

Teachers Reflection on the Factors Contributing Their Success in Conducting Action Research

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ABSTRAK

Abstract: This study aimed to explore the experiences of public junior high school English teachers in Malang in conducting classroom action research in terms of the factors that contribute to their success in conducting action research. The main data of this study were collected through individual semi-structured interviews administered to 3 public junior high school English teachers in Malang, Indonesia. The findings suggest that teachers' eagerness in helping their students learning better as well as improving themselves to be better teacher may be the 'it' factor contributing to their success in conducting action research. On the basis of aforementioned findings implications were discussed and recommendations were made for the teachers, schools, and future researchers.

Abstrak: Studi ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi pengalaman guru bahasa Inggris di sekolah menengah pertama negeri di Malang dalam melaksanakan penelitian tindakan kelas yang mencakup faktor-faktor yang mendasari keberhasilan mereka dalam melaksanakan penelitian tindakan. Data utama dalam penelitian ini dikumpulkan melalui wawancara individu semi terstruktur pada tiga guru bahasa Inggris di sekolah menengah pertama negeri di Malang. Hasil dari penelitian ini memberikan kesan bahwa keinginan kuat guru untuk membantu muridnya dalam belajar dan meningkatkan kemampuan dirinya untuk menjadi guru yang lebih baik mungkin menjadi faktor kunci kesuksesan mereka dalam melaksanakan penelitian tindakan. Berdasarkan hasil penemuan yang telah disebutkan implikasi didiskusikan dan rekomendasi dibuat untuk guru, sekolah, dan peneliti selanjutnya.

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Realizing a more interesting and dynamic classroom instruction can be done through quality professional development designed for the teachers in order to be successful. (Mizell, 2014) states that significant improvements in education almost never take place without professional development. Therefore, educational research has long been interested in trying to identify factors that affect teachers' development. One of the factors which is considered to have a great influence for teachers' professional development is teachers' beliefs about their teaching practices. Thus, it is not surprising that this topic has been garnering attention to be discussed on.

Recently, researchers have considered that the value of professional development relied on the teachers themselves rather than on the people outside the school community. Why? It is because the teachers in a school are the real experts who know the condition and needs of the other teachers and students in that school in order to increase success. (Wermke, Olason Rick, & Salokangas, 2019) study claims that classroom teachers need an autonomy and personal decision-making. Autonomous, teacher-directed professional development can take on a variety of forms (Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, Mundry, & Love, 2010), however this study would focus only on action research (AR).

(Wyatt & Borg, 2011) investigated teachers' perspective of researching their classroom practices. The starting point of his study was that action research (AR) helps teachers to improve their professional development as they focus on their intellects, academic knowledge, and personal experience while conducting the classroom-based research. The results of his study show that teachers highlight various benefits of engaging in action research, particularly on their professional development including raising their awareness in helping fellow teachers as well as overcoming their students' problems. These results are also supported in study (Kang, 2007). The results of his study show that elementary school teachers view action research as a valuable vehicle for them to improve their professional development in terms of conceptual understanding about the materials. Also, teacher research as professional has been found to have distinctive effect on those who have done it. (Atay, 2008) states that teacher participation in AR helps teachers to become more flexible and more open to new ideas.

Furthermore (Rahimi & Weisi, 2018) states in his study that teachers who conduct action research respond to their engagement in action research positively as they believe that it has helped them in improving their professional teaching practice. In addition to these, (Mettetal, 2003) also claims that teachers see action research as an effective and data-based practice inquiry for them to know what work best in their classroom.

Over the last few years, researches have shown that teachers hold positive view on action research as they consider it as a means to improve their professional development. (Piggot-Irvine, 2006) in her literature review study supports this idea as she states that effective professional development points directly to action research. However, conducting action research as a part of professional development is rewarding and demanding at the same time for teachers. Although there are growing evidence in the literature on the positive outcomes associated with teachers' engagement in action research, not many teachers are willing to conduct action research as it also means an additional workloads for them (Cain, 2011).

In Indonesia, professional development is a key area of critical planning and agenda of the Ministry of National Education (MONE) and Action Research belongs to one sub area of teachers' professional development. Therefore, MONE through the MONE Regulation No. 35 Year 2010 about *Teachers Functional Positions and Its Credit Numbers* has encouraged Indonesian teachers to conduct AR and make scientific publications to increase their credit numbers. Yet, the number of teachers' researches in Indonesia were reported to be still low as teachers are faced with many problems that affect their interest and motivation to conduct research (Leonard, 2015). (Leonard, 2015) found that 90% of 60 teachers in his study stated that they never conducted research. There are five reasons on why teachers in Indonesia are reluctant to conduct action research namely (1) lack of professional understanding; (2) lack of time to read researches; (3) lack of time to write research; (4) unable to manage time; (5) being trapped into routines.

