Teachers' Conception and Difficulties in Doing Action Research

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Abstract

This study was conducted to describe the conceptions and difficulties of Junior High School teachers and to explore their issues and challenges on the conduct of action research. A combination of quantitative and qualitative types of research was utilized in the study involving 60 teachers in the Junior High School department. The results reveal that action research is a valuable tool for teachers to improve teaching and learning process, to increase pedagogical and instructional knowledge, and to positively impact students' learning. Furthermore, teachers find difficulties in the conduct of action research especially along literature search, presentation and publication of results, and data collection. Finally, four major themes emerged as the major issues and challenges of teachers in the conduct of action research which are additional workload and burden in the part of the teacher, wri ting anxiety, lack of time, and inadequate knowledge in the conduct of action research. As an offshoot of the study, an intervention program was developed to develop research skills and to improve the research productivity of teachers in the junior high school department.

Keywords: *Action Research, Conceptions, Junior High School Teachers*

Introduction

The educational system of the Philippines is rapidly evolving due to many factors such as ASEAN integration, global competitiveness, globalization, integration of ICT in teaching and other important internal and external factors. With the implementation of the new K-12 program of the Department of Education across all Basic Education institutions in the Philippines, some key impetus should be considered such as evidence-based

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policy, better student achievement, enhancement of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, teacher quality and teacher professionalism (Abaya, 2017; Tindowen, Bassig, & Cagurangan, 2017). With these, many important factors should be considered for basic education institutions to cope with the demands of the fast-changing world. And one of these factors is the inclusion of action research as a major function of a teacher in the 21st century (Chou, 2011; Hazelton & Haigh, 2010). It is then imperative for teachers to embrace action research in his professional life to foster a culture of research among schools to improve educational outcomes for local and global competitiveness.

Action research is a process of systematic, reflective inquiry to improve educational practices or resolve problems in any operating unit such as in the school, classroom, and office (Department of Education, 2017). Furthermore, action research is related to ideas of reflective teacher and teacher as researcher. Action research involves taking a self-reflective critical and systematic approach to exploring one's teaching contexts, and seeks to intervene in a deliberately way in the problematic situation to bring about changes and even better improvement in practice. Also, action research is in the hands of teachers and reflexivity, action, and transformation are embedded in the process of teachers examining their own teaching practices (Burns, 2014). Many studies and previous literature had proven the positive outcomes of action research to many academic aspects such as improvement of teaching and learning, reflection of teachers' practice, professional growth of teachers, and most especially leads to positive educational outcomes of students such as improved academic performance, promotion of positive behavior and values, and enhancement of life and survival skills (Burns, 2011; Dick, 2006; Taylor & Medina, 2013). In fact, the Department of Education implemented and initiated many activities and programs for the institutionalization of action research in the Basic Education. Some of the major shifts and initiatives of the department along action research are the implementation of the DepEd No. 24

series of 2010 or the *Basic Education Research Fund*, DepEd No. 13 Series of 2013 or the *Establishment of a Policy Development Process at the Department of Education*, DepEd No. 13 series of 2015 or the *Revised Guidelines for the Basic Education Research Fund*, DepEd No. 4 Series of 2016 or the *Amendment to DepEd No. 43 Series of 2015*, and DepEd No. 39 series of 2016 or *the Adoption of the Basic Education Research Agenda.*

However, despite the institutionalization of research in the basic education and the many initiatives and programs of the Department of Education, still the research productivity of teachers is still low (Vinluan, 2011; Mapa, 2017). In fact, many studies revealed that teachers in the basic education such as in the junior high school still in the adjustment phase in embracing action research as part of their educational culture (Salazar-Clemena, 2006; Hirsch, 2005). In addition, many studies conducted focused on the status of research productivity of teachers along action research, but limited studies were conducted to look into the root cause of this low productivity of teachers, such as looking on their conceptions and difficulties in conducting action research (Inanc & Tuncer, 2011; Ynalvez & Shrum, 2011).

This study was conducted to describe the conceptions of Junior High School teachers towards action research and exploring their difficulties and challenges in conducting action researches. As the Head of the Educational Research across all the levels in the university, the researcher observed that the productivity of teachers in the Junior High School is low. With this study, the result will address the issue on the root cause of this low productivity of teachers in doing action research. And with the result, this will serve as a basis for the school administration in coming up with intervention program to enhance and improve the research productivity of Junior High School teachers.

Research Methodology

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative types of research. The respondents of the study are the Junior High School Teachers of the University of Saint Louis in the School year 2017-2018. Total enumeration was utilized in the study. All teachers were given a questionnaire; however, only 60 questionnaires were retrieved. Among the respondents of the study, majority of the teachers are teaching in less than five years and possessed bachelor's degree as their highest educational attainment. It is important to note that almost all of the teachers did not complete any action research.

Research Instruments

The study utilized a standard questionnaire developed by Morales, et. al. (2016) to examine the conception of teachers and needs on action research. The said tool is consists of 13 items divided into two indicators which are (1) Conceptions on the outcomes of action research (5 items) and Difficulty and non-difficulty in conducting action research (8 items).

