

are a result of the experimental treatment?

External validity Is the research design such that we can generalize beyond the subjects under investigation to wider population?

Nunan 1992:

*The problem here is how to establish validity. It can be argued that in action research external validity is not an issue because action research is not concerned with arguing from samples to populations (Le Compte and Goets, 1982). This means that if the intention is to describe and interpret phenomena in context, rather than establish a relationship between variables, then there will be no need to establish external validity in the case of action research.*

In SLA and FLT, some have assumed that the purpose of research should be testing theories. There are problems with such position because first of all not all theories are testable. Take The Monitor theory by Krashen for example. Here, Krashen puts forward terms such as “conscious”, “subconscious”, and the like which are not only vague but sometimes misleading in that they sound so familiar that people will take them for granted, while there is no agreed upon, clear cut definition for them among researchers. More than that, how one can claim that he/she is capable of controlling all the variables in the classroom in the manner that experimental research expects us to do? Allwright and Bailey (1991) propose an alternative purpose for research. They believe that in education, the researcher should try and

understand and deal with immediate practical problems facing him as a teacher and his students as learners. Action research makes sense particularly here because it makes no sense for an outsider to arbitrate on the practical problems facing teachers and learners. This, however, does not mean that applied linguists have no role to play because they are outsiders. What it means is that there must be collaboration and advice rather than direction and control, which is the case at the present.

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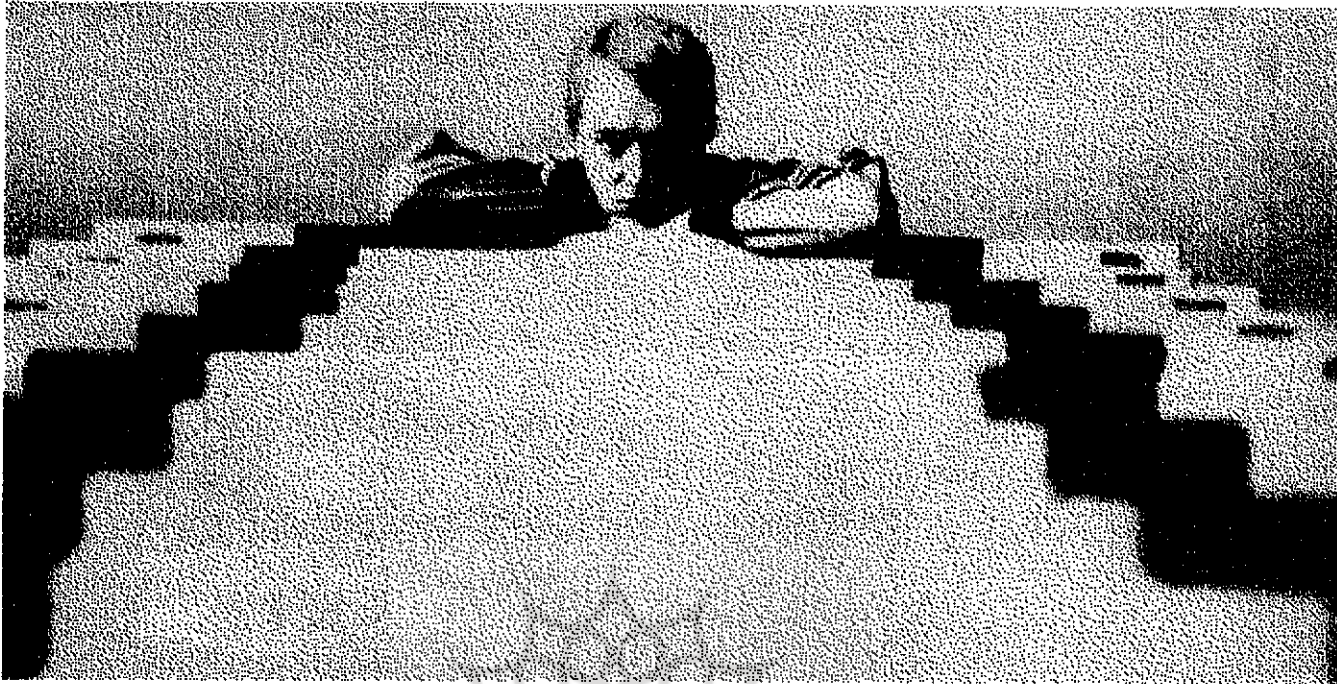
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are characteristic of much action research:

- There is a deliberate stage of data collection. This enables participants to reflect on the situation after the event, in a concentrated way, with some kind of record or 'memory jog' which prevents them from being locked into one set of perceptions and one set of memories.
- Use is made of the process of triangulation which places one piece of data against another, and then a third, so that differences in perceptions are revealed and made available for reflection.
- There is collaboration with a partner sometimes called a facilitator or critical friend who is a co-researcher, although likely to be concerned more with his/her own role and intentions in the situation. This is, as much as possible, an equal relationship in which each adds to the perspective of the other. Among other things, it provides support if and when the action research process reveals mismatch between intentions and outcomes and consequent loss of self-esteem for either partner.
- There is honest debate and problem-sharing, in a situation of trust, promoted by a written ethical code setting out the conditions under which data may be released for publication and how it may be used. This ensures that any inequity in status between the research partners is not used consciously or unconsciously to manipulate the weaker partner (Somekh, 1995: 30).

