Chapter One

Introduction

Overview

This introductory chapter will provide a description of the theoretical framework of the study with special focus on the statement of the problem, study questions, hypotheses, objectives and the methodology of the study.

1.1 Context of the study

Action Research

Action research is an interactive method of collecting information that's use to explore topics of teaching, curriculum development and student behavior in the classroom.

Action research is an instrument that is mainly used to help teachers and other educators to come up with strategies to improve teaching practices (Sagor, 2004); it is a practical and down-to-earth endeavor for all educators. Action research requires teachers to design a study in an area of interest that they would like to carry out in their classrooms or schools. Many times, action research is considered a professional development opportunity because, frequently, teachers test a new instructional strategy, assess a new curriculum program, or evaluate an existing pedagogical method. In many research studies, taking part in action research has been observed to be the force for positive change as demonstrated in teacher improvement, self-reflection, and overall learning that enhances classroom practices (Ferrance, 2000; Johnson & Button, 2000; Ross, Rolheiser, & Hogoboam-Gray, 1999; Sax & Fisher, 2001). These forms of change may affect teaching quality.

Action research is a form of research that is authentic and meaningful to the teacher-researcher because it is conducted by the teacher in his/her own classroom space. Action research helps teachers to "pick up threads suggested in academic circles, and weave them in their own classroom" (Ferrance, 2000, p.13). Johnson and Button (2000) cited one teacher researcher who stated, "I never thought before that what was going on in my classroom could be considered research or thought of as research or respected as research" (p.116).

To sum up, action research is a rather simple set of ideas and techniques that can introduce you to the power of systematic reflection on your practice. Our basic assumption is that you have within you the power to meet all the challenges of the teaching profession. Furthermore, you can meet these challenges without wearing yourself down to a nub. The secret of success in the profession of teaching is to continually grow and learn.

Action research is a way for you to continue to grow and learn by making use of your own experiences. The only theories involved are the ideas that you already use to make sense of your experience. Action research literally starts where you are and will take you as far as you want to go.

1.2 The Research Problem

As far as it is widely known, very little action research is conducted in relation to classroom settings. Action research actually calls for a dynamic teacher who plans his classes from the beginning of the academic year. It is an effective way for improving the teaching profession. Assessing student understanding at mid-term helps you plan the most effective strategies for the rest of the semester. Comparing the student learning outcomes of different teaching strategies helps you discover which teaching techniques work best in a particular situation. Because you are researching the impact of your

own teaching, you automatically take into account your own teaching strengths and weaknesses, the typical skill level of your students, etc. Your findings have immediate practical significance in terms of teaching decisions.

Second, classroom action research provides a means of documenting your teaching effectiveness. The brief reports and presentations resulting from classroom action research can be included in teaching portfolios, tenure dossiers, and other reports at the teacher or school level. This information can also help meet the increasing requirements of the assessment movement that we document student learning.

Third, classroom action research can provide a renewed sense of excitement about teaching. After many years, teaching can become routine and even boring. Learning classroom action research methodology provides a new challenge, and the results of classroom action research projects often prompt teachers to change their current strategies. Classroom action research projects done as teams have the added benefit of increasing peer discussion of teaching issues.

Classroom action research follows the same steps as the general scientific model, although in a more informal manner. Classroom action research methods also recognize that the researcher is, first and foremost, the classroom teacher and that the research cannot be allowed to take precedence over student learning. The classroom action research process can be conceptualized as a seven-step process. (For more detailed information about conducting classroom action research, see authors such as Bell, 1993; Sagor, 2000; and Hubbard and Power, 1993)

Step one: Identify a question or problem. This question should be something related to student learning in your classroom. For example, would a different type of assignment enhance student understanding? Would a strict attendance policy result in better test scores? Would more time spent in cooperative learning groups help students understand concepts at a higher level? The general model might be "what is the effect of X on student learning?"

Step two: Review Literature :You need to gather two types of information, background literature and data. The literature review may be much less extensive than traditional research, and the use of secondary sources is sufficient. Sources such as Cross and Steadman (1996) or Woolfolk (2000) will often provide background information on learning, motivation, and classroom management topics.

Step three: Plan a research strategy: The research design of a CAR study may take many forms, ranging from a pretest-posttest design to a comparison of similar classes to a descriptive case study of a single class or student. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are appropriate. The tightly controlled experimental designs of traditional research are rarely possible in a natural classroom setting, so CAR relies on the triangulation of data to provide validity.

