THE DYNAMIC JOURNEY OF TEACHER-RESEARCHERS: UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVING FORCES AND COPING STRATEGIES IN CONDUCTING ACTION RESEARCH

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Abstract: *This study investigated the experiences of eight elementary school teachers in the Division of Bataan as they engaged in action research, focusing on their driving forces, coping strategies, challenges, and professional growth. Using a qualitative multiple-case study approach with NVivo software for data analysis, the study revealed that personal fulfillment, professional responsibility, and career advancement were key factors for participation in action research. Teachers employed strategies such as seeking support from colleagues, coordinators, and institutional resources to overcome challenges, particularly limited time and stringent DepEd regulations. Effective time management emerged as essential for balancing teaching and research responsibilities. The findings emphasized the transformative impact of action research on professional development, including improved instructional practices, career advancement, and contributions to educational innovation. External support from schools was instrumental in shaping these experiences. Targeted organizational initiatives are critical for increasing research engagement, such as time allowances, research mentoring, and capacity-building projects. To sustain educator engagement and promote effective change, the study proposed the I-REAP (Instigating Research Engagement and Action Planning) framework—a practical model designed to foster collaboration, address institutional barriers, and build a culture of continuous professional development. The framework's adaptability suggested its relevance not only in the local context but also in broader educational settings.*

Keywords: Educational research, Action research, coping strategies, driving forces, dynamic journey of teacher-researchers, Qualitative research, Bataan, Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

Action research is widely recognized as a powerful approach to professional development in education, aimed at improving student learning outcomes through teacher-led investigations. It enables teachers to reflect on and refine their practices, fostering skill enhancement and knowledge acquisition (Wong, 2019). By systematically evaluating and improving instructional methods, action research provides teachers with opportunities for continuous professional growth (Manfra, 2019). Research by Dee et al. (2003) explores the antecedents of teacher empowerment, highlighting the essential role of collaborative practices in enhancing instructional leadership. Their findings illustrate that when teachers are involved in decision-making processes through action research initiatives, their perceived empowerment increases, which positively influences their motivation and commitment to student success. In Southeast Asia, where teacher-led professional development is gaining ground, action research has emerged as a key tool for addressing local educational needs (Wangdi & Tharchen, 2021). However, educators in the region face challenges such as limited time, inadequate institutional support, and insufficient research training. Amin et al. (2019) explores the implementation of action research in teacher training programs in Malaysia, shedding light on the challenges and issues faced by educators in this context, while Indonesian teachers cite poor resources (Tanduklangi et al., 2019), and Cambodian educators face systemic barriers (Ty, 2018). Despite these obstacles, programs in countries

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like Indonesia have successfully provided support through partnerships with lecturers and school supervisors (Nurhasanah et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) stress the importance of research in teacher development (Ulla, 2017), but Filipino teachers still encounter challenges such as overburdened workloads, lack of time, and low interest in research due to its perceived extra workload (Subia et al., 2018). While DepEd's Basic Education Research Agenda (DepEd Order No. 39, s. 2016) aims to address these issues, its influence on teachers' research competence remains limited (Abelardo et al., 2019).

Given these challenges, understanding the experiences of teacher-researchers is crucial for advancing action research, particularly in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. Studies suggest that teachers' perspectives on research and their identities as researchers significantly impact the effectiveness of their studies (Varona, 2021). The support teachers receive, both emotional and institutional, also plays a pivotal role in their engagement with action research (Nazari et al., 2023). This study aims to explore these challenges and the impact of action research on professional development, with a focus on the experiences of teachers in the Division of Bataan, Philippines, in order to provide insights that may inform broader educational practices in Southeast Asia.

