

Adapting Classroom Action Research as a Form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Practice for Teachers of English in Improving English Language Teaching

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Abstract

This paper discusses the use of Classroom Action Research (CAR) as a form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in an English language classroom. CAR is a research method that allows teachers to reflect on their teaching practices, identify problems, and develop and implement solutions in their own classrooms. CPD is essential for teachers to improve their skills and knowledge and maintain their professional competence. This paper examines the benefits and challenges of using CAR as a form of CPD in an English language classroom and the strategies involved in conducting a CAR project. It explores the place of classroom action research (CAR) as a form of continuous professional development (CPD) in English language classrooms. CAR is a cyclical process of inquiry that involves teachers systematically reflecting on their practice, identifying problems or issues, and implementing changes in their teaching to improve student learning. The paper provides an overview of CAR and its potential benefits for English language teachers. It then discusses the challenges that teachers may face in implementing CAR and offers suggestions for how these challenges can be overcome. The paper concludes that CAR is an effective and valuable form of CPD for English language teachers, as it allows them to reflect on their practices, develop new skills and knowledge, and improve the learning outcomes of their students.

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Introduction

In today's rapidly changing world, it is more important than ever for English language teachers to be engaged in Continuous Professional Development (CPD). CPD is a process of acquiring new knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable teachers to improve their teaching practice. There are many forms of CPD, but one of the most effective is Classroom Action Research (CAR).

CAR is a cyclical process of inquiry that involves teachers systematically reflecting on their practice, identifying problems or issues, and implementing changes in their teaching to improve students' learning. CAR is a powerful tool for teachers because it allows them to develop a more profound understanding of their students' learning needs, identify and address the challenges that their students are facing, experiment with new teaching strategies and approaches, evaluate the

effectiveness of their teaching, reflect on their teaching practice.

Teaching is a very dynamic job. It requires constant thinking in an effort to make the educational experiences valuable to the learners and also, improve their practice. It is more pressing in this century because schooling is faced with emerging issues that challenge effective learning, (Okoth and Simiyu, 2017:3). Additionally, educators have to deal with the daunting task of handling learners who are diverse in all senses but who have to be prepared to take up roles in a world that is constantly changing. To do this successfully, Darling-Hammond (1998) posits that practising teachers need to develop appropriate skills and knowledge to facilitate powerful teaching that results in high standards of learning and learners who will transform this century. Literature and studies reveal the fact that teachers need to constantly deepen their knowledge of student thinking, subject matter knowledge, instructional practices and assessment procedures (Borko, 2004; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Hoban, 2002).

Classroom Action Research (CAR) is a powerful tool that allows teachers to reflect on their teaching practices, identify areas of improvement, and develop solutions that can benefit both their students and themselves. As an iterative and systematic approach to investigating teaching and learning in the classroom, Classroom Action Research enables teachers to continuously evaluate and refine their strategies, methods, and materials in response to the needs of their students

and the changing education landscape. In the context of teaching English, Classroom Action Research can be particularly valuable as it allows teachers to explore the complex and dynamic nature of language learning and teaching, and to develop effective and contextually appropriate pedagogies that can enhance students' engagement, motivation, and achievement. In this regard, Classroom Action Research can also be seen as a form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that helps teachers to develop their knowledge, skills, and confidence in a collaborative and evidence-based manner. Classroom Action Research (CAR) is a systematic approach to professional development that involves teachers in reflective and collaborative inquiry to improve their teaching practice. It is a form of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) that empowers teachers to identify and address specific teaching and learning challenges in their classrooms. CAR can be particularly effective for teachers of English, who often face complex linguistic and cultural contexts that require innovative and context-sensitive teaching strategies.

In this context, CAR offers a valuable opportunity for teachers to investigate their teaching practices, experiment with new pedagogical approaches and evaluate their effectiveness through data collection and analysis. By engaging in CAR, teachers can develop their skills and knowledge, deepen their understanding of the English language, and enhance their ability to meet the diverse needs of their learners.

What is action research?

