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A Practical Guide in Writing Your Action Research

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CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING ACTION RESEARCH

This chapter includes the following topics:

- The Meaning Of Action Research
 - The Purpose Of Action Research
 - Comparing Traditional Research And Action Research
 - Models Of Action Research
 - The Basic Steps Of Action Research
 - Determining The Research Topic
 - Writing The Action Research Proposal
 - Research Implementation Schedule
 - Budgeting For Your Research Implementation
 - The Action Research Report Format
 - Writing The Action Research Abstract
 - The Role Of Reflection In Action Research
-

THE MEANING OF ACTION RESEARCH

What is action research? To most newcomers in the field, the word ‘research’ can be intimidating; and to add ‘action’ into the puzzle could make it seem like an ordeal. Therefore, some information about the concept and characteristics of action research is a helpful start before you embark on the project itself. It should make you realize that action research is simply a useful process that we have employed in our day-to-day lives in bits and pieces without realizing it. A clear understanding of action research will ensure that you start out right, and proceed in the right direction.

TIPS

The definitions here should be useful for you to integrate into your review of literature as you discuss on the use of the action research design in your research report.

Definitions and concepts

Kurt Lewin (1946) introduced the concept of action research through his work in improving relations in industrial situations. It is a systematic inquiry, made public and detailed records are kept. He first conceived it as a three-step spiral process of (1) planning which involves reconnaissance; (2) taking actions; and (3) fact-finding about the results of the action. (Lewin, 1946). It was adapted into the educational setting especially through the work of Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) and his followers in England, who initiated the idea of teacher as researcher. The teacher bases the research on his practice and uses it as a platform for continuous improvement.

According to Carr & Kemmis (1986) “action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations 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.” The research action being a “a spiral of cycles” is not linear, and does not follow a series of stages. It is a dynamic process with research, action and evaluation interact (Carr & Kemmis, 1986 p.162) in a way that “aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework” (Rapoport, cited in Hopkins, 1985).

Elliott (1991a) defined action research as a process through which

- (a) teachers collaborate in evaluating their practice jointly
- (b) raise awareness of their personal theory
- (c) articulate a shared conception of values
- (d) try out new strategies to render the values expressed in their practice more consistent with the educational values they espouse
- (e) record their work in a form that is readily available to and understandable by other teachers and thus
- (f) develop a shared theory of teaching by researching practice.

Other definitions of action research include that of Somekh's (2006, p. 164) who viewed action research as *"the study of a social situation, involving the participants themselves as researchers, with a view to improving the quality of action within it."* Ebbutt (Hopkins, 1985) added that it is *"the systematic study of attempts to improve educational practice by groups of participants by means of their own practical actions and by means of their own reflection upon the effects of those actions"*. McNiff (2001) defined action research as *"the proces of people researching their own learning with a view to generating their own theories of practice"*.

The characteristics of action research

Based on the above definitions, here are some important characteristics of action research.

Characteristics of Action Research	What it means for your research
It is a dynamic and systematic process of self-inquiry and action carried out by practitioners in the line of work.	The action should be current and relevant to you. It should be related to your present teaching responsibility so that you should not expend extra time on the research. In other words, action research should be integrated into your teaching.
The researcher is involved in an immediate and direct way.	It is crucial for you to understand that the course of action you take involves you directly.

The project is undertaken collaboratively by the participants in the situation, not by outsiders studying the practice of an individual or group.	You and your participants are actively involved in the action. If you are merely an observer looking at an action on a group of subjects, it becomes more of an experiment and less of an action research.
The action proceeds through a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and evaluating.	You may repeat the implementation of action as many times as you feel necessary to produce results, adapting and improving on each cycle of action in even small but significant ways.
It raises awareness and understanding of your practice, leading to change and improvement through practical action.	The research action allows you to improve and grow professionally. That is why you should decide on an area that is related to your teaching responsibility.

Figure 1.1: Characteristics of Action Research

TIPS

As you plan your research implementation, bear in mind that some or all of the above characteristics should be reflected in your action research.

What Action Research is not

- (a) Action Research is not a library project where we learn more about a topic that interests us.
- (b) Action Research is not problem-solving in the sense of trying to find out what is wrong, but rather a quest for knowledge about how to improve.
- (c) Action Research is not about doing research on or about people, or finding all available information on a topic looking for the correct answers. It is about exploring your strengths and limitations and acting on it to improve yourself and your participants.
- (d) Action Research is not about learning why we do certain things, but rather how we can do things better. It is about how we can change our instruction to impact students.

HELPFUL INFORMATION

The action you implement is primarily meant to improve your practice. In improving yourself, the positive effects are passed on your participants. Therefore you should start by exploring your own shortcomings as a practitioner and how you can professionally develop yourself and improve your practice. This is how action research is different from an experimental design. In the latter design, the researcher like a scientist approaches an experimental action in a detached manner, makes impartial observations and calculations and reports the results of the action on the subjects rather than on himself.

