

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF CONDUCTING ACTION RESEARCH IN EDUCATION COLLEGES

Pyae Phyo Thu¹ and Zin Nwe Than²

Abstract

This study highlights the challenges and benefits of conducting action research in Education College. In this study, 32 teachers from five Education Colleges were interviewed to investigate the benefits and challenges of conducting action research. *Semi-structured interview* was utilized to explore the perceived benefits and the challenges teachers faced. Based on the responses of teacher-participants and research findings, it can be concluded that there were many benefits as well as challenges when conducting action research for Education College-teachers. The benefits teachers perceived were improving knowledge about action research, knowing and practicing new teaching methods, understanding deeply about the subject matters, improving good relationship and having a habit of reflective practice. The challenges were insufficient knowledge, insufficient time, insufficient supports, insufficient reference materials and experts and finally insufficient attitudes.

Keywords: Action Research, Benefits, Challenges

Introduction

Research is about exploring new understanding and solves the actual problems in a respective area. Classroom research, school-based research, teacher research, and action research have been defined as a research undertaken and conducted by teachers in the classroom and/or in the school. This kind of research is conducted primarily to examine and identify a problem or an issue within the classroom and in the school for which teacher - researchers want to find a solution, by understanding it thoroughly (Burns & Kurtoglu- Hooton, 2014). Action research is one of the systematic methods of research in solving problems or making practice better. It aims at immediate application of theory and places its emphasis on the solution of a problem in a local setting. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) indicated that action research is deliberate and solution-oriented investigation that is group or individually conducted. Additionally, action research allows teachers the opportunities to identify changes they need to make in their teaching practices by providing them with the framework to build their own classroom projects.

The importance that conducting action research has upon the professional development of teachers and their practices has been widely acknowledged in the literature. For one, it provides teachers and other educational leaders with the skills and knowledge necessary for identifying what the problem is in a school or classroom, and knowing how to address that problem systematically and effectively. Two, it supplies a chance for teachers to self-evaluate their teaching practices. Three, it allows teachers to make a change in their teaching practices that will have a positive and significant impact upon teaching-learning process. Lastly, it is a great opportunity to improve lifelong learning and of continuing professional development teachers (Cain & Milovic, 2010, Ulla, Barrera & Acompanado, 2017, cited in Ulla, 2018). Action Research is essential to professional development in which teachers systematically and effectively reflect on their work and make changes in their teaching. Furthermore, action research provides a chance to teachers to evaluate themselves about their teaching practices. It is conducted action research to investigate what effects their teaching have on students' learning, how they could work better with colleagues, and how can they work to change the whole teaching-learning environment for the better (Gilles, Wilson, & Elias, 2010).

¹ Assistant Lecturer, Department of Methodology, Monywa Education Degree College

² Dr, Professor & Head of Department, Department of Educational Theory, Sagaing University of Education

This study will be significant because it will provide information about the benefits and challenges of conducting action research in Education Colleges. At the current time, Department of Higher Education emphasizes the importance of action research in Education Colleges. According to the policy of teacher education, teacher-educators in Education Colleges are required to engage in action research activities. Therefore, in Education Colleges, action researches are widely conducted by teacher-educators and action research competitions are held two times in one academic year. Teacher-educators conduct action researches but they have many difficulties and challenges. On the contrary, there are many benefits of conducting action research. That is why, this study will help in the development of a better understanding of the benefits and challenges of conducting action research in Education Colleges for implementation of the educational objectives and production of qualified teachers although it is likely to have shortcoming and weakness.

Teacher Education in Myanmar

In Myanmar, teacher education has been providing two Universities of Education and twenty five Education Colleges under the guidance of Ministry of Education. Two universities of Education: Yangon University of Education and Sagaing University of Education, produce senior teachers for Basic Education. Twenty five education colleges, such as Mandalay Education College, Pakokku Education College, Sagaing Education College, Monywa Education College, Magway Education College, Meikhtila Education College, Myitkyina Education College, Taunggyi Education College, Lashio Education College, Loikaw Education College, Katha Education College, Hakha Education College, Kyine Tone Education College, Taungngu Education College, Yankin Education College, Thingan Kyun Education College, Mawlamyine Education College, Hleku Education College, Dawei Education College, Pyay Education College, Kyaukphyu Education College, Patheingyi Education College, Bokalay Education College, Myaungmya Education College, Education College and Pha-an Education College produce junior teachers and primary teachers.

