

Experiences of Action Research Component in the B.Ed. (Hons) Programme

Munir Lalani

**Notre Dame Institute of Education, c/o St. Patrick's High School Campus,
Ahmed Munir Shaheed Road, Saddar, Karachi: 74400, Pakistan**

Corresponding author's e-mail: munir.lalani@ndie.edu.pk

Received: March 6, 2021 Revised: May 24, 2021 Accepted: June 17, 2021

Abstract

The implementation of the action research component as per Higher Education Commission's guidelines and Karachi University's scheme of studies for B.Ed (Hons) programme was the first experience for Notre Dame Institute of Education (NDIE). This research study aimed to explore perceived experiences of the students and their research supervisors on the effectiveness of action research component as implemented in NDIE for the B.Ed (Hons) students using exploratory case study design. The data was collected using semi structured interviews taken from the 7 students and 2 research supervisors using purposive sampling strategy. The thematic analysis of the data guided by the research questions helped in drawing conclusion and recommendations for the study. Overall, the participants viewed action research component playing a major role in helping them become practitioner researchers. The strengths and weaknesses identified by the participants provide insights to enhance the quality of learning opportunities pertaining to action research for the future cohorts.

Keywords: Action research, Teaching, Teacher education, Practitioner-researcher, B.Ed. (Hons)

Introduction

Innovations in the andragogy are lifeblood for the growth of an educational institute. Equally important is its basis on research findings. It is therefore important to have pre-service teacher education programmes (TEPs) guided by the contextual researches (Gupta, 2019). Notre Dame Institute of Education (NDIE) is a non-profit teacher education institute. The institute is committed to bring about positive change in the quality of teacher education in Pakistan and aspires to do this by developing committed individuals as teachers, educational leaders and researchers. On phasing out of the B.Ed programme from Pakistan, NDIE replaced its one year B.Ed programme with B.Ed. (Hons) Secondary in 2017. As per the curriculum guidelines by Higher Education Commission (HEC), the Karachi University (KU)'s scheme of

studies places content embedded action research project in the fifth semester, as a compulsory requirement for all B.Ed. (Hons) programmes in the affiliated colleges. The challenge for NDIE was to structure the implementation of action research course in a simplistic way to help the students get quality experience of their first action research. At the end of semester and on completion of course, it was considered important to examine the challenges and prospects of the research experience provided to the students. In the past, different institutional research studies had informed the impact of the teaching practices at NDIE (Gulab & Sharjeel, 2019; Rizvi, 2010; Schneider, 1997; Thomas, 2008). However, the need of this research was identified because action research component in B.Ed. (Hons) programme was a new experience and practice- not only for the students and faculty but for the institute itself. The insights from this research will help the institute to make decisions that can provide maximum learning opportunities and quality experiences to the B.Ed. (Hons) students in the action research component. It will also help to identify solutions for the issues including time constraint, internal assessment, supervisor-supervisee relationships and coordination, and so on.

Literature review

Action research-An introduction

Research is a vast and multidimensional process involving a series of activities that are linked together. Within the qualitative paradigm of research, action research represents an approach which is disciplined and objective as well as scientific in nature. It is a process which rather than developing a theory, tries to keep the problems focused and identify its practical solutions (Bouma, 2004; Phillips & Carr, 2010). Action research is most closely related with integration of practice and research. Moreover, it serves as a mechanism of continuous personal and professional development (Yiğitoğlu & Dollar, 2018).

Within the educational framework, action research is viewed as a classroom research, a form of self reflective practice, means of enhancing teaching skills; a measure to evaluate the impact of newly introduced strategies or resources and a source to generate contextually relevant and appropriate creative ideas. It becomes a source of teachers' empowerment and autonomy as instead of rigidly following traditional theories and practices, the teachers shape up new practices and solutions for their classrooms. Action research does not provides generalized conclusive outcomes, however, it enables teachers not only to improve their own practices and classroom situations but also to develop an understanding of their practices within the broader educational context (Burns & Westmacott, 2018; James & Augustin, 2018; Keegan, 2016).

Action research in TEPs

The action research process is generally evolved out of the desire to become a caring, intellectual and transformative educator. The results of action research is in fact the beginning of a journey to become a teacher living research life and simultaneously improving teaching practices and students' outcomes and thereby bringing a positive change in the school system.