Carr and Kemmis (1986) define action research as “a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social (including educational) situations to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their social or educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations in which the practices are carried out. It is most rationally empowering when undertaken by participants collaboratively, though it is often undertaken by individuals, and sometimes in cooperation with 'outsiders'. In education, action research has been employed in school-based curriculum development, professional development, school improvement programs and systems planning and policy development.” This definition captures a series of reflective processes in which a general plan, action, observation of action, and reflection on action are developed and then moved to a new and revised plan with action, observation, and further reflection. Carr and Kemmis (1986) are concerned with the teacher focusing on the problems he encountered in the classroom and asking constructive questions such as: What is happening now? In what way is it problematic? What can I do about it? After asking these questions, the teacher then figures out a way of exploring these questions, creating an action plan, and implementing these action plans to improve the situations/challenges in his classroom.

Action research is a form of research conducted by participants in a social situation, who are at the same time both active agents and

investigators of their own ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Burns, 2010). In language teaching, action research is typically conducted by teachers wishing to explore in depth various aspects of teaching or learning in the classroom. It involves conducting a systematic, but dynamic, process of research with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of practices within the classroom and enhancing the conditions for teaching and learning that already exist (Burns, 2014). Action research is now widely advocated as a means for teaching practitioners to gain greater insights into their practices, renew their pedagogical approaches in their local contexts, and accommodate recent innovations or changes in teaching approaches. Recent publications (e.g. Borg, 2010, 2013; Burns and Edwards, 2014) also reveal the complexities involved in such shifts in focus toward the notion of teacher engagement in research. Studies looking at teachers as both consumers and doers of research indicate that for teachers to successfully undertake action research they need opportunities to investigate issues closely aligned with their questions or concerns about their daily work, support from experienced facilitators, and acknowledgment of their work from their institutions, administrators, and peers. It is this close engagement and support that potentially leads to sustained changes in teaching practices (Burns and Edwards, 2016; Dikilitaş and Wyatt, 2015). Considering the positive results that action research seems to bring to teaching and learning, it, therefore, follows that teachers need support in engaging in this kind of research to improve their practices. In

particular, supporting teacher engagement in Action Research means tapping into the realities of teachers' daily work and the inevitable restrictions on their time. Providing these teachers with time away from work to conduct meaningful practitioner research at the classroom level can lead to enhanced teaching and improved student learning, and is a productive investment. When teachers are engaged in a well-supported action research process, especially in the English language classroom, the teacher not only benefits in improving his/her effectiveness, but the learners also benefit. According to Borg, it can "bridge the gap between formal qualifications and effectiveness in the classroom" (Borg, 2013: 217).

Continuing Professional Development

UNESCO (2005) suggests that for meaningful educational reform to take place, there is the need to shift focus from educational accessibility to quality of education and also the need to focus on ensuring that all teachers as professionals are well-informed about advancing their teaching, training, and learning expertise and offering opportunities for professional networking. One of the hallmarks of being identified as a professional is to continue to learn throughout a career. Loucks-Horsley, Love, Stiles, Mundry, & Hewson, (2003) in Kennedy (2014), advocates for CPD as an effective means to influence teachers' learning, their methods and practices of teaching (instruction) as well as students' learning (curriculum).

Continuing professional development is a 'planned, continuous and lifelong process whereby teachers try to develop their professional qualities, and improve their knowledge, skills and practice leading to their empowerment... and the development of their organization and their pupils (Padwad and Dixit, 2011:10). CPD is applicable to teachers at all levels. Hayes (2014) describes it as a multifaceted, lifelong experience capable of taking place within or outside the workplace and impacting on both the professional and personal life of the teacher. Continuing professional development is a collective responsibility of both individual teachers and the educational intuitions where they work. Individuals and their employers should take joint responsibility for professional development and training, which is meant to be for the benefit of both. The experience and expertise of staff, both teaching and support, is generally recognized to be the school's most important and most expensive resource (Eraut, 2001). Of all the factors that are needed to enhance the quality of teachers, Continuing Professional Development has been observed to be a major one, (Clarke, 2005; Clotfelter and Ladd, 2004; Lewis, Parsad, Carey, Bartfai and Westat, 1999). Continuing Professional Development does not only expose the teachers to all the needed knowledge and skills that will make them to become highly effective as well as coping with modern-day challenges of the teaching profession, it also helps them to update already acquired knowledge.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is the process of acquiring and maintaining the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are necessary to perform one's job effectively. It involves the ongoing learning and development of an individual's professional skills and expertise.

