

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Action Research Practices of English as Foreign Language (EFL) Teachers at Two Ethiopian Public Universities: Implications for Personal and Professional Improvement

Firdissa Jebessa Aga

Abstract

The study intended to assess EFL teachers' actual practice of action research and the concomitant change to themselves and to their practices. Analysis of the data collected from EFL teachers and students at Jimma and Hawassa Universities using questionnaires and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide has shown that the majority of the teachers did not consistently do action research and yet those who claimed to have done highly valued the role of action research for betterment of oneself and one's professional practices. Time constraint, low or little empowerment, and commitment of the teachers with deep-rooted work cultures were rated as the major constraints for not doing action research as required. It has, therefore, been recommended that the universities should empower their respective teachers by creating enabling environments to conduct action research. Equally, the staff members themselves should take the driver's seat so as to invest their leftover time on action research regardless of the prevailing administrative support and contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The current landscape of teaching at universities demands recognition of global competitiveness and local accountability requirements whereby teachers are

expected to justify the quality and relevance of their practices. Both requirements call for conducting action research, which is primarily concerned with changing oneself and one's practices.

By implication, change is an inevitable and important part of being a teacher educator. Teachers are expected to explore their own educational values and practices so as to make informed decisions by pragmatically tuning to the routines of their day-to-day practices-being responsive to their practices, in their practices and at their practices. Action research is viewed as living, experiencing, and influencing change through the production of descriptions and explanations by individuals themselves to account for their educational practices. In educational setting, action research is important to effectively connect theory to practice, to improve educational practice, to empower teachers, and as a means for promoting professional growth (Mertler. 2009).

Though action research is a recent phenomenon in Ethiopian education system in general and in education of teachers in particular, there is a wide spread recognition of its contributions to promote teaching as a profession and teachers as professionals. Whereas there have been several studies carried out piecemeal on action research by different individuals, action research in a coordinated effort and deliberative manner in teacher education programs has come with the launching, in 2003, of *Higher Diploma Program (HDP)*, which is a practice-based training program for teacher educators at higher education institutions in Ethiopia. It has one year duration whereby teachers attend 2 hours discussion classes for 2 days per week, supplemented with additional classroom observations and secondary school visits for a week or two. To graduate, the participants are expected to complete an action research project with the aim of improving an aspect of their institution and practices (MOE 2006).

Evidently, therefore, the landscape of Ethiopian education and world professional development attest that action research is an essential undertaking in professional engagements. Accordingly, there are proliferation of a number of action research works undertaken by teacher educators, researchers, and students today than ever before. As Firdissa (2010) indicates, action research: a) has thrived as an exercise for betterment, problem resolution, connecting theory to practice, and professional growth; b) has gained popularity, credibility, visibility, recognition, acceptance, and legitimacy as research strategy with acceptable rigor; and c) has sold its remarkable features and thoroughness to sustain quality of education in general and that of teaching in particular.

Consequently, is it has been situated in its rightful prominent place for pre-and in-service teacher professional development in many countries including ours. Currently in Ethiopia, action research is taught as a course at the level of pre-service undergraduate program, and as part of research course and work in MA/MSC programs. Consequently, all level school teachers are expected to do action research as one of the many requirements for career development, and students also get acquaintance to action research practices through different mechanisms one of which is practicum placement at secondary schools (Firdissa, 2010).

In short, the role of action research in empowering teachers to learn appositely new ways of doing their businesses: to teach the right contents, using the right approaches, at the right time, has got common recognition among all stakeholders.

Statement of the Problem

As teacher educators, unlike artists, deal with human beings having different physical, physiological, intellectual, emotional, and moral makeup, they are expected to be vigilant to the day-to-day dynamic professional environment. This calls for practicing action research for the purpose of bringing betterment of one's knowledge, skills, and professional practice. The case in turn demands enabling environment, empowerment and the commitment of the teaching staff to appear as both innovators and implementers of professional improvement programs and/or approaches.

Notwithstanding the renewed recognition of the roles of action research for change and improvement, nonetheless, my formal and informal observations have taught me that teachers rarely do and value action research as it ought to be. My experiences as HDP Tutor and Leader at Addis Ababa University, and my observations through brainstorming while training instructors as part of Continuous Professional development (CPD) at Universities had put me in a doubt whether teacher educators were actually practicing action research and bringing improvement for themselves and to their practices.