FRAMEWORK

This study adopted the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to understand the driving forces, coping strategies, and professional development of teacher-researchers engaged in action research. Teacher-researchers often engage in their practice driven by intrinsic motivations, such as the desire to enhance their teaching effectiveness and improve student learning outcomes, along with extrinsic motivations, including the necessity to fulfill institutional requirements for career advancement. Literature indicates that intrinsic motivation encompasses factors like job satisfaction, professional development, and a commitment to educational goals (Sabthazi et al., 2024). Altruistic motivations, such as helping students and contributing to societal change, also play a key role (Bergmark et al., 2018). The process of action research necessitates that teachers balance their extensive teaching responsibilities with the demands of conducting research. This dual focus often leads to significant challenges such as time constraints and increased workload, prompting educators to employ a variety of coping strategies. Research indicates that these strategies can include active planning, establishing support networks, and flexible coping methods to manage stress and maintain effectiveness in both roles (Klapproth et al., 2020; Nazari et al., 2022). The strategies employed by teacher-researchers through action research are crucial for maintaining motivation and promoting professional growth. Engaging in action research empowers teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills and fosters necessary reflections on their educational practices. By systematically investigating their own teaching experiences, educators are able to identify the challenges they face and adopt strategies to resolve them, leading to both professional and personal advancement (Puspitasari et al., 2021). Additionally, external factors such as supportive school culture, administrative backing, and government policies can significantly influence the success of action research (Oestar, 2022). Schools that actively promote collaboration among teachers and provide ample research opportunities play a crucial role in enhancing teacher-researchers' engagement in action research. Research indicates that institutional policies that allocate resources towards teacher development fundamentally influence the frequency and quality of action research activities undertaken by educators (Cantalini-Williams et al., 2016). According to Hairon, fostering an environment that provides emotional and professional support is

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essential for teachers to navigate the challenges of action research, thereby enhancing their resilience in the face of obstacles (Hairon, 2017).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main goal of this study was to understand the dynamic journey and the process of action research experienced by eight elementary teacher-researchers at the Division of Bataan. In more detail, the aim was to elucidate the factors that drive teacher-researchers to get involved in action research and clarify how they deal with difficulties through the process of conducting action research. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify the numerous struggles encountered by teacher-researchers while engaged in the action research process and to reveal the methods to combat them while meeting their responsibilities at schools.

Furthermore, it sought to explore the impact of participation in action research on the development of teacher-researcher professionalism, as well as any external factors, such as school culture and support mechanisms, that impacted their journey as teacher-researchers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a multiple case study design to explore the dynamic experiences of teacher-researchers conducting action research. The approach was chosen for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of participants' motivations, coping strategies, and challenges in real-world educational settings. Yin (2018) describes case study methodology as a robust means to analyze phenomena within their natural environments, utilizing multiple data sources for comprehensive insights. Solis & Gordon, 2019; note that the initial conditions of a school, particularly its collaborative culture, significantly impact the efficacy of action research initiatives. This design enabled the study to investigate teacher-researchers' motivations, strategies, and their navigation of unique cultural and institutional settings. (Crowe et al., 2011) encourage the use of multiple case study approaches, particularly in health services research, as this permits the incorporation of various viewpoints and situational factors influencing participant experiences. Transparency and reflexivity, as discussed by Jackson and Bazeley (2019), were central to this study's approach, considering the complexity of teacher-researchers' journeys.

Research Site

The study was conducted in the first district of the Division of Bataan, encompassing the municipalities of Hermosa, Orani, Samal, and Abucay. Located in Central Luzon, this area includes several elementary schools serving learners from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The Division of Bataan operates under the K-12 curriculum, aiming to prepare students for higher education or vocational pathways. Each municipality's district is overseen by a division superintendent responsible for the schools' performance, creating a structured educational ecosystem conducive to action research.

Participants

Participants were eight elementary school teachers from the Division of Bataan who had engaged in at least one cycle of action research within the past five years. Purposeful sampling was employed to ensure participants had relevant knowledge and experience, thereby enhancing the

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study's validity and reliability (Meyer & Mayrhofer, 2022). Martin et al. (2016) underscore the necessity of smaller samples in action research conducted within educational settings. The sample was intentionally diverse, ensuring variability in teaching experience, grade levels, and subject matter. This diversity enriched the study by capturing a broad spectrum of teacher-researchers' experiences across different contexts. Criteria for selection included teachers who had actively participated in action research and had demonstrated a commitment to improving their instructional practices through research. This approach ensured a comprehensive view of the challenges and impact of action research.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tool, allowing for in-depth exploration of teacher-researchers' motivations, coping strategies, and challenges. This method was chosen for its flexibility, which enabled the researcher to probe emerging themes during the interviews (Husband, 2020). The interview guide underwent a rigorous development process, including validation by three experts, to ensure alignment with the study's objectives and clarity. Member checking was integrated into the study to enhance the accuracy of the findings. After the initial interview transcription, participants were invited to review the transcripts for accuracy, which allowed them to clarify or elaborate on their responses (Motulsky, 2021). This process enhanced the validity and trustworthiness of the data by ensuring the participants' perspectives were accurately captured. Ethical considerations were integral to the study, with participants providing informed consent, and their confidentiality and anonymity being ensured throughout the research process.

