

Employing Collaborative Strategies to Improve Action Research Engagement of Teachers and School Heads

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Abstract

This study was conducted to improve the low engagement of teachers and school heads in the conduct of action research. Research engagement here was referred to as the number of research studies completed and approved. The low engagement of the participants in doing action research was attributed to the different challenges and difficulties they experienced. Among the challenges are lack of time, work overload, and writing anxiety. They also agreed to have had difficulty in identifying problems to be investigated, gathering, and analyzing data, searching for related information and literature, and writing and organizing findings. The study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative descriptive research. The findings of this study revealed that the strategies employed in the implementation of Project SHARE or Strengthening and Honing Ability in Research Among Educators motivated the participants to conduct and complete their research. The initiative likewise improved their skills in data collection and analysis alongside the improvement of their writing skills and time management in the completion of their research. It was also found that participants occupying the lowest position (Teacher I) are the ones who are more engaged in the conduct of action research.

Keywords: Action Research, Challenges and Difficulties, Simplified Guide, Online Consultation, Research Engagement, Collaborative Research Workshop

Introduction

Conducting educational research is one of the ways that lead to making improvements and innovations in education. In fact, the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) is committed to ensuring the delivery of quality education and achieving a culture of excellence for all learners through the conduct of research-driven educational innovations and studies geared at minimizing the instructional difficulties of the learners. The DepEd Order No. 16, series of 2017 establishes the Research Management Guidelines of the Department, which provides guidance in managing research initiatives from the grassroots to the national level, thereby promoting and strengthening the culture of research in basic education.

While several pieces of literature and studies suggest ways to write research, many teachers, on the contrary, view research work as burdensome and an additional workload apart from their regular task which is to teach. Writing anxiety, lack of time and inadequate knowledge are among the issues and challenges faced by the teachers in the conduct of research (Bullo, et al., 2021).

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For the past two years, since the creation of Claveria Central District, engagement in educational research among educators has been low. It was observed that teachers including school heads were hesitant to do action research despite their participation in various research workshops conducted. Out of 150 teaching and non-teaching personnel of the district, there were only 16 action research studies conducted from 2020-2022.

With the constantly changing landscape of teaching and learning which has brought tremendous challenges in enabling learning recovery and continuity, research-driven innovations in education are considered vital. This is where teachers and administrators design, adopt, and implement strategies through research to improve learning and educational outcomes. However, the low engagement of doing action research among the teachers and school heads in the district is a challenge that needs to be addressed.

This action research therefore aimed to address the low engagement or participation of teachers and school heads in educational research. This likewise aimed to determine the impact of the initiative, which employed various innovative approaches including the use of a simplified manual in making action research, and collaborative and consultative engagements. Moreover, it also sought to increase the total number of teachers and school heads in the district, who would engage in making classroom-based, and educational action research, respectively.

The findings of this study would benefit the learners, being the recipient of the various research-driven innovations that would be created and designed by the teachers.

It would likewise benefit the teachers, who may immerse themselves in the culture of research as a way of life in improving teaching practices to improve learning outcomes. In fact, alongside improving teachers' teaching practices, Norasmah and Chia (2016) suggested that action research should be a mandatory component of teachers' official functions and should be part of their performance evaluations to motivate them to work towards implementing action research.

Educational leaders on the other hand would also benefit if the result would lead to the creation or enhancement of policies. Education leaders and administrators at various levels play significant roles in providing policy support, and professional and technical assistance for their teachers. In fact, as instructional and curriculum specialists, school heads should encourage colleagues to analyze and use data more effectively, learn new things, or change the status quo (Harrison and Kellion, 2007), a matter affirmed and supported by Lunenburg (2010) pointing out that realization or the success of the performance of a teacher is largely a function of effective leadership support. Hence, instructional leadership support from school heads matters in teachers' engagement in research.

Proposed Innovation, Intervention, or Strategy

The intervention is named Project SHARE, which is an acronym for Strengthening and Honing Ability in Research among Educators through employment of enabling strategies which include collaborative research workshops, utilization of simplified manual in making action research, and open online consultation with the district research committee.

Project SHARE was implemented as an action research course (through the school Learning Action Cell), which discussed different parts of the action research stipulated in DO 16, s. 2017. Each part of the action research was introduced to the participants in the most practical way, which was followed by a workshop, in which the participants had to write their own.



Figure 1. Project SHARE Model

A simplified guide was given to the participants, where each part of the action research was introduced through practical questions that served as a guide for the participants in accomplishing each part. This was made to respond to the writing anxiety of the participants and their difficulty in starting to write. Not all individuals are gifted with prowess in playing with words, and in forming prose. There are those who need extensive guidance to fuel their interest to eventually engage in writing.