By implication, teachers' participations in authentic assessment of performances, in reflecting on their practices, in collecting information, in making informed decisions, and in developing action plans so as to sustainably improve their teaching and their students' learning quality and standard seem negligible.

In most cases the reasons are attributed to:

- a. Lack of clear understanding of the salient features of action research and its distinctions from the traditional research approach;

- b. Lack of knowledge of whether what teachers scantily practice could be considered as action research or as the traditional research;
- c. Scanty support for teacher educators to conduct action research;
- d. Unavailability of the culture of reporting action research works (when and where undertaken) in many of our schools;
- e. Mistakenly thinking that basic (pure) research could bring more improvement than what action research could;
- f. Low faith in action research contribution; and
- g. Lack of reward for doing action research (Firdissa, 2010).

Virtually, failure to do the right things right by being alive in changing classroom practices for betterment leads to pitfalls that have direct and indirect repercussions for the quality of education in general and for that of teaching-learning in particular. The failure in turn morphs teachers' thinking to consider the practice of action research as nuisance, painful, boredom, and burden beyond their knowledge, skills, wills, and beliefs.

In principle, improving one's own practice is neither as sophisticated as 'rocket science', nor as watertight as 'Platonic ideals'. It may, of course, demand inquisitive qualities like 'Socratic debates' so as to generate evidence for learning, understanding, and changing the practices; or 'Aristotelian diplomacy' to create collegial environment to collaboratively work for common value ends in relation to the practices (Firdissa 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess EFL teachers' actual practice of action research and the concomitant

changes/improvements to themselves and to their practices as a result of the new knowledge gained from their research. It was founded on the premise that the power of the teachers' actual practice of action research would result in learning, understanding, and bringing change and improvement in thinking and action within the environmental context of teaching EFL. The purpose presupposes the inevitability of the research aspect of action research (learning and understanding). It, nonetheless, implies the action aspect (change) as hoped for, but not essential outcome of the current study. Even though suggesting for intervention by way of deriving some implications are a core agenda of the study, working to bring change instantaneously is beyond the scope of the current research. This is because change entails investing many talents and much effort in a specifically enabling environment and time.

Research Questions

To realize the above purpose, the study tried to answer the following questions:

1. How often do EFL teachers actually practice action research, if at all? Why?
2. Are EFL teachers who practice action research changing/improving (themselves and their practices) in light of the new knowledge gained from the research?

The two questions form a pair as they deal with the investigation of the power of the EFL teachers' action research practices to result in learning, and understanding to bring the teachers' improvement in thinking and action so as to change their practices for the better.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study employed a case study design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The subjects of the study were instructors, and students at Jimma and Hawassa Universities. Whereas systematic sampling technique was employed in selecting the two Universities, purposive and availability sampling techniques were employed in selecting the research participants.

The selection of the Universities was preceded by registering all the nine public universities in the country functioning prior 2004/05 in a descending order of their years in offering English as a field of study. Whereas the first three from the order (Addis Ababa, Haramaya, and Bahirdar Universities) had been taken for another related large-scale research, Jimma and Hawassa Universities have been selected for the current study. From the two Universities, 43 instructors (25 at Jimma and 18 at Hawassa Universities) and 150 second and third year undergraduate students (90 at Jimma and 60 at Hawassa Universities) were selected as participants of the study using purposive and availability sampling techniques respectively for the teachers and the students. The selection of the instructors was purposive because those who served for a minimum of two years at higher education institutions and who were said to have conducted action research were included. On the other hand all the available and accessible second and third year undergraduate students were included as data sources.

Data Collection Tools

Two data collection tools were utilized in the course of the research work: two kinds of close-and open-ended questionnaires (one for teachers and the other for

students); and a focused group discussion guide (for six teachers at the two universities). The data generated through these different tools were used to back up or cast new light, each onto the other.

Whereas the teachers' questionnaire and the FGD questions directly addressed EFL teachers' actual practice of action research and whether they are changing/improving (themselves and their practices) in the light of the new knowledge gained, the students' questionnaire just addressed teachers' actual practices of action research with the purpose to generate data that would complement that of the others, and also to serve for triangulation purpose.

