

Teachers' Ability in Formulating the Topics of their Classroom Action Researches

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Abstract. The objective of the study was to find out how successful the teachers were in formulating the topics of their classroom action researches after following a four- hour research proposal writing workshop. This phase of proposal writing activity was considered the most urgent among school teachers in Indonesia because most of them were not obliged to do researches until they were about to be promoted to be senior teaching staff members. The respondents of the study consisted of forty- two (42) teachers working for a junior high school in Yogyakarta Special Province, Indonesia. The instruments for collecting the data were the sheets of problem identification, particularly designed for assisting the teachers to begin writing their action research proposals. A descriptive quantitative technique was used to analyze the data. The results of the study showed that most respondents were not successful in formulating the topics of their classroom action researches.

Keywords: *classroom action research, junior high school teachers, research proposal.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In dealing with daily situations, teachers have to attempt to overcome practical problems they encounter in relation to their teaching activities. Since the problems can be very complicated, ranging from personal to academic contexts, various efforts have been made with or without the help of others. They work hard to improve the quality of their teaching by reading different books and articles about education and teaching. They consult senior teachers working for the same school for advice. They go to educational seminars to share their experiences and get new updated insights from university lecturers or other successful teachers. They return to college to get higher academic degrees or take part in seasonal non-degree courses. They join regular in-house training organized the school management or local teacher professional associations to learn new teaching approaches or governmental policies in education. However, most of them fail to do so because the source of their teaching problems lies within their own pedagogical, personal, social, and academic competencies. When the teachers begin to realize that all the teaching problems they face during their careers originate from within themselves, this is the time when classroom action researches can actually be performed.

Classroom action research is an academic activity that reflects the teaching-learning process. Suwandi [1] stated that classroom action research is aimed not only to reveal various kinds of problems having something to do with the teaching and learning processes but also to improve the quality of the teachers' performance and the results of students' learning. Furthermore, such an activity would most probably result in a conclusion that drives the teacher to become more autonomous, especially when the action research is done in a longitudinal design. Besides that, professional development would improve as the teachers also collaborate with other teachers, university students, and lecturers in doing the research.

As there are teachers who still need more information and understanding in doing classroom action research, a study on how they complete the initial steps in doing such researches is deemed necessary. The results of such a study are expected to reveal the problems that the teachers actually face in identifying their practical problems in preparing classroom action research. The most important purpose of the research is to reveal whether the teachers are successful in formulating the topics of their action researches in line with the problems they identify and the priorities they set up for further follow-ups.

Further explained, Harmer [2] defined that action research as the name given to a series of procedures in which the teachers can engage because they want to improve or to evaluate the success of certain activities and procedures. To extend this notion, Richards and Farrell [3] stated that action research is teacher-conducted classroom research that seeks to clarify and resolve practical teaching issues and problems. In sum, action research is carried out in the classroom by the teacher to solve some issues and problems related to the teaching-learning process.

This research methodology considered cyclical, dynamic, and collaborative in nature. Through repeated cycles of planning, observing, and reflecting, individuals and groups engaged in this research can implement changes required for improvement. Thus, it provides teachers with new knowledge and understanding about how to improve educational practices or resolve significant problems in classrooms and schools [4]. Action research offers beneficial opportunities for those within the teaching and for improving school practice, policy, or culture. Action research can be used to fill the gap between theory and practice and helps teachers develop new knowledge directly related to their classrooms, or in other words, action research is an effective means for professional development [5].

Mizell [6] define professional development as a kind of educational experience related to an individual's work. Thus an individual should continue learning and applying new knowledge and skills, which will improve their performance at work. Richards and Farrell [3] argued that professional development should not be regarded as an administrative duty, but rather as an effort aimed at disclosing the factors that contribute to the success of the learning process by means of action research. In other words, teacher-initiated research is a powerful way to investigate their own practice and be involved in institutional decisions and policies.

Action research requires the teacher to investigate an issue that he or she has been struggling with while engaging in the process of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Action research provides the means to solve the issues. Mills [4] outlines the goal of conducting action research as: "gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and educational practices in general, also improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved".

2. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach was used in this research. The collected data were quantitative in nature. They were in the forms of numbers [7] and were collected by using questionnaires. The respondents of the study consisted of forty-two (42) teachers working for a junior high school in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The instruments for collecting the data were the sheets of problem identification, especially designed for assisting the teachers to begin writing their action research proposals. The descriptive quantitative technique was used to analyze the data. The research is done through these steps: the collected data are organized, summarized, and described, and commonly used means include amount and range.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Pre-Lesson

The data showed that 50% of the respondents understood the concept of a teacher and student. 14% of the respondents showed that they get difficulties in comprehending the curriculum, while 12% of the respondents felt the other way around. 50% of the respondents thought that drafting a semester, and the annual program is not really hard. Though for writing the lesson plan, only 35% of the respondents thought that it was easy, 16% thought that it was a bit hard. In developing the teaching material which the researchers found that 26% of the respondents considered as an issue, and in scoring, 23% of the respondents felt that it was not too difficult. In addition, 45% of the respondents felt that they were ready to teach from their physical and psychological side.