To triangulate, collect at least three types of data (such as student test scores, teacher evaluations, and observations of student behavior). If all data point to the same conclusions, you have some assurance of validity.

Step four: Gather data :CAR tends to rely heavily on existing data such as test scores, teacher evaluations, and final course grades.

You might also want to collect other data. See Angelo and Cross (1993) for a wonderful array of classroom assessment techniques. (Be sure to check with your Institutional Review Board for policies regarding the use of human subjects. Most CAR with adult students will be exempt from review as long as you do not identify individual students.)

Step five: Make sense of the data Analyze your data, looking for findings with practical significance. Simple statistical analyses of quantitative data, such as simple t-tests and correlations, are usually sufficient. Tables or graphs are often very helpful. Qualitative data can be analyzed for recurring themes, citing supporting evidence. Practical significance, rather than statistical significance, is the goal.

Step six: Take action: Use your findings to make decisions about your teaching strategies. Sometimes you will find that one strategy is clearly more effective, leading to an obvious choice. Other times, strategies may prove to be equally effective. In that situation, you may choose the strategy that you prefer or the one that your students prefer.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This study sets out to investigate the problem of academic writing amongst undergraduate students. Role of action in improving practitioner's classroom practice with reference to writing.

1.4 Significance of the study

The significance of the present research stems from the fact that the tutor in an action research is heavily involved in the action right from the very beginning. To come up with effective results, tutors have to be in close proximity with their students. To carry out their experiments quite successfully, tutors have to adopt a typical

timeline. For example in the first month they may choose to Write about their wonderings, talk about them with colleagues, decide on a question to follow, an action to take. In the second month Write about the context of your question (why is it important to you?), start to collect data using one familiar and one new research tool. Then they can proceed in the following months to handle things in relation to the data they have collected so far. Reshape their question if they need to. Start to read (and take notes) about their issue. Think about what they have learned so far and what further action(s) they need to take. Write a series of short profiles of what they have been reading about their topic. (These will be useful to you later on when they are analyzing your data.) Try another tool. Keep on collecting data. Keep collecting data. Write about what they have learned so far. Ask them whether it resonates with what they have been reading about the topic. Begin their analysis. Try different ways of representing their data succinctly. Think about how their data relates to your reading. You may want to try a new action or set of actions at this point. Monitor the impact! Keep analyzing their data. Begin writing about what they have learned. Be sure that they have data to support your claims. Develop a draft of their study. Finish their work. Be sure to include what they have learned and how their practice has changed. Find a way to share their study with others and plan to do another study!

This process reflects that tutors in an action research hardly find time to get away from their classrooms should they aspire for effective outcome and results. This engrossing activity helps collect enough data to inform the study.

1.5 Research Questions

1. To what extent can action research be a useful tool that helps teachers grow and develop?
2. To what level can action research be thought of as a powerful systematic reflective process?
3. In what ways can action research provide the teacher with the power to meet all the challenges of the teaching profession?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

1. Action research can be a useful tool that helps teacher grow and develop as classroom practitioners.
2. Action research can be thought of as a powerful systematic reflective process.
3. Action research can provide the teacher with the power to meet all the challenges posed by the teaching profession.

1.7 Methodology

The type of method to be adopted in the present study is both an empirical and descriptive methodology. This is largely so because it is a type of applied research in which the researcher is actively involved in the cause for which the research is conducted. Moreover, it fits within the rich tradition of qualitative research that has emerged from the fields of anthropology, sociology, and ethnography. Data can be collected by means of a questionnaire as well as the teacher's ongoing observations, reflection and remarks. The study shall handle within the scope of classroom action research problems of reading comprehension and how they can be solved.

Data will be collected through a questionnaire for teachers and a pre and post tests for the students. SPSS, will be employed to analyze the data to report findings.

1.8 limits of the study

This study will be restricted to the reading comprehension problems to be dealt with through the tool of classroom action research by drawing on texts supplied by the students" course book. The study is also confined to a representative sample of English language teachers and pupils at Khartoum secondary schools.

Summary of the chapter

This chapter provided defines of action research. Problem of the study, objectives of the study, significance of the study, hypotheses and methodology were described. The next chapter will present literature review studies.