# Enlightening Action Research Makes My Life Easier in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workplace

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#### **Abstract**

In my workplace, there are several serious changes in terms of learning, teaching and working with other people. *How do I survive and live with happiness in my workplace?* In this research, the development of my paths of life would be focused. Three successful outcomes happened in my life. First, I could graduate with doctor of education even though I was quite a low potential student (in my mind), and was not a rich person. Second, I could lose my weight from 80 kg to 60 kg in two years. Third, now I am very happy in my work life. I can live, learn, develop and adjust myself in any circumstance at my workplace.

With self-reflective thinking carefully, I realized that skills of learning to live, work and adjust myself in various situations are very significant for me. Action research in action adapted from Hadley (2003) and action research procedures are the main thinking processes of thinking and the main methodology to obtain data. They are most influent in my successful outcomes. I enlightened the processes of my problem solving by using them. There are two steps in this research. Step 1: Action research in action (setting, focus, investigate). I used *setting* when facing real and current problems: *knee pain because of my over weight; felt very worried because of tough learning in doctorial program* and *felt unhappy in language teaching at my workplace*. I used *focus* to narrow the problems and *investigate* which strategies were most suitable to solve problems by using action research procedures. Step 2: Action research procedures (plan, act, observe, reflect, revise and report).

I used *plan* for goal-setting and finding strategies obtained from various knowledge sources to reach my goals: to lose my weight at least 10 kg in two years; to finished doctorial program by five years and to be happy in language teaching at my workplace, act for doing following the plans, observe for noticing what interesting events happened while following the plan, reflect for analyzing the interesting events in terms of what; why; and how, revise for changing better for the next time and report for summarizing the negative and positive outcomes.

The research showed that I graduated Doctor of Education Program in five years (2002-2007). Now in 2014, my weight is about 60kg, and I am very happy in my work life because during years 2011-2013, my career life was fairly successful. In 2013 I received certificates of outstanding working and teaching award. I think it is not the end of development but my life has just begun. However, the big successful learning is that I enlighten how I can survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with happiness.

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**Keywords:** Action research, action research in action, action research procedures

#### Introduction

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This research is the development of action research processes which I have learned and gradually had experiences to make my life easier in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At present, people meet a lot of obstacles from their workplace because of rapidly changing world. People who could not learn and adjust themselves in various situations would face high life challenge. They may suffer from their changes and then might finally quit their jobs. As results, I was very curious to know how I could survive in my 21<sup>st</sup> century work place where several things were also changed rapidly. Therefore my self-reflection processes were analyzed. First of all, I would like to introduce myself and the brief of my workplace to support the reasons why I had conducted this research.

I have been working as a lecturer at King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok (KMUTNB) for twenty years. I had most precious opportunities in my life to receive full scholarships to study both master and doctoral programs from my workplace. Therefore, if I had done nothing to gratitude my workplace, I would have been miserable forever. For KMUTNB, there were about 141 programs offering 69 Bachelor's programs, 46 Master's and 23 Doctoral program curriculums, plus 3 vocational certificate courses, also known as the Pre-Engineering programs under the auspices of College of Industrial Technology offering students the opportunity to complete the first 3 years of an engineering curriculum prior to admission to further engineering program (KMUTNB events, 2013).

Its philosophy, commitments, vision and mission are as follows: <a href="Philosophy">Philosophy</a> "To Encourage Innovation in Science and Technology through the development of people"

Commitments "The development of human resources in science and technology through a balance of knowledge, morality, as well as the capacity to innovate so as to contribute to the economic, social and environmental development" Vision "To guide KMUTNB professional science and technology" Mission "To supply qualified graduates to the society, To encourage research and academic services, To support public academic services, and To maintain national arts and culture"

According to theses issues above and to gratitude my workplace, I noticed that one of significant factors to drive all these issues to the destination was that each person working here should improve his/her professional development, and tried to help together to reach KMUTNB' goals at his/her own pace. In this research, the development of my healthy life (losing weight about 20 kg) and career life (professional development) were focused. However, in the development of both healthy and career life, I have gradually perceived and learned through action research in action and action research procedures as well. he next section is described about important aspects and theories behind the research.

