Co-researching and Multi-site Research of Alike Problems of English Learning to Enhance Teachers’ Ability to conduct Classroom Action Research

Ratna Dewanti and Ifan Iskandar

English Department, State University of Jakarta

Abstract
Teachers are supposed to develop their research skills to solve English learning problems. However, for most teachers research is an esoteric realm which tends to be avoided due to its complexity, rigorousness, and the amount of time required. This study aimed at identifying the problems encountered by teachers in designing classroom action research, the alike problems of English learning which are potentially solved through co-researching and multi-site classroom action research, and to what extent co-researching and multi-site research of alike problems of English learning improve teachers’ ability to conduct classroom action research. This study involved twelve teacher researchers from twelve different schools in Jakarta, Indonesia. It was carried out from May to October 2013. The findings showed that the problems encountered by teachers in designing classroom action research were identifying researchable problems, formulating the title and the problem, and designing the plan to implement the treatment. The alike problems of English learning potentially solved through co-researching and multi-site classroom action research by teachers as researchers were listening. The study improved teachers’ ability to conduct classroom action research in the sense that they managed to design the research and empirically carried it out.

Key words: Co-researching, Multi-site Research, Classroom Action Research

Introduction
Classroom Action Research (CAR) is a compulsory course in Teacher Professional Training and Education (PLPG) since 2008—when it was established to enhance the quality of teacher competence and as a requirement for professional teacher license. The teachers in the PLPG show inadequate competence to conduct CAR due to at least three observable constraints; constraint to understand the nature of English language teaching (ELT) problems feasible to be researched; constraint to maintain the chain of reasoning of problem, literature review, research methodology, result, and conclusion; and failure to comprehend the methodological aspects and elements when designing CAR because of research complexity, rigorousness, and the amount of time required (Iskandar, 2012).

This confirms the investigation on the constraints to conduct action research by McKerman (Burns, 1999: 46) in the USA, UK, and Ireland in 1993 finding that lack of research skill was the fourth frequently ranked constraint of the eleven identified constraints. These constraints should be addressed with real practice (more than one-day course in PLPG), real action in which the teachers are involved from scratch—identifying real problems feasible to be studied in CAR—until the writing of the research report. Co-researching and multi-site research are assumed to be effective ways to cope with the hurdles.
Problem and Research Methodology

The problem of the study is “How is co-researching and multi-site research of alike problems of English learning enhance teachers’ ability to conduct CAR?” It seeks to find out the problems encountered by teachers in designing CAR to solve English learning problems, the alike problems of English learning potentially solved through co-researching and multi-site CAR; and the extent to which co-researching and multi-site research of alike problems of English learning improve teachers’ ability to conduct CAR. Twelve teachers of junior high schools, English Department lecturers, CAR proposals and reports are the data source. Participant observation, focus group discussion (FGD), observation, and document study were used to collect the required data – problems to design CAR in ELT, alike problems of English language learning, and co-researching and multi-site research of alike problems of English learning and teachers’ ability to conduct CAR. The study was conducted from May to October 2013 in Jakarta.

Co-researching

The co-researching comprises co-identifying, co-formulating, co-designing, co-reflecting, and co-redesigning as illustrated below.

Co-researching

Co-identifying

- Listing English learning problems
- Listing possible causes of the identified problems
- Separating researchable causes from unresearchable ones
- Selecting the main causes to be addressed

Co-formulating

- stating the title, problem, and purpose of the study

Co-designing

- designing the plan to implement the treatment to solve the problem

Co-reflecting

- thinking carefully or evaluating the success of the treatment

Co-redesigning

- designing the revised plan for treatment when the previous plan is unsuccessfully implemented to solve the problem
Research Ability and Classroom Action Research

Quality research, according to the National Research Council of the United States as quoted by Shavelson and Towne (2002 in McMillan and Wergin, 2010: 2-3), is characterized by: “a) significant questions; b) the relevance of research to theory; c) relevant research methodology; d) a coherent chain of reasoning between research question, literature review, methodology, results, and conclusion; e) replicability and generalizability; and f) scrutiny and critique through open dissemination.” The principles are pivotal bases to delineate the indicators of research ability in general and the indicators are then specifically adapted in terms of CAR.

Problems encountered by teachers in designing classroom action research to solve English learning problems

The problems encountered by teachers in designing classroom action research to solve English learning problems cover: 1) inadequate capacity to differentiate between problems of ELT in general or research problems in ELT, 2) inadequate capacity to differentiate between problems or root of problems in ELT, 3) inadequate capacity to identify the reasons to select a problem of CAR, 4) inadequate capacity to differentiate between the formulation of research problems in ELT in general or of research problems in CAR, 5) inadequate capacity to identify the relevant theory in literature review, 6) inadequate capacity to identify data and data source based on the research problems, 7) inadequate capacity to predict relevant instruments to collect data, 8) inadequate capacity to predict possible answers or solutions to research problems, 9) inadequate capacity to predict possible conclusions based on research problems, 10) inadequate capacity to identify reasons to have a cyclic process in CAR, 11) inadequate capacity to identify reasons to move from a cycle to the next cycle in CAR, 12) inadequate capacity to identify differences between one cycle and other cycles, 13) inadequate capacity to identify reasons to end the cyclic process in CAR, and 14) inadequate capacity to identify reasons to have collaborators in CAR.

