

Research paper

Investigating Teacher Educators' Reflections on Challenges of Conducting Action Research

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Citation

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Abstract

Teacher educators need to be familiar with action research since it assists them to solve their class problems. The design of the study is qualitative and explores teacher educators' perceptions to address the benefits and challenges of conducting action research. For this purpose, 250 teacher educators with master or doctorate degree were invited to participate in this study. First, they were familiarized with action research through a workshop. Then they were invited to conduct their own action research in their classes at school and reflect on that through reflective essays and interviews. The obtained data were scrutinized to find emerging themes in relation to the main purposes of the study. Results revealed action research led to improving students' behavior, teaching techniques, engagement, interactions, and enhancing motivation. The teachers' perceived benefits of action research were increasing reflectivity and awareness about their own practice, enhancing students' motivation, improving students' engagement and interaction and improving teaching techniques and students' learning. The major challenges that teachers encounter in the process of conducting action research include a lack of sufficient time to conduct action research and administrative restrictions and lack of teachers' freedom to conduct action research was a significant challenge for the teachers. Implications of the study suggest that action research should be considered by educational policy makers to promote teacher educators' reflection on the use of local and practical research agendas. They also need to practice and conduct action research in their schools to follow problem-solving activities.

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Introduction

Action research (AR) receives much attention in educational theory and practice since it offers teachers' opportunities to engage in answering teaching and methodological questions. AR can be a beneficial exercise for teachers to conduct. It is a dynamic (Frabutt et al., 2008; Johnson, 2012; Sartika, 2020; Stringer, 2008), collaborative (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), and practical (Holter & Frabutt, 2012; Mills, 2011) process of inquiry that focuses on areas of teaching and learning the second language (L2) in the classrooms. Moreover, AR helps teacher educators to be equipped with some knowledge needed to achieve positive changes within classrooms (Johnson, 2012). AR can be important in educational settings since it has been a growing nature of studies on its local use in English language teacher education programs (Ali, 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Hine, 2013; Hong & Lawrence, 2011; Kitchen & Stevens, 2008; Kosnik & Beck, 2000; Levin & Rock, 2003; Lin, et al., 2021). However, much of these studies have been conducted in conditions that AR was mandatory as a part of the teacher education program. In other words, teachers had to conduct their ARs in order to fulfill an assignment to complete the teacher education program (Mackey & Gass, 2011). "This may result in a lack of teachers' engagement and attention to actual problems of education. Moreover, they may fake their work in order to pass an obligatory assignment" (Hobbs, 2007, p. 405). Additionally, the focus of the majority of previous studies have been on the positive aspects of AR and they have not considered the troubles and challenges that teachers may come across in the process of engagement in AR (e.g., Cabaroglu, 2014; Clarke & Fournillier, 2012; Hagevik, Aydeniz, & Rowell, 2012). In light of the significance of AR in teacher development and considering the mentioned gaps, the present study intends to engage some English teachers to conduct AR as a voluntary activity (i.e. not as a part of a teacher education program). In this relation, the main purpose of the study is to analyze English teachers' areas of concern in the process of engagement in AR.

There are some views about the nature of AR (e.g., Mills, 2011; Stringer, 2008) that view AR as a broad process of systematic inquiry that improve social issues affecting the teachers' educational status (Stringer, 2008). Other scholars (e.g., McDonough, 2006) have defined AR as a classroom-based research for professional or educational development. Therefore, they believe that AR involves teachers examining their own classroom problems to improve their teaching practice (Johnson, 2012). It gives practitioners new awareness to develop educational practices or resolve problems in schools (Chen, et al., 2021; Lin, et al., 2021). AR provides several opportunities for those teacher educators working within the teaching profession (Johnson, 2012). These opportunities assist the professionals progress and raise teacher empowerment (Hensen, 1996), and bridge the gap between theory of teaching methods and practice (Johnson, 2012). In the educational setting, the primary goal of AR is to decide research approaches to improve the teaching situations (Mills, 2011). AR in education addresses learners' needs and empowers practitioners to adequately change classroom practices and school communities (Ali, 2020). Furthermore, action research

