
ENCOURAGING TEACHER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CONDUCTING ACTION RESEARCH IN SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSES AT EFLU TRAINING CENTRE

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Abstract: Teaching is an on-going professional development. It needs to be refreshed and developed with the passage of time as new ideas and approaches towards teaching and learning are discovered. Therefore, teacher development is a continuous pursuit that cannot be named simply in some workshops organized for in-service teachers. It is more like a continuing education system aiming to foster teachers' professional progress. This way, teachers ought to look for all possible professional development opportunities in order to advance in their careers. In some teaching contexts, development opportunities may not be so varied. This paper suggests that action research can be used as a useful technique in developing teachers in contexts where development opportunities are limited. The paper focuses on the role of action research in developing teachers especially in my teaching context, which is EFL program in an internal corporate training centre in EFLU. I will review the literature on teacher development, how it is important for in-service teacher, how it would help both teachers and learners, how it differs from training, and the principles, objectives and methods of teacher development. Then, I explore action research as a way of doing teacher development, its role in teacher development. In the last section, I address the need for teacher development within a specific teaching context, namely EFL classes in a corporate training centre in EFLU. Then, I present an action research case study which could be implemented by in-service teachers in my teaching context as a means of doing teacher development in this specific context.

Keywords: Teacher Development, Action Research, Second Language Classes, EFLU Training Centre.

Introduction: Teaching undergoes on-going developments like any other profession. Therefore, teacher development is a continuous pursuit that cannot be named simply in some workshops organized for in-service teachers. It is more like a continuing education system aiming to foster teachers' professional progress. This way, teachers ought to look for all possible professional development opportunities in order to advance in their careers. In some teaching contexts, development opportunities may not be so varied. This paper suggests that action research can be used as a useful technique in developing. **Teacher Development: Term and concept, Defining Teacher Development:** Lange (1990 p. 250) argues that the term "professional development describes a process of continual intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal growth of teachers". Lange's definition concedes with Richards and Farrell's (2005) emphasis that "development generally refers to general growth not focused on a specific job" (p. 4). Teachers always need a renewal of their professional skills and knowledge and as Burns and Richards (2009) comment that this is not to be traced to the lack of or inadequacy of teacher training. They sign up to the facts that theoretical knowledge is changing constantly and that the pre-service teacher education does not provide everything to novice teachers. This means that there is always a constant change in the teacher's knowledge due to updates of theories and experience in teaching.

Teacher Development, Teacher Training and Teacher Education: According to Richards and Farrell (2005), teacher development is one of the two goals of the scope of teacher education. Therefore, teacher development constitutes a significant part of what can be called "continuous teacher education". Now, is there a relationship between teacher development and training? From the above definitions, we

may conclude that teacher development involves self-reflection into current teaching practices, enquiry on more effective teaching practices, exploration of new teaching theories, changing teaching techniques, growth of knowledge about teaching. Teacher training is related to activities directly focused on a teacher's present responsibilities and is typically aimed at short-term and immediate goals" (Richards and Farrell 2005, p. 3). Thus teacher development has a wider scope than mere training. Training involves learning the theory while development involves the professional growth. James (2001, p. 151) contrasts teacher training with teacher development arguing that "teacher development often focuses on the extension or development of teachers' existence knowledge or skills. It may be partly or wholly initiated by teachers, and is more individualized and flexible than teacher training with respect to the participating teachers". Ur (1996, p. 3) suggests that training "can imply unthinking habit formation and an over-emphasis on skills and techniques". Thus, we may summarize the relevance of both teacher training and teacher development in the course of teacher education in some points. Training is referred to as 'top-down', while development is referred to as 'bottom-up' (James, 2001, p. 152). Teacher training is done with experts, while teacher development is done with peers. Training focuses on skills and techniques while teacher development focuses on developing attitudes. Training can be presented or managed by others; whereas development can be done only by and for oneself.

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Underhill, A. (1986). Editorials. *Teacher Development Newsletter*, 9,4.
This reviews says that Professional development is a continuous proces, by applying action research teacher will be reached learners needs.

