

CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH IN ENGLISH LEARNING

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Abstract

One of the scientific activities in English learning is conducting a research. Research in English learning aims at investigating the rules that work in the process of English learning. Research activities in English learning cover four steps: observing, describing, analyzing, and explaining. The way each step is done depends on the nature of the data and the objective of the research. Classroom Action Research for English Learning aims at developing a certain instructional strategy to solve practical instructional problems in English classrooms. Each English learner is basically able to learn English provided that he or she is given the appropriate help as each learner has his or her own style and strategy of learning. Classroom Action Research for English Learning aims at discovering learning-teaching strategies that match learners' style and strategies in learning English. Classroom Action R is done in several cycles each of which is repeated in the following cycle if the result is not satisfactory yet with the better revised lesson plan. Each cycle begins with lesson planning, implementing the plan, observing the implementation, and reflecting or evaluating the process and the result of the implementation.

Key words: Classroom, Action, Research, English

I. Introduction

Research in English learning is a scientific activity that aims at investigating the rules that work in the process of English learning. Understanding a process of English teaching means being able to explain the system, rules, patterns, or formula, in the process of English teaching (Marshall & Rossman, 1995:16) Researchers believe that an effective process of English teaching is based on a certain system, rules, patterns, formula, or regularity. It is this system that is going to be discovered by researchers in English teaching.

One of the types of the research in English learning is classroom action research. This research aims to improve the quality of English teaching in the classroom. So, English teachers and the students of English departments as prospective English teachers should understand well about this type of research.

The reality shows that some of English teachers and the students in English department do not understand well how to conduct classroom action research. The main question is “what should be done in every step of classroom action research?”

This paper explains the process of classroom action research that covers repeated cycles consisting of planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. Four key terms used in Classroom Action Research are *planning*, *acting*, *observing*, and *reflecting*. *Planning* refers to the proposed instructional strategy to be developed in the research to solve instructional problems. *Acting* refers to the implementation of the strategy that has been planned, (usually) with or without a collaborator. *Observing* and *reflecting* refers to assessing the success of the implemented strategy in solving the instructional problems. In *observing*, the data indicating success and other instructional problems are recorded, while in *reflecting* all the recorded data are analyzed to judge how much the implemented strategy has effectively solved the problems.

