

# Master Teachers' Challenges in Doing Action Research: A Case Study

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**Abstract** This case study explored the Master Teachers' challenges in doing action research. It sought to find out Master Teachers' understanding of action research, reasons why they were unable to do one, type of assistance they need and its implication to their performance rating. It utilized a semi-structured interview, and transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. Based on the findings, the Master Teachers have good understanding of the meaning of action research. However, they were unable to do an action research, because they have no time to do it; but they are willing to do it if someone guides them through the process. They realized that if they will not do an action research, it will not affect their performance rating. It is recommended that these Master Teachers should be helped in managing their time through a one-year action plan and school calendar, incorporating all DepEd activities, deadlines for submission of paperwork, schedule for classroom observations, and timeline for going through the process of action research, to ensure that they have a guide on what and when to do a specific task. This will help them manage their time and do an action research.

**Keywords** Action Research, Master Teachers, DepEd, Philippines, Case Study

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## 1. Introduction

The researcher used to teach in a public elementary school. There are five Master Teachers in the school, and only one among them was able to do an action research. The researcher decided to do a case study to identify their challenges in doing an action research.

The Department of Education (DepEd) maintains its progressive orientation by making sure that its actions are grounded on relevant evidence from research. Research

can draw lessons from past and existing programs and identify ways to enhance them. Research studies can define problems and generate possible solutions. Social experiments can compare the effects of school interventions and take out ineffective practices from promising ones [1]. To better serve its stakeholders, DepEd continuously improves itself. With this mandate, DepEd strengthened research among its members. As the biggest government agency in the country, there are numerous topics to probe in the education sector, the Department's research thrusts are geared towards supporting its mission "to protect and promote the right of every Filipino to quality, equitable, culture-based, and complete basic education." With the implementation of the Research Agenda, DepEd employees, from teachers to administrators, are encouraged to do an action research. It is already part of the Individual Performance Commitment and Review Form of Master Teachers. In the first Key Result Area (KRA), which is Content Knowledge and Pedagogy, the second objective states that a Master Teacher must have "Collaborated with colleagues in the conduct and application of research to enrich knowledge of content and pedagogy." Hence, they are required to conduct and complete an Action Research and present the study to the Division Research Committee and a Research Congress.

This study aimed to determine the Master Teachers' challenges in doing action research in Aloran Central School, Aloran District, Division of Misamis Occidental during the School Year 2019-2020. Specifically, the researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is their understanding of action research?
2. What are the reasons why they are unable to do an action research?
3. What assistance they need to do an action research?
4. What is the implication of doing action research to their performance rating?

## 2. Review of the Literature

Research is a means of determining the truth. It is defined as systematic, controlled, empirical and critical inquiries of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relations among natural phenomena. Research has three characteristics: First, research is systematic and controlled, basing its operations on the inductive-deductive model; Second, research is empirical, it turns to experience for validation; Third, research is self-correcting, for not only the scientific methods have built-in mechanisms to protect scientists from error as far as humanly possible, but also their procedures and results are open to public scrutiny by fellow professionals [2].

Action research is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice, systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research. It gives educators new opportunities to reflect on and assess their teaching. It explores and tests new ideas, methods, and materials. It assesses how effective the new approaches were. It shares feedback with fellow team members. It makes decisions about which new approaches to include in the practice [3].

Educators who are involved in doing action research find that teachers become more reflective, critical, and analytical about their own teaching behaviors in the classroom [4].

Action research facilitates teacher empowerment. Teachers are empowered when they are able to collect and use data in making informed decisions about their own classrooms. Within the classroom, empowered teachers can implement practices that best meet the needs of their learners and complement their particular teaching philosophy and instructional style. In exercising their individual talents, experiences and creative ideas within the classroom, teachers are empowered to make changes related to teaching and learning. By doing so, student achievement is enhanced and schools become more effective learning communities [3].

Moreover, as action research affords teachers opportunities to connect theory with practice, to become more effective in their practice, and to become empowered practitioners, in the study of Chou [5], the teachers have tried out teaching strategies to see what worked best with their students in their own contexts. Action research bridges the gap between theory and practice. The theoretical components supporting action research practice are used to help teachers observe and understand what is happening in the classroom. These data collected are used to understand theories and researches about good practices. Action research encourages teachers to become continuous learners within their classrooms. Teachers are further encouraged to examine the dynamics of their classrooms, reflect in the actions and interactions of learners, evaluate existing practices, and take risks in the process because of the professional, reflective stance required by practitioners engaged in the action research sequence. These specific

actions are similar to those regularly exercised by teachers on a daily basis; using a systematic, strategic action research plan which provides those daily actions with improved structure and focus [6].

