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EFL Theory & Practice: Voice of EED UKI

English Education Department (EED) Collegiate Forum 2015-2018

Editor
Parlindungan Pardede

Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
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English Education Department Collegiate Forum (EED CF) 2015-2018

"EFL Theory and Practice: Voice of EED UKI"

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PREFACE

English Education Department Collegiate Forum (EED CF) is an academic forum organized by the English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Kristen Indonesia (EED FKIP UKI). Initiated in 2008 by Mr. Parlin Pardede Dean of FKIP UKI, the event was held bi-monthly in every even moth. It aims at providing a friendly and open opportunity for the faculty, students, alumni, and English teachers to share ideas, research findings, and experiences in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) field. It is expected that the forum can cater the interested parties an innovative and exciting opportunity to share, care, and collaborate for developing their professionalism in EFL learning and teaching.

Following related parties' recommendation, staring from 2015 the papers presented in the forum will be compiled and published in a proceeding in every four years. This proceeding, therefore, includes the 24 articles presented in the forum from 2015 to 2018. Since the presentation in this forum is voluntary, every resource person is free to decide the EFL topic he or she presents. Consequently, the articles in this volume cover a broad theme. Despite the broad theme, the topics covered in the articles do represent current hot issues in EFL, such as learning and teaching methodology and strategies; language skills, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar development; curriculum, evaluation and assessment matters; language research methodology, and the implementation of technology in EFL.

On behalf of EED FKIP UKI, I would like to offer my appreciation all faculties, students, alumni, and fellow English teachers who had contributed in EED CF along 2015-2018. My special thanks should go to Parlindungan Pardede whose hard work in editing the articles in this proceeding has made this publication possible.

Finally, I hope each article in this proceeding can inspire every reader as it had inspired the audiences when it was presented in EED CF.

Jakarta, July 26, 2019
English Education Department Chairperson,

Hendrikus Male

CONTENTS

Action Research in EFL Learning and Teaching [1]

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Abstract

The increase of changes taking place in today's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom has faced today's EFL teachers with various challenges in their endeavor to practice effective learning and teaching. Current studies show that to meet those challenges, AR is one of the powerful tools teachers can use. This article reviews and synthesizes current ideas and studies on AR to see its application in the EFL context. It is shown that action research empowers teachers to obtain knowledge through their practices and use it to improve their teaching skills. In addition, action research can be used to handle problems encountered in all aspects involved in the learning process.

Keywords: *action research, reflection, classroom practice, EFL learning and teaching*

INTRODUCTION

Facilitated by technological advancement, globalization has been intensifying the interaction and integration of ideas, corporations, people, and culture. New inventions in transportation and information and communication technology have been increasing the interconnection and interdependence among people and nations around the world. In the educational field, all of these have been emerging new issues, such as students' diversity, new thinking and learning styles, and the need of studying new skills to prepare the students to take up roles in the constantly changing world. The influx of abundant technological devices such as digital texts, audio-visual products, multimedia, visual materials, and software into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has also provided opportunities and at the same time challenged English teachers to create a varied learning environment to address students' individual differences (Pardede, 2012). Since teachers are a key factor to realize quality education, these changes have pressingly challenged today's teachers to practice effective teaching. To meet the challenge, Darling-Hammond (1998) posited that teachers should improve appropriate skills and knowledge to facilitate great teaching that results in high standards of learning that produce learners in the educational field transform the world.

There are some ways teachers can take to improve their skills and knowledge for improving their teaching practice. However, recent practices and studies show that conducting action research (AR) is very effective to help teachers uncover strategies to

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improve teaching practices (Sagor, 2004). AR is a research type conducted by a teacher in his/her classroom so that it is authentic and meaningful to him/her. Ferrance (2000), stated that AR helps teachers to "pick up threads suggested in academic circles, and weave them in their own classroom" (p.13). AR is also a practicable and realistic endeavor for all educators. It enables teachers to design a study for identifying and solving the problems encountered in his or her classroom or school. It also provides the opportunity to assess a new curriculum program, test a new instructional strategy, examine a new medium, or evaluate an existing pedagogical method. Moreover, through the AR process, teachers not only improve their teaching practices, but also learn about students, colleagues, and themselves as they pursue ways to continually improve (Ferrance, 2000). This is why AR is regarded as the best tool for teachers' professional development.

This article reviews current ideas and studies on AR to see its application in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The discussion begins an overview of AR nature. It is followed by the scope and benefits and challenges of AR. The process of AR is described before the discussion ends with some conclusions.