II. Discussion

2.1 The Concept of Classroom Action Research

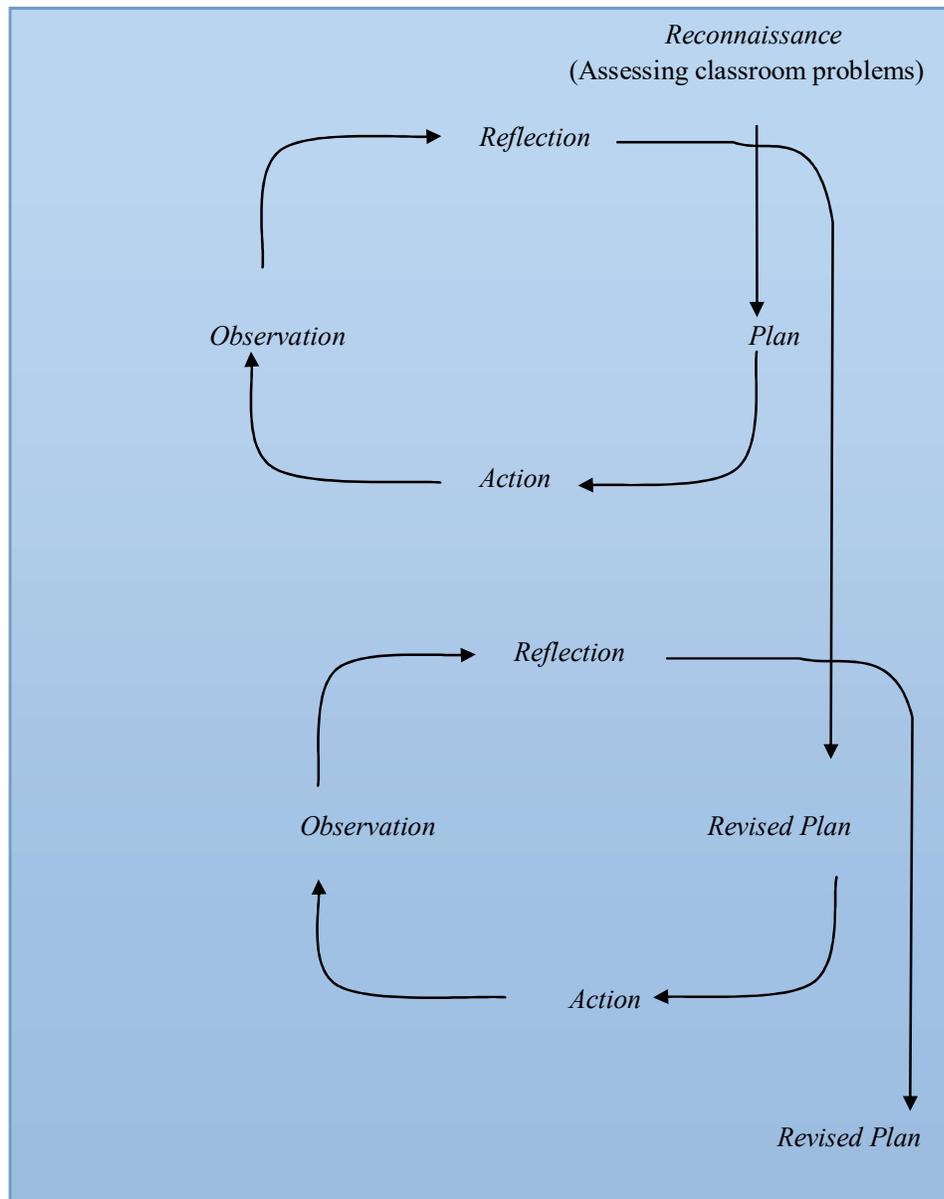
Classroom Action Research is an effective media in improving the quality of English teachers' performance in instruction as well as students' achievement in learning English in classrooms. In Classroom Action Research, English teachers assess the effectiveness of their own teaching activities and plan the improvement based on the result of the assessment. The results are innovations in English instructions. Very often, teachers' innovations in English instructions are accepted more (bottom up) than innovations forced from outsiders (Top down). Classroom Action Research starts from teachers' serious concern about their success in their own instructions, their students' learning progress, their students' behavior, their students' learning problems, and the learning environment, which they assess throughout the whole process of instruction for the purpose of planning, implementing, and evaluating improvement (Borgia, S. 2003).

Classroom Action Research for English Instruction is aimed at developing innovative instructional strategy that can help enhance the success in students' learning English. English teachers believe that every student can succeed in learning English if appropriate learning strategy is provided.

2.2 The Cycles of Classroom Action Research

Classroom Action Research activities involve repeated cycles, each consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The result of one cycle is used to determine the need for the following cycle, until the problems get solved by the strategy (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) See Figure 1

Figure 1 The Action Research Spiral



Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R. (1988)

Classroom Action Research is done by teachers in their own classrooms. As English teachers, they have to solve their classroom problems or improve the quality of their classroom practices to result in better English achievement of their students. As researchers, they have to produce an innovative classroom strategy that contributes to the improvement of English teaching-learning practices in schools of the same level.

The research starts with observing and identifying classroom problems. A classroom problem refers to a classroom practice that can still be improved to result in better learning achievement of the students.

A professional teacher can always see which classroom practice can still be improved. Then the teacher-researcher searches for alternative instructional strategies from references, by discussing with their colleagues, or by joining seminars or workshops. One best alternative strategy is then selected, and translated into an instructional scenario.

All necessary instructional media and assessment instrument are developed to implement the instructional scenario. The teacher-researcher has to learn well how to implement the scenario in the classroom before the action is started. At this stage, there should no question anymore about how well the teacher can implement the instructional planning otherwise the action cannot be started.