Principles and Objectives of Teacher Development: Clearly, teacher development is an on-going pursuit which needs to be framed by clear principles and objectives. The literature addressing on Teacher Development principles is not ample. However, there are some online sources for this but are either generic, i.e. related to professional development in general, or field specific, i.e. related to a specific filed of teaching. In an article appeared in the IDRA Newsletter by the Intercultural Development Research Association, Villarreal (2005) suggests seven principles for effective professional development for diverse schools. Of these we can take the following two principles to be applicable in EFL teaching context: Professional development is a lifelong process Professional development is based on adult learning

Research Methodology:

The Methods of Teacher Development: There are a number of activities which promote teacher development such as the knowledge growth, experience and attending workshops and conferences. Teacher development can be pursued as individuals for example by reading or as members of a group for example by conducting workshop mix theory with practice. These activities may be classified into individual and collaborative. Collaborative can be further subdivided into 'one-to-one', 'group- based', 'institutional'. Richards and Farrell (2005) label these into activities that can be achieved individually, collaboratively or a response to an institutional directive. Ur (1996) suggests some possible development areas including personal reflection, sharing with a colleague, in-house staff meetings, and many others. Richards and Farrell (2005, p. 14) introduce the types of activities for teacher development in the following table:

Table 1: Activities for Teacher Development adapted from Richards and Farrell (2005)

Individual	One-to-One	Group-based	Institutional
Self-mentoring	Peer coaching	Case studies	Workshops
Journal writing	Peer observation	Action research	Action research
Critical incidents	Critical friendships	Journal writing	Teacher support
Teaching portfolios	Action research	teacher support	groups
teacher support	Action research	Critical incidents	groups
	Team teaching		

One significant notice here is that action research is present in all types of activities. This means that it can be done through all the methods. It can be achieved individually, one-to-one, group-based and institutionally. Therefore, it is worth exploring the effectiveness of Action Research in doing teacher development.

Action Research: Burns (2009, pp. 289-290) introduces an elaborate definition of the action research in teacher education as follows:

Action research is the combination and interaction of two modes of activity – action and research. The action is located within the ongoing social processes of particular societal contexts, whether they are classrooms, schools.... The research is located within the systematic observation and analysis of the developments and changes that eventuate in order to identify the underlying rationale for the action and to make further changes as required based on findings and outcomes.

This systematic inquiry definitely seeks solution(s) to practical problem(s). Johnson (cited in Hines, 2013, p. 153) "asserts that action research bridges the gap between research and practice". Similarly, Burns (2009, p. 290) argues that the main purpose of action research is to "bridge the gap between the ideal (the most effective ways of doing things) and the real (the actual ways of doing things) in the social situation". The process of action research consists of three main stages "commonly referred to as the 'Look, Think, Act' model" (Hines, 2013, p. 153). The process begins with gathering information about the problem in the 'look' stage. Then, the information gathered is subjected to analysis and feature identification in the 'think' stage. Then, the information and the results of analysis are used to devise a solution for the problem in the 'act' stage. This process is represented in the form of helix or spiral as in figure 1 below (Stringer, 2004).

Encouraging Teacher Development through Conducting Action Research in Second language:

Figure 1: Action research helix (adapted from Stringer, 2004, p. 4) However, this process can be expanded to include five cyclic stages which are: designing the study, collecting data, analysing data, communicating outcomes, and talking actions. This is called action research cycle which is the common research process according to Stringer (2004). Figure 2 depicts these five key steps.

Figure 2: Action research cycle (adapted from Stringer, 2004, p. 5)

According to Burns (2009), there are more complex models for action research but the most common action research study model would consist of four stages: planning, action, observation and reflection. This model was designed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). It can be summarized in the following 4 steps: 1. develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening. 2. Act to implement the plan. 3. Observe the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs. 4. reflect on these effects as the basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action and so on, through a succession of stages (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 10). In applying my proposition on action research, I will apply this model as it is more suitable to my case study. As we have indicated in the outset of this section, teacher at the centre focus mainly on the practice of teaching. A major benefit of engaging them in this action research would be to enhance their knowledge of conducting research.