Furthermore, action research helps the students of pre-service TEPs to develop their identity as teacher-researchers (Borg, 2017; Phillips & Carr, 2010; Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). It encompasses field work in the classrooms that helps them to observe the children, apply different strategies, collect the evidence of learning and analyse it purposefully to revisit their teaching (Aras, 2020; Dikilitaş & Comoglu, 2020).

In many contexts, teachers owing to several reasons (e.g. workload of teaching, less time for syllabus completion etc) rarely analyse their classroom situations to address the students' problems (Bognar & Krumes, 2017). The introduction of action research in the TEPs is rooted in the notion that the reforms in teaching are needed to be situated as per the contextual needs. Instead of looking for a uniform solution for every problem, the critical self reflection and research should influence the way teachers learn and bring change in their classroom situations (Amin, Rashid & Teh, 2019; Vaughan & Burnaford, 2015; Yan, 2017).

Challenges and possibilities

Despite its benefits and global implementation, there are many challenges in its practice and implementation. Undertaking a research project in many cases is not an easy process for the students. Thalhoo and Gomos (2020) in their study of the two educational institutes in Sindh, Pakistan point out that in certain cases, the students enrolled in the B.Ed. (Hons) programmes with the primary motive of getting academic credentials, do not show interest to engage in action research rigorously. This assertion perhaps cannot explain the generalized reason for the disinterest shown by the students. One of the primary factors could be lack of guidance on the process of action research. Having inadequate necessary methodological knowledge of conducting action research could create chaos and thereby demotivate the student-researchers (Yiğitoğlu & Dollar, 2018). A study by Halai (2011) in Pakistani context also informs that the students found action research as a messy process, which requires adequate support and guidance from the supervisors. Similar examples can be found in other contexts such as a study in Chinese context informs that the students found doing action research harder than writing a comprehensive literature review (Yan, 2017).

Nevertheless, lessons can be learned from the empirical studies to make the action research component an enriching and exciting learning process for the students. A study by Burns and Westmacott (2018) in the Chilean context informs that participants of a TEP engaged in the action research particularly found that the monthly group meetings led by the research coordinator were helpful. During these meetings they shared their progress with their colleagues and their queries were answered. The students also found in-house presentations as helpful in gaining confidence. However, it was also observed that too much negative feedback and criticism on the presentations resulted in the low esteem of the students.

One of the major challenges generally faced by the students in the research project is time management. Many students find it difficult to create a balance between the time they needed to spend on the research work and on the assignments from other courses as well as on their other personal commitments (Borg, 2017). Burns and Westmacott (2018) found that in a TEP in Chile, the report writing part took much longer than what was earlier anticipated for

the students. The students found it frustrating to incorporate the feedback given by the supervisors repeatedly to finalize their research reports. Research supervisors also found it challenging to support the students who were struggling with the skills of academic reading and writing. However, they realized the need to keep on encouraging the students by reminding them that though the process is challenging but the outcome is rewarding. They have also proposed different solutions to address the students' needs. This includes asking students to submit partial drafts and giving them early feedback on it and also arranging sessions for the students on academic reading and writing.

In the study by Amin, Rashid and Teh (2019) in the Malaysian context, both students and the research supervisors were of view that the concepts of action research needs to be introduced in the curriculum in various course works and assignments much before its formal application. The exposure of action research readings and its connection with the classroom learning need to be established in other courses.

Many times, student researchers face difficulties doing their field work in the cooperating schools as guest researchers. The study by Gupta (2019) identifies challenges perceived by the B.Ed students mainly concerning the cooperating schools including long distance of the host schools from their homes, lack of cooperation by the school teachers and lack of resources and infra-structure in the cooperating schools. To minimize some of these problems, the teacher education institutes need to communicate clear goals regarding relationships they aspire from the cooperating schools. In addition to this, the teacher education colleges need to support students engaged in research with the facilities such as printing, photocopying, access of internet and library resources (Vaughan & Burnaford, 2015)

Methodology

Research question

This research is guided by following key and subsidiary questions: What were the major strengths and weaknesses of the research component implemented at NDIE for the B.Ed (Hons) students; what were the factors that facilitated or hindered research supervisors in overseeing their supervisee's action research process through completion of their research project; what were the factors that facilitated or hindered the students in completing their research project; how the experiences of the action research component helped B.Ed. (Hons) students to develop their identity as teacher-researchers.

