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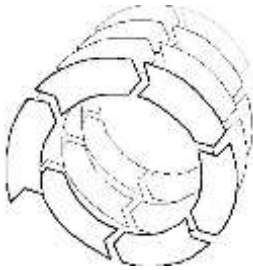
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Editorial

Greetings,

Action learning (AL) and action research (AR) have been employed in various fields of endeavor; one of the most prominent being education. This *ALARj* issue contains three different articles examining different aspects of education through the lens of AR and AL, as well as a book review to help AR facilitators. Lastly, the issue introduces a new and exciting initiative, Thesis Research Notes (TRN), to assist researchers in gaining early exposure for their future publications.

The first article, *The Emergence of lifelong learning strategies through an action research study in second language learning,* by Helen Stavrou, highlights the importance of teaching a second language within a cultural context, by researching the use of popular cultural resources (PCR) such as music, TV series, and films. She claims that the utilization of PCR increases students' learning motivation and assists in developing lifelong learning strategies. One noteworthy aspect of her research is its focus on higher education, since many of the studies regarding the use of music in language teaching focus primarily on children and youth.

The author grounded her participatory action research in motivation theories, especially regarding learning and "Deci & Ryan's (1985, 2008) Self Determination Theory (SDT), which focuses on tenets of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and their role in intrinsic motivation." (p. 13). Her literature review highlights the need for such a study, given the "… decreased learning motivation in undergraduate EFL learners in the local context of Cyprus" (p. 20).

Stavrou's action research findings indicate that, not only did the study's participants increase their learning motivation through the

use PCR that aligned with their interests, but it also inspired develop lifelong learning strategies. The author calls on language educators and institutions to employ participatory action research to improve their practices for teaching foreign languages.

Like the first article, Gerry Digo's piece, *Effectiveness of a state university extension on pedagogical action research* also focuses on higher education. He argues that there is a need to improve the action research competencies of both undergraduate and graduate students, as well as those in teacher training programs. His claim comes as a result of his examination of the indicators of teacher education standards in the Philippines. His proposal that schools of higher learning — and in his case, the state university where he works--create an extension program to increase students' AR knowledge and skills met with the school's approval. He named this project "*Mindful Change: A Capacity Building Program for Pedagogical Action Research.*"

Participants in the study gave feedback of their experience, and one of the recurring issues was their lack of understanding of learning theories during the AR first cycle. According to proper AR practice, this led him to conduct a second cycle whose goal was to respond to this need and provide a series of webinars focusing on learning theories such as Behaviorism, Constructivism, Connectivism, and Social Cognitive Theories.

Digo's findings indicated that the project was effective; participants improved their AR competencies after participating in the extension program, and the quality of research increased. He is now planning for a third cycle that may "…focus on action research dissemination to ensure that their immersion from action research conception to dissemination is complete." (p. 61). Like Stavrou, Digo is also keen on universities implementing programs to improve AR competencies and encourages them to contact him.

The common thread connecting both articles is expressed in Stephen Kemmis' words (quoted by Digo) "…action research is a practice – a practice-changing practice" (p. 53).

Saeed Shalbafan, Shankar Sankaran, Elyssebeth Leigh and Julien Pollack collaborated on the third article, *Action learning for simulation design in project portfolios*. In contrast to the AR-focus of previous two pieces, these scholars used action learning (AL) in exploring how AL applications can benefit project management and effective decision-making during uncertain times. More specifically, they assert that utilizing AL to design a research methodology will provide better data to the research question than conventional research methods.

The article discusses what they have learned from a simulation they developed: "HOOSHMAND-1" (meaning 'Intelligent' in Persian). To better understand the context for developing this simulation or role-play, the authors reviewed the literature on project portfolio management (PPM) and the application of action learning. The authors conducted six action learning cycles, each one including implementation and reflection, with the creation of HOOSHMAND-1 in cycle five.

> HOOSHMAND-1 as a role-play simulation creates a unique set of conditions for study of decision makers' judgements and decision-making processes in PPM steering committee contexts where they are finding they have to cope with events arising during their decision making" (p. 79).

Like Digo, the researchers used the participants' input to modify the research process, with the lead author (Shalbafan) requesting participants' feedback in the fifth cycle so as to improve the simulation in the sixth and final cycle.

The authors conclude that their study

> contributes to project management research by sharing knowledge of how to develop a custom design research method using action learning to address complex research problems where there is little evidence available from previous research in the body of knowledge" (p. 84).

They then advocate adopting using AL so researchers of project management and portfolio management may benefit from designing research methods for their projects.

Even though each of the three articles focuses on a different topic, they all offer suggestions and practical steps to improve practice and to educate practitioners and researchers on how to implement them.

Next, the issue features a review of Rosetta Pillay's "*Growing through reflection: A journal for action learning facilitators by* ALARA president Colin Bradley. The work, as its title would suggest, is as much a journal as a guide, with most of the space devoted not to text, but to blank lined pages for the reader (who are assumed to be AL facilitators) to record their notes and reflections.

Following the book review, this issue also introduces the Thesis Research Notes (TRN) initiative, inviting authors to submit their papers in order to gain early exposure. The TRN focuses on the researcher's journey and would usually be co-authored with the thesis supervisor, who would add insights and another perspective of this research process. TRN papers should be 4,000-8,000 words or 10-14 pages. The papers that are sought are "not a scaled-down paper on the masters or doctoral thesis that had been submitted and successfully passed. It is intended as an informative paper that directly refers to and links to the author's thesis to 'whet the reader's appetite' to consider downloading and reading it as well as to gain an appreciation of the HDR candidate's research journey, motivation to choose the research topic to maintain interest in the many years taken to complete the research." ALARA invites all interested researchers and authors to take part in this initiative. Please see page 95 to find more details and guiding questions regarding TRN.

Wishing you all a healthy, successful, enriching, and fruitful New Year.

Yedida Bessemer, EdD

The emergence of lifelong learning strategies through an action research study in second language learning

Helen Stavrou

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the emergence of lifelong learning strategies during an action research study investigating the impact of using popular cultural resources on the learning motivation of English as foreign language undergraduate students in higher education. The study was undertaken with 30 students enrolled in General Advanced English courses over a 13-week period. Throughout the action research phases, students were given multiple opportunities to work with resources aligned to their own interests as learning prompts to reinforce course learning objectives. Weekly diary entries, online surveys, focus groups and practitioner field notes were used as data sources. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic which necessitated a rapid transferal of all courses to an online mode, the study was modified and undertaken within an online teaching environment. The results indicate that using popular cultural resources such as popular song, TV series and film as learning prompts positively impacted student learning motivation in addition to facilitating the emergence of lifelong learning strategies.

Key words: Motivation, participatory action research, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English Language Teaching (ELT), Self-determination Theory (SDT), lifelong learning

What is known about the topic?

Much of the literature investigating the potential of music and song to positively impact motivation in second/foreign language learning has focused on the use of specifically designed songs and younger learners. There is limited research on the use of popular song and other sources of popular culture with foreign language learners in higher education settings.

What does this paper add?

This paper supports the use of popular cultural resources (PCR) in future English language teaching practices as a means through which to enhance the satisfaction of basic learner needs, competence, autonomy and relatedness, Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which in turn seem to positively impact learning motivation. The paper also presents the emergence of lifelong learning strategies as observed through the use of learning prompts aligned to students' interests.

Who will benefit from its content?

Language teaching institutions, language learning practitioners interested in improving practice as well as foreign language learners will benefit from an understanding of how practices which satisfy core learning needs may positively impact student learning motivation.

What is the relevance to AL and AR scholars and practitioners?

- This paper highlights the potential of action research studies to assist practitioners in the pursuit of better practices through the development and exploration of specific pedagogical strategies.
- This paper offers practical insights as to ways through which theory and practice may be bridged through the findings and outcomes of participatory action research.

Introduction

Irrespective of teaching mode, enhancing the learning motivation of foreign language learners is of paramount concern to language teaching professionals due to its widely acknowledged role in helping students better achieve language learning potentials. Crucial to this process, is the role of the teacher in providing classroom practices and experiences which enhance the learning motivation of students. In a study by Fathi, Torabi & Arashpour (2019), motivation was found to be "context-bound" suggesting that in striving to motivate students, teachers also need to

"consider the importance of their specific teaching and learning context" (p. 9). Whilst extensive research has been done in the area of second language learning and motivation, Mercer (2018) notes that the role of the teacher in creating environments and tasks that trigger positive responses from students remains under researched.

Background and Literature Review

The history of research in language motivation spans multiple decades and has evolved from focusing on affective factors and their influence on language learning to the inclusion of factors concerning classroom contexts. Al-Hoorie (2017) provides a historical overview of this 60-year history citing among others, Gardner's (1979, 1985, 2010) work on integrative motivation and the language learner's favourable attitude towards the target language community, the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2015) which centres on learners' ideal image of themselves as future learners of the target language and Deci & Ryan's (1985, 2008) Self Determination Theory (SDT) which focuses on tenets of autonomy, competence and relatedness and their role in intrinsic motivation.

In discussing the history of L2 motivation research, Ushioda (2016) notes a 'general scarcity of published work reporting on classroom-based practitioner led investigations' (p. 566). It is on account of this scarcity that we continue to have:

> limited understanding of how processes of motivation evolve through-day- today interactions and events in the classroom, and of how teachers can work responsively and adaptively to shape these interactions and events in motivationally constructive ways (p. 566)

Guilloteaux and DÖRnyei (2008) specifically investigated teacher use of motivational strategies and effect on student motivation. The study involved 40 English as a second language classes and 27 teachers in South Korea with results indicating that teacher motivational practices are linked to increased levels of motivated learning behaviour as well as motivational state. The authors note

the worldwide problem of student demotivation and call for the investigation of ways to "raise teachers' awareness of their motivating practices" (p. 73). Based on the results of their study, they concluded that teaching the curriculum in a motivating manner is a realistic possibility which can be enhanced through the systematic application of motivational strategies in a "context-appropriate manner" (p. 73).

Few studies have investigated the impact of using popular song and other popular cultural resources in English Language Teaching (ELT) practices in higher education. Mahmud (2017) investigated the use of popular song as prompt for academic writing in university students. Results indicated that the use of song as prompt assisted in the creation of more 'enriched' content in the writing samples of learners. Mahmud (2017) noted that "the inclusion of songs as a prompt can bring positive outcomes in students' academic write up," (p. 200) in addition to promoting a positive and pleasant experience for the students. Mahmud's research offered a novel approach to the use of song in its real-world form as a pedagogical resource with older second language learners. He acknowledged the existing absence in the current literature by noting that very few attempts of using songs in teaching writing have been made so far. Israel (2013) used singing and music as a way to inspire students of English literature who found the study of poetry to be overwhelming. Due to decreased interest and motivation, contemporary songs were used as a means through which to re-motivate students.

Motivation is believed to be one of the main "influential factors in an individual's success for learning a second or foreign language" (Wijnen, Loyens, Wijnia, Smeets, Kroeze & Van der Molen, 2018, p. 60). Conversely, demotivating factors such as dissatisfaction with course content, learning materials and language learning environment "impede learners' learning motivation and, consequently lead to unsuccessful mastery" of the language (Vakilifard, Ebadi, Zamani & Sadeghi, 2020, p. 2). Rigorously investigating pedagogical strategies and possible impact on

learning motivation allows for better insights and the potential to improve future practices.

While our everyday experiences suggest the importance of motivation in goal attainment, quantifying success is a multifaceted issue. In the case of passing or doing well on internal or external examinations, success may be measured in terms of a pass or fail grade or in terms of grade improvement. Success in second language learning is not however limited to this singular interpretation. Success can also be measured through benchmarking or via a set of personal learner goals. In this sense, any improvement in a learner's ability to use the target language qualifies as success. Increased student motivation or interest to continue learning the target language may additionally qualify as success as would the development of lifelong learning strategies enabling students to continue their language learning endeavours beyond the scope of the immediate classroom context. These strategies would promote long term learning and prolong learner contact with the target language. Wang and Luo (2019) note the necessity for students to acquire "qualities for self-development, with which they self-regulate their learning, adapt themselves to different situations, and undertake lifelong learning with healthy mind and body" (p. 115).

In a study of academic emotions and emotional validation, Komlosi-Ferdinand (2020) investigated the effect of emotions experienced in the classroom and the effect of these on learners' and educators' motivation. A total of 11 English teachers and 70 Mongolian students attending a bilingual school in Mongolia participated in the study. The study looked at the impact of students' emotions, as experienced during their second language learning classes, on their motivation. Results showed that for the majority of participants, validation of student emotions (consideration of their positive and or negative feelings) had "an enormous impact on the self-esteem, dignity and self -confidence" of students while also significantly enhancing their "willingness to learn more" (p. 14).

Celik and Yildiz (2019) carried out a 12-week study with two groups of 40 students at an upper intermediate Level at Iraq Ishik University Preparatory School. The students were divided into a control and experiment group of 20 students each. Both groups followed the same curriculum and made use of the same course textbook over the 12-week period with the addition of motivational elements of the target language culture with the experimental group. Based on the 12 unit tests given over the 12-week period the students in the experimental group were observed to receive more significant and successful test scores from week to week over the 12 week span. The authors note that "the use of cultural items in the course and classroom environment for foreign language teaching influenced the results of the students positively" as the students "became more motivated to learn" the target foreign language through exposure to "cultural elements, objects and activities" associated with target language cultures (Celik & Yildiz, 2019, p. 158).

In an investigation into factors which demotivate English as a foreign language (EFL) students at tertiary level, Le and Tien (2019) state that one of the aims of the study was to explore the contribution on motivation upon the success of learning a foreign or second language. A total of 235 students enrolled at a private university in Vietnam were asked to complete a questionnaire investigating factors that demotivate students in EFL learning in addition to strategies that may be employed to overcome demotivating factors in EFL classrooms. The results reaffirmed the fact that demotivating factors have negative effects on students' EFL learning. Additionally, students reported that their success in learning a foreign language was dependant on a variety of factors. They reported that the more "autonomous, confident and motivated" they were, the more "successful in learning" (Le & Tien, 2019, p. 884) they became. The authors suggest future research involving students and teachers at other universities in similar contexts.

This paper presents the findings of a participatory action research study in which the practitioner-researcher and participating

students investigated and reflected upon ways in which popular cultural resources (PCR) such as popular songs, TV series and film of the target language, English, could be used in ELT practices on account of their popularity among students of the local cohort. Results showed that the use of PCR to which students could relate, appeared to rouse emotional responses which in turn positively impacted learning motivation. Throughout this process, evidence of emerging lifelong learning strategies was also observed.

