

TEACHING AND RESEARCHING: IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS AND FINDING SOLUTIONS THROUGH CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH (CAR)

Pengajaran dan Penelitian: Mengidentifikasi Masalah dan Mencari Solusi Melalui Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK)

*Yulia Indahri, **Santri E. P. Djahimo

yulia.indahri@dpr.go.id
Pusat Penelitian Badan Keahlian DPR RI
Jl. Jenderal Gatot Subroto Senayan Jakarta
**Universitas Nusa Cendana, Kupang

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Abstract: *This paper presents several key issues about what teachers should do in their English as a foreign language (EFL) classes, in relation to their main job as teachers (i.e. teaching) and additional job for their professional development (i.e. researching). The main aim of this paper is to provide insightful information for teachers and teacher candidates about how they can improve themselves through teaching and researching activities, In addition, it also aims to discuss a particular way for them to be able to identify problems as well as find solutions in their own classroom through classroom action research (CAR).*

Keywords: *teacher, teaching, researching, classroom action research (CAR)*

Abstrak: Makalah ini menyajikan beberapa isu utama tentang apa yang harus dilakukan guru dalam kelas yang mengajar Bahasa Inggris, dalam kaitannya dengan pekerjaan utama mereka sebagai guru (yaitu mengajar) dan pekerjaan tambahan untuk pengembangan profesional mereka (yaitu penelitian). Tujuan utama dari makalah ini adalah untuk memberikan informasi yang mendalam bagi para guru dan calon guru tentang bagaimana mereka dapat meningkatkan diri mereka sendiri melalui kegiatan mengajar dan meneliti, Selain itu, juga bertujuan untuk membahas cara tertentu bagi mereka untuk dapat mengidentifikasi masalah serta temukan solusi di ruang kelas mereka sendiri melalui penelitian tindakan kelas (PTK).

Kata Kunci: guru, pengajaran, penelitian, penelitian tindakan kelas (PTK)

Introduction

It cannot be denied that teaching is a primary obligation of teachers. Many teachers are so comfortable being in the “teaching only zone” that they tend to escape the importance of other related activities for their professional development, such as conducting research, writing academic papers, attending professional seminars and/or workshops, etc. This group of teachers tends

to focus only on teaching because they want to improve their students’ learning quality without being interrupted by other activities.

However, they are not aware that they can even have double advantages if they step out of their comfort zone and start doing other professional development activities as mentioned earlier. By conducting research and attending professional workshops, they

are not only improve themselves in teaching performance, but also give much contribution to their students' quality. In this case, the expression of *input equals to output* applies. If the input is good then the output is great, and vice versa. This clearly means that if teachers have good teaching performance, students will have great result.

This paper will focus on one of teachers' professional development activities, that is, researching. It has been previously mentioned that in order to professionally develop themselves, teachers have to conduct research. It is expected that their aim of conducting research is not limited to fulfill one of the requirements to promote themselves to a higher position. It has to go beyond that. Teachers have to broaden their aims to improve and evaluate their teaching performance.

Teaching and Researching

Teaching and researching are two academic activities which are not supposed to be separated. They can support each other in each own way. Teachers as the executors of both activities can conduct them at the same time, in the same place, under the same authority.

Teachers can use their teaching and learning experience as the starting point for their research. They do not have to leave their classes or schools to conduct their research because they can conduct their research while teaching. Many teachers are still confused about the term 'research'. When it comes to their heads, they will think that it is a complicated academic activity which cannot be carried out by them in a school or classroom setting. Let's get a clear picture of what actually 'research' is before we go any further.

The word *research* consists of two parts, they are *re* and *search*. If we check in English dictionaries, *re* means *do again* and *search* means *look for* or *examine something*. So, research can be defined as a process of reflection and evaluation. We look back to the existing phenomenon and try to examine it in order to improve to a better stage. However, when we

are talking about scientific research, it has to be conducted in a set of scientific procedures by using scientific method and approach.

