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CONTENTS

Anca Cehan TEACHER BETWEEN REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER AND ACTION RESEARCH.....	6
Betsy Gilliland ACTION RESEARCH IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: PRACTITIONER REFLECTIONS.....	20
Michael K. Daugherty PROJECT-BASED LEARNING FOR INCREASED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT.....	30
Viorica Condrat A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE BENEFITS OF DOING ACTION RESEARCH.....	39
Nataliia Bondar DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING BY MEANS OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES.....	55
Antonina Bulyna ADDRESSING STUDENT IDENTITY WITHIN MARGINALIZATION INSTITUTIONS (BASED ON THE NOVELS BY JOANNE HARRIS).....	64
Angela Coşciug LES ANGLICISMES DES AFFAIRES ET DE LA FINANCE EN FRANÇAIS : CONSIDÉRATIONS SUR LEUR ASSIMILATION ET LEUR DIDACTISATION À TRAVERS LA RECHERCHE-ACTION.....	78
Oxana Chira ZUM KULTURBEGRIFF IM KONTEXT INTERKULTURELLER ERZIEHUNG UND BILDUNG.....	90
Alla Gembaruk ACTION RESEARCH IN PRESETT CONTEXT.....	98
Melissa R. Herman ACADEMIC WRITING IN AMERICAN ENGLISH.....	108
Tetiana Konovalenko THE WAYS OF CREATING STUDENT-CENTERED EFL METHODOLOGY CLASSES.....	113

Olena Kovalchuk LINGUISTIC BARRIERS IN TEACHING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE.....	123
Victoria Mascaliuc INTEGRATED APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH FOR THE GROWTH MINDSET TRAINING.....	131
Alyona Rutkovska, Maksim Rutkovsky ORGANISATION OF EDUCATION IN THE PANDEMIC.....	138
Irina Postolachi-Josan DE L'APPROCHE COMMUNICATIVE À LA PERSPECTIVE ACTIONNELLE : LES PRATIQUES ARTISTICO-THÉÂTRALES DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT/APPRENTISSAGE DES LANGUES VIVANTES (FLE).....	150
Manana Rusieshvili-Cartledge WHY ARE STUDENTS (UN)WILLING TO COMMUNICATE IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE?.....	162
Elena Rusu TRANSDISCIPLINARITE-UNE NOUVELLE APPROCHE DE L'APPRENTISSAGE DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT PROFESSIONNEL.....	173
Olha Sushkevych DEVELOPING STUDENTS' WRITING STRATEGY.....	181
Viorica Cebotaroș NEGATIVE PRAGMATIC TRANSFER: THE CASE OF ADVICE.....	189
Elvira Guranda PARTICULARITĂȚI LEXICALE ALE LIMBAJULUI MODEL.....	199

ACTION RESEARCH IN PRESETT CONTEXT



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Abstract: The article describes the way the pre-service students are trained to do action research which is done within the framework of the Core Curriculum for English Language Teaching Methodology Course (Bachelor's Level) designed in the context of 'New Generation School Teachers' joint project (2013–2019), initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science, Ukraine and the British Council, Ukraine. The notion of the action research and its key characteristics are revealed in the article. The understanding of the action research in PRESETT context is given. The article highlights the content, structure, number of hours and assessment specifications of the units devoted to action research: Unit 5.1 Action research 1 and Unit 6.1 Action research 2. The article also specifies the requirements for qualification paper done by the students as a result of learning on these units. The Qualification Paper Sample Template and criteria for assessing the qualification paper as well as criteria for public defence are provided in the article.

Key words: action research, the Core Curriculum for English Language Teaching Methodology Course, 'New Generation School Teachers' project, qualification paper, assessment specifications

Action research has long been considered a desirable form of teachers' professional development. However, teachers often have no idea what is meant by action research and how they can do the research. The Core Curriculum for English Language Teaching Methodology Course (Bachelor's Level) (2020), which was developed within the framework of the «New Generation School Teacher» joint project initiated and supported by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, and the British Council Ukraine, trains students to do action research. Two units, out of 22 the Curriculum includes, are devoted to action research.