can improve the lives of professionals who work within educational systems. Within the classroom, teachers can implement practices that best meet the needs of their students, and complement their particular teaching philosophy and instructional style (Johnson, 2012). Ary, et al. (2010) assert that AR fills the gap between theory and practice in language teaching and learning. The theoretical elements can support AR since the researchers can help practitioners figure out which research is needed in a classroom. The data collected by AR can be useful for teachers to perceive theories and practices in language teaching and learning the L2. AR encourages teacher educators to improve their professional careers since they need to become permanent learners within their classrooms (Mills, 2011). Thus, teacher educators could be reflective in their position which is required in the AR cycle. Teachers also need to explore the dynamics of their classrooms and take into account the actions and interactions of students. Moreover, they need to face challenges and validate existing practices and take risks within the learning and teaching processes (Yousef, 2015). Mertler (2009) addresses a list of features to understand an AR and non-AR in the following table.

Table 1

Characteristics of Action Research (Adopted from Mertler, 2009)

Action Research	Non-Action Research
Improves education by incorporating change and involves educators working collaboratively to improve their own local problems.	The usual thing that teachers do when thinking about teaching
Can be a persuasive action since it is done by teachers in the class.	Acceptance of solutions posed by the experts
Encourages educators working together in the class and solve the problem raised in classes in an integral process.	Done to or by other people outside of the setting
Can be practical and relevant that allows educators have access to research findings.	Theoretical, complicated, or elaborate
Can develop critical reflection thinking of the new teachers	A way to provide conclusive evidence
Should be a planned, systematic, and cyclical approach to analyze the educational problems and solve them	Relying on tradition, gut feelings, and common sense
Requires testing of the teachers' ideas about education and focuses on their perceptions	The implementation of predetermined answers to educational questions

Examination of the previous studies provides a wide number of important advantages of AR. For example, according to Wallace (2000), some of the most beneficial aspects of AR is a research that it is local and contextualized that aim at exploring new areas of investigation in the classes and to detect or monitor challenges and solutions in practice. AR improves teachers' perceptions (Kincheloe, 2003) and assists them to critically view their teaching practice (Moreira et al, 1999). Furthermore, AR raises teachers' self-confidence and allows them to play facilitative roles in education. Thus, AR can be useful to bring teacher-researchers with new ideas and attitudes toward the nature of classroom research (Crookes, 1993). In other words, it bridges the gap between research and practice. It is also assumed that AR builds teachers' self-efficacy and makes them aware of their students' needs (Cabaroglu, 2014; Ronen, 2020). In addition, it is argued that through engagement in AR, teachers put their individual theories into practice (Chant et al, 2004).

In light of the importance of AR in education, there has been an increasing pool of research on its use in English language teaching (e.g. Hine, 2013; Hong & Kitchen & Stevens, 2008; Kosnik & Beck, 2000; Lawrence 2011; Levin & Rock, 2003; Satrika, 2020). In the majority of these studies, teachers' emphasis was more on issues related to their own pedagogical tasks. Schmuck (2006) calls teacher educators' studies as the *practical model* of AR since this model focuses on local problems. In other words, the teacher educators examine and focus on a specific classroom issue to solve it. Therefore, teachers focused more on the conditions under which their students could acquire content knowledge (e.g. Atay, 2008; Cabaroglu, 2014; Clarke & Fournillier, 2012; Hagevik et al, 2012). There are some studies (e.g., Cabaroglu, 2014) that address AR as an increasing issue that motivate the students to learn the L2 effectively. These studies investigated the effect of AR on teachers' self-efficacy and found that teachers were concerned with classroom management and raising students' motivation. Other studies (e.g. Atay, 2008; Barkhuizen, 2009) have stated that teacher educators often focus on students' motivation as another common feature of the previous studies. In addition, AR was carried out as a part of teacher education programs (e.g. Hine, 2013; Hong & Lawrence 2011; Kitchen & Stevens, 2008; Kosnik & Beck, 2000; Levin & Rock, 2003). In these studies, AR has been used in teacher preparation programs as a way of introducing a culture of inquiry for people learning to teach. According to Diana (2011), teacher educators must conduct their own research and engage in the research on their problem. The problem that can arise here is that in these studies AR was an institutional requirement, not a voluntary activity. In other words, teachers had to do their ARs to complete a teacher education program or pass an assignment. This can lead to the deviation of teachers' focus from sufficiently addressing educational problems to task completion (Hobbs, 2007). To minimize such problems, more studies need to be done in situations where teachers do AR as a voluntary activity to address educational concerns more logically. Another gap in the previous studies is that majority of them focused too one-sidedly on the positive aspects of AR (e.g. Cabaroglu, 2014; Clarke & Fournillier, 2012; Hagevik et al, 2012). Results of the previous studies have shown that AR enables teachers to help children to do ongoing and future tasks (Gennari, et al., 2021). In other words, they have not considered the problems and challenges that teachers may encounter in the process of engagement in AR.