Action Research in Practice

The distance between the ongoing process of practice, reflection and innovation inherent to good teaching practice and the process of creating and disseminating actionable knowledge inherent to good research can be bridged by participatory action research. For the practitioner concerned with the pursuit of pedagogies which are fit for purpose, the need to systematically reflect on practice leads to numerous cycles of change which combine intuition, practice and evaluation. This process mirrors the process of action research which consists of fluid and overlapping cycles of investigation, action planning, piloting of new practices, and evaluation of outcomes. The main difference between the two practices is that action research aims to combine at each stage the collection and analysis of data on a path towards generation of knowledge (Given, 2008). Having as its starting point the identification of a problem, action research is a systematic, disciplined inquiry which focuses on addressing a specific identifiable research question (Brighton & Moon, 2007). It strives to plan and implement a strategic form of action as a proposed solution to the problem whilst simultaneously recording, reflecting and potentially making changes and adaptations to it in a collaborative process of doing and learning.

Practitioner action research bridges the divide by providing the practitioner with the opportunity to become practitioner-researcher. In doing so, 'data collection becomes systemized, reflection is built into practice, findings are analyzed, and discoveries are disseminated' (Campbell, 2013, p. 2).

Inherent to action research is the desire to bring about "improvement within the context of the study," (Tomal, 2010, p. 10) as well as to recognise the site of action research as being theoretically significant (Edward-Groves, Olin, & Karlberg-Granlund, 2016). In terms of changing education, projects of action research need to put in motion "processes of local, site-based education development" (Edwards-Groves et al., 2016, p. 328) in order for change to occur.

Edward-Groves, Grootenboer & Wilkinson (2018) carried out a study investigating existing perceptions of educational action research with a specific focus on teachers' actions and talk and how these may be used a means of transforming their learning within today's global conditions. The results of the study showed that specific practices and conditions proved conducive to the "transformation of teachers' understandings of practice" (p. 438) due to the 'doing' nature of active enquiry.

Context

Characteristic of participatory action research is "that participants in social and educational life can do research for themselves" (Kemmis, 2014, p. 5). Since the aim of the reported research was to learn by doing, a participatory action research approach was adopted for a study undertaken at the Language Centre of the University of Cyprus during the FALL 2020 semester. Within the local context, and in light of the island being a former British colony, the English language is the most widely used foreign language on the island of Cyprus. Although originally intended for a face-to-face context, the study was modified and undertaken within an online teaching setting due to the COVID-19 pandemic which necessitated a rapid transferal of courses to an online mode.

Research Question

The overarching research question this study aimed to investigate was the possible impact of using PCR as prompts on the learning motivation of undergraduate EFL students enrolled in General Advanced English language classes in higher education.

Methodology

Informed by Ryan's (2017) self-determination theory, the participatory action research explored the effects of offering advanced EFL learners in higher education opportunities to use PCR of the target language, English, as prompts within their second language learning experiences in order to explore possible impact on learning motivation.

In the absence of available information relating to local students' relationship with PCR, an exploratory survey was designed as part of preliminary research for the specific purpose of informing the consecutive action research. The aim of the survey was to provide currently unavailable, yet key, information relating to local student engagement with English language PCR such as popular song, T.V. series and film.

Referring to the action research process, Tripp (2005b) notes that when "one does not have a good measure or adequate baseline data," then "one seeks to make judgements on the best evidence that one can produce" (p. 4). Since to the best of the researcher's knowledge no existing questionnaire with the same focus of enquiry was available for modification, the survey was designed to provide previously unavailable local stakeholder insights considered necessary in informing the subsequent participatory action research study (Kemmis, 2014).

To inform the development of the survey, information from prior studies such as that of Tegge (2015) who used a questionnaire to investigate song-based language teaching and its effect on lexical learning as well as The Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal & Vallieres, 1992) and The language Learning Orientation Scale (Noels, Pelletier, Clement & Vallerand, 2000) was used in addition to a review of the literature and consideration of Self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Face and content validity of survey items were determined through review by 4 experts with over 50 years combined experiences in teacher training, with two of the experts having

developed, administered and contributed towards multiple published national and international surveys. Expert review ensured that the key topic considerations were represented, questions were assessed for readability and that the survey's format was suitable for higher education students. A group of undergraduate students sharing characteristics of the target cohort was asked to pilot the survey and provide feedback relating to ease of understanding and overall time needed for completion. The survey was administered to two different cohorts of undergraduate students in Phase One and Early Phase Two of the study, to be discussed in greater detail further below.

Both the survey and the consecutive action research were aligned with Self-determination theory (SDT) which stipulates the need for three basic tenets to be met in the pursuit of enhancing intrinsic (internal) motivation: 1) competence (a basic need to feel we have mastered or accomplished a goal), 2) autonomy (a need to self-regulate and self-endorse ones experiences and actions and 3) relatedness (a desire to feel socially connected) (Ryan, 2017). When the aforementioned tenets are satisfied, subjects are better able to thrive and flourish. SDT considers how non-intrinsically (extrinsically) motivated behaviours can become increasingly self-determined as well as how certain social settings can impact on learning outcomes. This framework provided a lens through which changes to teaching practice were initially conceptualised and implemented in this action research study.

The Participatory Action Research Phases (1-5)

The action research was prompted by the initial problem of decreased learning motivation in undergraduate EFL learners in the local context of Cyprus. The research was undertaken in five phases as shown in Figure 1.

Phase one of the research involved the identification of the problem through practitioner-researcher knowledge and experience based on changes in student behaviour and engagement. The identified problem of decreased student learning motivation led to an extensive literature review which allowed for
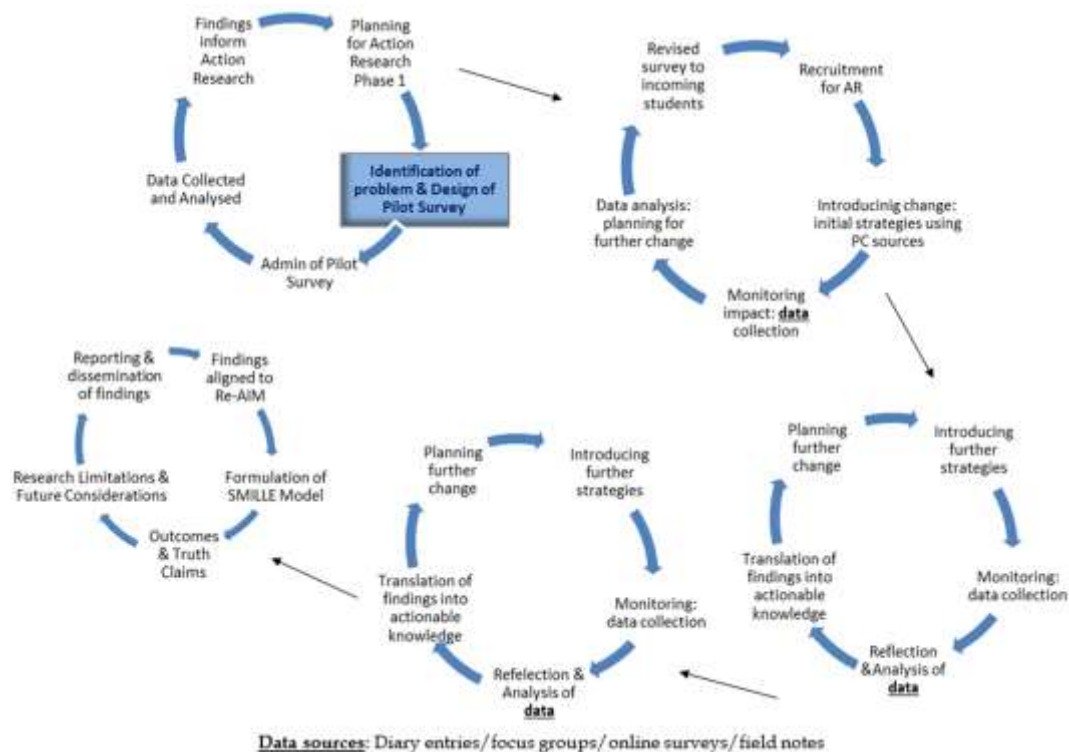
Figure 1. Action Research Study Phases 2020-2021

an in-depth understanding of current learning theories, motivation theory and subsequent research studies previously carried out in areas of second language learning. In order to gather important insights relating to the past language learning experiences and leisure time habits of local undergraduate students which were currently unavailable to the best of the researcher's knowledge, a survey was designed and implemented. The particular approach taken was one of *development* (Greene, 1989) in that insights from phase one were used to inform consecutive phases (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The timing of the phases was *sequential* in that the data generated in phase one preceded and informed later phases.

Phases two to four consisted of the participatory action research which was carried out during the 13-week FALL 2020 semester (September – December). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all courses for the FALL 2020 semester were delivered online. Microsoft TEAMS was used for all class management needs and the ZOOM video conferencing tool was used for every class session. Throughout phases two to four, a series of 13 intervention-like tasks and activities which made use of PCR as learning prompts to reinforce course objectives were implemented and reflected upon in a systematic process of planning, action, reflection and further action. As a result of the unexpected shift to online teaching, and as part of the action research process, tasks were modified for suitability within an online setting. One of the challenges which arose was the sharing of audio-visual stimuli such as popular song via share screen, rather than within a physical classroom. Wherever technical problems arose, students were sent the appropriate link and were able to listen to the song in separate breakout rooms. Despite this presenting itself as a challenge in that the impact of the song in a physical classroom space was lost, student feedback described the use of song as having a mitigating and unifying effect. Students felt that collaborating with others in breakout rooms helped them to make connections with peers which would have otherwise been impossible. Those who more technologically savvy, assisted those

less so which again assisted in bridging the online distance and allowing students to work together.

Task types varied in their didactic purpose and were designed to reinforce communicative aspects of language use. These included the use of songs as opposed to written texts as an alternative means of developing comprehension skills and identifying themes and topics. Song lyrics were also instrumental for spoken and written mediation tasks whereby students were involved in the application of strategies needed to process, explain or simplify input (Nagai, Birch, Bower & Schmidt, 2020, p. 43). Additional tasks focused on phrases and expressions used in the context of song lyrics and their broader applicability as well as the use of self-selected PCR as prompts for the development of oral presentations. Ongoing cycles of planning, action and reflection of the various data collected throughout the study influenced the design of consecutive tasks based both on practitioner-researcher observations as well as participant qualitative feedback via the data sources to be discussed below.

Phase five consisted of final phase coding and analysing of data, the formulation of study outcomes and assertions and the dissemination of these to the broader ELT community.

Recruitment Procedures

All registered students were invited to participate in the study. Participation was entirely voluntary and bore zero impact on course grades. A student information statement detailing the aims and scope of the study as well as the types of data sources to be used was sent to all students in standard modern Greek and English. Students were given a week to consider participation and were encouraged to seek any additional information or clarification needed. A total of 30 students provided signed consent and were recruited for the study. Participants were acknowledged as "engaged learners" (Gibbs et al., 2016) involved within a dynamic of shared knowledge building (Kemmis, 2009).

Data Sources

Burns (2009) divides data sources into observation and non-observation types. The data sources selected for this study consisted of online survey data (1 initial + 3 mini surveys throughout semester), weekly online reflective diary entries (PENZU), focus groups (3 over the course of the semester) as well as practitioner-researcher field notes and observations. As research which focuses on the creation of knowledge through collaborative critical reflection upon practice, it was considered "more appropriate to use mainly qualitative, rather than quantitative research methods" (Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher, 2015). Vaughn (2019) used a similar protocol consisting of student surveys, interviews, assessment data, reflective teacher notes and recorded discussion sessions in their action research study exploring student attitudes towards writing instruction.

Ethical Considerations

All protocols and procedures applied to the research undertaken adhered to the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated 2018. Ethics approval was granted in two phases by the Human Research and Ethics Committee (HREC), Charles Sturt University. The first phase concerned the pilot survey administered in Phase One and repeated in early Phase Two of the study (Protocol Number: H20046) and the second concerned the 13-week participatory action research, Phases Two to Five, (Protocol Number: H20139). Ethics approval was also given by the Language Centre of the University of Cyprus where the research was undertaken.

In order to respect the privacy, confidentiality and cultural sensitivities of the local participants, a number of protocols were followed. Participant information statements, consent forms, focus group information and invitations as well as online diary information handouts were provided in Greek and English following ethics approval. To ensure ease of participant responses, students were free to choose between the use of standard Modern

Greek, or English for student reflective diary entries, online surveys as well as during focus group discussions.

Blake (2007) acknowledges the non-traditional relationship between researcher and participant inherent to participatory action research which lacks the objectivity emphasised in traditional research approaches. Kemmis (2014) speaks of dependent relationships which exist between students and teachers where the dependent party may feel compelled and obligated to consent to participating in the proposed study in order to avoid any feared "penalty" or "repercussion" (p. 162). In this study, participant involvement was carried out on a Co-option basis (Tripp, 2005a) whereby students were encouraged to participate based only on their own interest and initiative. Renegotiation of consent was undertaken (Meyer 1993) as cited by Normand, Meyer & Bentley (2003), in the event that any participant wished to discontinue partaking in the study.

Extensive protocols such as the use of pseudonyms for student diary entries, the use of a third person to carry out recorded student focus groups as well as the anonymous completion of online surveys were implemented so as to protect the anonymity of the participating students as well as to minimise existing power relations and maximise the trustworthiness of the data collected. Students were also forwarded relevant contact information for the university's Mental Health Clinic services and were encouraged to reach out in the unlikely event that their involvement in the action research study caused distress.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection sources comprised of weekly diary entries, focus groups, online surveys and practitioner field notes and observations. With respect to the weekly diary entries, students were encouraged to document their emotions and insights freely. Emphasis was placed on the reporting of student feelings and motivation for class tasks and activities. Students often asked for guiding questions and these were provided with a focus on encouraging student critical feedback and honest documentation

of ongoing experiences. Participants were asked to reflect upon activities and tasks, their own personal interest and engagement in these, any feelings of stress and anxiety which may have emerged, as well as likes and dislikes with respect to activities and class tasks.

Online survey questions were designed to elicit honest feedback with questions prompting students to document both positive as well as negative reactions/responses to the intervention-like tasks being implemented. Focus group questions were similarly designed to enhance the trustworthiness of the data. Participants were invited to record anything they felt could assist in an overall understanding of the impact of the new teaching and learning strategies using PCR which were implemented throughout the semester and the impact of these on their own classroom experiences and motivation.

