

Connecting Action Research in English Language Teaching: A Postulation

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Abstract

The paper entitled 'Connecting Action Research in English Language Teaching: A Postulation' aims to explore the theoretical aspects of action research by linking the idea with a particular context where the English language is being taught as a foreign language. It was written by collecting related documents from the library and online sources specifically. The resources were sorted out to make them relevant to the selected issue. Specifically, the books and generally, some articles were reviewed mainly for the literature and made a list thematically. Then, they were analyzed, interpreted, and connected to the topic. It was concluded that the area of action research is broad and many action kinds of research are being done cyclically in social science. As it is a buzz word in the field of education, particularly in English as a foreign language teaching, the practitioners are requested to connect the action research for the purpose of improving the teaching-learning as well as professional development in this nonnative English situation.

Keywords: Improving, Practitioner, Connecting, Intervention, A Postulation

Introduction

The English language is mostly a foreign language in Nepal. It is taken one of the difficult subjects in the schools specifically remote areas of the country. Even Bachelor level learners often complain about having English as a difficult course. So this is a request to implement action research simultaneously as part of teaching and learning to improve the context of English in Nepal.

To understand the concept of action research, various literature shows that action research in its traditional sense comes from the work of Kurt Lewin (1946, 1948) and involves a collaborative (Somekh, 2006; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005) change management or problem-solving relationship between researcher and client aimed at both solving a problem and generating new knowledge. Action is synonymously understood as an activity or work, and the term research is to create new knowledge. So this research is based on the systematic activity which is done by the involvement of the concerned people to generate new knowledge. It is the task of those people who are directly involved in the social

situation that is being researched (Altrichter et al., 2005). According to Coghlan and Brannick (2005), it is the research in action rather than research about the action.

Action research is the study of that issue which is experienced by a particular group of people on their own work, to help them improve what they do, including how they work with and for others (Kemmis and McTaggart (1992) as cited in (Cohen et al., 2007). Action research is social research that is carried out by a team that includes a professional action researcher and the members of an organization, community, or network ("stakeholders") who are seeking to improve the participants' situation (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). So it includes a kind of collaborative practice to generate new knowledge while being involved in everyday task. It is done within the network of the people who are experiencing the same phenomena in their working life. Action research is designed among the people who belong to the same field and desire to form new way of doing activity: they want to do the task another way so that there will be new insights for that specific situation.

Action research in other sense, is another way to improve practice, so it is creating knowledge which is practice based, and practice is understood as action and research. It is done by practitioners (Tavakoli, 2012; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Efron & Ravid, 2013) in any area of social science to bring change in the project working among the members in the same field of profession. It is carried out in the working place and by working people with the purpose of transformation of the activities.

As the actions which are performed by the educationists to improve the existing situation in their working practice is educational action research. It is more familiar in teaching and learning process because there exists problems and to be solved by those teachers who are working and facing the problems in their daily activities. It is done by the action doer in the context of work especially teachers in education sector who face problem in the classroom and wanted to solve it.

Value and Purpose of Action Research

Action research begins with the aim of transforming in the society (Somekh, 2006). People agreed that action research has significant potential for human betterment (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). It is necessary for the improvement of the working situation with evidences of empirical activities. An action research helps to develop individual knowledge and skills especially plays role for professional development because it helps to identify the problem in the particular working area and deals problematic situation for further progress. It enhances the situation as emphasized by the progressive (Efron & Ravid, 2013) educational leaders.

An action research helps to make use of the theories in the real field and test to what extent it is working. It helps for the professional growth and empowerment with systematic engagement in in the practice. Action research is change oriented to bring transformation in the existed situation. So it is a kind of progressive research with improving practice (both action and research), creating knowledge and generating (Efron & Ravid, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010) living theories of practice. It is to make that action more effective while simultaneously building up a body of scientific knowledge (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

Thus, action research is one of the most powerful ways (Greenwood & Levin, 2007) to generate new knowledge which helps to form theories. It is a collaborative practice among the stakeholders in a common institution to make a theory rather than theory to practice. Action researchers wanted to make

theory practical in order to improve practice (Altrichter & Gstettner, 1993) from the purposeful and systematic engagement.