Until Batch 23/2018, twenty five Education Colleges provided D.T.Ed (Diploma in Teacher Education), P.P.T.T (Post Primary Teacher Training), P.A.T.C (Primary Assistant Teacher Certificate) and J.A.T.C (Junior Assistant Teacher Certificate) programs for teachers. Two year program of D.T.Ed is given for pre-service teachers who want to enter teaching profession after passing matriculation examination. Four month program of P.P.T.T is given for pre-service teachers who have got a degree from one university or degree college. Two month program of P.A.T.C is given for in-service teachers who are not permanent and do not have any teacher certificate. Two month program of J.A.T.C is given for in-service primary teachers who want to be junior teachers in Basic Education schools. In 2019, Education Colleges started four-year program and will provide bachelor degree for pre-service teachers who want to enter teaching profession after passing matriculation examination.

Purpose of the Study

General Objective

- To explore the benefits and challenges of conducting action research at selected Education Colleges located in Upper Myanmar.

Specific Objectives

- To investigate the benefits of conducting action research perceived by teacher-educators themselves at selected Education Colleges, and
- To analyze the challenges of conducting action research perceived by teacher-educators themselves at selected Education Colleges.

Research Questions

1. What are the benefits of conducting action research perceived by teacher-educators themselves at selected Education Colleges?
2. What are the challenges of conducting action research perceived by teacher-educators themselves at selected Education Colleges?

Definitions of Key Terms

The terms used throughout the current study are identified below for clarity and understanding.

- **Action Research** refers to a method of systematic inquiry undertaken and documented by teachers for the purpose of improving their own practices (Vula, 2010).
- **Benefits** refer to positive impacts that improve teachers' professional development from carrying out action research (Erda, 2013).
- **Challenges** refer to constraints that inhibit teacher-researchers from carrying out action research (Erda, 2013).

Operational Definitions

- **Action research** is one type of research that is conducted by teacher-educators to improve their professional and personal development in Education Colleges.
- **Benefits** refer to improving professional and personal developments of teacher-educators such as improving knowledge about action research, improving good relationship by conducting action research, etc.
- **Challenges** refer to the difficulties of teacher-educators to conduct action research effectively and systematically such as insufficient knowledge, insufficient time, insufficient supports, etc.

Limitation of the Study

This study was limited to selected Education Colleges in Upper Myanmar because the researcher had available time and the necessity for effective communication between the researcher and participants. Among thirteen Education Colleges in Upper Myanmar, all teacher-educators who had experiences about action research from five selected Education Colleges in Upper Myanmar were selected as sample of this study.

Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Framework

Lewin developed a Unified Change Theory based on four distinct elements; Field Theory, Group Dynamics, Action Research and Three Step Model of Change. Action research is the foundation stone of organization development practice; it is what underpins the theory and practice of the discipline in the organization. The theory is based on what Lewin advised, "no action without research, no research without action" (Dick, 2009).

Action research can be defined as the process of studying a classroom or school in order to improve the quality of teaching. It is, however, a very systematic and scientific study which promotes inquiry-based and contextually-driven professional development (Hathorn & Dillon, 2008). The four main types of action research design are individual research, collaborative research, school-wide research and district-wide research. The action research process has five

main steps: identify a problem or question, determine the data collection needs and method, collect and analyze the data, create an action plan and describe how findings can be used, and report data and plan for future action. This is actually more of a cyclical process than a step process. The most commonly cited cycle was plan-action-observe-reflect devised by Kemmis & McTaggart (2000). These steps help to ensure that the action research will be professional, complete, and valid. Action research does not start with an answer, although it is structured, and the question to be explored may be refined or changed during the course of the research. Regular observations are very important to action research (Johnson, 2002). Action research is not meant to be complicated, elaborate, lengthy, or quantitative in nature. Due to these characteristics, action research is user-friendly and requires little prior experience on the part of the researcher (Glathar, 2008).

Conducting action researches are the most important activities to bring changes and improvements in teaching learning process. Based on the literature review and pilot study, when teacher-researchers were asked about their perceived benefits of conducting research, a number of them stated that conducting action research can have improving knowledge about action research, knowing and practicing new teaching methods, understanding deeply about the subject matters, improving friends and good relationship and having a habit of reflective practice. However, the most of the teacher-researchers from Education Colleges revealed that five challenges were faced when conducting action research; insufficient knowledge, insufficient time, insufficient reference materials and experts, insufficient supports and insufficient attitudes.

