A Practical Model for Integrating Action Research Time into Second Language Education Schedule

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Abstract

Time limitation has always been considered a major problem in conducting action research (AR) in the field of second/foreign language teacher education. In order to overcome the lack of time obstacle to research engagement, a comprehensive framework was set up in this study that allowed teachers the flexibility to plan and incorporate research activities into their current teaching schedule. Seven Iranian teachers of a private English language teaching institute participated in the present study. The structure of first- and second-order AR was used in this collaborative AR study. Qualitative modes of inquiry, including reflective journal and semi-structured interview, were used to elicit teachers' views about conducting their AR projects. Analysis of the data revealed three major themes about AR that concerned issues such as empowering teachers in dealing with a particular problem, creating a sense of belonging to a professional community, and helping them to value time allotment.

Key Words: first-order action research, second-order action research, reflective journal, semi-structured interview, teachers' views

Un modelo práctico para integrar el tiempo de la investigación-acción en el programa de educación de segunda lengua

Resumen

La limitación de tiempo siempre fue considerada el mayor problema en la realización de la *Action Research* (AR) en el campo de la formación de profesores de segunda lengua/ lengua extranjera. Con el fin de superar el obstáculo de la falta de tiempo para el compromiso investigativo, en este estudio se estableció un marco integral que permitió a los docentes la flexibilidad para planificar e incorporar actividades de investigación en su programa de enseñanza habitual. Siete profesores iraníes de un instituto privado de enseñanza de lengua inglesa participaron en el presente estudio. La estructura de la AR de primer – y segundo orden- se usó en este estudio colaborativo de AR. Modalidades cualitativas de investigación, incluyendo el diario reflexivo y la entrevista semi-estructurada, se utilizaron para obtener la visión de los profesores sobre la realización de sus proyectos de AR. El análisis de los datos reveló tres temas principales sobre la AR que se referían a cuestiones tales como empoderar a los profesores para enfrentar un problema en particular, crear un sentido de pertenencia a una comunidad profesional, y ayudarlos a valorar el tiempo disponible.

Palabras clave: investigación-acción de primer orden, investigación-acción de segundo orden, diario reflexivo, entrevista semi-estructurada, visión de los profesores.

Introduction

In recent years, applied linguists have paid special attention to foreign/second language (L2) teacher education and practice (e.g., Bartels 2005; Burns & Richards 2009; Johnson 2000, 2009; Tedick 2004). Classroom discourse has thus been a locus of interest for quite some time, as the literature has tended to focus on teacher development far more than teacher training. Richards and Farrell (2005) argue that the former aims at helping teachers understand themselves and their teaching, while the latter deals with basic concepts, strategies, and methodology, and therefore aims at short-term and immediate goals. Thus, since the issue of teacher development has become central to the field of L2 teacher education (Edge 2005; Richards & Farrell 2005), action research (AR) has gained its reputation as a reliable tool to this end (e.g., Atay 2006, 2008; Burns 2005, 2009; Campbell & Tovar 2006; Chou 2011; McDonough 2006; Poon 2008).

In spite of the fact that AR is a primary "vehicle for practitioners' personal and professional development" (Burns 2005, p. 70), time limitation has always been considered a major problem in conducting AR in the field of L2 education. Although time is more of a structural factor, which will not in and of itself guarantee that high standards of professional development will be fulfilled, reviewing the related literature shows that there has not been provision made for time within the workload of teachers to accommodate the necessary ingredients for conducting AR (see the literature review section). Dealing with the prominent dimensions of research communities, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) consider time to be one of the most important dimensions when teachers come together as researchers because they "need sufficient chunks of time in which to work and sufficient longevity as a group over time" (p. 294). At the same line, Firkins and Wong (2005), recognising research as a sign of professionalism of teachers, also assert that "educational authorities need to allocate resources to schools by way of time and funds" (p. 69). However, although many previous studies have introduced and blamed lack of time as a major obstacle in conducting AR, less has been said about how the kinds of conditions might be created in teachers' workplaces and workloads to support them in terms of time for carrying out their AR projects.

