Research Paper Education

Action Research in a Teaching Process

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ABSTRACT

Action research is an approach designed to develop and improve teaching and learning processes. Action research provides teachers with a systematic procedure toreflect, implement and evaluate solutions. This article provides a review ofwhat actionresearch is and how it can be used to benefit the teaching process. The aim of the researchis to illustrate thebenefits ofconducting action research within the teaching process. Therefore, the importance and value of action research within education are explored.

KEYWORDS Action Research, Research, Methodology, Pedagogical Approach, Teaching Process, Implementation

Introduction:

Action research is widely used in education to improve the learning and teaching process in the classroom. It is considered to be a part of the teaching process and has become more important in educational organizationsfor 20 years in Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan. Action research is brought into thecurriculum of specialties in Universities as an elective subject. It is used to explore topics of teaching, curriculum development, and student behavior in the classroom. Action research is a process that allows teachers to investigate teaching and learningto improve their own and their students' learning. Kurt Lewinwas the first scholarto invent the idea of action research. According to Kurt Lewin action research is "a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action"(Lewin, 1946:35).

Carr and Kemmis provide a classic definition:"Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out"(Carr and Kemmis, 1986:162).

Action research is used not only for individual work, but also collaborative group work.

According to Stringers, the action research process works through three basic phases:

Look - building a picture, a question and gathering information. When evaluating we define and describe the problem to be investigated and the context in which it is set. We also describe what all the participants (educators, group members, managers etc.) have been doing.

Think - interpreting and explaining. When evaluating we analyze and interpret the situation. We reflect on what participants have been doing. We look at areas of success and any deficiencies, issues or problems.

Act - resolving issues and problems. In evaluation, we judge the worth, effectiveness, appropriateness, and outcomes of those activities. We act to formulate solutions to any problems (Stringer 1999: 18; 43-44;160).

The term "Action Research" is a key feature of this approach. The teacher does not simply perform a specific set of actions in order to investigate his pedagogical practice, but according to the structure of this approach, he/she designs a so-called meta-practice.

The effectiveness of using action research in the teaching process depends on four stages within a cycle. The first stage is planning.The planning stage helps to identify the question and plan the methods of searchingfor answers. The second stage is acting, which generates the interest of researchers in order to collect appropriate data. The third stage is observing. In this stage, researchers analyze the data and reflect the situation related to given question. Finally, the fourth stage is result, which is required to evaluate the progress and report the outcome. The search question is changed and adopted throughout this cyclical process. Researchers may repeat the cycle of four stages in order to receive successful result for given question. During the next cycles, errors can be corrected, improving the methods of activities, and, in teachers' practice, the pedagogical activities of the teacher. Particularly, in action research teachers reflect on their own teaching practice and they implement the result of this reflection and thereby improve their teaching. This kind of cyclical research process provides a balance between the change in the situation (action) and insight (research).

The differences between action research and academic research are described in table 1. The main importance of action research is a particular focus on doing research independently. Action research is the relation between research and discussion of a small group, who has an interest in the research question.

Table 1.The differences between Action Research and Academic Research.