DISCUSSION
What is action research?
Synthesizing the definitions of AR, some key characteristics of this form of study will emerge, i.e. (1) it is a systematic inquiry into one's teaching practice so that it is empirical; (2) it is based on actions taking place the teachers' own classroom, therefore it is context-specific and participatory; (3) it could be conducted alone or in collaboration with colleagues; (4) it is participatory and is aimed at empowering the practitioner first and then others to increase their effectiveness, so that it is and aiming for change and improvement.

The definition of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) covers the whole characteristics They described AR as "a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of: (a) their own social or educational practices; (b) their understanding of these practices; (c) the situations (and institutions) in which these practices are carried out" (p. 5.). Robinson (1991) accentuated characteristic 1 and 4 by stating that any action undertaken by teachers to collect data and evaluate their teaching. In a more systematic definition, Ferrance (2000) accentuated characteristic 1, 2, and 4 by asserting that AR is a procedure that participants study their educational practice systematically and carefully in, by employing research techniques. Mills (2007) presented a more comprehensive definition that covers the whole characteristics by stating that AR "any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how well their students learn" (p. 5). He added that the information is collected for obtaining awareness, increasing reflective practice, achieving positive changes in the school environment (and on educational practices in general), and refining student outcomes and the lives of anyone involved.

Based on the ideas proposed to describe its nature, AR is essentially grounded in a qualitative research paradigm. It includes the process of collecting and analyzing data related to teachers' professional development by concentrating on individual and small group professional practice for gaining greater clarity and understanding of a question, problem, or issue. Different from other forms of research like experimental studies, library project, or survey studies about students, learning methods, teaching media, or teaching approaches, AR is about how teachers as practitioners obtain knowledge through their practices and use the knowledge to improve their teaching skills. Stringer (as cited in Nasrollahi et al, 2012) accentuated that AR concerns with how educators can do things better and how they can change their initial practice to elucidate the issue in concern and to reveal the way participants define their experience of that issue.

Origins of Action Research

The origin of AR can be related to Aristotle because his concept of 'phronesis' or 'practical wisdom', together with its relationship to other ethical and intellectual virtues can be regarded as the basis of AR (Mariyam & Ullah, 2015). Although the modern AR is always related to the social psychologist Kurt Levin who coined the term AR about 75 years ago when he promoted that AR could be effectively used to succeed workers' communication and positive social interaction in order to increase their involvement, and such greater involvement would probably improve their productivity (Levin, 1946), it is also credited to John Dewey with his theory of 'learning by doing'. Somekh (2006) asserted, "the tradition of action research is rooted both in Lewin's social psychology, which conceived of action as emerging from a process of group exploration of social interactions rather than solely from rational deduction, and in John Dewey's theory of 'learning by doing'" (p. 23).

Due to its effectiveness in solving problems in workers' daily life, the idea of AR was adopted enthusiastically in US education in the 1950s. One of the initiators of using AR the field of education was Stephen Corey who believed that because AR implementation involves educators in both the research and the application of information, it will cause change (Ferrance, 2000). However, since AR was regarded as unscientific and the work of amateurs, it later went into decline by the end of the 1950s. Through the work of several researchers like Lawren Stenhouse, John Elliott, Jack Whitehead, Wilf Carr, and Stephen Kemmis, AR got a new stimulus in the UK in the 1970s (Nasrollahi et al, 2012). Then, at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, the field of Teaching English as Other Language (TESOL) enthusiastically welcome and favored the practice of AR among teachers in the profession (Crookes, 1993). To help language teachers understand and practice it, various books (Burns, 1999; Griffee & Nunan, 1997; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Nunan, 1991; Wallace, 1998) have been published.

Action Research Scope

AR is an impressive method. Cohen, et.al (2000) claimed it can be used in almost any setting where a problem involving people, tasks, and procedures needs to be solved, or where some changes should be made to get a more desirable outcome. Therefore, AR could be used to solve problems or to increase the outcomes of everyday' learning

activities related to cognitive, motoric, and attitude domains. In the EFL context, AR can be used to develop students' language skills, vocabulary, and grammar. It can also be used to promote analytical, critical and creative thinking skills, and to increase the learners' motivation as well. The following reviewed AR reports are some examples showing the use of AR to solve problems or to increase the outcomes in various areas of EFL learning and teaching.

Siahaan (2012) carried out an AR to improve young learners' English vocabulary. While teaching using the conventional curriculum, the teacher included every session with a story reading. Conducted in three cycles, the collected quantitative data revealed that story reading techniques improved the participants' vocabulary mastery.

