

A Phenomenological Study on the Constraints in Conducting Action Research

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Abstract

This phenomenological research aims to describe and understand the constraints experienced by the teachers in conducting action research and find ways to address them. The study has four phases – locating the informants, data gathering, data storing, and Phenomenological explication of data. The five (5) informants chosen were considered the primary informants, and a Senior Education Program Specialist from the Division office was considered a secondary participant. Data collection involved in-depth phenomenological interviews done online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also employed a five steps simplified version of Hycner's (1999) phenomenological analysis developed by Groenewald (2004). The study has the following themes: As to the constraints (1) negative perceptions toward research, (2) time constraints, (3) lack of financial and moral support from the administration, (4) inability to identify appropriate statistical tools and methodology, (5) lack of knowledge in the research writing process, (6) problem in processing and handling the research documents, and (7) insufficiency of training conducted for teachers. For addressing the constraints: (1) action research materials development, and (2) conduct of action research training workshop. The results imply that teachers were struggling to conduct action research. Thus, it is recommended that a detailed and comprehensive action research guide will be developed, and an extension program focusing on training teachers in conducting action research will also be conducted.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Schools can be compared to a gold mine of valuable data. Every day students attend courses where they may be engaged or distracted, interact productively with peers or experience difficulties in social situations, complete assignments proficiently or poorly, and express enthusiasm or disinterest for the lesson being covered. As teachers, we notice these behaviors and information and even place them in our class records from time to time, but how often do we systematically collect this information to assess our methods? Moreover, action research has been beneficial to in-service teacher professional development. AR worked best as a schema of teacher professionalization. Thus, several researchers propose its use in pre-service education. Baumann and Duffy (2001) recommend that pre-service teachers need various forms to conduct action research. This supports the premise that the use of action research will "engage students in structuring their perception of a situation, their actions or learning, or they

are engaged in altering or adjusting these structures" (De Jong & Korthagen, 1988 quoted in Wubbel & Korthagen, 1990) thus developing a reflective attitude. Wubbel and Korthagen's study of teachers from program designed to promote reflective teaching specify that such teachers had a grander capacity to improve; they also had a better teacher-student relationship and a higher job satisfaction getting them ready to face the 21st-century learners as quality teachers for quality learning for Philippine education system to achieve quality assurance.

Indeed, action research can be used to meet the needs of a diverse student body or achieve success in a standards-based system. "The time is right for action research," Sagor (2005) says. "The teachers... that seize this opportunity and begin investing in the power of inquiry will find that they are re-creating the professional practice of education in their locale as a meaningful and rewarding pursuit." Those who do not enter the 21st century willing to invest in the "wisdom of practice," he warns, will find it increasingly challenging to tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

Furthermore, action research is a cooperative regular search process to identify a strange situation and decrease or resolve it. Like systematic research, it is an effort to improve the educational activities by a group of participants in this action through the practical activities and their thoughts about influences of this activity (Kelly, 1999, cited by Heidarnia and Haj Ali, 2015).

As teachers' professional skills increase, their status and position increase too. Teachers' research provides self-assessment for him/her, thereby he/she attains a deeper understanding of himself/herself, and the teaching process eventually causes scientific and research climate among colleagues and students.

Regardless of these findings of action research, very few teachers are conducting or engaging in action research. In the Division of Passi City, last 2017, out of 242 secondary teachers, the Division office records only 7 or 2.89%. From the Division of Iloilo, 71 teachers, precisely 33 from elementary and 38 from secondary, conducted action research in 2017 – 2018. Of 9 727 elementary teachers and 5,675 secondary teachers for 15 402 teachers in the Division of Iloilo, that is only about 0.46%. It is significantly suppressing that very few teachers are engaging in research.

Although some existing memos and orders state that Dep Ed teachers were mandated to "undertake national educational research and studies," which can become part of the basis for necessary reforms and policy inputs (Chapter 1, Section 7 (5) of RA 9155), there were even RA 9155 mandates DepED to require all schools' divisions to engage in research activities. It means that all teaching and non-teaching personnel in the Department are enjoined to fully implement research in doing priority improvement projects for future referrals and modifications (Arangco, 2016).

Teachers will not even find it challenging to write action research because they have DepEd Memorandum No. 144 s. 2017 - Supplemental Research Guides and Tools. They also have DO 4, s. 2016 - Amendment to DepEd Order No. 43, s. 2015 (Revised Guidelines for the Basic

Education Research Fund [BERF]) for research funding if it passes specific guidelines and criteria.

With all these good things, guides, and financial support, the researcher is curious what hinders these teachers from conducting action research and developing a program that would help them ease if not solve the existing problems.

1.2. Epistemological and Theoretical Framework

This qualitative study rested on the premise that meanings are constructed from interpreting the patterns and symbols during the interactions with informants. This study will be anchored on the epistemological stance of constructionism. The theoretical perspective to which this study will be grounded is symbolic interactionism, a specific type of interpretivism (Crotty, 1998).

From the epistemology of construction, truth or meaning is formed by the subject's interaction with the world (Gray, 2014), and it is constructed, not discovered (Crotty, 1998). People actively construct their meaning by interacting with other people and objects around them, not just by being passive receivers.

Moreover, constructivism refers to the process by which the observer creates reality. The observer creates reality by giving meaning to what is observed (Jonassen, 1991). In other words, reality is constructed through a person's operational experience. In other words, the reality is constructed through a person's active experience. We can never have objective access to the world, since the world in an objective sense cannot be known.

Furthermore, from a constructivist point of view, any one person's interpretation or construction is as 'true' as any other person's interpretation or construction, as long as it works within a particular context (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996; Doan, cited in Rapmund, 2000). This constructivism point implies that all stories or interpretations that 'work' are equally valid and that no single 'truth' or interpretation exists (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996; Doan, cited in Rapmund, 2000). The researcher will interview several teachers from the Dep Ed. The interview results from the informants will be organized into different themes. As a faculty of a higher institution where research is a part of our function, these teachers' reasons might sound reasonable. Also, the answers from one teacher might be different from the others, but whatever will they give will be used as bases for designing a training program to address the difficulties they encounter in the conduct of action research.