3.2 During the Lesson

Throughout the teaching and learning process, 26% of the respondents assumed that the class situations already support the process. However, 21% of them felt that the class situation in reverse in the process. 40% of the respondents were assured that there is no obstacle in their punctuality on both starting and ending the learning process. Whereas 14% of the respondents were thinking of it as a bit of a problem. There were 50% of the respondents believed that they felt effortless to give the opening, 23% of the respondents also assumed that they were able to observe the learning process. However, 33% of the respondents considered that making an observation was a little hard. Furthermore, in terms of the students' responds, only 14% of the respondents who declared it was simple to ask the student to respond, 33% of the respondents assumed it was a problem. Additionally, 23% of the respondents thought that it was challenging for communicating both oral and written with the students, and only 26% of the respondents felt they were able to communicate easily. In closing the lesson, 26% of the respondents assumed that there were no difficulties in giving the score, 23% of the respondents found that it was quite demanding. However, 42% of them found it easy to deliver a summary of the learning material and the next learning-topic. Only 14% of the respondents felt a bit difficult about it.

3.3 Post-Lesson

To determine the standard minimum of completeness (KKM), 23% of the respondents realized that it was an easy task, whereas 18% of the respondents believed it was demanding for them. Moreover, the data showed that 19% of the respondents assured that they found

difficulties (the daily tests' results, the mid-term tests' results, and the final test result). Whereas the other respondents gave different responses to these questions, they assert that they thought they were having no problems with the scoring, 28% of the respondents assured on the daily tests' result, 21% respondents in mid-term test and 21% respondents in the final test's result rubric.

However, in making the school report, 23% of the respondents assumed that it was easy, and 16% of respondents assumed it was hard to do. While for the result of national-based school exams (USBN), 21% of respondents supposed that they do not have any difficulties, and 14 % of the respondents stated differently. For the result of the computer-based national exam (UNBK), 19% respondents felt that they found it not as a problem, though 16% of the respondents felt it was a problem for them. Additionally, as for the number of alumni accepted by well-known schools, 16% of the respondents stated that there were no difficulties for the students to be accepted-in by well-known schools. However, 30% of the respondents assert inversely.

3.4 Self-Development

In the context of self-development, the respondents set the plan to the self-development program such as the short term, medium-term, and long term self-development. However, 28% of the respondents stated that it was not a problem for them, and 19% stated that they felt it would be hard for them. 38% of the respondents would be keen on participating in the internal-teacher forum and external. Moreover, 33% of respondents would love to participate in various scientific forums inside and outside the school (seminar, etc.). 28% of respondents would like to participate in the teaching team, lesson study, etc. Additionally, 30% of the respondents stated that they followed the education and/or with/without a degree- and workshop. However, for developing personal-library development (printed and/or digital), only 19% of the respondents stated that they were attracted to it.

3.5 Topics formulating

The results of this research showed that more than half of the respondents (55%) could formulate the topics of their classroom researches in line with the problems they identified and the priorities they set up for further follow-ups. The other respondents (34%) failed to formulate the research topics appropriately, and the rest (9%) did not deliver their topics. This very fact indicated that the program of continuing teacher professional development supported by the government through its various programs, especially the teachers' certification program, which has already increased their financial power, was in jeopardy. The school management must make more efforts to motivate the teachers to work hard to be more autonomous in developing their jobs as professional teachers.

Formulating research topics is an important step in doing any research, especially classroom action research. The success in formulating such topics would help ease the remaining steps, including a literature review and research methodology, which consists of data collection and analysis. An appropriate research topic would facilitate the researcher in getting the overall pictures of the research activities. One of the criteria of a scientific research topic is its informative and attractive nature. In the context of action research itself, Huang [8] writes that the quality of action research consists of the following aspects.

- 1) It proceeds from a praxis of participation,
- 2) is guided by practitioners' concerns for practicality,

- 3) is inclusive in terms of stakeholders' ways of knowing,
- 4) helps to build capacity for ongoing change efforts, and
- 5) is engaged with those issues people might consider significant for the flourishing of people, their communities, and the broader ecology.

5. CONCLUSION

Classroom action research has been practiced as one of the becoming more popular teachers' common efforts to solve the teaching problems at schools. Nevertheless, most teachers still have difficulties initiating this particular research. The results of this study showed that, after taking part in a classroom action research workshop, almost half of the participants failed to formulate their research topics appropriately. This was mainly due to two important factors, 1) misconception of classroom action research and 2) lack in practical research experiences.

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