Benefits of Conducting Action Research

Many benefits of action research for teacher development personally and professionally have been pointed out in recent action research studies. One such study interpreted that action research afforded to produce significant gains for organization professional development. Some of the gains included: improved skills and knowledge about action research, amplified motivation to develop new teaching methods, enhanced collaboration and interpersonal relationships with colleagues, and increased teacher reflection (Raudenheimer, 2003). Results of action research studies show that teachers believe that engaging in action research enhances their personal and professional growth (Neapolitan, 2000).

Teachers also identify action research as a useful tool for impacting and influencing other teachers and their professional development. Action research aids teachers to become role models, change agents, and in establishing their credibility with other teachers (Neapolitan, 2000). Teacher participants in action research gain more confidence in delivering their classroom instruction. Teachers who are empowering are able to bring their talents, experiences, skills and creative ideas into the classroom and implement programs and strategies that best meet the needs of their students (Johnson, 2002). In addition to an empowered approach to change in classroom instruction, teachers gain other skills through action research. They report more autonomy, a higher level of problem-solving skills and an increased ability to use classroom data more effectively (Neapolitan, 2000).

Another benefit of action research is the transformation that occurs in teacher communication. Teachers who have participated in action research improve their relationships with their colleagues (Russo & Beyerbach, 2001, cited in Glather, 2008). As communication between teachers becomes more warm and close, opportunity for support, sharing, development and growth increase. Additionally, cooperation and collaboration flourish as a result. Action research emphasizes meaningful and collaborative teacher-teacher relationships and provides opportunities for focused, helpful dialogue (Levin & Rock, 2003, cited in Glather, 2008).

The benefits of action research as a tool for professional development are many and varied. They range from subtle impacts on individual teachers' views of their teaching to continuing efforts

to engage in action research and report findings (Salzman & Snodgrass, 2003, cited in Glather, 2008). Action research can be used as a meaningful replacement of traditional teacher in-services (Johnson, 2002). This study is valuable in understanding how action research can function as professional development for teachers. The experiences of the participants can inform education leaders about the pros and cons of conducting action research for teachers as a professional development model.

Challenges of Conducting Action Research

Conducting action researches are the most important activities to bring changes and improvements in teaching learning process. However, it is expected while conducting it, constraints become difficulties for teacher practitioners so as to perform things easily. For instance, from the constraints that affect those teachers in conducting action research, problem related with lack of in-service training, lack of knowledge and skills, lack of attitude and interest, shortage of materials or resources and financial problems plays a great role in affecting teacher practitioners in schools.

Different research results reported that research knowledge and skills of school teacher were insignificant to conduct research systematically (Ashenafi, 2007 & Gebeyew, 2007). Similarly, the result pointed out that teachers did not understand how to conduct action research and the interest to practice in the research process was extremely influenced by the involvement of teachers in research activities.

Additionally, Mc kerman (1996) and Seyoum (1998) cited in Dereje (2011) indicated that there are many challenges that hinder teacher in conducting action research at school or classroom level. Among these challenges, institutional and other teacher related problems could be mentioned. School climate, leader-follower relationship, lack of time and lack of resources are of the school based problems.

Similarly, Dame (2011) found that insufficient time due to teaching and administrative work load, inadequate support systems, lack of commitment of the responsible persons, lack of adequate resource, inadequate knowledge and skills about action research, and inadequate incentives available for teacher-researchers as the most strong constraints that encountered the teacher educators to effectively undertake action research in their study fields.

Additionally, Yohannis (2011) indicated that lack of sufficient research knowledge and skills, lack of resource materials and support from the responsible department as a intense problem that hinder teachers not to participate in educational research activities and practices. Similarly, Burns (1999, cited in Yohannis, 2011) classified challenges of teachers in conducting action research into three: as lack of enough time, lack of resources, school lack of research knowledge and skills are the most frequently found research challenges among participants. On the other hand, Johnson (2011, cited in Yohannis, 2011) pointed out that five challenges of conducting action research that some teachers face in schools - lack of enough time, lack of resources such as research books and supports, difficulty of formulating the research question, resistance to change and ethical considerations.

To be concluded, even though challenges are classified differently according to different scholars and researchers, they affect negatively the participation of teachers in conducting action research in the classroom and school where they are working.

