

Empowering Teaching, Learning, and Supervision Through Coaching in Action Research

Norasmah Othman

Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

Tel: 60-3-8921-6276 E-mail: lin@ukm.edu.my

Chia Swee Yee (Corresponding author)

Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

Tel: 60-19-859-6267 E-mail: phoenixchia@hotmail.com

Received: August 10, 2014 Accepted: November 14, 2014 Published: February 1, 2015

doi:10.5296/jmr.v7i2.6931 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/jmr.v7i2.6931>

Abstract

Education plays a vital role in the economic growth and development of a country. In an education setting, the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process and supervision (TLS) is the most important determinant of a country's future success. Thus, educators should ensure that implementation of the TLS process is effective and appropriate for their students. To this end, educators should engage often in action research in order to identify their students' problems and to seek solutions to those problems. This paper discusses current issues that prompted action research in order to determine whether coaching can be applied effectively to the TLS process. The research design is action research. Four postgraduate students who were willing volunteers were selected as research participants. Methods for collecting data included interviews, checklists regarding coaching sessions, and coaching forms, such as coaching session log sheets, coaching progress log sheets, and evaluations by coachees. Discussion focuses on the GROW coaching model and how this model can be adapted to the Kolb Cycle Model in order to make the TLS process more powerful. The findings showed that the coaching strategies were successful in improving the four participants' understanding and skills pertaining to action research implementation.

Keywords: Action research, Coaching, Teaching, Learning, Supervision

1. Introduction

Education plays an important role not only in economic growth but also in the development of a country. Through a high-quality education system, education can produce knowledgeable and competent citizens that are able to compete successfully with the citizens of developed countries. Therefore, the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process and supervision (TLS) in higher education is the most important determinant of a country's future success. Thus, educators should ensure that implementation of the TLS process is effective and appropriate for their clients. However, educators are facing increasingly challenging duties and responsibilities in this new millennium. According to Othman (2011), educators are no longer focused only on teaching, but they also need to make sure that the teaching and learning process is interesting and effective. Additionally, the demands of students are more challenging than ever before. To fulfil those demands, educators are required to ensure that the TLS process is consistent with the needs of students. If educators fail to adequately plan the TLS process, they will not be able to effectively evaluate their students' strengths and weaknesses, and that will create a variety of problems. To this end, educators should often engage in action research to identify their students' problems and to seek solutions to those problems (Norasmah & Chia 2014).

Action research is necessary for individuals, groups, or organizations that want to improve their performance (Tran 2009). Action research is usually conducted in the fields of education, medicine, and security, among others. In the education field, educators can understand and improve TLS through the implementation of action research (Noraini 2010). This is because action research involves a systematic process of planning and action (Othman 2011) and is a systematic activity that can be used by educators to improve their practices (Norasmah & Chia 2014; Mohd Sahandri, Ramli dan Shaffe 2010). It is an active process that involves the planning, implementation, observation, and evaluation of an educator's actions and the impact of those actions on students. Therefore, action research can help improve the TLS process in particular and the quality of education in Malaysia in general. Action research is imperative for all educators. This can be proved by the fact that Education Planning and Research Development (EPRD) received an additional budget allocation in the amount of six-hundred-thousand in Malaysian currency to conduct action research programs. With this budget allocation, EPRD can appoint an Action Research Coordinator in each state to design, implement, and monitor action research programs in schools. (EPRD 2008; Madzniyah 2006). Similarly, the Institute of Higher Education, such as the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, is also allocating funds to conduct action research study. All of this action research study is focused on the goal of improving TLS to produce graduates who are competent (T Subahan & Kamisah 2013).

Implementation of action research was used as one of the essential criteria in the selection Excellent Teachers (Wahid Hashim 2013; Soon 2007), as well as in the promotion of educators at the university level (T Subahan & Azami 2013). In conclusion, action research has been recognized as a method to improve teaching effectiveness (Volk 2010). Through the implementation of action research, educators will be more reflective, think creatively when

planning, act as ‘trouble shooters’, and evaluate the effectiveness of their actions until there is an improvement in the problematic situation.

