

Action Research Case Study at School-Lyceum No. 60, Astana

At School-Lyceum No. 60 in Astana, we have been committed to Action Research (AR) for the past four years. This commitment stems from our deep belief in reflective, collaborative professional inquiry as a powerful driver of educational improvement. Our aim has always been to foster a dynamic environment where teachers continuously analyze, reflect on, and improve their practice. Throughout these years, Action Research has become an integral part of our professional development strategy.

Over the years, the scope of our research has evolved. Initially involving only a handful of volunteers, the initiative has now expanded to include a core team of 35 dedicated educators from various disciplines. This collaborative effort has allowed us to pool expertise, share diverse perspectives, and tackle complex educational challenges with a unified vision. AR has helped us transition from reactive teaching to proactive planning and student-centered instruction. It has also built a strong professional learning community where risk-taking, innovation, and honest reflection are valued. Ultimately, this sustained engagement with AR has enabled both teachers and students to take ownership of their learning, leading to a more vibrant, reflective, and inclusive school culture.

In the 2024–2025 academic year, our Action Research team, comprising 35 dedicated teachers, focused on two primary areas: (1) low student motivation in learning and (2) poorly motivated reading habits among students. These issues were not only affecting students' academic performance but also their long-term engagement and love for learning. This case study provides a comprehensive overview of our Action Research journey, including insights from teachers, lessons learned, and the significant impact observed in the classroom.

Identifying the Problem

The idea for our research arose from a series of reflective seminars held every Saturday, where teachers discussed recurring classroom challenges. Two consistent themes emerged:

- A growing number of students displayed signs of disengagement, lack of participation, and minimal enthusiasm for learning across various subjects.
- Students, especially in grades 5–8, were showing very little interest in reading, with some openly admitting that they had not read a book in the past year.

We decided to frame our study around two interconnected focal points: general student motivation and specific reading engagement. Our main research questions were:

- What are the key factors contributing to low student motivation in our school?
- What can we, as a professional learning community, do to enhance students' interest and involvement in reading?

As we explored these questions, we identified deeper systemic issues: a lack of student voice in lesson planning, limited authentic assessment, and outdated reading materials. Additionally, socio-emotional barriers were observed, such as performance anxiety, fear of failure, and lack of belonging. These findings helped us shape targeted strategies aimed at increasing intrinsic motivation, fostering engagement, and promoting meaningful reading experiences. By recognizing the root causes, rather than just the symptoms, we laid the foundation for a more transformative and sustainable approach.

Furthermore, during our problem-identification phase, we conducted focused interviews with small student groups and held focus-group discussions with teachers and parents. These sessions revealed a striking discrepancy between students' perceptions of school and the educational goals we aimed to achieve. Students voiced a desire for more interactive, personally relevant, and emotionally safe learning environments. Their feedback helped us reframe our goals and ensured that our interventions would be designed with students, not just for them. Teachers, in turn, began to see the importance of shifting from content delivery to experience design, aiming to make every lesson resonate personally with learners.

Research Design and Methodology

To investigate these issues, we used a mixed-methods approach:

- **Quantitative** data were gathered via student surveys, classroom participation logs, reading diagnostic assessments, and teacher evaluation forms.
- **Qualitative** data were collected through interviews with students, reflective teacher journals, peer observation notes, and group discussions.

Our process followed the classic Action Research cycle: planning, action, observation, and reflection. Importantly, each teacher designed their own mini-cycle within this broader project, based on the needs of their class. Regular Saturday seminars provided a space for exchanging ideas, analyzing interim results, and supporting each other.

The methodology was designed to be flexible yet rigorous. Teachers identified key indicators for success and aligned their classroom practices with clearly defined goals. Data collection was ongoing, allowing for continuous adjustments and refinements. Feedback loops between teachers and students were emphasized, ensuring that students were active participants in shaping their learning journey. Collaboration was at the core of this process: peer observations, co-teaching opportunities, and shared reflection sessions helped create a vibrant learning culture. Importantly, the school administration provided logistical and emotional support, making it feasible for teachers to sustain inquiry amidst their regular duties.

We also adopted a spiral model of AR, allowing iterative improvements and cycles of micro-changes that could be tested in real-time. The diverse methodological instruments enabled triangulation of findings, ensuring reliability and depth of analysis. Moreover, student artifacts such as journals, project presentations, and reading logs became a rich source of evidence for evaluating engagement and growth. Importantly, the school created a digital repository where all teachers uploaded data, reflections, and materials—fostering transparency and collaborative accountability.