Action research helps teachers and other educators discover strategies to improve teaching practices. It also requires teachers to design a study in an area of interest that they would like to carry out in their classrooms or schools. It is considered a professional development opportunity because teachers test a new instructional strategy, assess a new curriculum program, or evaluate an existing pedagogical method. In many studies, partaking in action research was found to be the motivation for positive change exemplified by teacher improvement, self-reflection, and overall learning that improves classroom practices [3].

While talking about action research for teachers' professional development, Gould [7] indicates that the research topics must be relevant and engaging to teachers. These are certainly important topics and there is likelihood that such research will have a direct and vast impact on teaching and learning.

In action research, the learners become important sources of information and data [8], the findings exemplify how teachers use action research to investigate and evaluate their work [9]. As Noddings [10] emphasized, "Caring is the very bedrock of all successful education." Teachers who believe in their students' abilities demonstrate that they care by placing the learners at the center of the educational process. Linking inquiry and learning requires that participants are responsible for helping students learn better, delivering quality education, and making improvements in their day-to-day practices. The study of Chou [6] finds these teachers have continually reflected on and refined their instructional approaches to ensure that their students are learning and that they deeply cared about the learning of each student. This result confirms what Grossman, et al [11] state, although teacher learning is important in any professional development program, improvements in student learning are necessary for the effort to be considered successful.

## 3. Methodology Research Design

This research is qualitative in nature, it is an approach used to investigate and identify the fundamental nature of human experiences from participants in the study [12]. Specifically, this qualitative research is a case study, which generally focused on examining the experiences of a population by analyzing a central case [13]. Researchers frequently use case study analysis to examine a collective entity, such as Master Teachers, as a single case by analyzing the experiences of individuals within the context of doing action research. This involves creating a descriptive analysis of the experiences that is applicable to the particular unit [13]. This research utilized case study method because the goal of the present study is to

determine broad interpretations that can be generalized to multiple experiences that do not necessarily share the same contextual qualities as the participants.

### 3.1. Research Setting

The researcher conducted the study in Aloran Central School, Aloran District, Division of Misamis Occidental, Northern Mindanao, Philippines. It has 36 teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 6. Each grade level has an average of 3 sections, and each section has an average of 35 learners. It caters to the learners of the villages in the town center area. Majority of the parents of the participants are private and government employees and some of the parents belong to the middle socio-economic status of living. Aloran Central School has monograde-type classes that cater children with multiple intelligences. It is a child-friendly school supported by competent teachers, school administrator, and stakeholders in the community.

### 3.2. Sampling

The participants in this research are the Master Teachers of Aloran Central School. There are three (3) Master Teacher I and two (2) Master Teacher II. They are assigned across all grade levels, except for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

### 3.3. Data Collection

The researcher approached the Master Teachers one by one, and requested them to participate in the research. They were informed about the rationale and purpose of the study, and set a schedule for the interview. It was emphasized that their participation was purely voluntary.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with all the participants. Each interview, conducted in English or vernacular depending on the participant's preference, ranged in length from approximately 15 to 30 minutes. All the interviews were recorded. After the interview, the answers were transcribed verbatim, analyzed, and described.

To ensure the accuracy of the transcription, the researcher frequently and critically reviewed the transcripts against the recordings. He did the transcription himself. The transcripts were printed and showed to the participants for verification and corrections purposes. This was done to ensure authenticity and validity of data. The data were then analyzed in an inductive and thematic way.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke [14], thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It organizes and describes your data set in rich detail. Employing thematic permitted "flexibility". In other words, this method can be applied

across a wide range of theoretical and epistemological approaches.

The gathered data were analyzed using the thematic analysis. The analysis usually aimed to analyze similar data on a topic and comment on it. The first step taken in the data analysis process was the data organization procedure. In organizing the data, the researcher revisited each interview and listened to each recording while reviewing the transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the data. Each participant's interview transcript was analyzed according to the data analysis procedures, which called for development of coding categories, mechanical sorting of the data, and analysis of the data within each coding category. In this respect, each participant's interview was coded separately. This was done in three steps: category definition, exemplification, and codification regulation. First, the answers to each question was separated into meaningful categories, named, and coded. In the second step, the conceptualized statements were brought together. In the third step, each statement was carefully checked to avoid repetition. In the last phase, the identified results were explained and related to each other.