This article is targeted at describing the way students are trained to do action research by brief outlining the units devoted to action research in terms of their content, structure, number of hours; by presenting the requirements to qualification paper, its structure and assessment criteria.

To begin with we will clarify the notion of an action research.

According to Watts, H. (1985) action research is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research. It is based on the following assumption:

- Teachers and principals work best on problems they have identified for themselves.
- Teachers and principals become more effective when encouraged to examine and assess their own work and then consider ways of working differently.
- Teachers and principals help each other by working Collaboratively.
- Working with colleagues helps teachers and principals in their professional development (Watts: 118).

As a result, action research in education is grounded in the working lives of teachers, as they experience them.

According to Burns, A. (2010) action research is an essential tool that empowers teachers to find their own answers to their own questions.

Borg, S. (2018), an authority on action research, states that action research is one of the flavours of teacher research. In his opinion the basic idea in action research is that professional growth and better quality educational provision can be achieved when teachers (individually or collaboratively) engage in cycles of systematic classroom inquiry. Borg, S. identifies the following key characteristics of an action research:

- It is reflective.
- It is systematic.
- It is conducted in the teacher's own professional context (the topics are chosen by the teachers and are of direct relevance to their work)
- It aims to enhance the teacher's understanding of some aspects of their practice.
- It may be collaborative, though it's not a requirement.
- It presupposes collecting different kinds of evidence to evaluate the project.

- It presupposes qualitative or/and quantitative analysis of data.
- It is made publicly available.

But unlike teacher research, action research is cyclic and requires a specific action as an outcome.

In PRESETT context by action research we understand a kind of classroom enquiry carried out by trainee-students during their observed teaching which is resulted in qualification paper. The Core Curriculum for English Language Teaching Methodology Course (Bachelor's Level) includes two special units that prepare students to do action research. These are Unit 5.1 Action research 1 and Unit 6.1 Action research 2.

Unit 5.1 Action Research 1 comes first in Module 5. Specialized Dimensions. According to the Curriculum this unit is studied in Year 4, Semester 7. The total number of hours allocated to the unit is 30, where 18 hours are contact and the rest 12 hours are self-study. The objectives of the unit are shaped in the way, that by the end of this unit students *will be aware of*: enquiry as principled teacher behavior; the value of action research as a tool for professional development *and will be able to*: notice classroom issues and formulate research questions; explore the action research cycle: stages and steps; design and use data collection tools (e.g. observations, questionnaires, interviews); analyse, interpret and present collected data; formulate an action research proposal.

The content of Unit 5.1 Action Research 1 is designed to meet these objectives and covers the following topics:

- Enquiry as principled teacher behaviour;
- Enquiry as a key step at the planning stage of teacher research;
- Teacher research and its varieties;
- Action research as a way to success in the profession of teaching;
- Action research: the Who, the Why, the What, the How;
- Action research cycle: stages and steps;
- Classroom issues and research questions (noticing an issue/problem, formulating a research question);
- Planning action research;
- Sampling in action research;
- Action research ethics;
- Collecting data;

- Quantitative and qualitative data;
- Data collection tools: variety, advantages and disadvantages;
- Analysing, interpreting and presenting data;
- Reporting action research;
- Quality in action research;
- Action research proposal (writing a proposal using the template in the Sample session materials).

The content is indicative, so each university can make any changes both to the content and its distribution within sessions. The only thing that matters is meeting the objectives and demonstrating the evidence of learning on the unit in terms of outcomes which can be assessed.

Assessment in Unit 5.1 states as follows: *Formulate an action research proposal following the suggested template.* The template includes guiding questions for students to give their description, *e.g.* What is the topic of your project? Why do you want to study this issue? What is/are your research question(s)? What will the general context for the research be (*e.g.*, the school, one or more classes)? *etc.*

Action research proposal correlates with the content and is structured in such a way that students can gradually fill it in after learning the particular topic. All in all, it corresponds to the main steps of the action research:

- Identify the problem.
- Formulate questions.
- Cycle 1.
- Plan (choose ways of collecting data, plan interventions).
- Take action (gather data, intervene).
- Analyse and interpret data (assess impact on teaching and learning).
- Cycle 2.
- Plan.
- Take action (wider scale intervention).
- Analyse and interpret data.
- Report (formulate recommendations).