To fill in the above-mentioned gaps, the present study intends to engage volunteer teachers in AR and then analyze their areas of concern as well as the benefits and challenges they perceive while conducting AR. Thus, this study intends to analyze teachers' perceived advantages and challenges while conducting AR. Regarding these purposes, the following research questions are posed:

1. What are English teacher educators' objectives to conduct AR?
2. What are English teacher educators' benefits and challenges while conducting AR?

Methodology

Participants

Research population comprised of 250 graduates who had already accomplished their master or doctorate in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). They received invitations to participate in this study with the consent letters. Among them, 152 individuals agreed to take part in the study. They held master degree (n=91), doctorate (n=24), and Ph.D. (n=37). All of the participants were teaching at different schools and universities in Khuzestan Province. The rationale for selecting such participants was that they were holders of higher degrees in TEFL and were familiar with conducting research studies.

Instrumentation

Data were collected via a semi-structured interview and the teacher educators' reflections and think-aloud reports were recorded about their AR experiences and perceptions. Teacher educators' reflections are as the same as think-aloud protocols which are two methods for data collection. This method is used to gather data for qualitative research design. The product is used in psychology and a range of social sciences. Teacher educators' reflections included participants' thinking aloud as they are reporting specified activities and tasks (Gass & McKey, 2011)

In this relation, participants were required to reflect on their AR considering their AR areas of interest well as perceived benefits and challenges they encounter while conducting AR and document it in the form of an essay. All of the reflective essays handed in by the participants were in English and ranged from one to four pages in long. The second source of data collection was an interview which was conducted for every participant. The semi-structure interviews were conducted so as to broaden the scope of the exploration. Teachers were required to expand on their comments in their reflective essays. Each interview lasted, on average, about 15 minutes. All interviews had been recorded and transcribed for further examination.

Data Collection Procedure

Ethical values were created in the teacher-learner consent form, and data collection was anonymous. The data was qualitatively collected through teacher educators' reflections in several semi-structured interviews. To make participants familiar with the research procedure, the researcher invited them to participate in a workshop. In this workshop, the definition and objectives of action research, types of questions a teacher might ask, steps for conducting an

AR is introduced by Kincheloe (2003) were elaborated. A detailed account of the workshop is given in Appendix A. After that, all of the participants were required to conduct their own ARs in their classes in high schools where they were teaching English courses. This procedure took twenty-seven days. In the meantime, they were in contact with the researcher and they were assisted and guided when they had any questions. After this procedure, they were required to report and reflect on their experiences considering two broad themes including 1) their areas of AR interest and 2) their perceived challenges and opportunities while doing AR. The focus of the study was based on the research questions that addressed relevant literature concerning language teacher educators' engagement (Mackey & Gass, 2011). The reports of the teacher educators' reflections were collected in the semi-structured interviews. These data were qualitatively analyzed to answer the research questions of the study.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed qualitatively since the teacher educators' reflection were gathered via semi-structured interviews based on several open-ended questions. There are two sources of data including teachers' reflections in a semi-structured interview. The collected data were carefully scrutinized to come up with emerging themes related to the participants' areas of AR interest and their perceived challenges and opportunities in doing AR. It should be noted that the three bodies of data were considered complementarily. Thus, the results that are presented based on the teacher educators' reflections to make conclusions of the study (Kincheloe, 2003).

Results

Data were gathered qualitatively and analyzed via estimating frequency of responses concerned with the areas of AR projects selected by the participants. The participants reported their ideas and perceptions to address the research questions. The first research question of the study was concerned with teaching goals and focused on their action research projects. Analysis of teachers' research reflective essays and interviews resulted in four main themes including *improving students' behavior*, *enhancing students' motivation*, *improving students' engagement and interactions*, and *improving teaching techniques and students' learning*. Table 2 summarizes the teacher educators' concerns along with instances and frequency of teachers' educational objectives.

