Coaching in Action Research

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ABSTRACT

Action research is a systematic activity implemented by educators in improving the teaching and learning process. However, its implementation is time consuming. As a result, most educators are not able to conduct action research, even though it is often recommended by the administration. The failure in implementation is mostly due to time constraints, educators' workload, and also the lack of skills and knowledge of action research itself. This paper will discuss a method that educators can apply to action research, known as coaching. Coaching will be discussed using Kolb's Model as a model for action research. The flow of action research implementation will also be discussed in detail.

Keywords: Coaching, GROW model, action research, Kolb Cycle, teaching and learning, teachers

1. Introduction

Education plays a vital role in the economic growth of developing countries. A quality education system can produce competent and knowledgeable citizens in accordance with the country's requirements for becoming a developed country. Therefore, the teaching and learning process used in schools should be *given serious attention* to ensure the quality of the education system. The quality of the education system is the most important determinant of a country's success, as how well a country fairs in the global economy is highly dependent on the knowledge, skills, and competencies of its citizens. Thus, it is not surprising when a country's economy expands rapidly with the growth of a highly educated work force. At the same time, education is the basis of the country's formation and national unity. Moreover, individuals have an opportunity to improve their quality of life through education in order to become successful members of society and actively contribute to the country's development (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013).

Only with a quality education system can the quality of human capital generation be achieved. In this case, educators are integral to the production of a high-quality education system and student success. However, their duties and responsibilities are more challenging in the new millennium. In addition, the requirements of parents and students are higher now than before. Therefore, educators play an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. If educators fail to implement effective teaching and learning activities, or if they cannot engage in self-reflection or evaluate students' strengths and weaknesses, a variety of problems may result.

To realise the vision and mission of the Ministry of Education Malaysia, educators need to have competencies and sincerity. To this end, the qualifications and credibility of educators are often emphasised. If there are any doubts about the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, educators should make improvements as quickly as they can. Changes can be made with help and support from external parties, such as recommendations from academicians, parents, and the community, to empower the education system. When such recommendations are taken into account, the teaching and learning process is continuously improved, ultimately leading to a high quality of human capital.

The Ministry of Education's current attempt at ensuring the quality of the teaching and learning process encourages educators to engage in action research. Through action research, educators can understand their teaching practices (Noraini, 2010) and solve various problems by diagnosing student problems or their own problems (Mohd Sahandri *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, educators can identify the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching practices in responding to the needs of student diversity. According to Levin and Martin (2007) and Volk (2010), action research can be used as a basis method to improve teaching practices.

Although action research has many advantages, there are problems as well. Among the most common problems encountered by educators are time constraints and heavy workloads (Volk, 2010; Othman, 2011; Jun, 2013). The situation is exacerbated when educators realise they lack the necessary knowledge and skills to do action research. Eventually, these problems may hinder the implementation of action research in schools.

Further, school administrators cannot force educators to conduct action research. This is because it is not among the educators' official duties or responsibilities. The educators must be ready and willing to do the action research (Madzniyah, 2006). Therefore, school administrators should strive to create an environment that leads to the implementation of action research. Especially, educators should be disclosed to appropriate action research methods with the subject they teach. This paper describes the Kolb Cycle as a method that can be introduced.

2. Kolb Cycle - Action Research Model

The Kolb Model is currently used as a model for teaching and learning styles. It can also be regarded as a form of an action research cycle (Kolb, 1984). According to Zuber-Skerritt (1992) and Petty (2002), the concept of the Kolb Model can be transformed into the Kolb Cycle Model, which comprises four phases. The first phase is called Review. In this phase, all information related to the educators' strengths and weaknesses in implementing action research is identified. The second phase, called Learn, is when researchers identify actions or guidance needed based on information obtained from the first phase. Then, the third phase of the Kolb Cycle Model is called Apply. How to execute an action is planned in this phase, preferably after actions or guidance needed is identified in the second phase. In this case, a coaching method has been used. Why coaching? This question will be discussed in section 3. The last phase of the cycle is Do, in which the coaching method is implemented in the action research. The action research cycle is repeated until the teacher practices have been successfully improved. According to Sharlanova (2004), the action research cycle can be initiated at any phase with the condition that the phase is followed by the next one in the sequence.