There are many different definitions of the word 'research' given by different experts. In spite of the differences in their views, they have similar points, that it is a scientific activity done in a systematic way in order to bridge the existing gap (Soekanto, 1986; Faisal, 2010; Ary, 1997; Creswell, 2014; Hillway, 1956).

Many technical terms appear around the word 'research'. Some of the terms are: basic/pure research, applied research, descriptive research, experimental research, qualitative research, quantitative research, action research, etc. Many of us sometimes get mixed up with those terms. To make it clear, We will give a brief description of those terms before continuing to discuss about a particular research for teachers.

Research is divided into many kinds and classifications based on its distinctive features. It can be classified based on the purpose, goal, type of analysis, strategies, level of investigation, etc. (Gonda & Aspi, 2014). It can also be classified based on the working field, namely: educational and non-educational research. Action research is an educational research which is, on one hand, classified as a type of applied research based on its goal, on the other hand, categorized as a classroom action research based on its scope. No matter what classification and type of research it belongs to, CAR) is unique by itself. The issues of what CAR is and how it is conducted will be discussed further in the following part.

Classroom Action Research

What is action research? What is CAR? The answers to those questions can be found easily nowadays. Many related answers have been given by many experts, as many as related literatures which grow rapidly.

Action research is an actual research method. It consists of two words, *action* and *research*. In a glance, these two nouns can mean taking action in a research activity or conducting a research through a set of actions.

Arguing about its definition, Cohen & Manion (1989) state that it is not easy to comprehend the definition of this term because time, place, and setting are varied between one another. Whatever it means, in this paper, it refers to the integration of teachers' actions into the research activity.

Historically, the movement of action research in education was emerged in the United States in the 1940s (Cohen & Manion, 1989) as one of the research models in the place where the researcher worked, for example: teachers conducted research in classrooms, headmasters carried out research in schools, villages where there were activities of community were the places for illumination providers, etc. and the use of this kind of research was to improve the effectiveness of the doers (Sukardi, 2003).

It has been stated earlier that there are various definitions of action research given by many experts, and two of them are presented here:

Action research is the way groups of people can organize the conditions under which they can learn from their own experiences and make their experience accessible to others (Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 1982 in Sukardi, 2011: 210).

Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 162).

It can be seen from these definitions that when we are talking about action research, we are still dealing with some general issues because it has not discussed about the classroom setting as a research site, teachers as researchers, and students as research subjects and/or informants yet. When a research is conducted in a classroom by a teacher, then it is called CAR.

CAR mainly occurs in classrooms and/or schools and its main aim is to encourage

and motivate teachers to involve in their own practices and to become researchers of their own problems in their own classrooms (Stenhouse in McNiff, 1988).

There are various definitions of CAR, and here are several of them:

Classroom action research is an examination of learning activities in the form of an action that is deliberately occurred in a classroom (Arikunto, 2006: 3).

CAR is a research that applies scientific method to solve a particular problem in a limited scope (Gonda & Aspi, 2014).

Classroom centered research is just that—research centered on the classroom, as distinct from, for example, research that concentrates on the inputs to the classroom (the syllabus, the teaching materials) or the outputs from the classroom (learner achievement scores). It does not ignore in any way or try to devalue the importance of such inputs and outputs. It simply tries to investigate what happens inside the classroom when learners and teachers come together (Allwright, 1983: 191).

The three definitions above are different but they involve some common factors, such as, the setting is in the classroom, the participants are teachers as researchers and students as research subjects, and it basically aims to solve problems in the classroom scope.

To wrap up, CAR is an action research method conducted by a teacher as the researcher in his/her classroom where the data is collected. In short, it can be summed up that CAR is conducting an action research in a classroom.

