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CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH: PARADIGM SHIFT IN TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

Action research is an applied scholarly paradigm resulting in action for continuous improvement in our teaching learning techniques. It has been established as an appropriate research paradigm for educational, professional, managerial, and organizational development. Classroom AR is collaborative, critical, and self-critical inquiry by practitioners into a major problem or issues in their own practice. This paper defines classroom action research which is carried out as an effective way of professional development. This article reviews the iterative action research process of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and revising in which the researchers collaborate, openly communicate, critically analyze, reflect, and relate their classroom practice to theory. It also presents an outline of how action research could be conducted in the form of reflective cycle as the part of regular classroom activities.

Keywords: Action research, classroom, pedagogy, active learning, reflection, paradigm shift

Background

In terms of historical perspective on action research, Lewin (1948) is deemed as a father of AC in the educational world of the teacher research. In social science, almost all the disciplines have two facts, i.e. theoretical and applied. Theory is learnt to gain insight into the concerned discipline and that insight is, in turn, supposed to be applied in the real practice. Research, which is carried out to contribute to theory is known as theoretical research, and which aims to help in practice is known as applied research (Bhattarai, 2005). The main aim of former type is to add some new knowledge to the existing body of knowledge of the concerned discipline whereas the latter aims to solve existing problems in real practical field.

Classroom Action Research (CAR) plays an important role in teacher education. CAR requires a combination of research and practice for its continual development. Reflection is an important process in the action research spiral because it encourages the impacted parties to criticize, exchange, and share their findings (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988; Mettetal, 2004; Wongwanich, 2001). Nepalese education system cannot fully utilize CAR on an individual (teacher), organizational, and professional levels. At individual level, teachers often use research results to improve problems in a certain study without continuing the improvement for the next study.

How can CAR be utilized on an individual and organizational level? To turn the individual learning (teachers) into the organizational learning (schools), a crucial step must be conducted. That step is knowledge sharing among the teachers (Collinson and Cook, 2003). If schools can conduct all steps of the CAR process, especially the reflection and sharing, a true development from teacher learning to school learning can become a reality. Organizational learning is a process in which individuals share knowledge, understanding, and behavior to do new things. When a person changes his thinking or behavior, there will be changes within his organization as well.

Teacher quality and the evaluation of effective teaching are dependent upon student outcomes or gains demonstrated by a wide range of students who bring diverse experiences as well as other social factors found in the classroom. A recent paradigm shift in the focus of educational research and the role of teachers and teacher educators (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2006) might address the challenges of how to appropriately measure teacher performance. It is possible that the teachers through their own problematization of the teaching and learning process within the contexts and through their own research, they can closely examine their role as change agents and decision-makers (Alsop, Dippo, and Zandvliet, 2007).

The scholars noticed this disparity in late 1940s (Denscombe, 1999) and looked for the new type of research which could bridge the gap between the research findings and their implementations to enhance the practice of concerned discipline. As a result, in 1946, Kurt Lewin, for the first time, used the term *action research* and discussed its features. After him many scholars discussed its characteristics, purposes, and processes of this type of research. Some of them preferred slightly different names as well. For Johnson (1992), it is a *teacher research* because the real teacher is the researcher. For Wallace (1998), it is a *professional reflection* because the practitioner reflects upon his/her current practice and strives to improve the practice through research (as cited in Bhattarai, 2005).

In this paper “Classroom Action Research: Paradigm Shift in Teaching” the focus is firstly on identifying some of the key concepts of AR, defining AR, the process in CAR, focusing on the pedagogical issues, and reflection.

Objective of the study

The main objective of this study is to develop the classroom action research process to enhance teacher quality and school learning. The purpose of this paper is to encourage business educators to utilize the action research paradigm to meet their educational responsibilities in the everyday improvement of classroom practices.

Significance of the study

The significance of this study is to help improve the teaching profession and create learning organizations. The notable result is CAR with wider viewpoint as lead to CAR process that helps enhance school learning which benefits CAR on both individual and organizational levels.

Methodology of the study

This paper is based on literature review as a design of study. The introspective design that investigates a phenomenon, situation, or issue that has happened in the past (Kumar, 2009) was adopted to carry out the study. So, the study was descriptive and qualitative in nature. The researcher was only selected purposefully as the sample of the study because in the qualitative research, “the main goal of sampling is to find out individual who can provide rich and varied insight into the phenomena under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn” (Dornyei, 2007). Secondary sources for the study included the websites, based on the document study, reviewed related articles, and journals in this study.

Self-reflection of the researcher and self-study of the secondary sources of data were used as the tools for data collection. Self-reflection and memoire documented in the daily diary provided vivid comprehensive and informative data for the research. The data collected in the introspective diary journals were analyzed using the explanatory mode. The data were analyzed in order to discover inherent facts (Koul, 2012) about the course under discussion.