Research design

This is an exploratory case study. Case study research methodology was considered appropriate to address the research problem as the researcher intended to answer a descriptive question with a focus on a specific unit of study (i.e. Action Research Component). Furthermore, the researcher intended to critically analyse the implementation of the action research component and its outcomes as perceived by the students and research supervisors (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Gay et al., 2012; Yin, 2014).

The focus of this study was mainly on exploring and understanding instead of quantifying and verifying, therefore the study does not claim to generalise its findings to the population beyond the cases similar to those studied in this work.

Population and sampling

The population of study comprised of 15 students of B.Ed (Hons) 2017 Cohort and 7 research supervisors. The data was collected from 7 students and 2 research supervisors using purposive sampling strategy. The 7 student participants selected for the sample were different in terms of: (1) their class performance (high, average and low level of academic performance) (2) time they spent on completion of research (completed on time, completed within grace period, could not complete within the specified grace period) (3) research supervisors overseeing their work and mentoring them. The research supervisors were selected on the basis of (1) their availability to participate in the study during the required timeframe (2) expression of interest and (3) their voluntary willingness to participate in the study by sharing their experiences in a reflective manner (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data collection and analysis

The data was collected from the semi structured interviews conducted from the students and research supervisors. The thematic analysis was based on the model given by Labra et al. (2019). The themes were drawn out of the data and were critically reviewed to derive conclusions. The thematic analysis of the data's content was guided by the study's key and subsidiary questions as well as the openness to themes beyond the questions.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was taken from all the participants. Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of the participants is an important ethical consideration. Instead of using real names, pseudonyms have been used for all the 7 student participants (i.e. Anaya, Flora, Salman, Karim, Sumaira, Muriel and Hannah) and the 2 supervisors (i.e. Tina and Sarah). Identities of the participants are concealed to an extent it was possible to do so i.e. their names and the names of anyone else they mentioned (e.g. name of supervisor, friend etc.) were changed (Saunders et al., 2015; Tolich, 2004) In addition to this the researcher tried as far as it was possible, not to quote any such statement or remarks (particularly on sensitive issues) that would make it very obvious for some stakeholders to identify the participants or their supervisors/supervisees.

Discussions

This section is divided into subsections based on the following themes: action research component and practitioner-researcher identity, facilitating and impeding factors, strengths and weaknesses, and challenges, solutions and opportunities.

Action research component and practitioner-Researcher identity

Action research has a major role to prepare future teachers for their role as practitioner researchers. It enables them to address the learning needs of the children, to whom they would be teaching (Campbell, 2013; Lattimer, 2012; Ryan et al., 2017).

Though all the student participants had a different experience of the action research project, all of them agreed that this component of B.Ed (Hons) programme helped them to become a teacher-researcher. Moreover, it was the first experience for all of them of doing an independent research study guided by the research supervisors.

Recalling her experience of the action research component, Anaya stated

I was very shy and introvert but I gained a lot of confidence by doing action research. I realized first time how it feels to be in teacher and researcher's shoe, both at the same time. As a child, I used to think teaching is very easy but now I understand the complexities of it. It requires dealing with the students who are all different from each other and to meet their learning needs (Interview, August 31, 2020).

Similar views were also expressed by Muriel. She stated, "At the time of comprehensive viva, I had interaction with students from other teacher education colleges. After having conversation with them, I realized that we had a much better experience of action research than any of them." (Interview, September 3, 2020).

The participant students have also shared specific reasons of how the action research project helped them to become a teacher-researcher. For instance, Flora mentioned that action research helped her to practice out what was previously learned in other courses. Moreover, it helped her to "learn overcoming problems in the class and exploring different methods to address it". She further added.

For Salman, action research component was "one of the most important aspects of the B.Ed. (Hons) programme". For him 'good teachers' are identical to 'good practitioner researchers'.

Commenting on the empowering role of action research, Salman stated

Action research is the best approach to identify the problems in the class and to find solutions for it....As a professional teacher, now I will not need to always rely on the external teacher educators to conduct a session for giving me solutions of my class problems. I can conduct action research to address the problems of my own class (Interview, August 31, 2020).