#### **Important Aspects and Theories Behind the Research**

In this section, there are two important aspects and theories behind the research. They are as follows: aspects of 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace and how to make life easier, and theorise of action research: action research in action and action research procedures.

# Aspects of the 21st Century Workplace

If we want to live easier in our workplace, we need to know the important aspects of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. The followings are examples of thinking processes of how to succeed in this century workplace. Pink (2005 in Wikipedia) summarizes a history narrative into four majors "ages as follows: 18<sup>th</sup> Century: Agricultural Age (*Farmers*), 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Industrial Age (*Factory Workers*), 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Information Age (*Knowledge Workers*), 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Conceptual Age (*Concept Workers*). He also describes conceptual age as a new trend of work. People in workplace need guided by the right brain in including: "Design (Moving beyond function to engage the sense.), Story (Narrative added to products and services-not just argument. Best of the six senses), Symphony (Adding invention and big picture thinking- not just detail focus), Empathy (Going beyond logic and engaging emotion and intuition), Play (Bringing humor and light-heartedness to business and products), Meaning (the purpose is the journey, give meaning to life from inside yourself)." People working in this age should develop thinking in term of design, telling stories, reflecting with fun and relevance.

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I as a teacher and researcher should improve myself by developing thinking processes to reach KMUTNB' goals. I started to summarized my interesting situations, reflect on them, adjust or change better. If we need to succeed in 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace, we should know and apply them into our real life situation. enGauge, 2003 describes four important skill clusters to success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace: "Digital-age literacy (Basic, scientific, economic, technological, visual, information and cultural literacy and global awareness), Inventive thinking (Adaptability and managing complexity, self-direction, curiosity, creativity, risk taking, higher-order thinking and sound reasoning), Effective communication (Teaming and collaboration, interpersonal skills, personal responsibility, social and civic responsibility and interactive communication), High productivity (Prioritizing, planning, and managing for results, effective use of real-world tools, ability to produce relevant, high-quality products).

According to these views, I applied them to my real life situation. For example, in losing my weight, there were several choices to help me beginning from paying much money to pay nothing such as buying commercial books, video packages, or free studying from videos, articles, research, etc in the internet. I decided to save my money to study how to lose my weights by the latter, designed a schedule to exercise and adjusted the schedule to reach efficient results by discussing, sharing and exchanging experiences and knowledge to others. This meant that I applied Digital-age literacy, Inventive thinking, high productivity, and Effective communication to my real life situation. Self-reflection processes in action research in action and action research procedures helped me to apply these four skill clusters into my real life situations.

# **Aspects of How to Make Life Easier**

While doing the research I realized that doing things relevance to my life with passions enhanced me live easier. Gundolt (2010) provides five ways to make life easier as the followings; "Do what you like to do most, Keep it simple, Accept things the way they are, Forgive and move on, and Be aware." Landers (2014) also provides some practical tips to make life easier such as "changing things by doing instead of blaming, focusing on you inner inspiration instead of other people's opinions, stopping being negative, being easy on yourself,

falling in love with fearless, doing something making you a little uncomfortable every day to develop your confidence to manifest your dreams." I did things I liked most: to further study, to lose my weights and to consistently do action research. Sometimes, I accepted some things which could not be solved, forgave myself when I did not make it and moved on to the main goal with reflecting for changing better. For example, when I could not follow my schedule of losing weights, I adjusted action plans without anxiety and moved forwards. Rohn (cited in Robbins 2011) suggested Tony Robbins, coming from a troublesome family to live easier, "happiness and success in life are not the result of what we have, but rather of how we live." I agree this view because happiness and success in my life also take place from understanding how I live. Moreover, I realized that the processes of action research in action and action research procedures usually helped me to understand how I live.

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#### **Action Research**

How to react and solve important problems suddenly happened in correct ways as much as possible were very meaningful to my life. The main aspects of action research were parts of solving my problems. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, describes action research, "Action research is either research initiated to solve an immediate problem or a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a "community of practice" to improve the way they address issues and solve problems." Self-reflection processes also enhanced me to further develop and change better for the next phase. The aspects of action research are systematic and self-reflective for one's professional practice and then could develop social change (Riel: 2010).