Part I: Addressing Low Student Motivation

Many teachers observed that their students often lacked purpose in their learning. They rarely set goals, seldom asked questions, and were quick to give up when facing challenges. We identified several contributing factors:

- Curriculum delivery was overly teacher-centered.
- Lack of student autonomy and voice.
- Limited use of real-life contexts or cross-curricular connections.

To address these issues, teachers piloted a variety of strategies:

- Introducing project-based learning units.
- Allowing students to choose topics for certain lessons.
- Building stronger relationships through personalized feedback.
- Integrating digital tools like Kahoot, Padlet, and Google Forms to increase interactivity.

After 12 weeks of consistent practice, we saw a noticeable transformation. Students were more vocal, more curious, and more involved in class discussions. Teachers reported that even quieter students started to take initiative. One teacher reflected:

"When I gave my students the opportunity to design their own science experiment, their enthusiasm was incredible. It reminded me that ownership is key to motivation."

Peer observations confirmed these changes. Several classrooms moved from passive learning environments to lively, student-driven spaces. The teaching team agreed that one-size-fits-all lessons were no longer viable; personalization and relevance had to be at the core of our pedagogy.

Additionally, motivational strategies were enriched with goal-setting sessions, where students documented their personal learning objectives. Teachers used formative feedback not merely as assessment, but as a conversation that empowered learners. Reflection journals, both digital and paper-based, encouraged metacognition. Visual goal trackers were introduced to make progress tangible. Most importantly, students began to recognize their own role in the learning process. Teachers noted improved attendance, fewer behavioral disruptions, and greater persistence during challenging tasks. The momentum generated by this shift has inspired our staff to continue exploring personalized and learner-centered pedagogies.

We also organized motivational assemblies, led by student ambassadors, where students shared their success stories and learning strategies. Guest speakers—including alumni, university students, and local professionals—visited classrooms to speak about the importance of lifelong learning. These narratives humanized success and made learning goals more relatable. Some teachers used portfolios to showcase student progress over time, helping learners see their own growth. This holistic approach to motivation cultivated not just academic engagement but also emotional and social development.

Student Motivation Survey Results (Grades 5–8)

Indicator	Before AR (%)	After AR (%)
Participation in class	42%	71%
Interest in subjects	38%	65%
Goal setting by students	29%	59%
Positive attitude toward school	47%	72%

Part II: Enhancing Reading Motivation

Our second research focus was specific but equally significant: the reluctance among students to read. Teachers from language arts and homeroom classes collaborated on this theme, identifying common challenges:

- Assigned readings were often perceived as boring or outdated.
- Students had limited access to diverse reading materials.
- Reading was treated as a task, not a pleasure.

To counter this, our team initiated the following:

- A “Reading for Fun” corner in every classroom.
- Weekly reading circles where students shared opinions about books of their choice.
- Integration of audio books and visual storytelling.
- Inviting guest readers, including school staff and parents.

A teacher from grade 7 shared:

*“I realized that many of my students had never been asked what they *wanted* to read. Once I allowed them to bring in their favorite genres, everything changed.”*

One of our proudest achievements was the revival of the school library. Through donations and community support, we updated our collection and created an inviting reading space. Students were encouraged to recommend books and manage small reading clubs. Book swaps became a popular event. We noted a steady rise in reading logs, and even students with previously low literacy skills began to participate actively.

Furthermore, teachers integrated reading into cross-curricular themes. For example, a science teacher asked students to read and summarize popular science articles, while a history teacher facilitated debates based on historical novels. Reading was no longer confined to literature classes. A reading passport initiative tracked students' progress and offered badges for completing different genres. Peer recommendations were highlighted on classroom boards. The impact was felt not only in reading assessments but also in improved vocabulary, empathy, and critical thinking. Many students began bringing books from home and forming informal reading groups, showing a cultural shift in how reading was perceived.

To further celebrate reading, we introduced a “Reader of the Month” program, where students received certificates, book prizes, and recognition in school assemblies. Reading marathons, storytelling competitions, and themed days (e.g., Mystery Book Day) added excitement and built a communal love for literature. Teachers also modeled reading by sharing their favorite books and engaging in classroom reading time. The role of parental engagement was emphasized through reading logs that required family signatures, and home reading challenges were introduced to create continuity between school and home environments.