2. Action Research Implementation Issues

Even though there are many advantages to conducting action research, there are also many issues. This is because of the unwillingness of educators to conduct action research (Jun Zhou, 2013; Shamsahhimi 2007; Price & Valli 2005). In addition, educators are not prepared to implement action research (Shamsahhimi 2007; Nor' Azah 2007). Among the issues often raised by teachers regarding action research are time constraints and heavy workloads (Jun Zhou 2013; Othman 2011; Volk 2010; Nor' Azah 2007). Action research is not an official duty of an educator; however, it is regarded as a burden by them. According to Madzniyah (2006), action research implementation is an extra activity for educators, and they are not eager to implement it even though it could help them in their professional development. Findings (Volk 2010) also showed that lack of time to carry out action research is the most common reason given by educators for not doing so. In addition, educators have the perception that their duty is only to teach and not to conduct research (Nor' Azah 2007).

At the Higher Education Institute, action research similarly takes a long time to implement due to educators' need to focus on and monitor the action research implementation process. As was true for educators in schools, action research is hard to implement by lecturers because of their heavy workloads and other key performance indicators. The situation is exacerbated by the educators' lack of knowledge and skills regarding action research. This is supported by Nor' Azah's (2007) findings, which showed that educators' knowledge and skills regarding action research are not high, even when they have a positive attitude toward the implementation of action research. There is especially a lack of understanding of the concept of action research (Jun Zhou 2013; Othman 2011; Shamsahhimi 2007) and a lack of skills to implement action research (Nor' Azah 2007). In conjunction, the implementation of action research in schools is low. This is supported by T Subahan and Kamisah (2013), who stated that the percentage of educators who are involved in the implementation of action research is still low. Therefore, it is necessary to try to increase educators' knowledge and skills regarding the action research implementation process. In this study, coaching as a strategy was used to empower the TLS process. This is because coaching is one of the effective strategies that can improve performance in the education system (National Reading Technical Assistance Center 2010; Lofthouse, Leat & Towler 2010).

3. Coaching

Coaching is not a new approach to improving performance in the education system. However, mentoring is a commonly used approach in the Malaysian education system. Coaching not only helps to develop the skills and achievements of individuals, but it can also increase their job satisfaction and motivation (NHS Leadership Centre 2005). This is supported by Shaker (2012), who stated that effective coaching is able to provide individual job satisfaction and high motivation for whatever an individual undertakes. According to Thomas and Smith (2009), coaching can improve students' motivation and increase their understanding of how to think and learn. Coaching can help educators become more reflective and creative, improve

their work effectiveness and satisfaction, and contribute to their professional development. Thus, the researcher wants to identify effective coaching strategies for the TLS process. There are different types of coaching models that can be used for coaching sessions. However, this paper discusses only three types of coaching models related to the education field—the STRIDE model, OSCAR model, and GROW model.

3.1 STRIDE Model

The STRIDE model was developed by Will Thomas for coaches to help coachees solve problems and improve their performance. According to Thomas and Smith (2009), the STRIDE model can help coachees learn how to set goals, overcome their limitations, and move forward toward their goals. The STRIDE model is described below by means of the acronym STRIDE:

- **Strength:** Focus on the coachee's strengths.
 - **Target:** Identify the coachee's goals and motivation, which can help achieve the goals.
 - **Reality:** Review the coachee's current situation and identify any barriers to achieving goals.
- **Ideas:** Identify methods that may be used to overcome obstacles to achieving goals.
- **Decision:** Decide what to do and select the most appropriate method.
- **Evaluation:** Divided into two parts
 - **Result Evaluation:** Identify the coachee's commitment to the decision and action.
 - **Progress Evaluation:** Identify the total progress toward the achievement of goals.

According to Allison & Harbour (2009), the important aspects of this model are to focus the strength of the coachees, encourage them to identify barriers to achieving their goals, and have them determine ways to overcome those barriers. A coach's duty is always to ask open-ended questions to guide the coachee toward resolving their problems.

3.2 OSKAR Model

This model was developed by Paul Z. Jackson and Mark McKergow and discussed in a book titled, *The Solutions Focus: The SIMPLE Way to Positive Change*. This model is as follows:

- **Outcome:** Help the coachee describe the desired goals.
- **Scaling:** Help the coachee describe his or her current situation using a scale (0-10).
 - **Know-how and resources:** Coachee explains what he or she has done and the resources that have been used to reach this current situation.
 - **Affirm and action:** Help the coachee describe his or her next steps to move forward and take responsibility for his or her action plan.
 - **Review:** Establish an evaluation process to help the coachee continuously evaluate his or her current situation.