An open-online consultation dubbed “Research OK!” or Research Online Kumustahan was one of the approaches in implementing Project SHARE. This was a one-hour consultation per week, which catered to questions and clarifications while the participants were doing their action research.

All these approaches were geared towards improving research engagement among teachers and school heads in the district and at the same time developing among them the appreciation of classroom-based and education research as a tool in improving learners’ learning outcomes.

Research Questions

This action research sought to answer the following questions.

1. What are the challenges and difficulties faced by the teachers and school heads in doing action research?
2. What is the impact of Project SHARE or Strengthening and Honing Ability in Research among Educators to the teachers and school heads in Claveria Central District?
3. Is there an increment in the number of teachers and school heads who have completed their research after the intervention?

Action Research Methods

This section presents the data-gathering methods that were employed in conducting the study. It likewise presents the participants and other sources of information as well as the data analysis plan.

a. Participants and Other Sources of Data and Information

The participants of this study were determined through the responses from the invitation sent via Google form. Only those who responded and agreed to participate were included as participants or respondents of this research.

Out of the 135 teachers, only 76, or 56.29% accepted the invitation sent via Google form together with all the eight (8) school heads, who also responded positively.

The following tables present the profile of the participants according to sex, teaching assignment (elementary or secondary), research engagement (whether has approved research or none), and length of service.

Table 1a	Profile of Participants According to Sex		
Types	Male	Female	TOTAL
Teachers	16	60	76
School Heads	5	3	8
TOTAL	21	63	84

The above table further shows that 75% of participants in this study were female. The great number of female participants implies that most of the teaching personnel in the district are women. The data above further implies that the country has a larger number of women teachers than men as supported by the World Bank collection of development indicators in 2020 where 87% of the teachers are women. Accordingly, census findings affirmed that in the Philippines, teaching is a woman-dominated profession (Regalado, 2017). However, while teaching is predominant in women, Quismundo (2012) as cited by Regalado (2017), disclosed that the highest occupational ranks and the highest-paying positions are still occupied by male administrators, which is true in this study where there are five (5) males out of eight (8) school administrators in the district.

Table 1b	Distribution of Participants According to their Assignment					
Types	Elementary		Junior HS		Senior HS	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Teacher I	22	26.19	14	16.67	2	2.38
Teacher II	9	10.71	4	4.76	0	0.00
Teacher III	18	21.43	3	3.57	0	0.00
Master Teacher I	3	3.57	0	0.00	0	0.00
Master Teacher II	2	2.38	0	0.00	0	0.00
Head Teacher I	1	1.19	0	0.00	0	0.00
Head Teacher II	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Head Teacher III	1	1.19	0	0.00	0	0.00
Principal I	2	2.38	1	1.19	0	0.00
Principal II	2	2.38	0	0.00	0	0.00
TOTAL	60	71.43	22	26.19	2	2.38
N	84					

According to the level of assignments, 71% of the participants were elementary school teachers and school heads wherein 26% were holding a Teacher I position. Teachers occupying Teacher III items ranked second in the number of participants. The table also shows that senior and junior high school teachers had less participation in this study. Looking at the table, it can be deduced that most of the teachers in the district are those occupying Teacher 1 plantilla positions.

Table 1c Distribution of Participants According to Research Engagement From 2020-2022

Types	Elementary		Junior HS		Senior HS	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Teacher I	6	7.14	1	16.67	1	1.19
Teacher II	1	1.19	1	1.19	0	0.00
Teacher III	1	1.19	1	1.19	0	0.00
Master Teacher I	1	1.19	0	0.00	0	0.00
Master Teacher II	1	1.19	0	0.00	0	0.00
Head Teacher I	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Head Teacher II	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Head Teacher III	1	1.19	0	0.00	0	0.00
Principal I	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Principal II	1	1.19	0	0	0	0.00
TOTAL	12	14.29	3	3.57	1	1.19
N	84					

In this table, research engagement refers to whether the participants had conducted action research from 2020 to 2022. It reveals that only 19.05% of participants had conducted action research in the past two years. Out of those who had approved research studies, 12 personnel, or 14.29% were from elementary. Looking at the table, it can be presumed that the district has low engagement in educational research despite yearly training and re-orientations conducted. It can also be gleaned from the table that teachers occupying the Teacher 1 position had the most engagement in research. In an interview, these teachers said that doing action research would help in their aims for promotion, a point which was also emphasized by Juliano (2019) elaborating that one of the reasons that prompted these teachers to do research is the equivalent points that will be given during the ranking of teachers for promotion. However, with the number of engagements across all teaching positions reflected in the table above, low or no engagement in research was common to all.