The stance of symbolic interactionism tends to focus on the language and symbols that help us give meaning to the experiences in our life. They notice that as we interact with the world, we change how we behave based on the meaning we give social interactions. We spend time thinking about what we will do next and adjust our approach depending on how we believe others perceive us (Serva, 2018).

Moreover, symbolic interaction is one of many theories in social sciences. This theory claims that facts are based on and directed by symbols. The foundation of this theory is meanings. Symbolic interaction examines the meanings emerging from the reciprocal interaction of individuals in a social environment with other individuals and focuses on the question of "which symbols and meanings emerge from the interaction between people (Aksan et al., 2009)".

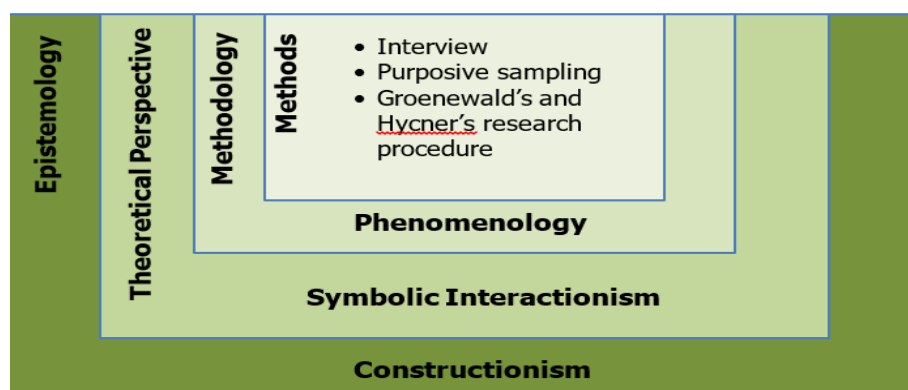


Figure 1. Epistemology, theoretical research perspective, and the methods used in the study.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

This research aimed to describe, analyze and understand the constraints experienced by teachers in conducting action research. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following:

1. What are the constraints experienced by the teachers in conducting action research?
2. How can these identified constraints experienced by teachers be addressed?

2. Methodology

2.1. Methodological Perspective

To attain the objectives of this study, the researchers utilized the phenomenological research approach. According to Christensen, Johnson, and Turner (2010), the primary objective of a phenomenological study is to explicate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person, or a group of people, around a specific phenomenon. The phenomenologist attempts to understand human behavior through the eyes of the participants in the study. This has been called *verstehen*, which is German for the interpretive understanding of human interaction. A phenomenologist's worldview aligns with the belief that all perceptions and constructions are ultimately grounded in a particular perspective in time and space. Phenomenology does not begin with a theory but, instead, begins with a phenomenon under consideration.

Furthermore, Pereira (2012) investigated thoroughness in phenomenological research and concluded that "to be judged valid, a phenomenological study must take into consideration methodological congruence (rigorous and appropriate procedures) and experiential concerns that provide insight in terms of plausibility and illumination about a specific phenomenon." Any manner in which participants can describe their lived phenomenal experience can be used to gather data in a phenomenological study. Although the most common means of data collection in a phenomenological study is through in-depth interviews to gather the participants' detailed descriptions of their experience, participants' written or oral self-reports, or even their aesthetic expressions (e.g., art, narratives, or poetry) can also be evaluated.

Throughout the slow process of collecting data and analyzing themes, the researchers were able to explicate the meaning, structure, and essence of the informants' experiences. In-depth interviews, written responses, and Groenewald's (2004) and Hycner's (1999) research

procedure were the basis for collecting data. In phenomenology, the researchers study the lived experiences of individuals and ask one or more to tell stories about their experiences through interviews as connected to this research study. This methodology enabled this undertaking to better understand the experiences on the constraints among teachers in conducting action research.

2.2. Context of the Study

This section includes the discussions of the locale, informants, data source/s, data collection and analysis procedure, and ethical consideration.

2.2.1.1. Research locale. The pandemic has resulted in a devastating impact worldwide, which prompted

mitigation policies to contain the pandemic (Phua et al., 2020). The ground strategy followed by most countries around the world was to reduce the transmissibility of the disease, often by non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs), including enforcing masks policy, hands sanitization, social distancing, travel restrictions, schools closures, and partial or complete lockdowns (Nicola, 2020). Due to this, all the interviews were done online through Google meet. Some informants were contacted through their cellular phones due to poor internet connectivity. Informants were asked of their most convenient time for interview provided it is in the research time frame. In order to augment the expenses of the informants for the data used during the online interview, the researchers provided a Php 300.00 load to all the informants and to the researchers who joined the interview. Consent forms were asked from the informants prior to the actual interview, and during the actual interview, permission to record was also sought. The researchers explained that the recording will only be used for easy transcription of the interview to come up with themes for the study and has no other purpose, and will be deleted after the study was completed. The interview commenced as soon as the informants gave their approval and submitted their consent form.

2.2.2. Informants. Hycner in Groenewald (2004) stressed that the phenomenon dictates the method, including the type of informants. Informants were selected because of who they are and what they know rather than by chance. For validity and reliability, the triangulation approach was employed; thus, the Senior Education Program Supervisor in charge of the research in the Division of Iloilo acted as secondary informants of the study.

Moreover, in this study, five (5) informants were selected. Polkinghorne (1989) recommends that researchers interview from 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Furthermore, the sixth participant was no longer included due to poor connection and conflict in the schedule given. Also, because the five informants have given all needed data, thus data saturation was reached, and the information from the sixth informant was not needed anymore.