A series of self-reflection of action research create learning processes of problem solving (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993 in Riel, M. (2010) and "it also a process of living one's theory into practice" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010 in Riel, M. 2010). In my research, I stared from having no ideas to enlightening action research to solve my problems and I noticed that the more I used a series of self-reflection, the more I understood how to apply theories into practice and how to apply practice into theories.

#### **Action Research in Action and Action Research Procedures**

Renandya, (2003:i) describes action research in action, "Action research in action is about classroom—oriented research conducted by classroom teachers." Hadley, (2003:ii) says, "Action research in action is the reflective language teacher's organized and ongoing search for classroom solutions and professional insight." The eight action research in action (edited by Hadley:2003, Ribereiro:2003, Farrell and Ting: 2003, Mayo:2003, Green: 2003, Warwick and Jefferey: 2003, Martin: 2003, Watson Todd:2003, Hadley:2003) were described action research in action systematically as follows: setting, focus, investigate, response, reflections, task. In my situation, I applied these steps in to Goal-setting (describing general goal), focus (narrow the scope of problems), and investigate (how to solve problems) and then followed action research procedures: plan, act, observe, reflect, revise and report to change better for the next cycle. In doing so, I could learn and increase my professional development. The elaborated processes are described the next section below.

### **Research Procedures and Presentation**

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There are three cycles in this research. They are described as follows: Cycle 1. In the condition, I had no ideas about action research at all. Cycle 2. In the condition, I gradually perceived action research because of studying Ed.D program, professional development. However, it was not focused on current situations. Cycle 3. In the condition, I enlightened action research because of having more experiences in conducting action research. More details were described below.

#### **Cycle 1: Having No Ideas About Action Research**

Before studying doctoral program, I noticed that my workplace changed drastically in terms of Philosophy, Commitments, Vision and Mission, its goals focus encouraging innovation in science and technology through people development. Most people around me discussed and talked to me about study further. One of them said, "If you want to live here easier, you have to study further because of in the coming new policy. People who want to teach in the university have to graduate doctoral level." At that time, I realized that the condition was very interesting but tough to make it. One question came up in my mind, "How do I live in that situation if I want to work for this job? The answer in my mind is, "I must study further. That's it! That was the starting point to inspire me to study further, doctoral program. Therefore, I started to ask myself, "How do I prepare myself to study doctoral program? How and when do I start to reach my goal, studying doctoral program?"

These questions always happened in my mind so every time when I had opportunities to meet people who graduated or was studying Ph.D. programs, I started asking them without hesitation about how to prepare to study further. Most of them suggested the following topics which should be focused: Standardized testing scores, study fields places, and money. I just asked the questions, but did not much respond to the answers. I did not know the way to react when I met tough situations and most of the time I decided to do nothing. As results, I spent almost five years to reach my goal: to study doctoral program with getting full scholarship.

### **Unconscious Thinking Processes**

To study doctoral program (Goal-setting), on language teaching and how about money (focus), How do I get scholarship to support my study? (Investigate). Talking, Asking, and discussing with a lot of people several times about how to get full scholarship to further study (Action research procedures: plan, act, observe, reflect, revise and report unconsciously in phases 1, 2, 3 until reach the goal). Finally, I got full scholarship to study international doctoral program under academic cooperation between Burapha University, Thailand and Victoria university, Melbourne, Australia. However, I spent much time to handle obstacles to reach my goal because I did not have explicit knowledge of action research.

#### **Cycle 2: Gradually Perceiving Action Research**

I started to know the name of action research because 4 of 6 courses of this program emphasizes on professional development, especially my dissertation based on action research. In this cycle, there were two goals: to graduate Ed.D program and to lose my weight. They were described below.

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# Goal 1: To graduate Ed. D program Phase 1.

