality, with expert evaluation scores exceeding a mean value of 4.20 and positive student perceptions regarding clarity, usability, and learning engagement. Implementation findings show notable improvements in student participation, collaborative problem-solving, and confidence in articulating managerial arguments. Furthermore, learning outcome analysis reveals a significant increase in academic achievement, with an average gain of 17.4 points in post-test scores compared to pre-test results.* ***Novelty:*** *The novelty of this study lies in positioning action learning as an instructional design framework embedded within a systematically developed and evaluated module, offering empirical evidence of its effectiveness in fostering 21st century skills in basic of educational management course.*

INTRODUCTION

The swift progression of digital technology, along with the growing intricacy of modern educational systems, has profoundly altered the expectations for higher education institutions (Khalid et al., 2018; Kumar & Manjula, 2024; Rahimi & Oh, 2024). Universities are no longer seen merely as institutions for knowledge dissemination, they are more anticipated to equip graduates to address real-world organizational difficulties (Bridgstock, 2016). In educational management, this transition is particularly pronounced, as graduates must exhibit not only theoretical comprehension but also the capacity to assess intricate circumstances, work efficiently, communicate professionally, and exercise responsible leadership (Ahmad Ridzuan et al., 2015; Pourkarimi et al., 2025). Without instructional designs that intentionally integrate experiential and reflective learning, these competencies risk remaining normative expectations rather than demonstrable professional capabilities. These competencies are widely recognized as core components of 21st century skills, which have become essential professional capacities for future educational leaders and administrators.

Despite the growing importance of these competencies, instructional practices in basic of educational management course often remain predominantly theory-oriented (Božič et al., 2022; Gao & He, 2021). Learning activities tend to emphasize conceptual mastery through lectures and textual analysis, with limited opportunities for students to apply theoretical frameworks to authentic managerial contexts (Grant & Baden-Fuller, 2018). Consequently, students may demonstrate adequate declarative knowledge while experiencing difficulties in translating that knowledge into practical decision-making, collaborative problem-solving, and reflective professional practice (Chen, 2025). This persistent gap between theory and practice not only limits student engagement but also reduces the perceived relevance of academic learning to the realities of educational organizations (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Wong & Liem, 2022).

Empirical evidence derived from program learning outcome evaluations further underscores this concern. Data from undergraduate educational management programs indicate that learning outcomes related to critical analysis, collaboration, and professional communication have not yet reached optimal achievement levels. A substantial proportion of students remain within moderate performance categories, suggesting that existing instructional approaches have not fully supported the development of higher-order thinking and applied managerial competencies. These findings point to a structural limitation within instructional design rather than deficiencies in student capability, thereby highlighting the need for pedagogical approaches that integrate conceptual understanding with experiential learning.

Action learning has been widely recognized as a pedagogical approach capable of addressing this challenge by directly linking learning with action and reflection (Mickler, 2025; O'Siochru et al., 2021). Through engagement in real or contextually relevant problems, students are encouraged to work collaboratively, propose and evaluate solutions, and critically reflect on their learning experiences (Antao & Morales, 2025; Ordóñez Fernández et al., 2026). Within the basic of educational management course, action learning holds particular relevance, as it mirrors the decision-making processes, leadership dynamics, and organizational complexities encountered in educational institutions. By situating learning within meaningful contexts, action learning enables students to internalize theoretical concepts while simultaneously developing professional competencies (Chung et al., 2016; Virtanen et al., 2017).

However, the effective implementation of action learning in higher education is highly dependent on the availability of systematically designed instructional resources (Trihantoyo et al., 2023; Wu Berberich, 2022). In practice, many lecturers lack structured instructional modules that explicitly integrate action learning principles with clearly defined learning outcomes and assessment strategies. Existing teaching materials are often fragmented or insufficiently aligned with program learning outcomes, making it difficult to ensure instructional coherence, practicality, and effectiveness. This limitation highlights the importance of developing instructional modules that not only adopt action learning as a pedagogical approach but also operationalize it within a structured instructional design framework.

In response to these challenges, this study focuses on the development of an action learning–based instructional module aimed at bridging the gap between theory and practice in the basic of educational management course. Employing the ADDIE development model, the module is systematically designed, validated, implemented, and

evaluated to ensure its validity, practicality, and effectiveness (Fang et al., 2011). The module integrates authentic learning activities, collaborative projects, reflective processes, and outcome-based assessment to support the development of both conceptual understanding and essential 21st century skills among students.

This study contributes to the theoretical discourse by positioning action learning not merely as a teaching strategy but as an instructional design framework embedded within a structured module. By integrating action learning principles into a module developed through the ADDIE model, this research demonstrates how experiential learning can be systematically aligned with course learning outcomes and program learning outcomes in unfergraduates of educational management study program. From a practical perspective, the study offers a validated instructional module that can be directly implemented in basic of educational management course. The module provides learning scenarios, collaborative project designs, and reflective activities.

