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How School Teachers can Benefit from Action Research: A case study

Muhammad Salahuddin *

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I. Introduction

Educational research is a disciplined attempt to address questions or solve problems through the collection and analyses of data for the purpose of description, explanation, generation and prediction (Anderson & Arsenault, 2005). Action research is one type of educational research which has begun in the beginning of 20th century (Begum, Zinnah & Alam, 2002). Generally it has been conducted by teachers, administrators or other educational professionals for solving a specific problem or providing information to decision making at all levels of education (Wiersma, 2000). It has emphasized on practical focus, the educator-researcher's own practice, collaboration, a dynamic process, a plan of action and sharing research (Creswell, 2008). Those things known as a characteristics of action research.

Action research is not a problem solving approach only, but also a systemic process of improving the present situation through maintaining its philosophy. The purpose of action research is to earn personal and professional development by conducting an action (Koshy, 2005). It has been used in various sectors for improving running situations, such as by workers in community development, practitioners to progress their own practice, teacher to improve instruction and motivate learners and researchers to solve specific problem (IGNOU-MHRD project, New Delhi). In this 21st century, action research is done by teachers (Dhali, 2006) and this benefit at the least three areas: political, professional and personal (McNiff, 1999). Also, through action research a teacher can improve various aspects of literacy situation as- at-risk students, becoming a teacher, block scheduling, bully prevention, conflict management in school, classroom behavior management, creating equitable classroom, development of basic literacy skills, inclusive education, online learning, parental involvement, professional development of teachers, role of institutional coordinator, science and mathematics teaching, school improvement, school's monitoring



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programme, staff collaboration in the school restructuring process, social justice, special education and teacher's beliefs (Sharon Jeffrey, 1996 cited in Pine, 2009).

This paper presents a discussion first on definitions of action research, types of action research and the difference between traditional research and action research. Thus the benefits of action research is presented briefly. Finally a case study (The case study was conducted in 2010 at the Engineering University School. The study was stimulated by the need to manage a conflict situation prevailing between boys and girls in class seven in that school. An action research undertake to address such specific situation shows how a teachers can gain personal and professional development through an action research.) is provided to illustrate 'how teacher benefit from action research'.

2. Action Research

Action research is a systematic process which is done by a teacher or other individuals in educational setting to collect information about, and subsequently improve, the ways their particular educational setting operates, their teaching and their students learning (Creswell, 2008 cited in Mills, 2000). It emphasizes on solving a problem in local or natural setting

immediately (Best & Kahn, 2005). It is a special kind of research which conducts to determine effectiveness of actions for improving a situation is called action research (Habib, 2006).

The action research movement in education began in America in 1940s, according to Koshy (2005). In 1946 Kurt Lewin, an American social psychologist, (the founder of action research) conducted a study following action research model. In 1967-72 John Hopkins used action research for curriculum development process at United Kingdom (UK) and in 1975 Lawrence Stenhouse opened a new path of action research through his study 'an introduction to curriculum and research and development'. In 1976 Elliot and Adelman used action research to examine the existing class room practice. These authors considered four steps of an action research is planning, acting, observing and reflecting. At the consequence of time, Stephen Kemmis and Robin Mc Taggoert also worked to progress action research models and issues in Australia. They said that, the self reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and re-planning as the basis for problem solving (McNiff, 1999). In Bangladesh, the action is totally absent in educational research procedures. Some of the non government institutions follow the action research system in

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their educational working process. Some researchers use personally this research process as a unit of education research course (Begum, et. al. 2002).

Only problem solving is not an action research but it follows some principles such as participatory, sharing, time bounding, problem solving, collaborative attitude, distributive leadership, openness, democratic environment and collaborative decision (Nazneen & Hossen, 2006; Anam & Rahman, 2006). When a researcher conducts his study following this philosophy and procedures it will be named as action research.

3. Types of action research

Action research is not a new concept of educational research in developed country; but in developing countries it is now at the preliminary stage. In developed countries, there are different types of action research used for problem solving in class room and it is depending upon the participants involved (Ferrance, 2000). It has been already discussed that many participants involved with action research for conducting their study. In that case action research can involve a single teacher investigation, a group of teachers working on a common problem, a team of teachers working on a school- or district-wide issue (IGNOU-MHRD project, New Delhi). Now we present a comparative study on types of action research according to Ferrance, (2000),

	Individual teacher research	Collaborative Action research	School-wide Action research	District-wide Action research
Focus	Single classroom issue	Single or several classrooms with common issue	School issue, problem or area of collective interest	District issue Organizational structures
Possible support needed	Coach/mentor Access to technology Assistance with data organization and analysis	Substitute teachers Release time Close link with administrators	School commitment Leadership Communication External partners	District commitment Facilitator Recorder Communication External partners
Potential impact	Curriculum Instruction Assessment	Curriculum Instruction Assessment Policy	Potential to impact school restructuring and change Policy Parent involvement Evaluation of programs	Allocation of resources Professional development activities Organizational structures Policy
Side effects	Practice informed by data Information not always shared	Improved collegiality Formation of partnerships	Improved collegiality, collaboration, and communication Team building Disagreements on process	Improved collegiality, collaboration, and communication Team building Disagreements on process Shared vision

(Action Research, p.6)

4. Difference between traditional research and action research

Traditional research and action research are not similar. Traditional research is a process of logical steps to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue (Creswell, 2008). On the other hand, action research is problem

solving and providing information for decision making at all level of education (Wiersma, 2000). Regarding the above statements we will give a clear concept about the difference between traditional research and action research. Now we present a narrative description about this issue. According to Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon (2010), difference between traditional research and action research is-

