

Conducting Action Research (CAR): Difficulties, Issues, and Challenges of Junior High School Teachers of Bukidnon National High School

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to investigate the difficulties, issues, and challenges of junior high school teachers of Bukidnon National High School in conducting action research. Specifically, the study aimed to identify the difficulties, issues, and challenges, and their coping mechanism in addressing their difficulties, issues, and challenges in conducting action research, and formulate recommendations and insights of the teachers to address the difficulties, issues, and challenges they had experienced. The study utilized a qualitative research design using phenomenological analysis. The participants of the study were five teachers coming from the different departments in our school. They were purposively selected such that each of them has completed at least one research project. A face-to-face interview was conducted with all of the participants. The instrument being used was a semi-structured interview tool in which the participants were asked to answer the five open-ended questions. The qualitative data gathered was analyzed using thematic analysis.

The findings of the study reveal that time management is one of the challenges of the teachers who conducted action research. They also have difficulties in writing the content of their research as well as the format to be followed. The teachers also have issues in conducting action research, especially the resources that they can use for their study. Based on the experiences of the teachers, they recommended creating a mentorship program in our school about research, creating a guide outline that serves as a friendly template for new researchers, and an “Adopt a Teacher-Researcher” program.

Keywords: Challenges in Conducting Research, Conducting Action Research

INTRODUCTION

Over the previous decades, action research in education has gotten much attention, notably in developed countries and even in developing ones like the Philippines. In light of current educational trends worldwide, teachers must continue to improve their professional abilities and expertise. One way to improve professionally is by engaging oneself in research.

Action research has also allowed teachers to reflect on their pedagogical approaches and make changes in their practices to positively impact their teaching and the enhanced performance of their learners. Moreover, conducting action research has had a significant impact on improving teachers’ lifelong learning and continuing professional development (Ulla, et.al., 2017; Cain & Milovic, 2010). It is also a way to discover how a particular practice can be improved or adjusted to address the educational problem and to write an account of what happened (Bayan, 2017).

With the implementation of the K-12 program of the Department of Education across all Basic Education Institutions in the country and the present pandemic the world is experiencing right now, some significant

variables must be considered such as evidence-based policy, increased learner achievement, upgraded curriculum, instruction, and assessment, teacher professionalism, and competitiveness. With these, the inclusion of action research as a crucial function of a teacher in the 21st century is strongly advocated.

Many initiatives and programs were implemented and established by the Department of Education to institutionalize action research in basic education. Some of these are Implementation of *DepEd No. 24, Series of 2010 or the Basic Education Research Fund, DepEd Order No. 43, Series of 2015 – Revised Guidelines for The Basic Education Research Fund (BERF), DepEd Order 4, series of 2016 or the Amendment to DepEd Order No. 43, series of 2015, DepEd Order 26, series of 2021 or the Amendment to DepEd Order No. 16, s. the year 2017 (Research Management Guidelines)*. Teachers must therefore embrace action research in their professional lives to build a research culture among schools to improve educational results for local and global competitiveness.

Although the Department of Education and other educational institutions in the Philippines have encouraged their teachers to conduct their action research, as it is seen to be useful for their professional development and in their teaching career, teachers are confronted with many issues and concerns that affect their desire to undertake research. Teachers' research productivity is still low and not impressive at all (Morales, 2016). Teachers in basic education, such as those in junior high school, are still adjusting to action research as a component of their educational and professional function.

Moreover, despite the issuance of DepEd order no. 39 s. 2016 or the Adoption of the Basic Education Research Agenda, which guides DepEd and stakeholders in the conduct of education research and the utilization of research results, teachers from elementary and secondary schools are uninterested and unmotivated in doing action research. Teachers ignore the benefits of researching that it is for their professional development. They are uninterested in conducting research since they believe it will add to their workload.