Similarly, other student participants (i.e. Karim, Sumaira, Hannah and Muriel) remarked action research component as "important", "remarkable", "unique" and "enriching" experience in preparing them as teacher-researchers. All the student-participants felt complete confidence to do action research entirely on their own in future with exception to Anaya, who felt she is confident "up to 70%" to do action research on her own, but might require "assistance from NDIE" for guidance, in-case of emergence of a challenging situation (Interview, August 31, 2020).

Quite similar to the views of the students are also the views expressed by the participant research supervisors. For instance, Sarah remarked.

I believe every teacher is also a researcher. Action research has helped them (students) to become self disciplined independent learners... Experts are not always available for professional development. Action research has open the doors for them to self explore and address the classroom problems (Interview, September 1, 2020).

Similarly, Tina also regarded action research as a “very worthwhile and valuable” experience for the students as it is “classroom oriented”. Besides preparing students for their professional life as practitioner researchers, she adds the value of action research component as “a stepping stone in building capacities for research in higher education” (Interview, September 1, 2020).

Facilitating and impeding factors

The participants identified different facilitating and impeding factors in the students’ journey to become practitioner researcher through action research component. These are collectively discussed in this subsection as certain times impeding factors identified by some of the participants were facilitating factors for the others and vice versa.

Supervisor-Supervisee relationship

Supervisor-supervisee relationship is an important factor in the research project. The supervision sometimes involves meeting many challenges including effective communication with supervisees, managing time constraints and sustaining supervisee’s motivation. Supervisees generally expects from the supervisors to provide them timely feedback and encourage their ideas and efforts (Ali et al., 2016; Smith, 2020).

In this study, some of the student participants appreciated the support and feedback they received from their supervisors for instance:

“Despite of her busy schedule, my mentor made herself available to help me in all possible ways” (Anaya, Interview, August 31, 2020).

“My mentor encouraged me a lot....even when busy, my mentor managed to give me time for guiding me throughout the research process” (Flora, Interview, September 2, 2020).

“Supervisor’s continuous guidance and constructive feedback was of great importance” (Sumaira, Interview, August 30, 2020).

Karim while appreciating the feedback he received from the supervisor also regrets that he was not fully benefited with the supervisor’s expertise knowledge due to his supervisor’s “many other commitments and work responsibilities” (Interview, September 2, 2020). On the other hand, Salman complains of having not been given “proper guidance and feedback” because of supervisor’s “engagement in other responsibilities” (Interview, August 31, 2020).

With regards to insufficient time for the supervision meetings, one important factor that appears from the student participants’ interviews is not explicit communication on the proposed modes and timings of contact or otherwise providing very limited options for it. For instance, Hannah stated “My mentor did not allow me to send the drafts on email. I was required to meet

the mentor in person and had to wait for a long time (for him/her to get free).” She further added “There was not any specific time given to all mentees for the meeting. Whoever would go first would get time and unfortunately most of the time whenever I went, I found my mentor busy with some other student” (Interview, September 1, 2020).

Muriel, while appreciating the research supervisor for “explaining everything in quite detail” also complained, “I was being asked to do a lot of work which was in-fact irrelevant. Despite of spending a lot of time in working, towards the end, I felt as if I have reached nowhere.” Elaborating further on problems faced by not getting timely feedback she added, “I was required to show all my (intervention) plans in hard copy. Often, my plans were not approved timely and so I was not able to go to school on scheduled days. This disturbed my commitment with the (cooperating) school” (Interview, September 3, 2020).

Some of the participants were also afraid of making mistakes and seeking guidance from their research supervisors. The fear was mainly because of non-acceptance of their ideas.

Hannah narrated “Whatever I intended to do was rejected by my mentor. I felt demotivated and started keeping a picture of St. Anthony and saying a prayer before meetings.” Hannah further added, “Many times I was not able to work the way it was expected from me. However, at times when my work was good, my mentor suspected that it was not being done by me and someone else has done that for me” (Interview, September 1, 2020).

Similar to this was also noticed by both the participant research supervisors, who observed a particular student being reluctant to approach the supervisor “out of fear of the work being rejected” (Interview, September 1, 2020).

Regarding the role of supervisor-supervisee relationship, Tina mentions “It is important for the supervisor and supervisee to have an understanding of their expected roles. Rapport building is very important in positive mentoring.” She further added, “It is important to make supervisees feel comfortable. When I am comfortable, I am able to do my best and similar is the case with the students.” Regarding pressure on supervisees, she asserted “I never pressurize my supervisees. I do not make them afraid. It never works. It brings anxiety. I push them (to timely complete their work) knowing their limits” (Interview, September 1, 2020).