Action research is important and valued to improve the situation in the particular working context in general and educational practices in particular. Educational action research is the driving force in the classroom (Burns, 2010) where activity plays vital role to bring change in the educational issues. The condition of teaching and learning English can be enhanced by the involvement of teachers, students, and other stakeholders in action research as English is not recorded a native language.

Areas of Action Research

Since its origin of concept, action research has been practiced in many diverse fields, for example, the women's movement, indigenous land rights, green and conservation activism, disease prevention and in professional fields such as education, nursing, medicine and agriculture (Kemmis et al., 2014). Different kinds of action research have emerged across different fields to bring new knowledge from the different models of activities. The action research are various in nature because of the unique types of the problems they confront in different working areas and the mismatch of dominant research methods with those emerging problems contextually.

Action research can be used in almost any setting where a problem lies. The process of involving people, doing tasks and following certain procedures, investigation is carried out for the solution of the issue. From the action in the day to day practice where some changes of feature results in a more desirable outcome (Cohen et al., 2007). So the social activist implemented this research to solve social problems and to bring change in the working conditions. Similarly, managers and workers carried out this kind of activity in the offices to challenge the practical issues. Likewise, nurses, doctors, and health professionals utilized this research to solve health related problems. With the new way of practice, farmers can solve the problems and transform their agricultural practices. Action research is also called a reform practice (Greenwood & Levin, 2007) so any field of social science can be area of action research which needs change.

As the seeds of action research are to be found as early as the late nineteenth century in the Science Education movement and a variety of other social reform initiatives McKernan (1996) as cited in (Burns, 1999). The area of educational action research involves the stakeholders who work in the fields of education can be teachers, educationists, students, and even guardians collaboratively want to bring desirable changes in the practices of education. Although, it can be used in any sector of social science, it is especially used by educators who want to bring new trend in educational field for better result from their own involvement in the process of teaching and learning.

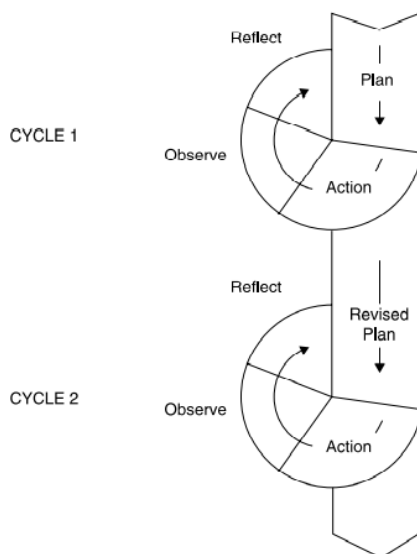
There can be various areas of the action research where the actors are facing problem and they desire to make better successful story of their work. But especially, it is widely being used in educational sector in the field of teaching and learning. Any area of teaching and learning can be the object of the study if there are problems and needs to be solved. One of those area could be the 'development of learners' paragraph writing ability by the use of invention technique', another may be 'guess work for developing speaking', and the next might be 'use of aloud reading for pronunciation improvement'.

It shows that any area could be the subject of action research aiming to get solution of the problems. It demands to include the researcher as one of the members among the participants who are

facing difficulties in their day to day working projects. So, it is a collaborative investigation to bring change in the problematic issue what they are facing in their institution of any field of involvement. There is not limitation of the area of action research, any field of problematic situation is possible to be investigated. Likewise, action research can be a tool to bring improvement in English language teaching from school to university level classes in the context of Neal. It can be used in improving language skills which are the most important for language to develop. Similarly, it can be used in teaching vocabulary, grammar, and language functions. Action research also can be used to enhance teachers' professional development proves that the area of action research is wider.

Steps of Action Research

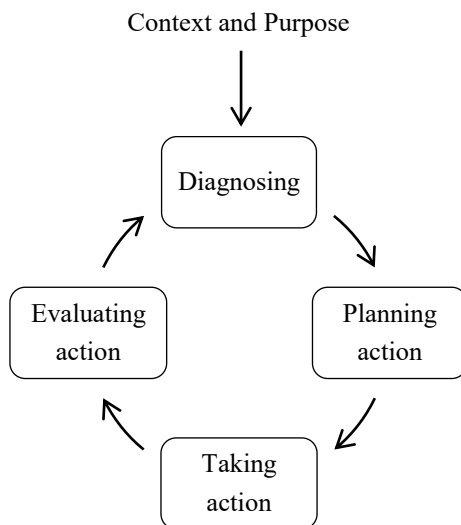
Action research is carried out by the practitioners to make the working practice better so it has not only one straight starting and ending line. Instead, it has a spiral and flexible cycles of self-reflection (Kemmis et al., 2014; Somekh, 2006) which includes plan, act, observe, reflect, re-plan, act, and repeat the cycle again and again as shown in the picture.