### 3.5. Ethical Considerations

Before the conduct of the interview, the researcher adhered to ethical standards by obtaining informed consent from participants, to minimize the risk of harm to participants, protect and respect their anonymity, confidentiality, and elude deceptive practices. Participants were made to sign informed consent forms to ensure that they understood what it meant to participate in this particular research. Informed consent was given; thus, the participants were given the freedom to participate and the leeway to withdraw at any stage. Pseudonyms were used for the sake of confidentiality and anonymity in the reporting of the findings of the study. The researcher assured respondents of strict confidentiality of the information and data gathered and explained that only aggregated results would be made public.

## 4. Results

There were four problems identified in this study: What are the Master Teachers' understandings of action research? What are the reasons why they are unable to do an action research? What assistance they need to do an action research? And what is the implication of doing action research to their performance rating? Five themes, that answered the four problems, emerged after doing a thematic analysis:

- Action Research is done to find solutions to classroom problems;
- Master Teachers are able to identify classroom problems and its possible solution;
- Master Teachers have no time because they are busy;

- Master Teachers need someone who will guide them through the process;
- Action Research cannot affect the overall rating of a Master Teacher.

**Problem 1: What are the Master Teachers’ understandings of action research?**

Theme 1: Action Research is done to find solutions to classroom problems

These Master Teachers think that action research is done to find solutions to the problems they have encountered in the classroom. They have been teaching for several years, and they have been doing interventions to help improve the teaching-learning process. They believe that what they did was a starting point of action research. When action research was institutionalized in the Department of Education, they already have the idea that the intervention they did in their respective classrooms was the action part of the action research.

Theme 2: Master Teachers are capable of identifying classroom problems and its possible solution

The main goal of action research is to find ways to enhance the lives of children [6]. These Master Teachers have been teaching for several years (MT 1=27, MT 2=23, MT 3=25, MT 4=25, MT 5=17), so they have experienced different problems in the classroom, and have tried to resolve it. A teacher will always find ways to help the struggling learners. Among the five participants, three of them are in the primary level. Their main concern is reading. It is in the 1st to 3rd grades that pupils start to read; and not all are able to read. So, they do remediation to help the slow readers. The 1st grade Master Teacher focused on sounds during the first few months of the school year; first grade pupils are taught with the sounds first, then paired with another sound. It is in the 2nd grade that pupils are taught to read words and sentences. It is expected that a pupil can read at least simple words when he reaches 3rd grade. Cebuano is the medium of instruction in the primary level. Mathematics and Science concepts are taught in Cebuano. The receiving 4th grade Master Teacher struggled in teaching Mathematics because the pupils do not know the numbers in English.

**Problem 2: What are the reasons why they are unable to do an action research?**

Theme 3: Master Teachers have no time because they are busy

All Master Teacher participants in this study are united in saying that they have no time to do action research because they are busy doing a lot of things. Doing the Classroom Observation (CO) for teachers is the most common task they do. In the absence of the Principal, the Master Teachers (MTs) do the CO. There are 35 teachers in

the school, and there are only 5 MTs. These MTs are distributed in each grade level, except for the 6th grade MT who is also handling the 5th grade. Each MT observes at least five teachers per quarter. They leave activities to their pupils while doing the CO. The MTs in the primary level are loaded with 7 teaching loads. They are self-contained teachers, so they handle all the subjects in their classes the whole day. The 4th to 6th grades are departmental, so teachers only handle specific subjects in all sections. The 4th grade MT has 5 teaching loads and at the same time works as the MTAP Coordinator; while the 6th grade MT has 6 teaching loads and also works as Campus Journalism Adviser. Master Teachers are also expected to relieve the classes of teachers who are absent, as narrated by Participant 5 who is a 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher.

**Problem 3: What assistance they need to do an action research?**

Theme 4: Master Teachers need someone who will guide them through the process

These Master Teachers attended training and seminars about action research. All of them participated in the mentoring sessions initiated by the District Research Coordinator. During these sessions, they were taught how to go through the process of doing the action research. It was done every Saturday, and each session required them to do the parts of the research. But they were unable to finish what they have started.