In Bukidnon National High School where the researchers are teaching, promoting the culture of research through various initiatives such as having “Research Hour”, Annual School-based Research Congress, Action Research Action Cell (ARAC), and the likes, are the different initiatives conducted by the school just to capacitate teachers for them to engage into research, but only a few got to finish their action research proposals. During the School Year 2019-2020, only 21 teachers out of the 210 Junior High School teachers were able to finish their Action Research Proposals and that is only 10% of the total population of Junior High School Teachers. School Year 2020-2021, almost the same number of Junior High School teachers also participated and presented their action research. The number of teacher-researchers had never increased despite the many initiatives offered by the school. In addition to that, most of the teacher-researchers of school year 2020-2021 were also the same teachers presented research during school year 2019-2020. With these claims, there could be hidden issues that need to be explored as to why the productivity of research is low.

Thus, this study aims to explore the issues, difficulties, and challenges of junior high school teachers at Bukidnon National High School in conducting their very own action research. Moreover, this action research will provide our school administrators and the school Action Research Cell (ARAC) team with baseline data on what they should do to deal with the real cause of the low research productivity of junior high school teachers at Bukidnon National High School.

Basic Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of Junior High School Teachers in Conducting Action Research?
2. What are the difficulties, issues, and challenges of Junior High School Teachers in Conducting Action Research?
3. What are the coping mechanisms of Junior High School Teachers in addressing the difficulties, issues, and challenges in Conducting Action Research?
4. What recommendations and insights can Junior High School Teachers suggest for addressing the difficulties, issues, and challenges they experienced in Conducting Action Research (CAR)?

Scope and Limitations

This study was delimited to the difficulties, issues, and challenges of Junior High School Teachers of Bukidnon National High School in Conducting Action Research (CAR). Furthermore, this study was delimited only to the Science, Mathematics, Filipino, English, and T.L.E. teachers who experienced conducting action research or basic research once or twice. This study was conducted at the main school of Bukidnon National High School during the school year 2021-2022.

There were five Junior High School Teachers who participated in the study. The five Junior High School Teachers came from different departments of Junior High School.

The study used a qualitative research design using the phenomenological method. Semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and casual observation were used. The study focused on the difficulties, issues, and challenges of Junior High School Teachers of Bukidnon National High School in Conducting Action Research.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a stratified purposive sampling method. One teacher was purposively chosen by the researchers from a chosen department of Bukidnon National High School. They are the teachers who experienced writing an action or basic research once or more than once. They were chosen by the researchers for the reasons that they can give an in-depth experience relating to their difficulties, issues, and challenges in conducting action research. A total of five (5) participants in the study were included. 1 English teacher from the English department, 1 Science teacher from the Science Department, 1 Filipino teacher from the Filipino department, 1 Mathematics teacher from the mathematics department, and 1 teacher from the Technology, Livelihood & Education department. There were no participants from Araling Panlipunan and MAPEH departments since none of the two mentioned departments had conducted action research. The composition of the 5 Junior High School Teachers who experienced writing action/basic research were 5 females regardless of their ages and designation.

Research Design

The study used a qualitative research design using phenomenological analysis. This research design reflects what Creswell calls a personal experience story and is characterized by gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2018, p. 504). It is a popular research method for presenting the experiences of individuals Creswell, (2012), and is particularly suitable for the current study because it can provide a macro-analytic picture of teachers' experiences of Conducting Action Research in all its complexities and richness (Bell, 2002, p. 209).

In this study, qualitative data were gathered from the semi-structured interviews which were done through online video calls and open-ended questions using google forms which seek to analyze the stories by identifying themes or categories of information. This is to gain an in-depth and thorough understanding of the difficulties, issues, and challenges of Junior High School Teachers of Bukidnon National High School in Conducting an Action Research (CAR) primarily by telling their difficulties, issues, and challenges. After the semi-structured interview, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also conducted to validate the responses of the participants and also to avoid biases.

Before the conduct of the online interview and focus group discussions, questions that need to be asked to the participants of the study were validated by an expert in qualitative research. This is to make sure that all questions to be asked are valid, credible, and in line with the research study.