Using these reasons as a starting point, this study tried to further explore the experiences of public junior high school teachers in Malang, with regards to doing action research in their classes. We must wonder about how teachers can succeed in doing their action research. Why are they interested in doing action research? What motivate them to conduct action research? These questions need to be answered so that the value of action research in EFL teaching can be completely addressed. In addition, as there are limited studies regarding teachers experience in conducting action research in Indonesia context, this study attempts to fill the gap in the literature. Understanding how these teachers reflect on their experience in conducting action research is essential in order to know their key success in education research.

Based on the background of the research, this study aimed to discuss the research experiences of EFL teachers in Junior High School in Malang and explore the overarching question of how they reflect on their participation on action research. Specifically, the main research question of the study was formulated as follows: "*How can the teachers succeed in doing action research?*" In addition, to address the main research question in this study, the main research question was elaborated into several sub-questions as follows (1) What are the motivation that the teachers have in conducting action research?, (2) What is the school managers' attitude towards action research—do they provide support system for the teachers to conduct action research?

METHOD

This study used the framework of descriptive qualitative research. Descriptive qualitative research design was chosen in order to get in-depth analysis of the data collected. In order to get the authentic data, the researcher took the data from the subjects directly without manipulating the condition. The study was conducted in Malang, East Java, Indonesia, where three English teachers from three different public junior high schools participated in the research. The subjects of this study were chosen using criterion-based selection as mentioned in (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & Ann McKibbin, 2015) The specific criteria used for selection were: first, meet the purposive criteria for the research, namely: had done/conducted at least one research study and written research report based on their study, had presented their research study in local/national seminars or conferences, had won at least one regional or national competition in CAR/Teachers Competition, and had taught in public junior high school for at least five years; second, the recommendation from the Chief of Secondary School Subject Teacher's Working Group (MGMP Bahasa Inggris) in Malang; and lastly, willingness to participate in this study.

Since this study was a descriptive study, the main instrument of the study is the researcher herself. The researcher will act as the one who interview, collect, analyse, and interpret the data. The secondary instruments will be an interview guide. The researcher developed the questions in the interview guide and asked an expert validator to validate whether the questions in the interview guide were good enough to address the issue in this study.

The technique of data analysis employed in this study is Interactive Model of Analysis using snowballing procedures. (Miles & Huberman, 2019) in this model suggest that minimally four procedures should take place interactively in data analysis. These procedures were data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Meanwhile, according to (Latief, 2012) snowballing procedures allow the researcher to collect data, analyze data, and draw conclusion in one cycle.

FINDINGS

The findings are about their reflection on their experience in conducting action research in which is developed into several variables namely: interest/motivation to conduct/participate in research and school supports. This variables are presented into sub-themes. Directly quoted interview excerpts are given below and pseudonyms are used for the participating teachers.

Motivation

The results from the interview revealed that awareness of the importance of action research as well as willingness to help the students to be more successful in their learning along with eagerness to improve themselves to be better teacher become their biggest motivation to succeed in conducting action research.

“... [I became] aware of the importance of action research to make academic publication based on the research report that we have written, after joining the teacher training program—the program also taught us how to conduct action research. After that, I began to conduct my research, starting from reading a lot of references for my research. I became more motivated to help my students to achieve better results in their study through the implementation of CAR that I have planned.” (Jasmine)

“I did want to help my students improve their skills in English (through CAR).” (Rose)

“At that time I was new in teaching. I had less than 10 years teaching experiences. ... I felt that I was lacking in classroom management, teaching media, and (after joining the teacher training program) I felt that doing CAR might help me to overcome my problems. Besides, I also felt motivated to help my students to be better in studying (English).” (Lily)

From the teachers’ responses when asked about their motivations to do research, it is clear that conducting research for the purpose of fulfilling instrumental factors like job promotion or employer pressure were not the case for the participating teachers in this study.

School Supports

The results from the interview revealed that although the schools of all three participating teachers were supportive of their engagement in action research, the sufficient support system in terms of work, financial and training have not been provided for the teachers when conducting their action research.

“(My school is) really supportive of course. My school (through the principal and vice principal) really support me and other teachers who conduct CAR. No, there is no systematic support system yet.” (Jasmine)

“My school (managers) really supports teachers’ participation in CAR—for example, if we need partner to conduct CAR—as observer or rater—then, we are allowed to ask for helps from our fellows. And, if there is seminar in education, we would be informed so, if we are interested, we can present our work there. (As for the systematic support system) we don’t have it yet.” (Rose)

“My school really supports teachers’ participation in CAR—for example, when we hold teachers meeting, the Principal would encourage us to conduct CAR, to make improvement in our teaching and learning activity—as for the systematic support system) as far as I know there is no support system yet.” (Lily).