Table 2

Areas of AR Projects Selected by Participants

Primary themes	Instances of teachers' educational concerns	Frequency
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Improving students' behavior	How to deal with students' misbehavior; How to manage students' bad behaviors in large classes	14
Developing students' motivation	Increasing the learners' motivation is the goal in the classroom	12
Improving students' engagement and interaction	Increasing students' participation; Designing pair work and group work activities for classroom practice.	7
Improving teaching techniques and students' learning	Using games to improve students' grammar; Teaching new words with funny pictures.	4

Table 2 depicts the objectives of the participants was to improve students' behavior and motivation toward the L2 learning. They need to enhance learners' motivation to throughout their AR procedures. Other goals include improving students' engagement and improving teaching techniques in the classes.

The second question of the study was related to the participants' perceived benefits and challenges during the procedure of their ARs. Analyzing the two sources of data indicated that three most common themes about the perceived benefits of the participants and the two most common themes of the participants were the perceived challenges. Tables 3 summarize participants' benefits and challenges as well as some instances for each theme.

Table 3

Participants' Reflections on the Benefits of AR

Benefits	Instances	Frequency
Increasing teachers' reflectivity and awareness about their own practice	I became more reflective and now I'm better aware of my own strengths and weaknesses; Through AR, I learned to reflect on what I teach and how to improve my weaknesses.	14
Making a connection between teachers' theory and practice	AR helped me to test my theories in an immediate practical situation; It helps me to develop my own theories about my own classrooms and test them in practice.	9
Raising teachers' interest, motivation, and self-confidence in teaching	Now I am more interested in teaching English at school. It increased my self-confidence.	4

Participants' Challenges in the Process of AR.

Challenges	Instances	Frequency
Lack of sufficient time to conduct AR	Conducting an AR is very time consuming. I am too loaded and I do not normally find enough time to conduct an AR in my classes.	16
Administrative restrictions and lack of	We need to obtain school principal's written agreement to conduct an AR in our classes. There are many restrictive	11

teachers' freedom to conduct AR	rules and regulations; Teachers do not always have enough freedom in their classes to conduct such a research.
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Table 3 suggests that the most perceived benefit of AR was increasing teachers' reflectivity and awareness about their own practice (N=14). Another highly perceived advantage of AR that most of the teachers referred to was enhancing students' motivation. Further perceived benefits of AR include improving students' engagement and interaction and improving teaching techniques and students' learning. Moreover, it indicates that lack of sufficient time was the major challenge that teachers encounter in the process of conducting AR. After that administrative restriction and lack of teachers' freedom to conduct AR was a significant challenge for the teachers.

Discussion

Findings of the study are concerned with the research questions of the study that are discussed in this section. The first research question addresses the teaching goals selected by the teacher educators for their AR projects. Results showed that teacher educators' interests are to remove the local problems they have in the classes. They also pursued topics that can indicate their individual interests and perceived areas for their action research projects including improving students' behavior, improving students' engagement and interactions, enhancing students' motivation, and improving teaching techniques and students' learning. In this connection, findings suggest that most teacher educators selected issues that are directly connected to foreign language techniques. In addition, they focused more on the conditions under which their students could acquire such knowledge, such as improving students' behavior, increasing student participation, enhancing students' motivation. Out of four themes, only one theme was related to foreign language content knowledge which included three cases, namely: using games to improve students' grammar, teaching new words with funny pictures, and techniques to improve students' pronunciation. A study on the AR process by Clarke and Fournillier (2012) reported similar findings, which suggested that pre-service secondary school teachers were more concerned with concentrating on teaching circumstances rather than on content knowledge.

Results showed that most preferred area in which teacher educators' interests are involved are the management of learners' misbehavior. They do some studies to impact teachers' efficacy since it is highly concerned with behavior management issues in their AR projects. Moreover, they have shown that behavior management is a common concern for school teachers. This finding is in line with other studies (e.g., Johnson, 2012) that report that new teachers are in challenging with new tasks and deeply concerned with classroom management issues. Thus, failure in coping with learners' misbehavior can affect the teachers' self-efficacy. The other findings include promoting learners' motivation and improving their' engagement.