Next, after the participants and the researcher's encounters is done, a major theme was identified after looking into the relationships of the responses of the participants. Validation was also added to check the analysis of Junior High School Teachers' difficulties, issues, and challenges in conducting action research.

Data Collection

After that the study was approved by the school's thesis committee, a letter of intent requesting permission to conduct the study was secured from the School Principal of Bukidnon National High School.

Upon approval by the principal, the researchers asked for assistance from the different department heads in identifying the teacher in their respective departments who experienced conducting an action or basic research to recommend one teacher who was willing to be the researchers' participant in the study. After the identification of the participants, each of them was given a consent letter signed by the researchers inviting them to become one of the participants of the study. They were informed of the intent of the study and were assured of the confidentiality of their possible responses as well as their identities.

Since Face-to-face interviews can't be done in today's situation because of the pandemic the researchers gathered data through individual interviews using an interview guide as the researcher's tool and open-ended questionnaires using google forms. During the interview, motive questions were asked regarding the participants' difficulties, issues, and challenges in Conducting Action Research (CAR). The researchers recorded the video call interview in order not to miss important details narrated by the participants of the study if any concepts were missed writing by the researchers.

In conducting the interview, the participants of the study and the researchers have an interview session in just one sitting. Meaning, that cutting of video call interview and continuing the said interview the following day is unacceptable in this process for this might affect the validity of the given in-depth experiences of the study participants. During the interview, the participants were allowed to express themselves in vernacular or any language that they are comfortable with in expressing their difficulties, issues, and challenges in Conducting Action Research (CAR).

The data that was gathered after the interview and from the open-ended questionnaires were then transcribed. The themes were identified and sub-themes based on the participants' common answers to each question. All the identified themes and subthemes were described comprehensively.

Ethical Issues

After identifying the participants, each of them was given a consent letter signed by the researcher inviting them to become one of the participants of the study. They were also informed of the intent of the study. They were assured of the confidentiality of their possible responses as well as their identities as participants of the study.

The letter also informed the participants of the schedule of the interview. The interview schedule was arranged properly by the researchers during the free time of the study participants so as not to disrupt their work during class hours.

Data Analysis

Data on the Issues, challenges, and difficulties of Junior High School Teachers in Conducting an Action Research (CAR) were gathered through semi-structured interviews through videocalls and open-ended questionnaires. The steps undertaken for data analysis include coding or identifying concepts from raw data through multiple coding processes, and categorizing or linking codes to create a unit or category. The researchers compared the data to be extracted and coded important statement that pertains to the participants' experiences; identifying patterns or repeated units from categories. The researchers identified common responses of the participants, and create a theme that represents a similar pattern (Castleberry et. al, 2018).

After collecting data on the difficulties, issues, and challenges of the Junior High School Teachers in Writing Action Research (WAR) from the semi-structured interview and focus group discussions, the researcher has done multiple coding processes by finding a word or short phrase that can be attributed for a portion of data (Campbell et. al, 2013). Then, look for relations between similar codes and combine them to make a category that can be built as grand themes. Identifying grand themes provides the complexity of a story and adds depth

to the insight about understanding individual experiences on the difficulties, issues, and challenges in conducting action research.

After the grand themes have been created from the semi-structured interview and open-ended questionnaire, subthemes were also identified through commonalities of their responses. Additionally, in each sub-theme, specific themes were also identified. It was analyzed and given meaning thoroughly. The responses of the participants were utilized to substantiate the explanations to ensure that findings were managed to concretize the results.

The researchers created a codebook on the experiences of Junior High School Teachers in Writing Action Research (WAR) as a basis for getting the information needed in the study. Codebook includes definitions of themes and sub-themes that were used as references for coding narrative text. The themes which were expressed by the respondents (these are called in *vivo* codes) or those that were constructed or inferred by the researcher (Macqueen, K. E. 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the experiences of the teachers who conducted action research, one (1) grand theme emerged; Time Management. In terms of the difficulties in writing action research, two (2) Major themes had emerged; they are writing the content of the different parts of the research paper and in the research format, for the Issues in conducting action Research one (2) major theme had surfaced it is the resources, and the use of terminologies. For the challenges in conducting action research one (1) major theme had evolved, it is the lack of time.