The study also utilized an open-ended questionnaire in order to explore the issues and challenges of Junior High School teachers in the conduct of action research.

The study followed a systematic procedure in the gathering of the data. A letter of approval was sent to proper authorities prior to the conduct of the study. Then, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the teachers during their vacant time. Furthermore, ethical considerations were strictly followed in the conduct of the study.

Finally, the data were analyzed using mean and median to describe the conceptions of the respondents on the outcome of action research and difficulty and non-difficulty of teachers in the conduct of action research. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was used to explore the issues and challenges experienced by teachers in the conduct of action research.

Results and Discussion

Conceptions on the Outcomes of Action Research

Table 1. Conceptions of Junior High School Teachers on the Outcomes of Action Research

Items	Mean	Median	Qualitative Description
1. Action research is a valuable way to improve teaching and learning.	4.15	3.00	Agree
2. Action research is a valuable way to develop knowledge as a teacher.	4.00	3.00	Agree
3. Action learning is important to the teaching and learning process for my students.	4.15	3.00	Agree
4. Action research project will positively impact my students' learning	3.85	3.00	Agree
5. I view myself as a teacher-researcher.	3.15	3.00	Agree

Table 1 presents the conceptions of Junior High School teachers on the outcomes of action research. It can be shown in that table that teachers agree to all the items regarding the outcomes of action research. Teachers of the junior high school agree that action research is a valuable way to improve teaching and learning. This means that teachers view action research as an important tool in the successful delivery of instruction in the classroom that will lead to positive learning outcomes. Many educational researchers and theorists had defined action research as a tool in improving teaching and learning (Halim, Buang, & Meerah, 2010; McIntosh, 2010). Hence, teachers of the Junior High School affirmed this claim on the role of action research in the classroom.

Moreover, teachers also agreed that action research is a valuable way to develop knowledge as a teacher. The result would explain the role of action research in the enhancement of pedagogical and instructional knowledge of teachers as a way of professional growth. Previous studies conducted stressed that action research is vital in the delivery of content lessons through research

since teachers are given more opportunity to expand their content knowledge and even pedagogies (Chen & Kessler, 2013; Ozer, Ritterman, & Wanis, 2010; Zhou, 2012).

Meanwhile, teachers also agreed that action research is important to the teaching and learning process for the students. This means that even in the utilization of action research, teachers always consider students' attitude and academic performance. This would also entail that the main goal of action research is geared towards students' improvement in the academic setting and in other aspects (Krell & Dana, 2012; Mamlok-Naaman & Eilks, 2012).

In addition, teachers also agreed that action research project would positively impact students' learning. This means that action research should always promote positive learning environment for students. This could also result to students' learning since teachers will have an opportunity to look on a variety of teaching strategies that will cater to the needs of the learners (Clarke, & Fournillier, 2012).

Finally, teachers also agreed that they view themselves as teacher-researchers. This could be attributed to the fact that in the 21st century learning landscape, teachers are not only confined in the four corners of the classroom for instructional delivery, but also need to fulfill one of its functions which is on research (Hayes, 2011; Winch, Oancea ,& Orchard, 2015). The Department of Education already mandated teachers to do action research and also one of the requirements for their promotion since teachers should be knowledge generators, and not just knowledge borrowers.

Difficulty and Non-Difficulty in Conducting Action Research

Table 2. Difficulty and Non-Difficulty of Junior High School Teachers in Conducting Action Research

Items	Mean	Median	Qualitative Description
1. Identifying issues and problems to be investigated by action research.	3.15	3.00	Difficulty

2. Searching for relevant literature to the chosen research.	4.66	3.00	Difficulty
3. Developing the processes of how to do research and collect evidence.	4.00	3.00	Difficulty
4. Analyzing quantitative data	3.15	3.00	Difficulty
5. Analyzing qualitative data	3.66	3.00	Difficulty
6. Organizing and writing the findings	2.85	3.00	Non-Difficulty
7. Making a relevant presentation on the project and write and article for publication	4.30	3.00	Difficulty
8. Using technology in:			
a. Literature Search	2.15	3.00	Non-Difficulty
b. Data presentation	2.15	3.00	Non-Difficulty
c. Statistical analysis	3.15	3.00	Difficulty
d. Bibliographical entries	2.00	3.00	Non-Difficulty

Table 2 presents the difficulty and non-difficulty of Junior High School teachers in conducting action research. It can be gleaned in the table that teachers of the Junior High School do not experience any difficulty along organization and writing findings and using technology in literature search, data presentation, and bibliographical entries. This means that Junior High school teachers are already equipped with the proper knowledge and skill in the writing research papers and reports. They already know how to organize their thoughts and have the ability to put the results into writing. Furthermore, Junior High School teachers are already knowledgeable with the use of different technologies in doing research. This can be attributed to the fact that there are already a substantial number of easy to use research soft wares that is freely available and can be downloaded in the internet (Sales Traver, & García, 2011; Strambler, & McKown, 2013). Also, the university library has enough research materials and electronic references and soft ware that will help teachers in the conduct of their research.