Furthermore, the study contributes to institutional practice by demonstrating how instructional innovation can support the achievement of program learning outcomes. By explicitly linking learning activities to measurable competency indicators, the module functions as a practical tool for quality assurance and continuous improvement in higher education. In this way, the research supports evidence-informed decision-making in curriculum development and instructional policy within undergraduates of educational management study programs.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a research and development approach aimed at producing and evaluating an instructional module grounded in action learning principles for basic educational management course. The ADDIE model was employed as the guiding framework because of its structured yet flexible nature, allowing instructional products to be systematically designed, tested, and refined based on learner needs and learning outcome requirements (Fang et al., 2011). The development process encompassed five interconnected stages, namely analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation, which were applied iteratively to ensure that the instructional module addressed both pedagogical and practical considerations within higher education contexts.

The research was conducted in an undergraduate Educational Management study program at a public university in Indonesia, involving students enrolled in the basic educational management course during the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. A total of 38 students participated in the implementation stage, selected purposively as they represented the primary users of the instructional module, with this number corresponding to a single intact class officially registered for the basic educational management course, thereby ensuring instructional consistency and ecological validity of the learning intervention. In addition, two course lecturers were engaged during the preliminary analysis and evaluation stages to provide insights into instructional challenges and to support contextual alignment with curriculum standards. This setting enabled the researchers to examine the module's feasibility and effectiveness within an authentic learning environment.

At the initial stage, a needs analysis was carried out to identify gaps between expected learning outcomes and existing instructional practices. Data were gathered

through curriculum document analysis and student questionnaires. The analysis focused on the extent to which current learning activities facilitated student engagement, collaborative learning, and the development of higher-order thinking skills. Findings from this stage informed the formulation of learning objectives and competency indicators that were explicitly aligned with program learning outcomes and 21st century skill dimensions.

Based on the analysis results, the instructional module was designed to integrate action learning cycles into the structure of the course. Learning activities were organized around authentic educational management problems that required students to work collaboratively, apply theoretical concepts, and reflect on their decision-making processes. The design emphasized coherence between learning objectives, instructional activities, and assessment strategies, ensuring that each component of the module contributed meaningfully to the development of targeted competencies. Assessment methods included reflective tasks, group project outputs, and post-test evaluations to capture both cognitive and skill-based learning outcomes.

During the development stage, the module was produced as a comprehensive instructional resource consisting of learning materials, activity guidelines, worksheets, and assessment rubrics. The content was developed in accordance with the course syllabus and refined through expert validation involving a subject matter expert and a media expert. Validation instruments employed a five-point Likert scale to evaluate content relevance, instructional clarity, and usability (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Feedback from the experts was used to revise the module prior to its implementation in the classroom, ensuring instructional quality and contextual appropriateness.

The implementation of the instructional module took place over eight class meetings, during which students engaged in action learning activities facilitated by the course lecturer. Students were organized into small groups and assigned to analyze and respond to real or contextually relevant issues in educational management. Data were collected throughout this phase through classroom observations, student response questionnaires, and learning outcome assessments. A pre-test and post-test design was applied to examine changes in students' understanding and skill development following the use of the module.

Evaluation of the instructional module focused on its validity, practicality, and effectiveness. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively by calculating mean scores and interpreting them based on predetermined criteria, while qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed descriptively to capture patterns of student engagement and learning behavior. The integration of these data sources enabled a comprehensive assessment of the module's instructional quality and provided evidence of its contribution to strengthening students' 21st century skills within basic of educational management course.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study provide empirical evidence that the action learning–based instructional module effectively supports the development of 21st century skills in basic of educational management basic. The findings across the ADDIE stages collectively demonstrate that the module was developed in response to authentic instructional needs, implemented in a realistic academic context, and evaluated using rigorous quality criteria.

During the analysis stage, the data revealed a substantial misalignment between existing instructional practices and the competencies expected from students. Student survey results, as summarized in Table 1, indicate that a majority of students perceived the learning process as overly theoretical, with limited opportunities to engage in real-world problem-solving and collaborative activities. High percentages of students also reported insufficient development of critical thinking and low confidence in academic communication. These perceptions were reinforced by program learning outcome data, which showed that competencies related to analytical thinking and collaboration had not yet reached optimal levels. Together, these findings justified the need for an instructional intervention that could meaningfully integrate theory with practice.

