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### Analysis of Secondary Level English Teachers' Action Research Reports

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#### Abstract

Action research (AR) is a methodical process of self-inquiry accomplished by practitioners to unravel work-related problems. This paper analyzed the action research reports (ARRs) in terms of objectives, methodologies, citations and references, structures, areas covered in the problem, and lengths purposely selecting 30 samples of ARRs prepared in the 2020-2021 academic year by all the permanent secondary level English teachers of community schools in Nuwakot district. The ARRs were analyzed descriptively by applying document analysis as the method for this study. From this study, 17% of the ARRs were found without clear objectives, 60% ARRs were without the methodological section, and around 77% of ARRs were prepared without in-text citations and references. The variation was found in the ARRs in terms of the format, no research was found in relation to the listening skill, and 23% of ARRs were related to solving writing-related problems. The ARRs were found to have 418 -5312 words in terms of length and the language used especially in the findings were vague. It can be concluded that there is a great variation in the ARRs and a gap between theories and practices of AR in terms of objectives, methodologies, citations and references, structures, and length.

**Keywords:** Permanent English teachers, action research reports, variations, Nuwakot district

#### Introduction

Teachers face different types of problems in the process of teaching-learning activities in the classroom. These problems include demotivation in the study,

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dropping out of school, and so on. The best way to solve the problems encountered in the teaching learning process is to conduct action research (AR), find out the causes, and go for the resolution. This is a reason for conducting an AR, and another reason is to get a promotion as provisioned in the teacher service commission rules and regulations (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2000) for the teachers. For the second purpose, the permanent teachers carry out and submit the action research report (ARR) attaching it to the work performance evaluation form provided by the concerned authority annually to the Department of Education of respective municipalities.

Teachers are the real practitioners of teaching and learning theories in the classrooms. They normally carry out the ARs based on some model/theories to overcome the problems seen in the classrooms. Regarding AR, there are some theories/models which provide a way to conduct AR. Following the model(s), many teachers, teacher educators, teacher trainers as well as researchers (e.g., Harris, 2021; Hebisen, 2018; Horne, 2018; Keller, 2021; Nikic, 2021; Shin, 2021; Suwal, 2021; Wnuk, 2021, to name a few) have recently carried out the AR to solve the problems experienced in the particular item in the various skills and aspects of the English language teaching and literature. However, less attention has been paid by the researchers to study about ARR and their analysis. To fill this gap, we conducted a study which has analyzed the ARs focusing on their components—objectives, methodologies, citations and references, structures, and length—prepared by the secondary level English teachers of community schools of Nuwakot district in 2020-2021.

### **Concept of AR**

AR is the methodology of research that tries to change the action. It helps to “innovate teaching practices in the classroom that will give a greater impact to the total development of the students” (Ching, 2021, p. 72) in schools. Lewin (1946), coining the term, described action research as “comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action” (p. 35). He further explained that the AR uses “a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action” (Lewin, 1946, p. 38). He concluded that AR is a cyclical and continuous process.

AR helps to change the way of teaching in the classroom and the way of perception of teaching learning activities and the conditions of teaching and learning. Kemmis (2009) asserts “action research aims to change practices, people’s understandings of their practices, and the conditions under which they practice” (p.

464). He further explains AR is a “critical and self-critical process” to stimulate the transformations “through individual and collective self-transformation”, that is to say, the “transformation of our practices, transformation of the way we understand our practices, and transformation of the conditions” (p. 465) that empower our practice.

In line with Lewin, Mills (2014) claims that the AR is systematically conducted by “teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how well their students learn (p. 21)”. AR improves the practice and ability to solve real-life problems. The researchers are practitioners and the practitioners are researchers in this case. The researchers are not outsiders but practitioners. The theories developed by the experts concerning AR may not be applicable in the local context. It may even not be applicable to another student in the same context. The researchers research and practise at the same time. Some models regarding AR are reviewed in the following section.

### **Models of AR**

Different models and formats of AR are discussed by different researchers. Goh (2012) writes “Kurt Lewin initiated the practice of action research when he researched about what happened when people became involved in decision-making about how the workplace was run” (p. 8). Many researchers planned their work and reports succeeding Levin’s cyclical five-step model: observe-reflect-act-evaluate-modify.

