Mistakes Made by Foreign Language Teachers in Conducting Classroom Research in A Large Private School in Rayong

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Abstract

This study was designed 1) to explore the scope for mistakes made by foreign language teachers while conducting classroom research, and 2) proposing suggestions to minimize the mistakes. This study is a qualitative study applying the Phenomenological research strategy. Twelve Thai foreign language teachers with at least two years of experience teaching Chinese, English, or Japanese in a selected large private school in Rayong, Thailand, were participants in this study. Purposive sampling was applied to identify the informants. The data collection method was semi-structured interviews. To code and categorize the obtained data systematically, this study followed the steps of data analysis proposed by Moustakas (1994), ATLAS. ti, which is the qualitative software for data analysis, was utilized to analyze the data. This study found five main misunderstandings while Thai foreign language teachers were conducting classroom research

Keywords: Foreign Language Teachers; Misunderstandings on Classroom Research; Steps of Classroom Research

Introduction

According to the education reform resulting from Thailand's National Education Act of 1999, which aimed to produce and develop educational personnel to meet the quality standards of an advanced profession (Office of the Education Council, 1999), it seeks to prepare teachers and improve the efficiency of the teaching profession by developing standard criteria of a professional teacher by following the 11th Education Development Plan of the Ministry of Education 2012-2016 (Office of the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Education, 2013). To face the challenges of the 21st

century, classroom research could be a method that teachers could implement to acquire the required professional standards. In recent years in Thailand, there have been several attempts to change the way of educating teachers, believing that teachers are the most influential persons affecting universal student success. As stated in the National Education Act 1999 and Amendments Second National Education Act 2002, The National Education Act also outlined the requirement for teachers to conduct a classroom research project stating that "Besides a major responsibility of teaching, the teachers are required to research to develop suitable learning for learners at different levels of education" (ONEC, 2002).

Conducting classroom research helps a wide range of stakeholders, including teachers, schools, and students, as well as the growth of teaching and learning and the raising of educational standards in various ways. At least five advantages of conducting classroom research in the classroom have been highlighted by LeGeros (2016). These include 1. classroom research powers professional growth, it could assist teachers' professional development in the education area; 2. classroom research makes change manageable, and it could help teachers focus on one aspect of their practice they would like to improve; 3. classroom research promotes collaboration, not only could it assist collaboration between teachers to work together on a classroom research project to document and study the results, but also could lead to collaboration between schools to share and compare related approaches; 4. classroom research loves being shared, teachers show their driving question as well as the method they used to investigate it, and their findings to give each other a way to peer into different classrooms and see solutions to common issues in teaching; 5. classroom research can power system change, and classroom research provides rapid cycles of experimentation and evaluation, in order to improve educators' teaching methods continuously, more and more schools are incorporating action research into their evaluation system.

Classroom research is a process in which informants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of analysis. Classroom research involves doing research in school settings about teaching and learning (Nunan & Bailey 2009). Stewart (2013) identified classroom research as a process of investigating questions about teaching and learning that is undertaken systematically by teachers who want to understand their own work better. This is in line with Syah with, (2016) classroom research is to do with the teacher exploring and investigating in their own classroom challenges, puzzles, dilemmas, and ideas they want to understand in more depth. Ferrance, (2000). The aims of classroom research are to improve teachers' competence, skills, and gain empirical experience in teaching, in implementing a new

method, as well as teaching and learning strategies. Expert, academicians, and educators define classroom research is a systematic process of teaching that is conducted by the teachers themselves to examine their teaching practice, to explore their teaching strategies and techniques, to discover the best practice of teaching, and to solve classroom problems (Nugent, Malik, Hollingsworth, 2012).

Above all, classroom research is a process in which teachers investigate teaching and learning to improve their own and their students' learning, allowing teachers to examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully. Moreover, it could help teachers develop practical solutions to address them quickly and efficiently when problems happened in the classroom. It also could appear that, teachers' professional development was highly demanded, so classroom research could be one method for assisting teachers' professional development.

However, after conducting a study named "Classroom Research Challenging Experiences of Teachers Teaching Foreign Language In One Private School In Rayong Province, Thailand" the researcher has found that most of the informants are misunderstanding the concept of classroom research and lack of classroom research skills caused them to encounter many difficulties while conducting classroom research. Other previous studies also found that lack of theoretical knowledge may cause teachers' misunderstanding the concept of classroom research (Zeichner & Klehr, 1999; Mingucci, 2001; Zhou, 2012), moreover, Nagibova, (2019) points out teachers have many issues with research methodology due to misunderstanding the classroom research. All the misunderstandings of classroom research caused the decrease of teachers' motivation to conduct classroom research (Zeichner & Klehr, 1999; Mingucci, 2001; Zhou, 2012; Nagibova, 2019). In this case, the researcher aims to summarize the misunderstandings of foreign language teachers when

Steps of Conducting Classroom Research

Before conducting classroom research, teachers and educators also need to know they have several choices for steps in conducting their classroom study. However, it has been found that the steps below in conducting classroom research were often reviewed and carried out.