Meanwhile, it is also presented in the table that still many teachers are experiencing difficulties in the conduct of action research from the identification of their research problem until the publication of the results of the research. The results may imply that teachers do not yet possess the required skills in writing action researches. Among the items in the conduct of

action research, searching for relevant literature to the chosen topic is considered as the major difficulty of teachers. Literature review is one of the most critical parts of a research paper. It provides the theoretical background of the study and serves as the links between the proposed study and what has already been studied, and more importantly, it integrates the research findings into the existing body of knowledge (Russ & Bruce, 2012; Cain, 2011). With the result, it can be stressed that teachers do not yet possess the skill of looking for appropriate related studies and literature that are suitable to the current study. The findings of the study affirmed the results of previous studies that indeed, literature review is the most difficult part of a research paper according to teachers (Fieldman & Weiss, 2010; Mcniff, 2016; Riel, 2010).

Issues and Challenges of Teachers in the Conduct of Action Research

Table 3. Issues and Challenges of Junior High School Teachers in the Conduct of Action Research

Issues and Challenges	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1. Additional workload and burden in the part of the teacher	35	58.33	2
2. Writing Anxiety	30	50.00	3
3. Lack of Time	42	70.00	1
4. Inadequate knowledge regarding the conduct of action research.	25	41.67	4

Table 3 presents the different issues and challenges of Junior High School teachers in the conduct of action research. Based on the responses of the respondents, four themes emerged as the major issues and challenges of teachers in the conduct of research, namely: additional workload and burden in the part of the teacher, writing anxiety, lack of time, and inadequate knowledge regarding the conduct of action research.

Additional Workload and Burden in the part of the Teacher

One of the major themes that was transcribed in the study is that teachers are having difficulty in doing action research since this serves as an additional workload and burden on their part. Specifically, teachers are

experiencing workload problems since this is a stressful task, overlapping of activities, and will experience sleepless nights and will eventually lead to stress. Some of their verbalizations are as follows:

T12: "*As much as I would like to conduct action research, we have a lot of things to do, many papers to be submitted and many deadlines to meet."*

T34: *"For me, I know how important action research is in the classroom. However, sometimes, doing action research is a burden on my part because you know our work load in the high school. We need to do many requirements not only in the classroom but also in other things. Hence, we do not have any time doing action research."*

T19: *"Working in high school is very stressful. You need to think of many concerns such as in the classroom, the attitudes of students that sometimes, I already forgot to do other things such as action research. Doing action research is stressful because I only do this when I have a vacant time and sometimes this is my least priority because of many activities which sometimes are overlapping.*

Writing Anxiety

Another theme that was deduced from the responses of teachers is that they encounter issues regarding the conduct of action research and they have writing anxiety. Specifically, teachers have fear in analyzing data and some have problems on their grammar. Some of their verbalization is as follows:

T18: *"Honestly speaking, I do not have the skill in writing most especially in writing research. I am afraid that when I do research, I am afraid that my paper will be rejected because of my writing ability."*

T20: *"One of my greatest fear is that I have problems regarding grammar. And I do not want to be embarrassed because of that.*

Definitely, many teachers and students will read my paper and I am afraid that many grammatical lapses will be read by my readers."

Lack of Time

Most of the respondents stressed that their major issue and challenge in the conduct of action research is they lack time. This means that teachers do not have available time to conduct an action research. Some of their verbalizations are as follows:

T45: *"I do not have any time in doing action research. When I'm done with my school requirements, I need also to take care of my children and my family."*

T10: *"I really love to do action research, but time will not permit me to do so"*

T55: *"I hope the school will also consider our time because 24 hours is not enough to finish all the requirements needed by the school. During weekends, I do not also have time doing action research because I am also busy for my master's degree."*

Inadequate Knowledge Regarding the Conduct of Action Research

Finally, the last theme that was transcribed in the responses of teachers regarding their issues and challenges in the conduct of action research is that they have an inadequate knowledge on the conduct of action research. The results further mean that teachers have difficulty in data gathering and also the process of writing the full action research. Some of their verbalization are as follows:

T60: *"I do not really know how to write a research paper, especially action research. I was not really oriented since then on the ways in writing action researches."*

T21: *"I am not familiar with action research. I do not have enough knowledge regarding the conduct of action research. All I thought that*

in high school, what we just do is to teach. But I was surprised that we also need to do action research."

Conclusion

The study concludes that action research is a valuable tool for teachers to improve teaching and learning process, to increase pedagogical and instructional knowledge, and positively impact students' learning. Furthermore, teachers find difficulties in the conduct of action research especially along literature search, presentation and publication of results, and data collection. Finally, four major themes emerged as the major issues and challenges of teachers in the conduct of action research which are additional workload and burden in the part of the teacher, writing anxiety, lack of time, and inadequate knowledge in the conduct of action research.

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