

Title of submission: Training on Classroom Research Skills for Student Teachers

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ABSTRACT

In year four, the students have to complete 20-week internship of practice teaching under the supervision of a lecturer and a class teacher. They have to assume full responsibility for learning experience of their assigned classes. To be effective becoming teachers, the students need to employ research as part of their own ongoing approach to the classroom. They were full equipped with pedagogical content knowledge except skills in conducting research. Therefore a training project on classroom research was established as a part of Student Teaching course to install in them a striving for self-improvement and benefits for their future career. The participants were 107 senior students who enrolled in Student Teaching course and 18 lecturers in the Department of Secondary Education, Faculty of Education. The principles of action research were employed to provide training process in classroom research. Mini-lecture, group activities, discussion, exercise, and presentation were used in training project. Participant observation, interview, journal writing, questionnaires, reflecting writing, and photographs were used to collect data. The results were reported in narrative form. The findings indicated that the students developed ability in conducting classroom research. Moreover the principles of action research could be used to teach research methodology at tertiary level.

Key words: action research; classroom research; student teaching

I N T R O D U C T I O N

As the foundation of the new Constitution, the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) has become effective since August 20, 1999 (Office of National Education Committee, 1999). Learning reform is the important part of all concern. The Act puts its emphasis on the development of quality of human resources, lifelong education for all, all for education, and continuous development of the bodies of knowledge and learning processes. Therefore, it is responsibility for everyone to be involved in the reformation of the education system (Kadetutat, 1999). Education shall be based on the principle that all learners are capable of learning and self-development, and are regarded as being most important. The teaching-learning process shall aim at enabling the learners to develop themselves at their own pace and to the best of their potentiality as stated in Section 22 of the Act. In addition, Section 24 of the Act stated that “In organising the learning process, educational institutions and agencies concerned shall enable instructors to create the environment, instructional media and facilities for learners to learn all be all-round persons, able to benefit from research as part of the learning process. In doing so, both learners and teachers may learn together from different types of teaching-learning media and other sources of knowledge”. Section 30 of the Act also stated that “ Educational institutions shall develop effective learning processes. In so doing, they shall also encourage instructors to carry out research for developing suitable

learning for learners at different levels of education” (Office of National Education Committee, 1999). The Thai education system has changed little in relation to teaching and learning strategies during the past three decades. The idea of child centred learning is good in fostering the above ideas but it is hard for teachers to implement. Although there have been many guidelines to support the above ideas but most teachers have not been able to implement theory into practice. Thus, recent teaching and learning methods were not enough to stimulate children’s thinking and action. To motivate children to think and act more efficiently, the teachers should always develop learning processes by conducting classroom research. Classroom research is a systematic and reliable process to investigate knowledge and information in a context that needs to be improved and developed. The teacher could be a producer and a consumer of research results at the same time. Classroom research helps teachers to be objective about themselves and also help them to make decisions efficiently (Suwankhetnikom, 1995; Miller, 2002). Classroom research is not only problem solving but also a research to find problems for further management. We can use the results of research to solve and improve real problems of our schools. Classroom research fosters our knowledge in schools. It is a research for professional development and it is a research that deals with teaching and learning in schools and communities. If we can conduct classroom research ourselves, the outcome is more directed and relevant to the problem and also can be implemented faster. Therefore the most suitable research for the teacher is classroom research (Worawan Na Ayudhaya, 1995; Miller, 2002)

According to the aforementioned ideas, classroom research is an interesting and useful idea of research in developing teaching and learning. Teachers conduct research in their own context. This research should enhance the teaching and learning competency of teachers. So it is an action research for professional development. Action research is focussed on the improvement and involvement of its participants (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992; Miller, 2002). It attempts to involve participants in educational process through studying their own professional work collaboratively (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992; Miller, 2002). The primary emphases of action research are action as a fundamental process or the improvement of practice, increasing understanding about practice in a collaborative group, and improving the situation in which the practice takes place (Zuber- Skerritt, 1992). Kemmis and McTaggart (1992) suggest four steps in a self-reflective spiral of action research: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. These steps provide basis on which participants can formulate new plans, new action, observation, and reflection, and repetition of the whole process until a satisfactory result is achieved. Action research emphasises dissatisfaction in personal practice. It seeks to improve teaching practice by systematically trying alternative strategies in a search for more satisfactory practice

The fourth year standing students who enrolled in the Student Teaching course have to practise teaching in schools under the supervision of the Faculty staffs and a class teacher. They have to perform all duties as teachers. Therefore conducting classroom research is also a task that the students have to perform. However, most of recent pre-service teacher education in Thailand does not offer subjects or courses for student to study or practise classroom research. Therefore the researchers conducted a study to foster students’ skills in conducting classroom research and to examine the outcomes of the training project. This project is very important because it is designed to help students develop teaching and learning process as well as to encourage them to conduct classroom research to enhance active participation of the pupils in their assigned classes.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The researchers thought that an action research is a possible strategy to foster classroom research skills for students. This idea led to the following research question:
What would happen when we apply the principles of action research in training classroom research skills for students ?

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

- To foster knowledge and skills on classroom research for students.
- To study the outcomes the training project.

METHOD

In conducting the study, the researchers performed a literature review and provided a training project using the principles of action research.

Participants

The participants were 18 lecturers (10 males and 8 females) and 107 fourth year standing students (39 males and 68 females) of the Department of Secondary Education, Faculty of Education, Khon Kaen University.