Hine (2013) pointed out the process of classroom research consists of three main stages, "commonly referred to as the "Look, Act and Think model". This process is represented in helix or spiral as in figure 1 below (Stringer, 2008).
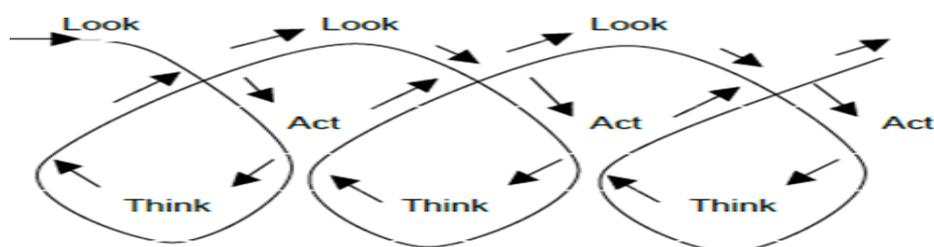
Figure 1 Classroom research helix (adapted from Stringer, 2008)

According to Figure 1, in the "look" stage, the process begins with gathering information about the problem. Then, gathering all the information to analyze, which comes to the "Think" stage. Finally, the information and the results of the analysis are used to devise a solution to the problem in the "act" stage.

However, this process can be expanded to include five cyclic stages, which are: designing the study, collecting data, analyzing data, communicating outcomes, and actions. This is called the classroom research cycle which is the common research process according to Stringer (2008). Figure 2 depicts these five key steps.

Figure 2 Classroom research cycle (adapted from Stringer, 2008)

The four basic steps in conducting classroom research are planning, action, observation, and reflection, which could also be seen as Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) mentioned in their study. These included 1) developing a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening,

2) acting to implement the plan, 3) observing the effects of the critically informed work in the context in which it occurs,4)reflecting on these effects as the basis for further planning, subsequent critically reported action and so on, through a succession of stages. In line with David Hopkins model(1993),

plan, action, observe, and reflection. The above steps in conducting classroom research could be a guideline for teachers and educators in conducting classroom research.

Classroom Research Applied In Foreign Language Teaching

The purpose of classroom research is to gain understanding of teaching and learning within one's classroom and to use that knowledge to increase teaching efficacy/student learning. Chamot, Barnhardt, Dirstine (1998) highlighted that classroom research is a process to assist foreign language teachers to develop insights into their students' learning from observing their behaviour. Reflective teachers analyze their students' behaviours, identify potential problems, modify their teaching practices, and evaluate the results. Alexandra (2018) points out that using classroom research in the classroom allowed teachers to involve students in the curriculum process. Moreover, it gives teachers the confidence to get started, plan a project, collect data, publish findings, and then continue to enjoy the empowering energy of researching and learning (Stewart, 2013). Mertler (2006) added that classroom research could foster the skill of inquiry in teachers. According to Zambo and Zambo (2006), through involvement in the research process, teachers can establish the habit and skills of reflection regarding their practices and thereby continue to learn from their own experiences and become better at teaching throughout their careers. Engaging in classroom research helps teachers to become more critical and analytical. On the other hand, for a long time, teachers tried to train learners to learn better and at the same time improve their own teaching skills. As teachers gain more and more teaching experience, they could encounter and solve not only teaching challenges, but also they would come up with new teaching practices and ideas. Some previous studies were conducted to encourage foreign language teachers to adopt collaborative classroom research to improve their own practices. (Banegas, Pavese, Velázquez& Vélez, 2013, Banegas, 2011).

Mistakes in Conducting Foreign Language Classroom Research

According to these previous studies, the researcher has summarized some mistakes that happened while foreign language teachers were conducting their classroom research.

1. Teachers identified students' learning problems inappropriately (Biruk, 2013; Gulzina, 2019; Jantarakantee, E., Roadrangka, and Clarke, 2012; Hackshaw, 2001; Lo Castro, 1994; Vásquez, 2017). This mistake can clearly explain that limited classroom training was one of the reasons limiting teachers from obtaining enough research knowledge necessary to address students' learning. Trying to determine the questions and challenges in conducting classroom research was

sometimes too difficult for untrained teachers Hackshaw (2001). It was found that many teachers do not know whether their research questions could correctly represent the existing problems, or the study could answer the questions or the hypotheses which were needed to formulate an investigation or improve their understanding of cases being studied.