<u>Plan:</u> I planned to attend the class every lessons. <u>Act:</u> I studied and tried to follow the university schedule. <u>Observe:</u> My big problem was that I was so stressful and worried about my learning that I could not sleep almost every night and then it made me sick because of sleeplessness. The outcomes of learning for two subjects in the first semester of the first year almost failed. In 2001, I got H3 for HER 8514: The Practice of Professional Development and H2A for HER 8512: Advanced Studies in Education and Train. (Criteria for grading: H1 means First-Class Honours 80%-100%, H2A means Second-Class Honours; Upper 70%-79%, H2B means Second-Class Honours; Lower 60%-69%, H3 means Third-Class Honours 50%-59%, N means Fail 50%-59%) <u>Reflect:</u> I was an insomniac person because I usually finished assignments in last minutes. I lacked confidence in doing assignments so I usually waited to the last minutes to submit. <u>Revise:</u> I decided to use two strategies created to solve problems. <u>Report:</u> summarized strategies to solve problems and promised myself to follow them as much as possible. (see appendix 1)

#### Phase 2.

Plan: I planned to follow the two strategies obtained from Phase 1."Try to submit assignments on time" (See appendix 1.) Act: I tried to follow the strategies by being clear objective assignments and collect key information in the class and tried to find Obstacles blocking my thinking. Asked my friend first to recheck my understanding by summarizing main ideas and then asked the lecturer to confirm whether I went to the right tract or not. Observe: I noticed that I had more time to understand the lessons, to analyse information and to apply to the assignments. I realized that strictly following the contract was very important to enhance me to achieve the task. However, it depended on obvious and priority goals. When I had problems, I started to find ways to solve problems immediately. Therefore, the following outcomes of learning for the last four subjects in the following semesters were better. In 2002, I got H1 for HER 8510: Policy Context of Professional Development, H2A for HER 8511: Education, Training and the Economy, H1 for HER 8513: Investigating Professional Practice 1 and H1 for HER 8515: Investigating Professional Pracitice 2. Reflect: Using these two strategies helped me to see the whole pictures which part I should took action immediately to solve problems first. As I saw the learning outcomes, I thought that I felt much proud of myself and could remember the processes of learning forever. Because I used these two strategies to help me to finish assignments in time, it made me felt better and I realized that the more I felt better, the better I was. However, the most important factor to encourage me to finish this program was all lecturers, especially my supervisor who always was willing to work very hard to supervise me until finish writing the dissertation. I would like to say from the bottom of my heart, "Thank you so much for their kindness to supervise me." Revise: Try to have more confidence in further

conducting action research for my career. **Report:** Finished writing Ed. D dissertation: "An Action Research Study of Promoting Students' Confidence in Speaking English" (Songsiri, 2007)

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# Goal 2: To Lose Weight

During 2007-2011, something happened by chance in my life. When I looked myself in the mirror I noticed that I had an over size to buy any clothes in reasonable prices and moreover I had a little knee pain because of my over weight (At that time, I was 155 cm tall and weighed about 80kg.) As a result, I talked to myself, "I had to do something for myself" and "changing eating behaviors and exercises every day" came up in my mind. I gradually changed eating from junk food to healthy food every day. I started to have clear **goal-setting** to lose my weights, **found** strategies to reach my goal by reading, asking, discussing, watching from various sources, **did** following strategies with trusting the plans via action research procedures) again and again.

The interesting processes of losing my weights were described below

Phase 1	Phase 2		
Goal-setting: To lose my weight at least 1kg a week every week	Goal-setting: To gradually lose my weight focusing on happy outcomes		
Plan: - To run about 1 kilometers every day - To work out various types every evening - To eat more fruit and vegetables - To scale my weights every morning to check whether my weight lost or not	Plan:- To run at least 500 meters every day morning  - To work out various types at least 5 minutes every  day evening  -To eat more fruit and vegetables (rice: fruit & vegetable 1:2)  -To scale my weight every week		
Act & observe: I tried to strict following the plans. However, sometimes I could not follow the plans. For example, I was too tired to run 1 km a day and I felt very disappointed. When I scaled my weight in the morning, it did not lose and sometime it also increased because of more eating. I felt failure and more depressed to lose weight. I felt more frustrated and angry myself. Finally, I realized that the more I felt frustrated and angry my self, the less my weight lost.	Act & observe: Every day morning, I could run at least 500 meters and every day evening, I could exercise at least 5 minutes. Sometimes, I continued to exercise more than an hour with pleasure. Wow! How could I do that? I could strictly follow the plan because the plans were adjusted to be suit for me and I did not too much force myself to lose weight. I thought it depended on my purposes. I noticed that I felt happier than the past when I started exercises. My weights gradually lost. Most people usually asked, "How could you do that?" That was a very wonderful question to encourage me to keep going.		
Reflect & revise:  Feelings frustrated and angry were not good factors for me to lose my weights so the question "How could I delete these feelings?" happened in my mind. I found that too much tough goal and plans made me frustrated and depressed. As results, my goal-setting and plans should be adjusted or changed.	Reflect & revise: According to observing, I realized that there were two main factors to make me feel happier. First, my goal was changed from tough to normal goal. This made me behave better than the past. As a result, I could strictly follow the plan over expectation. Second, the more I felt confident, the happier I was. It depended on my clear goal, "If I don't want to compete with others, my goal should be adjusted to suitable for me." It meant that I could follow the plans with relaxing and happiness. However, more knowledge of healthy food, healthy life and healthy mind should be emphasized for the next phase.		