Introduction to Action Research

Bogdan & Biklen (1992) explain that action research is the systematic collection of information that is designed to bring social change. In addition, Cameron- Jones (1983) defines action research as a research carried out by practitioners with a view to improve their professional practice and understand it better. Allwright & Bailey (1991), mention that it is a research that centers on the classroom, and simply tries to investigate what actually happens inside the classroom. It treats classroom interaction as virtually the only object worthy of investigation.

Hopkins (2002) mentions that action research combines a substantive act with a research procedure, and that it is action disciplined by enquiry and a personal attempt at understanding, while engaged in a process of improvement and reform. In Cohen & Manion's (1985) view, action research is conducted aiming at the improvement of the current affairs through the process of identifying the solving problem in a specific context. Similarly, Kemmis (1988) thinks that action research is a form of self-reflective action research enquiry undertaken by participants in order to improve their own professional practices. Likewise, in Elliott's (1991) words action research is the study of a social situation with a view to improve the quality of action within it. Johnson (1992) also views it as teaching through inquiry with the aim of developing professional practice.

Definitions mentioned above infer to the general meaning of action research and reflects the meaning of classroom action research. Particularly, it involves the practices done by teachers in their own classrooms or issues on how they respond to learner's errors, how interaction occurs in classrooms, the feeling of teachers and learners during or after the lessons, and so on.

AR aims to solve a particular teaching-learning problem that has been identified. It is a reflective process that improves the teaching practice and the curriculum. A teacher who is philosophical, reflective, and dedicated to developing as thinking professional, AR is an appealing way to look more closely at classroom issues or to investigate into teaching dilemmas. Technical action research aims to improve effectiveness of educational or managerial practice.

The Process in Classroom Action Research

Research is about generating knowledge. CAR creates knowledge based on enquiries conducted within specific and often practical context. As articulated earlier, the purpose of CAR is to learn through action that then leads on to personal or professional development. As mentioned in the introduction, process of action research refers to the different steps used in the research. Different scholars discuss almost similar steps of CAR, but they slightly differ in ordering of the steps. The table below exhibits different steps for conducting classroom action research as suggested by different scholars;

Hopkins (1985) states that process of classroom action research include plan, action, observe, and reflect. Also, Nunan (1992) states that process of classroom action research include initiation, preliminary investigation, hypothesis, intervention, evaluation, dissemination, and follow up. Likewise, Wallace (1998) states that process of classroom action research includes consider problem/ issues ask questions, action research, data collection and analysis, and application of professional practice. Finally, Denscombe (1999) mentions that process of classroom action research includes professional practice, critical reflection and identifying problem, research (systematic and rigorous inquiry), strategic planning translation of findings into action, and action (instigate change).

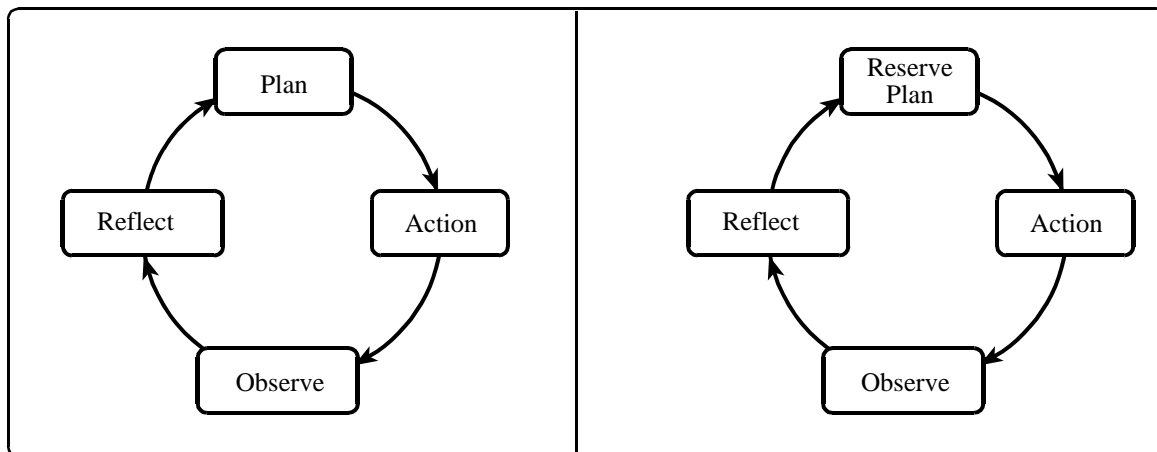


Figure 1: Action research process/cycle (Source: Hopkins, 1985.)