The informants were selected through the purposive sampling method. In the purposive sampling method, participants are grouped according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question. The inclusion criteria were the following: the informants have (1) taught for more than five years in the Department of Education, Division of Iloilo, (2) submitted an action research proposal and completed report at the Division office, and (3) may or may

not have formal training in conducting action research. Pseudonyms were used for all the informants to maintain the confidentiality of their identity.

The first informant was Ma'am Rose. She has been a Principal I of Lanas Elementary School in Barotac Nuevo since 2011. A copy editor of Division of Iloilo research journal. She earned her Ph.D. in Education major in Educational Management from the University of Iloilo. Before she completed her Master's degree in 2016, she has studied and completed academic requirements in a master's degree at UP Diliman in 2003. Currently a member of the Technical Working Group (TWG) of the Division Research Committee of the Division of Iloilo. Her educational background made her learn to research and helped her conduct action research.

The second informant was Ma'am Jo. She is a Master Teacher I of Banate National High School. She has been teaching for eleven years, eight years in Junior High School, and the rest in Senior High School, where she was the subject group head in Accountancy Business and Management. She earned her MAEd in Social Studies at WVSU. Currently, she is enrolled in the same university where she is taking up a Ph.D. in Education major in Educational Management, and she has already completed the academic requirements and preparing for a comprehensive examination. She is also a member of the TWG of Division Research Committee of the Division of Iloilo and TWG of the 4th Congressional District. She has been conducting action research since 2018. She learned to conduct research in her undergraduate program at Xavier University, Ateneo de Cagayan.

The third informant was Ma'am Sil. She is currently connected at Pototan Pilot Elementary School since 2011. A graduate of Bachelor in Special Education back in 2010 at WVSU. She also has finished her MEd Special Education at the same university and is currently taking up a Ph.D. in Education major Curriculum Development at WVSU. She is also a member of the TWG of Division Research Committee of the Division of Iloilo. She has been conducting action research since 2013. She learned action research because conducting action research was part of their undergraduate program. This was further strengthened during her Master's degree, where they were required to conduct action research as a requirement in the program. Because of this, she was able to conduct school-based action research. Basically, her knowledge on how to conduct action research was due to her educational background.

The fourth informant was Ma'am Sha. A Master Teacher II of Alimodian Comprehensive High School where she teaches Filipino for 13 years. She earned her Master of Arts in Education major in Filipino at the University of San Agustin in 2018. She is a copy editor of the Division of Iloilo's research journal "Kalantip" and a member of the TWG of Division Research Committee. During her undergraduate program at WVSU in 2007, she and her groupmates won first place in the search for Best Undergraduate Thesis. Because of this, she gained confidence and has conducted action research since then.

The fifth informant is Ma'am Nem, who has 25 years in service and is a Master Teacher II of Janiuay National Comprehensive High School. She is the school and 3rd Congressional District research coordinator in the Division of Iloilo. However, she plans to give up this position because she is about to retire. She is also the President of the School Division

of the Iloilo Research Organization. She is teaching both research and science subjects; thereby, she finds it easy to conduct action research because of its relevance to what she is teaching.

All of the selected informants underwent the screening process in which they were given an examination and made an action research proposal. All those who passed the screening became members of the TWG of Division Research Committee of the Division of Iloilo and were trained to write and conduct action research, quantitative, and qualitative research.

2.2.3. Procedures. Data collection is a series of interrelated activities to gather good information to answer emerging research questions (Creswell, 2009). With the use of Groenewald's (2004), and Hycner's (1999) phenomenological research procedure, the researchers divided the study into four phases: locating the research informants, data gathering methods, data storing methods, and phenomenological data analysis (see Figure 2).

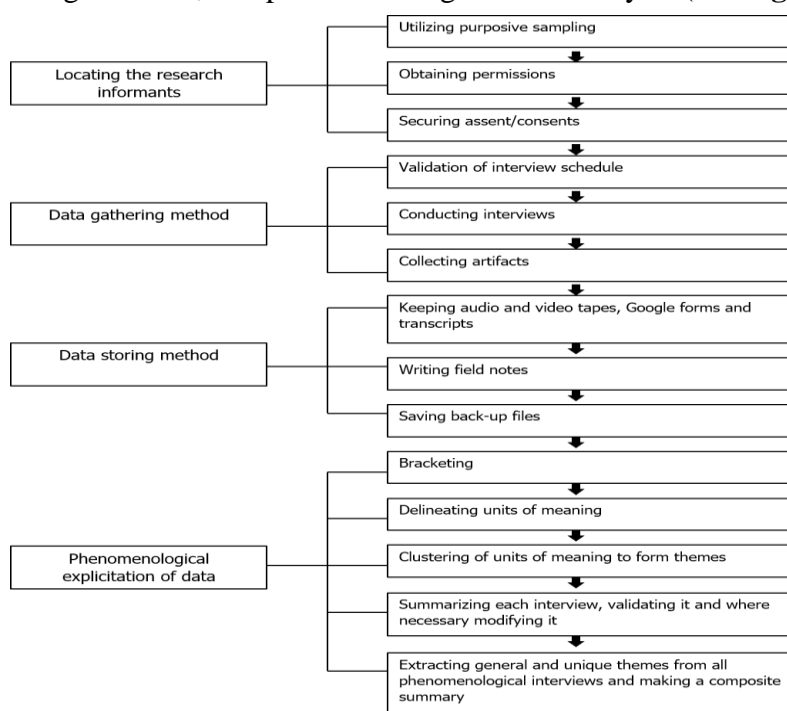


Figure 2. The research procedure

2.2.4. Locating the research informants. According to Hycner (1999), "the phenomenon dictates

the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants." The researcher should choose purposive sampling, considered by Welman and Kruger (1999) as the essential kind of non-probability sampling, to identify the primary participants based on the research purpose. In this study, a series of activities were the basis for collecting data to describe, analyze and understand the teachers' experiences. The very first stage of the undertaking was to identify the study's informants. The researchers set an appointment with the Senior Education Program Specialist in charge of the action research in the Division of Iloilo. After explaining and presenting necessary documents, the researchers were given the names, contact numbers, and email addresses of the informants that met the inclusion criteria. After which, the approval from the Schools Division Superintendent to conduct the study among teachers was secured. Next,

the researchers communicated with the informants by calling them up and briefly explaining the study's purpose. Informants who were not reached through calls were emailed and messaged using messaging applications. The communication went well, and all of the informants were reached and agreed to be part of the study. The rationale of the study, permit from the Schools Division Superintendent, and consent forms were sent to the teachers' emails after confirming to be the informants of the study. The researchers also explained that the in-depth interview would be done online for health security reasons, and a PHP 300.00 load was also sent to the informants to augment data consumption during the interview. All consent forms were returned to the researchers before the conduct of the interview.