Methodology

The present study is qualitative as it explores and analyses the benefits and challenges of 32 Education College-teachers who had experiences about conducting action research. In this study, semi-structured interview was used as data collection instrument. Seven interview guide questions were developed from the literature review and the pilot study. The interview data obtained from semi-structured interviews were subjected to content analysis in order to answer the research questions. All the responses were transcribed and were read many times in order to understand the content and the message that the participants wanted to give. They were then categorized into different themes and subthemes under the categories of benefits and challenges they had perceived.

Participants of the Study

This study focused on all Education Colleges in Upper Myanmar. There were thirteen Education Colleges in Upper Myanmar. Among them, three Education Colleges were used for pilot testing. Out of ten Education Colleges, five Education Colleges were randomly selected as sample colleges for the main study. As teacher sample, all teacher-educators from selected Education Colleges who had experience of conducting action research were used as teacher sample. There were 32 teacher-educators who had experience of conducting action research in selected Education Colleges. Among them, 8 teachers (25%) were male and 24 teachers (75%) were female. Concerning their academic qualification, 18 teachers (56%) were MEd degree holders and 14 teachers (43%) were MA/MSc degree holders. Furthermore, according to their positions, 9 teachers (28%) were lecturers and 23 teachers (72%) were assistant lecturers.

Data Collection Procedures and Data Analysis

After taking permission from the responsible persons, interviews were made to teachers from five selected Education Colleges in Upper Myanmar. Data were recorded by using mobile phone from all teachers who had conducted action research. Teacher-participants answered the interview questions about their benefits and challenges of conducting action research. All the responses were listened and transcribed and were read many times in order to understand the content and the message that the participants would like to give. They were then categorized into different themes under the categories of benefits and challenges they had perceived and met concerning conducting action research.

Research Findings

This study attempted to find out the benefits and challenges of conducting action research perceived by teacher-researchers in Education Colleges. Concerning benefits, there were six themes that the teacher researchers perceived by conducting action research. The themes were improving knowledge about action research, knowing and practicing new teaching methods, understanding deeply about subject matter, improving good relationship, having a habit of reflective practices and others. As the challenges, there were five themes that emerged from the interview data. The themes were lack of knowledge, lack of enough time, lack of reference materials and experts, lack of supports and finally lack of attitudes.

Benefits of Conducting Action Research

When teacher-researchers were asked about their perceived benefits of conduction action research, a number of them stated that conducting action research could improve knowledge about action research, know new teaching methods, understand deeply about the subject matters, improve good relationship and have a habit of reflective practice while a few said others.

1. Improving knowledge about action research

Among 32 teachers, 30 teacher-researchers (94%) claimed that they searched and studied research books and articles in the library and internet how to conduct action research. This made them improve knowledge level about action research. The teachers who had conducted about action research shared their knowledge and experience how to conduct it. When competing at national level competition, they had much knowledge about action research and understood clearly the procedures and trend of action research because of the judges' suggestions and comments. They also inspired new ideas by studying action researches of other Education Colleges.

2. Knowing and practicing new teaching methods

The 23 teacher-researchers (72%) argued that they knew new teaching methods (brain storming, presentation, think-pair-share, using videos as teaching aids, etc.) applying in conducting action research. They understood which teaching methods were convenient and consistent which lessons. They realized that the effectiveness of each teaching method used in action research. They also practically applied new teaching methods in teaching. The students also had learnt new teaching methods in practice not in theory. Teacher-researchers shared new teaching methods applying in action research to other Education Colleges and they were successful in using new teaching methods.

3. Understanding deeply about subject matter

For all 32 teacher-researchers (100%), they pointed out that they improved a lot of knowledge beyond the subject matter as they read a lot of books related to the content and used internet for further more readings. They could create more successful and effective teaching. For students, the students were more interested in the subject matter. They were bored in lecture method and more active when using new teaching methods in action research. All students were expert and understood deeply about the subject matter.

4. Improving friends and good relationship

The 18 teacher-researchers (56%) expressed that conducting action research made them improve good relationship. The relationship between the teacher-researcher and the students was more close, warm and open. Teacher-teacher relationship was more united and cooperative when conducting action research. In conducting action research, they become more flexible in their thinking and more open to new ideas. In competing at the national level competition, the teacher researchers had a chance to improve a number of friends. They were acknowledged by the principals and other departmental persons not because winning the prize but because conducting action research and competing it at the national level.