A classroom action research is done through a cycle and is designed into 4 steps. Hopkins (1985), Kemmis and Taggart (1988), state that the research starts from *planning* for an action. Then, the plan is implemented as an *action* in classroom and the action is then *observed*. Finally, the *reflection* is made to analyze the data obtained during the action.

Most models represent action research as a cycle, starting with a question and ending with more questions. Strickland, Borg, Gall and Gall (1993) explain that there are seven steps of action research. They are discussed as follows:

First is to identify a classroom-related question that you would like to research. Good question may include "Are my students more engaged when they work individually or when they work in groups?" *Second* is to examine whether any research applicable to your question. For example, you may investigate studies about the impact of technology on learning. *Third*, is to choose a teaching design that would work most effectively in answering your research questions. For example, you may teach Chapter 1 using one particular method, teach Chapter 2 using another method, and then examine how the grades from the two Chapters differed. It will give you an idea of an answer. *Fourth* is to collect the data that you need to help answer your research question, such as student grades, results of a survey or your own anecdotal notes about your classroom. Make sure to take notes on everything that you see or hear that relates to your question. *Fifth* one is to analyze the data you have collected to conclude, you can make a graph or table of test scores, categorize various anecdotes or make an annotated timeline during the analysis of the process. Similarly, *sixth* one is to implement a strategy used on your results. If you discovered that the strategy you were using was helpful, the new strategy would simply build on what you were already doing. If you found, however, that an alternative way of teaching was most effective, you could brainstorm various ways to put that method of teaching into practice. Finally, the *Seventh* one is to share your findings with colleagues and others who might be interested. The most important thing in action research is reflection and which has been discussed in the following section.

Reflection

Reflection is a significant component of self-study and action research (Mills, 2003) as it is a powerful way to know about the self in research and practice as well as to unpack the very self in teaching practice. Reflective practice in teacher education allows teacher educators to explore how teachers learn by including 'I' in an epistemology of reflective practice (Whitehead, 2000). Reflective pedagogy helps teachers closely examine current practice and spearhead changes as teacher leaders (Reason and Reason, 2007).

Swinglehurst, Russel, and Greenhalgh (2008) assert that CAR is becoming a popular approach to studying complex social situations such as those found in educational settings, where the focus is

on simultaneous (inquiry) into practice (generating knowledge) and action to improve situations. Through this self-directed inquiry, the teacher will (i) “ask essential questions, gather data and necessary information, and analyze and interpret the information to answer their questions” (McVicker, 2008/2009); and (ii) engage in critical and reflective thinking through self-directed (Elder and Paul, 2007) exploration to self-evaluate current practice.

Paradigm Shift in Teaching

Teaching has been considered as a researching framework in which teachers are known as researchers. Paradigm shift in teaching has indicated that teaching practices may be subject to change and improvement. Teachers’ interest has increased in inquiry of their teaching practices concerning reflective thinking, theories, professional development and curriculum design and deliberation (Wittrock, 1986). This motivation in teaching has enhanced among teachers as researchers who work under an umbrella of action research. According to McNiff (2002), action research is the process of transformation, a systematic process to observe, describe, plan, act, reflect, evaluate, modify (cited in Bughio, 2012). In classroom action research, the researcher investigates the problem related to their teaching practices with colleagues to solve the problem of immediate concern (Bughio, 2012).

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1992) “to do action research is to plan, act, observe, and reflect, more carefully, more systematically, and more rigorously than one usually does in everyday life.” This refers to that action research is a systematic process. It is a practice composed of saying, doing, and relating. It changes people’s practices, their understandings of their practices, and conditions under which they practice (Kemmis, 2007). The combination of action and research renders that action is a form of discipline inquiry, in which a personal attempt is made to understand, improve, and reform practice (Hopkins, 1985). These concepts and definitions about CAR advocate that it is a practice which aims at improving and bringing some changes and reflecting on what is done.

Conclusion

Action research is essentially the scientific method of teaching. Classroom Action Research (CAR) is a way of systematically examining teaching to gain new insights. CAR is a method of finding out what works best in the classroom so that teacher can improve student learning. Action research paradigm is to identify problem, to solve it by suggesting some pedagogical implications. The goal of CAR is to improve teacher’s own teaching in his own classroom. One can certainly be an excellent teacher without engaging in CAR. It enhances one’s knowledge of the profession of teaching and increases teacher quality to ensure that teachers reflect on their practice to learn from and improve it through continuing reflection and interactions. Action research is a process through which information is gathered with the goal of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, and affecting positive changes. The major implication is that action research is an appropriate paradigm for everyday classroom practice which monitors the learning process, as well as learning outcomes. The study also suggests that such approach needs to be implicated in classroom pedagogy in Nepal.

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