Table 1d Distribution of Participants According to Length of Service

Types	Elementary		Junior HS		Senior HS		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
0-5 years	11	13.10	12	16.67	0	0.00	23	27.38
6-10 years	20	23.81	6	7.14	2	2.38	28	33.33
11-20 years	12	14.29	2	2.38	0	0.00	14	16.67
21-30 years	8	9.52	2	2.38	0	0.00	10	11.90
31-35 years	6	7.14	0	0.00	0	0.00	6	7.14
36 years and above	3	3.57	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	3.57
TOTAL	60	71.43	22	26.19	2	2.38	84	100.00

Most of the participants, as shown in the table above, belong to younger generations of teachers as to length of service. Sixty-one percent (61%) were those below 10 years in the service. Given the above, it can be assumed that the district has a larger number of new teachers.

b. Data Gathering Methods

The researcher sought permission to conduct this study from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent. Proper protocols were followed prior to the conduct of the research.

The study strictly observed the ethics of research as indicated in the Research Management Guidelines of the Department of Education (DepEd Order No.16, s.2017) Permission and consent from the respondents were sought.

This study employed both descriptive-qualitative and descriptive-quantitative research designs. It also used Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to identify the challenges and difficulties encountered by the teachers and school heads in conducting action research, as well as the impact of the intervention on the teachers and school heads as far as research engagement is concerned.

The primary data gathered during the FGD underwent thematic analysis and were transcribed into statements or themes (qualitative). An instrument was developed thereafter to have a quantitative analysis of the data gathered. Descriptive statistics was used employing frequency, percentage and mean alongside a five-point Likert Scale to measure the degree or level of challenges and difficulties, as well as the level of effectiveness of the intervention.

Scoring Procedures:

The following items are scoring tables consisting of the scale, the range of weighted mean, and the visual interpretation of the responses of the participants.

Rating Scale	Weighted Mean Range	Visual Interpretation		
		Challenges	Difficulties	Impact of Project SHARE
5	4.50 – 5.00	strongly agree	Very Difficult	Very Effective
4	3.50 – 4.49	agree	Difficult	Effective
3	2.50 – 3.49	Undecided	Neutral	Neutral
2	1.50 – 2.49	disagree	Easy	Less Effective
1	1.00 – 1.49	strongly disagree	Very Easy	Ineffective

For problem number 3, the numbers of research completed before and after the intervention were compared.

Results and Discussion

Challenges of Teachers and School Heads in the Conduct of Action Research

The findings of the study revealed notable challenges faced by the teachers and school heads in conducting research. These include (1) lack of time, (2) additional task or workload, (3) writing anxiety. It was found that the majority of the participants strongly agree that lack of time challenges them in doing research. While teachers are qualified to do research, factors like time and other resources are to be considered (Usita, 2022). In fact, in a related study, it has been discussed that low to non-engagement in research can be attributed to lack of time. Teachers, particularly in elementary schools spend the entire day in class and are mostly mothers who attend to their family needs at home, hence adding research activities would mean additional time, which makes the teacher go beyond the prescribed hours to finish a day's workload (Juliano, 2019).

Table 2a Perceived Challenges Encountered by Teachers and School Heads in the Conduct of Research		
	MEAN	Interpretation
1. I lack time to do research.	4.571	Strongly Agree
2. It is an additional task or workload, and it is burdensome to me as a teacher.	4.560	Strongly Agree
3. I have writing anxiety. I don't know how to express my ideas in writing.	3.524	Agree
4. There is a lack of support from the school.	2.226	disagree
5. There is a lack of learning resources in research.	3.071	undecided
6. My knowledge of action is inadequate.	3.250	undecided

On the other hand, the participants agree that research activities mean additional workload or tasks, which would be burdensome to them. While teachers and school heads stay at school for 6-8 hours a day, Usita, (2022) narrated that the work pressure causes a struggle for these employees to engage in additional research tasks. In addition to the lack of time and the burdensome nature of doing research, the participants also agree that the skill or ability to write or express ideas in words following correct grammar and other technicalities in writing challenged them. Accordingly, this decreases their interest in completing a research study. This

finding affirmed the results of the previous study that teachers have fear when writing especially in dealing with grammar and analyzing data (Tindowen, 2019).

Difficulties Faced by Teachers and School Heads in the Conduct of Research

The table presents the difficulties encountered by the teachers and school heads in the conduct of action research. It can be seen in the table that difficulty in data analysis has the highest mean which connotes that the teachers and school heads of Claveria Central District had difficulty in analyzing data.

Meanwhile, the results also show that the majority of the respondents are experiencing complexities in the conduct of action research in terms of finding relevant literature and information. Accordingly, a literature review is considered a critical part of research. Pieces of relevant literature provide theoretical backgrounds of the study, which enables the researcher to establish a connection between the present study and those that have already been studied or investigated (Tindowen, 2019; Ross & Bruce, 2012).