According to Jackson & McKergow (2007), this model focuses on problem-solving rather than on identifying the problem. Both coaching models, OSKAR and STRIDE, focus on the coachee's strengths and encourage the coachee to use his or her strengths to overcome

problems.

3.3 GROW Model

The GROW model was developed by the pioneer of coaching, Sir John Whitmore. This model is one of the most famous coaching models and is widely used in the field of education. It provides a simple and efficient framework for solving problems (Whitmore 2009). The GROW model consists of the four stages shown below:

- **Goal:** Identify what the coachee wants to achieve and focus on solutions rather than problems. Each coaching session must have clear and measurable goals.
- **Reality:** Help the coachee review his or her current situation because only then can the coachee determine how to move forward to achieve those goals.
- **Option:** Help the coachee explore what options are available for achieving the goals.
- **Will:** At this stage, the coachee needs to identify the best options to achieve his or her goals.

The best coaching models correspond to the requirements of the coach because no fixed coaching model is appropriate for every coaching session. This viewpoint is supported by Cross (1995) who stated that there is no coaching model that is the best for coaching. Thus, researchers chose the GROW model for this study because it is simple, practical, and easy to understand and use in coaching sessions.

4. Methodology

The design of this study is action research using a qualitative approach, and data was collected through interviews, checklists from an executed coaching session, and coaching forms (Coaching Session Log Sheet COPC 1, Coaching Progress Log Sheet COPC 2, and Evaluation by Coachee form). In addition, this study used the Kolb Cycle Model to conduct the action research (Petty 2002). Four postgraduate students from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia who were willing volunteers were selected as research participants. They were teachers who served in different schools, and all of them wanted to engage in action research as their postgraduate research projects.

5. Findings and Discussions

5.1 First Phase: Review

The researchers began by interviewing the participants in order to review and identify the strengths and weaknesses in their knowledge of the action research implementation process. The study found that the research participants' perceptions of the purpose of action research implementation was that it was for solving a problem only, and that the participants were not able to correctly list the basic stages in the action research cycle.

‘Action research is...solving problems... First, find the problem...start the literature review...related to research problems ...then planning...action...action in the class...write a report...self-reflection and taking improvement steps.’
(Participant 1)

‘According to my understanding, conduct action research just to solve a problem. Solve our problems and student’s problems... Find out problem...collect data...plan the action...doing hypothesis analysis...and see the effectiveness of the action.’ (Participant 2)

‘When facing problem...take action to solve the problem and...see the action effective or not... That is it.’ (Participant 3)

‘Self-reflection...looking for the sources of the problem...acting...evaluate the effectiveness of the action.’ (Participant 4)

Based on the findings, the participants' understanding of action research implementation is very limited. This is also supported by Nor' Azah's (2007) findings, which showed that educators' knowledge of action research is not high and that they lack an understanding of the action research concept (Jun Zhou 2013; Othman 2011; Shamsahhimi 2007). Understanding that is not in-depth will cause educators to be less than confident when conducting action research. Most of the participants' understanding about action research was only limited to identifying problems and finding ways of solving those problems. In reality, there is more to action research than just identifying problems.

5.2 Second Phase: Learn

Based on the preliminary findings, researchers conducted a literature review and identified coaching strategies that could be applied to overcome the problems identified during the first phase. Because there are many coaching-strategy models, the researchers had to find the most suitable model for this research. In this study, the researchers chose the GROW coaching model because it is simple but powerful. In addition, this model is more flexible than are the other models. According to Shaker (2012), the GROW coaching model does not require that one proceed through the stages in order; rather it allows one to move through the stages as needed. Furthermore, the GROW model is performance oriented, and the coach can always be sure that there is continuous performance by the coachee (Deans, Oakley, James & Wrigley, 2006). In short, this model serves as a map for coachees so that they know exactly where they want to go (Goal), they know where they are now (Reality), they can explore various routes (Option), and they can finally select the best route (Will) to reach their destinations. Therefore, it is well suited to the needs of researchers who coach participants regarding implementing their action research project.

5.3 Third Phase: Apply

Researchers planned how to apply the coaching and identified the GROW model as a coaching model to be used in this study. G-Goal: Determine the coaching session's goal; R-Reality: Identify the coachee's current situation; O-Option: Identify the options available to the coachee; W-Will: Choose the best action option to achieve the goal. The planning will be discussed in detail in the Fourth Phase.