Clearly, unless teachers are presented with more concrete advice on how they might achieve this, they will struggle to apply the invaluable suggestions related literature offers. As Atay (2008, p. 140) rightly asserts, "although there is a growing literature on the positive outcomes associated with teachers doing [action] research, not much information is provided about the specific characteristics and stages of the [action] research process". This study is thus an attempt to provide teachers with a practical model for integrating action research time (ART) into their work so that it minimizes the extra burden it might create and maximizes the joy of a new journey in their professional development. In this way, the research questions that form the basis of the present study are as the following:

1) What practical model can be used to incorporate ART in the workloads of L2 teachers despite their busy schedule?
2) What might be the possible benefits of such a model for teachers?

Literature review

Professional development through AR

There is general consensus that teachers do not stop learning to teach during their lives (Atay 2006, 2008) and professional learning for teachers is an ongoing and lifelong process (e.g., Zeichner & Noffke 2001). The aim of in-service education and training (INSET) programs is thus to help teachers by stimulating their professional development (Kennedy 1995), improving their teaching practices and preparing them for higher-level educational policies (Roberts 1998), and providing them with lifelong education throughout their professional career (Sprinthall et al.,1996). As Atay (2008, p. 139) makes it clear, "providing meaningful professional development for in-service teachers is seen as central to this goal".

In order to achieve teachers' professional development, INSET practices have traditionally been constructed in the form of short-term or one-shot programs. In such programs, which have been designed by outside experts, knowledge has been disseminated almost exclusively by again outside experts (Craft 1996). These one-shot, knowledge-transmission INSET programs have been criticized for not affecting teachers in achieving a change in their professional practices (Hayes 1997) and incongruity of the knowledge transmitted and the reality of the classroom context (Atay 2008). According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993, pp. 1-2):

In-service teacher education programmes are typically organized to disseminate a knowledge base constructed almost exclusively by outside experts. This means that through their careers teachers are expected to learn about their profession not by studying their own experiences but by studying the findings of those who are not themselves school-based teachers.

As a consequence, not surprisingly, the aim of achieving professional development by teachers is rarely fulfilled.

Due to such limitations, researchers and educators have tried to find new ways of teacher professional development so that teachers take a more responsible role for examining their teaching context to gain a deeper understanding of their own work on an ongoing basis (Edge 2005). AR has gained its reputation as a reliable tool to this end as it fosters meaningful professional development for teachers, especially in-service teachers (e.g., Atay 2006, 2008; Chou 2011; Dean 2006). It is a type of inquiry that aims at reflecting on teaching practices, examining beliefs, values and principles, and sharing with colleagues, all of which, according to Schon (1983), lie at the very heart of professional development.

AR as a form of professional development has been found to have numerous benefits for and a profound effect on teachers in the field of L2 education. It is now an established fact that the process of AR, if conducted systematically and extensively, enables the construction of teacher-generated knowledge, thus empowering teachers as the creators and not just the holders of such knowledge (Avgitidou 2010; Edg, 2001). Moreover, AR has been regarded favorably because it can help teachers develop in-depth perspectives about the process of teaching and learning (Lacorte & Krastel 2002). In addition, AR can help L2 teachers recognize the importance of learning how to seek answers to their questions (Tedick & Walker 1995), address and find solutions to particular problems in a specific teaching or learning situation (Hadley 2003), develop personal theories about L2 learning (Crookes,

1997), become autonomous (Tinker Sachs 2000), reduce gaps between academic research findings and practical classroom applications (Sayer 2005), and become familiar with research skills and enhance their knowledge of conducting research (Crookes & Chandle, 2001).