Based on the interviews, they need that type of assistance, wherein someone stays with them through the process. They need guidance on what to do first, what to do next, until it’s done. They are willing to do an action research if someone will guide them. They need someone to help them go through this process as explained by Preisman [15] who offered six steps and directions for teachers to conduct action research. They are: (1) Determine what you want to improve in your classroom or school, (2) Research your idea, (3) Plan your study, (4) Put your plan into action, (5) Examine the information you collect, and (6) Decide what you will do with the new knowledge of your educational practices.

The Master Teachers were able to determine what they want to improve in the classroom: reading, comprehension, vocabulary, among others, are just few of the topics they are interested in improving. They have implemented the intervention to resolve the problem, but it is the writing part that they are struggling; and that is where they need assistance.

**Problem 4: What is the implication of doing action research to their performance rating?**

Theme 5: Action Research cannot affect the overall rating of a Master Teacher

The researcher checked the Individual Performance

Commitment and Review Form (IPCRF) of the Master Teachers for 2018-2019. All of them rated 1 for Quality; 1 for Efficiency; and 1 for Timeliness. Action Research is the main Means of Verification (MOV) for Objective 2, which indicates, collaborated with colleagues in the conduct and application of research to enrich knowledge of content and pedagogy. The MOVs for this objective are: 1. Copy of the research proposal focused on enriching knowledge of content and pedagogy; 2. Proof of participation and/or contribution to a collaborative research (e.g. e-mail, actual output submitted, terms of reference, etc.); 3. Certified completed collaborative research focused on enriching knowledge of content and pedagogy; 4. Proof of dissemination of research findings with colleagues; and 5. Proof of utilization of research findings.

Objective 2 constitutes 7.5% of the overall rating of a Master Teacher. For quality, one will get 5 if he/she conducted, completed and disseminated action research with colleagues; 4 if he/she conducted and completed action research with colleagues; 3 if he/she conducted action research with colleagues; 2 if he/she proposed action research with colleagues; and 1 if no acceptable evidence was shown. For efficiency, he/she will get 5 if he/she submitted at least 4 of the given MOVs; 4 if he/she submitted any 3 of the acceptable MOVs; 3 if he/she submitted any 2 MOVs; 2 if he/she submitted any 1 MOVs; and 1 if no acceptable evidence was shown.

These are the overall ratings of the MTs: Participant 1: 4.550, Outstanding; Participant 2: 4.250, Very Satisfactory; Participant 3: 3.963, Very Satisfactory; Participant 4: 4.325, Very Satisfactory; and Participant 5: 4.513, Outstanding.

Among the five MTs, two of them got an adjectival rating of Outstanding. The researcher went over their IPCRF, and found out that for Participant 1, among the 12 objectives with 7.5% weight, she rated 5 in 7 objectives, 4 in 4 objectives, and 1 in Objective 2. She also rated 5 in Objective 13, which is 10% of the overall.

One participant added that if she was able to do an action research, her overall rating would have been higher. Objective 2 is just a component of the overall rating, so a Master Teacher can still get a higher overall rating for as long as she performs well in the other objectives. However, they now have the idea that they may not do an action research because it won't affect the overall rating the IPCRF.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the given findings, it can be concluded that Master Teachers have good understanding of action research, and they are capable of identifying classroom problems and its solutions. These Master Teachers are unable to do action research because they are preoccupied with tasks, and doing action research is an additional burden for them. But they are willing to do it if someone guides them through the process from beginning to end.

However, they realized that not doing action research cannot affect the overall rating of a Master Teacher. In that case, it will now be a challenge to motivate them to do action research.

The following recommendations are proposed by the researcher based on the findings of the study:

1. The duties and responsibilities of a Master Teacher are already set, and we cannot ask the Department of Education to change it; but what can be done is to teach the Master Teachers how to manage their time. It is given that DepEd employees are busy, and the best remedy for this is time management.
2. As the District Research Coordinator, I will work closely with these Master Teachers. I won't be able to free them up with their tasks, but I can help them in planning their schedule and preparing the paperwork. A one-year action plan and school calendar, incorporating all DepEd activities, deadlines for the paperwork, schedule for COs and timeline for going through the process of action research, shall be laid out to ensure that they have a guide on what and when to do a specific task. This will help them manage their time.
3. A further study identifying the motivations of a teacher in doing action research shall be done. Since action research cannot affect the overall rating of a Master Teacher and it is not part of the IPCRF for Teachers, motivating them to do an action research is going to be a challenge.

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