5. Having a habit of reflective practice

Besides, 21 teacher-researchers (66%) mentioned that they had a habit of reflective practice by conducting action research. The teachers had reflected themselves what their teaching needed after finishing one teaching period of time. Reflection or self-study was a powerful way to know about the self in teaching practice. Moreover, they pointed out that action research was a way of thinking about a problematic situation that needs to be resolved. They said that action research could be a very powerful tool enabling practitioners not only to solve practical problems, but also to reflect on their understanding of how to develop practice.

6. Others

After conducting action research, 5 teacher-researchers (15%) revealed that

- They had decided that they must use more activity based-teaching methods than traditional lectured-methods.
- They gained more confidence in redesigning their classroom instruction.
- Their creative thinking and problem solving skills had improved.

Challenges to Conduct Action Research

In the interview, the most of the teacher-researchers from Education Colleges revealed that five challenges were faced when conducting action research; insufficient knowledge, insufficient time, insufficient reference materials and experts, insufficient supports and insufficient attitudes.

1. Insufficient knowledge

Among 32 teacher-researchers, 22 teacher-researchers (69%) said that most of them did not understand clearly what action research was. As the previous action research articles were different formats, there was no exact format of action research (e.g. which font and font size would be used in action research). As the department, it did not announce officially the correct format of action research. They also had no enough knowledge how to conduct action research and the procedures of action research. In addition, concerning skill, they had no enough experience and expertise about doing action research. They were weak of technological skill such as drawing tables and graphs in computer.

2. Insufficient time

According to 27 teacher-researchers (84%), action research needed a lot of time. They had many teaching periods, departmental jobs and other school activities. Furthermore, there was no clear instruction about action research; when to start, when to finish and the amount of time that a teacher-researcher gets to conduct action research. They had to know the date of action research competition that they would go to compete only if the action research competition was so close. The time to conduct action research was not insufficient for teacher researcher. On the other hand, the students were very busy with so many activities and they have full periods of time on the whole day. It was one of the difficulties to adjust time between the teacher researchers and the students.

3. Insufficient reference materials and experts

The 21 teacher-researchers (71%) claimed that there were insufficient research books to be referenced in the libraries of Education Colleges. There were only a few research journals and previous action research articles in most of the libraries of Education Colleges. Previous action research articles that had competed at the national level were not the same with each other in format, procedure, trend, etc. It was difficult to choose which one to be referenced. In the same way, as if there were no reference books and they did not know how to conduct, they had also no experts to request ideas. The teachers who had experience about action research could not explain clearly about action research. They had to contact the expert researchers from University of Educations.

4. Insufficient supports

For 20 teacher-researchers (63%), there were two kinds of insufficient supports for them. The first was insufficient colleague support. This was because some departments of Education Colleges were not sufficient in teaching staff. The colleague teachers could not help and support

the teacher researcher and they performed other duties of the department. Most of the parts of action research (taking photograph, supervising, typing, etc.) were done by the teacher researcher who took responsibility for action research, not others helped. The second was insufficient financial support. There was no equal financial support way for teacher-researchers to conduct action research among Education Colleges. Financial support ways were different among Education Colleges. Some Education Colleges allocated finance to all departments, from 30000 kyats to 50000 kyats. Some did not allocate like that. Only if the action research draft appeared, the principal or one of the heads paid the cost of draft. The costs while conducting action research like questionnaire, photo copy, teaching aids, were not paid unless the vouchers were presented. In this condition, all teachers in one department shared the cost of action research.

5. Insufficient attitudes

Among 32 teacher-researchers, 19 teacher-researchers (59%) mentioned that conducting action research was different according to Education Colleges. In some Education Colleges, every department took responsibility to conduct action research. In some, only the alternate department was responsible for action research. Whatever it was, most of the teacher researchers did not want to conduct action research. They were afraid of conducting action research. They also had no enough knowledge and experience about action research. They had strong desire to join research training in order to conduct research effectively and systematically.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of the Findings

The results of this study led to the significant findings that are summarized below.

When teacher-researchers were asked about their perceived benefits of conduction action research, a number of them stated that conducting action research could improve knowledge about action research, know and practice new teaching methods, understand deeply about the subject matters, improve friends and good relationship, having a habit of reflective practice while a few said others.