Cyclical for Action Research Model based on Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) as cited in (Burns, 2010).

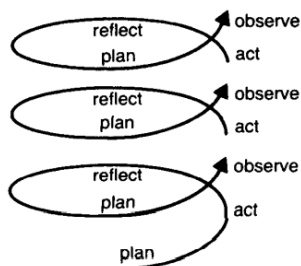
One of the pioneer of action research, Lewin (1946) as cited in (Cohen et al., 2007) has presented four main stages: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Action research has cyclical or spiral steps of identifying problem, planning for action, taking action, collecting evidences, and reflection to repeat the action. It starts with the experience of issue in the working area and gathering them, plan for action, observe the action and its effect, and evaluate the action with reflection, and plan for the repetition of the action on the basis of the knowledge obtained from the previous cycle. It is also cycled as the name of fact finding, planning, taking action, evaluating, and amending the actions for the second plan of the action.

A straightforward cycle of identifying a problem, planning an intervention, implementing the intervention, evaluating the outcome (Cohen et al., 2007) is presented here:



From (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005)

To address the practical day to day issues, practitioners should work on the spiral form with planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). It shows the repetition of the cycle again and again for the improvement of the practices.



From (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002)

The steps of the action research are in the cyclical in nature. They are repeated one after another cycle from identifying the problem, preparing for the action, implementing the action, reflecting on the action and making a decision, and repeat the cycle for further betterment of the situation. From our topic ‘developing paragraph writing ability through invention techniques’ as an example from English language teaching, we can make first plan to teach paragraph writing by using the freewriting as the invention technique in the first cycle. After observing this particular cycle with the intervention for a month, we can design second cycle as the use of cubing as the invention technique to improve paragraph writing ability. Again, with the observation of the result of this intervention, we can again plan for next cycle as the use of note taking as the invention technique and see the result. Thus, we can make a cycle of action research in this particular topic and in English language teaching in general.

Reporting Format of Action Research

After doing any action research, it is better to make public for validation of the new knowledge with the highlights of its usefulness. There can be various techniques for making the new knowledge accessible to readers. Among them, one of the general ways of making the new knowledge public is

to organize a sharing program. The program can be managed formal or semiformal and informal ways in which the stakeholders and other interested personnel voluntarily take part in it. Similarly, another commonly used tradition is to prepare a written report and offer to the audiences and other relevant sectors to have the flavor of the newly created knowledge. In action research, the basis for validation is the conscious and deliberate enactment of the action research cycle (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). So it can be reused and reformed with the time, place, and context.

Most people agreed that any research reporting is the process of chaptalization (Kumar, 2011) of the product of the investigation. It is the task of making every things systematic from the start of the introduction which includes general background, literature review, objectives, and the rational of the study of the particular issue. It is followed by procedures that consists of the information about the participants and methods applied to carry out the study. Another chapter is conclusion and recommendation which records the findings of the investigation and makes the further routes to be followed. The report also includes references and abstract of the study. Although one cannot find the same structure of the research report in various sectors, there can be some common features which are recommended for the English language practitioners to follow while reporting the action research starting from introduction to discussion.

Being a systematic process, any research report structured with introduction, method, results, discussion, references, and abstract (Tuckman & Harper, 2012) which can be applied in the formatting of the action research too. The most common and the simplest of a research report is referred to IMRaD (Hamp-Lyons & Heasley, 2007; APA Publication Manual, 2020) as the basic components. Here 'I' refers to introduction, 'M' signifies to method (ology), 'R' means the results, and 'D' symbolizes discussion in that particular written report. To take an instance from English language teaching entitled, "improving learners' paragraph writing ability through invention techniques."