Educational Action Research

Educational action research is action research carried out in educational settings. It is a form of self-reflective inquiry designed to improve the understanding, practices and situations in your school and classroom. The issues related to action research are usually based on your teaching and teacher practices. For example, as a language teacher, you may address the issue of improving your teaching strategy to improve your students' language proficiency. In this instance, the implication is that in improving your practice, your students' language learning may benefit from it. Action research is practitioner-centered; therefore the issues should be relevant to your duties and responsibilities as a teacher. Macro issues that arise from root causes like poverty or sanctioned policies that are viewed as beyond the control of the practitioner to change or improve, and therefore need not be considered for action.

THINK ABOUT IT

So when you decide on an issue to focus your action on, you should therefore ask yourself: "Is it within my ability to act on the problem?"

The plan of action should basically be perceived as achievable within the scope and ability of you as a teacher in the classroom. This reflects the characteristic of action research that it is usually carried out by practitioners in their line of work. Educational action research is basically carrying action research in educational settings, which is what your action research is all about. For the purpose of convenience, the term "*action research*" shall subsequently be used throughout this book to encompass the concept of educational action research.

TAKE NOTE

Educational action research is basically carrying action research in educational settings, which is what your action research is all about. For the purpose of convenience, the term “action research” shall subsequently be used throughout this book to encompass the concept of educational action research.

THE PURPOSE OF ACTION RESEARCH

Action research is an exercise that allows an individual to sustain his creativity, imagination, positive attitude and motivation towards work over time (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). By carefully examining your practices, the research acts as a diagnostic and self-evaluative tool. Self-enquiry results in new ideas about teaching. There is no absolute answer or solution to the problems, but there will surely be incremental improvement and change in the practice, and verified by peer and learner validation. Apart from improving your practice, action research is about how you – personally and professionally – benefit and grow from it.

Action research is very suitable for the classroom setting. Schon (1983) used the term “*swampy lowlands*” to refer to the complex problems of teaching that may be not solved by simply following the prescribed learning theories and techniques. The action research framework is most appropriate for teachers who recognize the shortcomings in their educational activities and who would like to adopt some corrective action, formulate a plan, carry out an intervention, evaluate the outcomes and develop further strategies in an iterative fashion (Hopkins, 1993). In short, action research is a workable technique for classroom teachers to achieve the following purposes:

- (a) To integrate teaching with research
- (b) To improve the effectiveness of practice
- (c) To bridge the expectation and performance gap
- (d) To continuously develop the personal and professional self
- (e) To routines reflexive teaching
- (f) To realize educational values

- (g) To enable systematic and scientific re-evaluation of current theories and
- (h) To influence what is known about teaching, learning, and schooling.

COMPARING TRADITIONAL RESEARCH AND ACTION RESEARCH

The action research method involves the understanding of the self through a “reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning” (McNiff, 1988b). On the other hand, traditional research investigation engages in enquiry to add to the understanding about others and its resulting phenomenon. For both kinds of research though, there is often a dependence on the triangulation of multiple points of view – the teacher, student, and participant observer – to support the conclusions. Schmuck (1997) provides a succinct comparison of traditional and action research.

Traditional and Action Research Both traditional and action research involves the following activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection Inquiry • Problem solving • Require research objectives and research questions • Follow systematic procedures • New learning 	
Traditional Research	Action Research
• Examines what others are doing	• Examines personal actions
• Seeks explanation or truth	• Seeks continuous change
• Objective	• Reflective
• Strives for knowledge	• Focus on planned change
• Removed from research site	• Personally involved
• Reveals effects and causes between variables	• Reveals patterns and relationships

Figure 1.2: Comparing Traditional Research and Action Research
(Schmuck, 1997)

MODELS OF ACTION RESEARCH

Kurt Lewin initiated the practice of action research when he researched about what happened when people became involved in decision-making about how the workplace was run (Lewin 1946). Subsequently, many researchers organized their work and reports following his cycle of steps: observe – reflect – act – evaluate – modify (Figure 1.3).

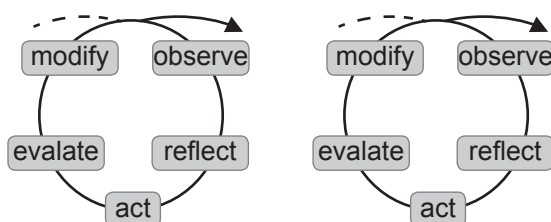


Figure 1.3: Kurt Lewin's Action Research Model

Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) model of action research is also popularly used among practitioners. The procedure is cyclical in nature and is intended to foster deeper understanding of a given situation. It starts with conceptualizing a focused problem and moving through several interventions and evaluations.