Attempts were made to validate the findings by generating data from five members of a *validation group* through close-ended and open-ended questions. The results of the validation analysis have shown that the research procedures and the tentative findings were valid. Whereas the quantitative data have shown (strong) agreement of the group members to the statements that supported the validity of the research procedures and the tentative outcomes from the set criteria; the data generated through the open-ended questions have brought a number of valuable ideas in conformity to the claim I, as a researcher, have made.

Methods of Data Analyses

A blend of both qualitative and quantitative methods has been used following descriptive- and interpretive- approaches in analyzing the data collected for the study. These are believed to derive relevant meanings from the data. The descriptive approach deals with the exploration of extant literatures that have been highlighted in the *Background of the Study section* and examining EFL teachers' actual practice of action research based on the data

generated. Following the interpretive approach, on the other hand, attempts have been made to clarify and justify what has been said in the literatures and the data-based results on subjectively, objectively, and dialectically constructed realities.

In the course of the analyses of the data, the order of the items of the data gathering instruments was followed. It followed a sequence of EFL teachers' action research actual practices, the extent to which the teachers' classroom decisions and actions were informed by action research, frequency of the teachers' actual practice of action research and action research-related tasks, the teachers' level of following the processes of action research, and their level of changing themselves and their practices in light of the knowledge gained from the research.

In the analyses, the common contents of all the data generated by all the tools have been brought together under pertinent research questions and analyzed accordingly. The data collected by all the close-ended questions of the questionnaires were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program and quantitatively analyzed. Accordingly, assessment of the internal consistency (reliability) of the items was made to see whether the items tend to be measuring much the same thing using Cronback's Alpha Reliability. Finally, the data generated by the generally stated questions of all the tools have been merged, analyzed and interpreted qualitatively, basically to complement the quantitative results.

Analysis of the Data

A total of 43 and 150 copies of teachers' and students' questionnaires, respectively, were dispatched by hand delivery. FGDs were also conducted with six EFL teachers

at the two Universities. Of the dispatched copies of the questionnaires, 7 and 29 copies of teachers' and students', respectively, were not returned. The rest 3 and 17 copies of teachers' and students' questionnaires, respectively, were returned but they were not properly filled in and consequently they have been jettisoned. Therefore, 33 (77 %) and 104 (69%) copies of the properly filled in and returned questionnaires, respectively, from teachers and students have been analyzed.

Of the properly filled in and returned copies of the questionnaires, there were only 17% and 15% female teachers and students respectively. Male dominance was manifested in both cases. Whereas the case of the students yet needs further

investigation, that of the teachers could be due to the long-lived gender gap among employees, particularly in posts that require high-level qualification including teaching at HEIs. As the document produced by the Office of the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs (OAVPAA) (2007) presents, there were 1286 (93%) and 104 (7%) male and female full-time Ethiopian teaching staffs respectively in the year 2006/07 at Addis Ababa University. Similarly in the academic year 2008/09, the number of female academic staff in the university was very low as it comprised only 11 % (231), out of the total 2078 academic staff in the University, in contrast to an 89% (1847) of male staff population (OAVPAA, 2009).

Table 1. Staff Teaching Load in hours per week

Teaching Load	Frequency	Valid Percent
Under 6	1	3
6-12	18	58
13-19	10	32
Above 19	2	7
Total	31	100
No response	2 (6%)	
Total	33	

As can be seen from Table 1, only one respondent had below six hours teaching load per week. Of the 31 (2 were missing) staff respondents, 58%, 32%, and 7% had teaching loads of 6-12, 13-19, and above 19 credit hours per week respectively. This shows that 39% of the teachers were overloaded beyond the maximum limit, which is 12 lecture equivalent hours per week for academic staff in the academic (teaching) departments (AAU, 2007).

Those who had fewer than 6 and 6-12 teaching load per week were engaged in different routines and administrative activities. Whereas one teacher indicated that he was serving as an associate dean, two indicated that they were heads at their

respective departments. Other six teachers also pointed out that they were engaged in teaching and other routine activities including coordination of different sections in their respective faculties.

Above all, the discussants underscored the fact that the majority of the teaching staffs were involved in advising students, teaching in the extension and part time programs and engaged in other non-teaching activities in and outside their institutions to supplement their incomes. The trend, in general, shows that the staff members did not have time to conduct action research due to much teaching load and other routine activities.