Time limitation problem

Despite such benefits, however, time limitation has recently been emphasized as one of the main barriers in conducting AR in the field of L2 education as has been echoed in some recent studies. For example, dissatisfied with this fact that neither pre- nor in-service teachers of English could do much research in Turkey, Atay (2006) used a collaborative AR model to help both in-service teachers fill the gap between research and teaching and pre-service teachers become familiar with research in real classroom contexts. Ten pre-service and ten in-service teachers participated in her study. After being provided with relevant theoretical knowledge on research, they collaborated and conducted their research in in-service teachers' classes. Although the findings of her study showed that participating in collaborative AR had a positive impact on the professional development of teachers, she concluded that teachers need to be given some time off to do research in the most effective way.

In another study from North America, Allison and Carey (2007) examined the views on research of teachers teaching at a university language center in Canada. A questionnaire was distributed to 22 teachers and 17 of them participated in the follow-up interviews. The respondents of the study mentioned lack of time and time-consuming demands of teaching as an impediment to conducting research. They stated that as their priority was satisfying immediate needs of learners in the classroom, they did not have time for any systematic enquiry. Borg (2009) also conducted a study on English language teachers' conceptions of research in different contexts. Examining the conceptions of research held by 505 teachers of English from 13 countries around the world, the results generally indicated that teachers' conceptions of research were aligned with conventional scientific notions of enquiry. Key ideas which resonated with teachers' notions of research were statistics, objectivity, hypotheses, large samples, and variables. The finding that is of particular relevance to the present study is that the teachers in Borg's (2009) study referred to lack of time by far as the most common reason for not engaging in research.

Finding different constraints on teachers' research activity, Barkhuizen's (2009) study also showed that time was a key factor preventing teachers from conducting research in their classrooms. Collecting data through a narrative frame during a professional development programme in China, he reported the findings of a course which aimed to introduce teachers to qualitative research methods. His study on different aspects of the research lives of a group of 83 tertiary English teachers in China during a 10-day teacher education programme revealed that time was a major constraint which prevented teachers from carrying out research.

Methodology

Method

The structure of first- and second-order AR (Elliott 1991) is used in this collaborative AR study. For the English language teachers in the study, the first-order inquiry included solving a problem in their own teaching practice. For the outside researchers, the second-order inquiry included facilitating the AR process and interpretation of the teachers' attitudes. This distinction between first- and second-order inquiry is of particular importance in the context of the present study because this distinction helps to deal with the ownership, as the research equally belongs to both the teachers and the researchers. In this study, the teachers had freedom to establish objectives and strategies to achieve them through conducting their own AR projects, however, the researchers' role was far from being trivial. In other words, although first-order AR was driven and directed by the teachers in the context of their collaborative AR project, second-order inquiry was conducted by the researchers to analyse and interpret the teachers' AR practices and experiences.

Participants

Being the conductor of the study, one of the researchers functioned as a participant observer. He invited eighteen teachers of a private English language teaching institute located in Mashhad (a northeastern city in Iran) to a meeting. After introducing and discussing the benefits of action research, he asked for volunteers to participate in an AR project as a venue for their professional development. He also distributed a research timetable to let them know about the research process. Unfortunately, due to the fact that most of the teachers could not devote time, only seven of them agreed to participate in this project.

The teachers were English teaching staff members who were recruited with the mission of teaching general English skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing) to various English language learners in terms of age and level. They had never gone through any AR process in their teaching career. All teachers were male, ranging from 5 to 12 years in terms of their experience in teaching. All of them had BA in English language and literature and were between 28 and 35 years old. To preserve their privacy, pseudonyms were used when presenting the results.

Data types

Qualitative modes of inquiry were used to elicit teachers' views about conducting this AR project in their classrooms. Data sources included reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. They are described in detail in the following.

Reflective journal

The teachers were asked to record their thoughts about their AR experiences weekly for ten successive weeks, making a minimum of two entries per week. We did not predetermine the number of required journal entries, but allowed the teachers to establish the minimum requirement through negotiation and consensus. In addition to prompts related to the focal

topics (e.g., advantages and disadvantages of conducting action research), the teachers were also encouraged to write about their own feelings in either English or Farsi (their first language to help them feel more relaxed and write more freely). The Farsi texts were then translated into English by the researchers. Each teacher made from 29 to 36 entries in his reflective journal, and the average entry length was 370 words with a range of 220 to 460 words.