Data Collection

Data collection began with reaching out to participants via electronic platforms, including email and Facebook Messenger, to distribute invitation letters explaining the study's purpose and methodology. Once signed consent forms were obtained, individual interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience. During the interviews, the researcher explored participants' experiences with action research, including their motivations and coping strategies. Interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and prepared for qualitative analysis.

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using NVivo software, which facilitated a systematic and rigorous thematic analysis of the qualitative data. NVivo was chosen for its ability to manage large volumes of qualitative data and its advanced tools for ensuring transparency in coding and enhancing analytical rigor. Eragamreddy (2024) implemented NVivo to perform thematic analyses in their study on passive voice teaching strategies. The software allowed for efficient organization and categorization of data, which supported the identification of core themes and subthemes aligned with the research questions.

Thematic analysis followed the guidelines set by Terry and Hayfield (2021), involving multiple readings of the transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the content. Initial codes were generated to capture significant insights from the data, which were then grouped into broader themes and subthemes. NVivo played a crucial role in maintaining consistency in coding, ensuring that the analysis was both methodical and reliable. The researcher also manually reviewed the data to verify the accuracy of the software's coding and ensure that the findings were reflective of participants' lived experiences. This iterative process enhanced the trustworthiness of the analysis, ensuring it was grounded in the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study examined several facets of action research by teacher researchers and arranged the results according to particular interview themes.

1. Driving Forces in Conducting Action Research

Compliance and Requirement

Institutional mandates, such as master teacher certification, promotions, and performance evaluations, were strong motivators for undertaking action research. Participants noted that these requirements played a critical role in encouraging engagement with action research, aligning with findings from previous studies on the role of institutional pressures in shaping teachers' research involvement (Feyisa et al., 2021). Compliance with institutional standards emerged as a significant factor, reflecting the powerful influence of organizational expectations on teacher behavior.

Problem-Solving and Improvement

Participants were motivated to address classroom challenges that affected students' learning and performance, particularly during the pandemic. These efforts were aimed at improving educational outcomes, demonstrating teacher-researchers' commitment to enhancing the learning experience (Mills & Rinehart, 2019).

Benefits to Children and Personal Fulfillment

Beyond meeting compliance requirements, participants reported immense personal satisfaction from positively impacting students' lives. This intrinsic motivation highlights their commitment to creating a supportive and enriching learning environment. According to Wang et al. (2022), teachers who possess a strong intrinsic drive are more committed to nurturing an environment conducive to student learning and engagement.

2. Coping Strategies in Conducting Action Research

Support Networks and Resources

District coordinators, administrators, and peers, along with external resources such as webinars, emerged as crucial supports. The networks that provide technical, emotional, and administrative support to teacher-researchers play a crucial role in helping them effectively navigate the challenges inherent to action research. (Qu & Wang, 2024) emphasizes that these support networks are instrumental in creating resilient educators who can tackle the complexities of research within educational settings. The availability of institutional and external resources enabled participants to manage the pressures of balancing teaching and research.

3. Challenges Encountered in Doing Action Research

Time Constraints

Participants identified time limitations as a significant challenge, especially for teachers balancing teaching responsibilities and research. Soncini et al. (2021) illustrates how self-efficacy can serve as a protective factor against emotional exhaustion for teachers engaged in distance learning. Their findings indicate that improved self-efficacy can mitigate perceived stress associated with balancing personal and professional duties, suggesting that this could aid mothers in teaching roles in managing their dual responsibilities more effectively.

Communication Challenges with Parents

During the pandemic, communication barriers with parents—particularly those with lower educational attainment—hindered effective collaboration in the action research process (Feyisa et al., 2021).

