

INDONESIAN EFL TEACHERS ENGAGEMENT IN CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH

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Abstract: *This study aims to investigate English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' engagement in Classroom Action Research (CAR) with an emphasis on defining levels of teacher involvement, benefits gained in CAR engagements and the main challenges which inhibit practicing CAR. 54 teachers from several Junior Secondary Schools in Palu participated in this mixed-method study by filling out an online questionnaire survey, followed by two Zoom-meeting interviews with 11 of the participating teachers. The present study found that the teachers have engaged in CAR, and some others never practise it due to personal and contextual challenges. Additionally, CAR helps teachers to reflect on their practices, develops their knowledge and skills about research and CAR report writing, and improves pedagogical practices. However, considerable challenges were encountered by teachers which apparently subdued their motivation to continue engaging in CAR projects. Teachers' workload had been identified as the main challenge, compounded with limited knowledge of doing CAR and writing its report, lack of incentive support and collaborators, and limited school facilities. The study implication to all-stakeholders of teacher professional development is discussed.*

Keywords: *CAR, Indonesian EFL teachers, Teacher Professional Development*

Introduction

Classroom Action research (CAR) has been well received as a tool for promoting teachers to be reflective teachers (Richards & Farrell, 2005). In CAR engagement, teachers constantly examine their practices, and seek classroom's practices solutions for the sake of students' learning achievement. In addition, CAR facilitates teachers' professional growth through learning from and systematically observing their teaching practice (Atay, 2008). Given these facts, it is no wonder that CAR is deemed as one of the most effective professional development (PD) tools for teachers (Atay, 2008; Burns & Rochsantiningasih, 2006).

In the Indonesian context, school teachers, particularly state-owned government teachers, are encouraged to conduct research in the classroom. CAR apparently is a preferable type of classroom research used by teachers to manage their teaching practices. It is further embedded as a part of professional development in order to authenticate their practise as professional teachers. Additionally, CAR is included in the promotion mechanism as teachers need to include their CAR publications (report or article) as a portion of requirements to gain higher career status. While this mechanism could motivate teachers to engage in CAR, it may also discourage them to do it when they are not supported with sufficient knowledge and skills through continous training/workshops.

Although CAR is relatively well-known in the Indonesian education system, as mentioned above, there is still a dearth of research exploring teachers' engagement in CAR (e.g., Burns & Rochsantiningasih, 2006; Mukrim, 2017, Puspitasari et al., 2021; Tursini, 2019; Wulandari, 2019). Conducting these types of studies are important in order to shed a light on perception by teachers about CAR, particularly their challenges in CAR. These studies are definitely beneficial to provide inputs for all stake-holders in supporting teachers to be involved in CAR. This curent study attempts to address this gap by investigating EFL teachers' CAR activities emphasizing level of engagement, benefits gained and main challenges which inhibited practicing CAR. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do junior secondary EFL teachers in Palu engage in CAR?
2. What are the benefits these teachers gain when practising CAR?
3. What are the main challenges these teachers experience which apparently discourage them from practising CAR?

Literature Review

CAR as a Means of Reflection

Classroom Action Research (CAR) as a PD tool in the Indonesian education context, as stated in CAR modules for English teachers, aims to promote teachers to be reflective on their teaching practices (e.g., Latief, 2009). Mertler (2009) argues that reflection has become a crucial part of AR as it relates to examining teachers' own practice. Richards and Farrell (2005: 7) defines reflection as "the process of critical examination of experiences, a process that can lead to a better understanding of one's practices and routines". Mann and Walsh (2017) maintain that teachers' reflection can be promoted through engagement in AR. According to Burns (1999), reflection in AR should be present in any stage of the inquiry process, although she suggests the reflection stage only occurs at the end of AR cycle.

In terms of the stages of AR, there are at least four spiral steps of AR. These are: (i) identifying problems, issues or puzzles and collecting data, (ii) developing action to address the issue, (iii)

observing the effects of action, and (iv) reflecting on the action and if necessary proceeding to the next action until the goal of improvement has been achieved (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Benefits and Challenges of CAR Engagement

Several studies have reported the benefits and challenges of CAR engagement experienced by EFL teachers. In terms of benefits, CAR project facilitates teachers to:

- a. Increase awareness of AR engagement and deepen their understanding of classroom practice (Kayaoglu, 2015),
- b. Enhance pedagogical skill, increase class management, and have a more positive view on teaching technique adopted in the classroom (Kiş, 2014),
- c. Develop awareness of PD engagement, self improvement, sense of autonomy, and increase new knowledge (Burns & Rochsantiningih, 2006),
- d. Be more reflective on their teaching learning practice and empower them to be researchers in their own classroom (Tursini, 2019),
- e. Increase awareness of students' needs; provide a framework to reflect on practices; and increase sense of leadership (Mehrani, 2017).

