

reflected upon. In the “act” phase, solutions are devised and implemented.

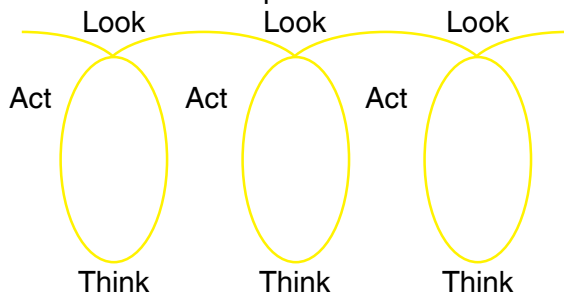


Figure 1: Three step process of action research

Burns (2010, p. 8) summarizes the four step process of action research as follows:

Planning

In this phase the researcher identifies a problem or issue and develops a plan of action in order to bring about improvements in a specific area of the research context.

Action

The plan is a carefully considered one which involves some deliberate intervention into your teaching situation that you put into action over an agreed period of time. The interventions are ‘critically informed’ as you question your assumptions about the current situation and plan new and alternative ways of doing things.

Observation

This phase involves you in observing systematically the effects of the action and documenting the context, actions and opinions of those involved. It is a data collection phase where you use ‘open-eyed’ and ‘open-minded’ tools to collect information about what is happening.

Reflection

At this point, you reflect on, evaluate and describe the effects of the action in order to make sense of what has happened and to understand the issue you have explored

more clearly. You may decide to do further cycles of action research to improve the situation even more, or to share the ‘story’ of your research with others as part of your ongoing professional development.

Final remarks

Reflection over the process of education and improving the quality of teaching and learning activity is one of the key features of good teachers. There are different tools and forms of reflection, but one of the important means of systematic reflection on the teaching and learning process which aims to change the current status toward a better and more effective one is action research. There are different models of action research which might include three, or four cyclical steps. The important point action researchers need to bear in mind is that these models and steps are forms and containers. You cannot put the applied scientific research gradients into these containers and claim that it is an action research. Action research has certain assumptions and features which need to be observed.

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researchers prefer to collect data through their own experience, and therefore prefer to observe reflectively, to interview participants, and to examine students documents, assignments, files, records, artefacts, etc. This is because, as already stated, being able to generalize is not a primary goal of action research; rather, the primary goal is to understand what is happening in a specific context and to determine what might improve things in that context. Action researchers believe that everything is context-bound and that the goal is not to develop a generalizable statement but to provide rich and detailed descriptions of the context so that others can make comparisons with their contexts and judge for themselves whether the findings might apply (Burns, 2010). In other words, instead of taking measures such as random selection, random assignment of learners into control and experimental groups and adopting an objective stance as prerequisites to guarantee the generalizability of the findings (as applied researchers do), action researchers focus on the context and provide rich descriptions of the context, the participants and the procedure for the reader of their report, so that the reader can compare his or her own context with the research context and decide whether the findings of the action research are generalizable to his or her context or not.

Much of what has been written about analysis in action research also mirrors strategies used in qualitative research (e.g. open, axial and selective coding of the collected data), although, as Ary et al. (2010) warn, the researcher should always remember that appropriate analysis will depend on the question asked and the method of data collection used.

The other difference between applied

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and action research is that, analysis and interpretation of the findings is not the ultimate stage of action research. The goal of action research is to take action based on the findings of the study and therefore, an action plan should be devised to guide the teacher behavior for change and improvement based on the findings.

Stages in action research

With the description of action research presented above, it appears that action research is not a strange and bizarre activity and many good teachers may have always been engaged in a form of action research without referring to their activity as action research. Action research emphasizes a systematic research approach that is cyclical in nature, and involves reflecting, planning, acting, and observing. These steps are not fixed either and some models of action research include three steps (e.g. Stringer, 2008 as cited in Ary et al. 2010) of look, think, act. The “look” phase involves systematically gathering information and data. In the “think” phase, information is analyzed and

Action research and other kinds of research

Some have suggested that action research is a new genre of research, different from the quantitative and qualitative approaches because it may have different purposes, different incentives, and different audiences compared to other forms of research, but the fact that action research puts the emphasis on the local context and aims to solve the immediate problem or improve the practice of the teacher and does not make far-reaching claims for the generalizability of the findings make it much closer to the qualitative mode of research. In other words, in contrast with quantitative research, action research is not intended to create theories or to be generalizable. The procedures of action research are close to qualitative research, too. Action research for example, does not divide the learners into control and experimental groups because it is often focused on one particular class context and the teacher may not have the opportunity to conduct his research in two homogenous classes. More substantially, proponents of action research believe that “assigning a student to a control group when the researcher believes that the treatment is superior is to deny students the best possible instruction” (Cohen, et al., p.517). Burns (2010) also, comparing and contrasting action research with applied scientific research asserts that action research tends to avoid the paradigm of research that isolates

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Burns (2010) also, comparing and contrasting action research with applied scientific research asserts that action research tends to avoid the paradigm of research that isolates and controls variables because contrary to the applied research, action research does not intend to establish a relationship between the treatment and the outcome, but instead it wants to explore the best possible ways of setting up classroom activities

research does not intend to establish a relationship between the treatment and the outcome, but instead it wants to explore the best possible ways of setting up classroom activities. This is a more ‘subjective’ approach, concerned with exploring different ways of teaching, and as a result of the information collected deliberately changing the conditions that exist in the classroom.