- The 30 teacher-researchers (94%) claimed that they searched and studied research books and articles in the library and internet how to conduct action research. This made them improve knowledge level about action research. When competing at national level competition, they had much knowledge about action research and understood clearly the procedures and trend of action research because of the judges' suggestions and comments.
- The 23 teacher-researchers (72%) argued that they knew new teaching methods applying in conducting action research. They understood which teaching methods are convenient and consistent which lessons. They realized that the effectiveness of each teaching methods used in action research. They also applied in practice new teaching methods in teaching. The students also had learnt new teaching methods in practice not in theory.
- For all 32 teacher-researchers (100%), they pointed that they improved a lot of knowledge beyond the subject matter as they read a lot of books related to the content and using internet for further more reading. They could create more successful and effective teaching. For students, the students were more interested in the subject matter. All students were expert and understood deeply and bready about the subject matter.
- The 18 teacher-researchers (56%) expressed that conducting action research made them improve good relationship. The relationship between the teacher researcher and the students was more close, warm and open. Teacher-teacher relationship was more united

and cooperative when conducting action research. In competing at the national level competition, the teacher researchers had a chance to improve a number of friends.

- The 21 teacher-researchers (66%) mentioned that they had a habit of reflective practice by conducting action research. The teachers had reflected themselves what their teaching need after finishing one teaching period of time. Reflection or self-study is a powerful way to know about the self in teaching practice. Moreover, they pointed out that action research was as a way of thinking about a problematic situation that needs to be resolved.
- The 5 teacher-researchers (15%) revealed that they had decided that they must use more activity based-teaching methods than traditional lectured-methods, gained more confidence in redesigning their classroom instruction, and their creative thinking and problem solving skills had improved.

The teacher-researchers from Education Colleges expressed that five challenges were faced when conducting action research; insufficient knowledge, insufficient time, insufficient reference materials and experts, insufficient supports and insufficient attitudes.

- The 22 teacher-researchers (69%) said that most of them did not understand clearly what action research was. They could not do action research systematically because they had never done it before. They had no enough knowledge how to conduct action research and the procedures of action research. They were weak of technological skill such as drawing tables and graphs in computer.
- The 27 teacher-researchers (84%) pointed out that action research needed a lot of time. They had many teaching periods, departmental jobs and other school activities. They had to know the date that they would go to compete only if the action research competition was so close. That was why they had no enough time to conduct action research effectively. On the other hand, the students were very busy with so many activities and they have full periods of time on the whole day. It was one of the difficulties to adjust time between the teacher researchers and the students.
- The 23 teacher-researchers (71%) revealed that there insufficient research books to be referenced in the libraries of Education Colleges. Only a few research journals and previous action research articles were in most of the libraries of Education Colleges. In the same way, as if there were no referenced books and they did not know how to conduct, they had also no experts to request ideas. The teachers who had experiences about action research could not explain clearly about action research. They had to contact the expert researchers from University of Education.
- For 20 teacher-researchers (63%), there were two kinds of insufficient supports for them. The first was insufficient colleague support. This was because some of the departments of education colleges were not sufficient in teaching staffs. Most of the parts of action research were done by the teacher researcher who took responsibility for action research, not others helped. The second was insufficient financial support. Financial support system was different among Education Colleges. Some Education Colleges allocated finance to all departments, from 30000 kyats to 50000 kyats. Some did not allocate like that. Only if the action research draft appeared, the principal or one of the heads paid the only cost of draft.
- The 19 teacher-researchers (59%) mentioned that most of the teacher researchers did not want to conduct action research. They were afraid of conducting action research. They had many stress and pressure, no time to rest, and many duties and activities. They also had no enough knowledge and experience about action research. They had strong desire to join research training in order to conduct research effectively and systematically.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study highlights the benefits and challenges of conducting action research in selected Education Colleges in Upper Myanmar. Analyses of qualitative data collected from the study attempted to answer two research questions. Research question one examined the benefits of conducting action research perceived by teachers themselves in selected Education Colleges. When studying the responses of teachers participated in the interview process, it was found that the teachers from all Education Colleges gained many challenges by conducting action research. These benefits were improving knowledge about action research, knowing and practicing new teaching methods, understanding deeply about the subject matters, improving good relationship and having a habit of reflective practice. This finding can be supported by the research finding of Ferrance (2000, cited in Erda, 2013) which focus to improve the knowledge of action research, form of teacher professional development, focus on new teaching techniques, potential to impact school change, reflection on own practice and improved communication. In addition, one study concluded that action research efforts produced significant gains in professional development of teachers and these gains support the finding of the present study. According to Raudenheimer (2003), these gains included: improved skills and knowledge about action research, amplified motivation to develop new teaching methods, enhanced collaboration and interpersonal relationships with colleagues, and increased teacher reflection.