Despite those benefits, CAR teachers, as reported, experienced various types of challenges:

- a. such as the time issue, lack of specific research knowledge, administrative restrictions, and a lack of collaboration (Al-Balushi, 2022; Mehrani, 2017),
- b. a lack of motivation (Al-Balushi, 2022; Rainey, 2000; Volk, 2009),
- c. lack of school support (Kitchen & Jeurissen, 2006; Negi, 2016), and
- d. personal issues, such as family commitments (Burns & Rochsantiningih, 2006).

While there has been research exploring EFL teachers' engagement in CAR, as presented above, the topic is still understudied. In the context of Palu, specifically, a small-scale study by Mukrim (2012) has only reported 5 senior high school EFL teachers' engagement in CAR. This present study fills this gap by exploring junior secondary EFL teachers' involvement in CAR in the context of Palu city, Central Sulawesi.

Methods

This current study adopts mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research. This type of research provides comprehensive, complete, balanced, and useful information (Brown, 2014). Either *One-after-the-other* design proposed by Flick (2014) or, *sequential explanatory design* (Creswel, 2012) was adopted in which the research embarked with distributing questionnaires, followed by interviewing participants of the study. In this regard, the interview data refined, complemented, or corroborate the results of the questionnaire.

The invitation to participate was circulated through a WhatsApp group of MGMP forum (teacher's support group of secondary English teachers), assisted by the head of MGMP. Out of 102 teachers, 54 EFL teachers (7 male and 47 females), specifically the government teachers, from several Junior Secondary Schools in Palu were keen on participating in this study.

Data were collected in two ways: using an online questionnaire and two interviews via Zoom meetings. The former one used a Google online-form survey, digitally distributed to the teachers along with the invitation to participate in the study as mentioned above. The questionnaire had two types of questions: closed questions and open ones. For the former, 54 participants responded by choosing four options (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly

disagree), while for the latter one, responses were provided by short answers. The questionnaire data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics, by counting the frequency and percentages (Roever & Phakiti, 2017).

Following this, the teachers who agreed to participate in the interview, as they wrote in the questionnaire form, were contacted via Whatsapp messages. Eleven teachers out the 22 participating teachers were able to attend online interview via Zoom. Out of these, eight teachers had engaged in CAR, and three of them (2 veteran teachers) never practised CAR.

Two interview meetings were set up with the teachers; seven teachers attended the first meeting, followed by four teachers at the second one. Each meeting took about 25-40 minutes, and were led by the first author. The interview data were analyzed by finding categories resultant from the teachers' responses (Richards, 2003).

Findings And Discussion

In this section, findings of the study are presented and will be followed by discussing them. They are further presented in the following sub-sections.

Findings

This section describes the results of the study to answer the research questions of this study. It begins with presenting the teachers' involvement in CAR, followed by delineating gained benefits of practicing CAR for teachers, and concludes by displaying challenges experienced by teachers.

Teachers' Involvement in CAR

The questionnaire results of this study, as shown in Table 1, suggest the level of teachers' involvement in CAR was at a moderate level. The following details describe the teachers' engagement.

Table 1. Teachers' involvement in CAR

| Statements | Teachers' responses | | | |
|---|---------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Strongly agree (%) | Agree (%) | Disagree (%) | Strongly disagree (%) |
| I engage in CAR around one to five times during my teaching career. | 7.5 | 52.8 | 37.7 | 1.9 |
| I engage in CAR around more than five times during my teaching career. | 29.4 | 3.9 | 64.7 | 2 |
| I never engage in CAR during my teaching career. | 0 | 33.3 | 57.4 | 9.3 |
| I engage in CAR and report it in the form of scientific writing | 3.8 | 53.8 | 40.4 | 1.9 |
| I engage in CAR, and only write its report, present it at school with colleagues, and save it at library. | 5.8 | 50 | 44.2 | 0 |
| I engage in CAR, but choose not to report it. | 3.8 | 47.2 | 45.3 | 3.8 |
| I engage in CAR, but its scientific writing report is made by others for me | 1.9 | 26.4 | 58.5 | 13.2 |
| N = 54 | | | | |

Table 1 suggests around 60% teachers have been involved in CAR, and the rest of them did not engage with it. A similar figure also shows that they engaged CAR from one to five times during their teaching career, and only around 30% of them conducted it more than five times. This fact may indicate that there are still many teachers encountering hindrances for involvement with CAR. The reasons for not doing it will be presented at the end of this section.