To improve the pronunciation skills of a group of around 12-15 adult students learning English for communicative, academic and professional development purposes in Colombia, Rengifo (2009) included karaoke in their English class. The activities began with an introductory discussion about the song the class is going to sing, including its background information, type and whether the students had ever listened to it. After the whole class sang the song, the lyric is discussed, including the meaning of unfamiliar words and what the song is about. After that, the lyric is used to practice pronunciation, including practicing the sounds, stress, intonation, etc. After that, the class sang the song again with the correct intended pronunciation. At the end of the karaoke song, the students were given a mini-quiz to assess how much they had learned from the activity. At the end of the fifth cycle, the participants' pronunciation improved significantly. The results also showed that the karaoke classes were fun and offered creativity while the participants collaborated to attain their pronunciation goals.

Huang (2016) conducted an AR involving 20 college students majoring in English to develop the participants' critical thinking in EFL writing through formative assessment and feedback. Conducted in the Fall 2013 semester in the two-credit College English III class, while taking the class as usual, the students were asked to find a topic and write an additional essay on it. The students were informed that their essays would be assessed with multi-stage and multi-source feedback. During the writing process, the students received feedback in the form of questions, challenges, and suggestions for improvement from the other students, assistant teacher, and the teacher. The final essays analysis employing a critical thinking rubric indicated that the essays revealed unique personal opinions and the students had control over the critical thinking structure.

The study of Mehmood (2011) was conducted to explore the passive and unresponsive manner which were shown by their tendency to avoid interaction with the teacher. Involving a group of twenty-five students attending a Basic English class at a small private Beijing college. The class covered conversation, reading, listening and writing skills development. The teacher realized he received very little oral feedback from the class because the students didn't voluntarily respond to his questions, did not partake in class discussions, and never asked him questions outside in one-on-one situations. In the next session, the teacher circulated an explanatory paragraph about "rules" for asking questions in class in English speaking countries. The teacher asked the students to read the paragraph out loud to the class, explained a few unfamiliar words, and urged the class to discuss the text. The students were reminded of the "rules"

in every session. After seven weeks, the class was observed. It was revealed that some students, without prompting from the teacher, asked questions before the class. During the session, they had also been active replying to the teacher and willing to participate in the class discussion. Such changes were considered a breakthrough.

Benefits of Action Research

In the educational context, current studies showed AR offers three benefits for educators who are committed to improving their practice, policy, or culture through a critical, investigative process. First, AR promotes teacher empowerment through their ability to collect their data and use them in making decisions related to their schools and classrooms (Hensen, 1996; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). Sweetland and Hoy (2002) found that when teachers are endorsed to take risks and make changes related to teaching and learning, student's achievement increases. Second, AR can be employed to fill the theory and practice gap (Johnson, 2012) and to develop new knowledge directly related to their classrooms (Hensen, 1996). Moreover, schools become more effective learning communities (Detert et.al. 2001). Third, AR is an effective and worthwhile tool for professional development (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). It is different from other means of professional development which are ineffective and hardly give teachers adequate time, activities, or content to affect their practice or to proliferate their knowledge (Birman et al, 2000).

In the English teaching context, Burns (2005, p. 68) listed eight benefits of educational AR. According to her, by carrying out AR teachers develop skills in: (1) thinking systematically about what happens in the school or classroom; (9) applying action where enhancements are thought to be possible; (3) observing and assessing the effects of the action for making continuous improvement; (4) monitoring intricate conditions critically and practically ; (5) applying a flexible method to school or classroom; (6) creating enhancements through action and reflection; (7) studying the real, complex and often confusing conditions and constraints of the modern school; and (8) identifying and transforming evolving ideas into action.

Challenges of Action Research

In addition to the various benefits AR, studies have also shown some challenges related to this research methodology. First, since teachers must research while they are handling their instructional practice, teachers may find AR time-consuming. (Bailey, 1999; Hine, 2013). Second, since AR is conducted by individuals who are interested parties in the research, the validity of data collection and analysis may be questionably biased (Waters-Adams, 2006). According to Brown (2002), teacher-researchers may find it difficult to attain an objective viewpoint in researching their practices. Finally, teachers may find it difficult to suspend any preconceived ideas concerning the potential solution(s) to the problem might be (Hine, 2003).

Action Research Principle and Process

As shown in the previous section, AR is a principled way of observing one's teaching, reflecting upon it, and trying to analyze its weaknesses and increase its strengths. Thus, AR is a way through which educators can help themselves and their students overcome the specific problems they encounter in the learning and teaching process. AR combines analysis, action, and reflection and focuses on identified practical issues or problems that are both problematic and yet capable of being changed. The idea of change is fundamental in AR (Cohen et al. 2007). Somekh (2005, p. 91) accentuated that the driving force behind AR is "an impetus for change/innovation through deepening the participants' understanding of social processes and developing strategies to bring about improvement".