The findings of the present research are matched with Cabaroglu (2014) who believes teachers are thinking of their self-efficacy since it can affect their class management and authority in the classes. Thus, teachers' self-efficacy can be very important issue for

prospective language teachers who are mainly concerned with classroom management and students' motivation. Other studies (e.g. Atay, 2008) have reported the similar results matched with the findings of the study and reported language teachers often want to focus their research efforts on students' motivation. This implies that language teachers are concerned with the technical values of AR and it reflects what Crookes (1993) addresses to as a practical model of AR. This finding is also consistent to Barkhuizen (2009) who addresses this model which is characterized by a focus on the local class problems that involve practitioners examining their own classroom context. This finding supports the idea that AR should be taken into account by the educational policy makers as a practical rather than a critical method of inquiry. In conclusion, teacher educators need to focus on local educational problems rather than global educational issues.

The second research question focused on the benefits and challenges that engagement in AR provides for teachers. Regarding the perceived benefits of AR, the major themes were increasing teachers' reflectivity and awareness about their own practice and how to improve it, making a connection between teachers' theory and practice and raising teachers' interest, motivation, and self-confidence in teaching. In this relation, the majority of the participants (n =14) showed their positive attitudes toward AR since it can help them to become more aware and reflective about their professional career. In addition, they reported that AR experiences and techniques were useful and made them aware of their strengths and weaknesses. They also said that AR reflections helped them to develop critical views toward their own teaching practice and make them improve their language teaching methods.

Learning to teach is a highly situated and idiosyncratic activity and action research helps teacher candidates to reflect on the issues that originate from their specific contexts and that are important to them. In line with the findings of this study, a number of researchers have reported an increase in teachers' level of reflectivity on account of involvement in research. Through engagement in AR teachers became more reflective and critical about their teaching and led them to modify their teaching styles and insights about language teaching. Teachers found research as a significant opportunity to help them monitor their teaching practice and then reflect on that. As a result, teacher candidates indicated that their participation in AR projects could make a connection between the theories they have known and the practical aspects of language teaching in the classroom. There are several studies (e.g., Ary, et al., 2010; Chen, et al, 2021; Johnson, 2012; Mills, 2011) that had previously asserted that AR and found out AR could bridge the gap between theory and practice. Moreover, Chant et al (2004) and Gennari et al, (2021) agree with the results of the study that learners' engagement in AR become better if the teacher educators practice their language teaching and learning theories. An additional benefit expressed by some participants was that AR increased their interest, motivation, and self-confidence in teaching. Several studies (e.g., Ali, 2020; Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000; Levin & Rock, 2003) are in line with the present study that AR could give self-confidence to the new teachers that they are in the right path of teaching processes.

Regarding the perceived challenges by teacher candidates, one of the most frequent themes was the lack of sufficient time to conduct AR. In this connection, a great number of teachers (N=16) addressed the time limitations and loaded programs as major barriers in conducting AR. Previous studies (e.g., Gennari et al, 2021) also confirm that time restriction is teaching the L2. The participants also note that productive research commitment cannot be possible unless the required time is allocated in the classes. Moreover, teacher educators need to be encouraged to carry out pedagogical research. Another challenge that some participants encountered in the process of conducting AR was administrative restrictions along with the lack of teachers' freedom to conduct AR (N= 11).

Teacher candidates referred to these challenges by expressions such as teachers' responsibility to follow a predetermined course outline, lack of teachers' freedom for carrying out AR, the need to obtain the school principal's agreement for conducting AR. Comments of this type imply teachers' authoritative position in their classrooms since they could have enough freedom to conduct their own research and examine their novel ideas. This agrees with Sartika (2020) who sought benefits of an AR to explore the educational system need to focus on the language teachers and identify their challenges of conducting AR. Finally, teacher educators should think of collaborative works in doing AR and pay attention to learners' academic behavior, teaching techniques, engagement and interactions, and motivation.