The researcher is recommended to choose a collaborator to help in observing the implementation of the scenario. Then the action is started with the collaborator observing the process of instruction to record any information indicating the success or the failure of the strategy in solving the classroom problems. The result of the observation is analyzed to reflect how successfully the implemented strategy has solved the classroom problems. When the strategy has not completely solved the problems, then the strategy has to be revised in the best possible way to make sure that when implemented again in the following cycle the problems can completely be solved.

According to Borgia, S, (2003), Kemmis Mc Taggart, (1988) and Tuckman, (1999), the cycles of classroom action research can be elaborated as follows:

a. Planning

Planning is a step to prepare the classroom instructional strategy to be developed in the study to solve the instructional problems. The instructional strategy has been selected based on the belief that the strategy can theoretically solve the problems. It is this strategy that becomes the focus of the study, to be prepared, to be tried out, to be revised, to be tried again until it proves effective to solve the problems. The instructional strategy has to be elaborated into a detailed scenario of instruction provided with all necessary instructional media and assessment instruments. At this stage, criteria of success to measure the effectiveness of the strategy are also decided. The criteria of success are derived from the problems to be solved through this study and some other instructional goals to be achieved through the implementation of this strategy. The criteria of success when achieved become the strength of the strategy that will attract other teachers to use the strategy to solve the same problems.

The success of an English instruction is not only measured with the achievement in learning English skills as indicated by the scores. An English instructional strategy that creates classroom atmosphere that gives students joyful learning experience can motivate students to sustain life-long self learning. This sustainable life long learning of English by the students is even more important than the students' achievement. This joyful classroom learning should also become the goal of an effective strategy besides the scores representing students' achievement in learning English. Another criterion of an effective as well as attractive instructional strategy is its practicality. A strategy that requires very expensive media and complicated procedures may not attract any other teacher to apply in

their classrooms. In other words, the more a strategy can attract other teachers who have similar problems to solve, the more effective the instructional strategy is.

b. Acting

Acting is the second step after the planning step to implement the instructional strategy that has been planned. At this stage, the researcher has mastered the instructional scenario before starting the implementation in class. The researcher at this stage is not in the process of learning how to implement the plan, nor in the process of improving the quality of teachers' performance, but in the process of actually trying out the strategy to test how much the strategy can solve the classroom problems. The researcher is recommended to collaborate with one or two other teachers of the same subjects. The collaborators observe the implementation of the plan to see how much the strategy can solve the classroom problems.

c. Observing

Observing is the process of collecting data indicating the success of the strategy in solving the classroom problems. The focus of the observation is on the data related to the criteria of success that have been decided. The question that becomes the concern in the observing process is "*How well does the strategy solve the problems?*" not other questions, like "*How well does the teacher teach?*" or "*How well is the strategy implemented by the researcher?*" These last two questions are not the questions for CAR but appropriate for observers observing students who are learning how to teach, like in the practice teaching program.

At this observing stage, which aims at collecting data, the researcher and the collaborator have to define the type of data to be collected, the instrument to collect the data, the data sources, and the technique of data collecting. In other words, the discussion on those topics should be under this observing stage.

Data collected for Classroom Action Research include all information related to the criteria of success targeted in the research. The data may come from numerical information, like the results of tests as well as verbal information, like students' problems, classroom atmosphere, students' motivation, the practicality of the instructional strategy, cooperative behavior of the students, etc. Because both type of data, numerical as verbal data, may be collected, Classroom Action Research does not belong to only quantitative research or qualitative research. It is not necessary to claim the Classroom Action Research as quantitative or qualitative.

Classroom Action Research instruments are needed to record the data to be collected during the process of observation. The instruments have to be developed based on the nature of the data to be collected. The data which are derived from the criteria of success to solve the classroom problems have to be defined based on the right construct and content. The data on students' English achievement, for example, can be collected using English achievement tests developed based on the curricular objectives, while the data on students' problems, classroom atmosphere, and students' motivation can be collected using observation, interview, documents, etc. An observation check list to record

the teacher-researcher's activities is not appropriate in the observation stage, because the teacher-researcher's activities do not always relate to the criteria of success. An observation check list to record students' activities in the learning process is not appropriate, either, as the students' activities do not relate to the criteria of success. Again the appropriate instruments to collect data in Classroom Action Research are the instruments that can be used to collect data reflecting "*how well the strategy can solve the problems*" not "*How well the teacher implements the strategy*", or *how well the strategy is implemented*".

d. Reflection

Reflection is the process of analyzing data to determine how far the data collected have shown the success of the strategy in solving the problem. Reflection also shows what factors support the success of the strategy or what other problems may occur during the implementation process. The discussion on data analysis is done under the reflection stage.