Different figures are shown with regard to teacher involvement in CAR and how their CAR projects were reported. Around 54% of study cases made project reports in a scientific writing format. Half of them preferred to disseminate it at the school level. Similarly, around 50% of cases opted not to report their projects, and nearly 30% of reporting teachers had others write their CAR project report. This result may indicate CAR project dissemination by some teachers is deemed a difficult endeavour. This fact was voiced by several teachers during interview. They revealed that disseminating CAR through a scientific writing model, as suggested by the government, was a huge challenge for them. In addition, interview data suggest some other challenges related with: lack of time due to workload, limited knowledge and skill of scientific writing, report format, and the absence of mentors.

While the results of Table 1 above show there was a relatively large number of CAR practicing teachers (>60%), interview data from 11 teachers suggest a contrasting fact. Four teachers revealed a prevalent practice among a vast majority of teachers (including English teachers) of not strictly adhering to CAR practice. Instead, to satisfy a CAR report requirement to gain professional promotion, the report preparation has been accommodated by paying other parties to write them. (see also Table 2). Even worst, one female teacher asserted that she did not even do an AR project in the classroom, but purchased two reports of CAR made by others. For this, she needed to pay an undisclosed amount of money (personal communication). In line with this, Table 2 displays around 80% of teachers, out of 18 teachers who never engage in CAR, admitted that they did not author their CAR reports.

Table 2 below further details the reasons for not engaging in CAR by 18 teachers (33.3%) as presented in Table 1.

Table 2. Teachers' reasons for not engaging in CAR

| Statements | Teachers' responses | | | |
|---|---------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Strongly agree (%) | Agree (%) | Disagree (%) | Strongly disagree (%) |
| I never engage in CAR because I have not attended any CAR training or workshop. | 11.11 | 77.78 | 11 | 0 |
| I never engage in CAR because I do not understand it well enough to apply it in the classroom, although I have attended its training. | 11.11 | 88.89 | 0 | 0 |
| I never engage in CAR due to time constraint. | 16.67 | 72.77 | 11.11 | 0 |
| I never engage in CAR because there are no colleagues who can collaborate with me. | 5.56 | 72.22 | 16.67 | 5.56 |
| I never engage in CAR because there are no supports from schools | 0 | 61.11 | 27.78 | 11.11 |

| | | | | |
|---|------|-------|-------|-------|
| regarding incentives for doing CAR and writing its report. | | | | |
| I never engage in CAR because the government requires CAR results written in the form of scientific writing, which is difficult for me to do. | 5.56 | 55.56 | 33.33 | 0 |
| I never engage in CAR because my need about scientific report writing has been accommodated by others with payment. | 0 | 83.3 | 5.56 | 11.11 |
| N = 18 | | | | |

Based on the data in the above table, it can be inferred there are five factors which mainly contributed to CAR disengagement by teachers in this study: (1) limited knowledge and skill of AR due to the absence of training/workshop; (2) time constraint; (3) no availability of colleague collaborators; (4) the option to purchase a CAR report used for job promotion purposes.

Benefits of engaging in CAR

This section delineates the benefits gained by those teachers who engaged in CAR based on responses from open questions of the questionnaire and from the interviews. The former will be firstly presented and will be followed by the latter.

The data from the questionnaire as displayed in Table 3 suggest that there are five aspects of benefit gained by the teachers. Those benefits are related with: (1) teachers' self-development in the aspect of pedagogy and CAR; (2) helping teachers to solve their students' learning issues; (3) promoting collaboration among teachers; (4) self-efficacy development; and, (5) becoming more reflective with their practice. The responses of teachers can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Benefits of CAR engagement

| Benefits | Frequency | Responses |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|--|
| Self-Development | 9 | <p><i>"Enabling me to develop myself in learning innovation"</i></p> <p><i>"My knowledge of CAR increases"</i></p> <p><i>"I can find ways and innovatif technique for my students' learning problems"</i></p> <p><i>"Very beneficial for the development of education quality and our status as educators"</i></p> <p><i>"Changing me in planning and executing the learning process"</i></p> <p><i>"Increasing my skill in writing research report"</i></p> <p><i>"Providing new insight for me as a teacher"</i></p> |
| Solving students' learning problems | 5 | <p><i>"I am able to know my students' ability in the learning process."</i></p> <p><i>"I am able to find out the right teaching techniques based on my students' specific learning issue"</i></p> <p><i>"I can be innovative in teaching as well as obtaining new knowledge and skills that can be implemented to my students"</i></p> |