Table 2. Experience in Teaching English at HEIs

Experience	Frequency	Valid Percent
Under 5	11	39
5-10	11	39
11-16	4	14
Above 16	2	7
Total	28	100
No response	5 (15%)	
Total	33	

As can be seen from Table 2, of the 28 total respondents to the specific question, 39% had fewer than five, and five to ten years of services, followed by 14% and 7% having 11-16 and above 16 years of services respectively in teaching English at HEIs. This indicates that the majority of the respondents (78%) had 10 and less than 10 years of services in teaching EFL at HEIs. This is an indication that academic staffs with relatively low teaching experiences staffed the departments of teaching English as a Foreign Language at both Universities entailing low level of action research

knowledge and skills to conduct action research.

Table 3. The Respondents' Attendance of Higher Diploma Program (HDP)

HDP attendance	Frequency	Valid Percent
Attended	17	55
Did not attend	12	39
Attending	2	6
Total	31	100.0
No response	2(6%)	
Total	33	

It can be seen from Table 3 that 55% of the respondents did attend and 6% were attending HDP during the time of data collection. On the other hand just 39% did not attend. The data show that the majority of the staff respondents attended HDP. This in turn implies that the majority of them had some awareness about action research, which is one of the main interactive Modules of HDP Portfolio. This finding has also been supported by the data from the FGDs. Though not specifically identified, the discussants indicated that the majority of the staff had attended HDP and conducted action research as a requirement for certification.

Action Research Actual Practices of EFL Teachers

Pertaining to EFL teachers' action research actual practices, 18 and 16 questions were

included in the questionnaires for teachers and students respectively. Whereas 2 questions were open-ended in the teachers' questionnaire, the Alpha Reliability for the rest 16 items is .90. In the same vein, the alpha reliability for the 16 items of that of the students is .87. Both are highly reliable. It can, therefore, be judged that the data collection procedures and the items on EFL teachers' action research actual practices were consistent in eliciting the required information.

The first question under this section deals with investigating the extent to which EFL teachers' classroom decisions and actions were informed by action research findings. The data generated by the question (both from teachers and students) have been presented in Table 4 and interpreted afterwards.

Table 4. The extent to which EFL Teachers' Classroom Decisions and Actions were informed by Action Research findings

	Frequency		Valid Percent	
	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students
Very little	8	13	25	14
Little	6	33	19	35
Undecided	7	20	22	21
Greatly	11	25	34	26
Very Greatly	-	4	-	4
Total	32	95	100	100
Missing system	1	9		
Total	33	104		

Table 4 shows that 34% of the teacher respondents indicated that their EFL classroom decisions and actions were greatly informed by action research findings. Whereas 22% of them hesitated to say any, 19% of them rated their classroom decisions and actions to be little informed by action research findings. The same Table further shows that 35%, 26%, and 21% of the student respondents rated the intent of the same question as *little*, *greatly* and *undecided* respectively. Whereas no one from the teacher respondents chose the alternative 'very greatly', 4% of the students chose this particular alternative to the question.

It has also been learnt from descriptive analyses that the average means for the

teachers' and students' scores are 2.66 (SD = 1.20) and 2.73 (SD =1.13) respectively. This also shows that the average means for both types of the respondents on the specific issue fall between 'undecided' and 'little' as the questions that generated the data were rated on a scale of 1-5, where 5 = very greatly, 4 = greatly, 3 = undecided, 2 = little, and 1 = very little. By all means, therefore, EFL teachers' classroom decisions and actions were not as such informed by action research findings.

Questions on the frequency of EFL teachers' actual practice of action research were also presented to both teacher and student respondents. Their responses have been presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Frequency of EFL Teachers' Actual Practice of Action Research

Respondents	N	\bar{x}	SD
Students	96	1.99	0.64
Teachers	32	1.78	0.55

It has been shown in Table 5 that the mean averages for the student and teacher respondents are 1.99 (SD = 0.64) and 1.78 (SD = 0.55) respectively. This indicates that the mean averages for both types of respondents fall between *hardly ever* and *sometimes* as the questions that generated the data were rated as 4 (always), 3 (most of the time), 2 (sometimes), and 1 (hardly ever). The result implies that the teachers did not do action research most of the time and always as the mean averages for both types of respondents fall below *sometimes*.