Report: If I had reached the goal, I would have lost my weights 8 kg in two months. However, I could not reach my goal and I was very unhappy during two months. My weight did not only decrease but also it increased about 2 kg. I decided to change better for phase 2. All the revisions were reported in phase 2

**Report:** Goal; My weight should gradually lose with happy life. Now I can lose my weight from 80 to 65 kg and I have maintained my weight during 60kg to 65 kg for seven years. That's it.

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**NB.** At first I thought that action research procedures could be useful only in my career. In this cycle, I started to apply action research procedures to save my life.

# **Cycle 3: Enlightening Action Research**

In this cycle, the processes of successful outcomes applied from action research in action and action research procedures were described the followings. The first step was describing real situations happened in my life, using action research in action to get current unexpected situations and using action research procedures to show how to solve problems, develop and change better as shown in the following pattern: *real life situations, goal-setting, focus, literature review (contents, knowledge, and skills I should know), investigate, action research procedures (plan, act, observe, reflect, revise and report)*. During 2011 to the beginning of 2014, I started to apply action research in action and action research procedures to help me to solve problems and the results were quite positive outcomes as shown below.

In 2011, I received a certificate for outstanding teaching award because the overall of my students' teaching evaluation was 4.6 of 5 which was rather high. I observed that while teaching, I started automatically thinking of the processes of action research in action and action research procedures to solve problems happening in the classes. For example, I conducted action research "Action research in action: Enhancing students to reach their speaking goal with confidence in a large class with limited time by action research procedures and awareness-raising" (Songsiri: 2011). The interesting processes of my teaching were based on the followings: situation (Summarizing interesting events happened in the class), action research in action: goal-setting (setting goal to improve), focus (to close analysis of interesting information), investigate (to find out how to solve problems) action research procedures (plan, act, observe, reflect, revise and report) to show how to solve the problems.

During 2012, I was appointed to be an academic assistant of Social and Applied Science Department and received a certificate for outstanding working in my workplace. At that time, I was asked to increase students' language ability, especially English speaking skills because of the coming of ASEAN Economic community in 2015 (Situation). Most students and authorities required speaking skills first. Thus, the goal of English activities was *speaking English as much as possible* (goal). I created various activities focusing on speaking (focus). For activity 1, "ASEAN Days," I provided opportunity to have variety of students from bachelor degrees and vocational certificate to join together to practice speaking English in the Hall. For activity 2, "The battle of EP 25 & EP 26" I had students from two classes of English program to battle in language performance outside regular classes. For activity 3, "Wow! Evaluation" I asked students of vocational certificate of English program to encourage, motivate and evaluate engineering students of regular program to practice speaking English as much as possible at their own peace. I felt curious to know whether all these activities worked or not (Investigate). I used action research procedures (plan, act, observe, reflect, revise and report) to get and develop learning outcomes. The results from the questionnaires of students' attitudes towards all three

activities reported that they were satisfied towards activities 1, 2 and 3 as follows: 3.6, 3.4 and 3.7 of 4 in respectively. I found that most students felt happier and more satisfied to join external activities in rapport and positive atmosphere.