2.2.5. Data gathering method. In gathering the data, the researchers made an interview schedule

presented to the panel of experts for validation and to check if the content was fit for the research undertaking. Then, the researchers met and discussed the comments and suggestions regarding the interview schedule and the research progress. Phenomenological interviews were conducted to gain insight into the informants' experiences (Groenewald, 2004). Open-ended questions were asked to understand the constraints experienced by teachers during the conduct of action research. These questions were used as a guide or structure during the interview sessions.

Moreover, the phenomenological interview was conducted using Google Meet. The interview was done on the following dates: March 22, 2020 to Ma'am Sil, March 23, 2021, in the morning to Ma'am Jo, and in the afternoon to Ma'am Sha, March 26, 2021, to Ma'am Rose, and April 4, 2020 to Ma'am Nem. Despite all the efforts and follow-up to the sixth informant, the schedule set was always in conflict with the informants' duties and responsibilities. There is also no internet connection in the area where the sixth informant lives and works. Thus, the researchers decided not to pursue the interview since the information given by the five other informants was sufficient and had reached data saturation. All interviews were recorded with permission from the informants for data transcription only. Each interview lasted for more than an hour. Furthermore, the researchers wrote field notes to record the necessary information during the interview. Aside from these, artifacts such as a photo of certificates, titles of action research, and a list of all research conducted in the Division of Iloilo, which were deemed beneficial in this study, were collected.

2.2.6. Data storing method. All collected artifacts mentioned above were kept and labeled in electronic folders on one of the researchers' laptops. Since the phenomenological interviews were conducted through Google Meet and were recorded with the consent of the informants, copies of the recording were automatically sent to the email of the host, who was one of the researchers. Then, it was downloaded and renamed based on the name of the informants. To lessen the tedious process of data transcription, the researchers hired a transcriber. All research protocols were explained to the transcriber, and the researchers made sure that the privacy and confidentiality of the data were strictly observed. By following Groenewald's (2004) transcription protocol, the researcher transcribes keywords, phrases, and

statements to allow the informants' voices to speak. The file names of videos and their corresponding transcripts were matched. Files were kept and organized in electronic folders, and they were saved in a separate hard disk for backup. The aforementioned data storing procedure was also done for the field notes.

2.2.7. Phenomenological explicitation of the data The heading “data analysis” is deliberately avoided because Hycner (1999) cautions that analysis has dangerous connotations for phenomenology. The term analysis usually means a “breaking into parts” and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon, whereas “explicitation” implies an investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole. Now that the term explicitation has been clarified, the researchers used the simplified version of Hycner’s (1999) explicitation process. This explicitation process has five steps or phases, which were: (1) bracketing, (2) delineating units of meaning, (3) clustering of units of meaning to form themes, (4) summarizing each interview, validating it, and when necessary modifying it, and (5) extracting general and unique themes from all phenomenological interviews and making a composite summary.

Step 1: Bracketing. Tuffond and Newman (2010) describe it as a method in qualitative research to mitigate the potential effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process. Given (2008) added the four core elements of the process: the actual brackets that the researcher places around the phenomenon; the nature of the internal and external suppositions, experiences, theories, or assumptions being held in abeyance or suspended by the researcher; the temporal structure in which the bracketing is applied; and, the reintegration of data generated from bracketing process. In this study, the researchers set aside their preconceptions and experiences about the constraints encountered during the conduct of action research, as well as how to address these constraints and the possible implication to higher education. Whatever data, knowledge, and experiences the researchers had in mind that could answer the research questions were held in abeyance. Moreover, the researchers restructured their perspective as a researcher and focused only on the experiences of the informants, as suggested by Creswell (2009).

Step 2: Delineating units of meaning. Hycner (1999) stressed that this provides a context for the emergence of specific units of meaning and themes later on. When doing this, the researcher especially wants to listen to the non-verbal and para-linguistic levels of communication, that is, the intonations, the emphases, the pause, etc. After establishing actual brackets, the researchers read the transcription a number of times and watched the entire recorded video. The narratives begin with knowing how they learned to conduct action research, then work forward with the constraints they experienced and the possible solution the informants could think of to address them.

Moreover, in this step, the researchers checked every word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and noted significant nonverbal communication in the transcript to elicit the informants’ meanings. Hycner (1999) explained that this is done with as much openness as possible and does not yet address the research question to the data. This is a process of getting at the essence of the

meaning expressed in a word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and noted significant nonverbal communication.

Step 3: Clustering of units of meanings to form themes. With the list of non-redundant units of meaning at hand, the researchers again bracketed their presuppositions to remain true to the phenomenon. By rigorously examining the list of units of meaning, the researchers tried to elicit the essence of the meaning of units within the holistic context (Groenewald, 2004). In this step, the recorded interviews were transcribed, organized, and analyzed. The meanings that were formulated were clustered using pens of different colors to form themes as to how it answers the research questions and how the generated ideas from the experiences unfolded can be implied to higher education. Exploration, data collection, and explicitation were involved in the study.