Learning from other courses

Most of the student participants regarded learning from other courses to have benefitted them in carrying out action research project. For instance, Sumaira mentioned, “Reviewing literature and writing skills developed throughout the B.Ed. (Hons) programme helped me in writing research report” (Interview, August 30, 2020). Karim particularly recalled an activity in English pedagogy class where they had to “identify problems from the given case studies followed by a discussion on it” as very helpful. On the other hand Karim also complained to have only “a surface level understanding of research being developed” by the time he reached in the final semester (Interview, September 2, 2020).

Sumaira asserted that while learning from the different courses contributed in the research project, the links and connections across different courses were not being deliberately made. She critiqued.

Many of the courses including Research and Statistics, English Pedagogy, Assessment etc had links and common elements. The teachers (course facilitators) teaching different courses were unaware of what other teachers had previously taught. It would have been better if the (action research) course facilitator was aware of our prior learning from the other courses and made connections from it (Interview, August 30, 2020).

Academic reading and writing

Academic reading and writing was a challenge for many students. Reflecting on her experience, Flora mentioned:

It was literature review, where I had to struggle and spend a lot of time. Previously, I was not habitual of reading so much. In the action research, there is an on-going role of literature. It was not just skimming of articles, but I had to read and understand it, paraphrase it, look for its relevance with my context and at times critique it, which took considerable time (Interview, September 2, 2020).

Both research supervisors i.e. Tina and Sarah expressed concern over students' academic reading and writing skills, which prolonged their work.

Personal factors

Some of the student participants had mentioned personal problems (e.g. health issues, family problems etc) that created hindrance during action research process. After recalling her personal problems, Hannah mentioned, "I was in stress and because of it, I kept forgetting, which added more to my stress. For three times, I typed my work but forgot where I saved it..." (Interview, September 1, 2020).

On the other hand Anaya looking at the positive side of her problems stated "I faced many personal problems during this stage. But whatever happened with me also made me stronger. Despite of my many personal problems, I loved and enjoyed doing action research" (Interview, August 31, 2020).

Strengths and weaknesses of the action research component

The participants identified different strengths and weaknesses of the action research component as implemented at NDIE. The strengths and weaknesses as perceived by the participants are discussed as follow.

Allocation of cooperating schools

Allocating cooperating schools for the students' research project was an important aspect of the action research component. As the B.Ed (Hons) students were pre-service teachers, therefore NDIE negotiated with the cooperating schools to facilitate the students in their action research field work. According to Tina "allocating nearby schools or otherwise allowing students to do field work in the school of their choice" was one of strengths of the action research component (Interview, September 1, 2020). Similarly, Salman stated, "NDIE allowed and supported me to do action research at my preferred school." (Interview, August

31, 2020). Flora also remarked about her allocated school: “Everyone cooperated with me. I enjoyed learning about dealing with students of different abilities.” (Interview, September 2, 2020). Anaya initially faced difficulty, when her plans were being interrupted by the teachers at the cooperating school. She, however, mentions that the problem was resolved with the assistance of the course facilitator, who had a meeting with the concerned teachers and after that she received “the required support and cooperation for the field work” (Interview, August 31, 2020).

However, some of the students faced problems at the allocated schools due to examinations taking place over there. Sumaira stated “We were rushed to do field work as the school decided to have exams. We needed time to identify the problem, do our planning and implement action plans. I think the field work should not be kept in schools when exams are approaching.” (Interview, August 30, 2020). Similarly, Karim also suggested “Before allocating schools, it is better to confirm that there no exams during that period” (Interview, September 2, 2020).

Allocation of research supervisors

In the action research component, the students were allocated research supervisors before the beginning of their field work. From the faculty members, those who had a prior experience of doing action research were given the supervision responsibility. As discussed earlier, the student participants had mixed feelings and varied experiences on the research supervision. It is evident from the data that the student participants in general believed the allocated research supervisors as expert in their fields. For instance, Karim remarked his research supervisor as “expert and well informed” (Interview, September 2, 2020). However from the critical analysis of data it appears that in a few instances, participants have likely perceived about some supervisors as having inadequate supervision skills. For example, Salman argued.