CPD is essential for professionals to stay up-to-date with the latest industry trends, technological advancements, and regulatory changes. It enables individuals to enhance their knowledge and skills, improve their job performance, and increase their career opportunities. CPD can take various forms, such as attending conferences, workshops, and seminars, completing online courses, participating in professional networking, reading industry publications, and engaging in peer-to-peer learning. It can be formal or informal, and it can be self-directed or provided by an employer or professional association.

The importance of Continuing Professional Development of teachers is made more profound because "teachers do not enter the classroom as a finished product" (Clotfelter and Ladd, 2004: 2). That is, when new teachers first enter the classroom, they do not possess all the knowledge and skills they will need to become highly effective. It is experience, practice, assistance, and training that make teachers become better. Therefore, through Continuing Professional Development, teachers acquire new concepts, ideas, and knowledge to enhance their professional skill and competence, which in turn improve the general quality of

educational service delivery, (Ememe et al., 2013).

CPD is an integral part of many professions, including law, medicine, engineering, teaching, and accounting. Many professional bodies require their members to undertake a certain amount of CPD each year to maintain their professional status and accreditation. Overall, CPD is a critical component of professional development, and it is essential for individuals to continuously improve their skills and knowledge to remain competitive in their respective industries.

The Place of Classroom Action Research as A Form of Continuing Professional Development for Colleges of Education English Language Lecturers

Classroom Action Research is a type of research that focuses on improving teaching and learning practices within a specific classroom setting. As a form of continuing professional development for English language teachers, Classroom Action Research offers several benefits that can help teachers to improve their teaching practices, increase their knowledge of teaching and learning and enhance student outcomes. A list of these benefits includes:

- Improved students' learning: Studies have indicated that CAR can lead to significant improvements in student learning (Burns & Edwards, 2014; Lee & Wang, 2012).
- Enhanced teacher's knowledge and skills: CAR provides teachers with opportunities to develop new

knowledge and skills in teaching and learning.

- Increased teacher's confidence and self-efficacy: CAR can help teachers to feel more confident in their teaching abilities.
- Improved teacher's job satisfaction: CAR can help teachers to feel more satisfied with their jobs.
- Increased teacher's collaboration: CAR can provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate with each other and share ideas.

In broader terms, the place of CAR as a form of CPD in English Language classrooms can be divided into four ways, these are:

Firstly, Classroom Action Research provides an opportunity for English language teachers to reflect on their teaching practices and identify areas for improvement. By conducting research within their classroom, teachers can identify their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their students' strengths and weaknesses, and use this information to develop more effective teaching strategies.

Secondly, Classroom Action Research provides English language teachers with an opportunity to engage in ongoing learning and professional development. Through the research process, teachers are required to review literature and research related to their area of interest, which can help to build their knowledge base and understanding of teaching and learning.

Thirdly, Classroom Action Research provides English language teachers with a practical framework for

implementing change within their classrooms. By using a systematic approach to identify, implement, and evaluate teaching strategies, teachers can make data-driven decisions that can lead to improved student outcomes.

Finally, Classroom Action Research can help English language teachers to build a culture of collaboration and inquiry within their school or department. By sharing their research findings with colleagues and inviting feedback and discussion, teachers can create a supportive and collaborative learning environment that benefits both themselves and their students.

Challenges of Using Classroom Action Research as A Form of CPD in an English Language Teaching Classroom

Classroom Action Research (CAR) can be an effective form of continuing professional development (CPD) for English language teachers. It involves conducting systematic inquiries into teaching practices and using the results to improve students' learning outcomes. However, there are also several challenges associated with using CAR as a form of CPD in English language teaching.

Time constraints: Conducting CAR requires a significant amount of time and effort, which may be a challenge for busy teachers who already have a heavy workload. Teachers may find it difficult to balance their teaching responsibilities with conducting research and implementing changes in their classroom practices.

Lack of expertise: Conducting research requires a certain level of expertise in research methods and data analysis. Many English language teachers may not have the necessary training or experience to conduct research independently. This can be a barrier to using CAR as a form of CPD.

Limited resources: Conducting CAR may require access to resources such as technology, research journals, and professional development workshops. Teachers in certain contexts may not have access to these resources, which can limit their ability to engage in CAR.

Ethical considerations: CAR involves collecting and analysing data about students, which raises ethical considerations around privacy and confidentiality. Teachers must ensure that they are following ethical guidelines and obtaining informed consent from students and parents.