Step 4: Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modify it. At this point, the researchers conduct a “validity check” by returning to the informant to determine if the essence of the interview has been correctly captured” (Hycner, 1999). In this stage, the researchers compared meanings with the original interview. The researchers returned to the informants to determine if the essence of the phenomenological interviews had been captured correctly. Moreover, the researchers asked the informants to read the exhaustive description to assure that it faithfully represented the constraints experienced by teachers in the conduct of action research as a measure of the validity of the research findings. Furthermore, the researchers made necessary modifications in some transcripts as a result of the validity check.

Step 5: Extracting general and unique themes from all phenomenological interviews and making a composite summary. Once the process outlined in steps 1 through 4 has been done for all the interviews, the researcher looks “for the themes common to most or all of the interviews as well as the individual variations” (Hycner, 1999).

The themes are now created from the constraints, and how to address these constraints in conducting action research was identified. It was also carefully analyzed and reviewed that no themes were the same and no support statements will duplicate with others. Finally, a diagram was formed to make a composite summary of all the themes created. This can be found at the end of the results and discussion.

3. Ethical Considerations

Ethics was properly observed in the conduct of the present study based on the standards of the American Psychological Association (APA) (2009). That is, this study must “do no harm” to participants. Furthermore, ethical guidelines such as privacy and confidentiality in conducting ethical research were observed.

The following ethical principles were observed by the researcher in the conduct of the study: (1) Permission to conduct the study to the teachers was solicited from the School Division Superintendent; (2) The researcher informed the informants that no harm would come to them in relation to the study; (3) In case the informants would not answer the questions or

he/she felt discomfort, the researcher maintained their right to self-determination; (4) Informants' anonymity was reserved, and their confidentiality was respected.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Constraints experienced by teachers in conducting action research

Upon reading the transcript from an in-depth interview about the constraints experienced by teachers in conducting action research, the researchers came up with the following themes: (1) negative perceptions toward research, (2) time constraints, (3) lack of moral and financial support from the administration, (4) lack of knowledge in statistics, (5) inability to identify appropriate research design and methodology, (6) lack of knowledge in the research writing process, (7) problem in processing and handling the research documents, and (8) insufficiency of training conducted for teachers.

Due to the limited number of pages', original transcripts of the interview for each theme below were deleted. Only the translated version of the selected transcripts was retained.

Theme 1: Negative perceptions toward research. A negative perception occurs if a person lacks positive or affirmative qualities, such as commitment, enthusiasm, interest, or optimism. This can also be due to the mindset of an individual. It's either they have a wrong perception of things or they believe they are not capable of doing things. This quality extends to conducting action research among teachers. Some of these negative perceptions is evident in what ma'am Nem said,

What I've seen in these cases is the negative perception and lack of commitment of teachers in that aspect because if you are committed to doing a thing you can find a way to overcome that, second is the openness to do a certain thing. These are some of the problems that the teachers have.

Ma'am Nem, described teachers having a negative perception towards research as someone who lacks positive qualities such as commitment. According to ma'am Nem, whatever problem or hardship teachers experience in doing action research, they can overcome it easily if they are committed to doing so. Commitment will also enable teachers to look at problems as an opportunity to learn. Ma'am Jo, gave her observation on the indifference of teachers during training. She said,

There are those teachers who were attending but were not eager to listen to the content being discussed in the training, so it's useless. For me, the first thing to consider is to let those who are willing and interested to join the training. Then, it will be followed up by a workshop and make sure that they could come up with at least a proposal as their output.

DepEd has to look into this. In order to produce quality action research, especially to those who are new to this, they need to be mentored and trained through a training workshop.

The efforts of the trainers will be put in vain if the participants are not interested to learn. Negative perception has something to do also with mindset. It may be influenced by the people

who have a wrong perception of the reasons why teachers conduct research. This is seen in what ma'am Shan said,

Teachers think that doing research is only for promotion. Like in my case, they told me to do research because they heard from others that I wanted to be promoted which was totally different from what I aimed for. I do research to help administrators in policy-making and decision-making, so it's really hard to change someone's mindset. They thought it was all about promotion, and they always lack time to do it.

This is a mindset that we have to change among teachers. We do things because we want to do it. If a promotion comes, then it's just an incentive to work hard. In connection to mindset, the fear of teachers thinking that they are not capable of doing action research also contributed to negative perception. This was evident to what Ma'am Sil said,

I was hesitant because I know I am not well-equipped with research although I had research subjects before, still, it's different if you are already in the field. You need to do it on your own. So, at first I was scared because I don't know how to do it, how to make a proposal and going through the whole process. I'm in doubt if I'm doing it right, and I also have fears of failing.

Negative perception also happens because action research is required among Master Teachers. According to Zhou (2012) teachers are usually assigned to do action research, that is why, they do not have willingness to understand the details of the process. Although teachers with lower rank can also conduct action research.

It can be seen in the transcript above that negative perceptions were considered a constraint in conducting action research. These findings are supported by the study of Bughio (2015) in Ethiopia. He affirmed that only a few teachers conducted research studies because teachers lack research skills and expertise. In addition, McLaughlin & Ayubayeva (2015) stated that one of the findings of their study showed that teachers were afraid of conducting action research at the beginning. They often felt under-qualified for this task. Finally, the study of Vásquez (2017) suggests that some teachers held a negative view regarding doing research in school. Teachers' negative attitudes towards research can be attributed to the lack of professional expertise.

Theme 2: Time Constraints. Time is one of the very important elements in conducting action research. Research is an endeavor which you have to invest a lot of your time in order to come up with good results. You need to be focused in doing research to come up with a quality report but the majority, if not all, who conduct research in the field of education do have other tasks and responsibilities. Thus, making time in doing it, posed a challenge. This was evident to what Ma'am Shan has mentioned. She said,

There are school administrators who would give you 7 loads then will require you to conduct research. That's a total of 28 hours per week. With that time spent, you will not have enough time to check and also to do research. So the main challenge I think, aside from knowledge about research, is time. It's really hard to do a certain task if you are not hands-on. So teachers in our school would juggle time since we also have other ancillary responsibilities. Like me, I also have a publication that I need to attend to.