A diary of self-memos and notes was kept by the practitioner-researcher throughout the action research. These had two main purposes: to facilitate the overall management of the study and to keep a detailed set of reflective notes concerning relevant in and out of class occurrences. The process of memo writing was initially unstructured in that whatever came to mind upon reflecting on data or any particular incident was noted freely. Upon rereading, memos were titled and categorised in order to "determine" their "place in the data corpus" (Saldaña, 2011, p. 44). These memos included but were not confined to issues of attendance, frequency of camera use by students, student engagement, nuances related to changes in class participation and mood, student physical movements and facial expression (when and where applicable) and overall classroom atmosphere. Self-memos were also instrumental in reflecting on the phases of the study, the methodology followed, and the phenomenon being investigated. These were used as a reflective tool and became part of the data collection and analysis process for the purpose of triangulation.

On account of the continuous process of data collection, it was possible to effectively cross reference visual observations related to implemented tasks with qualitative feedback provided by the

participants. This greatly assisted in the design of further tasks aligned to student interests. As evident in student physical responses such as smiling, engagement, enthusiasm as well as participant written feedback, the use of popular song emerged as extremely uplifting and was thus the PCR chosen most frequently in the design of consecutive intervention-like tasks.

Data Analysis

A descriptive statistical analysis using the statistical software SPSS 25 was conducted on the quantitative questions of the survey. All other qualitative data were collated and analysed in order to gain insights and detect common phenomena, patterns and themes which assisted in generating new concepts and generalizations within the topic area (Schreiber, 2012). Data was collected, coded and analysed via NVIVO (2020 version) software package (QSR International). Immersion and familiarisation with the data was initially undertaken through systematic reading, highlighting and annotating (Grbich, 2013).

Initial codes were created and later reduced through systematic reflection of the data. During the first cycle of coding, *concept coding* was used due to its appropriateness for studies which focus on theory and theory development, as was *emotion coding* so as to best capture participant experiences (Saldaña, 2011). Both *emergent* and *A priori* codes aligned to SDT and the research questions being investigated were used. A line-by-line coding approach was initially adopted after which open coding was also used for broader scale coding. The coding process continued until saturation of the data was achieved in that no new properties or dimensions were seen in the data (Saldaña, 2011). In the second cycle of coding, *theoretical coding* was used. Codes were categorised and emergent themes were found before assertions were formulated.

The RE-AIM model (Glasgow, Vogt & Shawn, 1999) was used as a framework for the translation of data findings into possible future recommendations for ELT practitioners.

Survey Results

While the emphasis of the open-ended survey questions was to gather insights as to student past enjoyable second language learning experiences, the aim of the quantitative questions was to ascertain the nature and extent of local undergraduate students' relationship with English language PCR. This previously unavailable information was extremely important in allowing the practitioner-researcher to better select materials aligned to students' interests for the pedagogical strategies designed in the consecutive action research phases of the study.

A key survey finding was that incoming undergraduate students of the local context seem to be driven to continue learning English by extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivators, with the top three motivators being: English is needed for future profession (M=4.40, SD .87), English is needed for academic studies (M= 4.34, SD=.91), English is needed for communication while travelling abroad (M=4.31, SD=.94).

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 5 hours	17	15.7	20.5	20.5
	5-10 hours	12	11.1	14.5	34.9
	11-15 hours	17	15.7	20.5	55.4
	16-20 hours	12	11.1	14.5	69.9
	21-25 hours	8	7.4	9.6	79.5
	More than 25 hours	17	15.7	20.5	100.0
	Total	83	76.9	100.0	
Missing	System	25	23.1		
Total		108	100.0		

Table 1. Frequency of Engagement with English Language Popular Cultural Resources

Responses to the question, how much time per week do you engage in listening to English language popular songs, watching English language TV programs/series or films and playing English language online games in the English language indicated extensive weekly engagement as shown in Table 1.

With respect to feelings and emotions generated while engaged with English language popular song, TV programs/series as well as films, a table was given for participants to complete. Results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Emotions Experienced while Engaging with English Language Popular Cultural Resources

When I listen to English language popular songs..

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I feel engaged, motivated	70	64.8	84.3	84.3
	I feel bored and uninterested	1	.9	1.2	85.5
	I don't feel any particular way	10	9.3	12.0	97.6
	Not applicable	2	1.9	2.4	100.0
	Total	83	76.9	100.0	
Missing	System	25	23.1		
Total		108	100.0		

When I watch English language T.V. programs/series…

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I feel engaged, motivated	64	59.3	77.1	77.1
	I feel bored and uninterested	3	2.8	3.6	80.7
	I don't feel any particular way	12	11.1	14.5	95.2
	Not applicable	4	3.7	4.8	100.0
	Total	83	76.9	100.0	
Missing	System	25	23.1		
Total		108	100.0		

When I watch English language films

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I feel engaged, motivated	72	66.7	86.7	86.7
	I feel bored and uninterested	10	9.3	12.0	98.8
	Not applicable	1	.9	1.2	100.0
	Total	83	76.9	100.0	
Missing	System	25	23.1		
Total		108	100.0		

When asked if they would like to be given the opportunity to choose which materials to use for their English language classes, 94% of participants responded 'yes' with a combined 80% choosing either popular song, TV series or film as their first choice.

By looking at the PCR most highly consumed by the cohort of undergraduate students surveyed, it was hypothesised that using these in the development of "teaching materials that are interesting for the learners" (Dornyei & Schmidt, 2001, p. 62) would likely positively impact student learning motivation.

Dincer, Yesilyurt, Noels & Vargas (2019) note that "the more that teachers" actions and classroom dynamics can support learners' need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the more that learners actively involve themselves in their learning activities' (p. 2).

Analysis of the qualitative responses generated by the open questions of the survey revealed that when asked to describe past enjoyable English language learning experiences, responses were unanimous in their reference to non-conventional approaches. One student described the experience of analysing song lyrics in a past English language class. This activity allowed him to recognise that he had previously been listening to English language songs "with deafness." The student noted that he "had been listening to songs" and "was often able to fully recite the lyrics" without actually stopping to consider "the meaning of them." This reference is significant with respect to the emergence of lifelong learning strategies observed throughout the subsequent action research phases of this study to be presented further below.

When asked to describe one *past* English language learning experience which stands out as enjoyable and effective, student responses focused on non-traditional teaching approaches which deviated from standard use of textbooks and written materials. A total of 78% of responses to this question made reference to various multimodal approaches.

Action Research Results

Informed by the findings of the survey, the first intervention-like task was designed to use a popular as a learning prompt. Student responses were overwhelmingly positive. It is noted that due to the class being delivered online, the song was played through the

share screen function on Zoom. Immediately following the task, students were asked to complete a short, anonymous, feedback survey. Results indicated that 95.2% of the students found the task interesting. Following the task, the field note below was recorded.

> The first task was extremely well met by students. The minute I introduced the task and mentioned the title of the song we would be using there were smiles and nods by multiple students. Certain students moved forward, from a reclined to a more upright position. It is noted that in future research, it would be valuable, ethics permitting, to record lessons so that physical responses can be later analysed more carefully. Being that we were in an online setting, changes in facial expression were notable. Students looked to be entertained by the idea that a song was coming. One student who did not have his camera on prior to the task, actually turned his camera on. I reflected upon this as a definite sign of increased interest. As I shared my screen and played the song (video clip showing), students were following along, moving their heads to the beat, some were mouthing the words – or singing- out loud. (I was unable to tell as microphones were muted while the song was playing). As we moved through the various post song tasks, one student noted the following: "It felt like the second time we listened to the song, after doing the tasks and discussing the expressions, it was slower!" The instant feedback survey results indicate that my impression of the task being well met was accurate. I am very interested in the **smiles** the task generated. I believe joy, smiles and language learning need to go hand in hand. (Week 2)

The use of PCR in ELT practices throughout the 13-week intervention provided evidence to support that the core tenets of self-determination theory (autonomy, competence and relatedness) were largely satisfied via the implementation of these tasks. This in turn was seen to have a positive impact on overall learning motivation.

The ability to choose topics and materials with which to work with for specific tasks was consistently documented as favourable, motivating and interesting. One student referred to the semester

oral presentation as being one of the most enjoyable tasks in that "it has given everyone the chance to present and talk about a topic that is of interest to them" (follow-up survey 3). The same student noted that "it was a fun experience that gave everyone the chance to be heard and participate, while also informing others about a contemporary topic."

The importance of autonomy also dominated the discussion of focus group 2 and 3. Referring to the ability to choose their own topics, one focus group participant described it as being "something relevant" to them. The student stated that "each student can choose what they want depending on their interests and views. It's not something predetermined, that will be imposed by someone else, and you might not even like it. You are free to choose, and I believe you can perform better if it's open. You'll draw better conclusions rather than if you were asked to watch a specific series or hear a specific song and build your paper around that. The result might not be as good." (Focus Group 2 female participant)

An overall need for freedom of expression and autonomy of choice permeated many of the student responses as is shown through the diary entry of one of the participants. "Imagine knowing you have a class that allows you to express your opinion, speak your truth and at the same time allows you to develop your speaking and listening abilities. Not only that but we learn to paraphrase and say things in a more interesting and creative way and all this just by listening to songs and watching clips!" (Diary Entry Week 6)

The ability to master set tasks and feel competent in performing class activities also featured extensively across data sources. With respect to the semester oral presentation, one student noted that while presenting, he initially "had a lot of anxiety" which reduced as he progressed. The student stated that in the end, he "managed to present as planned" which made it "a wonderful experience" (Diary Entry Week 13).

Another student noted feeling "really good but also so proud" for "being able to focus more on English than ever before." The same

student continued by saying that they really like "the way the lesson was carried out as well as the different learning techniques which were used throughout the entire semester." The student attributed the success as being "partly" due to personal effort "but at the same time" thanks to the teacher who "kept looking for new ways of teaching English online." (Follow Up Survey 3)

In terms of SDT, relatedness refers to the desire to feel socially connected (Ryan, 2017). In the data generated throughout the study, the notion of relatedness emerged as extremely important in second language learning settings. There were a great many number of references to the importance of group tasks (undertaken through breakout rooms – Zoom) and how working with others assisted students in feeling connected and able to seek and receive assistance from their peers. Extensive references were also made with respect to being freely able to solicit and receive assistance from their teacher.

Relatedness also emerged with respect to how familiar or connected students felt to the PCR used, this emerging as a critical factor within the action research study. It was this element of familiarity or relatedness which most affected students in that it appeared to be responsible for rousing emotion, enhancing student interest and engagement, and ultimately positively impacting motivation.

In a week 5 diary entry, one participant specifically referred to the relationship between the use of songs known to students and the elevated interest this appeared to generate. "Using songs really helps me to participate more in class because it is something more familiar to me, because I listen to songs every day" (Diary Entry Week 6) .

The importance of relating to resources used as learning prompts also emerged in the focus group discussions. One participant described the experience of using popular song as "something very beautiful because songs are something closer [more familiar] to us. In this way we can be more active in class" (Focus Group 1 female participant). In the same focus group discussion, another

participant added that "especially in recent years, with technology, a film, a series or a song are much closer to us. We use them much more than a text or a book. After so many years with texts and books, this is much more interesting" (Focus Group 1 female participant).

Of particular interest is evidence of a relationship between positive emotional responses, or in other words 'joy,' and positive impact on learning motivation as emerged through the data collected. By coding across all data sources for positive emotion and joy in connection with references to PCR, a relationship between the two appeared to emerge. A total of 461 references were coded to the node of 'Positive emotion, joy & anticipation.' A word cloud generated by the NVivo software is seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. NVivo Word Cloud of Most Frequent Occurrences Coded under Positive Emotion & Joy

Words like 'enjoyable,' 'lesson', 'song,' 'learn English,' suggest the emergence of a relationship between the use of PCR and the triggering of positive emotion. This is also captured in individual student responses. One focus group participant reported that in thinking of our next English classes, they are "filled with positive emotions" because during class time they do not feel "bored, tired or any other feeling." On the contrary, explained the student, "there is a feeling that stress is avoided" in this class. In a week 2 diary entry, another participant described the use of songs as helping them to "participate more in class because songs are more familiar to me as I listen to songs daily." A week 4 diary entry noted that "when we use songs or clips" the lesson is "more exciting than just working on a text" and this process is described as something "never tried before." Emotions also dominated focus group 2 where one participant declared they "personally like the course as the time passes pleasantly." When songs or a popular series were used during graded tasks, continued the student, "it didn't feel like an exam as we enjoyed it." In the same focus group, another participant refers to finding the lessons "not at all boring or uninteresting and this is because of the methods used, such as small videos, songs, clips. These give an enjoyable and attractive feel to our English classes." Towards the end of the semester, a week 10 diary entry described a love of "both music and movies," the student noting that this "combination is a really good way to keep you interested throughout the lesson."

Throughout the 13-week action research, evidence of the development of lifelong learning strategies appeared in the data collected. These were first documented in focus group 1 where one participant stated that "lately, I think I have started to become more aware of what a song is trying to say with the lyrics." Evidence of the development of lifelong learning strategies also dominated the focus group 2 discussion. "I think that the fact that we're going to use these media for the presentation will help us understand that through a series or a song you can draw conclusions or grasp the messages that the creators intended to send," one participant was recorded as saying. Another continued by explaining that "it feels really good to listen to a song you knew

before, but now be able to analyze it and better grasp its meaning." The participant went on to state that they "personally liked it" because it helped them understand on a deeper level, meanings communicated by PCR they were already familiar with. The student ended by stating that they "really like this" as it was "exciting." In the same focus group, a different student explained that "the song used for the listening task" was actually "heard again by chance on the radio, maybe 2-3 times after the task". The student described that when they "heard it again," they "actually understood what it was saying." In continuing with the discussion, another participant noted that "definitely, when I listen to a song now, I might actually find the lyrics as well in order to better grasp it and realise its message instead of just listening to it." The discussion ended with a student saying that "basically, I listen to music a lot. With Greek songs I read the lyrics too. With English songs, not so much. But, after the listening task, and after using some songs during the course, I do it more often than before."

Further evidence of the emergence of lifelong learning strategies was found in student diary entries. During week 5, a student wrote that "activities where we use a song are motivating me a lot because now, I listen to the song and try to understand exactly what it said. This is perfect for me because I learn new words." A different entry acknowledged that "now I am more critically aware while watching and listening and now, when I listen to a song or watch a movie, I pay more attention to the storyline, while in the past I didn't. This has helped me improve my English." The idea of paying closer attention emerged in the focus group 3 discussion also, one participant stating that "now, with other songs, we pay more attention to the lyrics so as to find their deeper meanings; and this is one of the aspects with which this course has helped us."

