Action Research in Teaching English for Students of Non-Linguistic Specialties in Higher Schools

M. Zh. Tussupbekova[*]
L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National UniversityAstana, Kazakhstan

M. A. Idrissova
L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National UniversityAstana, Kazakhstan

B. G. Smagulova
L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National UniversityAstana, Kazakhstan

N. K. Kazhikenova
L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National UniversityAstana, Kazakhstan

Zh. M. Konyratbaeva
L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National UniversityAstana, Kazakhstan

B. Abduali
L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National UniversityAstana, Kazakhstan

Abstract

This article presents the theoretical and practical part of using the action research in teaching English for students of non-linguistic specialties in higher schools. *Action research* is a new process of research in Kazakhstan education that presents conducting of research by action researchers who share their findings with others in teaching. Our daily life connects with action research in order to investigate, make analysis and evaluate our work. The term *action research* has become particularly popular in education, especially in teaching foreign languages. Different approaches can be applied to improve the process of learning in it. Action Research is a great opportunity for creative teachers to develop different skills of students. The main purpose of this paper is to study basic concepts of *action research,* develop a model of action research process in teaching English, and determine the effectiveness and advantages of action research in teaching English for students of non-language specialties.

Keywords: Action research; Teaching English;Practical lessons; Representatives; Inspectors;Developers.

1.Introduction

Within a historically short period after gaining independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has managed to take a strong position on the international scene. Kazakhstan became a member state of the United Nations and other international organizations. Since then, Kazakhstan has been actively involved in the activities of many UN organizations, such as UNESCO, UNICEF, ECOSOC, UNHCR, and others. Kazakhstan also began to collaborate with a number of major international organizations, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Kazakhstan is also an initiator of the convening of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). In addition, it is actively involved in the integration processes within the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Central Asian Economic Union (CAPS), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In 2010, Kazakhstan became the first Asian country to chair the OSCE.

Thus, in view of the political and economic internationalization, the good command of English has been becoming more and more important. Since Kazakhstan announced its independence, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev has constantly been advocating a trilingual model. Each citizen of Kazakhstan should strive to gain fluency in English, Russian, and Kazakh. Accordingly, the national project 'Trinity of languages' determines Kazakh as the state language, Russian as an official language, and English as the language of international communication (Nazarbayev, 2007); (Hilao, 2016); (Charoensuk and Jaipetch, 2017); (Unnanantn, 2017). Simultaneously, this trinity is understood as harmony rather than competition.

Therefore, it is important to accompany as well as to support the implementation of the language policy of trilingualism by scientific explorations. It needs to be related to the multicultural policy, which requires the knowledge of the native language and stimulates learning of other languages.

Transformation into the new multilevel system of higher education in Kazakhstan has shaken all academic community to enter a modern curriculum, to create methodical techniques, to publish teaching aids, to introduce new

*Corresponding Author

technology of education. Modules, a syllabus, criteria of grades, current, intermediate controls, students' self-work may be applied in academic terms of teaching.

The multilevel system of education in Kazakhstan should correspond to the European standards and meet the requirements of «L3» idea (Life Long Learning), which is a visiting card of Bologna transformation. Each level of education provides opportunity for learning foreign languages. The goal and task of teaching English in higher institutions is the practical acquiring of colloquial and professional ways of speaking for active using as in real and professional conversation (Abdul Amir, 2015; Passov, 2002; Pradhan, 2016; Taher, 2016).

2. The Basic Concept of Action Research in Teaching English

This study of action research is based on works of Lewin (1946); Masters (1995); McNiff (2002); Kemmis *et al.* (2004), Reason and Bradbury (2007) and others. The main goal of these works is to identify the meaning and concept of action research from different perspectives. K. Lewin described action research as "a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action." In other words, each research is done by action. Dewey (1986), completely describes the educational traditional action research in his book and gives real samples from his own experience. He always reminds about the process of action research in teaching (planning, action, observation and reflection).

Therefore, action research is a strategy of teachers to investigate a problem or area of specific interest to their professional context. It provides the structure to engage in a planned, systematic and documented process of professional growth.

The important aim of action research in teaching is to contribute the experience of teachers in solving of problematic situations, following the plan and targeted goals. It is concurrently collaborative work with students or colleagues. Gilmore *et al.* (1986), notes, that action research requires the active collaboration of a researcher (or a teacher) and a client (or a student). Scientifically, action research is a systematic inquiry of knowledge in educational practice to understand clearly the situations that are carried out in practice and develop strategies geared towards the problem's improvement. It can be focused on the teaching and learning processes to solve a problem.

Thus, action research is a practical approach that can be used in any social situations to generalize different ideas of solving research problems in real life. It is believed that action research develops powers of thoughts, discussions, decisions and actions by ordinary people who participate in research on "private troubles" that they have in common (Boonyarattanasoontorn, 2017; Junnak and Veerachaisantikul, 2016; Mills, 2000). In other words, action research refers to the unity of three parts: action, research, and participation. Freire (1970), tries to integrate three main aspects in this issue: participation, action and research. It makes orientation on methodology that enables teachers or researchers to work in partnership in a manner that leads to action for change.