5.4 Fourth Phase: Do

Based on the model chosen, researchers implemented the coaching strategies in the TLS process for four months. Coaching sessions began with appointments made by the coachee (participants), who determined the agenda to be discussed. During coaching sessions, a checklist for the GROW coaching model session was used. During the coaching process, the coach (researchers) used three forms. After completing the first coaching session, the coachee filled out the first form, COPC1, on which desired coaching session outcomes and action plans were recorded. The second form, COPC 2, was used to record the success or failure of the coachee's action. This form had to be submitted before the next coaching session started. Finally, the Evaluation by Coachee form was filled out. On this form, the coachee provided feedback regarding the coaching application in the TLS process after every two or three coaching sessions were held.

Based on the Evaluation by Coachee forms, researchers found that motivation from the coach was more beneficial or helpful to the coachee than was only guidance and encouragement. In addition, one of the participants stated that the coach acted as a reminder for her to complete every action plan on time. Researchers also interviewed coachees about their perceptions of the effectiveness of the coaching application in the TLS process. The study found that coaching strategies using the Kolb Cycle Model were successful in improving the four participants' understanding and skills regarding action research implementation. This is demonstrated by the participants' statements, which follow:

‘Become more effective at setting and reaching teaching and learning goals through action research implementation.’ (Participant 1 and 4)

‘Create and experience in doing action research. Increase understanding...in implementing the action research. Motivate me...continue in conducting action research despite many problems arising’ (Participant 2)

‘...Now I know how to implement action research...can improve my teaching and learning activities.’ (Participant 3)

These findings are supported by the NHS Leadership Center (2005) which stated that coaching can help to develop the skills and achievements of individuals. In addition, coaching can improve individuals' understanding of how to think and learn, how to be more reflective and creative, and how to improve their work effectiveness (Thomas & Smith 2009). Through coaching, researchers keep asking questions to guide participants to think about their problems, what they have, and what they need to do. Therefore, participants become more reflective and always look for solutions to a problem. Furthermore, the findings also showed that coaching can empower the TLS process and that it can also save time. This is evidenced by the following participant comments:

‘Supervision by coaching...superb and save time...because coaching session is based on my agenda...and more systematic.’ (Participant 1)

‘Coaching is the best... the best method for supervision... Help me understand clearly about how to apply / use action research in teaching and learning’ (Participant 1)

‘Time management...ok. Using coaching, easier and flexible.’ (Participant 2)

‘TLS process will be more easily understood through coaching. Save time.’ (Participant 3)

‘It is clear...compared to mentoring. Save time and more focused on my discussion topic.’ (Participant 4)

Coaching can save time because it always focuses on the coachees’ agenda or goals. Based on this, the participants’ understanding of the action research concept increases, and they become more confident in implementing action research to improve their teaching and learning practices in the classroom. Consequently, the participants’ work effectiveness and satisfaction will increase and they will further develop their professionalism.

6. Conclusions

In this study, action research has been identified as a very useful method to improve the TLS process. However, action research implementation often takes a long time to implement. For that reason, many educators are reluctant to engage in action research because of the limited time that they have. The situation is exacerbated because their level of knowledge about action research is limited. However, after being guided by coaches and using the Kolb Cycle Model as an action research model, their increased level of understanding of action research became apparent.

Acknowledgement

The authors are grateful to the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor, for giving the Strategic Action Research Grant (PTS 2013-073).

References

Allison, S., & Harbour, M. (2009). *The coaching toolkit: A practical guide for your school*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publication.

Education Planning and Research Development, EPRD. (2008). *Buku manual kajian tindakan* (3rd ed.). Kuala Lumpur: Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia.

Cross, N. (1995). Coaching effectiveness in hockey: A Scottish perspective. *Scottish Journal of Physical Education*, 23(1), 27-39.

Deans, F., Oakley, L., James, R., & Wrigley, R. (2006). Coaching and mentoring for leadership development in civil society. [Online] Available: <http://www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/371/Praxis-Paper-14-Coaching-and-Mentoring-for-Leadership-Development.pdf> (Disember 24, 2013).