Why CAR is needed? Because it is simple and practical, and does not need to undergo standard requirement of a research, such as hypothesis testing, treatment, etc. (Nunan, 1990). He further asserts that it can be done through seven basic steps, they

are: (1) identifying potential problems, then surveying and observing using any possible tools; (2) coding or classifying the results of observation based on the problems; (3) determining at least one positive change over the problems to be implemented; (4) starting implementing the change in the class; (5) observing while implementing; (6) repeating the same coding activity over the observation as in step 2; (7) comparing the coded results of the pre- and post- implementation to see whether or not the changing has already been successful (Nunan, 1990).

Other aspects which show simplicity and practicality of CAR are, it can be carried out by either individual or group; it puts ideas into practices, and most importantly, it can function as a tool to give better improvement not only to teachers' teaching practice, but also to students' performance in the classroom. In this case, Cohen and Manion (1989) present four *tangible features* of action research, as follows:

- *Situational*; which means the ways to diagnose and solve problems have to be in a line (in terms of contexts).
- *Collaborative*; this can be done by both teachers and practitioners working together on a project.
- *Participatory*; all team members have to participate well in implementing the proposed changing.
- *Self-evaluative*; this kind of research relies on self-reflection and evaluation as one of indicators of success.

Beside the features, CAR is unique by its characteristics, which are slightly different from other formal research. Sukardi (2003) claims that there are four characteristics of CAR, as follows: practical problems related to daily work to be identified and solved; well-planned treatment is used to solve the problems to improve the quality of the research subjects; the steps planned are always in the form of cycles or phrases to be intensively carried out by individual or team; there is a reflective thinking of the researcher

either before or after the action. This self-reflection is very important to evaluate what has been treated and its implication on the research subjects.

In addition, Suryabrata (1983) also provides four characteristics of CAR, they are: it is practical and straight to the point; it prepares a well-arranged framework for problem solving and new improvement, and this makes this research more empirical; it is flexible and adaptive, which means that the process and procedure can be adapted and changed during the research period; and it does not have enough scientific orderliness which leads to the weakness of both internal and external validity. Moreover, its objective is situational, the sample is limited and not representative, and the control on the independent variable is very small. Looking at the weaknesses of CAR, it can be said that although the results are good for practical dimension but it does not give direct contribution to the science itself.

There are several purposes of conducting CAR as proposed by Cohen and Manion (1989); to solve problems in a specific context and offer solutions to a better change or improvement; to act as an *in-service training* in giving *new skills and methods*, and improving *analytical powers and self-awareness* of teachers; to change the previous approaches which usually prevent from *innovation and change*; to provide better alternatives, from a *subjective and impressionistic* approach to an approach of *problem-solving in the classroom*.

In carrying out CAR, teachers are usually acted as researchers. Further explanation about who can undertake this type of research is as follows:

- It can be done by a single teacher who carries out the research individually in his classroom. In this case, he wants to change or improve the way teaching, learning, or organization of the classroom goes by translating his ideas into action in his classroom. In this research, he can be both a researcher

and a practitioner.

- It can also be carried out by a team of teachers within one school. This group of teachers works together in conducting this research. An outside researcher may or may not be used as a consultant for the advice and suggestions.
- The third one is mostly used as the main feature recently. In conducting the research, a teacher or some teachers do not work alone but accompanied by a researcher or even researchers from other interested parties, like advisers, university departments, etc.

No matter how many people conducts the research, either individual or team, it has to go through four main stages known as cycles: *planning*, *acting*, *observing*, and *reflecting* (Sukardi, 2003), which will be elaborated below.

Planning

In this stage, the researcher has to make series of action planning by looking at the current condition. This planning aims to improve the previous condition. That is why, the planning has to be future-oriented because whatever planned will be implemented in the stage of acting. Guidance questions in this planning stage are *what*, *why*, *when*, *where*, *by whom*, and *how* in relation to the acting stage.