Similarly, Ma'am Rose had the same response. She said,

Doing action research is time-consuming. I also found out later that it's not only the lack of time but they have other reasons. Some teachers would say that they are busy, they have conflicts with schedules, and they have heavy workloads.

Teachers in the government schools are required to render 40 hours a week. Eight hours a day; 6 hours of that shall be spent in teaching and 2 hours for preparation (CSC Resolution No. 080096).

Time is indeed considered a constraint in conducting action researches based on the transcript above. These findings are supported by several studies. One of this was the study conducted by de Borja (2018). According to the findings, conducting action research is difficult for teachers due to time constraints. In as much as they want to be involved in this activity, time hinders them to do so, but still they believe it has a positive effect on their professional growth and career. This was also supported by other studies which showed that lack of time was the major issue and challenge of teachers in the conduct of action research (Zhou, 2012). The lack of time was often due to tremendous workload based on the study of Valdez (2015).

Theme 3: Lack of Knowledge in Data Analysis. Data analysis relies much on knowledge in statistics. Statistics is the backbone of quantitative research. In order to answer your research objectives, you should know what appropriate statistical tools should be used. There are a lot of statistical tools and each has its own unique characteristic that you need to master before you could use them. So this is not an easy task if you are not inclined to statistics or mathematics. This poses as a challenge in the conduct of action research. This is evident to what ma'am Rose said. She said,

When I checked the statement of the problem and looked at the data analysis procedure, I realized that what their biggest problem is their poor knowledge on statistics. They don't know what appropriate statistical tools to be used. This was also supported by ma'am Nem. She said, they do not have enough knowledge on what statistics will be used to support a problem.

The same as with Ma'am Sil, she said, the fear of writing especially on the data analysis and research design section.

Although statistical tools/tests are introduced in Statistics classes in Graduate School (provided it was offered in their course) be it manual or using statistical software, if you do not practice and use it often, you might forget what you have learned. This can cause limited knowledge in statistics. The tedious process of manual computation can be avoided if we use statistical software like SPSS and excel. But this also became a problem to some teachers, like what ma'am Shan said, the use of the SPSS and other statistical software in analyzing data, especially for quantitative researches, it is really difficult for us.

If teachers do have knowledge about statistical tools, mostly it is limited. If they have used a particular tool, some teachers thought that they will also use the same tool the next time they conduct research. This is evident to what Ma'am Rose said, they do not know what

statistical tools to use in their studies. They would think that they can only use statistical tools like ANOVA or t-test. They are not familiar with the other parametric or non-parametric tools.

Lack of knowledge in data analysis is supported by the study of de Borja (2018). According to the findings of the study, knowledge of statistics or data analysis was one of the hindrances encountered by teachers in conducting action research. Also, the study of Wulandari et al. (2019) showed that the problems that occurred in implementing classroom action research were identifying the problem, proposing a literature review, and analyzing the data.

Theme 4: Inability to Identify Appropriate Research Design and Methodology. Research design is your plan for data collection while methodology is the elements used to implement that plan. Research design and methodology are different from each other but are closely related because if the data gathered are appropriate, it will help you answer your research question more effectively. Most researchers find this part challenging. This is evident to what Ma'am Sha mentioned. She said,

There are several things that you have to understand about research. For one, the design. Choosing the design appropriate for the methodology can be a challenge even if you have undergone training. But even if you have been trained, this training cannot provide all the information we need to know about research.

The same as with Ma'am Sil. She also experienced difficulty in identifying the appropriate methodology to employ in her research. She said,

But when it comes to methodology, it seems to be challenging for me, especially in data analysis or in choosing what research approach I should take. That is the major problem I have encountered]. Even if there is training, still they find it hard to identify the appropriate design and methodology to use in their studies.

The above findings were supported by the study of McGrath & O'Toole (2012). According to them, there was a whole range of issues and challenges on how to set the research design that can be decided by the researcher depending on the nature of the problem to be solved. Moreover, Zhou (2012) in his case study which explored problems teachers faced when doing action research, it came out that these problems were: lack of theoretical guidance; and knowledge of research methodology.

Theme 5: Lack of Support from the Administration. This theme was further subdivided into two themes: (1) financial and (2) moral support.

Subtheme 1: Financial. Doing research is expensive. Action research would require the conduct of intervention and this intervention would require special supplies, instruments, and equipment. This is evident to what Ma'am Rose mentioned, according to her, it is also quite expensive, especially for action research. That is why some teachers did not make it to the division level.

To augment these expenses, teachers had to apply for assistance from Basic Education Research Fund (BEFR). In order to qualify, they have to follow certain guidelines like the format to be used in writing their research and its purpose should be aligned to DepEd's agenda.

Missing some of these requirements will be grounds for disqualification of their research like what ma'am Jo experienced. She said,

So far, I have not yet received any funds from BERF. I even had a bad experience with BERF during this pandemic. I missed one part of my research and my proposal was disqualified.

If teachers were not qualified to BERF, they have to spend their own money because the school does not give them financial support. But most teachers are hesitant to use their money because they'd rather spend it for their family and personal needs. Like what ma'am Sha said,

If you do not qualify for BERF, you will not get the monetary support that you need. Teachers would really have to shell out from their pockets. It would be difficult for the teacher, especially if he/she has a family to support. That is why it is going to be difficult.

Others chose to apply for lesser financial assistance because of the tedious liquidation process. This was what Ma'am Sha mentioned,

Usually, they cut down the budget so we decided to work on research within a budget of less than P5000. It is very tedious to liquidate. If you can just spend your own money to pay P4000, you would. Just imagine, you really have to liquidate everything up to the last centavo.