Procedure

The training project is developed full consultation with the supervising lecturer and a class teacher but is essentially the student's own work. This training project is highly interactive. Mini-lecture, group activities, exercise, discussion, and presentation were used in this training project. The students have ample opportunity to consult with their lecturers in conducting a research task. The students had to participate in this project before, during, and after practising teaching in schools. This project was taken place at the Department of Secondary Education on Friday afternoon. The training process comprised of five steps: conducting a workshop on action plan, implementing the action plan, collecting the information along the process, analysing of information, and writing the report using both qualitative and quantitative forms. Topics in training workshop were classroom research (May 11, 2001); quantitative research (June 1, 2001); qualitative research (June 15, 2001); research proposal (July 20, 2001); writing research report (August 10, 2001); and techniques in presentation of research (August 31, 2001). The students had to present their research reports on September 14 and 21, 2001. October 5, 2001 was a day for reflection used as an evaluation of training project in conducting classroom research.

Techniques for collecting data and monitoring the study

For the training process, the lecturers planned the activities to foster classroom research knowledge and skills for the students and the schedule allowed them to consult on their problems with their research advisors once a week during their teaching in schools. In monitoring the study, the researchers employed various techniques for collecting data

such as participant observation, interview, questionnaires, journal writing, reflecting writing, and photographs.

Techniques for analysing of data

The data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, with the emphasis was place on qualitative approach. The data gained from questionnaires were analysed in frequency and percentage terms. The reflective writings were transcribed, implemented, checked, concluded and reported in narrative form (descriptive report). The triangulation technique was applied in cross - checking a number of participants' perceptions of an event (Grundy and Kemmis, 1981; Elliot,1991). Participants were interviewed with three different interviewers to determine the consistency of data. The report of journal writing and reflecting writing were read and verified by participants for authentic ideas or viewpoints. In analysing qualitative data, a process of interpretative approach was used to understand the essences of phenomenon under investigation by focusing on meaning of events and phenomena and the social events from every angle and considering it thoughtfully (Comstock, 1982; Jeans, 1997; Newman, 2002).

RESULTS

The students developed skills such as identification and definition of problems, classroom observation, collection and analysis of data, interpretation of the results, and writing a report. Most lecturers who advised the research mentioned that at first the students gained only some basic knowledge about classroom research but they gradually gained more knowledge and skills during the ongoing process and finally they finished their research tasks very well. They were satisfied with the results because the students presented their research very well. However, there were some lecturers who reported that some students' anxiety about conducting the research were gradually declined after consulting with their research advisors. Before the internship, the students mentioned that they were confused, discouraged and worried about the implementation of knowledge they possess into practice. They also mentioned that providing knowledge before, during, and after conducting classroom research made them gradually gain confidence in conducting classroom research. Most of them were very proud of conducting classroom research but some of them felt that they were unsatisfied with the results because they realised that there were many things that they had to improve their research. They suggested that it should add more documents and more time in providing knowledge and skills in conducting classroom research. The students and their research advisors stated that classroom research is useful and they had gained a lot of experience so that they could implement such projects in the future. The research advisors also agreed that this training project should be continued for the next students because this activity is very useful for future work of the students. However, both students and their research advisors suggested that knowledge of classroom research should be offered as a required subject course before they take the Student Teaching course.

The following are opinions extracted from journal writing, interview, and open-ended questionnaire.

“If you want the students to be successful in research, I suggest that you should offer a research course in curriculum. Let them study in this way before they go to practise teaching in schools. I really believe that the outcome would be better than training them for a short period of time”.
(E x t r a c t e d f r o m a l e c t u r e r ' s j o u r n a l)

“I think that conducting research will interrupt teaching practice of the students so it will lower teaching efficiency because they spend too much time for researching”. (Extracted from a lecturer’s journal)

“I believe that the students could apply experience in conducting research especially if they continue study some more details”. (Extracted from a lecturer’s interview)

“I think that this group of students’ research presentations are more effective than that of the former group of students”. (Extracted from a lecturer’s questionnaire)

“This project should be continued and improved the process of training using the principles of action research for the benefits of the students”.(Extracted from a lecturer’s questionnaire)

“Some students don’t understand research method well enough so it takes times for me to advise them’. (Extracted from a lecturer’s journal)

“In regard to the research task this semester, I am satisfied and happy with the fact that the Department has added this task to our teaching practice.” (E x t r a c t e d f r o m a s t u d e n t ’ s j o u r n a l)

“I will improve my teaching through researching. Classroom research is good for my career and for the benefits of the learners too”. (Extracted from a student’s questionnaire)

“At first, when I was informed that I have to conduct research apart from teaching, I was very worried and so were my friends. My tension was gradually declined after consulting with my research advisor. Now my research task is carried on very well even though it has not finished yet but I am fairly sure that I can finish it without any problems”. (Extracted from a s t u d e n t ’ s j o u r n a l)

“It would be nice if the research advisors give comments or suggestions in the same pattern on our tasks: proposal writing, report writing and presentation”.(Extracted from a student’s questionnaire)

Conclusions

Most research advisors believe that there are many positive impacts and value of classroom research towards the students’ ability and attitude in conducting research. Most students realised the usefulness and importance of classroom research and some of them are proud of the results. The students and lecturers developed a sense of working in a supportive environment. The students learned the benefits that came from working with lecturers and from building trusting relationship. Collectively, these skills of conducting a classroom research help prepare the students for the professional development. In addition, the benefits of this training project was not limited to personal development of students but also have included the professional development and pedagogical strategies. Moreover, the principles of action research could be used to the training of academics to teach research methodology at tertiary level.

For the next implementation of this training project, the researchers have to provide some more documents and time allocation. The outcomes of this study suggested that it is about time that the Faculty of Education, Khon Kaen University should offer the Classroom Research course for the students to take as a requirement for the degree before they take the Student Teaching course. It is necessary that teacher education students must be trained to be competent to teach and conduct a classroom research.

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