Research question two explored the challenges of conducting action research faced by teachers in selected Education Colleges. According to the responses of teachers, it was found that the teachers from all Education Colleges had many challenges when conducting action research. They were insufficient knowledge, insufficient time, insufficient reference materials and experts, insufficient supports and insufficient attitudes. This study is in congruence with previous study of Erda (2013) that there are many factors that hinder the teachers in conducting action research at school or classroom level. These challenges were lack of interest in the part of teachers, lack of adequate knowledge and skill, lack of support (time, financial and other resources) and supporting (training support, principals' support, colleagues' support). In addition, the research finding of Rahimi and Bigdeli (2016) supported the current study. According to their research finding, there were four challenges that hinder conducting action research; attitude toward action research, lack of fund and support, lack of cooperation among colleagues and lack of knowledge and confidence in doing action research.

Recommendations for Further Research

The present study explored the benefits and challenges of five Education College-teachers while undertaking an action research study in their respective Education Colleges. Concerning challenges, there are many challenges that the teachers faced while conducting action research. The studies done by Dereje (2011), Dame (2011) and Yohannis (2011) exposed a number of common problems that a teacher has to deal with when conducting action research. The finding of the present study were also similar the challenges that Education-College teachers encountered. Teacher researchers stated that they had no enough knowledge to conduct action research. In this condition, they needed to read and study about action research books and journals. But there were no enough research books and journals in most of the libraries of Education Colleges. That is why, the principal or the officers from Department of Higher Education should plan research trainings and seminars for Education College-teachers to conduct action research effectively and systematically. Reference research books and journals should be provided completely by the responsible persons for Education Colleges. These teachers also needed to join research trainings, seminars and conferences in order to develop more their skills and knowledge to confidently conduct an action research in the schools on their own. In addition, teacher-researchers revealed that there were insufficient financial and colleague supports when they conducted their action

researches and there was no enough time to conduct action research. Insufficient supports and enough time will be one of the reasons why teachers from Education Colleges had no attitudes and interest to conduct action research study. When teachers have the supports they need, they will be able to conduct action research systematically and effectively and produce good action research. Similarly, by giving an enough time for teaching and conducting action research, they will be able to perform their work more effectively and efficiently. By the school principals, they should hold college-level action research competition and select the appropriate persons for the national level in order to be more effective. Whatever it is, teacher-researchers from Education Colleges should overcome these challenges and difficulties with professional attitudes.

Despite the reported challenges faced by a number of teacher-researchers, they still stated the benefits of conducting action research. Most of them admitted that conducting action research could benefit them professionally and personally. These benefits were: improve knowledge about action research, know new teaching methods, understand deeply about the subject matters, improve friends and good relationship and have a habit of reflective practice. These perceived benefits as found in this study were congruent with the findings by Ferrance (2000, cited in Erba, 2013) and Raudenheimer (2003). Indeed, conducting an action research is a great opportunity for teachers to advance in their profession, improve their teaching qualifications and experiences, and adopt pedagogical changes that will have an impact on the teaching-learning process. Teachers who are engaged in action research will be able to share with their colleague teachers some best teaching and learning practices that are essentials for improving student learning and effective teaching-learning process.

Although the present study claims strengths in the presentation of teacher-researchers' challenges and benefits when conducting an action research, there are limitations with regards to participants and population. This study has only 32 teachers as participants in selected Education Colleges in Upper Myanmar. So, further studies are needed to expand this study to improve the quality of teacher education in the country. The data and the findings may not provide a sound representation of all Education College-teachers in Myanmar. Studies of teacher researchers with a different population, with a greater number of teacher-participants, and with different methodologies are recommended and suggested.

Since the researcher has shortage time and insufficient resources, only the benefits and challenges of conducting action research could be studied in this study. Thus, further research concerned with action research such as attitudes towards conducting action research in education colleges, problems teachers face when conducting action research and finding possible solution, action research as professional development, etc., should be studied. Finally, the possibilities for further studies are endless and meaningful. This study shows that there are many challenges as well as many benefits for Education-College teachers when conducting action research.

Acknowledgements

A special note of thanks goes to Dr. Saw Pyone Naing (Rector, Sagaing University of Education) Dr. Myat Myat Thaw (Pro-rector, Sagaing University of Education), Dr. Min Thein (Professor and Head, Department of English, Sagaing University of Education) and teachers from selected Education Colleges in Upper Myanmar for their time, honest, significant responses and accommodation to observe in Education Colleges.