Discussion

This paper draws on the results of a participatory action research study investigating the use of PCR such as popular song, TV series and film in ELT practices in a higher education setting.

Throughout the ongoing cycles of planning, action and reflection, student participants were seen to be positively impacted by the use of PCR aligned to their own interests as learning prompts. In reflecting on personal practice, it became evident that task design is benefitted from alignment with the core tenets of SDT, autonomy, competence and relatedness. Tasks which satisfy these were seen to enhance student enjoyment, motivation and overall engagement. The reflective process of the action research phases also offered new insights into ways in which practitioners may allow more student autonomy by encouraging student selection of resources to be used in second language learning practices. Additionally, the level of control to which most practitioners are accustomed with respect to the use of conventional tasks and testing procedures may also benefit from a move towards less conventional and more flexible future approaches.

The early investigation of student interests through the pilot and repeat surveys proved instrumental in identifying resources which have the capacity to motivate students. By identifying engagement with PCR as a popular leisure time activity of the local undergraduate cohort, these resources were then incorporated into ELT practices. The findings reported on in this paper reinforce the claim that "teachers' use of motivational strategies must suit the classroom atmosphere and the students' needs and mentality" (Elashhab, 2020, p. 139). These findings suggest the benefit of taking the time to explore student interests. By incorporating authentic materials of the target language, in this case English, with which students identify and already engage during their free time, an emotional response was triggered. This emotional response to the PCR used led to enhanced interest, engagement and motivation towards in and out of class tasks. In light of the study being undertaken in an online context due to the COVID-19 pandemic, findings illuminate the efficacy of using PCR to enhance learner motivation during unprecedented and undeniably trying times.

An unforeseen yet extremely revelatory finding which emerged through the process of data analysis was that the new pedagogies

using PCR appeared to be assisting students in the development of lifelong learning strategies. Whilst student engagement with English language PCR was extensive prior to the study, as found by the initial survey, the way in which they engaged with these appeared to change throughout the duration of the semester. Findings support that the strategies applied within the context of the 13-week action research became useful to participants beyond the immediate needs of their English classes. The data revealed that students had begun to develop lifelong learning skills which were already being used beyond the classroom. Rather than being passive consumers of PCR it appeared that students were developing strategies which enabled them to engage with these more critically and actively. This became evident through the multiple data sources through which participants self-reported their changing engagement with PCR. Findings suggest that participants were able to engage with PCR of the target language in a deeper, more meaningful way in pursuit of a deeper understanding of the topics, themes, and messages conveyed within them.

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of the study was that lessons were not recorded. Due to the sudden transferal of face-to-face courses to an online mode on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, local protocols did not allow for recording during the action research. Notes on classroom atmosphere and student physical responses were therefore limited to the practitioner-researcher's field notes. It is recommended that repeat studies allow for recording of classes where permissible.

The small-scale action research study involved 30 undergraduate students. This is not considered a limitation as in this type of participatory action research "the aim is to work in-depth with a relatively small group of people as 'participants'" on account of their being "interested, motivated and open to participate in solving their own problems and improving their own situation" (Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2015, p. 236). As undergraduate

students, the students of the local cohort were well positioned and eager to partake in practice to improve practice. It is noted that however that in the local context, students are generally unfamiliar with participatory action research which may have influenced the overall number of students who consented to participate. For the overwhelming majority of students, the FALL 2020 semester marked a first, abrupt initiation into the world of online learning due to the pandemic, this noted as an additional factor which may have influenced participation. It is recommended that future participatory action research with students in higher education settings is undertaken so as to further explore the possibility of impacting learning motivation through the use of resources aligned to students' interests.

As a qualitative methodological approach, reliance on rich data is paramount in participatory action research. Throughout the 13-week study, it was noted that the use of diaries was not the preferred data source from the perspective of the local students. It became evident that diary writing is not a common practice in the local setting. The participants appreciated however that despite the use of pseudonyms which protected their own identity, the consistency provided by the weekly entries was significant in allowing for a systematic reflection of emergent themes over the 13-week span of the study. It is suggested that some form of negotiation between practitioner-researcher and participants takes place in the early stages of the action research process so as to make sure all participants are free to voice concerns and queries specifically related to the selection of data sources to be used.

It is recommended that further investigation as to whether the use of PCR in different settings may have similar outcomes to those reported on in this paper. Further research on emotion and its role in impacting motivation is also suggested based on the findings of the action research which indicated that rousing emotion appears to play a role in positively impacting student learning motivation in addition to the development of lifelong learning strategies. In this study, the emergence of lifelong learning skills developed unconsciously via student engagement with a variety of PCR. Due

to the recent "swift pivot to online learning," teachers and students "have been forced to adopt a new way of teaching and learning", which and as was the case in this study, inadvertently "required students to become more self-directed in their learning" (Blaschke, 2021, p. 1629). More research is needed on exploring ways in which such approaches which allow students increasing autonomy in their own learning endeavors may be translated into effective future ELT practices.

As the world gradually recovers from the pandemic, there has been a hesitant return to face-to-face teaching. The impact of the pandemic on both teaching and research, however, continues to resonate. Following the return to physical classes, most practitioners and students have met with a new normal. The tentative post-Covid return to physical classes in the local Cypriot context, despite the virus continuing to pose a threat, presents new challenges. Mandatory mask wearing, in-class social distancing which prevents physical proximity and hence group work, as well as the difficulty of promoting discussion (due to mask-wearing), have presented a renewed need for strategies through which to enhance and sustain student interest and learning motivation. Trying to motivate during trying times remains an ever-present consideration.

In the current, face-to-face iteration of the undergraduate English language course used in this study, the tasks designed and implemented during the action research reported on have been sustained as a means through which to motivate and engage students during the currently challenging times. In the local context, student responses continue to be extremely positive lending further support to the efficacy and sustainability of future English language teaching practices which make use of popular cultural resources aligned to students' interests. The findings of the study support future practices which embrace a greater scope of real-world resources and materials to be used as second language learning prompts.

Conclusion

This action research study highlights the potential of participatory action research to collaboratively explore ways in which language teaching practitioners and their students may investigate beneficial changes to practice in higher education settings.

Acknowledgements

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Biography

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I have been an English language practitioner at the Language Centre of the University of Cyprus for 17 years and I am currently engaged in research as a PhD student at Charles Sturt University, Sydney, Australia. I teach Academic English Courses and English for Specific Purposes Courses to undergraduate students of varying disciplines. My research interests include motivation and emotion in second language teaching alongside the use of popular cultural resources in authentic materials design.

Publish Your Values-Driven Research for Systemic Change

Several publications with a common desire to promote and publish values-driven research for systemic change, which contributes to the flourishing of humanity, offered an opportunity at no cost for aspiring authors to gain advice on how to get their papers published. These values-driven research publications, including the *Action Learning and Action Research Journal*, conducted two webinars in September 2021.

In addition to discussing the various publications, representatives of the publications discussed a small number of summary papers or outlines submitted by participants to the webinar. Details of these webinars are available at https://www.alarassociation.org/events/alara-webinars/publishing-your-research.

A compilation video of these webinars is now available on Vimeo - https://vimeo.com/654453300.

The publications are planning another set of webinars in May 2022. You will find details on the ALARA website in early 2022.

Effectiveness of a state university extension program on pedagogical action research

Gerry S. Digo

Abstract

This paper described the effectiveness of the training program as extension project of a state university titled "Mindful Change: A Capacity Building Program for Pedagogical Action Research". The action research cycle was adopted in the design, implementation and evaluation of the program. Two hundred and forty-three basic education teachers in the Province of Sorsogon, Philippines were trained in 2020 and 2021. Results from t-tests showed that the 2020 training sessions were successful at improving the action research competencies of the participants. Furthermore, the 2020 project titled "Action Research in Education: A Methodological Approach" was rated "very satisfactory" and the 2021 project titled "Learning Theories for Pedagogical Action Research: A Critical Review" was rated "outstanding". Hence, the extension program of the state university was effective at improving the competency level of basic education teachers. It is recommended to focus the third cycle of the program on action research dissemination.

Key words: Action research, extension program, practice-based research

What is known about the topic?

There is a growing demand for action research competencies during the pre-service training of undergraduate teacher education students, in-service training of supervising and cooperating teachers, and thesis or dissertation of graduate students of professional master and doctoral courses.

What does this paper add?

This paper demonstrated that the demand for action research competencies may be effectively addressed through the extension program titled "Mindful Change: A Capacity Building Program on Pedagogical Action Research" of a state university in the Province of Sorsogon, Philippines.

Who will benefit from its content?

This paper is beneficial for faculty extension workers of state universities to address the action research capabilities of pre-service teacher education students, supervising and cooperating teachers, and graduate students enrolled in professional master and doctoral courses.

What is the relevance to AL and AR scholars and practitioners?

The training program discussed in this paper allows the development of a community of action researchers which may serve as a viable platform for action learning and practice-based research.

Introduction

Action research as one of the minimum requirements prescribed by the Commission of Higher Education (CHEd) for teaching internship has the potential to help the mentors and teaching interns reflect on and assess their practices as they aspire for their professional growth and development. Practitioners have important and developing roles as teacher-researchers engaging in reflective practice through action research (James & Mulcahy, 2000). However, the competency level of teacher education interns against the indicators for beginning teachers in the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) before and after practice teaching were novice and needed further training (Digo, 2018). Likewise, Afalla & Fabelico (2020) stated that pre-service teachers in a university in the Cagayan Valley appeared to manifest poor teaching efficiency when they manifest low pedagogical competence. The findings on the competency level on action research require a capacity-building program for the cooperating teachers and supervising instructors to improve their action research knowledge and skills so that they can help the

college of education as effective mentors of the interns during the internship program.

Improving the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher trainings can be strategically accomplished with a successful capacity-building program on pedagogical action research. Na-songkhla & Sujiva (2015) demonstrated that action research developed as a strategy for coaching process was effective for a nationwide professional development program. To achieve the expected outcome and to promote teacher-driven processes in building research-based education, it is important to emphasize fair conditions for voluntary engagement in action research (Bergmark, 2020). Hence, the multiplicity of the nature of action research can be exploited as process, strategy and outcome of a training program designed for supervising instructors and cooperating teachers as teacher-researchers.

Along the extension mandate of the state university, the program titled "Mindful Change: A Capacity Building Program for Pedagogical Action Research" was proposed, approved and funded as a three-year extension program of the state university in partnership with the Department of Education (DepEd) Division of Sorsogon. Furthermore, two projects were conceptualized and implemented in 2020 and 2021 titled "Action Research in Education: A Methodological Approach" and "Learning Theories for Pedagogical Action Research: A Critical Review". Participants in these projects were basic education teachers from DepEd and instructors from a state university laboratory school who are serving as cooperating teachers and supervising instructors of the teaching interns of the college of teacher education. Furthermore, postgraduate student also participated in the training program in line with their desire to be oriented about practice-based research.

More importantly, aside from proposing and implementing extension programs, it is necessary to establish the effectiveness and impact of the program against the success indicators established by the university and its partner agency for the program. Hence, this paper describes the effectiveness of the proposed training cum extension program on pedagogical action

research titled "Mindful Change: A Capacity Building Program for Pedagogical Action Research".

Materials and Methods

The action research cycle was adopted in the design, implementation and assessment of the program. Specifically, the survey method was used to assess the effectiveness of the extension program of a state university designed to improve the action research competency of basic education teachers. The ethical guidelines of the institution were adopted by guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity of respondents and providing the option to terminate participation, to refuse to answer questions, and to be informed of the study results among others.

The competency level of supervising and cooperating teachers on action research was assessed using a questionnaire adopted from Cortes (2019). Likewise, the program was evaluated using the institutionally approved instrument for extension programs. In the first cycle, 73 respondents who attended the 2020 training program answered the pretest and posttest questionnaires. The profile of the respondents are as follows: classroom teachers (67%), master teachers (20%), head teachers (3%), principals (3%), and 7% were instructor, assistant principal, and teacher applicant. In terms of the number of years in service, 60% (44/73): 5 years and below, 19% (14/73): 6 – 10 years, 11% (8/73): 11 – 15 years, 4% (3/73): 16 - 20 years, and 6% (4/73): 21 years and above. Participants in the second cycle were 31 doctoral students as facilitators and 139 basic education teachers as trainees. Likewise, a total of 243 respondents evaluated the overall effectiveness of the two projects implemented in 2020 and 2021. Frequency count, averages and t-test were used to analyzed the data.

The Proposed Innovation

The proposal was developed, and presented to the University Review Committee on December 18, 2019. Given the insights provided by the review committee, interviews were conducted to the research coordinators, legal officers, and Schools Division

Superintendent of DepEd Division of Sorsogon. Their inputs were integrated into the extension proposal approved by the University Research and Extension Committee on January 15, 2020. The planning stage established a linkage through a memorandum of agreement with the stakeholder for the approved extension program titled "Mindful Change: A Capacity Building Program on Pedagogical Action Research". The initial run of the training was held on February 27 and March 5, 2020 with 16 supervising instructors of a laboratory school. On December 5, 12 and 19, 2020, the first batch of 73 participants were trained on "Action Research in Education: A Methodological Approach". The 2021 training program was titled "Learning Theories for Pedagogical Action Research: A Critical Review". The need for this second cycle was decided from the inputs of the participants, which were consistent with the findings that teachers have less understanding of the action research theories (James & Mulcahy, 2000). The topics and inclusive dates included in the series of webinar were [1] Information Processing Theory (March 27 & April 3); [2] Behaviorism Theory (April 10-11); [3] Social Constructivism Theory (April 18–19); [4] Connectivism (May 1-2); and Social Cognitive Theory (May 8-9). The participation of the graduate students on the extension program was in line with the requirement of CMO 15, s. 2019, which prescribes the completion of practice-based research output for professional graduate degrees. Practice-based research is defined in CMO 15, s. 2019 as an "original investigation to gain new knowledge partly by practice and the outcomes of that practice". In keeping with this requirement, enhanced action research capability of the graduate school faculty, students and prospective enrollees will definitely improve the quality of dissertation outputs in the doctoral program. This is because action research is a practice – a practice-changing practice (Kemmis, 2009).

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion section presents the actual accomplishment of the program in terms of the number of participants trained on action research, the effectiveness of the

project along the pre-test, post-test, t-test, and evaluation of the participants. Furthermore, the completed and on-going action research outputs and recognitions received by the action researchers as reported by the participants were enumerated and discussed.