	Traditional Research	Action Research
Usually led by	Outside expert	Practitioners
Purpose	Develop new knowledge	Solve practical problem, improve practice
Types of data gathered	Quantitative or qualitative	Quantitative or qualitative
Purpose of gathering and analyzing data	Gain better understanding of phenomena, develop or test hypotheses	Explore practical problem, guide action planning, evaluate result
Standard for quality research	Peer review of methods and results	The research results in desired change
Primary audience (s)	Other researchers, the profession, government or private agencies	Members of the school community

(Supervision and Instructional Leadership: A Development Approach, p.305)

5. Benefits of action research for a teacher

Action research is situational, collaborative, participatory and self evaluative process of conducting a research which is very helpful for teachers. According to Dhali (2006), action research has been done by the teachers, they have encouraged and supported to their study and own teaching. He claim that, they have benefited some special areas such as to notice what their students really do, to get feedback about what they are doing, to justify their teaching learning process, to become less dependent on whom are not related to their teaching process. The action research also helps

school teachers to get ideas about others teachers teaching learning strategy.

For a number of reasons, action research can be worthwhile pursuit for educators. Ferrance (2000) has described some benefits of action research. He mention that action research helps to look at one's teaching in a structured manner rather than informal manner, to get confidence about his work, influence on teachers thinking skills and sense of efficacy, to know about students and colleagues, helps to determine ways of improving situation, develop a strong relationship among colleagues as it requires sharing of ideas and thoughts, brings positive changes in pattern of collegiality, communication and networking.

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According to Pine (2009), Practicing the strategies and skills of action research, teachers can be benefited by different ways. Action research helps in designing their own meaningful pedagogy, make a new identify of teacher as expert to one of inquirer and specially data collection procedures help in five categories of knowledge such as, knowledge of self, knowledge of students, knowledge of curriculum, also instruction and knowledge of theory.

6. Methods

This Study was conducted following the qualitative research approach with an action research perspective on secondary schools class room teaching learning process. Researcher conducts a case study following the model of Stephen Kemmis. This case study has illustrated to make clear how teacher's benefits from action research. Finally, it is an individual teacher's action research that has conducted in Engineering University High School.

7. A Case study

7.1 Problem Identification & Issues

When I was a trainee teacher in Engineering University High School, Dhaka, I found that there was no friendship among boys and girls students in class seven. At the beginning of classes, when social science teacher Mr. Kamruzzan started the class, he faced some problems to manage the class room. Most of the students gave him objection about one another. At that time I was sat on the back bench of the class and I was bit anxious to see the scenario of the class. After few days when I started my teaching in the class and I assigned them group presentation, group work, but they were not interested to do that. There was no sharing mentality among the students. These types of problem hampered the normal activities of the class.

I decided to create a new path to solve the problem. I discussed the matter with other teachers and they said that they also faced such kind of problems in the class.

7.2 Planning

Firstly I planned to motivate the students of the class, as a result they agreed to work with one another and promote friendship among them. I planed to counseling with them on gender equity and importance of group work.

7.3 Acting

I told them about the gender equity, importance of working together, sharing and discussion about learning. After that I assigned them group works/discussions about a particular topic.

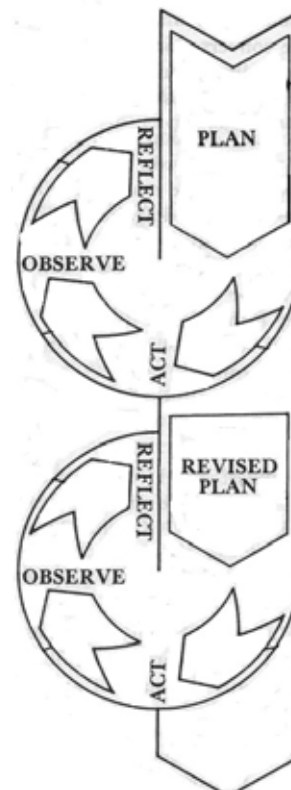


Fig-1: Stephen Kemmis Action Research Model

7.4 Observing

Actually observation started beginning of problem identification. At the time

of acting, I observed that students were gradually working together, objections were started to reducing but it was time consuming and noisy environment was created in the class room.

7.5 Reflecting

After conducting these works I saw that the activity was lively. But Class management should more effective and controlled.

7.6 Revised Plan

On that situation I shared my whole process to my colleagues (Trainee teacher & Class teacher) and supervisors (University teachers). They gave me some suggestions. With these I revised a new plan. I planed to monitor class more effectively and make a good time schedule for completing my syllabus.

7.7 Acting

I tried to monitor class room effectively and asked questions to those students who were making noise in class room. I also used the best utilization of time.

7.8 Observing

Students were working together and sharing their thoughts in class room. Time consuming and noisy environment was controlled systematically.

7.9 Reflecting

I reflect that class room management was effective and all students were active for group work. This environment was helpful for me to provide joyful learning in class seven students'.

8. Conclusion:

This case study was an individual action research. These steps of action research are not fixed, but they are interrelated. These steps helped the teacher to know about the students, identify their problem specifically, solving the problem using different techniques, revise the situation and finally make the classroom situation helpful for joyful teaching learning. Some teachers worked as mentor but there was no expert. While conducting an action research, one can take help on advice of expert of outside if necessary (Begum et al. 2002). Through this case study, it is clear that a teacher can solve classroom problem using action research.

Action research is the only research which gives priority to the real agent in micro level such as teachers and students. If teacher can apply this research effectively and improve the situation then it will be the real improvement in education system (Begum et al. 2002). For this point of view, we should encourage teachers for conducting action research.

The teachers were motivated to continue the training and they were progressing slowly.



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