Difficulty in writing and organizing findings ranked third in the difficulties encountered by the respondents in the conduct of action research. This may be attributed to the writing anxiety of teachers as mentioned in the challenges above, where a majority of them agreed that the technicalities in writing reduce their interest in completing their action research.

It can also be gleaned from the table that the difficulty in identifying the problem or issues to be solved and the difficulty in gathering and collecting data obtained the same mean. This implies that the majority of the teachers and school heads believe that searching for problems and issues to be studied and gathering and collecting data are difficult. This may be attributed to the lack of time and pressure of having research as an addition to their regular tasks, implying further that the lack of time and work overload are contributing factors to the difficulty they experience in the conduct of research.

Table 2b Perceived Difficulties Encountered by Teachers and School Heads in the Conduct of Action Research		
	MEAN	Interpretation
1. Difficulty in identifying issues or problems to be solved	3.917	Difficult
2. Difficulty in finding relevant information or literature	4.083	Difficult
3. Difficulty in developing the process and gathering or collecting data	3.917	Difficult
4. Difficulty in data analysis	4.548	Very Difficult
5. Difficulty in writing and organizing findings	3.929	Difficult

The Impact of the Intervention

The results of the study revealed that Project SHARE is effective as an intervention in improving the research engagement of teachers and school heads. Table 3 presents the mean level of impact as perceived by the respondents of the study. It can be seen gleaned that the majority believed that Project SHARE was very effective insofar as motivating the participants to conduct complete their action research. Meanwhile, they also agree that the initiative helped them overcome their fear of writing research and at the same time improved their knowledge of data collection and analysis. Some of their verbalizations are as follows:

R12: “Working with colleagues collaboratively through the Learning Action Cell (LAC) was helpful. I was able to write easily because I was able to benchmark the ideas from my groupmates. The LAC as Project SHARE strategy is helpful.”

R36: “For a person with less confidence in writing, the simplified manual guided me on how to start my sentence in every chapter of my research.”

R81: “The simplified guide helped me understand how data is handled and analyzed even using simple statistics.”

R71: “I realized that statistics like frequency, percentage, and mean can be sufficient to analyze research data. Thank you for the simplified guide.”

Further, the Online Kumustahan or (Online Consultation) strategy of Project SHARE, helped the participants to manage their time which enabled them to finish their action research in the given period. This implies that when teachers or school heads are assisted and given timely feedback, they can easily manage the timeline for completing their studies. Some of their verbalizations are as follows:

R15: “The mechanism is perfect. Technical assistance is made available without meeting in person. It made me maximize my time.”

R64: “I am glad that giving feedback is clear and timely. Online consultation is a big help for us in distant barangay. Instead of meeting onsite, our outputs could be checked online.”

R28: “It provides a support system, which makes it easier for me because I was able to scout ideas during the *kumustahan* (consultation).”

Table 3 Mean Level of Impact of Project SHARE

	MEAN	Interpretation
1. Project SHARE motivated me to conduct and complete my action research.	4.821	Very Effective
2. It helped me overcome my fear of writing research.	4.619	Very Effective
3. I gained relevant improvement in collecting and analyzing data.	4.536	Very Effective
4. I was able to manage my time and complete my action research in the given period.	4.357	Effective
5. I gained improvement in my writing skills.	3.976	Effective
Total Mean	4.462	Effective

Number of Completed Research after the Intervention

From the 16 completed action research, after the six-month implementation of Project SHARE, a total of 49 action research studies were completed while 15 are still ongoing.

The table below shows the comparative data of completed research before and after the intervention. With the implementation of Project SHARE, research engagement of teachers and school heads in terms of action research completion significantly increased to 39.29%

The 15 other ongoing research is due to the time frame of studies which require more than six months. In sum, a total of 64 action research studies have been conducted, which constitutes 76% of the total respondents.

Conclusion

Project SHARE as an intervention helped improve the research engagement of teachers and school heads in Claveria Central District amid the challenges and difficulties they encountered in the conduct of research. The strategies employed such as the collaborative research workshops through the Learning Action Cell, utilization of a simplified guide in writing action research, and the online “kumustahan” or consultation were responsive to the needs of the participants. They agreed that the intervention motivated them to conduct and pursue action research, improved their confidence in writing the same alongside improving data gathering and analyzing skills, and completed action research following the timeline.

On the other hand, this study also concludes that teachers occupying the lowest position are the ones who are more engaged in research, a finding that supports the previous study explaining further why teachers with the lowest position, or Teacher I in this instance, strive to conduct action research. Accordingly, to do research is to have a great chance of promotion since an approved, and completed research is given weight in the selection process for promotion (Juliano & Zabala Jr., 2019).

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