The data from discussants also concur with this finding. It was learnt that whereas EFL teachers were not regularly practicing action research in general terms, the situation was said to be changing due to HDP initiatives whereby all teacher educators were required to practice action research as one of the requirements to qualify in teacher education through the program.

Furthermore, both teacher and student respondents were requested to list down the reasons for EFL teachers' observed practices (for doing and not doing action research). Accordingly, they enumerated a number of reasons for their positive as well as negative responses. Those who rated EFL teachers' actual practice of action research positively had attributed their reasons to the inherent roles of action research for enhancing quality. Among others, they indicated: a) action research informs EFL teachers about the solutions to immediate problems in their respective classrooms; b) it enables EFL teachers to use innovative methods than sticking to textbook theories and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach; and c) it enhances the quality of EFL teaching and learning process.

On the other hand, those who underrated EFL teachers' actual practices of action research enumerated a number of reasons. The reasons they listed were not different from what the discussants raised as the hindering factors to do so. Consequently, the rationales for EFL teachers' not consistently doing action research have been summarized hereunder in terms of their significance and followed by overall brief discussions.

I. Time Constraint/ Time Pressure

The following reasons and issues were listed in relation to time constraint/pressure.

- a. EFL teachers were engaged in various routine responsibilities/activities like too much involvement in committee work, meetings, advising students and others;
- b. Excess teaching load;
- c. Scheduling problem, fixed and limited credit hours and time allotment within the semester;
- d. Using leftover time for income generating (earning) as the living standard is skyrocketing;
- e. Too much time is required to cover the course contents; and
- f. Lack of proper planning.

In addition to the above, one from among the teacher respondents indicated: "I have been busy with my own administrative work". This means he did not give due attention to practicing action research as he had been occupied by the administrative routine activities he was engaged in.

II. Low Enabling Environment and Support

- a. Paucity of finance/fund: i) to carry out action research, ii) for incentive purpose, and iii) for publishing the research outcomes;

- b. Shortage of materials including texts, stationery, etc;
- c. Low motivation and incentive systems for good practices;
- d. Large class size;
- e. The fact that poorly prepared students joined the teaching stream in general and DFLL in particular, discouraged the teachers to carry out another burden in addition to supporting the students;
- f. Low involvement of students;
- g. Lack of favorable work condition to conduct action research;
- h. Lack of sample action research papers to read; and
- i. Low collaborative work and collegial culture among staff members.

III. Deep-rooted Traditions/Trends

- a. Inconvenience and status quo;
- b. Since their findings of practitioners in most cases do not lead to action;
- c. The belief and confidence teachers have to bring change;
- d. Administrative lead, staff led research endeavors; and
- e. The tendency to rely on what is known through belief and customary manner.

In addition to the above, one teacher respondent indicated: “[t]he culture of conducting action research is not common in my university in particular and in other Ethiopian HEIs in general.”

It can be discerned from the lists that time constraint, low enabling environment, and the deep-rooted traditions (orderly) were among the factors that hindered EFL teachers to consistently do action research. Particularly, time constraint was the most single constraint to do action research. It was due to different reasons one of which was staff members’ involvement in routine works at their respective departments/faculties and in other teaching and

nonteaching institutes. The issue of low enabling environments for EFL teachers to do action research was another common concern that the discussants identified.

As the mechanism to overcome the hindering factors enumerated so far, the participants forwarded a number of points, some of which are listed hereunder:

- Overcoming time pressure/constraint by reducing workload (particularly routine work) of academic staff through opening staff-leadership negotiation, and enabling staff members themselves to restrain from being involved in too much committee and bureaucratic works that jeopardize their teaching and research time, and by increasing teachers’ salary that may commensurate with the skyrocketing living standard;
- Redesigning EFL courses in a way that they enable instructors to do action research, among others, by balancing methods and contents;
- Availing resources including enough finance for action research, and also use Teacher development (TDP) fund and/or other sources for the purpose of action research;
- Motivating staff members to do action research; among others, by supporting them to disseminate their findings, giving incentives and /or rewards for action research work, and creating enabling environment for self-reflection;
- admitting students with high grade in college entrance examinations to teaching faculties;
- Enhancing and strengthening collaborative and collegial work cultures and spirits among staffs;
- Empowering teachers in all aspects (beyond administratively led research engagements) so that they can acquire

commitment and build confidence to engage in action research and self-reflection activities.