Description and Design of the Action Research Case Study;

Implementing the Procedures of Action Research: The following is description of the four steps of the research conducted, preceded by a pre- research stage, i.e. initial reflection.

Pre- AR: Initial Reflection: The classes that were involved in this study case included students in the intermediate level with a number of 12 adult students per each class and the Headway Plus (Intermediate level) was the textbook for those classes. The students were generally unmotivated in reading lessons and there was also a struggle to make reading lessons interesting for them as they did not have the passion to read the texts in the book. Thus, changing the strategies of presenting the reading text was the action that needs to be taken as there must be pre-reading strategies that would encourage the students to read with passion.

Moreover following up the reading classes with the other teachers was necessary and needed. Thus, the questionnaire in was the tool for collecting information from my colleagues on that issue. The questionnaires' results aligned with mine as it was found out that my colleagues faced the same problem in their classes. The results also showed that we did not focus on the pre-reading strategies such as showing visuals and videos in presenting the topic of the reading passage and this was justified passively as the students were adults and visual aids would be out of their interest. The results of the questionnaire also showed that we got our resources only from the textbooks and we did not get any reading texts from authentic resources. Overall, the problems were precisely defined based on the results of the questionnaire which made our planning step easier and clearer.

Step 1: Planning: Planning step started with preparing a variety of authentic reading texts from different resources such as current newspapers' articles and different websites. Then, we shared a strong belief in the significance of authentic readings in increasing the students' motivation and excitement in reading. Moreover, there was an effective planning for our lessons delivery as they included pre-reading techniques using different types of media such as data show, visuals and videos that were related to the topic of the target reading passage. Therefore, this planning of this case study was determined to be achieved in a three weeks timespan.

Step 2: Action Different reading passages from authentic resources and effective lesson planning with interesting pre-reading techniques were delivered to our classes in a timespan of three weeks. Moreover, there were group discussions among the students on the topic of each passage that paved the way to the actual reading of the content of the passage with the passion to find out more about the topic. The actual reading included two stages; the first stage was reading for gist as the students had to skim the passage to get the answer of an exciting and a general question. While the second stage was going through he detailed questions and reading extensively in order to find out the answers for those questions.

Step 3: Observation: The results of this action were very positive as the students who did not get involved in reading and who used to feel bored during reading and answering the questions started to challenge and compete with each other as they had the passion to know extensively about the interesting topic that motivated them to read the content of the passage. Thus, it can be said that the students were motivated enough which made them eager to know about the true facts in the authentic materials. Those results that were identical to the other colleagues' ones highlighted the great impact of the authentic readings such as an article from a newspaper as it seemed very authentic to the students. Overall, reading authentic materials had a great influence rather than reading traditional and old news texts in the course books no matter how authentic they were as the students believed that those texts lost their authenticity because they were old news.

Step 4: Reflection: After conducting these strategies in a timespan of three weeks, the students were asked to complete a questionnaire in order to investigate how far they enjoyed and were interested in the reading lessons. The questionnaire results were positive and it was found out that most of the students were interested in the reading lessons because of their authenticity and the followed strategies in presenting the topics of the reading passages. Moreover, a reflective questionnaire was conducted for all the teachers on the effect of the changes we made in the reading class that came up with results that highlighted the importance of using daily authentic readings in the classroom and how it is important to start with pre-reading strategies that would attract the students' attention, fuels the compulsion to read and encourage them to read enthusiastically.

Conclusion: From the literature reviewed and based on the application of the case study, there is evidence that action research is a useful practice for teachers. Action research serves a dual objective, namely serving as a vehicle to devise solutions for existing teaching issues and promoting teacher development. In addition, it provides teachers with the practical skills and specialized knowledge essential to achieve positive change within classrooms (Stringer, 2008). We can conclude that action research should be emphasized as a prominent method of teacher development.

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