Semi-structured interview

All of the teachers were invited and participated in a semi-structured interview to elaborate on their experience of conducting the AR in their classroom context. The aim of the interview was to get the teachers' insights into such a new experience in their career. In this way, during the face-to-face interviews, teachers were requested to elaborate on the questions such as the following: How do you describe the experience of conducing AR in your classroom? What are the benefits of doing AR in your opinion? What are its problems? What were your reasons for engaging in this AR project? Do you feel that you are now a better teacher as a result? Should AR be part of the teachers' teaching program?

Although there was a set of pre-prepared guiding questions and prompts, the format was open-ended, and the interviewees were encouraged to elaborate on their views and experiences of AR in an exploratory manner. In other words, although we provided guidance and direction, we were also keen to follow up interesting developments and to let the interviewees to elaborate on the issues of their own interest. Interviews lasted on average between 20 to 25 minutes and were audio recorded and fully transcribed. Farsi was used as the teachers felt they could express themselves better in their native tongue. All of the transcriptions were then translated into English.

Data analysis

As is typical in qualitative research, an inductive approach was adopted so that themes emerged from the data (Dornyei 2007). To begin, we read the entire corpus (i.e., journal documents and interview transcriptions) and coded chunks of text to make the data manageable. Then, we reduced and simplified the coded data while highlighting special features of certain data segments in order to link them to broader concepts. we coded and recoded the data several times until the initial descriptive and low-inference codes were gradually replaced by higher-order ones. As a result of revisiting the data a number of times, the data revealed some general themes. The findings related to each theme, with representative comments from the teachers' journals and interviews that exemplify each theme, are presented in the "Findings" section.

First-order inquiry

Procedure

To begin the study, the entire group agreed to read *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching: A Guide for Practitioners* (Burns 2010) to provide guidance for the AR project the teachers wanted to develop and a common language from which we could begin our research efforts. The main reason for choosing this book, among other options, is that it is user-friendly and offers a step-by-step guide to the AR process especially for those who are new to this type of research. The book consists of five chapters which except for chapter one, which introduces and defines the concept of action research, the other four chapters "each take one phase of the [action research] cycle and discuss the decisions and steps that action researchers must make at that point" (Burns 2010, p. 9). The structure of Burns' (2010) book is based on Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) classic model of AR which is consisted of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

Each teacher selected one class at pre-intermediate level from his several classes. Each class had between 8 and 12 male students who were between 15 and 18 years old. The classes met twice a week, with 90-minute sessions each time. The courses lasted eight weeks, so resulting in 16 sessions. The teachers agreed to meet for ten consecutive weeks on a regular basis and discuss their AR projects, totalling ten meetings, each lasting almost two hours. This provided student-free time for the teachers to meet throughout the semester and was a key factor in enabling them to devote the necessary time and effort to their AR project and to communicate together. Each two weeks were devoted to one main phase of the AR process and the teachers were asked to read carefully the related chapters in the Burns' (2010) book before coming to each meeting.

Two caveats are in order. First, the mentioned time-line should not imply that the teachers only discussed their projects in those pre-arranged times. They had the chance to talk about their AR projects every time they met each other at work. Second, the time-line should not suggest that the AR project was inflexible as the phases of the AR naturally overlapped with each other during the AR process. However, the time-line was used to provide the teachers with a signpost to follow the order and be on the right track.

Plan

The AR project began by eliciting the wonderings of teachers: their own questions, their burning issues, in the first two weeks of the semester. As was expected, teachers struggled with this part of the process the most. When the teachers began, their initial questions lacked rigour and depth. This might be attributed to traditional teacher education system, especially in Iran, which presents teachers with very few chances to ask their own questions. Universities mainly focus on preparing teachers to answer L2 learners' questions most of the time. Not surprisingly, when teachers are in a situation which they should generate their own, they are confused what to do.