Reading Engagement Survey Results

Indicator	Before AR (%)	After AR (%)
Students reading weekly	26%	68%
Positive attitude toward reading	34%	71%

Participation in book discussions	22%	64%
Visits to the school library (monthly)	31%	76%

Collaborative Impact and Team Reflections

This Action Research project was unique in its scale and collective effort. Unlike isolated classroom experiments, this initiative involved a tightly-knit team that supported one another. Here are some recurring reflections shared during our weekly seminars:

- “I felt part of a meaningful professional movement.”
- “Seeing the spark in my students' eyes brought back my own passion for teaching.”
- “It wasn’t just about fixing something — it was about growing together.”

As a research team, we witnessed real-time shifts in teacher mindsets. Educators who were initially hesitant about innovation started to explore new pedagogical tools with confidence. New teachers learned from more experienced colleagues, and veteran educators embraced fresh ideas. This spirit of collaboration extended beyond the classroom — it began to shape school culture.

The collaborative nature of our work also improved professional trust. Teachers became more open to constructive feedback, peer reviews, and shared accountability. We developed a system of rotating team leads to foster leadership among all participants. Seminars evolved into action labs where theoretical discussions were directly tied to practice. Reflective storytelling became a regular feature, allowing teachers to share breakthroughs and setbacks in a safe space. This transparency created a ripple effect: departments began initiating their own research circles, and several teachers started blogging about their classroom innovations. It became evident that collective wisdom far outweighs isolated expertise.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Like any large-scale initiative, our Action Research journey was not without its challenges. One of the biggest obstacles was time management. Teachers often struggled to balance the demands of classroom instruction with data collection and reflection. Some participants initially found the research terminology or cycles unfamiliar and overwhelming.

To address these concerns, we adjusted our seminar structures by:

- Offering differentiated workshops for novice and experienced researchers.
- Providing templates and scaffolding tools for planning, data analysis, and reporting.
- Introducing asynchronous reflection options for those unable to attend every session.

Another challenge was sustaining student interest, particularly during the early stages when changes were still being tested. Some students were skeptical or passive, requiring time and consistent encouragement to engage in new reading activities or take ownership of their learning.

However, these challenges became valuable learning points. They taught us the importance of patience, iterative design, and the power of small wins. For instance, one teacher started with only

five minutes of daily free reading time, which gradually expanded into full reading circles by the end of the semester. Small shifts, we learned, could lead to transformative outcomes.

Furthermore, we discovered that teacher well-being is a crucial factor in the success of AR. We began incorporating self-care discussions and peer support into our seminars, recognizing that energized teachers inspire motivated students.

Voices from the Research Community

A vital strength of this project was the diversity of voices involved. To better illustrate the impact, here are a few reflections from our research team:

Nina S., primary school teacher:

“Before AR, I thought I had to ‘deliver’ content. Now, I co-create it with my students. Their ideas surprise me every day.”

Aliya Sh., Kazakh teacher:

“Once I let go of the textbook and let students lead a reading circle, I saw a spark I hadn’t seen before. We even had students writing book reviews for the school newsletter.”

Karina K., coordinator:

“As the research coordinator, I saw teachers grow more confident not only in their methods but in their ability to ask questions, challenge norms, and innovate responsibly.”

Student Reflection, Grade 6:

“I used to think reading was boring. But when we read mystery books and talked about them in groups, it felt like we were solving real cases.”

These testimonials reveal how Action Research reshapes identities — not just for students, but for educators as reflective practitioners, collaborators, and change agents.

- The journey reaffirmed several core beliefs:
- Sustainable change begins with empowered educators.
- Student voice is essential in driving meaningful engagement.
- Collaboration accelerates innovation and deepens learning.

Looking forward, our next research cycle will build upon this year’s success. Tentatively titled “Building Resilience through Inquiry and Reflection”, the new theme will explore how metacognition and emotional intelligence affect student motivation and academic success.

Ultimately, Action Research has become more than a project — it has become a mindset. A mindset that values curiosity, respects diverse voices, and believes in the potential of every learner. With each new cycle, we move closer to our shared vision of a reflective, responsive, and resilient school community.

In upcoming years, we plan to build on this work by initiating cross-school collaborations with other institutions in Astana. Sharing our methodologies and outcomes with a broader audience will amplify our impact and inspire other schools to embrace Action Research as a pathway to meaningful educational reform.

The Action Research project conducted at School-Lyceum No. 60 in Astana during the 2024–2025 academic year has led to significant improvements in both student motivation and reading engagement. Through collaboration, reflection, and the consistent application of research-informed strategies, our team of 35 teachers transformed their classrooms into more dynamic, student-centered environments.