Kemmis and McTaggart's action research model employed similar principles as Lewin's; however they are differentiated by the number of actions in each particular cycle. Lewin's model has 5 steps of actions, whereas Kemmis and McTaggart's model is completed in 4 steps. A representation of an action research protocol by Kemmis and McTaggart is provided below (Figure 1.4).

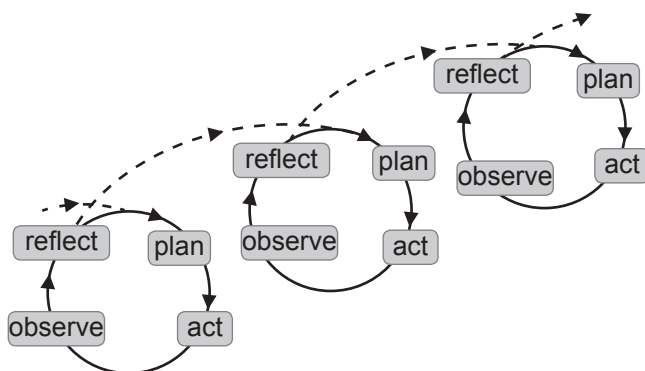


Figure 1.4: Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) Action Research Model

Gerald Susman (1983) distinguishes five phases to within an action research cycle (Figure 1.5). The researcher starts with an initial survey to diagnose the situation to identify or define the problem. This is followed by planning to take action. Alternative courses of action would be considered before finally selecting a most suitable action plan. Action implementation is accompanied by data collection and data analysis to evaluate the consequences of the action. The general findings are identified and the learning points may indicate how successful the action has been. Another cycle begins with a re-assessment of the situation and the process continues until the problem is resolved.

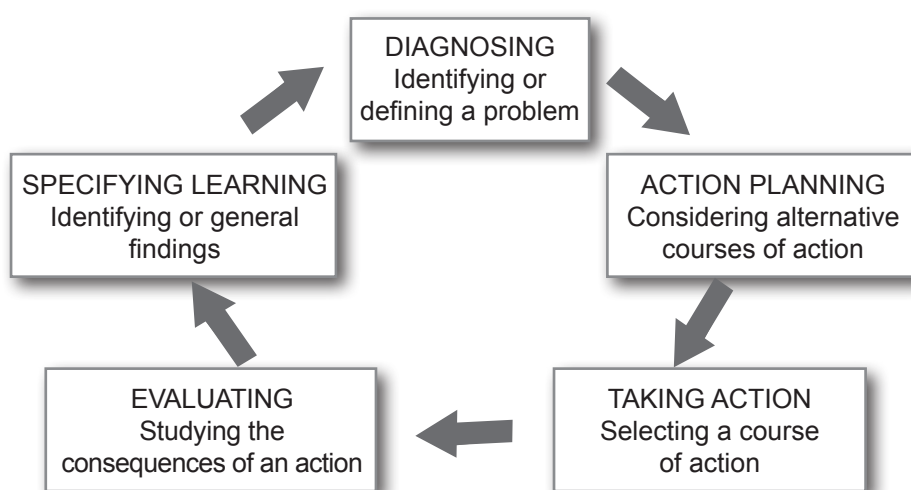


Figure 1.5: Susman's Action Research Model (1983)

Whitehead and McNiff's (2006) model consists of five disciplined and systematic steps in a research cycle known as "action-reflection" (p.8): observe -> reflect -> act -> evaluate -> modify (Figure 1.6). Observing will result in identifying a concern or problem. Reflecting is the act of thinking of a possible way forward. This is followed by acting to try out a new way. The action will be monitored through data gathering. Evaluation of the success of the action is done through reflection of what is happening. The cycle is complete with a plan to modify the action and move in new and improved directions.

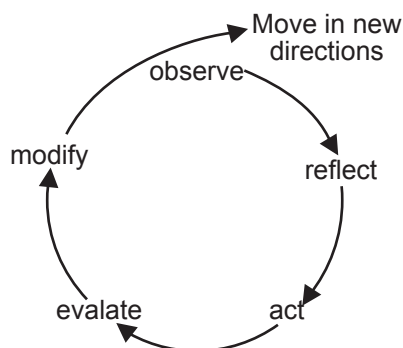


Figure 1.6: Whitehead and McNiff's Action Research Cycle (2006)

THINK ABOUT IT

There are other models of action research which you may like to read up: John Elliott's (1991a) model, and Dave Ebbutt's model. When deciding which model you wish to employ, consider which suit your situation and action better – there is no right or wrong model.