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4. Balancing Teaching Demands of Teacher-Researchers in Conducting Action Research
Time Management and Planning

Efficient time management strategies, such as creating schedules and prioritizing tasks, were essential for balancing research and teaching responsibilities. Eslit (2023) discusses how creating supportive and inclusive learning environments can enhance intrinsic motivation among both students and educators. This highlights the interdependence between effective time management and a positive educational environment, suggesting that teacher-researchers who utilize structured time management approaches are more likely to foster this supportive atmosphere.

Extended Time Commitment

Participants reported extending their working hours, often sacrificing weekends and evenings to meet deadlines and manage their dual roles. This finding highlights the significant personal cost of engaging in action research and mirrors the experiences reported by educators in other studies (Abelardo et al., 2019), where extended time commitments were necessary for teachers to succeed in research endeavors.

5. Effect of Action Research on Professional Growth
Promotion and Professional Recognition

Action research was essential for professional development, significantly impacting prospects for career advancement and promotions by accruing the points required for advancement (Abelardo et al., 2019; Zuber-Skerritt, 2021).

Professional Growth through New Learning

Action research was lifelong learning that expanded participants' knowledge and improved their research abilities (Wong, 2019). Teacher-researchers adopted reflective practice, which resulted in creative interventions and instructional strategies supported by research.

Interventions and Innovations to Enhance Teaching

Action research enabled teacher-researchers to innovate teaching methods, address classroom challenges, and refine strategies through reflection, enhancing both learning outcomes and their professional growth (Poudel, 2022).

6. External Factors in Conducting Action Research
Holistic School Support

External factors, such as school culture, administrative support, and parental involvement, were crucial to the success of action research. A supportive school culture, characterized by collaboration and recognition of teachers' achievements, encouraged greater engagement with research activities. Megawati & Akobiarek (2021) similarly found that a supportive school environment plays a critical role in promoting teacher engagement in action research. When schools foster a collaborative and recognition-driven culture, teachers are more motivated to pursue research initiatives that benefit their professional growth.

7. Action Plan for Enhancing Action Research Among Public School Teachers
I-REAP (Instigating Research Engagement and Action Planning)
Rationale

In order to support educators' continuous professional development, the I-REAP (Instigating Research Engagement and Action Planning) action plan was created as a strategic framework. This initiative is to establish mentorship programs and peer support groups, which are crucial for encouraging cooperation, information exchange, and teacher skill development.

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Teachers' professional development is essential to the ongoing enhancement of instructional quality in a knowledge-driven society. Professional Development Plans (PDPs) are becoming more and more popular as a means of promoting and assisting teacher development (Meesuk et al., 2020).

In a knowledge-driven society, the continuous improvement of instructional quality depends on the professional development of teachers. The increasing use of Professional Development Plans (PDPs) has been recognized as a vital tool for encouraging and supporting teacher growth (Meesuk et al., 2020).

The I-REAP Action Plan incorporates findings from this study, including the need to allocate dedicated time for teacher research. Drawing on the teacher-led action research paradigm by Lambirth et al. (2021), the plan advances professional growth through a five-stage process:
1.**Establishing the Research Field**
2.**Strategizing**
3.**Executing**
4.**Assessing**
5.**Reflecting and Re-Strategizing**

This approach aims to train teachers with research skills, foster collaboration, and provide mentorship opportunities, ultimately enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.

Objectives:
- The primary objective of the I-REAP Action Plan is to create an environment conducive to continuous improvement and professional growth among educators. By addressing the following Key Result Areas (KRAs), the initiative aims to support teachers in achieving these goals.

Key Result Area	Activity	Objective	Expected Outcomes
Training and Capacity Building	Conduct Workshops	Provide training and resources to help educators adopt research-based approaches to their teaching.	Enhanced understanding and application of research methodologies among educators
Professional Networks	Form Peer-Support Groups	Create platforms and frameworks for teachers to share knowledge, resources, and experiences to create a cooperative community that improves teaching.	Increased sharing of ideas, experiences, and resources among teachers within specific groups
Mentorship Programs	Implement Mentorship	Provide organized direction and tools to novice teachers to equip them to engage confidently in research activities that improve their teaching skills.	Improved skills and confidence in conducting action research for novice teachers