It might be argued that action research as depicted above can be justified on professional development grounds only. In a closer look at the problem one can see that action research quantifies as real research in that it incorporates the three elements of real research suggested by Nunan (1992), i. e. (1) it asks a question or poses a problem or hypothesis; (2) it has data to deal with; and (3) it analyzes and interprets data. Probably what really differentiates action research from real research is not so much of a difference but that of different points on a continuum in the research process. What really does differentiate action research from other forms of practitioner research is that it incorporates an element of intervention and change. Now, there are those who believe that the above criteria for research characteristics may be inadequate and that research should also be reliable and valid. Nunan (1992) argues that the following key questions are necessary to answer in order to establish the reliability and validity of any research:

Type	Key Question
Internal reliability	Would an independent researcher, on re-analyzing the data, come to the same conclusion?
External reliability	Would an independent researcher, on replicating the study, come to the same conclusion?
Internal validity	Is the research design such that we can confidently claim that the outcomes



observation or reflection. The second step, he believes, is the collection of baseline data through a preliminary investigation which is designed to identify what is currently happening in the classroom without trying to change anything. When the data is collected, an hypothesis is formed. Here, the teacher's responsibility is to find out if any change or intervention is to be done in the existing practice, and how this change can be evaluated in terms of its effects. Finally, it is necessary to report on the results of the interaction, and take the necessary measures in planning further interventions. So far what has been put forward has been more of a general nature. An example may further clarify the point in terms of the language teachers' specific problems here. Let's imagine a teacher complaining about his student's lack of interest in the course. The action research cycle for such a teacher will look like the following:

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Problem/puzzle identification | → A teacher identifies a problem/puzzle. "My students aren't using the target language." (English) |
| 2. Preliminary investigation     | → What's going on? Recording and observing class over several days                                 |
| 3. Hypothesis                    | → Teacher uses too much Persian. The main class activities are done in Persian.                    |
| 4. Plan intervention             | → Teacher increases target language use.   |
| 5. Outcome                       | → Dramatic use of English by students.   |
| 6. Reporting                     | → Article in teacher's newsletter.   |

One can see from the above example that there are a number of practical points which

teachers, but it is slightly more rigorous and might conceivably lead to more effective outcomes (Wallace 1991: 56-7).

What was mentioned shows that action research is justified on the grounds that it is a valuable professional development tool. Nunan (1992) calls this kind of research an 'inside out' approach to professional development. The reason for this, he thinks, lies in the fact that:

*It represents a departure from the 'outside in' approach (i. e. one in which an outside 'expert' brings the 'good news' to the practitioner in the form of a one-off workshop or seminar). In contrast, the inside out approach begins with the concerns and interests of practitioners, placing them at the centre of the inquiry process (P. 41).*

Another way of looking at the problem is to see how concept is related to conduct in language pedagogy. Prabhu (1995) analyzes this relationship and proposes that there are four components involved in the area of theory and practice, two in each respectively: the ideational component, the operational component, the ideological component and the managerial component.

The ideational component consists of ideas and concepts about knowledge of a language and the learning process. It is a mental picture of language competence and language learning. It is the essential content of understanding. We may have different ideations about language such as:

a. a storage of expressions in the mind

b. a form of patterned behavior

c. a rule-governed construction

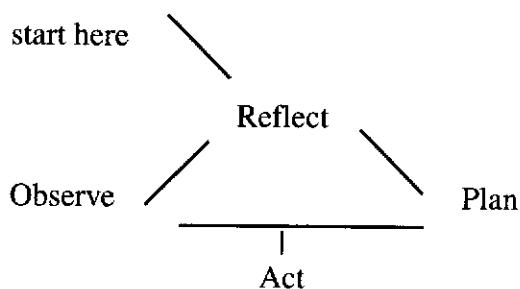
The operational component consists of actions and practical decisions that relate to or interact with the ideational component. There is a two-way relationship between ideation and operation, that is teaching is not only putting theory into practice but also a source of knowledge for confirming, disconfirming or developing a learning theory. In fact the operational component is what can be referred to as the teacher's feel for learning. The feel for learning is in turn responsible for the conceptualization of learning so the teacher's ideation and feel for learning is not permanent and it is open to change.

The ideological component is different from the ideational component in that although both can be said to be related to theory, the former involves ideals which go beyond the direct pedagogic aim of understanding and facilitating learning.

The managerial component involves making various practical decisions in the planning and conduct of teaching both at teacher's level and institutional level. This planning and conduct of teaching both at teacher's level and institutional level. This component is concerned with deciding on action despite uncertainties of operational and ideational components and conflicting over-certainties of the ideological component.