In other words, while applied scientific research wants to make a new contribution to a body of existing ‘scientific’ evidence about effective teaching and learning, action research intends to improve the practice of the teacher in the context.

Data collection and analysis for action research are also more aligned with qualitative techniques. Instead of relying on tests, scales and questionnaires, action

Background to action research

Action research is part of a movement toward qualitative, interpretive, and participative research paradigms that expanded dramatically during the 20th century. The philosophical underpinnings of action research can be attributed to John Dewey who distinguished three kinds of action including routine action which is usually done as we follow others, impulsive action, which is done hurriedly and without thinking and reflective action which is done after pondering over what to do. Kurt Lewin, however, is considered the father of action research, who coined the term in the 1940s, primarily associated with social change efforts (Cohen, et al., 2000). Action research, however, did not enter the realm of ELT until fifty years later i.e., 1990s (Burn, 2005).

Kumaravadivelu (2006), in talking about postmethod condition, refers to three pedagogical parameters of postmethod era including the parameter of particularity, the parameter of practicality, and the parameter of possibility. The parameter of particularity recognizes the particular features of different contexts and maintains that pedagogy “must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular

group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 538) and it emphasizes the local demands and lived experiences. The parameter of practicality refers to the relationship between theory and practice. Here, a distinction is made between professional theories which are made by experts and personal theories which are “those that are developed by teachers by interpreting and applying professional theories in practical situations while they are on the job” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 172). Action research plays a role here because it is a means of authorizing teachers to formulate their own theories. In other words, if teachers would like to have a say in pedagogy, and if they want to have the right to modify experts’ theories and more importantly to develop their own theories based on their lived experiences, they should attest this through reflection on their action and conducting action research which aims to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge. The Parameter of possibility is related to concepts of critical pedagogy and importance of recognizing teachers’ and students’ individual identities.



legacy
(of furniture) piede m; (CULIN: of chicken) coscia; (of journey) tappa; 1st
2nd ~ (SPORT) partita di andata/ritorno
legacy ['legəsi] n eredità f inv
legal ['li:gl] adj legale; ~ **holiday** (US)
n giorno festivo, festa nazionale;
~ **tender** n moneta legale
legend ['ledʒənd] n leggenda
legislation [lədʒɪˈneɪʃən] n legislazione

they search for better and more effective ways of doing their job. It may be for the same reason that in the literature on action research, the starting point is not called ‘a problem’ but ‘the focus of research’.

Features of action research

Three key features of action research can be summarized as follows:

1. Action research is situated in a local context and focused on a local issue. Therefore, immediate needs of the teacher are important and the action research should result in a change in an aspect of the local situation and improve the practice of the teacher.
2. Action research is conducted by and for the teacher (or other school personnel). Action research is not the only form of research which is done in classroom contexts. Other kinds of applied research may be conducted by other researchers in the classroom environment or outside

it with implications for the class, or even the teacher may be a partner in the research project, but that activity is called “classroom research” or “classroom-oriented research” and not action research because it does not focus on an individual teacher’s problem and does not aim to improve their performance.

3. Action research results in an action or a change implemented by the teacher in the context.
4. Action research is not an individual activity, but it involves the collaboration of the teacher with other parties who may be colleagues, parents or the students.
5. Action research is different from the ‘intuitive’ thinking that occurs as a normal part of teaching, as changes in practice will be based on collecting and analyzing data systematically (Burns, 2010).

Table 1 taken from Ary, et al. (2010) displays the differences between what is regarded as action research and what is not.

Table 1

Action Research <i>Is</i>	Action Research <i>Is Not</i>
A process to improve education by incorporating change and involves educators working together to improve their own practice	The usual thing that teachers do when thinking about teaching
Persuasive and authoritative because it is done by and for educators	Acceptance of solutions posed by the experts
Collaborative and encourages educators working and talking together in empowering relationships, including educators as integral, participating members of the process	Done to or by other people outside of the setting
Practical and relevant and allows educators direct access to research findings	Theoretical, complicated, or elaborate
A way to develop critical reflection and open-mindedness	A way to provide conclusive evidence
A planned, systematic, and cyclical approach to understanding the learning process and to analyzing educational places of work	Relying on tradition, gut feelings, and common sense
A process that requires testing of our ideas about education	The implementation of predetermined answers to educational questions
A justification on one's teaching practices	A fad

Twenty-first century teachers are expected to be versatile practitioners who can take different roles in the education process, such as a controller, an organizer, an assessor, a prompter, a resource, etc. (Harmer, 2015). But one main role expected of teachers is that of a reflector and a researcher, and the concept of teacher researcher or action researcher has become a buzzword in teacher development literature in recent years.