Introduction

In the introduction section of the research report, the general background is given with the well context setting: time, place, and situation of the issue. In our example as mentioned above title, the information about paragraph writing is to be collected from different literatures as well as our perception will mentioned. Similarly, invention techniques will be introduced in this section. Along with general information, the objectives of the study and the reason of doing this research as the form of problem is also needs to be stated. The title related literature is also reviewed in this section for mapping the gap and making the delimitation of the study. So with the definition, and the objectives of the study, the research gap is identified and also made a claim why this research is needed in this field with stating the problem clearly in this part of the research report.

Method (ology).

In this section of the research report, processes of doing the particular research is explained systematic way, how will this research be done? With what materials or subjects? How many people will be involved and how long? The way of doing the activities will be mentioned with the principles of clarity, reality and relevance. In our example, we will explain number of teachers and students who will be involve in this action, how long will they be engaged, what they will do in what way in the various cycle of the action, what task will be completed by whom, how the meaning will be made from the data

and how the new knowledge will be constructed will be explained at the methodology unit. It will be done in the cyclical order in multiple but interlinked spiral.

Results

In the result section, the actual data will be presented as the evidence or the record of the research. The product of the research will be kept in this part. In our example, the 'treatment' using the invention technique will be recorded minutely and presented in each cycles. It will be collected for the analysis purpose which is the base for the further intervention cycle. It is the answer of the question what happened during the activities, the outcomes of the action. It is a kind of the collection of the proof for the further claim.

Discussion

It is the meaning making process. The presented result will be analyzed and interpreted to make a meaning by interacting with the data and the literatures. It is re-examination of the whole processes from introduction, methodology, and the result in connection to the previous literature and the information from this particular study. It is the interaction of the researcher with the data/result from the particular study and the theories that are already existed with it. Discussion is a kind of talking with the existed literature, and the result from this particular study. In our example, what meaning does it give from the result of paragraph writing ability that was improved in every cycles of the activity in students who involved in this action research need to be analyzed? It is also discussed what other already reported researches documented are also taken into account for the interaction to make new meaning in this particular action research context.

It can be agreed that there are various formats for reporting research in different institutions and sometimes it depends on the preferences of the researchers who make a report of it. But the common structure broadly includes introduction with objectives and stating problem, methodology to explain processes, result to present the raw information, and discussion to reach the conclusion.

References

The works cited in the text should be listed in the reference section of any research report. It is for the acknowledgement to the literature and information for the resources too. It is also an important aspect of the research report to make the particular task authentic and academic. There are various systems for managing the resources in academic work. For example, American Psychological Association (APA) system is being used in the Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. So the writers who are making a report in English Education under this particular department are suggested to follow APA in action research too.

Abstract

An abstract is the summary of the whole research report. It includes from title, objectives, methodology, and analysis process to the main findings of that particular study. An abstract is short and complete form of any research report. So in action research also it should be included as one of the important parts of research report to give readers a glance view.

Conclusion

Action research has many origins and roots in the work of Kurt Lewin, one of the founding fathers of social psychology (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005) aims solving the day to day working problems.

The knowledge is created with the practice from the day to day work. As a result, the knowledge that is created collaboratively is knowledge of practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). In a sense, another name of this research is collaborative practice claiming new knowledge to be produced in any specific issue.

The people often referred action research as the practitioner research, or a similar name such as practitioner-led or practitioner-based research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002) which has a cycle of the steps: finding a problematic point, clarifying the situation, developing action strategies and putting them into practice, and analysis and theory generation (Altricher et al., 2005). It can be examined and re-examined of the all the activities to see further usefulness and improvements. The action research spiral consists of plan, act, observe, reflect, re-plan, act, observe, reflect (Kemmis et al., 2014) the best known model (Burns, 2010).

Thus the action research is collaborative, and focuses on the co-creation of knowledge of practices (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010) which is reported in chaptering broadly introduction, methodology, result, and discussion which covers references and an abstract.

As action research can be carried out in any area of work to improve the practices in the real working sector. For example, educational area especially teaching and learning English in Nepal which is being taken as the difficult subject in the remote schools should be the focus of our action research to improve the situation in educational aspects. Being in the field of English language educator, we can use this research in relation to teaching, learning, and assessment. Action research is activity oriented to bring change in the situation, but not on the behavior. So English teachers teaching in Nepal are requested to carry out action research in their day to teaching activity to enhance the learning ability of the students. It is also accepted that action research can improve the ways of assessment as well as teachers' professional development.

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