Frequency of EFL teachers' practicing action research-related tasks was examined

posing seven questions to be rated on a scale of 1-3, where 3 = frequently, 2 = sometimes, and 1 = seldom. The results of descriptive analysis have been presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Frequency of EFL Teachers Practicing Action Research-related Tasks

FEL Teachers:	Teachers			Students		
	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD
Research their classroom practices to bring improvement to student learning	32	1.72	0.813	97	1.84	0.640
Challenge and reexamine taken-for-granted EFL teaching approaches	32	1.91	0.588	98	1.92	0.668
Connect their teaching practice to research	32	1.78	0.608	97	1.85	0.727
Assess the effectiveness of their modules/teaching materials	31	2.32	0.791	96	1.97	0.746
Examine their success/failure in implementing CLT	32	2.16	0.723	98	1.95	0.765
Identify learners' communicative needs and work for appropriate actions	32	2.44	0.669	97	1.94	0.704
Strive to bring improvement to their practices in direction of their own values	32	2.41	0.798	94	2.15	0.747

As can be seen from Table 6, there are mixed results by the respondents on the frequency of EFL teachers practicing action research-related tasks. Whereas the trend of the average means for the student respondents (except one) fall between 'sometimes' and 'seldom', that of the teachers' fall above 'sometimes' for four questions and between 'sometimes' and 'seldom' for three questions. In all cases the standard deviations for both types of respondents and the questions are less than one, entailing that the scores are close to their respective means.

Table 7. EFL Teachers' Level of following the Processes of Action Research

FEL Teachers level of:	Teachers			Students		
	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD
Identifying an issue or a problem for investigation	32	2.31	0.78	95	1.97	0.67
Seeking knowledge	32	2.56	0.72	98	2.30	0.71
Planning an action	32	2.34	0.75	97	2.06	0.70
Implementing the action	32	2.28	0.73	98	1.80	0.70
Observing the action	32	2.22	0.71	97	2.01	0.65
Reflecting on their observations	32	2.22	0.75	96	1.82	0.73
Revising the plan	32	2.31	0.69	97	1.78	0.67

The questions that generated the data in Table 7 were rated on a scale of 1-3, whereby 1, 2 and 3 stand respectively for seldom, sometimes and frequently. It can, therefore, be judged from the results in the Table that EFL teachers seemed to frequently seek knowledge ($\bar{x} = 2.56$, $SD = 0.72$), plan an action ($\bar{x} = 2.34$, $SD = 0.75$), and identify an issue or a problem for investigation ($\bar{x} = 2.31$, $SD = 0.78$), and revise plans ($\bar{x} = 2.31$, $SD = 0.69$). For the teacher respondents, the means for all the questions are above 2. That means they claimed to have followed the processes of action research to learn and improve their practices. On the other hand, whereas four average means of the student respondents fall between 'sometimes' and 'seldom', three is above 'sometimes'.

Overall, nonetheless, the means for both types of respondents are above the average indicating that the teachers followed the processes of action research to learn and improve their practices. This finding provokes an issue of further concern. This is because it does not align with the previous findings that gainsaid EFL teachers' practice of action research. The respondents might have considered the steps of the questions on the issue as steps of *problem solving* whereby they might be expected to engage in their day-to-day personal as well as professional endeavors.

Finally, the respondents enumerated some additional information regarding EFL teachers' action research actual practices. It has been learnt that EFL teachers' action research practice was limited and was not that much developed due to low-level empowerment and commitment of the teachers themselves. The qualitative data also capitalized the fact that due attention was not given to support and empower EFL teachers to practice action research.

EFL Teachers' Change as a result of their Action Research

Thirteen questions pertaining to EFL teachers' level of change/improvement in the light of the new knowledge gained from their action research were included in the teachers' questionnaire. This particular section was answered only by those who claimed to have some sort of acquaintance to action research through practicing and/or participating training programs related to action research. Accordingly, 21 (64% of the total respondents) reacted to this part of the questionnaire and their responses have been presented in Table 8.