2. The teachers selected inappropriate teaching innovations to solve the problems in their classroom (Jantarakantee, E., Roadrangka and Clarke, 2012). There are countless teaching innovations and interventions for enhancing their teaching, not being able to identify what kind of innovative way they may use, limits their ability to design their research and solve the problems.

3. Teachers applied inappropriate data collection and evaluation methods (Gulzina, 2019; Jantarakantee, E., Roadrangka and Clarke, 2012; Hackshaw, 2001; Lo Castro, 1994), which means, teachers could not recognise the correct procedures or employ the variety of data collection methods, correctly.

Research Design and Methodology

This research was based on a qualitative investigation applying the Phenomenological strategy. Twelve Thai teachers teaching foreign languages (Chinese, English, Japanese), that have at least two years of teaching experience in a selected sizeable private school in Rayong in Thailand, were asked to attend semi-structured interviews with the researcher in a quiet room at their school. The steps of data analysis called "STEVICK-COLAIZZI-KEEN" proposed by Moustakas (1994) were used to analyse the data obtained from informants. The 6 steps of data analysis used in this study are presented below:

1) Begin with a full description of the personal experiences of the participants concerning the phenomenon.

2) Develop a list of significant statements.

3) Group the significant statements into "meaningful units" or themes.

4) Write a textural description.

5) Write a structural description.

6) Write a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions.

Ethical Considerations

To prevent potential harm and promote the rights of informants in this study, the researcher considered the following ethical issues.

1. The interview questions were sent to a Burapha University research committee to ensure that all items were approved and aligned on the criteria of valid ethical standards. Teachers who had been willing to join this study were not identifiable.

2. Teachers who had been willing to join this study were not identifiable.

3. Since some informants were a bit worried that the consent form could identify their identity, the researcher could only persuade some participants to sign the consent documents.

4. The researcher did not release the names of the informants, who provided the researcher with their experiences. The researcher neither refers to the educational institution, which was chosen for this study.

5. Before the interview, the researcher explained to his informants about the purposes of his research project and asked for their permission to record the conversation for the benefit of data analysis.

6. During the interview the informants had the right to provide only information that they feel comfortable to share with others and the informants could withdraw from the study at any time.

7. The researcher recorded the audio conversation, all transcriptions and any other type of data would never be shared with anyone.

Informants

Purposive sampling technique is the thinking behind developing criteria that could help the researcher to identify the most suitable informants. The researcher believes that the informants who could provide him with useful information should be Thai teachers teaching foreign languages (Chinese, English, Japanese), that have had at least two years of teaching experience in a selected sizeable private school in Rayong in Thailand.

Data instrument and data collection

Semi-structured interviews were applied to obtain data from his key informants. Harrell & Bradley (2009) noted that the semi-structured interview technique allows researchers to adjust the order of their questions, ask some probing questions to clarify their understanding, go deeper into

details as well as crosscheck information received from different interviews. Moreover, the semi-structured interview technique can, therefore, be used best if the interviewers have already planned areas and questions they want to ask, have skills and competence to ask additional questions to clarify their unclear answers as well as manage their limited time to cover all their set areas (Seidman, 2013)

Moreover, the researcher followed the "Data collecting process" proposed by Creswell (1998). This is because this method could assist the researcher in gathering the data, which the researcher needs in order to understand the meaning of the problems in this study from his informants, effectively. According to Creswell (1998), the data collecting process refers to "a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions". The data collecting process can be divided into seven activities consisting of 1) Locating site/individual, 2) Gaining access and making rapport, 3) Purposefully sampling, 4) Collecting data, 5) Recording information, 6) Resolving field issues, 7) Storing data (Creswell, 1998, p. 110).

Data analysis

To analyze the data obtained from interviewees, the researcher transcribed the recorded audio files into text or document files. After all text files were created, the researcher identified possible themes according to data analysis steps called modification of the STEVICK-COLAIZZI-KEEN Method of Phenomenological Data. These well-known steps of phenomenological data analysis were proposed by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas suggested that the following steps allowed the researcher to understand and search for particular experiences of the subjects of interest. This method consisted of six steps. They were as follows: 1) Begin with a full description of the personal experiences of the informants concerning the phenomenon. 2) Develop a list of significant statements 3) Group the significant statements into "meaningful units" or themes. 4) Write a textural description. 5) Write a structural description. 6) Write a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating textural and structural descriptions.