References

- Ashenafi T. (2007). *Involvement of Preparatory School Teachers in action Research: The Case of Gelemso Schondary and Preparatory School*. Unpublished MA thesis Addis Ababa University. Retrieved July 13, 2019, from <http://localhost:80/xmlui/handle/123456789/5813>
- Burns, A. & Kurtoglu-Hooton, N. (2014). Implementing Action Research in the Modern Language Classroom. *Scottish Languages Review*, 27 (Spring/Summer), 21- 28. Retrieved June 27, 2019 from <https://www.scilt.org.uk/Portals/24pdf>
- Dame, A. (2011). Action Research in Selected Teacher Education Colleges of Oromia: Knowledge Base, Practice and Challenges. *The Ethiopian Journal of Education*, 31(2), 33-62. Retrieved June 27, 2019 from <http://ejol.aau.edu.et/index.php/EJE/article/download/197/171/>
- Dereje B. (2011). *The Status of Teacher Engagement in Action Research in High School of North Shoa*. Unpublished MA thesis Addis Ababa University. Retrieved July, 8, 2019, from https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&asvis=1&q=
- Dick, B. (2009). *Theory in Action Research*. Retrieved June 27, 2019 from <http://arj.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/7/1/5>
- Erda, B., H. (2013). *The Practices and Challenges in Conducting Action Research: The Case of Sululta Secondary School*. Published Masters of Arts Thesis. Retrieved June 27, 2019 from <http://etd.aau.edu.et/bitstream/handle/123456789/7569/Biruk%20Haile.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Gebeyew S. (2007). *College Teachers' Involvement in Action Research in Amhara Regional State*. Unpublished MA thesis Addis Ababa University. Retrieved July, 8, 2019, from <http://localhost:80/xmlui/handle/123456789/8545>
- Gilles, C., Wilson, J. & Eias, M. (2010). Sustaining Teachers' Growth and Renewal through Action Research, Introduction Programs, and Collaboration. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 37(1), 91-108. Retrieved June 27, 2019 from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ872651.pdf>
- Glathar, W. R. (2008). *Action Research as Professional Development: A Study of Two Teachers*. Published MA Theses Brigham Young University. 1627. Retrieved June 27, 2019 from <https://scholar.archive.byu.edu/etd/1627>
- Hathorn, C. & Dillon, A. M. (2008). Action Research as Professional Development: Its Role in Education Reform in the United Arab Emirates. *Issues in Educational Research*, 28 (1), 2018. Retrieved June 27, 2019 from <http://www.iier.org.au/iier28/hathorn.pdf>
- Johnson, A.P. (2002). *A Short Guide to Action Research*. Boston, USA: Pearson Education Inc. Retrieved June 27, 2019 from <https://www.amazon.com/Short-Guide-Action-Research-4th/dp/0132685868>
- Kemmis, S. and McTaggart (2000). *Participatory Action Research: Communicative Action and the public sphere*. Retrieved July, 9, 2019, from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09650790600975593>
- Neapolitan, J. E. (February 2000). What do Teachers Believe about Action Research as a Mechanism for Change? *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Orlando, FL*. Retrieved July 3, 2019, from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED438260>
- Rahimi, B and Bigdeli, R., A. (2016). *Challenges of Action Research: Insights from Language Institutes*. Retrieved July 4, 2019, from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5260/6f32f015531242e4320978b75157babb0e7.pdf>
- Raudenheimer, C. D. (April 2003). Faculty Conceptions and Practices of Action Research in the NOVA Program. *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL*. Retrieved July, 11, 2019, from <http://www.investopedia.com/>
- Ulla, M., B. (2018). Benefits and Challenges of Doing Research: Experiences from Philippine public school teachers. *Issues in Educational Research*, 28 (3), 2018. Retrieved June 27, 2019 from <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v43n1.4>
- Vula, A., E. (2010). Action Research as a Form of Teacher Professional Development. *Albania International Conference on Education (AICE)*. Retrieved June 27, 2019 from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ae6d/7d7965cdd941f6aa9b01ab8b4d4e13af7008.pdf>
- Yohannis W. (2011). *Practice and Challenges in Conducting Educational Research in selected Secondary School of Ilubabor Zone*. Unpublished MA thesis Addis Ababa University. Retrieved July 2, 2019, from https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&asvis=1&q=Practice+and+Challenges+in+Conducting+Educational+Research