Table 1 shows the actual accomplishment of the program in terms of the number of participants trained on action research. In the first year of implementation, 73 participants were trained. For Year 2, 170 participants trained on classroom action research. Likewise, a total of 57 graduate students were capacitated on action research or practice-based research. Overall, the program capacitated a total of 243 trainees. The high turnout of participants, vis-à-vis the target number of participants, proved that there is a demand for this kind of activity from the pre-service, in-service and postgraduate levels.

In 2017, CHED released the policies, standards and guidelines for the new Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) through CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 74 s. 2017, CMO No. 75 s. 2017 for Bachelor of Secondary Education, and CMO No. 79 s. 2017 for Bachelor of Technical-Vocational Teacher Education (BTVTEd). Integrated in these curriculums is the revised student teaching program for the experiential learning courses, which require the student teachers to undergo practicum at DepEd cooperating schools. It is imperative to highlight that all of the teacher education curriculums from 1999 to present require the completion of action research during internship. Likewise, DepEd Order No. 16, s. 2017 provides the basis for the conduct of action research that aims to strengthen the culture of research in the basic education sector. For postgraduate students, this program was aligned to the requirement of CMO 15, s. 2019, which prescribes the completion of practice-based research output for professional graduate degrees. Practice-based research is defined in CMO 15, s. 2019 as an "original investigation to gain new knowledge partly by practice and the outcomes of that practice". Along this requirement, enhanced action research capability of the graduate school faculty, students and prospective enrollees will definitely

improve the quality of dissertation outputs in the doctoral program. This is because action research is a practice – a practice-changing practice (Kemmis, 2009).

Indicators	Year 1 (2020)			Year 2 (2021)		
	Target	Participants	%	Target	Participants	%
No. of basic education teachers trained on pedagogical action research	50	47	94%	50	139	340%
No. of graduate students trained in practice-based or action research.	10	26	260%	10	31	310%

Table 1. Number of Participants Trained in Action Research

Hence there is a need to determine and address the competency level of the participants on practice-based research or action research. Table 2 presents the level of the action research competency of the participants before the training program. The competency level was highest for technology application (2.5) and lowest for data gathering, interpretation, action and reflection (2.1). The competency levels in the sets of action research competencies were all basic. However, in a study conducted by Cortes (2019), teacher-researchers in Surigao del Sur rated themselves as proficient in all areas except on technology application and knowledge of research ethics.

Action Research Competencies	Mean Rating			Average	Interpretation*
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3		
1. Data Gathering, Interpretation, Action and Reflection	1.9	2.1	2.3	2.1	Basic
2. Problem Identification	2.1	2.3	2.5	2.3	Basic
3. Appropriate Use of Data Collection Tools	2.0	2.2	2.4	2.2	Basic
4. Technology Application	2.2	2.6	2.7	2.5	Basic
5. Knowledge on Research Ethics	2.2	2.4	2.3	2.3	Basic
Average	**2.1**	**2.3**	**2.4**	**2.3**	**Basic**

Note: 1 – Limited, 2 – Basic, 3 – Proficient, 4 – Advanced 5 - Expert

Table 2. Pre-test Results

Table 3 presents the level of the action research competency of the participants after the training program. The competency level was highest for problem identification (3.2) and technology application (3.2) while the lowest was for data gathering, interpretation, action and reflection (3.0). However, the competency levels in the five sets of action research competencies were all proficient. Tables 3 and 4 show that the action research competencies of the participants improved from basic to proficient.

Action Research Competencies	Mean Rating			Average	Interpretation*
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3		
1. Data Gathering, Interpretation, Action and Reflection	2.8	3.0	3.2	3.0	Proficient
2. Problem Identification	3.0	3.2	3.3	3.2	Proficient
3. Appropriate Use of Data Collection Tools	2.9	3.1	3.2	3.1	Proficient
4. Technology Application	3.0	3.4	3.3	3.2	Proficient
5. Knowledge on Research Ethics	3.0	3.2	3.2	3.1	Proficient
Average	**2.9**	**3.2**	**3.2**	**3.1**	**Proficient**

Note: 1 – Limited, 2 – Basic, 3 – Proficient, 4 – Advanced 5 - Expert

Table 3. Post-test Results

By subjecting the collected data to t-test as shown in Table 4, the absolute value of the calculated t exceeds the critical value (23.4787>2.776). Hence, there was a significant difference in the competency level of the participants along the five action research competencies before (M=2.28, SD=0.1327) and after (M=3.12, SD=0.0748); t =-23.47, p = <0.01 at p < .071, the training program. It can be deduced that the training sessions were successful at improving the action research competencies of the participants.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Critical Value	Df	P
Pre-test	2.28	0.1327	-23.48	2.776	72	0.05
Post-test	3.12	0.0748				

Table 4. t-test

Table 5 presents the average mean rating of the program for 2020 and 2021. Topics/theme, facilitator/speaker and visual aids and power point presentations received the highest mean rating of 4.6

(Outstanding). Audience and participant engagement received 4.5 (Very Satisfactory) while venue received 4.4 (Very satisfactory).

Indicators	FY 2020		FY 2021		Average	Description
	Mean Rating	Description	Mean Rating	Description		
Venue (Ventilation and lighting; facilities and equipment)	4.05	Very satisfactory	4.60	Outstanding	4.32	Very Satisfactory
Topics / Theme (Relevance to participants, updated and recent content, and comprehensive scope)	4.40	Very satisfactory	4.79	Outstanding	4.60	Outstanding
Facilitator / Speaker (Time Management; Organization of Ideas; Language Proficiency)	4.40	Very satisfactory	4.75	Outstanding	4.58	Outstanding
Audience / Participant Engagement	4.27	Very satisfactory	4.74	Outstanding	4.51	Very Satisfactory
Visual Aids, PowerPoint Presentation	4.45	Very satisfactory	4.77	Outstanding	4.61	Outstanding
Overall	**4.31**	**Very Satisfactory**	**4.73**	**Outstanding**	**4.52**	**Very Satisfactory**

Table 5. Effectiveness of the Capacity Building Program

Overall, the capability training program was rated 4.5 (Very satisfactory) by the participants. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the programs utilized social media like Facebook and Messenger to promote it and Google Meet or Zoom to execute the series of webinars. In spite of the lowest mean rating among the five indicators received for the venue for two consecutive years, the organizer decided to utilize it as the platform for the webinars because they are slightly more effective than asynchronous learning management system and offline face-to-face instruction

(Gegenfurtner & Ebner, 2019) and trainers are satisfied with their webinar-facilitated delivery of conceptual knowledge (Wang & Hsu, 2008). Furthermore, a participant commented if a "forum on theories and approaches of psychological theories and principles as applied to teaching and learning setting may be conducted". Likewise, another comment raised on the difficulty experienced on connecting their research problems and data analysis to learning theories prompted the opportunity to design and conduct the training program titled "Learning Theories for Pedagogical Action Research: A Critical Review". In return, a total of 170 participants attended the 2021 course until completion.

Furthermore, as shown in Table 6, five action research proposals from the participants of the course from DepEd Division of Sorsogon and Sorsogon State University were reported to have been completed in 2021 and one on-going action research from DepEd Sorsogon and five from SorSU Laboratory High School. In addition, the completed action research paper titled "*Students Academic Journal Analysis in Time of Pandemic*" received recognitions as "Best Online Presenter" and "2nd Best Paper Award" in an international research forum. These outputs and accomplishments confirm the findings of Na-Songkhla & Sujiva (2015) that demonstrated that the coaching process for classroom action research is an effective nation-wide teacher development program. However, 11 action researchers are only 5% of the 243 total participants trained on action research. In addition, 55% (6/11) of the papers reported to have been prepared out of the webinars are still on-going after two years. Hence, these results demand more effective and focused interventions from the program, which may be directed to these young researchers to ensure that they are able to experience research work from conception, utilization and dissemination.

Title	School
Conducting of Webinar Sessions in Addressing the Difficulties Met by Grade 12 Students in Investigation, Inquiry and Immersion	Gallanosa National High School

Title	School
Improving the Performance Level of Casiguran Technical Vocational High School Grade-10 Courage Students through Video Lessons amidst Pandemic	Casiguran Technical Vocational High School
Generating Greater Interest in Literature of CTVS Grade-9 Nickel Students through Video Lessons*	Casiguran Technical Vocational High School
Effectiveness of Modular Approach in Teaching Primary Grades Amidst CoViD-19 Pandemic	San Jose Elementary School
The Role of Parents on Blended Learning in New normal	Dinapa Elementary School
Students' Academic Journal Analysis in Time of Pandemic	SorSU Laboratory High School
Development and Validation of Supplemental Instructional Materials for Selected Topics in Physics for Senior High School*	SorSU Laboratory High School
Development and Validation of Supplemental Instructional Materials in Teaching Philippine Folk Dance*	SorSU Laboratory High School
Behavioral Problems of Grade 11 Students*	SorSU Laboratory High School
Development and Validation of Instructional Materials on the Use of Transition Words in Research Writing*	SorSU Laboratory High School
Development and Validation of a Teacher Vocabulary Guide in Teaching Biology and Chemistry in Junior High School*	SorSU Laboratory High School

*N.B. * On-going action research*

Table 6. On-going and Completed Action Researches

Looking forward to the third year of this institutionally approved and funded extension program of the university, the workshops will focus on the action research dissemination. Innovative dissemination strategies may be adopted by the action researcher to advance knowledge, improve concrete situation, and improve

behavior science methodology (Sommers, 2009). Furthermore, Henriksen and Mishra (2019) asserted that action research could benefit other practitioners and scholars beyond the local context through dissemination of innovations, lessons learned, and empirical research. Hence, this training will introduce innovative ways of action research dissemination. Specifically, the training program will capacitate the trainees on action research publication, oral and poster presentations, and preparation of news article and policy briefs.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper reported on the training projects implemented under the institutionally funded and approved extension program of the state university in collaboration with DepEd Division of Sorsogon. titled: "Mindful Change: A Capacity Building Program on Pedagogical Action Research". The effectiveness of the training program which trained a total of 243 basic education teacher was assessed and findings revealed that it was effective. T-test on the pre-test and post-test results showed that there was a significant difference in the competency level of the participants along the five action research competencies before and after the training program. Likewise, it was rated by the participants as "very satisfactory". More importantly, five participants have completed action researches while another six participants reported that they have on-going action researches. However, the sustainability of the program on the implementation of succeeding projects may lie on the ability of the organizer to make the doable feedback of the participants a reality.

The third cycle of the project may focus on action research dissemination to ensure that their immersion from action research conception to dissemination is completed. It is also suggested for other universities that want to develop the action research capabilities of their pre-service teacher education students, supervising and cooperating teachers, and graduate students enrolled in professional master and doctoral courses could

consider the program. For those who are interested, you may contact me through my email address so we can discuss it.

Acknowledgement

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Biography

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Action Learning Action Research Higher Degree Research Awards and Webinar

Action Learning, Action Research Association Ltd (ALARA) and Australian Institute of Business (AIB) present the AIB-ALARA Higher Degree Research Awards. There are two awards, which will be presented at a webinar to be held in March 2022.

- AIB-ALARA Best Student Action Learning / Action Research Paper Award

- AIB-ALARA Best Student Action Learning / Action Research Presentation Award

For more information about these awards, including how to enter, please visit https://www.alarassociation.org/research/al-ar-hdr-awards.

Action learning for simulation design in project portfolios

Saeed Shalbafan, Shankar Sankaran, Elyssebeth Leigh & Julien Pollack

Abstract

Accessing reliable data from within organisations is becoming more difficult as the business environment becomes ever more complex and there are increasing concerns about breaching 'commercial in confidence' requirements. Research that explores important project portfolio management problems are similarly complex due to confidentiality issues faced by businesses. This paper discusses lessons learned from the development of a simulation called HOOSHMAND-1 (meaning 'Intelligent' in Persian) in response to the question: how could an Action Learning approach help to develop a more robust simulation as a research method?

It explains how several cycles of Action Learning contributed to the development of a role play simulation which now aids in learning about decision making processes in complicated and complex conditions while making decisions on project portfolios. The process delivered a new research tool and demonstrated how appropriate use of Action Learning cycles can enable researchers to conduct innovative research when real world contexts are not readily accessible.

Key words: Action learning, decision-making, project portfolio, uncertainty

What is known about the topic?

Application of action learning has attracted interests for community of practice in project management. Increase in complexity in managing projects has enlightened opportunity for using adaptive approach to problem solving in project management.

What does this paper add?

This paper provides an example of applying action learning to design of research methodology where conventional research methods were unable to provide relevant data to the research question.

Who will benefit from its content?

Researchers in project management and project portfolio management may adopt the approach to use action learning and design the optimised research method for their research projects.

What is the relevance to AL and AR scholars and practitioners?

The paper introduces an application of action learning for design of research methodology. The adaptive use of action learning to design research methods can expand the use of scientific approaches to solve complex problems which could not be done through conventional research methods. The paper in summary :

- Promotes use of action learning in design of experiments and research methods;
- Expands scientific approaches to problem solving;
- Promotes practice base approach to academic research.

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Introduction

Decision-making in project, program and portfolio offices is often complex. This is partly because of the sheer number of decisions and consequent actions required, and the number of unknown factors likely to impinge on relationships among projects as they proceed. While there are a wide variety of tools (Pendharkar, 2014), frameworks (Archer & Ghasemzadeh, 1999) and methodologies (Ghapanchi et al., 2012) available to guide project portfolio managers, the quality of actual decision-making is often observed to fall short of the application of clear and rational analysis most likely to produce objective, high quality solutions.

The lead author of this paper observed such adverse behaviours in actual work conditions during a critical period when effective project portfolio management was essential but was not being exercised. These initial observations led to an investigation into the reasons why previously exhibited capacities for effective decision-making could be undermined during times of uncertainty. Most of the existing body of knowledge in project portfolio management (PPM) (Project Management Institute, 2012) describe processes that are based on assumptions of certainty and stability.

However, the validity of these assumptions is challenged by the evidence for increasing uncertainty which is becoming an integral part of business practice (Martinsuo, Korhonen & Laine, 2014). For example, Petit (2012) and Martinsuo (2013) examined sources of uncertainty affecting portfolio decisions and demonstrated the need for additional primary data collection to deal with the way in which project-oriented organisations (Gemünden, Lehner & Kock, 2018) made decisions on project portfolios during uncertain times (Taleb, 2007). The research that produced HOOSHMAND-1 was conceived and executed in order to help close the gap between knowledge and practice in project portfolio management under conditions of uncertainty (Petit, 2012).