Summary of findings

The participants in this study are Thai teachers teaching foreign languages (Chinese, English, and Japanese). They have at least two years of foreign language teaching experience in the selected school. The informant with the most extended teaching experience in this study has been teaching

English for 31 years. All informants have experience in conducting some classroom research, while about half of the informants have completed more than five classroom research. Over 90% of informants are teaching over 18 hours/week. About 60% of informants in this study have obtained a Master's Degree.

According to the informants in this study, the researcher classified the Thai foreign language teachers' mistakes while conducting classroom research into six themes.

Table 1 Misunderstanding of conceptions about classroom research

	Misunderstanding	Appropriate
Purpose of conducting classroom research	1. It is one of a teachers' responsibilities 2. It is an unnecessary process to improve students' learning 3. Teachers can choose topics based on their interests	1. Developing teachers' skills 2. Improving the quality of teaching 3. Enhancing teaching strategies 4. Improving teacher creativities 5. Solve students' learning problems occurring in the classroom (LeGeros, 2016; Melinda, Kolk 2019; Mill, 2011; Stringer, 2008; Johnson, 2012; McTaggart, 1997)
Literature review	Some informants come up with research plans and solutions which are based on their own beliefs, without studying any related literature	Literature study must be conducted before doing research design. This is to assist teachers to get ideas on how to design their research and seeing how others have studied similar issues. It also allows the researcher to construct more decisive research questions and operationalize constructs within their research questions. (Sagor, 2000; Mettetal, 2002; Kemmis & McTaggert, 1988, Strickland 1988)
Developing and detailing the	1. Classroom research can only be done through the quantitative method.	1. Could add Qualitative research, mixed-methods research (training required) 2. Participant's grouping should be based on students' background (Sagor, 2000;

	Misunderstanding	**Appropriate**
classroom research strategies	2. All classroom research needs to begin with identifying the problem, then develop some additional materials and apply them (the new treatment).	Mettetal, 2002; Kemmis & McTaggert, 1988, Strickland 1988), such as the problems some Thai students could have derived from specific English learning contexts that may differ between the two countries. It would have been better if the teachers had reviewed some successful teaching techniques from relevant previous literature that English language teachers implemented to improve Thai students' pronunciation difficulties.
Evaluating students' learning performance	1. Students' learning ability should be improved after applying some additional treatment. 2. Planning teaching techniques (lesson review, pre–test and post–test).	Hadiyanto, (2016) suggests teachers should be concerned with students' behavior, teaching problems, weakness and strengths of treatments. This will then enable them to plan teaching techniques and develop the correct method and strategy. Evaluating students' learning performance through teaching and post–teaching, pre–test and post–test.
Reporting of the findings	Teachers report their findings inappropriately (no discussion part)	Recording how did teachers' teaching skills improve, teaching strategy development, classroom problems and solutions, etc. (Wahyuni, 2020; Wulandari, Narmaditya, Utomo, Prayi, 2019; Burns, Westmacott, 2018)

1. Mistakes concerning identifying the purposes of classroom research

1) It is one of a teachers' responsibilities. Informants in this study mentioned that they were only motivated to research because it was part of the requirements for their personal development, or school requirements, this implies that foreign language teachers doing research is

more for teachers' personal rather than professional development (Mellati, Khademi, 2018; Ulla, 2018; Trent, 2018).

2) It is an unnecessary process to improve students' learning. Some foreign language teachers in this study view that it would be easier for them to help their students by giving alternative explanations to improve their students' understanding when students express their unclear knowledge in class. Teachers need to acknowledge the benefits of conducting classroom research; it is not only good for their students, but also benefits the teachers themselves, 1. Developing teacher's skills; 2. Improving quality of teaching; 3. Enhancing teaching strategies; 4. Improving teacher creativity; 5. Solve students' learning problems occurring in the classroom (Mill, 2011; Stringer, 2008; Johnson, 2012; Book, 1996).

3) Teachers can choose topics based on their interests. Teachers should identify actual problems of students' learning, arranging them and picking the most mistakes they/their students made to be considered as their classroom research topic (Hine, 2013; Stringer, 2008; Rust and Clark, 2007).

2. Mistakes involving the literature review

Some informants came up with the research plans and solutions, which were based on their own beliefs, without studying any related literature. It has been noted that engagement with academic literature can help educators to overcome some limitations sometimes encountered in teacher education (Kostoulas, et al., 2019). Literature study is one of the most important steps which could help teachers to understand how others have learned similar issues and assist them in constructing stronger research questions and operationalizing constructs within their research question (Pramantik, Burhaein, 2019; James, Augustin, 2018).