Acting

The second stage is acting, which should be controlled accurately. This phase must be done carefully and it must form a well-planned practical action. A good acting will be supported by a rational and standard planning. There are three important elements to build up a good acting, they are; *the improvement of practice*, *the improvement of understanding individually and collaboratively*, and *the improvement of situation in which the action takes place* (Sukardi, 2003). Shortly, this stage has to be carried out based on the plans.

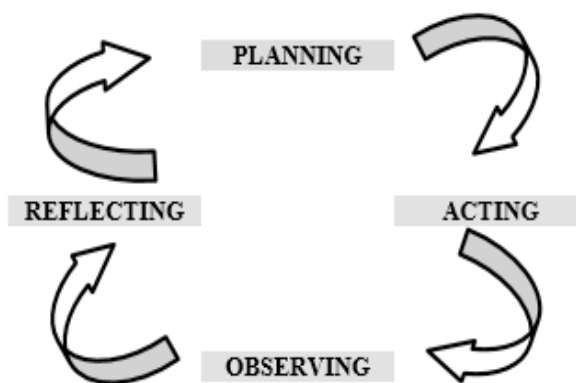
Observing

The use of the observing stage is to record the implication of action implemented. A very careful observation will be needed to overcome the limitation of action taken by the researcher. A good observation must be flexible and open in order to give a room for noting down both expected and unexpected indications.

Reflecting

The fourth stage is reflecting. This stage is seen as an instrument to reinvestigate the previous action used to treat the subjects, which has been recorded in the observing stage. In this stage, evaluation will take place to know whether or not the implementation is successful. If the result is not as expected then the process can be restarted from the first stage of the next cycle.

The procedures of conducting CAR can be seen in the model suggested by Kurl Lewin Kemis below:



(McNiff, 1988)

There are several important issues related to the procedure as suggested by Wallace (1998):

- Purpose; the teacher researcher has to consider about why the research is important to be conducted to come to the purpose. The purpose has to be in a line with the professional needs of the researcher(s).

- Topic; what to observe or what area to investigate is an essential question in order to decide the topic. The topic has to be feasible, it must support the professional development of the researcher(s), the source can be from the issues of teaching and learning process in the classroom, such as, classroom management, classroom interaction, students' motivation, etc.
- Focus; research focus comes from the topic. The question, like, _ what specific aspect of area/topic needs to be investigated in detail? _ is needed to determine a research focus.
- Product; what to achieve through the research is considered as the product. This product is resulted from the way the research is conducted.
- Research Modes; how is the research going to be conducted? _ is a good question to choose what research mode to use. Some common research techniques are verbal reports, observation, interviews, questionnaires, case studies, etc., and how to choose the best research modes has a close relationship with the ways of collecting and analyzing data.
- Timing; timetable is suggested to be created in order to know exactly the total period of time for completing the research. How long a research will take entirely depends on the research scope determined by researcher(s).
- Resources; material and people are two types of resources usually used in action research.
- Refocusing/fine-tuning; in the process of conducting a research, the problem(s) set at the beginning might be slightly or totally changed to some extent.

The flexibility and practicality of CAR can be felt as you step in that type of research. All the points presented in this paper are not

static, they can be dynamically used, depends on purpose, topic, research scope, research setting, research subjects, and so on.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn as the closing part of this paper:

- Teachers do not only do their primary obligation, that is, **teaching**, but they also have to deal with another important job for their professional development, that is, **researching**.
- For teachers. Classroom Action Research implies the way to educate themselves (as practitioners and teacher researchers) by adopting new ideas to be implemented in order to give better changes and improve their own classrooms at the same time.
- This type of research can be easily and practically carried out by a single teacher (individually), a team of researchers (team work), the joining team of teacher/s as practitioner/s and researcher/s from other interested parties.
- **Teaching** and **researching** can be an inseparable parts for teachers; while teaching, they can conduct their research, and vice versa. In teaching, they can **identify problems** which exist in their classroom, and through CAR, they can find solutions over the problems to improve their teaching-learning quality.

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