DISCUSSIONS

There are some commonalities in the findings of this study as highlighted in the interview. First, the findings also suggest that teachers’ willingness to help their students to achieve better in learning and their eagerness to become better teachers for their students also became the motor that motivate them to succeed in their CAR. This result is in line with (Wyatt, 2011) as he highlights in his study that teachers concern of their students learning problem was the biggest motivation for the participating teachers in his study to succeed in conducting action research.

Second, the findings of this study also suggest that instrumental factors such as promotion and employer (school managers) pressure did not appear as prominent motivation for all of the participating teachers in this study to succeed in conducting CAR. This results were different from what the researcher has predicted. Because the challenging nature of conducting CAR for teachers, the researcher had expected that getting job promotion would have played important role in motivating the participating teachers in this study to be successful in their CAR practice. However, the findings show differently as the participating teachers in this study assured that although such factor is important for their career, but it did not really exert a significant effect on their determination to succeed in conducting CAR. This findings also in contrast to (Ulla,

2018) study, as he reveals in his study that the purpose of the participating teachers in his study in conducting research was not for finding and solving problems in their classrooms but more on the instrumental factors like complying for their postgraduate requirements and job promotion.

And lastly, all of the participating teachers in this study did not get sufficient support from their affiliated schools. Even though, according to (Ellis & Loughland, 2016) study it was found that when teachers get sufficient support according to their needs, they will be able to write good quality research works. Furthermore, (Cooper-twamley, Ed, Wilkerson, & Ph, 2009) and (Othman & Masum, 2017) also suggest that the school environment is the best supporter for teachers' success in professional development, like in conducting CAR. In addition, (Morales et al., 2016) also state in their study that teachers' conception to conduct research depend a lot on their school support; when schools—through the school managers and administrators—encouraged their teachers, both morally and financially, to examine and assess their own work by conducting research, they become more effective and empowered to make positive changes in their classes. Unfortunately, the findings of this study are in contrast to these studies because the findings in this study show that school support did not play a major role in Jasmine, Rose, and Lily's success in conducting action research. Although the school principals and administrators of Jasmine, Rose, and Lily view action research positively and were supportive with their engagement in action research, the support system given to the teachers who conducted CAR is poor as the school principals and administrators of these three participating teachers have not yet provided them with work, training, and financial, needed to conduct action research in their schools.

CONCLUSIONS

This present study tried to identify the reasons behind the success in conducting action research of three English teachers in Junior High School in Malang. To address this, the researcher explored these teachers experience in conducting action research in the following variables, namely: 1) motivation to conduct/participate in research and 2) school supports. The findings of this study indicate that the strong will to succeed in helping their students achieve better in learning through CAR of the participating teachers in this study has contributed greatly in their success in conducting action research.

School's support and environment can be deciding factors for teachers' success in conducting CAR, but the results of this study suggest that these were not the case for the participating teachers in this study. Support system that includes financial, work and training in all of the participating teachers' schools have not been developed yet. However this did not make them less determined to succeed in conducting the research as they still get morally supported by their schools' principals and administrators to conduct research, however the lack of access to sufficient research materials/resources due to the unavailability of the support system in their school did become a setback in their research engagement.

Based on the conclusions of the study, some suggestions are directed to the participating teachers or English teachers in general, the schools, and the future researcher. First, since all of the participating teachers hold positive perception towards action research, it is suggested for the participating teachers or English teachers in general, to continue to pursue participation in classroom action research (CAR). Second, for the schools, the opportunity to conduct CAR as a form of professional development that is viewed by the teachers as being rewarding and may positively impact student achievement should continue to be supported. The schools, through the principal or administrator should support their teachers who are keep on doing research not only morally but also systematically (financial, work, and training) in order to increase their (the teachers') motivation to continue doing research. Next, to motivate teachers to conduct research, the school should send the teachers to research training and workshops (beside those already provided by the Department of Education) in order to gain the necessary skills and knowledge. Then, teachers who conduct research should be funded appropriately so that they will feel motivated to conduct their research. And last, time to conduct research should be given by, for example, reducing their teaching hours so that teachers will have more time to focus on writing good quality research report. Last but not least, for the future researcher(s), the findings of this study show that teachers motivation to help their students and improve their practice bring positive result in the successfulness of their CAR practice and CAR is seen as a valuable tool of professional development that have promising impact on them, both personally and professionally, however it must be noted that there are still limitation to this study as it only involved small setting, number of participants, and variables. Furthermore, the successfulness of the participating teachers in conducting CAR in this study was only accounted from the teacher's point of view. Therefore, it is suggested that the future researcher(s) would continue to pursue the study of CAR as a form of professional development and its impact on teachers with bigger setting, sample, as well as different research design and point of view, as necessary.

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