Experiences in time Management

In conducting action research, teachers have various experiences but their major experience is in time management. Classroom teachers have various tasks to perform. Teachers' daily teaching schedule would attest that per minute of the teachers is loaded with work. Teachers have to render duty eight hours a day with six hours of teaching and the remaining two hours are intended for checking papers, recording, making reports, and the like. Looking at the schedule, there is no time allocated for conducting action research. Teachers claimed that deciding to conduct action research means extending your work beyond office hours. Participant 1 claimed that;

“... trabahuon nako siya after school hours most probably diha ko mag start sa ala 6 sa gabii, 6-9 siya. So, 3 hours per day in which dili gani siya kada adlaw nga nay mahimo bitaw like like, unsa ni, usahay kay wala siyay output. Nahurot lang ang oras, sap pag lingcod, sap pag hunahuna, mga ing ana bitaw. So, usa na siya, kanang wala siya sa imong routine”

Even the teachers set time beyond school hours intended for action research, still, outputs are not evident, sometimes no output at all after 3 hours of working. It is time-consuming. It is outside of the usual routine of the teacher. An experience of getting out from your comfort zone. Participant 2 supports the statements of participant 1 which she claims that;

“..Isa siya kay mabahin niya imong time di na ka kabalo ug insert aha dapit”

Teachers have different tasks to perform every day and conducting action research is difficult to fit into the teacher's daily busy schedule. If teachers intend to engage in action research he has to consider investing of his/her time in writing.

The results support the idea of Bendtsen et al, (2021) that teachers do not have available time to conduct action research. Teachers' time was spent if not on schoolwork, it was spent at home taking care of their children and family.

Difficulty in writing the content of different parts of the research paper

In the 21st Century learning landscape, teachers are not only confined to the four corners of the classroom for instructional delivery but also need to fulfill one of its functions, which is research (Hayes, 2011). A research paper is composed of different parts. Each part has corresponding content that is different from the other. There are limitations on what to be included and what not to be included in each part. In writing action research, teachers experienced difficulties in writing the content of the various parts of the research paper. They declared that;

Participant 1: "...galisod ko sa introduction. sa tanan na parts"

Participant 2: "...mga pag galugad bitaw sa mga researches."

Participant 3: "Peru sa akong na observe, galisud ko sa treatment guro gihapon maam, kana bitawng ma insakto nimo ang treatment sa imong data"

Participant 4: "...ko galisod sa statistical churbalo kay kuan maam..."

Participant 5: "...paghimo sa introduction, prepare and pagfloat sa imong instrument gawas kung mag adopt raka or makapangayo kag help sa uban..."

With these results, it can be viewed that teachers do not have sufficient background or idea on what to write in various parts of the research paper. Teachers claimed that the parts of action research are new to them. They do not have basic knowledge about the content of it. To them, it's all foreign, not their daily language in the classroom setting. In a small instance, they may have heard about the parts of action research but are not sure of it. Sometimes, teachers write the parts of a research paper randomly or write ahead of the rest of the parts before writing the introduction. Introduction supposedly is the first part of the research paper to be accomplished. Teachers claimed that they have plenty of ideas in their minds but do not know which of those ideas are correct and to which part of the paper those ideas would be written.

These results support the claim of Tindowen et al. (2019) that teachers conducting action research for the first-time experienced difficulties from the identification of their research problem until the publication of the results of the research. This means that teachers do not yet possess the required skills in writing action research.

However, participant 2 added that conducting research using the Filipino language is very difficult. The researcher needs to resort to different ways just to make sure that the words used in Filipino are correct, and exact and were not distorted the thought of the sentence. The same difficulty was mentioned by participant 5 with regards to the use of the English language since accordingly, she feels that her knowledge of grammar and language is limited.