HOOSHMAND-1 (Shalbafan et al., 2015) is a role-play, paper-based decision driven simulation. The data collected addressed the factors of quality of decision making, time taken for decision making, and emotional and practical factors related to the process (Shalbafan et al., 2017, Shalbafan et al., 2015).
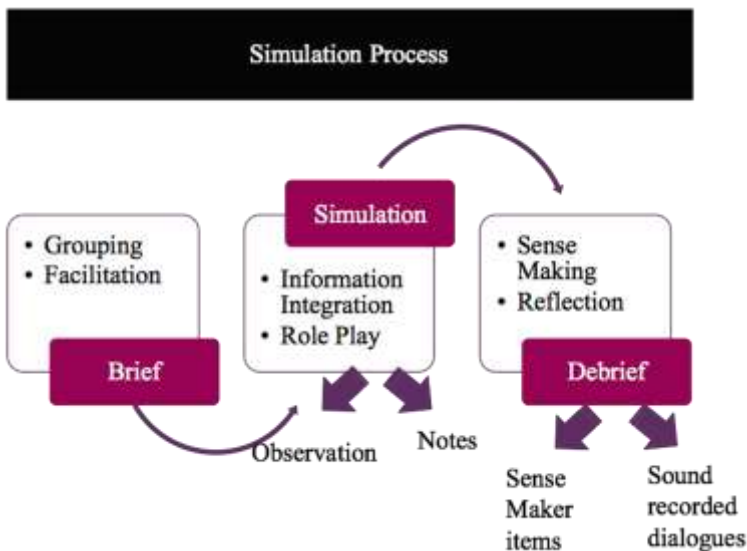
Figure 1. A typical process for simulation HOOSHMAND-1

Figure 1 shows a simplified view of the learning process as used in HOOSHMAND-1 and developed during the action learning cycles described below. This simulation provided an analytical framework and acted as a research tool to support collaborative research by the research team and with participants.

This paper describes application of the action learning cycle to generate the design of the simulation HOOSHMAND-1 drawing on lenses of emotions, individual backgrounds and collaboration among research team members and other practitioners, which theory suggests (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006) are important components of knowledge development. A review in existing role-play simulations and relevant literature supported the decision to use action learning to create a customised simulation.

As previous publications have described the development and applications of HOOSHMAND-1, this paper focuses on the following research question related to the use of action learning to develop the simulation:

How can an action learning approach help to develop a more robust simulation as a research tool?

In response to this research question, the paper describes the lessons learned through use of a series of action learning cycles in what follows.

The next section discusses theories of portfolio management, simulation and action learning. This is followed by narratives of the six cycles of action learning which led to development of HOOSHMAND-1. This is followed by discussions and conclusions.

Literature Review

This literature review includes a brief section on project portfolio management to illustrate the context in which the research was being conducted, while the main focus is on action learning in theory and practice and the simulation that was a product of the research.

Project portfolio management

Project components, including initial planning, development or implementation may be occurring in parallel which can lead to increasing complications requiring holistic decision processes for project portfolios (Teller et al., 2012). Research into the complexity of Project Portfolio Management (Blomquist & Muller, 2006, Killen et al., 2012, Martinsuo & Lehtonen, 2007, Petit, 2012) is generally concerned with establishing key determinants for the number of elements, the degree of interdependencies between elements and the predictability and magnitude of changes to these elements and their interdependencies (Ribbers & Schoo, 2002; Levinthal & Warglien, 1999; Daft, 1992; Teller et al., 2012).

Key decision-making constraints in project portfolio contexts (Gemünden et al., 2018) are now considered to include the existence of conflicting objectives (Ghasemzadeh & Archer, 2000), for example assigning resources among projects all linked to strategic plans, and/or maintaining cost-benefit ratios within the

goal of sustaining agreed strategic directions. As such issues become more complex they must be dealt with in an increasingly holistic manner (Archer and Ghasemzadeh, 1999; Cooper, 1994; Cooper, Edgett & Kleinschmidt, 2001; Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1995). However, this research while indicating a need for holistic approaches, does not concern itself with the essential human element of emotional engagement (or dis-engagement) on the part of the decision makers.

Although Gareis announced in a conference paper "There are emotions in projects!" (Gareis, 2004), the implications of their presence and impact are less well acknowledged or researched. Thus, the doctoral research work which gave rise to the action learning cycles and resulting simulation, was focused on exploring for ways to make visible the hidden impact of emotions on the kinds of holistic action recommended for successful project portfolio management action. Action learning and action research, as two frames for engaging in emergent exploration of human activity share the common characteristic of requiring the researcher to take action on contexts being researched for the purpose of understanding and/or changing specific factors within the environment. In this paper we describe an action learning approach used to develop a valid and verifiable representation of interactions among some specific emotional quotients found in PPM contexts.

Theory and applications of action learning

Action learning (McGill & Brockbank, 2004) has been used as a scientific approach (Revans, 1998), to deepen understanding of individuals and organisations (Leonard & Marquardt, 2010) for problem solving, team building and organizational transformation. The wide application of AL to practice and research has resulted in different definitions of action learning in different contexts (Cho & Marshall Egan, 2009). Recently, critical action learning (Vince, 2008) has been evolving to connect individuals' experience with their workplace in an organizational development context (Department of Families, 2002; Trehan & Rigg, 2015). Also there are schools of thought exploring application of action learning for

coaching and professional development (Abbott & Mayes, 2014). Olsson et al. (2010) introduced inter-organisation action learning as a method to increase capability for product innovation in a design science approach. Design science, in turn, provides a base of knowledge for research projects in two categories; 1. prescriptive knowledge such as models and design theory; 2. descriptive knowledge such as natural phenomena or patterns of sense-making (Gregor & Hevner, 2013).

Fundamentally all different approaches to learning in action and action for learning have one thing in common, all schools of thought use previous experience and further interpretations as the key approach to improve the understanding of a particular context and enhance the knowledge of the field (Dewar & Sharp, 2006). In summary, action learning: 1. helps leaders deal with ambiguity; 2. builds community; 3. reinforces managerial, transformational, political and professional aspects of leadership; and 4. promotes application of previous academic learnings to real problems (Leonard & Marquardt, 2010).

Acknowledging previous papers for the use of design science and action learning in project management, this paper presents action learning as a scientific approach used to create identifiable cycles using 'trial and error' principles, each cycle revealing new factors and leading to continuing reflection on ways to set up a process for accurately replicating (simulating) observable workplace conditions and interactions. The lead author used continuous cycles of action learning (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014) to enhance knowledge and understanding of available simulations, and decision processes in the context of PPM within an explicit action learning domain (O'Neil & Marsick, 2007).

Simulation – definition and application to project portfolio context

The specific outcome of this use of action learning was an artefact (i.e., the simulation) named HOOSHMAND-1, developed specifically for collecting and analyzing data for study of decision making in PPM under conditions of uncertainty.

Simulation is a useful research approach (Hussein, 2007; Leigh, 2013) as it can provide a means to reduce complexity in a controlled way, reducing it to a manageable scale, while still reflecting reality.

Design of HOOSHMAND-1 was driven by the need to create a context for eliciting information about the influence of complexity and the effect of space and time factors on decision-making processes for project portfolios. As noted above, the focus of the final design was on replicating a range of internal and external factors, including how to select, prioritise, optimise and terminate projects and programs within a portfolio contributing to generating complexity in a project portfolio management context (Ghasemzadeh & Archer, 2000; Unger, Gemünden & Aubry, 2012; Kaiser, El Arbi & Ahlemann, 2015).

In summary, although there was little evidence in the literature to support this approach to design of a research tool in the PPM domain, the work of Duke (1974), Geurts, Duke & Vermeulen (2007) and Leigh (2013) all highlight ways in which simulation can be used in exactly the mode sought. Thus, a cross-disciplinary search for concepts and designs was applied through the action learning cycles to seek out viable design options and guidelines. The arbitrage strategy is then used to explain findings from implementation of action learning for this research paper (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006).

Methodology

The paper reports on the sequential development of six action learning cycles leading to development of a unique simulation. As noted above action learning employs a 'form of 'trial and error' learning whereby each action learning cycle builds on what has been learned in the preceding cycle. Thus, the research methodology employed was designed to intentionally traverse a number (unknown at the beginning) of trials of existing simulations to assess their efficacy and/or identify specific criteria for inclusion in an original and unique design - namely HOOSHMAND-1.

Each action learning cycle included a pilot study of an existing and available simulation, observation of participants engaging with the particular simulation, analysis of outcomes and with the findings, generated by each cycle, contributing to the completion of HOOSHMAND-1.

Developing HOOSHMAND-1

Action learning (Revans, 1998) uses learning-focused strategies to seek out solutions to complex problems. One approach is known as the SHEAR (Survey, Hypothesis, Experiment, Audit and Review) cyclic approach to problem solving (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014) beginning with action and moving through critical reflection (Pedler, Burgoyne & Brook, 2007) about results to analysis, and then returning to further actions. The four key steps in most representations of the action learning cycle involve 1- asking fresh questions, 2- unfreezing underlying assumptions, 3- creating new connections, 4- rebalancing the framework (Abbott & Mayes, 2014). This paper reports on an adapted approach to using SHEAR as shown in Figure 2.
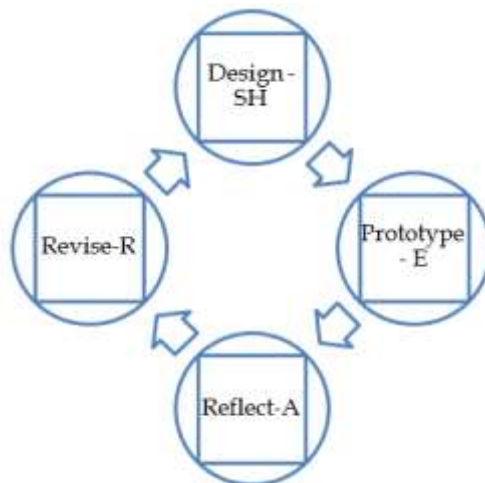

Figure 2. Action learning process for developing HOOSHMAND-1 with SHEAR steps in relation to progress

The eventual design of the simulation emerged through the process of assessing available literature and simulations, methods and design assumptions against the research needs as described in (Shalbafan & Leigh, 2017, Shalbafan et al., 2015). Reflection on personal observation and assessment of documents were essential research resources. Reflection employed three key components: 1–the researcher's presentation on self-reflection; 2–a summary of results and feedback from research participants; and 3–the (first author's doctoral) supervisors' comments and feedback on each experiment. The outcomes of each step were used to revise earlier assumptions in the research project and adjust goals and expectations for the next cycle of action learning.

Implementation and reflections

The development of HOOSHMAND-1 evolved through six action learning cycles, each of which is briefly described below. Each cycle had its own implementation and reflections which then created new connections leading into the subsequent cycle until the design of HOOSHMAND-1 was completed.

Cycle 1: Principles underpinning this simulation design

This initial action learning cycle identified key project decision factors and principles for inclusion in the eventual design. HOOSHMAND-1 is a unique approach to generating a simulated context within which expert project managers work on achieving consensus on decisions relevant to crucial business outcomes.

This first action learning cycle set the ground works and continued to inform all the subsequent development stages. The doctoral supervisory team at University of Technology Sydney and the lead author as the researcher and the champion of the action learning set worked together through finding cues, fragments and evidence that could contribute to the design of a simulation based on existing simulation tools, literature and concepts. The research team members' multi-disciplinary backgrounds contributed to development of different aspects of designing the research methods including HOOSHMAND-1. For example, one team

member was an expert in the design of simulations while two other members were more skilled in the context of decision making in PPM. In all these reflections, the lead author played the role of a facilitator to direct the team to conclusions.

Kurtz & Snowden (2003) define a 'complicated' state as a zone of knowable information where cause and effect are discoverable, although, separated over time and space. In contrast, a 'complex' state involves emergent patterns, where cause and effect relationships do not repeat and will only become coherent in retrospect. Snowden & Boone (2007) argue that leaders need to understand and apply relevant responses depending on actual conditions and assert that misunderstanding these patterns of communication and knowledge results in ongoing problems. To simulate 'real-life' conditions, it was decided that the eventual simulation design would have to create situations where participants could respond to an initially 'complicated' context, which is structured so as to become 'complex' as time passes.

Reflection

Such an artificial context would need to be both viable as a learning environment and verifiable like the conditions of real contexts without actually being conducted in a real context. It would also need to include sufficient complexity such that participants would experience a gradual shift from comfort and certainty to uncertainty and growing discomfort. Key lessons learned by members of the action learning team were identified in relation to defining the context of decision making in PPM, limiting the number of scenarios and number of participants in each group within the simulation, and appropriate framing for the initial facilitation process.

Cycle 2: Wip Wap / Holiday Paradise School (HPS)

Wip Wap – a role-play simulation was developed to explore factors influencing communication in an organisational context (Naber & van Oort, 2005). The 2nd action learning cycle investigated 'Wip Wap' to understand whether it could be a viable

tool to conduct data collection for research into decision making for project portfolio.

The simulation expert was a supervising member of the research project which had resulted in the design of Wip Wap. Thus in this cycle of the current research, she facilitated the process (Sanyal, 2017). However, the lead author remained the design champion, collating observations for planning the next cycle of action learning focusing on decisions about how to modify Wip Wap as a project portfolio management simulation called 'Holiday Paradise School' (HPS). The Wip Wap scenarios were amended to allow for fewer participants, and a shorter playing time. The research team, with the champion's lead, engaged project managers to play this revised simulation at the University of Technology Sydney. Participants in the pilot session did not complete any activities within the stipulated time although the debriefing collected quite a lot of feedback from the participants in HPS for reflection analysis.

In this 2nd action learning Cycle, HPS did create a kind of complex project management context. However, it was evident that the scenarios encouraged participants to overplay their roles such that energy shifted to personal interactions and away from the intended focus on decision making. HPS had been intended to study decision-making in project portfolio management but instead highlighted the importance of communication and personal interactions. However, the experience showed that the design was not appropriate to research on the quality of decision-making in PPM as it did not allow for the required data collection.

Reflection

HPS did, however, help to narrow the design parameters by illustrating that a group of three participants was enough for efficient decision making; and that additional rules could keep participants within the boundary of the facilitation process required to address defensive routines (Argyris, 1986) and thus materially contributed important elements to the eventual design of HOOSHMAND-1.