The process that the teacher-researchers go through to present the intended changes for improving their practices is a spiral of action research cycles consisting of four major phases: planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Somekh, 2006). Since various AR experts have independently designed their stages for AR, the models available in literature use varied terminologies. Table 1 sums up some of the commonly practiced AR stages.

Table 1. Stages of Action Research

Stage	Kemmis & Taggart (1990)	Sagor (1992)	O'leary (2004)	British Council (2015)
1	Planning	Problem Formulation	Observe	Notice a problem & Plan
2	Acting	Data Collection	Reflect	Teach/Act
3	Observing	Data Analysis	Plan	Observe
4	Reflecting	Reporting of Results	Act	Reflect

Despite their use of different terminology, all models above have the same purpose i.e. to conduct the systematic study to solve the classroom problems or to present change and improvement in teaching and learning process.

Based on these models, AR process is often described as (1) cyclical with four inter-related stages: plan, act, observe, reflect (see Figure 1 below); (2) Collaborative in two senses: i.e. (a) many similar action research activities are best conducted with colleagues; and (b) action research always involves the participants, and they, at least, should know what is being explored and why; (3) collect qualitative rather than quantitative data; and (4) reflective, i.e. it involves critical reflection on both the process and the outcomes (COBE, 2005).

As illustrated by Figure 1, the AR process is iterative or cyclical, and each cycle consists of four inter-related stages: plan, act, observe and reflect. The first cycle moves through the major steps of planning, action, observation and reflection, and the results of the reflection are then employed to revise the process in the next cycle (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1990). Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001), briefly described proses as follow. It commences with teachers (and possibly students) determining the inquiry focus and devising a plan to observe and record their classroom activities (Plan). The classroom activities are then applied (Action) and relevant observations are recorded (Observe) which are then critically reflected upon individually and collaboratively

(Reflect) leading to revising classroom activities based on what has been learned (Revised Plan). In the following paragraphs, the process is described in a more detailed manner.
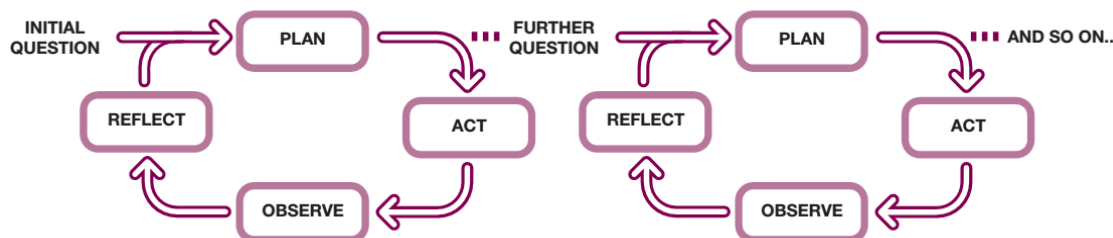

Figure 1. **Action research moving forward (COBE, 2005).**

In the first stage, plan, the teachers-researchers identify an issue or a problem to study. They should be certain that the problem to study is related to his practice and is under their control. It is followed by finding relevant information so that the researchers know deeply what the problem is, why it occurs, and what action should be conducted to solve it. That is why it is a good idea to involve the students in the problem identification. In this context, the researchers act like a medical doctor who is diagnosing a disease suffered by a patient. Depending on the complexity of the problem, this problem identification and the verification of its causes and solution can take time. It is possible that the researcher needs to interview the students with whom the researchers face the problem), read relevant literature, or consult experts to get comprehensive information. Being certain with the problem and its causes, the researchers then try to find the most appropriate solution. This could be done by consulting related experts or colleagues who had ever faced the same problems and searching relevant studies results. Being certain of the solution to take, the researchers then make a plan concerning the schedule, strategy (including the actions/interventions) to be implemented, material and tools to be used, the types of data to be collected, instruments to be employed for collecting data, and they type and the criteria of improvement to achieve.

The action stage refers to the implementation of the actions/interventions. During this stage, one or more of the researcher conduct the actions, while the others act as an observant(s). Videotaping the implementation, if possible, will be helpful later in the data collection and reflection stages.

The observe stage refers to the act of collecting information. Observation usually focuses on collecting data related to the intended improvement or success criteria. The collected data should also be related to type previously determined, and the instrument should be the ones decided in the plan stage.