Conclusion

Regarding the advantages of AR, most teachers found that AR helped them to become more reflective about their teaching profession. In addition, teachers were found to consider AR to make a connection between teachers' theory and practice and raise teachers' interest, motivation, and self-confidence in teaching. Moreover, AR projects are beneficial for both teachers and learners since the feedback provided by the research projects can reflect the teachers' outcomes in the classroom. And a teacher educator this can be the topics chosen by other teacher candidates shed light on the areas where further work is required that is a piece of important information in their classrooms and guide them in effective teaching. These experiences can be shared among new teachers to gain experiences. Therefore, it seems that AR should be considered as a framework for effective reflective teaching. In addition, the challenges of conducting AR should be taken into account by teachers and think of schedules and time limitations. There are also administrative restrictions that are among the challenges and make AR difficult to be conducted.

Implications of the study suggest extra research hours and administrative support for new teachers who are going to conduct AR in their classes. EFL teachers need to study basic research agendas in effective workshops to learn how to conduct AR to solve educational problems and challenges in the classrooms (see Appendix). They cannot wait for pedagogical and educational researchers to solve related teaching methodological problems and present them ready made solutions. Therefore, in EFL setting like Iran, language learning institute,

schools, and universities need teacher-researchers to provide the other teachers with appropriate solutions concerning potential problems in classes including language skill and subskills. The class research may be local as it is conducted in a high school or global that is applicable internationally. In both cases, the teachers may take benefits if they have the same challenges in their classrooms. Limitations of the study could be the lack of face-to-face interactions among the teacher-researchers inside or outside the educational settings as what can be seen in the present study. This challenge can be solved if it will be conducted in future studies. Thus, EFL teachers need a collaborative interaction via social media or internet applications to share their problems or challenges and discuss the related AR which is applicable to solve their classroom problems.

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Appendix: Action Research Workshop, Conducted by: Emad Arvand, Date: 22 December 2021

Action Research in Second Language Teacher Education

Location: Islamic Azad University, Science & Research Khuzestan branch, Foreign Language Department

Day / Date: Tuesday / 22 December 2021

Schedule: 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Participants: 17 English Teachers

Topic: Action Research in Second Language Teacher Education

Objectives: 1) to improve English teaching and learning

2) Participants are expected to learn how to conduct an AR and later apply it in their classrooms.

Workshop Agenda

1. Setting the Scene / Overview of workshop (5 minutes)

The **objectives** and **outlines** of the workshop were presented.

2. Warm-up / AR Definition (25 minutes)

a. The following main question was raised to attract the participants' attentions and elicit some general responses: "What is Action Research?" **After eliciting a few responses and commenting on them, the following definition was presented:**

AR Definition: It addresses teacher-conducted local research that seeks to solve practical teaching problems.

b. A short video about Action Research was shown.

c. A short discussion is followed after the video in order to identify some practical teaching issues and problems that could be carried out through an AR.

3. Steps in AR (30 minutes)

a. The steps below were presented. (Richards & Farrel, 2009, pp. 174-175).

I. Identifying a Problem: First a general teaching problem or one that a teacher has face in his / her class is identified.

II. Planning: steps in gathering data critically and improve the situation

III. Action: do several tasks to solve a local problem via a determined plan

IV. Observation: examine the effects of an action in the context

V. Reflection: report the effects of an action as the basis for further planning through a succession of stages.

b. There is a need to give an instance of actual AR (Richards & Farrel, 2009, P. 186).

c. Participants should reflect their thoughts, experiences, and suggestions to solve the problems raised in the classes.

[Tea Break (9:30 – 10:00)]

4. AR Methods (10 minutes)

a. Common methods of AR data collection and data analysis were presented.

5. AR Instances (20 minutes)

a. Explaining Instances provided by Richards & Farrel (2009, p. 186)

b. Summaries of two related AR

Mehrani, M. B. (2017). A narrative study of Iranian EFL teachers' experiences of doing action research. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 5(1), 93-112.

Dehghan, F. & Sahragard, R. (2015). Iranian EFL teachers' views on action research and its application in their classrooms: A case study. *Journal of Teacher Education and Educators*, 4(1), 39-52.

6. AR Ideas (60 minutes)

a. In pairs, participants were asked to identify issues that they could research in their own classrooms.

b. In small groups, participants were provided with some common issues (raised by workshop conductor) and asked to consider different ways of collecting and analyzing data.

c. The small groups were asked to share and discuss their ideas.

7. Reflection Time (30 minutes)

a. Audiences were asked to reflect on their experiences and the quality of the workshop.

b. The facilitator welcomed questions, comments, and disagreements.