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In 2013, I continued doing action research on the title: "Enhancing non-language learners to pass the English compulsory course by action research procedures" (Songsiri: 2013).

In 2014, received a plate for outstanding working in my workplace and I got scholarship from King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok to do research. Contract no. KMUTNB-GEN-57-42. The research title is "A model of professional learning practice for 21st century learners, focusing on language learning." This research is based on action research theory. The data obtained from seven language development projects which are as a tool to investigate how learners could reach their learning goals at their own pace. The goal of each project is to get "A simple model of professional learning practice in language learning." Seven language development projects are shown as follows: Project 1: How to write an abstract, Project 2: English conversation for beginners. The outcome of this project was developed into research. The research title is "A short model of professional learning practice of project 2: English conversation for beginners" published in the proceeding of the international conference on Future Trends in Learning, Education and Teaching Methodology (FTLETM 2014) held on May 3-4, 2014 Bangkok, Thailand, Project 3: English conversation for intermediate level, Project 4: English conversation for advanced level, Project 5: English conversation for engineering students, Project 6: Standardized tests, Project 7: Job application. All seven projects were adjusted and developed based on action research in action and action research procedures. this cycle, I deeply understood to use questions (what, how, when and why) with obvious purposes and use action research in action and action research procedures to solve any problem happened in my life. The more I practiced professional learning by doing action research, the more I had professional development. The more I enlightened action research in action and action research procedures, the more my life was easier and happier because I could handle important obstacles occurred in my life. Now, I realize that my successful outcomes were based on the automatically thinking processes applied from action research in action and action research procedures shown in the picture below.

My real life problem situations, Action research in action: Goal-setting, Focus, Literature review (contents, knowledge, and skills I should know to find strategies to reach my goal at my own pace), Investigate (how to reach the goal), Action research procedures (change for better):



Promoting professional learning development by sharing and exchanging experience and knowledge to others such as writing research or joining international conference

Figure 1: How enlightening action research makes my life easier in my 21st century workplace

#### Conclusion

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After my life has gradually had experience and knowledge of action research from having no ideas at all to understand it. I realize that the ways how I respond to problems are much different. In the past, I spent much time to handle obstacles happened with miserable life as in cycle 1. When I gradually perceived action research experience, I noticed that my thinking processes to solve problems were more obvious patterns as shown in cycle 2. In cycle 3, I had more opportunities to practice conducting action research. Therefore, the ways I responded to the problems were rather automatically and I had much more confidence in doing action research. I think I could apply the processes of action research in action and action research procedures in various fields. Nowadays, I strongly believe that enlightening action research makes my life easier in my 21 century workplace because of the development of my thinking processes. Whenever I meet any obstacles to reach my goal, I automatically use the processes of action research in action: goal-setting (set the goal), focus (make the goal clearer), investigate (find ways to solve the problems by various knowledge sources), action research procedures (plan, act, observe, reflect, revise and report) to change for better at my own pace. Finally I hope that this research might be a little useful for someone who has been suffering of facing any tough situation and did not know how to overcome it.

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# Appendix 1

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Goal: submitted assignments in time (semester 3)

**Table 1:** Strategy 1. Design a table to help me see the whole picture of doing assignment

	<u> </u>				
Subject	Be clear objective	Obstacles writing	Which channel	How to solve	Due date to
	assignments and collect	assignments	help me to solve	them.	submit
	key information in the		problem		assignment
	class				
1					
2					
3					

**Table 2:** Strategy 2: Learning contract sheet (I promised myself to follow the contract as much

as possible)

•	Week 1-2	Week 3-4	Week5-6	Week 7-8	Week 9-10	Week 11- 12
Subject 1,2, and 3	Understanding course evaluation and clear objective of assignments	summarizing main ideas of each lesson	grouping ideas of assignment objectives	creating First draft of assignment by my understanding and then consulting a lecturer whether I am going to the right track	writing second draft by adding, adjusting information obtained from self-learning and the lecturer	editing the whole paper to check for the last time
Clarify: Done/Not yet. If not :Why What problems/ How to solve problems						
Signature						
My feelings				, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,		1 . 1

NB. I noticed that the more I strictly followed two strategies, the less I was stressful and worried.