Action Research in an Institutional Context

Van Nguyen

University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi

Abstract: The researcher makes an attempt to investigate a research on the students’ attitude towards a project, which has been introduced for almost 2 years in her faculty. The mixed method will be employed to collect data both statistically and descriptively. The use of survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews with the involvement of participants to enhance the credibility of the research will be introduced. What is more, if time allowed, action research is highly recommended in the study. The researcher does hold the belief that the results of the study will be publicized in the faculty and will contribute to the other studies in project-based learning, case-based studies or other formative assessment types that have been launched in the faculty. The study will help both teachers and students to reflect their teaching and learning practices. As a teacher, the researcher also aims to improve her professionalism and professional development through the study.

Keywords: Action Research, Institutional context

1. Introduction

Assessment in education has been investigated by a number of researchers (Swaffield, 2008; Chen, 2003; Chan, 2014, Sadler, 1989; DiBello & Stout, 2007, to name but a few). In Vietnam, together with the reformation in the entire education system, the switch from conventional type of assessment, mainly summative assessment to alternative form such as formative assessment (FA), project-based learning, case studies, etc has been seen in some universities. Thus, assessment has been incorporated into the syllabus and curriculum design to support educational goals and teaching and learning activities. According to Popham and Heaton (cited in Chan, 2014), the aims of FA are to provide scaffolding supports for students to strengthen their advantages and limit weakness during their study.

Vietnam context

The importance of English has been viewed as the top priority in national education during 2010-2020 and has now been extended to 2025 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2017). English is seen as a bridge to connect the world of business, economics, science, technology, and all other aspects of life. Thus, teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) and teaching English for specific purposes (ESP) are the key strategies for English-major universities. University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS) has experienced a thorough transformation from teaching methodology, learning approach, learner centered strategy, to assessment and evaluation. There assessment employs PBL has been highly recommended. The PBL in Business Communication has been launched in the past 2 years. The effectiveness and feedbacks from students as stakeholders have not been investigated yet. Therefore, the research aims at (1) attitudes of students towards PBL, (2) effectiveness of PBL as perceived by students and (3) recommendations provided by students to deal with the difficulties during PBL.

Research Approaches

To better answer the three above research questions, qualitative and quantitative research methods have been proposed. While qualitative research (QR) method can be considered an explanatory notion in social science (Bell, 2005). That is, it is more related to the perceptions than statistics. It is important that QR is seen as suitable for ones that are well aware of this method (Delamont, 1992). For it is viewed as realistic and holistic, the aim of QR is to transfer the meanings of varying settings, disciplines and circumstances (Bray et. al, 2007). Some approaches consist of focus group interviews, observations and in-depth interviews, etc. (Bell, 2005). In this study, QR used includes observations, in-depth interviews, which encourage the participants to express the ideas and feedbacks freely. The interview questions will include open-ended questions to explore more questions with “why” and “how” (Bray et al., 1997), explanations of multi-layered incidents and settings can be additionally explained, explored and comprehended. The quantitative research will use survey questionnaires as a tool to collect responses from participants in the format of written statements or questions (Burns, 2000). The data collected using Google doc will be an efficient means to save time and money (Verma & Mallick, 1999) while it can provide a list of diagram and table to better understand and explore the answer. Moreover, the instrument can help to show patterns among participants’ responses (Gillham, 2005). The researcher is going to edit the survey questionnaires and ask the participants to help in providing more feedbacks related to the survey questionnaires as in the words of Noble and Smith (2015) involving the participants in the research, asking their feedbacks to questionnaires can strengthen the level of reliability of validity of the research.

Similarly, case based studies are commonly used in ESP division, thus applying the research approaches to other projects to conduct stakeholder’s ideas as to the their attitudes and feedbacks of case-based studies should be highly feasible.

Other research method

The study can be better understood when classroom action research (AR) has been employed. Classroom AR is considered a fixed method of teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), technical AR (Kemmis, 2009), practitioner inquiry (Orland-Barak, 2009), an approach to investigate what is the most suitable to enhance students’ learning in their own contexts (Mettetal, 2001). In the words of Mettetal (2001) classroom AR is more data-based and
What is more, if time allowed, action research is highly recommended in the study. The researcher does hold the belief that the results of the study will be published in the faculty and will contribute to the other studies in project-based learning, case-based studies or other formative assessment types that have been launched in the faculty. The study will help both teachers and students to reflect their teaching and learning practices. As a teacher, the researcher also aims to improve her professionalism and professional development through the study.

References