Difficulty in research writing format

Teachers' other difficulty in conducting action research is the research writing format. Participant 2 verbalized that;

"...iyang technicalities, kay wala man gyud ko background kay wala baya ko nag escuela, so intimidating gyud siya if wala kay background sa technical aspect well even the font, spacing naa gyud siyay specific format,"

Participant 4 also added that one of the difficulties she encountered was;

"...format, kay kanang usahay lahi ang akong naandan nga format unya lahi diay ang proposed nga format"

Research format is one of the important considerations in writing a research paper. The indentions, the font style choices, font headings font size, and other needed research format etiquettes should be followed strictly. These may pose difficulty to the teachers in conducting action research in the sense that there are plenty of

research formats and it depends on which format guide style an institution adapted. Not following any of the research formats would affect the whole research paper's quality.

These results support the claims of Caulfield (2020) that having a good research paper format signals to your readers that your paper should be taken seriously as a student's contribution to a given academic or professional field, additionally, it shows that you respect other people's work enough to give them proper credit for it. Finally, it helps your reader find additional materials if he or she wishes to learn more about your topic.

Providing teachers with the necessary skills, knowledge, and focus to engage in meaningful inquiry about their professional practice enhanced their capability and effect positive changes concerning the educative goals of the learning community. Conversely, if teachers do not have the necessary skills in conducting action research, the educative goals of the learning community are far beyond reach.

Issues on the Resources

One of the major themes that were transcribed in the study is that teachers have issues with the resources. Conducting and writing action research requires finances. It can be an additional burden to the teacher. Participant 2 alleged that;

"...kay kana bitawng pag reproduce, we use our own resources, like 5 copies so mag invest gihapon ka"

From the research proposal up to the final oral research presentation, the researcher has to print the manuscript multiple times. Not only one copy is needed but five (5) copies. This entails much amount of personal money, and it was an additional burden to the teacher. The teacher needs financial support for them to finish conducting action research.

This result supports the idea of Vásquez (2017) who mentioned that lack of financial support is one of the challenges faced by teachers as researchers in Colombia. Even if teachers have the skills in conducting action research but no financial support, the researcher may not continue doing the said research.

Writing Anxiety

Another theme that was deduced from the responses of teachers is that they have writing anxiety. Teachers are not confident in writing research. Participant 1 expressed that;

"...Kuan cguro, ang unsa cguroy isulat. Sayon raman gud siya eingon, nga ang imong isulat diri kay kung kinsa gyud ang involve, asa dapit, pila kabook, ilimit ra gyud nimo, dili ka sure ba, makalibog"

Due to the insufficient skills of teachers in conducting and writing action research, they experienced anxiety about what to write. They don't have the confidence to say that what they wrote in their paper were the right terms and were true. These were being proved by participant number 2 when she alleged that;

"...Struggle ko ana sa uban nga mga terms na gagamiton nato sa research., dili ko kasabot, wrong grammar, mahadlok na nuon ko ug korek ba akoang terms na gigamit or dili.."

These results support the claim of Tindowen (2019) who stated that teachers have fear in analyzing data and some have problems with their grammar. Being unsure of the statements and words that the researchers have to use leads to confusing results of the research conducted.

It Demands Time

Conducting action research demands time. From the start of the conceptualization of the research paper up to the day of printing of the completed action research, time is an issue. Most of the respondents stressed that their major issue and challenge in the conduct of action research is that they lack time. This means that teachers do not have available time to conduct action research. Participant 1 narrated that:

“...oras nato as teacher gyud, mao gyud ng pinaka kuan, aha nako ibutang akong kaugalingon. Asa nako e insert ang akong research.”

As a teacher, with different tasks that wait for us to accomplish every day, time intended for the writing of action research is difficult to realize. This statement was supported by participant number 4 when she said;

“Ang challenges lang kay kuan lang gyud siya imong time kung Makaya ba”.