Cycle 3: Air Power 2100

The simulation called 'AirPower2100' was examined in the 3rd action learning cycle. AirPower2100 was developed to improve fleet preparedness at an Australian Air Force base, a large and diverse workplace (Kearney, Heffernan & McLuckie, 2013) . The main focus of this role-play simulation was on investigating relationships among four groups of players: logistics, maintenance, operations, and Aircraft Upgrade Projects.

Since AirPower2100 was designed for training of air fleet staff in complex decision making, it was selected as a possible candidate to study how it replicated the actual complexity faced by decision makers in the real context. AirPower2100 appeared promising, because it seemed to create a learning environment focusing on the process and not on personal communication. The designer of the AirPower2100 was invited to facilitate the pilot implementation of this simulation for the research team members at the University of Technology Sydney. However, a 'walk through' of this simulation revealed that it focused on process management, rather than individual decision-making.

Therefore, AirPower2100 was also found to be helpful but not appropriate for the research goals.

Reflection

Trialling of AirPower2100 did provide evidence which informed the eventual design parameters for HOOSHMAND-1. Reflective analysis of the outcomes of this trial led to the conclusion that the eventual design needed a structure with a tighter time frame and a focus on personal interaction. It revealed that the design would need an explicit, but not over emphatic, but paying attention to process-based work with a focus on decision makers under pressure.

Cycle 4: Portfolio Selection

Finally, a third simulation called 'Portfolio Selection' was tested. It was observed during a classroom session for business postgraduate students at the University of Technology Sydney.

The lead author attended two sessions, first as an observer and then as a player to gain an appreciation of the process and an understanding of the portfolio selection process used. Other members of the research team also attended the classroom exercise as observers. 'Portfolio Selection' studies how methods of presenting information can influence individual perceptions about making decisions. In this simulation, individuals had 15 minutes to make a decision and then discuss with the group their perceptions of how they made the decision (Killen, 2013).

Reflection

This experience contributed to the design of HOOSHMAND-1 by drawing attention to the importance of timing in a decision-making scenario. 'Portfolio Selection' did not allow for the impact of uncertainty and was focused on individual learning of the decision-making processes, so proved useful but not appropriate. Engagement of the research team, educational team and classroom students helped deepen understanding of state-of-the-art knowledge required for PPM in postgraduate studies. Some outcomes of these interactions also included consideration of decision criteria, worksheets for recording PPM decisions, and presentation of data and their impacts on students' judgements during the decision making exercise.

Cycle 5: HOOSHMAND-1

Since an appropriate simulation for achieving the research goals had not been found during the previous cycles, two factors became evident. First: that further trials of apparently appropriate designs might reveal more useful design principles but were unlikely to uncover a useful ready-made design. And second, that the most appropriate next step would require development of a purpose-built simulation. Thus HOOSHMAND-1 began to emerge based on the lessons learnt from these prior trials of simulations. HOOSHMAND-1 has been specifically tailored to facilitate the study of how decision-making is affected by three sources of uncertainty: time pressure, intricate information, and the uncertainty of achieving desired outcomes.

The research team carried out the steps for revisiting the collected fragments and lessons learned from the previous four cycles of action learning and agreed on the framework that HOOSHMAND-1 would need in order to create a standardised protocol if it was to generate reliable, repeatable patterns of behaviour necessary for enabling collection of adequate research data.

Two scenarios are now used in HOOSHMAND-1each based on aspects of a case study of IT companies in Canada (Petit, 2012; Petit & Hobbs, 2010). Both scenarios are set in the (fictional) Sydney headquarters of an international IT company, in the context of a project portfolio committee meeting between the headquarters Director and the heads of Divisions of Application Development, Integration and Verification. The scenarios are dynamic and competitive, with sources of instability related to product content, unstable standards and unclear product requirements from customers.

As a result of this experience and analysis, HOOSHMAND-1 emerged as a unique and original design drawing on all the lessons learned. HOOSHMAND-1 as a role-play simulation creates a unique set of conditions for study of decision makers' judgements and decision-making processes in PPM steering committee contexts where they are finding they have to cope with events arising during their decision making.

The research team moved to engage a group of volunteer participants with relevant professional experience, and the lead author conducted the 1st trial with the help of a group of volunteers, with such relevant management experience.

Reflection

Extended interviews with these participants resulted in the emergence of additional design issues including 1) time management, 2) the facilitation process required for such a complex simulation HOOSHMAND-1 and 3) format for presentation of information package for roles and objectives in each scenario.

Cycle 6: HOOSHMAND-1 - time allocation and control

This revision of HOOSHMAND-1 improved design elements of the simulation against feedback received from the previous cycles of action learning. The lead author engaged a different group of volunteers - all professional managers – for a second trial. In this trial the participants had not finished the first of two scenarios after four hours engagement. This was much longer than planned, and it became clear that the 'fail point' was in the facilitation process itself. Participants did not perceive any sense of urgency to complete the tasks. The champion/lead author was facilitating the process and received extensive feedback from participants after the session, while also getting positive feedback on other changes the research team had previously agreed to.

Reflection

Reflection on feedback from outsiders (O'Neil & Marsick, 2007) and observation of this simulation exercise led the research team to incorporate additional strategies, including use of a large image of the 'time horizon' and ringing a bell as each 'month/decision cycle' ended to alert participants about their progress over time. This proved to be the final element needed to create a simulation that elegantly re-creates the original context with sufficient validity to generate exactly the kinds of stress-based pressure for participants which, replicated environments in which a decreasing quality of decision-making could be observed.

Figure 3 shows summary of action learning cycles and contribution of each cycle to the design parameters for final product.
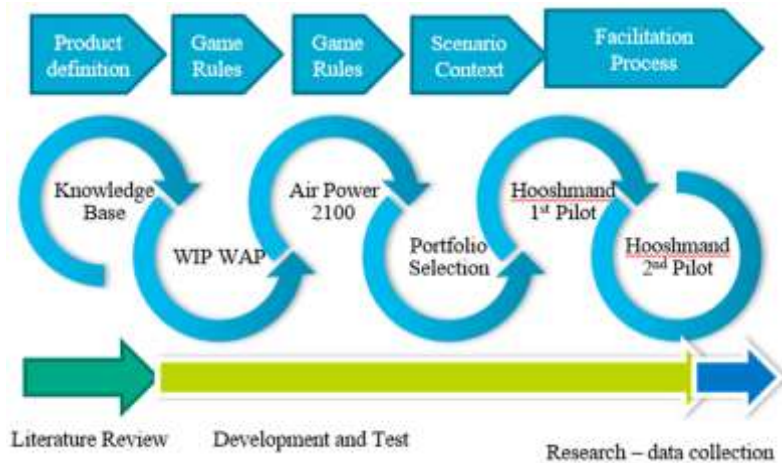
Figure 3 – Steps of action learning and contributions of each cycle to design of final product

This feedback provided confidence for concluding the action learning cycles and commencing use of simulation HOOSHMAND-1 for the research project itself.

Discussion

Van de Ven & Johnson (2006) suggest a four-step process based on an arbitrage strategy, to simultaneously enhance advancement of knowledge for theory and practice. They are:

1. Ground the research question in observable phenomena

2. Develop plausible concepts that present main aspects of the observed phenomena

3. Use suitable methods to design research methods and collect empirical evidence

4. Apply and spread research findings to address research questions

This paper has followed these four steps in response to the question posed for this aspect of the larger research work. The use of action learning throughout the research journey created suitable collaborations between practitioners, facilitators, and researchers contributing to the design and application of a multiple methods research approach to the study of complex cases – in this case that of decision making in PPM under conditions of continuing uncertainty.

As the final product of these action learning cycles, HOOSHMAND-1 has been successfully used in international education programs for postgraduate students in project management and MBA programs in Sweden and Australia. The lead author used this simulation as the tool for generating date his PhD research in 2013-2014 and conducted four workshops with 33 participants in private sectors, Project Management Institute (PMI) Sydney and the University of Technology Sydney. The approach and publishing original results of the research in various papers between 2015 and 2019 has encouraged the researchers to extend their customized research method by applying action learning to this less developed body of knowledge.

The six cycles of action learning employed to arrive at the design and development of HOOSHMAND-1 has provided an opportunity for learning for all the participating project members. For the lead author, as both observer and the researcher, it was a deep learning experience (Sanyal, 2017) about enhancing the use of management simulation games (Stainton, Johnson & Borodzicz, 2010) understanding complex project portfolio problems (Killen, 2013) and the dynamics of individual judgments (Shalbafan et al., 2017). Information available, external and internal dynamics (Müller, Martinsuo & Blomquist, 2008) are now understood to be influencing each other and changing the final results of decision making, which is regularly illustrated in the outcomes of the simulation. For other participants in the action learning Cycles including postgraduate students, use of action learning introduced a new approach to employing research methodologies for emerging fields where there is little evidence of previous

knowledge or experience (Petit & Hobbs, 2012) for conventional research approach.

For academics and policy makers the use of action learning provides it provides a means to facilitate engagement of different stakeholders in the research or policy design and development to create a rich and balanced journey for all participants and key stakeholders (van den Hoogen & Meijer, 2014). The outcome of these action learning cycles provided a novel research methodology (Leigh, 2013) which has also provided valuable insights to business executives concerning use of leadership styles in Chaotic and Complex conditions (Erçetin, 2016; Shalbafan et al., 2017).

The design of HOOSHMAND-1 highlights non-technical factors operating in high stress situations (Serrat, 2017), and supports exploration of the impact of unintended outcomes of decisions on project portfolios in complex and complicated conditions (Snowden & Boone, 2007).

To understand the cyclic nature of knowledge finding and creating, this paper presents a way forward for researchers considering use of action learning to develop simulations for use in research. Action learning contributed directly to designing a relevant simulation for management practice and executive training.

Conclusions

This paper describes the theoretical background to – and application of - action learning in the context of project portfolio management and simulation. In order to address of gaps in the literature, the research question as discussed was:

How does an action learning approach help to develop a more robust simulation as a research method?

In response to the question, the paper provides a narrative to explain the lessons learned in each of the six cycles of action learning. The results of this structured, yet also emergent process,

as illustrated in figure 3 demonstrate the contributions each cycle made to the final product design. And the successful outcome of all this work supports use of action learning as a suitable – and novel - research method.

We advocate for the importance of employing such a cyclic nature of knowledge development and, in that respect, this paper has reported one such experience from beginning to end.

The research process described here shows that use of action learning makes it possible to explore emerging parameters to address a suitable research method in dealing with complexity when the research cannot be conducted in real time or in real contexts.

Action learning as a tool for gaining insight into the as-yet unknown led to awareness and understanding of underlying assumptions influencing simulation settings, scenarios, facilitation process.

In setting up the study and completing it, the action learning cycles required a lot of time to establish a robust simulation supported by an appropriate analysis framework that is now shown to replicate real situations encountered in Project Portfolio Management as closely as is necessary to generate and collect data that is otherwise impossible to access in real time.

Finally, the paper contributes to project management research by sharing knowledge of how to develop a custom design research method using action learning to address complex research problems where there is little evidence available from previous research in the body of knowledge.

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Biography

Lead Author Dr Saeed Shalbafan

Dr Saeed Shalbafan has more than 20 years' experience as an executive engineer, project manager, researcher and lecturer in project portfolio management. Saeed's research interests span over 10 years for application of practice-based approach to research and education in project portfolio management, use of action learning in developing research methodology and design and facilitation of simulation games for management decision making internationally. Outcomes of Saeed's research has been published and presented in well-known conferences and proceedings such as ISAGA, EURAM, IRNOP and PCGS.

In addition, as a senior executive in Sydney Metro, Saeed leads transformation of mega projects and construction industry to achieve an optimal performance by applying digital tools and technologies.

Co-Authors

Professor Shankar Sankaran

Shankar Sankaran is the Professor of Organisational Project Management at the School of the Built Environment. He is a Member of the Centre for Informatics Research and Innovation and a core researcher of megaproject management in the industry transformation cluster.

Shankar's research covers organizational project management, megaprojects, systems thinking, project leadership and action research. Shankar is an editor of and author of chapters in the Cambridge Handbook of Organizational Project Management and A Guide to Systems Research: Philosophy Processes and Practice published by Springer. He is one of the authors of a book titled Organizational Project Management: Theory and Implementation and The Evaluative Study of Action Research Rigorous Findings on Process and Impact from Around the World. His current research projects are: Practice-based study of project portfolio management and strategic alignment in construction and Social Media Use in Project Management - Multiple Case Studies of Transport Projects.

Dr Elyssebeth Leigh

Dr Elyssebeth Leigh has more than 30 years as an educator and learning designer in workplaces and academic settings. As an experienced facilitator of adult learning she has published four books and numerous articles and conference papers on learning

and teaching. Much of this work concerns the use of simulation for learning, and research.

Elyssebeth has worked in many countries and in both the public and private sectors in Australia, and her work is characterised by action-

oriented and experiential learning for facilitating knowledge acquisition and individual development. As an academic supervisor and research examiner she is familiar with the complexities of planning, creating and completing research work at Masters and Doctoral level.

Dr Leigh recently completed a research project for the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Wollongong in NSW Australia on integrating indigenous ways of knowing and learning into the practice of engineering education, and has been enjoying a short term contract with the University of Aalto in Mikkeli, Finland.

Associate Professor Julien Pollack

Associate Professor Julien Pollack started working in project management in the Australian public sector delivering organizational change projects, where he completed an Action Research Ph.D. This research won national and international awards. Following this, he managed telecommunications and heavy engineering projects, before taking an academic position in 2011 to teach project management. His research has focused on two broad themes: trends in project management research; and developing project management practice to meet the needs of projects that cannot be pre-defined in simple and stable terms. He has successively drawn on systems thinking, complexity theory, and change management to address this latter area of research, particularly focusing on the delivery of organisational change projects. His research in these areas has been frequently published in the leading project management journals and research conferences.

Book review – Growing through Reflection

Growing through Reflection

Dr Rosetta Pillay

This book is a surprise in many ways. When first glancing through the book, one notices that most of it is comprised of lined, but apparently otherwise blank, pages. The book's subtitle gives a clue to its intent: *A Journal for Action Learning Facilitators*. Dr Rosetta (Rose) Pillay from South Africa, who obtained her doctorate in action learning, prepared this interesting, thought and activity-provoking format for a journal.