Generalizability of findings: CAR is often conducted in a specific classroom or context, which means that the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. Teachers must carefully consider the limitations of their research and be cautious about applying their findings to other settings.

Lack of support: Teachers may not have the support they need from their school or district to conduct CAR, such as access to a mentor or coach.

In summary, while CAR can be a valuable form of CPD for English language teachers, it also presents several challenges. Teachers must be willing to invest the necessary time

and effort, have the necessary expertise and resources, and carefully consider the ethical and generalizability considerations associated with conducting research in their classrooms.

Overcoming The Challenges of Using Classroom Action Research as A Form of Continuing Professional Development

Make time for Classroom Action Research: It is undoubtedly that teaching is one of the busiest professions there is. Teachers are swarmed with work while at the office and even when they are in their various homes, they still have to prepare for the next lessons, assess and records. There is always so much to be done. This leaves no time for other activity such as CAR. Therefore, teachers need to make time for CAR, even if it means sacrificing other activities.

Find resources: resources can be very scarce to teachers, most especially those in developing/Third World countries. Hence, the teacher who wants to engage in Classroom Action Research will have to work on finding adequate resources to carry it out. There are a number of resources available to help teachers with CAR, such as research journals, online courses, professional development workshops, and even sponsorships such as those provided by the British Council.

Get support: Mentorship for teachers is very important. To overcome the numerous challenges encountered in CAR, teachers can get support for Classroom Action Room from their colleagues, administrators, or professional organizations.

Practical Strategies for Implementing Classroom Action Research as A Form of CPD In an English Language Classroom

Classroom Action Research is a form of professional development involving teachers conducting research to improve their teaching practices. In an English language Classroom, Action Research can be a valuable tool for teachers to reflect on their practices, identify areas of improvement and make evidence-based changes to their teaching.

Here are some strategies for implementing classroom action research as a form of CPD in an English language classroom:

- i. **Identifying a Research Question:** The first step is to identify a research question that will guide the action research project. This question should be specific, relevant to the teacher's practice, and based on an area of teaching that the teacher wants to improve.
- ii. **Conducting a Literature Review:** Conducting a literature review is an essential part of action research. Teachers should research existing studies and articles on the topic they are investigating to better understand the issue.
- iii. **Collection of Data:** Teachers should collect data related to the research question using various research methods such as surveys, interviews, observations, or tests. This data should be analysed and interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions.

- iv. **Action Plan:** After a thorough study and analysis of the data collected, the teacher should plan the possible action plan he can carry out to address what the data is saying. For example, if the data is saying that there are gender biases in his classroom, part of the action plan will be to design reading lessons about topics related to gender–gender equality and how to deal with gender stereotypes.
- v. **Implementing Changes:** Based on the series of action plans that the teacher has come up with, the teacher should implement changes to their teaching practices using the action plans he has come up with to improve student outcomes. The teacher should then continue to collect data to assess the impact of these changes.
- vi. **Share Findings:** Finally, teachers should share their findings with colleagues, both in their school and in the wider teaching community. This sharing can take place through presentations, publications, or online forums. Sharing findings not only helps disseminate new knowledge but also provides an opportunity for peer feedback and collaboration.

In summary, implementing Classroom Action Research can be an effective way for teachers to develop their own teaching practices and improve student outcomes. By identifying research questions, conducting a literature review, collecting data, implementing changes, and sharing findings, teachers can engage in a cyclical process of continuous

professional development that benefits both themselves and their students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Classroom Action Research can be a valuable form of professional development for English language teachers. Through this approach, teachers can identify areas of improvement in their teaching practice, develop and implement effective interventions, and evaluate the impact of their actions on student learning outcomes. Additionally, by engaging in a continuous cycle of reflection, action, and evaluation, teachers can develop a more profound understanding of their students' needs and become more effective in meeting those needs. As such, classroom action research can serve as a powerful tool for promoting teacher growth, enhancing student learning, and ultimately, improving the overall quality of English language education.

Finally, CAR is an essential tool for English language teachers who are committed to continuous improvement in their teaching practice. Despite the challenges that teachers may face in implementing CAR, there are several things that they can do to overcome these challenges. By making time for CAR, finding resources, and getting support, teachers can reap the many benefits of this powerful form of CPD.

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