The proposal is the basis for writing a qualification paper, which is done by students Semester 8. Unit 6.1 Action research 2 is the first in Semester 8. It aims at enhancing skills that the students acquired as a result of learning on Unit 5.1. This unit is also recommended for

assisting students in writing, editing and finalising their qualification paper. By the end of this unit, students will be able to: write the first draft of their qualification paper, review and edit it. The selection of the content for this unit is based exclusively on students' needs in carrying out an action research and writing a qualification paper.

The qualification paper demonstrates a student's ability to link theoretical knowledge with the practical elements of their own work during school experience (Observed teaching). The students submit the paper in English at the end of Semester 8. The paper is assessed according to the detailed criteria given in *Table 1* and *Table 2*. This accounts for 70% of the total for the qualification paper. A further 30% is allocated to the public defence of the qualification paper which is held in English.

Table 1. Criteria for the qualification paper

Criteria		Mar k
Context	Clear statement of context, including a profile of the class or classes in focus	5%
Topic	Clear, well-focussed research questions and/or hypotheses on a classroom-based issue or problem Evidence of the ability to relate the issue to relevant theory in the literature.	15%
Classroom investigation methodology	Clear description of research methodology Appropriate choice and justification of research methods and instruments	15%
Findings	Clear analysis and presentation of data and findings	10%

Interpretations, implications and conclusions	Valid interpretations, implications and conclusions, including any materials developed as a result of the investigation	20%
Presentation of the written work	Systematic and consistent referencing. Readability: style, organization and signposting of writing Length and format according to requirements	5%
Total		70%

Table 2. Criteria for the public defence

Criteria		Mark
Content of the presentation	The student: -gives due consideration to key results of the research -provides argumentation to support the most important conclusions -demonstrates the ability to reflect on research experience	15%
Dealing with questions	The student: -addresses the questions directly and clearly -clarifies the fundamental aspects of the research -links answers to different aspects of the paper	10%

Form of the presentation	-The presentation is clear, structured, comprehensible to listeners and within a time limit	5%
Total		30%

The Core Curriculum for English Language Teaching Methodology Course provides also Qualification Paper Sample Template and Guidelines. The template is presented in *Table 3*.

Table 3. Qualification Paper Sample Template

Heading (paper section)	Content	Number of words
Title page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May vary from university to university. 	N/A
Table of Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include headings and relevant page numbers. 	N/A
Lead-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce your research topic. • Describe the context, including a profile of the class or classes in focus. 	400 –500
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a classroom-based issue or problem. • Formulate a research question. • Put forward a hypothesis. • Relate the issue to relevant theory in the literature. 	500 – 600
Lead-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline the stages of 	1300 -1400

	<p>the action research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the kind of data you need to collect. • Describe and justify the data collection methods and tools. • Describe your research participants. • Evaluate the effectiveness of research tools. • State any ethical issues. 	
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse the collected data. • Present the findings (e.g. description, table, chart, diagram, etc.). 	1400 – 500
Lead-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpret the findings and draw conclusions responding to the research question. • Come up with recommendations for further actions. • Point out any areas which need further research (optional). 	1400- 1500
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a bibliography of resources referred to in your paper. 	N/A
Lead-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include any materials which directly relate to the research, e.g. questionnaires, sample tasks, tables, etc. and which you refer to in the paper. • Put the appendices in 	N/A

	the order they are mentioned in the paper.	
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is not a separate section of the paper. • Refer to reliable sources in the rationale and throughout the paper wherever appropriate and justified. 	N/A
Total		5000– 5500

Students are also provided with Sample Qualification Paper Timeline. It serves as a guideline for students. They clearly know what they are to do by the end of each month starting with September. The timeline may vary from university to university. Students may adjust the timeline to their own pace and needs except for the deadlines for submitting and defending the paper. Students need to explore the requirements and guidelines for writing the qualification paper well in advance.

Summing up, we can state that the Core Curriculum for English Language Teaching Methodology Course provides students' thorough training for doing action research which is considered one of the forms of teachers' professional development.

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