After lots of discussions they eventually began to understand that the purpose of this AR project is to learn more about something they really think is worth investigating. They gradually initiated discussions of topics about which they were concerned and on which

they might wish to focus their inquiry. Then they started to generate questions that were of considerable importance to them: What kinds of teaching strategies can I use to help learners make best use of different learning strategies? How can I create an environment that helps learners in my classroom to learn from each other? How do I engage my students as active partners and not passive learners? Having identified a range of issues, they were confronted with selecting an issue for immediate attention in their specific teaching context. Before making a final selection, they decided to reflect on each issue identified from personal and institutional perspectives with the aim to establish the degree to which it offers opportunities for personal growth and learning; the degree to which issue resolution offers the possibility of improving both their teaching and learners' learning; and the degree to which the issue may be resolved within available resources and time constraints.

Considering all of these criteria, they came to the conclusion that one of the most annoying problems in their classrooms was that some of their students were not active enough during the class, and did not speak most of the time. To set the scene, the learners rarely responded to the teachers or actively participated in discussions. They were quiet during the lessons and when they were called on, they just spoke in a barely audible voice. After reviewing a large amount of literature, they found out that various reasons had been proposed for this reluctance to speak in L2 classroom contexts; one of the most important ones was the lack of confidence (e.g., Burden 2004; Ewald 2007; Tong 2010; Yashima et al. 2004). They also found that many previous studies had shown that L2 students' lack of confidence was attributed to their lack of speaking practice (e.g., Benson 1991; Kubo 2009; Schneider 2001). Thus, the key research question that formed the basis of their AR project was as follows:

Does the EFL students' confidence in speaking in our particular classroom contexts grow, as a result of encouraging them to engage in pair/group work speaking activities through additional speaking materials?

Act

This phase started from the third week and continued to the end of the semester (i.e. week eight). During this period, extra speaking activities, based on an authorised book on speaking (*Speaking Extra* by Gammidge, 2004) on the market containing photocopiable materials for supplementary classroom work, were incorporated into the classroom to increase the students' performance in terms of pair/group work, and consequently, their confidence. What was of utmost importance in this phase was matching teachers' data collection methods with what they wanted to find out. At the same time, they should have looked for manageable and doable techniques which were cost-effective. In order to fulfill these needs, they decided to go through a convergent parallel mixed methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011). Convergent parallel design is a one-phase design, in which both quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analysed concurrently and are equally weighted. In order to best understand the research problem, a researcher collects and analyses both numeric and text data concurrently but separately. Mixing of the data occurs only after the quantitative and qualitative data are analysed, and the results are compared and contrasted to produce a final valid interpretation of the issue studied. In this AR study, quantitative data included a confidence questionnaire and qualitative data included reflective journals. Each data type is described in detail in the following.

Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire: Griffee (1997) designed the "Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire", and it is one of the first published questionnaires specific to L2 confidence. His questionnaire is based on three aspects of confidence, namely *ability*, *assurance*, and *willing engagement*, and it fits our research inquiry well, in that it has allowed the teachers to broadly examine their students' sense of confidence. At the beginning of the semester (week three), the teachers had students complete, with full anonymity, Griffee's *Confidence in Speaking English as a Foreign Language Questionnaire*. They re-administered the questionnaire at the end of the semester (week eight) to see whether students' sense of confidence in speaking English had changed.

The questionnaire consisted of 12 items, which elicited responses to statements, such as *I like speaking English*, or *I can speak English easily*. A 5-point Likert scale accompanied each item, requiring respondents to report degrees of agreement or disagreement. The quantitative analysis involved collating questionnaire results from the beginning and end of the semester, showing percentages of increases or decreases in confidence because of incorporating extra speaking activities into the classroom by mapping the Likert scale onto a percentage scale.