The Alpha reliability for these items is 0.95, which is very high from statistical point of view. This is because "the higher the coefficient, the more reliable the procedure is" (Selinger & Shahomy, 2007: 187). It can, therefore, be judged that the data collection procedure and the items on EFL teachers' level of change/improvement in the light of the new knowledge gained from their action research were consistent in eliciting the required information.

Table 8. EFL Teachers' level of Change due to their Action Research

EFL teachers' Action Research knowledge helped them to:	N	\bar{X}	SD
Learn and understand their EFL classroom practices	21	3.86	1.20
Improve their EFL classroom practices.	21	3.90	0.99
Become more efficient in helping learners to make effective use of the English language for academic purposes.	21	3.95	1.16
Inform their EFL classroom practices with authentic actions.	20	3.65	1.14
Tailor their teaching to the needs of their learners.	20	3.90	0.85
Become critical of their own implicit theories related to EFL.	21	4.38	0.87
Make their personal epistemologies of their own classroom practices public.	21	3.76	0.94
Shape and guide what they want/decide to do in their classrooms.	21	4.10	0.89
Take actions that lead to a resolution of practical problems in their classrooms.	21	3.95	0.97
Evaluate their action and its consequences against the insights or new perspectives they have developed.	21	3.90	0.89
Develop enhanced capacities to adapt CLT to their classroom realities.	21	4.10	0.83
Deal with the EFL classroom reality in a better way.	21	4.10	0.99
Improve the quality of EFL classroom practices.	20	4.35	0.93

As can be seen from Table 8, EFL teachers' action research knowledge, in most cases, helped them greatly in bringing change and improvement of themselves and their practices. The questions that generated the data in Table 8 were rated on a scale of 1-5, where 5 = very greatly, 4 = greatly, 3 = medium, 2 = little, and 1 = very little.

It has, therefore, be learnt from the results that all the average means fall above 'medium'. More specifically, EFL teachers' action research knowledge greatly helped them to: a) become critical of their own implicit theories related to EFL ($\bar{x} = 4.38$, $SD = 0.87$); b) improve the quality of EFL classroom practices ($\bar{x} = 4.35$, $SD = 0.93$); c) develop enhanced capacities to adapt CLT to their classroom realities ($\bar{x} = 4.10$, $SD = 0.83$); d) deal with the EFL classroom reality in a better way ($\bar{x} = 4.10$, $SD = 0.99$), and e) shape and guide what they want/decide to do in their classroom ($\bar{x} = 4.10$, $SD = 0.89$).

Finally, the data from the open-ended questions of the teachers' questionnaire and from FGDs indicated that those who did action research could mold their teaching practices to the different classroom needs and settings; revise modules and suggested sequences in presenting and cutting out some redundant details from the contents of their teaching; capitalize the role of action research knowledge to changing practice; and evaluate the modules and devise ways of solving some classroom problems.

DISCUSSIONS

The results of the data analysis show that EFL teachers' classroom decisions and actions were not that much informed by action research findings. This is because

the teachers were said to practice action research just sporadically. Specifically, the result on the frequency of EFL teachers' actual practice of action research has given mean averages of 1.99 ($SD = 0.64$) and 1.78 ($SD = 0.55$) respectively for the student and the teacher respondents. This indicates that the mean averages for both types of respondents fall between *hardly ever* and *sometimes* as the questions that generated the data were rated as 4 (always), 3 (most of the time), 2 (sometimes), and 1 (hardly ever). The result implies that the teachers did not do action research most of the time and always as the mean averages for both types of respondents fall below *sometimes*. Whereas those who rated EFL teachers' actual practice of action research positively had attributed their reasons to the inherent roles of action research for personal developments and professional improvements; those who underrated EFL teachers' actual practices of action research attributed the reason to: time constraint; low or little teacher empowerment and commitment; low or little enabling environment for the teachers and deep-rooted work cultures, the cumulative of which diminished teacher stamina and sense of accountable to truth and to others. A similar study by Firdissa (2009) has attributed the reasons for teachers' losing commitment to conduct action research to: a) time constraint; b) low support and empowerment; c) lack of knowledge and capacity to do so; d) lack of awareness of its importance; e) negligence of the instructors; and f) paucity of budget and other resources. Furthermore, Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck (1994) indicate that teachers in HEI often have no enough time to fulfill all their obligations.