Table 1. Analysis of Learning Needs (Student Survey Results, N = 114)

Learning Need Indicator	Percentage (%)
Learning is overly theoretical and lacks real practice	67.20
Limited experience with project-based group work	59.40
Insufficient development of critical thinking skills	72.10
Low confidence in academic communication	63.80
Learning tasks do not foster creativity	61.90

Source: reseacher data (2025)

Building on the needs identified during the analysis stage, the design phase focused on structuring learning activities that aligned course objectives with program learning outcomes and 21st century skill indicators. As illustrated in Table 2, the instructional design emphasized authentic educational management problems, collaborative action learning cycles, and assessment strategies that captured both process and outcomes. This alignment ensured that learning activities were not isolated tasks, but part of an integrated instructional system aimed at fostering applied competence.

Table 2. Alignment of Learning Design Components

Design Component	Description
Learning orientation	Real-world educational management problems
Learning strategy	Action learning cycles (problem–action–reflection)
Learning activities	Collaborative projects, case analysis, reflective discussions
Assessment methods	Reflective journals, group presentations, post-test evaluations
Targeted competencies	Critical thinking, collaboration, communication, leadership, digital literacy

Source: reseacher data (2025)

The development stage produced a complete instructional module that underwent expert validation to ensure instructional quality and usability. Validation results presented in Table 3 indicate that both material and media experts rated the module highly, particularly in terms of alignment with learning outcomes and clarity of presentation. The average scores placed the module in the "very valid" category,

suggesting that it was conceptually sound and suitable for undergraduate learning contexts. Feedback from the experts was incorporated into the final revision, strengthening the coherence and accessibility of the module.

Table 3. Expert Validation Results

Aspect Evaluated	Material Expert	Media Expert
Alignment with learning outcomes	4.50	4.40
Content quality	4.30	–
Instructional presentation	4.35	4.20
Visual design and navigation	–	4.15
Language clarity and readability	4.28	4.10
Average Score	4.36	4.21

Source: reseacher data (2025)

Implementation of the module in classroom learning revealed meaningful changes in student engagement and learning behavior. Observational data summarized in Table 4 show a marked increase in active participation, confidence in expressing ideas, and initiative in collaborative problem-solving after the module was applied. These changes suggest that the action learning activities successfully shifted the learning environment toward a more interactive and student-centered model, enabling students to engage more deeply with educational management concepts.

Table 4. Student Participation Before and After Module Implementation (N = 38)

Activity Indicator	Before (%)	After (%)
Active participation in discussions	58	88
Ability to express arguments	42	81
Initiative in problem solving	45	79

Source: reseacher data (2025)

The evaluation stage further confirmed the practicality of the instructional module from the student perspective. As shown in Table 5, students rated the module highly in terms of ease of use, alignment between activities and learning objectives, and overall learning engagement. The high practicality score indicates that the module was not only pedagogically sound but also feasible for routine classroom use without imposing excessive instructional or cognitive burdens.

Table 5. Practicality Evaluation by Students (N = 38)

Practicality Indicator	Mean Score
Ease of use	4.32
Alignment of activities with objectives	4.45
Time allocation feasibility	4.41
Learning engagement and attractiveness	4.49
Average Score	4.42

Source: reseacher data (2025)

In terms of effectiveness, learning outcome data demonstrate a substantial improvement following the implementation of the module. As presented in Table 6, the average post-test score increased by 17.4 points compared to the pre-test, indicating meaningful gains in students' conceptual understanding and applied knowledge. These results suggest that the instructional module effectively supported learning achievement while simultaneously strengthening students' ability to connect theoretical principles with practical educational management contexts.

Table 6. Learning Outcome Improvement

Assessment Type	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Improvement
Cognitive Test	64.5	81.9	+17.4

Source: reseacher data (2025)

Overall, the convergence of findings across all ADDIE stages confirms that the action learning–based instructional module is valid, practical, and effective in bridging the gap between theory and practice. The results indicate that a systematically designed instructional module can play a critical role in enhancing student engagement, improving learning outcomes, and strengthening 21st century skills in basic of educational management course.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide robust empirical support for the effectiveness of an action learning–based instructional module in bridging the long-standing gap between theoretical knowledge and practical competence in basic of educational management course. The substantial increase in student engagement indicators, such as active participation in discussions rising from 58% to 88% and confidence in expressing arguments improving from 42% to 81%. These results reinforce the view that meaningful learning in higher education emerges when students are positioned as active participants who engage in experiential and reflective learning rather than passive recipients of content (Bui & Yarsi, 2023).

The needs analysis further highlights a structural challenge commonly found in basic of educational management course's instruction, where learning remains predominantly theory-oriented with limited opportunities for application and collaboration. More than 70% of students reported insufficient development of critical thinking skills, and over 60% expressed low confidence in academic communication. The convergence of these perceptions with program learning outcome data, which showed moderate achievement levels in analytical and collaborative competencies, underscores a critical misalignment between curricular aspirations and instructional practices. This finding resonates with broader higher education research that emphasizes the necessity of pedagogical transformation to address competency gaps rather than merely enhancing student motivation or satisfaction (Bell, 2022; Jackson, 2019).