Stages	Action Research	Academic Research
Theoretical aspects		
Case	Problems are revealed by researcher	Problems are revealed by the need of social, economic and cultural situation of humanity
Aim	Continual; to solve immediate problems and increase their understanding	Occasional; to solve and generalize the problems
Method	Effective/pro-active strategically faced with daily problems; cyclical process	Logically/methodologically driven; to analyze the similar previous/ alternative problems
Source	Use innovative sources; Getting information from your environment, books, colleagues, students, pupils, parents	Use primary original and fundamental sources
Approach	Use systematical and regulated activities; intervene in the situation and implement it in practice	Experiment; to predict and evaluate the situation; to generalize the broad information and introduce it in knowledge
Quality	Focusing on practical habits and skills	Using significant historical, statistical, theoretical, comparative and other data
Share	Involves all stakeholders	Involves other researchers
Result and reflection	Dissemination; it will be implemented practically and improve the situation	To publish; it will be used in teaching processes as a theoretical/fundamental knowledge, investigation, bachelor and master thesis, PhD researches
Practical aspects		
Planning	- identify the problems; - raise a question; - plan the ways of searching answers; - organize the sharing in interesting groups	- prepare for research - define the goals and objectives - explore the main problems of the topic - identify the methods of investigation - devise the plan
Acting	- engage the researchers in the process; - collect appropriate data; - study/learn process; - seek answers;	- access resources; - locate questions logically related to the significant sources; - select theoretical and practical sources; - gather statistical and analytical data
Observing	- analyze and collect data; - reflect the situation;	- process and analyze the information on the topic - test the practical situations - process the innovative points
Result	- evaluate the progress; - implement improvement; - report result; - changebehavior	- revise critical opinions of interesting colleagues - present to a publication - transfer learning into real using

To see action research in use, it is better to observe it in practice.

The current piece of action research was conducted at ICLON, Leiden University by the trainers Tamara Platteel and Daan-Romein for Kazakhstani teachers of an internship programme. The purpose of this action research was to observe the process of gathering and analyzing data as it is done in Dutch-universities. The main objective of this experiment is to observe the improving and diversifying processes of teaching and learning.

The research included four steps; each of them had a purpose and different tasks, which were mentioned above. Action research was executed during the five lessons of Kazakhstani teachers' internship programme at the ICLON, Leiden University.

The first lesson was to discovera problematic question in the teaching process, search for ways to solve them and work out the research question. The process of the lesson on action research was to think of the given question in terms of "How can I….?" Firstly, one person from the class was chosen. Secondly, the teacher askedcritical questions based on the topic and other students helped him/her too. Thirdly, the question of the chosen person was analyzed by other members of the group.All the participantswrote their own ideas and advice related to the given question in terms of"I think the problem of…is…" and this was discussed in the group. Finally, the teacher gave a task to write a recommendation to that person.

The purpose of the second lessonwas to discuss the question in order to improve it. The people in the group were divided into three subgroups of three participants. One of the participants told the group about the research question and the other two asked critical questions where there was no advice, no tips, no suggestions, no judgment. Afterwards, the participants wrote the problem analysis and their recommendations to the question.

The third lesson was to identify the stakeholders, i.e. the people who have an impact on the research.Stakeholders can be colleagues, students, teachers and trainers.Three stakeholders were definedin relation to the research question. Participants were asked to determine the way they were going to communicate with the stakeholders.

The fourth lesson was to consolidate the answers of the stakeholders. The participants wrote emails to their stakeholders and then they had to analyze the answers. Furthermore, they had to search for additional theoretical material.

The last lesson was to work out the plan of implementing the outcomes into the learning process of participants' practice. The plan had to contain answers for questions such as "What have you done so far? When? How? Why? Who?"In order to answer the first question"What have you done so far?, the participants just consolidated all the knowledge acquired during the process of action research.Regarding "How" and "Why" questions participants had to determine methods of implementing action research results in their practice.

To summarize, it should be noted that the main points of action research are to involve other people, to determine the problem, and to, not to make it too wide; otherwise it would be difficult to determine the results.

In the current article, we have tried to conduct a structured reflection, analyze the stages of action research as applied to pedagogical research. It is explained that action research helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice in education. It is designed to solve problems associated with disconnection of theoretical knowledge with practice. As a practice-oriented approach, it develops professional skills of the teacher in the role of researcher. This approach has enabled us to build teacher-trainee leadership skills to transform and improve our own professional activities.

Analyzing the theoretical aspect of action research, we declare that it is one of the effective methodsof teaching. The table 1 "The differences between action research and academic research" and practical examples mentioned above confirm that action research develops critical thinking and self-study abilities of students. Using of action research helps teachers to motivate students for studying the disciplines.

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