3. Mistakes of developing and detailing the classroom research strategies for classroom research

1) All of the informants in this study only applied quantitative research. Qualitative research and mixed-methods research training was therefore required.

2) Grouping the majority of the informants.

Most teachers were applying new treatment to all students. By doing this, the teacher cannot compare the quality of the treatments they have developed. Adding additional treatments to the students who could not perform well in the normal class, by doing this, the teachers will not be able to identify whether a more remarkable improvement of students in their experimental group was derived from their new treatment or the old memorization that students in this group could still

remember since they were taught with their friends in the classroom. (Sagor, 2000; Mettetal, 2002; Kemmis & McTaggert, 1988; Strickland, 1988). This mistake may be due to foreign language teachers inability to identify their participants, which may be caused by the limited knowledge/ skills in participant selection (Tindowen, Guzman, Macanang, 2019; Wulandari, Narmaditya, Utomo, Prayi, 2019). Toquero, (2021) and Dikilitaş, Yaylı, (2018) believes that strengthening the research skills and knowledge could assist teachers in sampling design.

4. Mistakes of evaluating students' learning performance

1) Students' learning ability should be improved after applying some additional treatment.

2) Planning teaching techniques (lesson review, pre–test and post–test).

Most of the informants believed that classroom research should improve students' learning ability by applying some additional treatment. Continuously conducting classroom research could support teachers to become better teaching professionals, help them develop and make use of their own experiences. In fact, conducting classroom research is a continuous cycle process. While classroom research is applied, it also required teachers to be able to implement contextual learning (Kemmis & McTaggert, 1988; Mettetal, 2002; Sagor, 2000).

On the other hand, teachers should be concerned with students' behavior, teaching problems, weakness and strengths of chosen treatment. This will enable them to plan teaching techniques and to develop the required method and strategy. They must, in addition, correctly evaluate students' learning performance through teaching and post–teaching, pre–test and post–test. (Wulandari, Narmaditya, Utomo & Prayi, 2019; Hadiyanto, 2016).

5. Mistakes concerning presenting classroom research findings

Teachers report their findings inappropriately (no discussion part). Instead of discussing the effectiveness of the treatment and considering the reasons for the change in student learning, teachers report their satisfaction about an increase in students' enjoyment of the additionally given activities. The report of teachers' satisfaction of students' enjoyment is solely based on personal feelings. Wulandari, Narmaditya, Utomo, Prayi, (2019) claims that report findings were the most critical issues in research, most teachers did not present a discussion part in their findings report. Burns, Westmacott (2018) conducted a study, in which they requested teachers to find and bring two or three articles relevant to their area of interest and discuss them to introduce reflection on the academic literature from the beginning. The researcher suggests adding discussion points into classroom research. The purpose of adding the discussion point is to allow the teachers to step back

from their classrooms and interpret how their work might be anchored to the larger problems and issues addressed within education (Spencer, Molina, 2018).

Conclusion

This research was conducted using qualitative research. This study aims to explore the mistakes of foreign language teachers while conducting classroom research. These include 1, Failures in defining the purposes of classroom research; 2, Mistakes in conducting the literature review; 3, Failures in developing and detailing classroom research strategies; 4, Poor decisions in evaluating students' classroom research performance; and 5, Failures in presenting classroom research findings and proposing suggestions that may address misunderstandings about classroom research.

Some suggestions based on the findings in this study are also presented as follows:

- The school management team and Thai universities aside, teachers as a researcher while conducting classroom research, still lack classroom research skills and classroom research basic knowledge. Classroom research training programs were strongly required, which may involve classroom research basic knowledge, research skills, and methodology are absolutely essential. Moreover, developing strategies, solving problems, and acquiring academic skills and research skills that incorporate the ability to observe, hypothesize and analyze, evaluating results, developing and implementing additional teaching materials, should all be included.

- On the foreign language teacher's side, classroom research is one of the techniques to improve teachers' teaching as well as professional and career development. It is also a process of lifelong learning, so teachers should participate in classroom research courses and activities. Rich classroom research experience could help teachers arrange their time more reasonably and achieve effective research. Moreover, teachers should pay more attention to classroom research basic knowledge and research skills learning; then following the classroom research steps while conducting classroom research. On the other hand, referring to the five kinds of mistakes found from this study could be relevant points to help teachers to minimize or avoid the mistakes which may be experienced.

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