Participant 5 also confirmed that one of the challenges in conducting action research is;

“...time sa trabaho maam, so mudugang pa gyud lugar kag another time sa lain na trabaho?”

These results support the idea of Ellis & Loughland (2016) that time was one of the challenges that limits and restricts teachers to do quality research outputs. Likewise, Norasmah & Chia (2016) also claimed that workload and time constraints, lack of research knowledge, and limited support were among the challenges reported to prevent teachers from doing research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers recommended that the research committee of the school will create a mentorship program. A small group with 10 members and a leader who is knowledgeable in writing research would serve as their mentor during research hours. The mentors or the research experts will coach and guide the mentees in conducting action research.

Teachers also recommended that the school research committee would create a simplified school research template that would serve as guide for teachers in writing research. With the help of simplified research template, teachers are guided and can follow the proper way of writing research even without the research expert on their side to coach and assist them.

Teachers also added that group research work would not be as tedious and time-consuming as compared to doing individual research since research works are divided among research group members. Teachers also expressed that; they would love to attend research small group workshops to update oneself in writing research. These activities would make teachers get interested and would love conducting research.

Implementation Plan

This proposal describes how to improve teachers' research skills by implementing a mentorship program and an efficient school research template of Bukidnon National High School. The program aims to enhance teachers understanding and skills in data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and research methods, encourage a culture of inquiry and research within the school community, make use of research results to guide and enhance teaching methods and student learning objectives and give educators chances for growth and professional development. The target audience are teachers of Bukidnon National High School interested in conducting research.

Mentorship Program

There will be a mentorship pairing. The mentors or the experienced researcher teachers will be paired with the mentees or the teachers who do not have a background in writing research. In pairing, research interests, expertise and availability of time should be given considerations. The mentorship activities will involve regular meetings or there will be a scheduled meetings for discussion, feedback and guidance. Research workshop will then follow. The workshop allows the mentees to learn several methodologies such as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. They would also learn data collection techniques and data analysis methods. Furthermore, through research workshops, mentees would gain proficiency in conducting literature reviews, synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying research gaps. They would learn ethical considerations by understanding ethical principles in research, including data privacy, informed consent and responsible research conduct.

The mentors observe the mentees' research activities and provide constructive feedback. Collaborative research projects between mentors and mentees are also encouraged. During the dissemination of findings, the mentor will support the mentees in presenting their research findings at school research presentations, conferences and publications. To evaluate and assess the mentorship program, there will be a regular assessment about its effectiveness through surveys, interviews, and observations. The feedback will be gathered from both mentors and mentees to identify areas for improvement.

Simplified School Research Template

A research template is a pre-formatted document or outline that offers an organized framework for carrying out and recording research. It has title page, introduction, literature review, methodology, results and findings, discussions, conclusions and references parts. The research template will be designed to be user-friendly and accessible to teachers with varying levels of research experience. It uses clear and concise language by avoiding jargons instead simple and straightforward language will be used. It also gives a detailed explanation of the entire research process, from formulating research questions to sharing results. It also provides examples and templates for different research method. Research template also provide links to relevant resources.

Implementation Timeline

Planning and Preparation is the phase 1 of implementation timeline. It is a phase for development of mentorship program, guidelines, and criteria. Also, phase for recruitment and train mentors. For phase 2 which is the program Implementation and refinement. Conduct initial mentor-mentee meetings, organize workshops and training sessions, facilitate research activities and provide ongoing support, monitors progress and provide regular feedback. Phase 3 is the evaluation and refinement. Evaluate the effectiveness of the mentorship program and research template. Gather feedback from mentors and mentees and make necessary adjustments to the program and template based on feedback.

Dissemination and Sustainability

Research findings should be shared both inside and outside of the school community to guarantee that they have a significant and long-lasting effect. The institution should create a system of continuing assistance and mentoring in order to maintain its research culture. Research activities should also be integrated into the school's professional development plan.

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