The findings above were supported by several studies. One of the themes that came out from the study of Ulla (2018) was the lack of support from the school. One common challenge that the teacher-researchers faced when doing research is the lack of support from the school. This lack of support refers to financial, work, and training support. Valdez (2015) in his study showed that the limited budget of their schools hinders the researchers to conduct action research. The researchers also believe that their income cannot accommodate additional expenses for doing action research. Finally, Okoduwa et al. (2018) in their study showed that some of the obstacles reported that prevented research activities include the following: lack of funding, lack of professional mentorship, and inadequate research facilities.

Subtheme 2: Moral. School administrators should give whatever support they can offer to their teachers for professional growth. Giving someone moral support encourages her/him and is also a way of showing them approval on what he/she was doing (Cambridge, 2021). Based on the interview transcripts, teachers wanted their school administrators to support them morally in their research endeavor. This is evident to what Ma'am Nem mentioned. She said,

There is a need to develop a support system from our administration aside from what DepEd initially provides. Even DepEd has no organized support system. We even asked to analyze and assess (manuscripts). Can you imagine assessing more than a hundred research proposals?

On the same thought, Ma'am Sil said,

We need support from our school head. It's not easy to conduct action research and they know that. Still, they keep on giving us tasks, so how can we finish our research?

Some teachers can't get moral support because their school heads are not inclined to research. With that, they find it difficult to convince their school to give them the support they need. This was evident to what Ma'am Sha mentioned. She said,

It is difficult to convince the school administrator, who is not into research, to implement the recommendations from the results of the study. We cannot get the support that we need for us to fully realize the purpose of the study.

Theme 6: Lack of Knowledge in Research Writing Process. It has been an obstacle for teachers in the field to play the role of a researcher, at the same time. Especially if the teacher has not experienced doing any research or has not updated herself in the current trend in research. Some may have done research during their baccalaureate degree and end up forgetting what they have learned when it comes to conducting any type of research.

According to the study conducted by Bogner (2013) which was entitled, Problems in Making Significant Changes in Teaching Practice Through Action Research, he inferred that it is not easy for teachers to assume the role of an action researcher. The process of casting off the old roles and assuming the new ones takes time and patience and has to overcome the resistance within others, but primarily within themselves. However, it would be wrong to expect that teachers develop all the necessary competences first and then begin with their research.

This is very evident in what Ma'am Rose said, reality sir, that is not the only reason why teachers did not conduct research, but really because their basic knowledge is very poor from the beginning. Ma'am Sha, agreed that teachers have limited understanding of what action research is. She shared that, the problem is the concept that I have, I thought an action research is a descriptive research. So, how did I know that what I have submitted as a paper to Schools Division of Iloilo is a full bloom paper; but, sadly of course I didn't know that it has to undergo checking, it has to undergo pilot testing, and the rest of the processes of the research or the research process.

This problem was also evident in the study conducted by Zhuo (2014) which explored about the problems teachers face when doing action research and the results showed the following: teachers lack theoretical guidance or knowledge of research methodology, inadequate knowledge in the conduct of action research and they may misunderstand the research.

The insufficient knowledge of teachers with action research has brought another challenge. They were hesitant to explore other types of research to use in their studies. This is shown in what Ma'am Sha shared,

Only few teachers are using qualitative research, there's none even a conduct of action research. Likewise, teachers lack knowledge on how to analyze themes and patterns when it comes to qualitative research. There were only few, even in our school. Actually, there is no one conducting qualitative research and no one would validate, as well.

Theme 7: Problem in processing and handling the research documents. One of the most difficult part of conducting research is getting started. Today, teachers in the Department of

Education who holds master teacher positions are required to conduct action research, and they find it hard to start. They also find it difficult to go through the process of research.

The processing of the approval of research proposals also posed as a challenge for teachers in their attempt to conduct action research. In the study conducted by Hussein and Lngam (2019), which was carried out to determine the factors and reasons why teachers are having difficulty in doing research, revealed the following: tedious and rigorous process in the proposal, no mentor in conducting research, and poor support from the management. These factors and reasons were also the sentiments of teachers here in the division. According to Mam Jo,

Actually, one of the problems now in the Division is that there are so many signatories and approval sheets of the proposal. So, there are many lost papers. Probably, these papers were lost maybe because they went through in a lot of offices.

These scenarios may be prevented if the management will consider the proposals of teachers as an important factor to improve the quality of instruction and delivery of the lessons.

This was supported by the study conducted by Ulla et al. (2017) which explored teachers' perceptions and motivations, challenges, and needs of teachers in Agusan del Norte, Philippines with regards to doing research. It revealed that teacher-respondents had a positive perception towards doing research and its benefits to their teaching practice and students' learning process. However, a lot of challenges had hindered them in involving themselves in it.

Theme 8: Insufficiency of training conducted for teachers. DepEd has been releasing a memorandum encouraging teachers to submit research proposals for funding. According to Caprino (2014), teachers who are action researchers make better-informed decisions about their instructional practices and learn to be reflective and purposeful in their instructional choices. They evolve as collaborators and feel a deeper connection to their colleagues, administration, and school community.

Although there are a lot of benefits in doing research, still, teachers are reluctant to engage themselves in it. In the study conducted by Tindowen et al. (2019), that aimed to identify the issues and challenges of teachers in the conduct of action research, the following were the results of the study: additional workload and burden on the part of the teacher, writing anxiety, lack of time, and inadequate knowledge in the conduct of action research.

Inadequate knowledge in doing research is one of the most common factors that prevent/discourage teachers. This is evident in Mam Nem's response,

The problem with the training of DepEd is somewhat like haphazard training. You cannot give training if you are just simply talking in front and you expect your trainees to do a certain thing at the end?

Training should involve a step-by-step process and guidance in doing something, such as doing action research. A lot of exposure to research writing is needed in order for teachers to be equipped with all the knowledge needed to conduct researches. In addition, Mam Sil, said that,

We were trained for a few days. I think it is a week of training and the expected output is you have to submit a proposal. I think on my part, they gave somewhat sufficient inputs for us to be able to work on a proposal or make a proposal or a working title; but, still I am hesitant.