Reflective journals: Despite conducting the confidence questionnaire, we should note that unlike variables such as height or age, it is very difficult to deal with affective variables, such as confidence, directly (Lightbown & Spada 2006). In addition, the students' perception of their self-confidence was deemed to be worthy of consideration. Thus, the students were asked to record their thoughts about their L2 classroom experiences weekly for six successive weeks. The teachers agreed that they would not read the students' journals until after the course grades had been submitted, in order to allay any of their concerns that negative comments about their experiences or classroom context might affect their grades. The qualitative analysis involved reading the entire corpus of reflective journals and identifying general themes that illustrated the students' impressions about the extra speaking activities and their impact on their confidence.

Observe

Although the weeks five and six were devoted to this phase of AR in our earlier time-line, the teachers collected and analysed the data at the end of the semester (i.e., the week eight and afterward). This is because we had already decided to collect and analyze both the quantitative and qualitative data at the end of the semester (see the previous section). Also we should note that as Burns (2010, p. 135) rightly asserts, "like the AR cycle itself, data analysis [observation phase] is dynamic, cyclical and recursive" which makes the overlapping of the phases unavoidable. However, the teachers had already read the relevant chapter in Burns' book (chapter four) and had discussed this part of AR theoretically.

Quantitatively, the students of the seven classes felt on average 63% more confident in all three aspects of Griffee's (1997) confidence questionnaire (i.e., ability, assurance and willing engagement) at the end of the semester than the beginning. The qualitative data results were consistent with the results of the quantitative data. The students' reflective journal writings generally indicated that incorporating extra speaking activities into the classroom had a positive impact on their confidence development by providing them with more

opportunities to speak, appreciating the role of their classmates in facilitating the speaking tasks, and recognizing the importance of pair/group works in learning English. Overall, the findings showed that intensive pair/group work speaking activities result in students' heightened sense of confidence in L2 speaking.

Reflect

This part of AR was conducted after collecting and analysing the data, which was after the eighth week. In order to bring out their interpretations of what this AR project meant, the teachers extended their time-line two more weeks to review and synthesise their whole set of data. In this last phase of the AR cycle, the teachers shared with each other orally what they had discovered about the issue at hand in their AR projects. This allowed the insights they had gained through AR to go even deeper. Not only did they talk about the AR process and its results, but they also took the opportunity to express to other teachers what they had found to be important and meaningful about it.

Although teacher-centered instruction, typically utilising little interaction in English, is the most common in EFL classrooms, the teachers, after conducting this AR project, came to the conclusion that an instructional methodology stressing peer collaboration as a tool for increasing the ability of the students to speak is likely to result in confidence. Their findings suggest that they should seek ways to include students' collaboration in the subject language as part of their curriculum design to help them gain confidence in speaking English.

Second-order inquiry

Analysis of the teachers' data revealed three major recurring themes in terms of the effects of the AR process on them as the following: Empowering teachers in dealing with a particular problem; belonging to a professional community; and valuing time allotment.

Empowering teachers in dealing with a particular problem

Almost all of the teachers pointed to the empowerment role of AR in identifying and solving their own problems in their own specific contexts as one of the most important gains of their AR projects. A good example is found in the remarks of Siavosh, who writes about this advantage of AR in one of his late entries:

It [action research] has radically changed my attitude toward teaching because I can no longer conceive of teaching without posing questions about my own teaching and trying to find answers to those questions…After eight years of routine teaching, I felt exhausted and didn't have any motivation. I think that my teaching behavior is now more fascinating and exciting in ways I had never considered…I have decided to make it part of my teaching and the core of my new career. I am now eager to systematically pursue action research projects at least twice a year to gain a deeper understanding of my own teaching and my students' learning.

Jamshid expresses the same idea in his interview where he emphasises that, "one of the most interesting aspects of this action research project was that it helped me focus more systematically on the important questions related to my own instructional practices and commit myself to find appropriate answers".