In Iran, research capability of teachers has also received attention in the recent decades and the high level documents such as Fundamental Reform Document of Education (2011) and the National Curriculum (2012) in different articles and parts have emphasized the importance of research skills for teachers (e.g. guidelines 7-11, 23-1, 23-2, 23-3 in FRDE, and 4-2 in NC).

Along these lines, action research as the main form of teacher research has been under the spotlight in the Ministry of Education and teachers are encouraged to be reflective teachers and action researchers. However, it seems that despite more-than-twenty years of emphasis on action research in the ministry, there are still some misconceptions about action research. This paper aims to review the concept of action research, its theoretical background, its place among other types of research and the main stages of action research.

Defining action research

In the context of education, action research is a kind of research conducted by teachers or other personnel to solve a problem faced in the immediate context to improve practice, and it is a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). To use Ary, Jacobs, Serensen

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and Razavieh's (2010) words, action research is about taking action based on research and researching the action taken. This broad definition implies that action research is not confined to educational contexts and it can be used in a variety of other settings, including hospitals, health clinics, government units, and other environments. As Burns (2005) maintains, action research may be used in almost any setting where a problem involving people, tasks and procedures cries out for solution. She further adds that action research is "a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (p.241). The latter note by Burns indicates that, action research is not necessarily problem-focused. In other words, a teacher does not necessarily do an action research because he or she faces a difficulty in the classroom which hinders the education process. Rather, most often, teachers may undertake action research because they want to have a better understanding of different aspects of their jobs and want to develop professionally and because

Action Research in the Classroom: Key Points to Keep in Mind

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چکیده

بیش از دو دهه از ورود اقدام پژوهی به ادبیات پژوهشی آموزش و پرورش ایران می‌گذرد. در طول این زمان، معلمان همواره به انجام اقدام پژوهی تشویق شده‌اند تا هم برای مشکلاتی که در کلاس درس با آن‌ها مواجه‌اند راه‌حل‌های عینی پیدا کنند و از این طریق عملکرد خود را به‌عنوان معلم بهبود بخشند و هم به واسطه فراهم شدن فرصت تأمل و اندیشه درباره عملکردشان، به رشد حرفه‌ای خود کمک کنند. با وجود این پیشینه به نسبت طولانی در آموزش و تشویق معلمان به انجام اقدام پژوهی، به نظر می‌رسد هنوز نکات مبهم و سوء برداشت‌هایی در این باره و تمایز اقدام پژوهی با سایر گونه‌های پژوهشی، به‌ویژه پژوهش‌های کاربردی و کلاس‌محور، وجود دارد. این مقاله بر آن است که مهم‌ترین نکات در مورد اقدام پژوهی را مرور و برخی مسائل بحث‌برانگیز در این باره را بررسی کند.

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Abstract

It has been for more than two decades that action research has entered the educational settings of Iran, and teachers are encouraged to incorporate action research into their career both as a means to find concrete solutions to the problems they face in the classroom context with the aim of improving their practice and as a means to contribute to their professional development through providing them with opportunities for planned reflection on their practice. Despite this rather long time of focus on action research in the Iranian school context, there still seems to be some misconceptions and vague points about action research and its distinction from other types of research especially applied and classroom oriented research. This paper aims at reviewing some of the issues in action research and shedding some light on its controversial aspects.

Key Words: action research, reflection, applied research



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Guidelines for Publishing in Action Research

We have recently specified a special column in *Roshd FLT Journal* for publishing small-scale research studies that teachers conduct in their own classes. We intend to publish at least one action research report in each issue of *Roshd FLT Journal*. Thus, we encourage you to submit the reports of your classroom research to be published in our “Action Research Column”.

We accept papers on the basis of their relevancy to our readers, simplicity, readability, and freshness of viewpoint. Your papers do not have to follow the standards of scholarly, academic research papers. We do not use complicated statistical analyses, technical terms or footnotes. Thus, write in a simple, plain and easy to understand manner. Please cite all of your sources within the text, and provide a list of references at the end of your article. When writing your paper, please include the following information in your report:

- Your research questions and your plan for answering the research questions
- The actions that you did over a period of time in order to answer the questions
- Your evaluation of the effects of the actions and any evidence that support your evaluation
- Your conclusion and suggestions for other teachers

To be accepted for publication, your articles need to:

- Be maximum 2500 words, including references
- Be on a topic of relevance or interest to Iranian language teachers
- Include an abstract of no more than 200 words, and a list of references

We are looking forward to your action research reports. Should you have any inquiries about how to prepare a report of your action research, you can send an email to Dr. Mehrani at the following address: meh.mehrani@gmail.com