The studying of the basic concept of action research helps us to develop our model of action research process in teaching English for students of non-linguistic specialties.

3. An Action Research Model Development in Teaching English

Developing action research model in teaching English assists to investigate clearly our teaching experience and students' learning. This model explains and directs teachers to use action research in practice. If we take into account Freire's three main aspects of action research. According to it, we determine the group of students to participate in our experiment. Then, we describe the following action and do research (Figure 1).

Figure-1. Action research process in teaching English
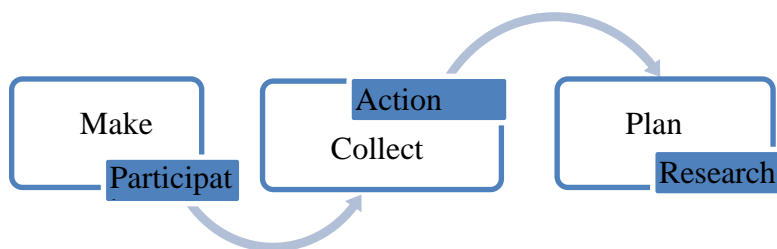
3.1. The First Stage: Participation

In this stage, we make a plan of the research and identify topics. Our participants are 2 second year students of non-language departments of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (engineering, tourism, and philology specialties). The first meeting includes a short description of the research action, discussion of the plan, indication of special dates, and deadline of the whole research (Table 1).

Table-1. The plan of the research action

Stages	Date	Events
I	Friday 20th January	Introductory lecture
	Friday 23rd February	Tutorial (a session to allow students to meet with teachers and discuss the following steps of work on the research action)
II	Friday 21th March	Submission of the proposal to Inspectors
	Friday 18th April	Submission of the proposal to Local Authority
III	Friday 28th April	Inquiry meeting
	Friday 19th May	Feedback on ideas (Comments on topic)

The themes of the research are selected according to the students' specialties and their syllabus (Table 2).

Table-2. Research topics

Groups	Research topics	Departments
G1	Restoring the building of Cinema City (Imanova Street, Astana)	Engineering
G2	Retirement center (Borovoe, Kokshetau)	Tourism
G3	Nursery school (Koktal village, Astana)	Philology

During the second meeting, teachers discuss the stages of work on the research action. 12 students and 6 teachers take part in this study. Teachers play the role of representatives of the local authority; some students perform the role of inspectors and another group of students are in the role of developers. Students-developers work in pairs on the suggested topic, students-inspectors solve the problem which are presented to the representatives of the local authority (Table 3).

Table-3. The working group

Groups	G1	G2	G3
Students (Developers)	Abdualieva Damira Akibaeva Kamila	Esenamanova Nargiz Doskaliev Serik	Kabylbekov Temirlan Ongarbekova Aisulu
Students (Inspectors)	Afandiev Rasul Darbosova Kamila	Zhuaspaev Timur Zhadiger Madikhan	Samizhan Maral Tussunova Aziza
Teachers (representatives of the local authority)	Tussupbekova Madina Abduali Bekzhan	Idrissova Mapruza Smagulova Botagoz	N.K. Kazhikenova, Zh.M. Konyratbaeva

3.2. The Second Stage: Action

The aim of the stage is to develop students' ability to collect and analyze data. Teachers prepare special guidelines for research projects. Each project consists of introduction (a short description of working project); main issues (a short description of the main issues in the project), a proposal (suggestions with a description of all reasons), and a conclusion.

The main purpose of collecting data in this action research is to find a decision for the main issues of the chosen topic. Collecting data means a collection of information on the given topic about the location of Cinema City. First of all, it is necessary to get information about the construction of this construction, about the developers, then, make photos and videos, learn all gathered computer information, do mathematical operations to get quantitative information for analyzing data, create a chart or tables, transcribe the contents of photos and video recordings.

Analyzing data involves examining all gathered information to make some conclusions to understand better the researched problem and the whole situation.

There exist two kinds of data to analyze. Quantitative data include numbers, which can be analyzed mathematically. Qualitative data consist of descriptions, opinions, quotes, interpretations that are more valuable and informative in action research.

3.3. The Third Stage: Research

The third stage requires planning an application and submission a paper. Developers prepare a planning application and submit it to inspectors. Inspectors decide whether the proposal should be allowed or dismissed. Therefore, inspectors should submit a planning application to the authority (teachers), backed up with appropriate reports. The planning of application is presented by developers at the Inquiry meeting. After listening to the developers' planning applications, inspectors can ask questions to decide whether the proposal should be realized. The representatives of the local authority consider whether the proposal in the planning of application is acceptable, in terms of its compliance with the guidance and decision making.