The book has a consistent structure across ten themes, such as *Resplendently you* (know yourself), *An inner "knowing"*, *Surrendering to the process*, and *Respectful observer*. Each starts with a description of the theme, followed by "ABCs" of each theme to highlight the core aspect of the themes. For example, in the theme *Freedom through questions*, the ABC statement is:

> An *Attentive* facilitator knows that questions must be
> *Bespoke* to aptly *Challenge* the thinking and actions of the set.

A Quick Response (QR) code provides access to more content on the theme. The following page has activities – questions facilitators can answer to seek a deeper understanding of themselves. The following pages are the lined pages, with reflection questions on each leading page, on which facilitators can reflect and explore to as a means to improve their work as a facilitator. For example, the *Freedom through questions* theme has reflection questions such as *How effective are my questions? How are my questions creating an atmosphere of safety? and How do I inspire the set to be curious?* These activities make this book a highly useful development tool for the facilitator.

The structure of the book also provides a way to support the facilitator in an almost cathartic manner. Facilitation can be isolating, as one needs to adopt a steady, even-handed approach to supporting the set. Short of seeking supervision to explore concerns and problems that the facilitator feels are occurring, a structured reflection process, as this book provides, can help the facilitator in many ways. In addition to helping the facilitator identify ways to improve the activities of for the current set, re-reading at a later time may assist with future assignments. The book's structure also allows a facilitator to improve the facilitator's methods and interventions, again, in the current and future facilitations. The structure can also help the facilitator identify when the facilitator needs assistance to address a larger problem in the facilitation or set.

The final statement in the book sums up the benefits to facilitators in using the book in their journey.

> As a Facilitator, you play a significant role in this
> transformation by demonstrating how participants can
> activate Action Learning in all aspects of their lives.
> Therefore, managing your own growth through conscious
> inner work is key to your credibility as a Facilitator. My
> hope is this journal will serve as a useful guide in advancing

> both your personal journey to self-mastery and your
> professional facilitation skills.

The book can be ordered online as a hard copy or as an interactive e-version for 220 South African Rand (about 13.70 USD or 19.50 AUD) from https://www.panaceahedging.co.za.

Colin Bradley

Introducing Thesis Research Notes

Introducing Thesis Research Notes in *ALARj*

Action Learning, Action Research Association has decided to add Thesis Research Notes (TRNs) to the *Action Learning and Action Research Journal*. A TRN is an informative paper that directly refers to and links to the author's thesis to 'whet the reader's appetite' to consider downloading and reading it as well as to gain an appreciation of the HDR candidate's research journey, motivation to choose the research topic, maintain interest in the many years taken to complete the research, and university's support.

The purpose of the TRN is that:

- Academics get early exposure to the work, given that most recent theses will have several if not many papers but these fade out over the years;

- Supervisors of HDR candidates (Master and Ph.D.) get an idea of what is currently happening in terms of trends and topics, as will the general readership of *ALARj*;

- Candidates and potential candidates get an idea of what are the motives and characteristics of their fellow travelers along this fantastic journey; and

- The TRN should provide an engaging account that offers the reader with a better understanding of what makes a HDR candidate 'tick' and what seems like a good topic, and how it was tackled, and recognition that its contribution is about understanding how the field of Action Learning / Action Research (AL/AR) is evolving.

Thesis Research Notes Guidelines for *ALARj*

Nature of questions posed by the TRN

The TRN is not a scaled-down paper on the masters or doctoral thesis that had been submitted and successfully passed. It is intended as an informative paper that directly refers to and links to the author's thesis to 'whet the reader's appetite' to consider downloading and reading it. In addition, it should help the reader gain an appreciation of the HDR candidate's research journey, motivation to choose the research topic, maintain interest in the many years taken to complete the research, and university's support.

The questions addressed in a TRN can be summarised as:

1. What was this thesis generally about in terms of the research and/or practice gap it sought to bridge: why should it be of interest to the reader?

    a) An E-link should be provided to enable interested readers to download a pdf of the thesis having their interest hopefully whetted by the TRN.

2. How did the HDR researcher become interested enough in the topic to undertake the 2-3+ year full-time equivalent study? To answer this question, provide:

    a) A brief explanation of the context of the background topic context that presented a research and practice gap opportunity to fill;

    b) A brief explanation of how the HDR candidate's academic and work experience led to this topic interest (often from a gut-gnawing niggling question that plagued the candidate for several years, perhaps?).

    c) Details of the possible influence that the chosen academic institution had on the HDR candidate, such

> as its research track record, scholarship incentive, or the reputation of the candidate's supervisor.

3. How was the research undertaken?

    a) A brief explanation of the general literature areas that were investigated throughout the doctorate to inform the thesis;

    b) A brief explanation of the action research or participatory research approach adopted and how it was deemed appropriate for the research question the thesis addressed.

    c) A brief discussion and summary of the research key findings and the contributions made.

    d) A brief account of how the university supported (or failed to support) the study so that readers may understand the type and level of support offered to HDR candidates.

4. What was the personal journey undertaken through the thesis research work?

    a) A brief explanation of the mode (full/part-time), whether undertaken at the university or remotely, and how that mode experience helped/hindered progress; whether the research was conducted in the workplace as action research or other participatory approaches.

    b) What if any were significant moments or events that are worth sharing.

    c) What career/personal opportunities opened up from the work?

    d) What areas of research or practice is the candidate now pursuing because of the research.

The aims for TRNs can be summarised as:

1. Provide readers access to recent (within the past 12-24 months) HDR theses / dissertations that have used participatory approaches to conduct the research. When reading an interesting paper, a reader is often intrigued by the topic and would like to find more about the author's work. While authors might have cited several related articles of theirs, the primary and core source is their thesis. It would be beneficial to know a little more about the thesis, its context, and how to download it electronically for further detail.

2. Provide a *summary* of the thesis. All theses require a summary at the start of the thesis, usually about 1000 to 1500 words; this can be used with modifications as the basis of the thesis note. There may also be a similar amount of content, perhaps a page or two with a helpful figure summarising a conceptual model or the findings. Usually, an outline only of the research approach is included. The idea is to provide a summary and not a full paper, and the author may have already written one or several papers already that are in print or under review.

3. Provide a context of the thesis. It would be interesting to know a little about the thesis authors and their journey to the thesis topic. Generally, they are reflective practitioners and have an interesting background that led them to this topic. After reading the thesis note, other readers may be prompted to follow a similar journey.

4. Provide a context for the university where the thesis was developed. Most readers are unaware of the variety of schools, universities, and opportunities to undertake a doctorate on a research topic. Many readers would be interested in a description or short contextual setting of the university and the research expertise that can be accessed. A short section of about a half to one page could provide useful information for readers about what opportunities are

available to conduct action research at the masters or doctoral level.

5. Indicate outcomes from the work. The thesis notes should cite papers presented at conferences, journal papers, and any other IP outcomes such as a patent, invention, new process, or whatever else may be of practical use that came out of the work.

6. A URL where the thesis can be downloaded. People would like to be able to download the thesis, even if it is in a language other than English.

The paper should be about 10-14 pages or about 4,000-8,000 words excluding references. It is usually co-authored with the thesis supervisor, who can add insights for where that work is now heading, the institution's philosophy that supported the research, and any other relevant issues to deliver the doctorate.

Acknowledgment

Yedida Bessemer and Shankar Sankaran

Membership information and article submissions

Membership categories

Membership of Action Learning, Action Research Association Ltd (ALARA) takes two forms: individual and organisational.

ALARA individual membership

Members of the ALARA obtain access to all issues of the *Action Learning and Action Research Journal* (*ALARj*) twelve months before it becomes available to the public.

ALARA members receive regular emailed Action Learning and Action Research updates and access to web-based networks, discounts on conference/seminar registrations, and an on-line membership directory. The directory has details of members with information about interests as well as the ability to contact them.

ALARA organisational membership

ALARA is keen to make connections between people and activities in all strands, streams and variants associated with our paradigm. Areas include Action Learning, Action Research, process management, collaborative inquiry facilitation, systems thinking, Indigenous research and organisational learning and development. ALARA may appeal to people working at all levels in any kind of organisational, community, workplace or other practice setting.

ALARA invites organisational memberships with university schools, public sector units, corporate and Medium to Small Business, and community organisations. Such memberships include Affiliates. Details are on our membership link on our website (https://alarassociation.org/membership/Affiliates).

Become a member of ALARA

An individual Membership Application Form is on the last page of this Journal or individuals can join by clicking on the Membership Application button on ALARA's website. Organisations can apply by using the organisational membership application form on ALARA's website.

For more information on ALARA activities and to join

Please visit our web page:
https://www.alarassociation.org/user/register
or email admin@alarassociation.org

Journal submissions criteria and review process

The *ALARj* contains substantial articles, project reports, information about activities, creative works from the Action Learning and Action Research field, reflections on seminars and conferences, short articles related to the theory and practice of Action Learning and Action Research, and reviews of recent publications. *ALARj* also advertises practitioners' services for a fee.

The *ALARj* aims to be of the highest standard of writing from the field in order to extend the boundaries of theorisation of the practice, as well as the boundaries of its application.

ALARA aims *ALARj* to be accessible for readers and contributors while not compromising the need for sophistication that complex situations require. We encourage experienced practitioners and scholars to contribute, while being willing to publish new practitioners as a way of developing the field, and introduce novice practitioners presenting creative and insightful work

We will only receive articles that have been proof read, comply with the submission guidelines as identified on *ALARj*'s website, and that meet the criteria that the reviewers use. We are unlikely to publish an article that describes a project simply because its methodology is drawn from our field.

ALARA intends *AlARj* to provide high quality works for practitioners and funding bodies to use in the commissioning of works, and the progression of and inclusion of action research and action learning concepts and practices in policy and operations.

ALARj has a substantial international panel of experienced Action Learning and Action Research scholars and practitioners who offer double blind and transparent reviews at the request of the author.

Making your submission and developing your paper

Please send all contributions in Microsoft Word format to the Open Journal Systems (OJS) access portal: https://alarj.alarassociation.org.

You must register as an author to upload your document and work through the electronic pages of requirements to make your submission. ALARA's Managing Editor or Issue Editor will contact you and you can track progress of your paper on the OJS page.

If you have any difficulties or inquiries about submission or any other matters to do with ALARA publications contact the Managing Editor on editor@alarassociation.org.

For the full details of submitting to the *ALAR Journal*, please see the submission guidelines on ALARA's web site https://alarassociation.org/publications/submission-guidelines/alarj-submission-guidelines.

Guidelines

ALARj is devoted to the communication of the theory and practice of Action Learning, Action Research and related methodologies generally. As with all ALARA activities, all streams of work across all disciplines are welcome. These areas include Action Learning, Action Research, Participatory Action Research, systems thinking, inquiry process-facilitation, process management, and all the associated post-modern epistemologies and methods such as rural self-appraisal, auto-ethnography, appreciative inquiry, most significant change, open space technology, etc.

In reviewing submitted papers, our reviewers use the following criteria, which are important for authors to consider:

Criterion 1: How well are the paper and its focus both aimed at and/or grounded in the world of practice?

Criterion 2: How well are the paper and/or its subject explicitly and actively participative: research with, for and by people rather than on people?

Criterion 3: How well do the paper and/or its subject draw on a wide range of ways of knowing (including intuitive, experiential, presentational as well as conceptual) and link these appropriately to form theory of and in practices (praxis)?

Criterion 4: How well does the paper address questions that are of significance to the flourishing of human community and the more-than-human world as related to the foreseeable future?

Criterion 5: How well does the paper consider the ethics of research practice for this and multiple generations?

Criterion 6: How well does the paper and/or its subject aim to leave some lasting capacity amongst those involved, encompassing first, second and third person perspectives?

Criterion 7: How well do the paper and its subject offer critical insights into and critical reflections on the research and inquiry process?

Criteria 8: How well does the paper openly acknowledge there are culturally distinctive approaches to Action Research and Action Learning and seek to make explicit their own assumptions about non-Western/ Indigenous and Western approaches to Action Research and Action Learning?

Criteria 9: How well does the paper engage the context of research with systemic thinking and practices?

Criterion 10: How well do the paper and/or its subject progress AR and AL in the field (research, community, business, education or otherwise)?

Criterion 11: How well is the paper written?

Article preparation

ALARj submissions must be original and unpublished work suitable for an international audience and not under review by any other publisher or journal. No payment is associated with submissions. Copyright of published works remains with the author(s) shared with Action Learning, Action Research Association Ltd

While *ALARj* promotes established practice and related discourse *ALARj* also encourages unconventional approaches to reflecting on practice including poetry, artworks and other forms of creative expression that can in some instances progress the field more appropriately than academic forms of writing.

Submissions are uploaded to our Open Journal System (OJS) editing and publication site.

The reviewers use the OJS system to send authors feedback within a 2-3 month period. You will receive emails at each stage of the process with feedback, and if needed, instructions included in the email about how to make revisions and resubmit.

Access to the journal

The journal is published electronically on the OJS website.

EBSCO and InformIT also publish the journal commercially for worldwide access, and pdf or printed versions are available from various online booksellers or email admin@alarassociation.org.

For further information about the *ALAR Journal* and other ALARA publications, please see ALARA's web site http://www.alarassociation.org/publications.

Individual Membership Application Form

This form is for the use of individuals wishing to join ALARA.

Please complete all fields.

ALARA

Name

Title	Given Name		Family Name

Residential Address

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Country			

Postal Address

Street		Town / City	Postcode / Zip
State	Country		

Telephone / Mobile Telephone

Country Code	Telephone Number	Country Code	Mobile Number

Email

Email Address

Experience (Please tick most relevant)

- No experience yet
- 1 – 5 years' experience
- More than 5 years' experience

Interests (Please tick all relevant)

- Education
- Health
- Community / Social Justice
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Are you eligible for concessional membership?
If you are a full-time student, retired or an individual earning less than AUD 20,000 per year, about USD 13,750 (please check current conversion rates), you can apply for concessional membership.

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Privacy Policy

By submitting this membership form, I acknowledge that I have read, understood and accept ALARA's Privacy Policy https://www.alarassociation.org/sites/default/files/docs/policies/ALARA_PrivacyPolicy11_1.pdf.

ALARA will acknowledge receipt of your application and send you an invoice or receipt of payment. You will receive an email confirming activation of your account, and details on how you can access website functions.

ALARA is a global network of programs, institutions, professionals, and people interested in using action learning and action research to generate collaborative learning, training, research and action to transform workplaces, schools, colleges, universities, communities, voluntary organisations, governments and businesses.

ALARA's vision is to create a more equitable, just, joyful, productive, peaceful and sustainable society by promoting local and global change through the wide use of Action Learning and Action Research by individuals, groups and organisations.