“I observed that most of the research supervisors were very helpful and supportive. But NDIE need to allocate only those teachers as supervisors who have a good understanding of the action research process.” (Interview, August 31, 2020). Similarly, Muriel commented “The scenario of teaching and learning is continuously changing. It is important for the research supervisors to have latest and up-to-date knowledge of what is going on. Not everyone can do action research and similarly not everyone can supervise the action research.” (Interview, September 3, 2020).

Regarding allocation of research supervisors, Tina mentioned that she had a good understanding and rapport with her supervisee, however, the supervisee’s focused area of action research was not an area of her interest and expertise. She also suggested “It would be better, if the students can be given an option to suggest their preferred supervisor based on objective criteria” (Interview, September 1, 2020).

Action research classes

Almost all the student participants found on-going weekly action research classes as one of the strengths of the action research component. Regarding pre-fieldwork classes, Salman stated, “We were guided well before the fieldwork” (Interview, August 31, 2020). On contrary Karim asserted that he was sent to school “without having adequate knowledge about the process of action research” (Interview, September 2, 2020).

The student participants have appreciated certain aspects of the action research classes. For instance, Flora remarked “These classes helped in developing better conceptual understanding and I also learned new research terms and concepts” (Interview, September 2, 2020). Karim particularly mentioned the “quiz activity with paper chits” and Sumaira mentioned “mock viva preparation” as very helpful.

One aspect of the action research classes which was identified as strength by all the participants (students as well as research supervisors) was the students’ presentations on their action research. Discussing the students’ perspective on it, Salman stated, “Initially some students thought that there should not be presentations. It was an extra workload. Later, all of us realized that it was beneficial for us to present. This opportunity given to us by NDIE helped us to gain confidence to present our research in conferences” (Interview, August 31, 2020). For Sumaira, presentations helped her to “give a logical structure” to her work. The feedback received at the end of presentation from the faculty and class fellows helped her get a “better understanding of action research”. Similarly to Muriel, these presentations offered “a new perspective to look on”.

Both the research supervisors found these presentations very helpful for the students. According to Sarah, in absence of guidelines about the research report from the affiliated university, the students’ presentation was “the best decision being taken”. She further added, “It helped them gain confidence. It also in a way helped them prepare for higher academic education” (Interview, September 1, 2020). Tina particularly, liked the idea of inviting faculty and research supervisors in these presentations. It provided benefit to both students and research supervisors. She explained:

The presence of research supervisors and faculty in these presentations made the students think deeply about ‘what, why and how’ are they presenting. It helped them to get feedback from other research supervisors. It would have been better, if all supervisors could have managed to attend these presentations. As a supervisor, attending these presentations helped me learn how other supervisors are preparing their supervisees. It made me reflect how my supervision practices are similar or different from them (Interview, September 1, 2020).

Coordination among staff members

Some of the participants perceived that there was lack of coordination and mutual understanding among the staff members. For instance, Karim noticed, “the students were not clearly communicated on what was expected from them. There was difference in the guidelines given by the coordinator, course facilitator and supervisor. It appeared as if all of them were

not on same page” (Interview, September 2, 2020). Without providing any particular example, Salman and Muriel also claimed getting “contradictory guidelines” from different stakeholders.

Among research supervisor participants, Tina also identified communication gap as a weakness of the action research component. She pointed out, “There was a lack of debriefing on what was expected from the research supervisors. Most of the time, I had to rely on the information communicated to me by my supervisee. An expected tentative timeline shared with the students and supervisors could have minimized communication gap” (Interview, September 1, 2020).

Sumaira explained the lack of coordination with disconnect between the practicum and action research. She critiqued.

We went to three different schools- one for doing observations (for Teaching Practicum), another one for teaching lessons (for Teaching Practicum) and yet a different one for action research. The students could have identified action research problem while doing observations for teaching practicum and have continued it from there. Even the students cannot do the field work of action research without teaching lessons. But there were different schools and different mentors. Both components-though interlinked, were planned out and executed differently by the respective course facilitators. It added more work load on students (Interview, August 30, 2020).