Jackson, P. Z., & McKergow, M. (2007). *The solutions focus: The simple way to positive change* (2nd ed.). London: Nicholas Brealey International.

- Jun Zhou. (2013). Problems teachers face when doing action research and finding possible solutions. *Chinese Education and Society*, 45(4), 68-80. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2753/CED1061-1932450405>
- Lofthouse, R., Leat, D., & Towler, C. (2010). *Coaching for teaching and learning: A practical guide for schools*. United Kingdom: CfBT Education Trust.
- Madzniyah Md. Jaafar. (2006). Pelaksanaan kajian tindakan oleh guru di sekolah. Tesis Dr. Fal. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi.
- Mohd Sahandri Gani Hamzah, Ramli Basri, & Shaffe Mohd Daud. (2010). *Karakter guru: Ilmu diagung, guru disanjung*. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publication & Distributors Sdn. Bhd.
- National Reading Technical Assistance Center. (2010). *How does coaching affect classroom practice?* United States: RMC Research Corporation.
- NHS Leadership Centre. (2005). Literature review: Coaching effectiveness - a summary. [Online] Available: http://literacy.kent.edu/coaching/information/Research/NHS_CDWPCoachingEffectiveness.pdf (Disember 22, 2013).
- Nor' Azah Binti Ahmad Sarfan. (2007). Kesiediaan pengetahuan, kemahiran dan sikap guru perdagangan melaksanakan kajian tindakan dalam amalan pendidikan. Kertas Projek Sarjana. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Noraini Idris. (2010). *Penyelidikan dalam pendidikan*. Kuala Lumpur: McGraw Hill (Malaysia) Sdn. Bhd.
- Norasmah Othman, & Chia, S.Y. (2014). Coaching in action research. *Journal of Empirical Studies*, 1(3), 98-104.
- Othman Lebar. (2011). *Kajian tindakan dalam pendidikan: Teori dan amalan*. Perak: Penerbit Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.
- Petty, G. (2002). Improving teaching with action research. [Online] Available: <http://geoffpetty.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/ActionResearch2.doc> (November 13, 2013).
- Price, J. N., & Valli, L. (2005). Preservice teachers becoming agents of change: Pedagogical implications for action research. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 56(1), 57-72. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022487104272097>
- Shaker Mustafa. (2012). *Mudahnya coaching & mentoring: Kaedah transformasi berkesan, minda dan sikap insan cemerlang*. Kuala Lumpur: Inteam Publishing Sdn. Bhd.
- Shamsahhimi Bin Harun. (2007). Kesiediaan guru melaksanakan kajian tindakan di sebuah sekolah menengah di daerah Kinta, Perak. Tesis Sarjana. Institut Pengajian Keperguruan, Universiti Malaya.
- Soon Seng Thah. (2007). Perkembangan terkini dalam kajian tindakan. Kertas kerja Kursus

Pemantapan Jurulatih Utama Kajian Tindakan. Anjuran Unit Penyelidikan Dasar Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Pendidikan Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, Kedah, 5-8 February.

T. Subahan Mohd. Meerah & Azami Zaharim. (2013). Motivating engineering lecturers to conduct action research. [Online] Available: <http://tree.utm.my/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/MOTIVATING-ENGINEERING-LECTURE-RES-to-conduct-action-research.pdf> (February 22, 2014).

T. Subahan Mohd. Meerah, & Kamisah Othman. (2013). What is 'Action' in action research: A Malaysian exposure. *Asian Social Science*, 9(16), 148-153.

Thomas, W. & Smith, A. (2009). *Coaching solutions: Practical ways to improve performance in education* (2nd ed.). New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Tran Thi Thu Hien. (2009). Why is action research suitable for education? *VNU Journal of Science, Foreign Languages*, 25(2), 97-106.

Volk, K. S. (2010). Action research as a sustainable endeavor for teachers: Does initial training lead to further action? *Action Research*, 8(3), 315-332. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1476750309351358>

Wahid Hashim. (2013). Kajian tindakan merit guru cemerlang. [Online] Available: http://www.utusan.com.my/utusan/Pendidikan/20130701/pe_01/Kajian-tindakan-merit-guru-cemerlang (November 28, 2013).

Whitmore, J. (2009). *Coaching for performance: GROWing human potential and purpose - The principles and practice of coaching and leadership* (4th ed.). London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Copyright Disclaimer

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).