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) proposed a model of AR which is familiar among researchers. This model is also based on the cycle which envisioned to develop a deeper understanding of existing circumstances. It begins with conceptualizing a concentrated problem and moving through numerous interventions and evaluations. They proposed a four-stepped model: plan-action-observe-reflect.

Efron and Ravid (2013) provided a sixth-step model for conducting the AR. The first step of action research, according to them, is identifying an issue or problem the practitioner wants to explore; AR starts with the identification of the problem. When the practitioner faces a problem, s/he needs AR to solve it. The second step is gathering background information through a review of appropriate literature and existing research on the topic; background information helps to understand the problem. To overcome the problem, we need to analyze the context with the help of background knowledge. The third step is designing the study and planning the methods of collecting data; after collecting the background information, the

researcher should design and plan for the research. The researcher should be able to choose suitable methods in his or her context.

Fourth step is collecting data; it includes getting the necessary information from data collection tools. The finding is based on the collected data. The fifth step is analyzing and interpreting data; raw data become meaningful after the analysis and interpretation. It is the process of giving meaning to the data collected. It enables the researcher to come to the conclusion. The last step is writing, sharing, and implementing the findings, a conclusion is drawn after the analysis of the data. It should be shared with other practitioners. At last, the findings are implemented to solve the work-field problem (teaching-learning problem). After some time, this method may not work. Then, the teacher conducts the research. This process is continuous as AR is a cyclical process.

McNiff and Whitehead (2002) set out an eight-step model of the AR process. Step one is reviewing the current practice. At this step, the researchers review the current practices to begin the action research. Step two is identification of wish to improve. The researcher, at this step, identifies the aspect he/she wishes to improve. Step three is imagination of a way forward. At this stage, the practitioner/researcher analyzes them carefully. Step four is trying it out. The researcher should try the best one that he/she thinks to be best. Step five is monitoring and reflection on what happens. After the utilization of the possible solution, the researcher has a reflection on what kinds of improvements are found in the practice.

Step six is modification of the plan in the light of what has been found, what has happened, and continue. This stage is for the medication of the plan based on the findings. The reflection helps to find weaknesses and strengths in the practice. It also helps whether to continue the method or modify it. Step seven is evaluation of the modified action. The researcher evaluates the modified action which shows whether the modified action has worked well or not. Step eight is continuation until satisfaction with the aspect of the work (e.g., repetition of the cycle). AR is a cyclical process. Therefore, the researcher conducts the AR continuously in a cyclical way.

Sagor (2005) sets out a straightforward four-step model of AR. They are “Clarify vision and targets. . . . Articulate appropriate theory. . . . Implement action and collect data. . . . Reflect on the data and plan informed action” (p. 5). The steps provided by Sagor are more or less similar to the other four-step model introduced above.

McNiff and Whitehead (2002) provide useful advice for novice action researchers. They suggest the researchers stay small and stay focused. They should identify a clear research question. It is required to be realistic about what can be

done and be aware that wider change begins themselves. They need to plan carefully and set a realistic time scale. They are suggested, if needed, to involve others (as participants, observers, potential researchers, etc.) in the research process and ensure good ethical practice. The authors advise novice researchers to concentrate on learning, not on the outcomes of action and the focus should be on the own self in company with others.

In the context of Nepal, the Education Section of the concerned rural municipality seems to be flexible relating to the model or the format of ARs to be prepared by the concerned teachers. In this circumstance, keeping Levin's cyclical five-step model (i.e., observation-reflection-action-evaluation-modification) in the center, we analyzed the ARRAs carried out by the English teachers of the secondary level of the selected district.

### **Methods and Procedures**

To analyze the ARRAs we employed the "document analysis" (Asdal & Reinertsen, 2022; Bowen, 2009; Davie & Wyatt, 2022; Rapley, 2018) design which is used to review and evaluate documents both printed and electronic material systematically (Bowen, 2009) as a method to fulfill the objectives of the present study. In this study, 30 ARRAs prepared by the secondary level English teachers in 2020-2021 were used as the documents which were collected using a purposive sampling procedure. To collect these documents, the first author visited the office of municipalities, rural municipalities, and Education Development and Coordination Unit (EDCU) of Nuwakot district.