Planning Application

	G1 - Restoring of the Cinema City
Introduction	Cinema City is situated in Imanova Street, Astana city. It is located in the centre of the city. Its building is near the main street (Republic Avenue). It was constructed in 2000. It was considered as one of the big and new cinemas during several years. Cinema City provided only one big screen and was closed two years ago, because it was uneconomic to operate.
Main issues	- Cinema City is adjacent to the city highway and it is used by drivers as a parking place for cars; - The availability of only one big screen in the cinema can significantly reduce the prospects of the development of a new cinema in this part of the city.
Proposal	The proposal is to increase the number of screens to 5. The largest hall will hold 200 seats. The number of seats in the other halls will be 100. It is planned that the most popular films to be shown in the largest hall and other films in the small ones.
Conclusion	Today, all new cinemas have multi-screen designs. Screening of a popular film attracts a large audience of film amateurs. The number of filmgoers may be a huge amount in a week and can bring even the annual income for the short period. The new cinema can show at least 4 different movies simultaneously. In this way, it is possible to avoid the uneconomic operations as they are with the old one. From economic point of view, we think that this new cinema may get more financial benefits. First, its location in the centre of the city will satisfy the leisure demands of the residents of this area.

	G 2 – Retirement centre
Introduction	Retirement centre is in the place called Borovoye. Borovoye is situated over 200 kilometres to the northeast of Astana and almost 100 kilometres to the south of Kokshetau. This place by Kazakh standards makes it very accessible for the inhabitants of this region. All people appreciate this beautiful place in Kazakhstan with picturesque mounting cliffs and lakes with crystal-clear bluish water. There is a very large old building far from Borovoye in the pine forest. This building is proposed to change into a retirement centre for old age people.
Main issues	- The building is very old, located in a remote area; - There are no public transport services, no cycle lanes or footways leading to and from the site.
Proposal	The proposal includes the creation of a retirement centre, consisting of 50 beds. Moreover, this centre will provide quiet and safe place, where elderly can take pleasure in this retirement center; the old building will be restored and all living conditions will be created.
Conclusion	The retirement centre is situated within an area of a beautiful countryside and clean environment especially for elderly people. The centre provides with all internal arrangements and there will be a social club (a gymnasium, game rooms, hairdresser's salon, and a medical center), a restaurant, a cafe, and a small supermarket. In spite of remote area, there will be a number of cycling and jogging tracks for pedestrians.

	G 3 - Nursery school
Introduction	Children's nursery has been operating in a small hall close to the shopping centre. The size of the hall only allows the nursery to accommodate 30 children.
Main issues	- Nursery school is too small to accommodate more children. This is a popular, well-run nursery and so there is already a waiting list of parents wishing to send their children to the nursery. - Nursery school is likely to increase the number of parking places for private cars
Proposal	The proposal includes increasing the capacity to at least 80 children and a longer period of free pre-school attendance in this nursery. Moreover, there will be the area outside where parents can park their cars for a short period that is clear because of the highway.
Conclusion	This nursery school will accommodate 80 children and has the potential to provide a further increase in capacity. The redundant barn has become available and this area has a good accessibility for parking to bring and pick up the children.

Developers submit their planning applications to inspectors. Developers can submit their applications in written form. Inspectors get acquainted with the planning applications and decide whether it should be allowed or dismissed. After inspectors' decisions, the planning applications are submitted to the authorities (teachers). At the end of all processes, the planning applications are presented by developers at the Inquiry meeting. The inquiry process has the following requirements:

1) Developers present a brief introduction of their researched topics (1-2 min.);
2) Developers prepare a presentation with photos and videos (5-7 minutes);
3) Inspectors present their solutions about the planning applications (1-2 minutes);
4) Authority questions to developers and inspectors (5-7 minutes);
5) Cross-examinations (up to 10 minutes):
6) Feedback of authority (up to 10 minutes).

Developers (only whose planning applications are accepted) present their research topic with all arguments to inspectors and authority. After listening to the developers' proposals, inspectors and authority decide whether the proposed decision should be allowed to go ahead. Inquiry meeting helps to finish researching and shows the real results according to the model of action research (participation of students, action in researching, and doing research work).

4. Conclusion

Action research is concluded in improving English language teaching techniques and in empowering teachers' competencies. Following the model of action research, students can work on presented issues. Each research is done by action and action is accompanied by participation. During this action research, students allocate the role of developers and inspectors. Students work in pairs; follow the plan with deadlines and events. Moreover, students are learnt to collect and analyze data to find the right decision, plan an application (introduction, main issues, proposal and conclusion). Students participate in inquiry meeting with all participants of action research (developers, inspectors and authority). It is important to follow the stages in action research process. In planning it is to identify the problem, find the causes of the problem and its solutions, how to implement it and decide whether the action successful or not by using collection and analyzing data. In the second stage it is necessary to take the right decision, in observation is to gather evidence, which you will analyze in order to solve an issue and whether a solution is successful or not. The last stage is reflection where you should know how to analyze issues, before finding the solution to the researched problem, how to give and support ideas, disagree with others, ask research questions, what roles the participants play in groups, how to solve the problems in order to improve practice. Finally, action research is a very beneficial tool, but it needs a lot of time to conduct to be done.

Action research is an operating process of reflection of the most effective learning environment. It is to note that to solve problems, the results are not immediate as one might expect. In fact, action research is an essential process of education to develop learning skills of students in English.

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