The analysis of the result of observation is done by comparing the data collected with the target or the criteria of success. For example, a strategy of improving the students' writing skill using *picture series* is considered successful if (1) the students enjoy learning writing using picture series, (2) the teacher feels convenient in using the strategy of picture series, (3) the students become more active in improving their own writing skills, (4) the students enjoy helping each other in the process of learning writing, and (5) the students writing skills improve as indicated by the average score of at least 75.

The reflection stage aims at evaluating which criteria or target of success has been achieved, which one has not been achieved, and what are the possible reasons that those targets are not achieved yet. The result of the reflection is used to determine what part of the strategy needs improvement. The strategy is examined to find out how maximum improvement can possibly be made so that when implemented again all the targets of success can be achieved. The revised strategy (planning) is then implemented again, the result is observed, and then reflected in the second cycle. The cycle is repeated until the implementation of the strategy can achieve all the targeted criteria of success.

The number of cycles cannot be predicted in advance. A Classroom Action Research may take only one cycle if after the first cycle, all the targeted criteria of success have been achieved. The researcher, in fact, has to do their best to plan their Classroom Action Research as few cycles as possible. But if the targeted criteria of success have not all been achieved yet, then the revision of the strategy still needs to be done and another following cycle is still needed.

2.3 Stating Research Problems and Research objective of CAR

The research problems in Classroom Action Research reflect two things; the classroom problems to be solved and the strategy to be developed to solve the problems. For examples, *How can Reading Skills of Junior High School Students in SMPN 2 Banjarbaru be improved using Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) strategy?*

The following is example of research problems in Classroom Action Research by Maulida (2015).

1. How can students activities of reading comprehension in descriptive text improved using KWL strategy?
2. How can students achievement of reading comprehension in descriptive text improved using KWL strategy?

The first research problem concerns to the improvement of the process of English teaching using KWL strategy. Meanwhile, the second research problem concerns to the improvement of the result of English teaching.

Research objectives in Classroom Action Research are stated to contain two things, the classroom problems to be solved and the innovative instructional strategy to be developed. For example, “*This study aims at developing Contextual Teaching Learning strategy to improve Reading Skill of Junior High School students of SMPN 2 Banjarbaru*”.

The following is example of objectives for Classroom Action Research by Maulida (2015). This study aims:

1. To improve students activities of reading comprehension in descriptive text improved using KWL strategy.
2. To improve students achievement of reading comprehension in descriptive text improved using KWL strategy

2.4 Question Often Raised about Classroom Action Research

Following are questions and the answers addressed to Classroom Action Research, about the uniqueness, objectives, stating research problems and objectives, the criteria of success, the process, the cycle, the content of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, and measuring the success of a cycle.

1. How is Classroom Action Research different from Experimental Research?

Classroom Action Research is different from Experimental research. In English Classroom Action Research, the goal is to produce an innovative instructional strategy that can solve English classroom problems. The final product is an instructional strategy that has proved effective in solving classroom problems. The process is repeated cycles. The result of one cycle is evaluated to see how much the strategy has solved the problem. If the problem has not been completely solved yet, the strategy is revised and implemented in the following cycle, until the strategy effectively solves the problem. In experimental research, the goal is to see the effectiveness of an existing strategy (not the strategy which is still in the process of its development). The effectiveness of one strategy is measured by comparing the average score of a group of students getting the experimental treatment with the average score of another group of students getting another control treatment (Tuckman, 1999:132). No revision on the strategy is done in experimental research.