After collecting the documents, the ARRAs were simply coded with numbers from Report 1 to Report 30. Preparing the checklists for the target items of the ARRAs - objectives, methodologies, structures, citations and references, themes of the topics, and lengths, we filled out the checklists with the appropriate data based on the ARRAs. Then we (both authors) analyzed and described the data by means of tables and figures using percentage - one of the most commonly used statistics - in already decided themes (i.e., objectives, methodologies, citations and references, structures, areas covered, and length regarding the ARRAs).

While collecting and analyzing the data, we followed the guiding principles of ethical consideration such as voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality as informed by Creswell (2007), Ryen (2007), Ary et al. (2019), and Cohen et al. (2018). For this, we took informed consent from the education officers and the chief of EDCU that we were going to use the research reports as the data of the study. We made sure we would maintain the researchers'/ practitioners' privacy and confidentiality. We also made sure that the information

received from the ARRAs would not be used any other purposes than writing research and publishing.

## Results and Discussion

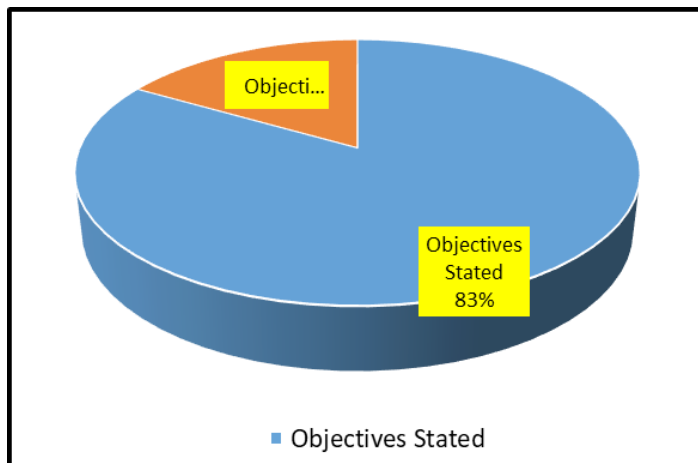
This section presents the findings of the research and their discussions. The raw data collected from 30 ARRAs were analyzed and described on the basis of the themes - objectives, methodologies, citations and references, structures, themes of the topics, and length, - as follows.

### Objectives of the ARRAs

Objectives in any research pre-define concisely what the researcher is trying to achieve. The objectives provide guidelines to the researchers to go to the action. It is also true in the ARRAs. While analyzing the ARRAs, we found five reports (i.e., Report 1, 2, 15, 17, and 21) were completed and submitted without the objectives stated (see Figure 1). Completing the research reports without mentioning the objectives do not seem to be sound in the field of research. Concerning the issue, Trigueros (2019) mentions that research without objectives is like the adventure of unknown places without a guide which may lead the researchers to the unknown places. The five reports (17%) seem to have been out of track as they missed mentioning the objectives of the research.

**Figure 1**

*Statement of the Objectives in ARRAs*



Among the 25 ARRAs with a statement of objectives of the AR, most of them have imprecise objectives. For example, a researcher in Report 13 entitled “Ways of developing writing skill of secondary level students” stated the objectives (a) to encourage the students in writing skill of English, (b) to enable the students to do

different writing tasks, (c) to enhance their grammatical knowledge, and (d) to find out the better ways to improve writing skills. Similarly, another researcher in Report 14 entitled “An AR on developing skills of reading comprehension in English in grade-8” stated the objectives ambiguously, for example, (a) to improve the reading comprehension of the students, (b) to build up the vocabulary to comprehend the text easily, (c) to answer the questions related to the text appropriately, (d) to make effective and interesting reading experiences in their long life. These objectives are not in line with Bjerke and Renger (2017) who talk about the process for developing the research objectives. They stated that the research objectives should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). Most of the teacher-researchers have not used SMART principles while preparing the objectives.

### **Methodologies of the ARRs**

The methodology section of the report presents a step-by-step explanation of the research process and how the research was conducted, the research methods used, and the reasons for choosing those methods. Some scholars (e.g., Kassu Jilcha, 2019) suggest that the major considerations of methodology are the design of the study, sources of data (primary, secondary, or both), the methods of the study, the population and sample, sample strategy, the study area/field, tool and techniques of data collection, the step-by-step procedures of data collection and the procedures of data analysis and interpretation.