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Developing self efficacy | 1 | <i>“Feeling satiesfied and proud when my CAR project gets recognition, and it brings benefits for other teachers who adopt it”</i> |
| Developing self-reflective | 5 | <i>“I am able to identify my weakness in teaching, and to know whether one method is effective or not in my CAR project”. “It makes me be cognizant to the learning process and challenges encountered” “enable me to know my students’ weakness and my self” “I am able to identify my weaknesses in teaching”</i> |
| Learning to collaborate | 1 | <i>“In CAR, we learn how to collaborate with colleagues.”</i> |
| Incomplete answer | 4 | |

Responses = 25

The interview data affirms the above responses. The teachers argue that benefits of implementing CAR encompass development of being reflective with their practice, solving their student pedagogical issues, and increasing their self-efficacy. The following interview excerpt of one of the teachers reflected the mentioned categories.

“I gain many benefits...my self-confidence increases as I can evaluate my teaching, analyse the result of CAR, find my own weakness and challenges in teaching and be able to solve them...increase my writing skill (scientific writing), give me satisfaction after doing it “ Oh, I can do it finally”

(teacher 1).

Even though the above data suggest CAR brings benefits for teachers, challenges for conducting it are also evident. The following section presents various challenges experienced by the teachers in CAR engagement.

Challenges in CAR

This section addresses the challenges encountered by the teachers when involved in CAR. Several challenges are found from quantitative and qualitative data. We will present the former and then present the latter. Types of challenges can be seen in the following table.

Table 4. Teachers’ challenges in CAR

| Types of challenges | Frequency | Percentages (%) |
|--|------------------|------------------------|
| Lack of time due to workload | 10 | 35,71 |
| Lack of school support (incentive) | 3 | 14,29 |
| Unsupported facilities | 4 | 28,57 |
| Lack of CAR knowledge and skill (including writing the report) | 4 | 14,29 |
| Type of challenges | Frequency | Percentages (%) |
| Lack of references for writing CAR report | 3 | 14,29 |
| No collaborator in CAR | 1 | 7,14 |
| Irrelevant and incomplete answers | 3 | 21,43 |

Responses = 28

The above results indicate that time was the major challenge for the teachers, followed by lack of CAR knowledge and school support. Interview data strengthens this finding. Eight interviewed teachers, who practised CAR, agreed limited time was the main challenge. They added that this issue was induced by their heavy teaching load (24-hour per week lesson), teaching administration, and family commitment. One teacher, for instance, admits that lack of time motivated him to hire others for writing the report of CAR, to meet a promotion requirement.

In addition to time issue, three teachers in particular also voiced limited knowledge of doing and reporting CAR as their challenges. One of the teachers asserts “I was not clear about how to write my CAR report” (7 August, 2020). Additionally, another challenge occurred from the view of teachers of themselves, that is a low level of intrinsic motivation. One teacher argued that her challenge was related to feeling lazy and being reluctant to do CAR.

The above results were in line with factors that affected several teachers never engaged in CAR as presented in Table 2.

Discussion

This study suggests that many EFL teachers have engaged in CAR and they gained benefits from it, although there are still several others who never practice CAR due to personal and contextual challenges. The research of EFL teachers doing research, particularly Action Research, have been reported by several research studies (e.g., Al-Balushi, 2022; Kayaoglu, 2015; Kiş, 2014; Mehrani, 2017). This study, in particular, adds the depiction of EFL teachers doing AR in the Indonesian context as reported by Burns and Rochsantiningsih (2006), Mukrim (2017), Puspitasari et al. (2021), and Tursini (2019). In this context, more studies are obviously needed to explore the involvement of EFL teachers in CAR, and this study addresses the scarcity of such studies. While CAR has been well promoted among Indonesian EFL teachers, very few studies attempt to explore how they deal with it amidst their contextualized challenges. We will further discuss teachers’ challenges in CAR at the end of this section.