Despite the challenges and difficulties faced by teachers in doing action research, however, it is argued in the study conducted by Hancock (1997), that with appropriate support, more teachers may become involved in research-like activities and thus enable a wider dissemination of their insights into children's learning.

4.2. Addressing the constraints in conducting action research

Some of the possible ways on how to address the constraints experienced by teachers in conducting action research were suggested by the informants. Two themes were generated and these were: (1) Action Research materials development; and (2) Conduct of Action Research training-workshop.

Theme1: Development of Action Research Materials. Delivering effective instruction can be attained through developing appropriate, relevant, and adequate instructional materials. Many educators and researchers had reported the importance of instructional materials in teaching and reinforcing verbal instruction.

Instructional resources in teaching and learning make students learn more and retain better what had been taught and it also promotes and sustains learners' interest. It also allows the learners to discover themselves and their abilities (Abimbade, 1997 as cited in Pagcalinawagan, 2015).

Thus, teacher-researchers can learn and work best if there are materials to be developed and be produced as a guide for writing the research paper. Ma'am Sha said,

It would be better if there is a print-out so teachers would be aware. If it is a Powerpoint presentation, it can only give a limited explanation.] Also, she added, but if there are examples or tips given, for example, a material that could be really helpful for the presenters.

Moreover, according to Bolibar (2019), instructional materials are of many kinds and one of which is the module. The module identifies examples, tasks, and exercises and allocates spaces for them.

Specifically, Maam Nem said that it would be best if the research material to be developed is in a form of a guidebook or a booklet. This is shown in her statement,

Guide book, a very simplified guide book for the teachers on how to conduct research, like for example, I am following the format of Department of Education. Let's say for example the background and the rationale, what should be the content of the background and rationale? If they have identified a certain problem, what should be the background? How should they attack the background and rationale? After that, there should be an example. Let's say, in the presentation of a problem, what are the things we need to focus on? Another is, how do you establish the gap? Then, the step-by-step process will follow, until you reach the end of the research.

Finally, Ma'am Jo emphasized that the different research designs should be added to the contents of the research material. This was evident in her statement,

Another thing is, I think it would be difficult if you include the differences of each design because I know there are many. Maybe we can just include examples of designs which was usually used in action research or include an example with visual illustrations.

Theme2: Conduct of Action Research Training-Workshop. Conducting a training workshop is one way of elevating the knowledge of teachers, especially in areas where they find difficulties such as research writing and presenting aspects. As educators, we should not deprive ourselves of attending training, seminars, or workshops to improve our quality of teaching and of course, our skills in doing research.

According to Shivani (2020) seminars, workshops and conferences hold great importance in the life of a student. They are platforms not only to learn new aspects, others' perspectives, and the latest information but also a good way of networking. Moreover, she added that an individual, who can sometimes lose motivation and excitement to study or work, should definitely attend a conference or workshop related to his or her subject. This will lead to higher productivity and fulfillment of their goals.

Thus, to address the lack of necessary skills of teachers in conducting action research or research in general, they need rigid training. This will enable them to become knowledgeable or skillful in conducting research in the future.

Furthermore, teachers need to enhance their basic understanding of doing research probably through attending training. This was evident to what Ma'am Nem said,

They need a basic understanding of how to do real research and action research through training. So, there are three most important things in proposal writing. The first is how to identify the problem. Second, how to write the background and rationale. And third, how to present an intervention. Because basically if these parts are quite understood by the teachers, the methodology can be easily done. The methodology is quite easy to write because the methods are technical, right?

To further elaborate teachers' skills in doing research, Ma'am Sil, believed that continuous training is necessary to master the art of doing research. She mentioned in her interview,

I think continuous training is needed to be able to somehow master your craft in conducting action research and also for you to share to others the skills that you have learned.

5. Concluding Observation

1. Strengthening of research in tertiary education. Not all teachers proceed to graduate studies nor enroll in institutions with strong research programs. Thus, as early as college, students should already be exposed to research activities. It is good now that research subject and thesis writing were retained in the new curriculum, and action research will be required during the internship. These subjects and activities should be given emphasis and need to be strengthened to produce graduates that are academically and research competently.

2. Developing of research skills in graduate studies. When informants were asked when they learned how to conduct action research, all of them answered during their graduate school program. Teachers have to choose wisely where to enroll and earn their degrees. The academic institutions should have a robust research program, track record of published research in a reputable journal, and competent faculty that can help them develop their research skills and knowledge. Moreover, students should take their statistics classes seriously because that is where they can learn more about data analysis and interpretation.

3. Training for research immigrants and research natives. Most of the Master Teachers in primary education are experienced teachers, and research was not part of their curriculum before, or if it was, it was not given emphasis. Thus, many of them struggle to conduct action research because it is new to them, or some are still learning and adapting, unlike the younger generation of teachers where research is part of the curriculum. They were equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge about research, so conducting action research for them became more manageable.

4. Developing and producing research materials. It was noticed that most of the informants wanted the material for research or action research to contain simplified and detailed parts which are interesting to read and easy to understand. Moreover, a material that deals with a step-by-step process that will guide the teacher-researchers on the specific things to do in every part of the research, and what they need to focus on as they write their paper. Providing a specific example on every part of a research paper may be a big help for them to thoroughly understand what they really need to know and do. Thus, it is a great challenge for research material developers on how to produce a simplified action research material, which may be in the form of a book, booklet, or kit that may serve as a guide for the teacher-researchers, especially for the beginners.

5. Conducting training-writeshop on research. This will be a very detailed training that will further help concretize their understanding of doing action research. This will also be done through a small group of 10 people per session so that they will have enough time to interact, learn, and collaborate. This will also give more time for the trainers' to facilitate, discuss, and answer queries about research. In addition, as we face this pandemic and most of the seminars or training were done online; thus, it is ideal to have training on a small group of participants.

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