While analyzing the methodological section of the ARRs, most of the teacher-researchers (60%) have not stated the research approach/method of the AR clearly. Regarding the statement of sample in the ARRs, only 18 of them were found to consist of the sample of the research. Among 18 ARRs, five reports (Reports 3, 12, 15, 22, and 23) were found to have stated the number of samples taken for the study. Among 30 ARRs, about three-fourths of the reports had the absence of a sampling procedure for selecting the sample. Of those which have consisted of the sampling procedure, all of them except one have applied the purposive sampling procedure. Only 22 research reports were found to have mentioned the research tools, the researchers employed limited types of tools (e.g., tests, observation, questionnaire, and interview) to gather the data for their AR.

Regarding the methodology section in ARRs, Goh (2012) suggests to include the action research framework, target group, action research plan, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and conclusion. However, more research reports were not found to align with Goh’s suggestion. Besides, many scholars (e.g., Flick, 2022; Kumar, 2019), concerning the research methodology, state that



the researchers, regardless of the type of research, have to present a procedural plan systematically to answer the research questions validly, objectively, accurately and economically. They show the importance of the research design and methodology in the research which most of the practitioners have missed mentioning in their ARRs in the present study.

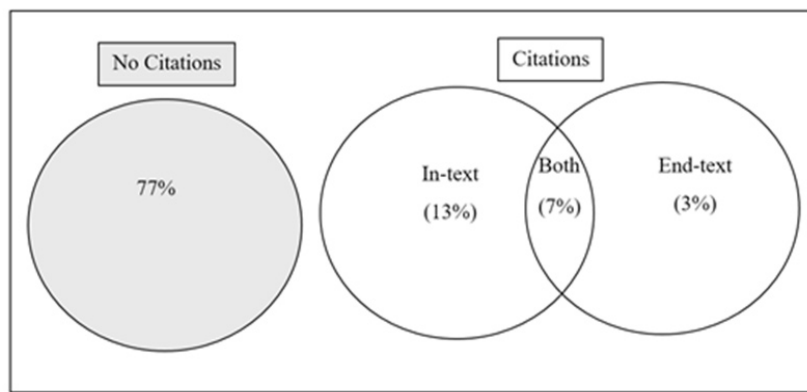
### Citations and References of the ARRs

Citations and references mentioned in the research reports provide the original authors with proper credit for their creations. Incorporating others' creations and ideas without acknowledging them in a proper way is "plagiarism" or "academic offense" (Bailey, 2015; Hartley, 2008; Leki, 1998). Principally each reference cited in the text should be listed in the reference section.

Among 30 ARRs, 23 (77%) ARRs have neither in-text citations nor a list of references (end-text citations). Four reports have in-text citations but do not have a list of references. Two reports are found to have both in-text and end-text citations. One ARR among 30 has only a list of references but has no in-text citations. The condition of citations and references in 30 ARRs used by the practitioners has been diagrammatically presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Use of Citations and References*



The result of the present research regarding the use of citations in the reports is informed by Karki's (2020) findings however, providing references and citations in academic writing is essential for three reasons. The reasons, according to Bailey (2015) are to show that the researchers have "read some of the authorities on the subject, which will give added weight" to their writing, to allow "readers to find the source, if they wish to examine the topic in more detail", and to avoid plagiarism"



(p. 52). Most of the ARRs prepared by the practitioners could neither show their “weight” in writing nor provide the source of their writing.

### Structures of the ARRs

Different models and formats of AR are discussed by several researchers. The common cyclical structure which is tentatively followed by most of the practitioners is: observe – reflect – act – evaluate – modify as suggested by Lewin (1946). While analyzing the ARRs, they are found to be varied in terms of format or structure. Some of them are found to have only the description of the components used in the methodology of the AR, while some are found to have reviewed some of the related literature works and some are found to follow some traditional ways before writing something in the methodology of AR. The structures of three ARRs are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Structures of Three Sampled ARRs*