Regarding the benefits of doing CAR, this study found that there are five main benefits obtained by the teachers who engaged in it. They are: (1) developing teachers’ pedagogic and CAR knowledge (2) helping teachers in solving their students’ learning issues; (3) promoting collaboration among teachers; (4) enhancing self-efficacy; and (5) becoming more reflective with their practice. These results are in line with the benefits gained by EFL teachers from other studies (e.g., Gebhard, 2005; Kayaoglu, 2015; Kiş, 2014; Mehrani, 2017; Puspitasari et al., 2021; Tursini, 2019). In particular, this study supports the previous studies by Burns and Rochsantiningsih (2006), Mukrim (2012) and Tursini (2019), suggesting that engaging in CAR impacted on teachers’ pedagogical practice, self-development, and self-reflection on teaching. Indeed, literature has documented action research is one of the tools for promoting teachers to be reflective teachers (Mann & Walsh, 2017). In this sense, CAR apparently transforms conventional teacher, those who perform tasks as asked by others, to become reflective teachers, those who constantly examine their own practice and use it as the baseline for overcoming their pedagogical problems (Richard & Farrell, 2005).

This study also found out teachers encountered challenges engaging in CAR as documented by studies in EFL context. Generally, three prominent challenges were experienced by the teachers: time issue due to excessive workload, limited knowledge of CAR, and lack of school support. Other constraints were related to lack of references when writing their CAR reports,

and the absence of collaborators. These findings agree with studies by Al-Balushi (2022), Burns and Rochsantiningasih (2006), Kitchen and Jeurissen (2006), Mehrani (2017), Negi (2016), Rainey (2000), Tinker-Sachs (2000), and Volk (2009). The results are also consistent with the study by Mukrim (2012) who investigated the challenges faced by five senior secondary school of EFL teachers in the context of this current study. He found that the teachers' main challenges were time constraints, insufficient knowledge of CAR, lack of mentors, collaborators, and lack of school managers. It is also worth noting these challenges apparently demotivated the teachers to continue practising CAR, as voiced in their interviews. This results resonates with the current study conducted by Mukrim et al. (in Press) suggesting that intrinsic and extrinsic factors become the demotivating factors for EFL teachers in Palu city in CAR engagement. The former one relates to individual factors (laziness and ignorance of CAR engagement), while the latter one is associated with the contextual factors (heavy workload, limited CAR training and workshop available, lack of colleague support, existing of CAR reports purchasing practice, and ineffective system of teachers' CAR documents for promotion requirement). With regard to the present study, the challenges faced, in particular time constraints may give a considerable pressure and be a demotivating factor for them to continue engaging in CAR. Given this fact, the stake holders of teacher professional development, particularly regional education office and schools, need to continuously support teachers by providing adequate trainings/workshop, incentives, and mentoring.

Additionally, it is also interesting to note that, in the Indonesian context, the inclusion of CAR report in the promotion is a unique case, which may not be found in other countries. This study suggests that writing a CAR report was definitely still a challenge for the teachers, imbued by the lack of time, limited knowledge and writing academic skill, and report format. Due to these challenges, some teachers interviewed opted to pay others to write reports for them, even without conducting CAR themselves, as echoed by a teacher. This dishonest practice was also evident in the questionnaire data responded by the teachers who never practiced CAR; 83% out of 18 teachers did respond "I never engage in CAR because my need about scientific writing report has been accommodated by others with payment" (see table 2). Drawing from this result, we argue that the above promotion mechanism is a paradoxical policy; on one hand it could motivate teachers to engage in CAR and facilitate their extrinsic motivation, yet on the other hand it could undermine their intrinsic motivation, as evidenced by the above narrative (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Hence, we suggest that the central government should introduce a simple mechanism of reporting CAR to encourage teachers to disseminate their inquiry projects, and ultimately will diminish, if not eliminate, teacher involvement in unethical practice as discussed above. These strategic initiatives are expected to motivate teachers to engage in CAR for improving their practice for the sake of promoting education quality in the school level.

Conclusion

This study provides a description of EFL teachers engaging in CAR from the context of the eastern part of Indonesia. This research may reduce the scarcity of studies of CAR in the general EFL context, and specifically in the Indonesian context, in which CAR has been widely promoted among Indonesian state-owned teachers. Our results suggest that albeit there are gained benefits from doing CAR, both personal and contextual challenges are encountered by the study participants. These challenges also become dominant factors for several teachers who never practised CAR.

Given this study had limitations in terms of context and participants, studies involving a larger number of participants from secondary schools and from different Indonesian geographical contexts need to be done to broadly unveil teachers' main challenges in CAR. Accordingly, strong empirical data can be obtained as a basis for imposing policies by the government to facilitate teachers engaging in CAR for enhancing teachers' professionalism.

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