Institutional support for the individual needs

Some of the student participants mentioned institutional support provided to cater their individual needs as strength of the action research component. Reflecting on it Flora recalled Due to some personal problems, I was not able to manage my work on time. The institute gave us time even when I missed the deadline. When I discussed my problems with the mentor, I was given a lot of support and care so I could complete my work (Interview, September 2, 2020).

Similarly, Hannah stated, “The institute catered to my individual needs. I was allowed to come and avail the facility of computer lab even on the public holiday so I could meet the deadline. The director, academic coordinator and the teachers were all supportive” (Interview, September 1, 2020).

One of the student-participant also gave example of the institutional support being provided to the students who missed their external assessment (comprehensive viva). An arrangement was being made for them to appear for the viva in the institute, when they were ready for it (The pseudonym here is not mentioned as it could disclose the identity of the student-participant).

Challenges, solutions and opportunities

As is clearly evident from the data, the participants have appreciated many learning opportunities provided to them in the action research component. At the same time, they have also shared hurdles and challenges they encountered during the process. While, discussing the

challenges, they also proposed different suggestions and solutions that could be considered for the future. These suggestions were made in context of their individual experiences.

Anaya having a very pleasant experience stated “Overall, the experience was very worthwhile. It met all my expectations. In my opinion, no changes are needed in it for the future” (Interview, August 31, 2020). On the other hand, some of the participants suggested major structural changes.

Muriel proposed to “integrate teaching practice and action research to an extent that is possible” (Interview, September 3, 2020). From the research supervisor participants, Sarah also proposed the same suggestion. She also rationalized it in the similar manner and stated

All the planning was done on urgent basis. It over burdened the students. The better option would be to integrate these components (observation, teaching practice and action research). There could be a longer time period given to the students for the fieldwork in the same school, where they could have done observation, teaching and action research at the same time (Interview, September 1, 2020).

Interestingly, Sarah also proposed similar suggestion of starting action research work before 5th semester. She stated:

Though the students have learned the process of doing action research, but due to time constraints, the actions cycles were very short. It would be better, if once a week, a class for action research is scheduled in the 4th semester to help the students understand the theory and process of action research. This will allow them to start the fieldwork at the beginning of 5th semester with more time for intervention (Interview, September 1, 2020).

Tina during research supervision noticed some of the students struggling with computer skills. She suggested for the “ICT sessions to help students learn making table of contents, referencing and formatting in Ms. Word.” She suggested these sessions “must be recommended but should not be made compulsory for all the students to attend.” (Interview, September 1, 2020).

Findings and recommendations

From the analysis of data, it is clearly evident that the research participants (students and research supervisors) do not limit action research component only as one of the courses with 3 credit hours to be completed as a requirement of the B.Ed (Hons) programme. Rather, they view action research project as a stepping stone in helping them to become the practitioner researchers. While the participants identified different limitations, challenges and shortcomings of the action research component, on the whole, they were highly appreciative of the opportunities and support that was being provided to them by the institute.

A critical glance at the perceived experiences of the participants informs a few shortcomings in the supervision process. There was absence of an agreed policy or mutual understanding among the supervisors and supervisees about the supervision process. Because of the differences in the learning needs and learning styles of the students as well as supervision style of the research supervisors, it would be difficult to have a uniform policy of research supervision. Nevertheless, during staff meetings, an understanding needs to be developed

among the research supervisors on important aspects of the research supervision (process, level of rigor, number of time feedback to be given on drafts etc.). The course facilitator also needs to make sure that the students and their research supervisors have mutually agreed on modes of contacts for the supervision meeting

The strategies of time management can be shared with the students in individual counseling or through any other means to help them prioritize their work responsibilities and to meet the deadlines. As for all of the students, this is generally a first research experience; therefore the process could bring anxiety and stress. The supervisors and the other staff members need to encourage students and should not pass any remarks that could negatively affect the self esteem of the students.

Support mechanisms needs to be developed to provide extra support for the struggling students. In this regard, the suggestions given by the participants including academic literacy and research skills classes, ICT sessions and providing editorial support on completion of research reports etc. can be considered for the upcoming cohorts.

Some of the participants have suggested integrating the teaching practicum and action research project. The complete integration might not be possible as discussed in the earlier staff meetings. However, integrating certain aspects of the two components (such as keeping the same cooperating schools and mentors) can be considered keeping in view that it would provide the students with more time for the field work. Moreover, they will be able to understand the common links between the teaching and research practice.

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