The case in point is in contrary to demand of the current day professional environment, which requires teacher educator to base their classroom decisions

and actions on action research findings. Interestingly, nonetheless, the teachers' action research knowledge (of those who practiced) has been valued and acknowledged as having paramount relevance in changing practices and the practitioners themselves and consequently, it was suggested not be compromised but must be a duty of everyone to be professionals.

More specifically, the teachers' action research knowledge greatly helped them to: a) become critical of their own implicit theories related to EFL ($\bar{x} = 4.38$, $SD = 0.87$); b) improve the quality of EFL classroom practices ($\bar{x} = 4.35$, $SD = 0.93$); c) develop enhanced capacities to adapt CLT to their classroom realities ($\bar{x} = 4.10$, $SD = 0.83$); d) deal with the EFL classroom reality in a better way ($\bar{x} = 4.10$, $SD = 0.99$), and e) shape and guide what they want/decide to do in their classroom ($\bar{x} = 4.10$, $SD = 0.89$). As a result, the teachers who did action research could morph their teaching practices to the different classroom needs and settings; revise modules and suggest sequences in presenting and cutting out redundant details from the contents of their teaching; capitalize the role of action research knowledge to changing practice; and evaluate the modules and devise ways of solving some classroom problems.

CONCLUSIONS

This study intended to explore the extent to which EFL teachers practiced action research to bring understanding and betterment of themselves and their practices. The intent is based on the conviction that practicing action research and sustaining the quality of teaching demands empowerment and commitment

of the frontline implementers, the teaching staffs. Teachers should be considered as both innovators and implementers; the ones who initiate, plan, and implement professional improvement innovations and/or reforms-valuing commitment, openness, a quest for truth and fidelity for authentic policies and guidelines related to their practices.

The findings, nonetheless, proved that the teachers' classroom decisions and actions were rarely informed by findings and/or evidences as most of the teachers did not consistently do action research. Even those who claimed to have done were said to do so just sometimes. Consequently, the teachers' action research practice was limited and was not that much developed and the teachers' classroom decisions and actions were not supported by evidence-based judgments. The case implies that there was low or little teacher empowerment (in terms of allotting time, support, and leeway on course or module contents) to conduct action research; and additional workload as teachers were engaged in so many commitments other than teaching and research. Particularly, time was not set aside for research activities or to engage in meaningful self-evaluation. Consequently, the teachers relied just on superficial, easily observed but hardly lead to improvement of oneself and one's practice. In addressing the impact of additional workload, Yates (2000) cites the case of Hong Kong that *teachers' heavy workloads* to be among the issues influencing the success of action research projects in promoting changes in classroom practice. On top of this, the level of the teachers' time management skills, attitude, and work culture also matter.

The fact that EFL teachers' (who did action research) have highly valued the roles and purposes of action research to bring

betterment of language teaching, and the teachers themselves entails the features of 'pragmatic validity', which deals with: a) determination of the evidence of the validity of new knowledge to cause change in practice; b) authenticity of the new knowledge to lead to new actions and patterns of activity and confirmed by participants; and c) the notion that action speaks louder than words (Firdissa, 2010).

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the current day professional environment demands learning new ways of doing one's own practices, doing action research and informing classroom decisions by the concomitant results are becoming mandatory for being a teacher educator. On the basis of the conclusions made so far, the following recommendations have been forwarded.

1. Universities should: a) empower instructors to conduct action research, among others by giving enough time, support (such as disseminating their action research findings, rewarding action research work/incentivizing, creating enabling environment for self-reflection), training; and special recognitions to engage in action research, and b) enhance and strengthen collaborative and collegial work cultures and spirits among staffs so that instructors think and act in supportive and enabling work environment to investigate their own practices for personal and professional betterment.
2. The staff members themselves should: a) take initiatives to open forums for negotiating with their respective university leadership on load allotment with the purpose of engaging in action research; and b) set aside time to conduct action research by being

restrained from involving in too many commitments that jeopardize their teaching and research time. Equally, as waiting an ideal condition is waiting for ever, they should be committed to invest their leftover time on action research regardless of the support available and prevailing environmental conditions.

3. The EFL courses and/or modules should be designed in a way that they enable instructors to do action research, among others, by balancing methods and contents.

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