Nunan (1992) sees different steps involved in the process of action research. He thinks that identification of the problem is the first step, and that identification emerges as a result of





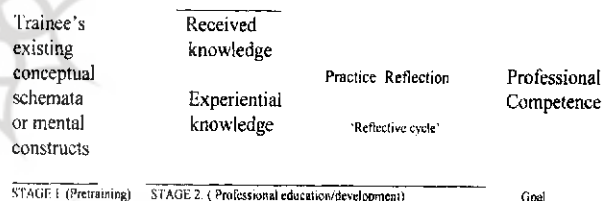
In Stenhouse's words:

*The expression of [educational] ideas as curricular specifications exposes them to testing by teachers and hence establishes an equality of discourse between the proposer and those who assess his proposal. The idea is that of an educational science in which each classroom is a laboratory, each teacher a member of the scientific community. ... all well-founded curriculum research and development... is based on the study of classroom. It thus rests on the work of teachers. It seems probable that a teacher can assume the role of a researcher... only in an open classroom (1975:143).*

A definition of 'open classroom' may be in order here, since this is where the real rationale behind action research lies. Many researchers have emphasized the importance of classroom as a context for investigation of the learners' progress. Ellis(1992), for instance, takes classroom instruction as the most effective means of providing evidence as what happens in the process of learning/teaching, therefore giving the researcher a very good acting ground to work. What makes the classroom a suitable place for research is its unique characteristic as a community in which social and psychological threats do not exist for the

teacher in their intensified form. That is why the teacher's role here is gradual and progressive. To Stenhouse (1975), open classroom is one in which there is negotiation and where the learner recognizes the role of the teacher as a researcher gradually and progressively.

An important concept underpinning action research is that of reflective practice. Wallace (1991) argues that reflective teaching provides a way of developing professional competence by integrating two sources of knowledge, received knowledge and experiential knowledge with practice. The following shows how Wallace conceptualizes this cycle:



(Adapted from Wallace 1991: 56-7).

In this model, the attraction of action research is due to the following:

- It can have a specific and immediate outcome which can be directly related to practice in the teacher's own context.
- The findings of such research might be primarily specific, i. e. it is not claimed that they are necessarily of general application, and therefore the methods might be more free-ranging than those of conventional research.

Research of this type is simply an extension of the normal reflective practice of many

Many language teachers tend to wait for researchers in other fields to tell them what to do. Questions such as “I want to know what to do with my students when they ...” show that they expect somebody else to take care of their problems. Action research is a way out of this dilemma. Teachers can use the classroom as a laboratory with each teacher acting as an individual member of the scientific community. Action research, as an approach to integrating theory generation with practice, has a long tradition. John Elliott (1988) believes that action research can be traced back to Aristotle. He mentions:

*Long ago Aristotle outlined in his Ethics a form of practical philosophy or moral science which involved systematic reflection by social practitioners on the best means for realizing practical values in action. Aristotle called this form of reflection ‘practical deliberation’ (Elliot, 1988:14).*

Today, we realize that the role of the language teacher is in fact the same as that of a social practitioner's and therefore the term “practical reflection” is what a teacher should undertake in order to fulfill his responsibility as a member of the teaching community.

Somekh (1993) sees action research as a methodology in that it has the following features:

- the research is focused on social situation;
- in the situation participants collaborate with each other and with outsiders to decide upon a research focus and collect and analyze data;
- the process of data collection and analysis

leads to the construction of theories and knowledge;

- the theories and knowledge are tested by feeding them back into changes in practice;
- to evaluate these changes, further data is collected and analyzed, leading to refinement of theories and knowledge, which are in their turn tested in practice, and so on and so forth...;
- at some point, through publication, these theories and knowledge are opened up to wider scrutiny and made available for others to use as applicable to their own situation. This interrupts the cyclical process of research and action, but is useful in bringing the research to a point of resolution, if only temporarily (Somekh, 1993:13).

A more common definition of action research may be the one given by Stenhouse (1975): a small-scale intervention in *the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention* (1975:142). One can easily detect the similarity between these two views, i.e. Somekh's and Stenhouse's, in that both see action research as a cycle which starts with reflection, or a problem, and ends with an action. Stenhouse (1975) presents a cycle for the action research which can be schematically shown as in the following:

# ARR Action Research the EFL teacher

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چکیده

در سال های اخیر، مدرسان زبان از نتایج پژوهش های زبان آموزی بهره زیادی برده اند. با این وجود، هنوز هم لازم است برای یافتن پاسخ مشکلات در کلاس ها، خود درگیر پژوهش شوند. این امر بویژه در مورد آموزش زبان دوم ضرورت پیدا می کند؛ زیرا در این جا تجربه مستقیم مدرس از مسائل مربوط به محیط آموزش امری اساسی است. در این مقاله سعی شده است که پژوهش کاربردی تعریف و در قالب تدریس زبان دوم قرار داده شود. کلیدواژه ها: پژوهش کاربردی، آموزش زبان دوم، فراگیری زبان دوم.

## Abstract:

*In recent years, language teachers have greatly benefited from the findings of second language acquisition research (SLAR). However, it is still advisable for them to get involved in seeking solutions to their own classroom problems. This is especially necessary in foreign language teaching (FLT)*

*in which the teacher's first hand experience with the classroom situation is indispensable. This short article, defines action research and tries to put it in the context of EFL teaching.*

**Key Words:** action research; foreign language teaching, second language acquisition