Important notes

In the beginning of the FGD, most participants do not know what a research problem is, how it differs from a problem in ELT, and how to formulate a research problem from symptoms, difficulties, or problems they encounter in the classrooms. Very few participants could transform the problems into a CAR research problem though they had been exposed to the discussion of CAR, the proposal and the reports. It’s plausible that they are not able to identify feasible research problems due to their very little exposure to research in general; most don’t even recognize data, instrument, variable or focus, let alone methodological and technical aspects of CAR. There is, however, another factor that is probably pertinent to the understanding of the problems feasible to be researched and is complained about by all instructors—low proficiency of English.

Alike problems of English learning potentially solved through co-researching and multi-site classroom action research by teachers as researchers

The alike problems are grouped on the basis of four language skills, Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. In Listening, the problems cover: a) discriminating sounds, b) distinguishing word stress and
intonation, c) understanding the meaning of a word, d) understanding the meaning of a sentence, e) distinguishing boundaries between words, f) identifying names of person/ country/ language, f) recognizing word classes (nouns, verbs, etc.), g) understanding the grammar: tense, pluralization, elliptical forms, h) distinguishing literal and implied meanings, i) recognizing main topics, j) getting the main idea, k) getting supporting details, l) inferring meaning, m) deducing causes and effects.

In speaking, the problems involve: a) pronouncing words including reduced forms of words/contraction, b) using word stress and sentence intonation, c) using word classes (nouns, verbs, etc.), d) using tense, agreement, plural forms, numbers, e) using strategic devices—pauses, fillers, self-corrections, f) backtracking—to enhance the clarity of the message, g) speaking fluently.

In Reading, the problems constitute: a) understanding word meaning in context (including idiomatic meaning), b) distinguishing literal and implied meanings, c) identifying subjects and verbs in sentences, d) getting the meaning of a sentence, e) getting the main idea, f) understanding generic structure of texts, g) inferring.

In Writing, the problems range from: a) using grammatical sentences (tense, agreement, pluralization), word class, word order, b) using punctuation, c) using cohesive devices, d) achieving unity and coherency, e) developing ideas, to f) writing a good paragraph.

**Alike problems of English learning potentially solved through co-researching and multi-site classroom action research by teachers as researchers**

Out of four groups of alike problems, Listening seems to be the alike problems potentially solved through co-researching and multi-site classroom action research by teachers as researchers. The problem of low proficiency of Listening may occur because of three causes: 1) inaccessible input, gaps between listening materials and students’ listening proficiency; 2) deficiencies in phonology, inaccurate pronunciation of intelligible English; 3) uninformedness of texts to be listened for.
The multi-site research of alike problems of English learning is illustrated in the following figure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-identifying low proficiency of listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cause 1: inaccessible input; gap between listening materials and students’ listening proficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause 2: deficiencies in phonology; inaccurate pronunciation of intelligible English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause 3: uninforminedness of texts to be listened for.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-formulating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>using tailor-made listening materials to promote listening proficiency (title, problem, purpose)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improving students’ pronunciation to promote listening proficiency (title, problem, purpose) (feature detection and metrical segmentation of segmental and suprasegmental)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activating schemata to promote listening proficiency (title, problem, purpose)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-designing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>how tailor-made listening materials are developed to promote listening proficiency?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how students’ pronunciation is developed to promote listening proficiency?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how activating schemata is developed to promote listening proficiency?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-reflecting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a group of 4 researchers at 4 different sites/schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a group of 4 researchers at 4 different sites/schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a group of 4 researchers at 4 different sites/schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-redesigning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plan 2 of cycle 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan 2 of cycle 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan 2 of cycle 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

underlying principle: accessible input
underlying principle: bottom up processing
underlying principle: top down processing
Co-researching and multi-site research of alike problems of English learning improve teachers’ ability to conduct classroom action research

The co-researching and multi-site research of alike problems of English learning improve teachers’ ability to conduct classroom action research was carried out in twelve junior high schools: four schools in Rawamangun, East Jakarta; another four in Tanjung Priok, North Jakarta; and four other schools in Rawasari, Central Jakarta, each with three different alike problems: To what extent do tailor-made listening materials promote English listening proficiency?, To what extent does improving students’ English pronunciation promote English listening proficiency?, and To what extent does activating schemata promote English listening proficiency?

Conclusion

The study generated these following findings. First, the problem encountered by teachers in designing classroom action research to solve English learning problems are inadequate research experience and skill ranging from identifying feasible research problem to technicalities in conducting CAR. Second, the alike problems of English learning potentially solved through co-researching and multi-site classroom action research by teachers as researchers are identifiable in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, it is proven that listening is considered the most intricate and problematic one. It can then be concluded that co-researching and multi-site research of alike problems of English learning improve teachers’ ability to conduct classroom action research in that they manage to design and carry out classroom action research together with their colleagues to cope with the real problems they encounter in their classrooms.

Reference

Yin, R. K. (1997). The abridged version of case study research, design and methods. In L. Bickman & D. G. Rog (Eds), Handbook of applied social research met