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Time Management Tips	Schedule Research Time	Schedule research projects in teachers' schedules to balance teaching and action research	Enhanced focus on research without compromising teaching responsibilities
Recognition and Incentives	Establish Acknowledgement Programs	Create programs and recognition to inspire teachers, recognize their research achievements, and promote academic endeavors.	Increased motivation and recognition for teachers' research efforts
Collaborative Culture	Foster a Culture of Collaboration	Facilitate relationships between teachers across departments to promote openness, idea exchange, and mutual support to improve teaching techniques.	Open culture of sharing, learning, and mutual support among educators
Teacher Development	Assess Changes in Teachers' Skills	Use thorough evaluation methods to measure teachers' research methodology growth and competency, assuring continuous improvement in their skills and instructional approaches through action research.	Improved confidence, skills, and pedagogical approaches among teachers after action research

Impact of I-REAP Implementation

The implementation of the I-REAP Action Plan had a significant impact on the educational community, particularly on teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders.

1. Peer-Support Groups

These groups fostered a collaborative culture, allowing teachers to share ideas and learn from one another, resulting to improved instructional practices.

2. Mentoring Programs

Mentorship provides assistance and resources to novice educators, strengthening their confidence and preparing them to conduct action research.

3. Recognition Programs

Award programs inspired teachers, encouraging a culture of intellectual inquiry and innovation. According to Seppala and Smith (2020), teaching awards extend beyond individual recognition to foster a culture of teaching excellence.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the dynamic journeys of teacher-researchers engaged in action research, revealing the motivations, challenges, and strategies that shaped their experiences. Key motivators included institutional requirements, a commitment to problem-solving in education, and personal

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fulfillment derived from improving student outcomes. These motivations directly influenced their dedication to action research and sustained their engagement despite significant challenges such as time constraints and communication issues with parents. Coping strategies, such as leveraging support networks and fostering teamwork, played a critical role in navigating these obstacles, enabling teacher-researchers to balance teaching demands with their research activities.

Furthermore, these findings suggested the effectiveness of action research in the improvement of teaching practices, personal and professional growth, and enrichment of career development prospects. The study highlighted previously underexplored factors, such as the role of school culture and the intrinsic satisfaction derived from positively impacting students' learning experiences.

To foster a more conducive environment for teacher-researchers, it is recommended that educational institutions establish robust support structures that include dedicated research time, professional development programs, and mentoring opportunities. Additionally, schools should prioritize the creation of collaborative spaces where teachers can share insights and strategies, thereby strengthening their engagement in action research.

From a policy perspective, educational leaders should consider integrating action research into the core professional development frameworks, ensuring that teachers have the necessary resources, time, and institutional backing to engage meaningfully in research activities. Furthermore, initiatives should focus on addressing barriers such as administrative load and lack of research training, which often impede teachers' ability to conduct action research effectively.
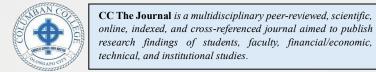
Future studies should investigate cultural implications on teacher-researcher encounters and use mixed-methods approaches to evaluate the long-term effects and scalability of action research across diverse educational contexts.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

To successfully disseminate the findings and dynamic experiences of teacher-researchers engaged in action research, a strategic approach utilizing diverse translational media—brochures, posters, films, and digital platforms—was adopted. Brochures designed specifically for educational institutions can clearly communicate the study's important findings, including practical recommendations, and can be delivered during professional development activities or shared digitally with school administrators and lawmakers. These brochures can be tailored to policymakers, highlighting the policy implications of action research and encouraging institutional changes that support teacher-researchers. When placed in schools or training venues, eye-catching posters incorporating visuals such as infographics, charts, and photos of teacher-researchers in action can capture the attention of teachers and pupils, encouraging interest in research-based approaches.

Furthermore, short films or video presentations can reach a larger audience, including parents and community stakeholders, by graphically depicting the research process and its influence on student learning and teacher development. These videos can also be shared on social media or educational platforms to maximize outreach. Each tool is meticulously crafted to ensure that the message is relevant to the requirements of its intended audience, enabling increased knowledge, comprehension, and involvement with the transformative role of action research in education. This comprehensive strategy ensures that teacher-researchers' different experiences are successfully communicated, inspiring stakeholders from all educational levels to support and engage in research-driven innovations

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