Figure-1. presents an overview of the implementation of action research using the Kolb Cycle Model.
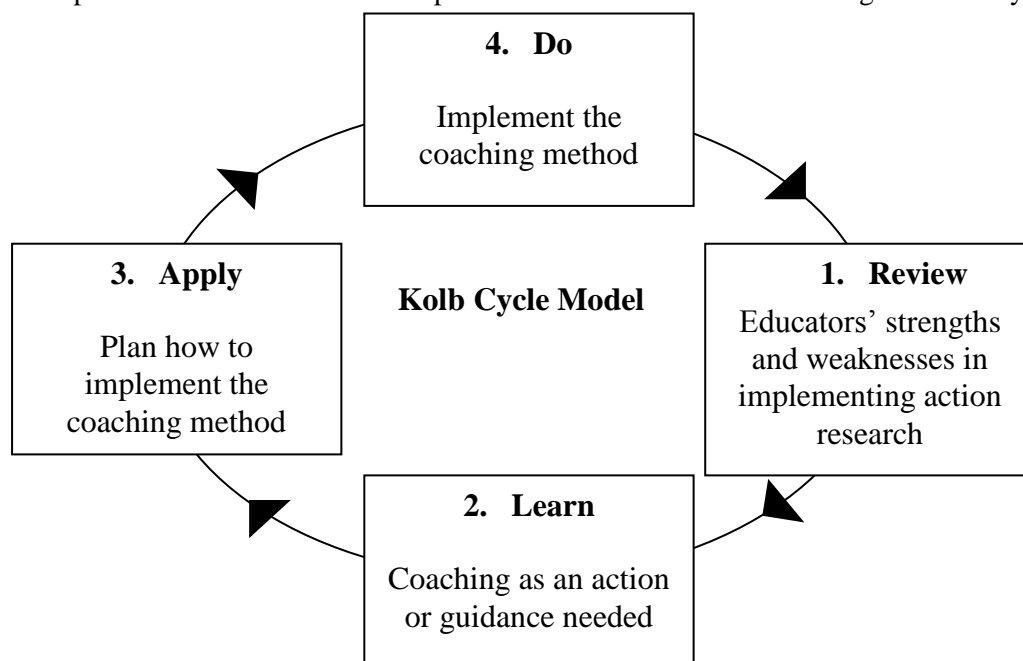

FIGURE 1 Kolb Cycle Model

3. What Is Coaching? Why Coaching?

Coaching refers to the skill of helping others unleash their potential in order to achieve their desired goals (Rosinski, 2003). According to Sir John Whitmore (2009), *'Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them learn rather than teaching them.'* In addition to this coaching, a series of conversations occurs between the coach and coachee (Starr, 2008). Coaching also refers to a systematic process to improve a person's ability and performance in the teaching and learning process by giving guidance and feedback (Redshaw, 2000). Moreover, coaching enables individuals to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to develop their professional practice and work to become more effective (Stone, 1999). In general, it is a method for helping people to achieve their goals or objectives. These goals or objectives refer to an individual's desire: e.g. improving teaching practices, career promotion, improving student-teacher relationships.

What are the benefits of coaching? Coaching helps improve not only a person's ability, skills, and performance but also his or her job satisfaction and motivation (NHS, 2005). According to Thomas and Smith (2009), the benefits of coaching in education are different for students, educators, and institutions. For students, coaching can improve motivation, decision making, and relationships with peers, teachers, or lecturers. It also can increase resilience and self-awareness. In addition, it can enhance student's understanding of how to think or learn and create readiness to accept and act upon feedback. For educators, coaching can improve teaching practices and students' academic performance. Through coaching, teachers become more reflective and creative, and at the same time, it assists their professional development. Lastly, for institutions, coaching can improve student achievement as well as the performance of teachers and support staff. It can also improve interpersonal relationships and teamwork between staff members. A survey conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development found that 99% of the 500 respondents agreed that *'Coaching could produce tangible benefits, both to individuals and organisations.'* In addition, 96% of respondents agreed that *'Coaching is an effective way to promote learning in the organisation'* (NHS, 2005).