Report 1	Report 2	Report 11
Introduction	Introduction	Introduction
Plan	Statement of the problem	Objectives
Action	Possible causes of the problem	Problems of statement
Observation	Selected cause within my research	Possible causes of Problems
Reflection	Intervening actions	Strategic Intervention
	-Stage 1	Plan
	Plan-Action	Acts
	Observation-Reflection	Observation
	-Stage 2	Reflection
	Plan-Action	Conclusion
	Observation-Reflection	
	-Stage 3	
	Plan-Action	
	Observation-Reflection	
	Findings and conclusions	

Regarding the format or the structures of the reports, Goh (2012) states “Unlike most conventional research, the action research report need not follow a rigid format, however, for a beginning researcher, you may wish to take comfort in a given structure”. Most of the ARRs have been aligned with the ideas of Goh in terms of the format as there are similarities and differences in writing ARRs in terms of the structure. Though all the researchers do not seem to have followed the particular

model, the common thing is that most of the teacher-researchers more or less have used the cycle “Plan-Action-Observation-Implementation” in their ARRs.

### Areas Covered (Topics) in the ARRs

In the Nepalese context, English is regarded as a foreign language. In this situation, a number of problems can appear in the process of English language teaching-learning activities. There can be a wide range of researchable issues in English language teaching classrooms. While observing the topics of 30 ARRs, they are found to have focused on language skills (16 ARRs), and other are vocabulary (five ARRs), grammar (two ARRs), and others (seven ARRs). The areas covered by the research report are presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*Research Area Covered in the ARRs*

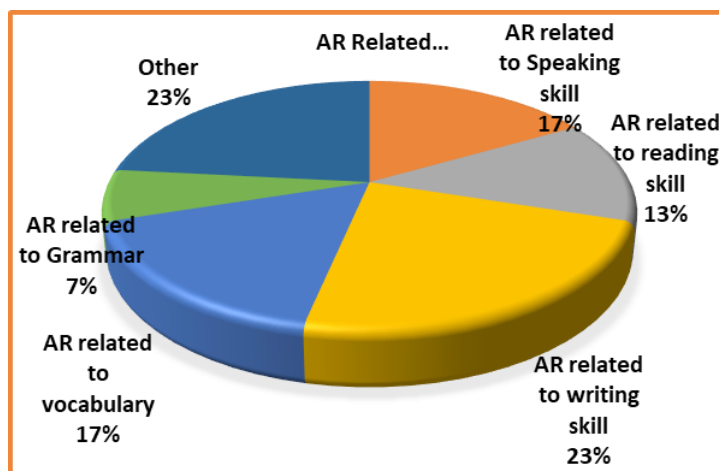


Figure 3 shows that the highest number (seven) of ARRs is carried out in relation to writing skills (Reports 13, 14, 17, 23, 25, 28, and 30). An equal number of research topics were found related to speaking skills (Reports 6, 8, 15, 16, and 18) and vocabulary (Reports 5, 7, 9, 11, and 27). Four ARRs (Reports 4, 10, 12, and 26) were found in reading skills. There are two ARRs (Reports 20 and 24) conducted on grammar-related topics. Some other areas covered in the ARRs were “Effectiveness of alternative teaching-learning tools used during covid-19 lockdown (Report 29), “Teaching in English medium” (Report 22), “English language curriculum” (Report 21), “Practical use of English language” (Report 19), “Way of improving learning achievement” (Report 1), “Facilitating learning through the messenger (Report 2)”, and “Dealing with the students of disruptive behaviors” (Report 3).

The teacher-researchers may have many potential issues, especially appearing

in the teaching-learning activities in English language classrooms. However, some significant issues are left to be researched. They could not cover the research topic related to listening skill which is a primary and important language skill (Tyagi, 2013) to learn the language. Similarly, among many others, the ARRs were not found to cover the areas related to the teaching aids, especially the “supplementary resource materials” (Karki, 2018) which play an important role in learning the content and language.