Belonging to a professional community

Many teachers considered themselves as belonging to a professional community through conducting this AR project in their own classrooms. For example, Ardalan describes the enjoyment of exchanging experiences and ideas with sympathetic colleagues in his journal in this way:

This collaborative action research made me feel I belong to a learning community. It helped me focus on my classroom and I had the chance to see what I was doing through new lenses by sharing my experiences with other teachers. These insights also came from other teachers' points of view. I began to see patterns that I even didn't know existed.

Kaveh expresses very similar ideas in his interview where he says, "this collaboration with my colleagues [in the action research project] created new opportunities and new understandings, allowing me to see my students and my teaching differently than I had before". Bijan also confessed in one of his late entries how conducting this AR project changed his attitude toward the professional community:

As far as I know myself, I'm quite happy to go ahead on my own. However, I found this project much easier to conduct collaboratively. In fact, doing this action research created a forum to talk about problems related to our teaching, to pass on our teaching ideas, and to voice concerns of our own classrooms. I would never have had such a chance to deal with all of these issues if I had been alone.

Valuing time allotment

Another important theme that was unanimously acknowledged by teachers was valuing time allotment in their teaching schedules for conducting action research. Sohrab who initially had doubts in conducting his AR project, explains in his interview how the model used in this study for conducting AR helped him change his opinion:

Honestly, before I do the action research project, I was afraid of putting extra burden on my shoulders. As we all know, new ideas require a lot of energy and extra work for which there is no time in the teachers' tight schedule. However, the idea to meet each other every week at a particular time put me at ease because I knew that I had to focus only on my action research project in those meetings and nothing else.

Ardalan also expresses the same concern in one of his journal entries, however, he, at the same time, values allotting a particular time for conducting AR in teachers' schedule:

We [teachers] are always asked to improve our teaching both to fit the new demands of our society and to be in line with new trends in education. Of course many of us want to be part of this new movement. However, every day we have to deal with a lot of work that does not let us think about our pedagogical practice, leave alone conducting action research in our classrooms. In my opinion, the only way we can overcome this situation is putting aside a special time for action research in our curriculum like what we did in this project.

Conclusion

This study makes a contribution to our understanding of English teachers' engagement with AR. It shows a problem the teachers in the present study would like to see investigated in their teaching context and explains how they actually did the AR to solve that problem. The present study then suggests that if AR and collaborative inquiry are to continue as trends of

teachers' professional development, teachers need to devote time, as they did in this study, or be provided time by their institutions to undertake AR. As Borg (2007, p. 744) mentions, "sustained and productive research engagement is not feasible unless the time it requires is acknowledged and built into institutional systems".

In order to overcome the lack of time obstacle to research engagement, a comprehensive ART framework was thus set up that allowed teachers the flexibility to plan and incorporate research activities into their current teaching schedule. Although time is a main practical difficulty, the present study, however, showed that there are noticeable gains that make AR attractive to teachers and change their attitude toward themselves as teaching professionals. As this study revealed, receiving release time for professional development activities such as AR increased teachers' commitment to solving their own problems in their own specific contexts, their sense of belonging to a professional community, and their awareness of valuing time allotment for conducting AR in their schedule.

Developing a culture of AR within an educational institution will likely require reducing teacher workloads to give him/her more time for research productivity. Burns et al. (2016) warn that, "while institutions may be reluctant to set aside time for teacher research, those wishing to create a productive research culture need to seriously consider the implications of not providing adequate time allocations" (p. 68) and meanwhile suggest that "building some research time into teachers' timetables both recognises the additional role teachers are being asked to take on and acknowledges that research has a distinctive role to play in teacher quality" (p. 68). Thus, institutions seeking to ensure teacher put effort into AR must balance the time of the researcher and other stakeholders.

While it is not difficult to see the beneficial effect of building in ART for L2 education, it is no challenge to recognise the increasing importance of having a culture of AR in the professional education in other fields. This is not surprising because a culture of AR results in a supportive context through which research is unanimously carried out and valued by all parties involved. Moreover, the increasingly competitive atmosphere has made research production vital for success. For example, it has been shown that increases in research productivity lead to favorable reputation (Dundar & Lewis 1998).

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