Action Research Paper answer questions - Joonas Kessel, HCI

Does this look like research to you? How does it differ from someone "just trying out stuff"?

The main difference between this case and a simple tryout is the methodology - for example an HE teacher wouldn't come up with a research plan and use one approach to find and answer to a question. Although the Action Research is theoretically suitable(for educational purposes, iterative process etc), the overall assumption that everything is going according to the plan and postponing changes, was a bit wrong. The main blunder was in my opinion the postponement of qualitative data gathering sessions - student seminars.

Which Activities did the author perform in the four action research phases (Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect)?

The phase-cycle seems to have done only one round or cycle. They planned the Wiki participation for students; they acted by giving out homework; They observed the participation in the seminars and had discussions with the users; They reflected upon the questionnaires that the students filled out. But when the answers came in, they did not have time to do anything about it. The iteration was incomplete. The study plan was not changed - the problem could have been, that the seminars were made more infrequent and before you could make any changes, half of the semester was over and no articles were posted.

The cycle itself is fine and the methodology theoretically is suitable. But I personally feel that they should've done the qualitative questionnaire before the Wiki assignments as well. Just to find out the computer usage patterns of different students. In the questionnaire answers, we can clearly see that 90% of the students haven't written a blog before. So we can say that they are not going to start that voluntarily. Especially in the academic environment where people tend to grade you a little bit different than in normal life situations.

What instruments did the author employ to gather data?
- Questionnaire
- Informal student engagement during seminars
- U-link activity monitoring

Did the author's reflections lead to a change in the way the wiki was used? If yes, how?

The change could be in the future and we can learn something from this failed research. The main thing here is that the problem was not in the Wiki itself, but rather the construction of the subject and its differences with others. For example the complaint: "a piece of coursework to submit every week for the last 4 weeks". It clearly says that students have other time constraints from other subjects.

How could the design of the study be improved to conform to a "real action research"?

As said earlier - the action research should perform as cycles. The trial-and-error period should be shorter to actually change something in the action that you are making. You need to fail fast and that's why the iteration methodology is good. The first assumption is usually wrong and unless you test and fix it, you cannot know the right answer. In this research no actions were taken about the errors of the implementation. If empirically analysed actions were taken afterwards and then reassessed, the research could have been more action research and could have even succeeded.