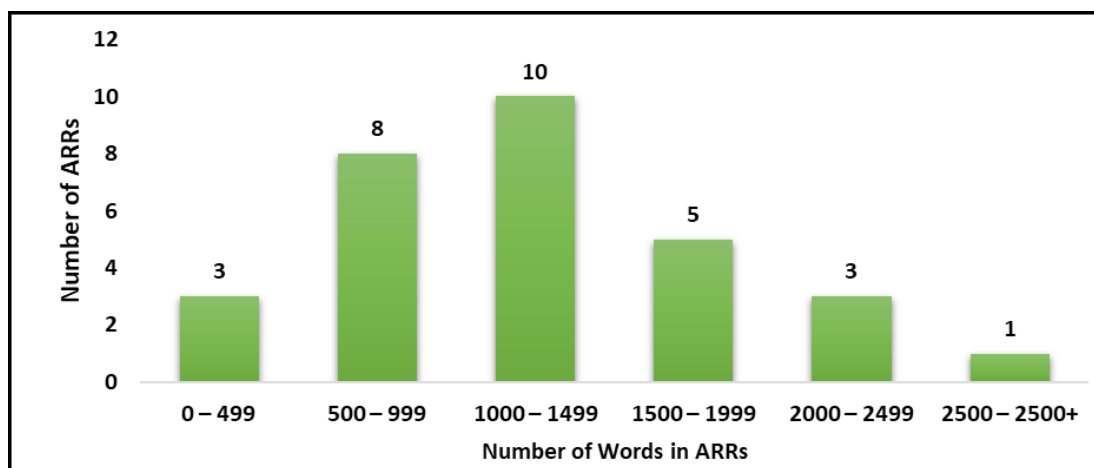
Besides, some topics of ARRs are vague such as “Practical use of English language” (Report 19), “Classroom teaching in English medium” (Report 22), etc. While deciding the appropriate topic, an action researcher, following Goh (2012), needs to be specific in the issues such as “the shortcomings in the teaching plans, preparation, and implementation” (p. 11), which facilitates the otherwise the researcher can be lost while selecting the topic.

### Length of the ARRs

The length of the content of the research is an aspect of any report. The ARRs were found to be wide-ranging in terms of length (see Figure 4). A report (Report 12) was found to have only 418 words which is regarded as the thinnest one and another report (Report 22) was found to have 5,312 words which was the thickest of all the ARRs. Among 30 ARRs, one-third of the ARRs seem to have 1,000-1,499 words, slightly higher than one-third of ARRs have less than 1,000 words, and slightly lower than one-third ARRs have more than 1,000 words in general.

**Figure 4**

*Length of AR Reports in Terms of Words*



With reference to the length of the ARRs, there is no hard and fast rule on

how long the ARR should be. The government policy documents even seem to be flexible in the issue of the length of the ARRs to be prepared by the teachers to submit to the concerned authorities. Similarly, different theories and models concerning AR proposed by several scholars even do not seem rigid about this issue. Concerning the issue, Mertler (2017) clearly states that “the length of research reports depends largely on their purpose” (p. 375). According to him, the ARs focus on cultivating the children’s learning, improving the schools, and empowering the educators rather than the length of the reports. The important thing is that the ARRs are believed to raise and discuss the target issue mentioned in the objectives/research questions of the particular AR. Whether the ARRs raised and discussed the target issue sufficiently can be another separate topic of research in the future.

### **Conclusion**

The main purpose of conducting ARs is to assist teaching learning activities so as to avoid the problems experienced and faced by the students in the classrooms. It is a considerable approach to the teachers’ professional development. This paper analyzed purposively collected 30 ARRs carried out by the secondary level English teachers of Nuwakot district for their promotion, by selecting the parameters such as objectives, methodologies, citations and references, structures, research areas covered by the topics, and lengths of the ARRs. After analyzing the ARRs, it was found that there were significant variations among the reports in the target parameters and gaps with the AR theories or models of these reports were clearly observed in the parameters of the ARRs.

To produce quality ARRs, to bring uniformity among the ARRs, to implement the findings appropriately in the classrooms, and to minimize the gap between the ARRs with the AR theories, there is a need for preparing the guidelines by the concerned authorities at different levels (e.g., Teacher Training Center, Department of Education in the municipal level, Teacher Service Commission, etc.), for providing the teacher training focusing the AR, for mentoring the teachers while preparing the ARRs. As the study was conducted by collecting the data purposively from a confined place within a limited area, the findings of the research cannot be generalized to other places and subjects. For more wide-ranging, credible, and extensively applicable outcomes, similar but larger-sized studies in the future concerning AR are recommended.

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