Why coaching? What are the coaching principles that set this approach apart from others? The principles of coaching are as follows: The coach should guide the coachee to reach an objective by supporting, listening, and helping the coachee to stay focused on moving forward (Shaker, 2012). According to Shaker (2012), coaching should follow seven principles. 1) Awareness: The coach needs to raise the coachee's self-awareness so that he or she can attain the greatest possible benefits from the coaching process. 2) Responsibility: The coachee is responsible for all decisions that have been agreed upon. This is more beneficial to the coachee than just listening to another's instructions and following them. Thus, the coachee is responsible for the content, and the coach is only responsible for the process. 3) Self-confidence: Coachees may have convinced themselves that if anything goes wrong, they have to correct it during the coaching process. The encouragement of a coach will increase the coachees' confidence level. 4) Never blame others: Mistakes in coaching are considered the coachee's learning experience, not a punishment. However, the coach should explain any mistakes with value added for the purpose of the coachee's improvement. 5) Solution-focused: Coaching focuses on finding solutions to a problem. 6) Challenges: Most people prefer to be challenged, with encouragement and support given. Through coaching, coachees can review the past and evaluate themselves. 7) Action: The coach reveals new perspectives and raises coachees' awareness to ensure they react to improve the existing situation with a variety of options.

4. Coaching Implementation

Next, we will consider the four steps for coaching implementation suggested by Shaker (2012). The first step is preparatory. The coachee's situation and skills are observed directly to identify strengths, weaknesses, and the individual's ability to reach goals. The second step is discussion. The coaches must be prepared properly so that they clearly understand the purpose of discussion. This also ensures that the conversations held between the coach and coachee can help the coachee to identify and develop problem-solving skills. In addition, a coaching plan should be created and agreed upon by both parties through discussion. The goal of the plan is to improve the performance of the coachee within a given time period. Next, the third step is being active in coaching. Effective coaches always practice 'active listening', a way of listening, paying attention, and responding to others to improve mutual understanding. According to

Shaker (2012), there are five levels of listening: waiting your turn to speak, sharing experience, giving advice, listening and asking questions, and listening intuitively. However, coaching starts at the fourth level, as the coach listens and asks the coachee to give more information. At the fifth level, the coach learns to be attentive to the meaning of what the coachee says and offers feedback. The final step in the implementation of coaching is follow-up. According to Shaker (2012), an effective coach should continuously follow up and monitor the coachees to make sure they are on the right path.

5. A Model of Coaching (GROW Model)

In addition to the four-step model of coaching implementation described in section 4, there are many coaching models that can help coaches implement coaching sessions. Amory (2011) describes 45 coaching models in his book 'Personnel Coaching: Definition and coaching models'. However, only the Goal Reality Option Will (GROW) model is discussed in this paper, because it is appropriate for the study. The GROW model is simple, practical, and easier to understand and use compared to other coaching models. In addition, its flexibility allows coaching conversations that do not need to follow a specified order (Shaker, 2012). For all of these reasons, the model has been chosen for use in this study. The GROW model was developed by the pioneer of coaching, Sir John Whitmore. It is one of the best known and most widely used in the field of education (Allison and Harbour, 2009). It provides a simple framework for identifying an effective solution to a problem (Whitmore, 2009).

The GROW model consists of four stages: 1) Goal: In a coaching session, a clear and measureable objective must be stated in terms of whether it is short-term or long-term. In this stage, the coach should identify the coachee's goals and focus on solutions instead of problems. 2) Reality: This stage is to examine the current reality of the coachee's situation so that the coach has the clearest possible understanding of the conversation topic. 3) Option: Once the coach and coachee have a clear picture of the current reality, the next step is to help the coachee explore all possible options for achieving the goal. If the coachee cannot identify any options, stages 1 and 2 are repeated until all the available options are clarified. 4) Will: In this stage, coachees are able to identify the best options for achieving their goals. However, the coach must motivate and ensure the coachees always work towards achieving their goals.

6. Conclusion

Action research has increasingly captured educators' attention, as evidenced by its robust implementation, especially among school educators. According to Wahid (2013), action research implementation has been used as the basic merit criterion for the selection of Excellent Teachers. In addition, some universities offer large grants for action research, and it has also been used as part of the merit criteria for the promotion of lecturers (Subahan and Azami, 2013).

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