Reflection refers to "the act of critically exploring what you are doing, why you decided to do it, and what its effect has been" (Mertler, 2009, p. 12). At this stage, the researchers analyze and discuss the collected data so that they make sense to them. Usually, the researchers need to organize the data into tables or put them into charts to

make it easier to determine whether the collected data has indicated the targeted improvement, what factors are attributed to the improvement, and whether collateral problems are identified during the implementation of the action.

The targeted improvement is rarely achieved in a simple cycle so that after finishing Cycle 1, Cycle 2 needs to be conducted. So, the researchers need to go through the plan stage of Cycle 2. Different from the plan stage of Cycle 1, in Cycle 2 the researchers take the problem obtained in the reflection of Cycle 1 as the problem to resolve through the actions/interventions in Cycle 2.

When the targeted improvement is achieved, the researcher may need to share the findings through a conference or submitting the report to a journal.

EFL Teachers' View of Action Research

Different from TESOL in which AR has been flourishing since the end of the 1980s, EFL field has not got much information about the implementation of AR among its teacher in the world. Up to now, the first and probably the only study investigating AR practice among EFL teachers around the world is Rainey's (2000) research which investigated the knowledge, practices, and opinions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers from 10 countries. To collect the data, 240 questionnaires with both open and closed questions was distributed to EFL teachers in 10 countries, and 229 were returned. In addition, 4 teachers who completed the questionnaire were also interviewed to get qualitative data to clarify the data obtained through the questionnaire. The result surprisingly showed that 75.5% of the respondents have never heard of AR, and only 75.9% of those who have heard of action research practiced it. Among the 41 respondents who had practiced AR, only 6 (14.6%) who did it regularly; 13 (30.9%) did it quite often; and the rests 54.5% seldom did it. It was concluded that most respondents did not conduct AR due to their lack of time and research skills.

Bashier's (2011) study of Sudanese EFL teachers' conceptions of work through AR. The result showed that since AR was not part of the Sudanese teachers' institutional culture, they had no idea about AR. Also, the teachers were unwilling to conduct AR due to their lack of research skills and time. Some responded they were overloaded and uncertain about their ability to conduct AR.

Dehghan and Sharagard (2015) investigated 89 Iranian EFL teachers' perception of AR. Data was collected employing a questionnaire exploring the participants' belief about AR and in-depth interviews involving three participants to complement the questionnaire data. The results revealed that the participants regarded action research as one of the research types which is the duty of professional researchers, not teachers. Despite their belief that conducting research needs familiarity with research skills, they are not sure that doing classroom research is advantageous to teachers and that teachers can be researchers in their classrooms.

Kurucukis's (2014) study involved an EFL teacher and thirty 4th graders at a public primary school in Konya, Turkey. The study focused on how AR can affect the teachers in terms of context, knowledge, practices, beliefs, and attitudes. The findings revealed that that AR was an effective tool for enabling the teacher to develop professionally, and it positively changed the teachers' performance leading to students' learning

improvement. In addition, Savaskan's (2013) study investigating EFL teacher candidates' knowledge of action research showed that the teacher candidates were slightly inadequately equipped with the skills to conduct AR, and none of them had the actual opportunity to practice AR.

More studies are needed to make a more valid conclusion about the view and belief of EFL teachers around the world of AR. However, limited they may be in number and scopes, the results of the reviewed studies above revealed that the majority of EFL teachers in the world have not favored the practice of AR. Many of the in-service teachers do not conduct AR because of their lack of skills or time. Also, pre-service EFL teachers are not yet well equipped with the skills and opportunities to practice AR. These findings can be accepted as a warning bell of how urgent it is for EFL stakeholders to empower EFL teachers and pre-service teachers to implement action research so that they can continuously improve their teaching practice.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The advancement of technology which keeps on bringing about changes to EFL education, such as students' diversity, the emergence of new thinking and learning styles, and the influx of digital media into the classroom has faced today's EFL teachers with various challenges in their endeavor to practice effective learning and teaching. To meet such challenges, AR is one of the powerful tools teachers can use. Combining analysis, action, and reflection to solve a problem in focus, AR implementation can help EFL teachers and their students overcome the specific problems they encounter so that they can learn and teach more effectively. What is more, AR could be used to solve any problems, including those related to cognitive, motoric, and attitudinal domains.

Although AR is a powerful tool for increasing learning and teaching effectiveness, available studies show that most EFL teachers in the world have not yet favored the practice it due to their lack of skills and/or time. Besides, pre-service EFL teachers are not yet well equipped with the skills and opportunities to practice AR. Therefore, EFL Teachers colleges need to make their student empowerment for conducting AR one of their priorities.

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"EFL Theory and Practice: Voice of EED UKI"

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