2. What are the criteria of success?

The criteria of success for Classroom Action Research are derived from the classroom problems to be solved and the classroom goals to be achieved. Many criteria are used to measure the success of the process of teaching and learning. Classroom instructions that do not result in students’ academic achievement is having a classroom problem to be

solved. So, students' academic achievement is one criteria of success. Classroom instructions that do not sustain students' motivation in learning (self-regulated learning or independent self-learning) are having a classroom problem to be solved. So, students' motivation in learning is one criteria of success. Classroom instructions that create scary atmosphere, where students are scared or highly worried, that create students loose their self esteem and their self confidence, that kills their personal as well as social skills are having classroom problems that need to be solved. So, classroom atmosphere is criteria of success.

The data indicating the achievement of the criteria of success may come from numerical information (quantitative data), obtained from the result of a test, or from verbal information (qualitative data) obtained from observation, interview, or documentation. The more criteria of success are achieved in the process of Classroom Action Research, the more other teachers having similar classroom problems get interested in using the strategy in their classrooms (Borgia, S, 2003).

3. What represents a cycle in Classroom Action Research?

A cycle in Classroom Action Research comprises four stages. The first stage is strategy planning, where the strategy is planned to solve classroom problems that have been identified. The second stage is acting, where the strategy that has been planned is implemented. The third stage, which is done simultaneously at the second stage, is observing, to collect data indicating the achievement of the criteria of success. The fourth stage is reflecting to analyze the data collected from the observing stage by comparing the data and the criteria of success.

The implementation of the instructional strategy may be done in one classroom meeting or several related classroom meetings. In writing instructions, for example, the first meeting is used for activating students' schemata and drafting, the second meeting is used for peer editing and revising, and the third meeting is for publishing. All the three meetings make up one cycle. In speaking instructions using Picture Games strategy, for example, one meeting is enough to implement the Picture Games Strategy. This one meeting makes up one cycle.

4. How do we measure the success of a cycle?

The success of a cycle is measured from the achievement of the targeted criteria of success indicating the solution of the classroom problems and the achievement of the classroom goals that have been decided in advance. When the result of observation and reflection in one cycle has shown that the targeted criteria of success have been completely achieved, the cycle is successful, and no further cycle is needed. If some criteria of success have not been achieved, the cycle is not successful yet, and further cycle is needed to improve the quality of the strategy. A Classroom Action Research may need only one cycle or many need several cycles.

The improvement in the results from one cycle to the following cycles is not the measure of the success of the cycles. The improvement of the results from the first cycle to the last cycles does not determine whether one more cycle is needed. Therefore, comparing

and analyzing differences in achievement from the first cycle to the last cycle to find out statistical significant difference is beyond the Classroom Action Research and so it is not needed. This comparison belongs to another research design.

Comparing the results of pre test conducted before the first cycle is started and the results of post test administered after one cycle is conducted to find out statistical significant difference is not the measure of success of the cycle, as the significant difference between the two sets of scores does not determine whether one more cycle is needed. Similarly, comparing and analyzing the results of one cycle with the results from an instructional process using another strategy to find out statistical significant difference is not the measure of success of the cycle, as the significant difference does not determine whether one more cycle is needed. The statistical comparison belongs to another research design.

5. Does Classroom Action Research belong to qualitative or quantitative research?

Quantitative research is differentiated from qualitative research from the type of data collected. Quantitative research collects numerical data while qualitative research collects verbal data. Data collected in Classroom Action Research depend on the criteria of success used as the target of achievement. Usually the criteria of success are related to both types of data, numerical data as well as verbal data. Therefore, Classroom Action research cannot be claimed as quantitative research because verbal data are also collected. It cannot be claimed as qualitative research either because numerical data are also collected. It is safer to claim that Classroom Action Research belongs to both quantitative research and qualitative.

III. Conclusion

Professional classroom teachers always have classroom problems to be solved and try to find alternative strategies to solve the problems. The development of the strategies to solve the classroom problems can be done through Classroom Action Research. Teachers who always conduct Classroom Action Research help maximize the achievement of their students as well other teachers of the same field. So, it is important that teachers learn how to conduct Classroom Action Research.

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