The high validity scores obtained during the development stage—4.36 from material experts and 4.21 from media experts—indicate that the instructional module effectively translated action learning principles into a coherent and pedagogically sound instructional design. These results suggest that experiential learning approaches require systematic instructional frameworks to be effective. Consistent with instructional design scholarship, the use of the ADDIE model ensured alignment between learning objectives, learning activities, and assessment strategies, thereby preventing the fragmented implementation that often undermines innovative pedagogies. This finding supports arguments in the literature that instructional innovation must be grounded in rigorous design processes to achieve sustainable impact in higher education contexts (Baroudi & ElSayary, 2024; Hunuk & MacPhail, 2023).

The implementation results further demonstrate the pedagogical value of action learning in basic of educational management course. The marked increase in students' initiative in collaborative problem-solving—from 45% before implementation to 79% afterward—reflects the capacity of action learning to cultivate shared responsibility and participatory learning cultures. These outcomes align with socio-constructivist perspectives that view knowledge construction as a socially mediated process, where dialogue, interaction, and reflection play central roles. Moreover, the observed gains in communication and collaboration skills are particularly significant for educational management students, for whom leadership, teamwork, and decision-making are essential professional competencies (Abdul-Rahim et al., 2025; López et al., 2019).

Student evaluations of practicality provide additional evidence supporting the feasibility of the instructional module. The overall practicality score of 4.42 indicates that students perceived the module as easy to use, engaging, and well aligned with learning objectives. This finding is crucial, as pedagogical approaches that are theoretically sound but operationally complex often face resistance in real classroom settings. The positive student responses suggest that action learning, when embedded within a well-structured instructional module, can be implemented without imposing excessive cognitive or procedural burdens on learners or instructors. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing that usability and clarity are key determinants of successful instructional innovation in higher education (Chugh et al., 2023; Stefaniak, 2024).

The effectiveness of the module is further substantiated by quantitative learning outcome data. The average post-test score increased by 17.4 points compared to the pre-test, indicating not only improved engagement but also significant gains in conceptual understanding. Importantly, qualitative reflections revealed that students were better able to connect theoretical frameworks of educational management with real-world contexts, suggesting that learning outcomes extended beyond surface-level knowledge acquisition. This finding supports existing evidence that experiential and action-oriented pedagogies enhance higher-order thinking and transferable knowledge, particularly when students are encouraged to reflect critically on their learning experiences (Bailey et al., 2026; Evans & Ferreira, 2020).

Collectively, these findings contribute to the growing body of research that positions action learning as a powerful pedagogical approach for developing 21st century skills in higher education. By embedding action learning within a systematically developed instructional module, this study demonstrates how experiential learning principles can be operationalized in a structured, evaluable, and outcome-oriented manner. The explicit alignment between action learning activities and program learning outcomes also highlights the role of instructional design in supporting institutional quality assurance and competency-based education frameworks (Hao, 2024; Keo et al., 2025; Vitchenko et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the study's scope. The research was conducted within a single undergraduate program and involved a limited number of participants, which may constrain the generalizability of the results. Future research could extend this work by implementing the module across diverse institutional settings or by examining its longitudinal impact on graduates' professional practice in educational management roles. Despite these limitations, the study provides compelling evidence that instructional design grounded in action learning can enhance student engagement, improve learning outcomes, and contribute meaningfully to the preparation of graduates equipped with essential 21st century competencies.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: This study concludes that an action learning–based instructional module, when systematically developed through a structured instructional design process, is effective in strengthening the alignment between theoretical understanding and practical competence in basic of educational management course. The findings demonstrate that students benefit not only in terms of cognitive achievement, as reflected in improved learning outcomes, but also in the development of essential 21st century skills, including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, through the integration of authentic learning tasks and reflective activities that connect theory with real-world educational management contexts. **Implication:** from a policy and practice perspective, these results suggest that higher education institutions should actively promote experiential and action-oriented pedagogies as part of curriculum implementation and quality assurance strategies, as action learning–based instructional modules provide practical instruments for operationalizing outcome-based education, particularly in programs preparing future educational leaders and administrators. **Limitation:** the findings should be interpreted considering certain limitations, as the module was implemented within a specific program context and evaluated over a limited instructional period, which may restrict the generalizability of the results and the assessment of long-term professional impact. **Future Research:** recommended to examine the scalability and sustained effects of action learning–based instructional modules across diverse institutional and disciplinary settings, as well as to explore the integration of digital technologies to enhance the flexibility, reach, and sustainability of action learning initiatives in higher education.

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