THE BASIC STEPS OF ACTION RESEARCH

The basic steps of action research are as follows (McNiff, 2002):

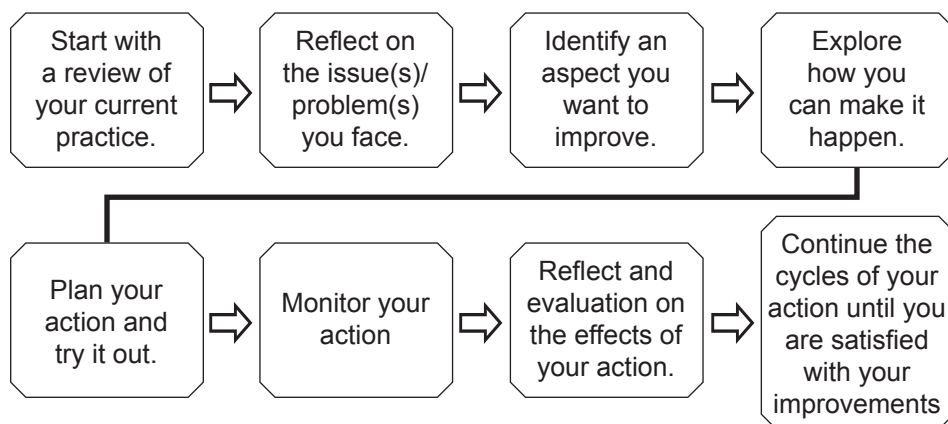


Figure 1.7: The Basic Steps of Action Research

DETERMINING THE RESEARCH TOPIC

Deciding on the right topic for your research may not be as easy as you think. You may be at loss about how to start the topic selection and what you wish to work on that might also interest others. Perhaps the first step in your action research project is to determine an area of interest to you. You may consider doing an action research on any aspect of your teaching situation.

- Consider the shortcomings in your teaching plans, preparation and implementation.
- Consider professional strengths you wish to develop for deeper understanding, improved practice and effective teaching.
- Consider issues in teaching and learning that interest and fascinate you professionally.
- Consider persistent ideas and thoughts about aspects of work that have made you think, or made you curious or puzzled you.

ACTIVITY

Determining a research topic

In the first column of the activity sheet below, jot down aspects of your teaching situation that appears significant to you, or concerns you. Be specific in your statement. For example, do not just mention “*student discipline*”; but state “*students walk in and out during lesson*”. Evaluate the importance of each aspect based on the criteria provided. The aspect that generates the highest score should give you an indication of your area of interest.

- Scale: Not (1) -- (2) -- (3) -- (4) -- (5) Absolutely							
Aspects of teaching	Significant	Important	Interesting	Worth doing	Exciting	Troubling	Total Score
The shortcomings in your teaching plans and preparations							
i.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	
ii.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	
iii.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	

- Scale: Not ① -- ② -- ③ -- ④ -- ⑤ Absolutely							
Aspects of teaching	Significant	Important	Interesting	Worth doing	Exciting	Troubling	Total Score
The shortcomings in your lesson implementation							
i.	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	
ii.	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	
iii.	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	
Professional strengths you wish to develop							
i.	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	
ii.	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	
iii.	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	
Professional issues in teaching and learning							
i.	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	
ii.	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	
iii.	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	
Persistent ideas and thoughts of personal interest							
i.	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	
ii.	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	
iii.	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	①②③ ④⑤	
Pick out the aspect with the highest score and consider the topic you have determine. Consider also recurring issues from the various sections. That could influence your decision on a topic.							
Complete the statement: I think I would like to study							

Activity 1.1: Determining a research topic

TAKE NOTE

Once you have narrowed your selection of research area and topic, you may want to decide on a tentative title for your action research. Bear in mind that the title should be determined based on your research issues, research concerns or research focus, and that it should not be too long. At this stage, do not worry about finding the perfect title; it will undergo changes and amendments as you proceed with your project.

WRITING THE ACTION RESEARCH PROPOSAL

You will be required to submit a proposal to your research supervisor for discussion and approval. A research proposal allows you to anticipate what will happen. You can plan accordingly so that the research can be implemented systematically and ethically.

The proposal will also provide the basis for discussion with your supervisor and in the process provide opportunities to make changes for improvement. A sound research proposal will allow you to implement your actual research with more confidence. It also provides the basic structure on which you may build on your first few chapters of the final research report.

ACTIVITY

Checklist for Completing the Action Research Proposal

Use the following suggested headings as a guide and checklist to make sure your action research proposal is thorough.

HEADINGS	Done (✓)
Research Title Name of Researcher Name of Department/Institution Content Page Abstract	
Chapter 1: Introduction <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Context Of The Research ii. Reflections About Past Teaching Experiences iii. Statement of the Problem iv. The Initial Survey v. The Research Focus vi. Research Objectives vii. Research Questions viii. Importance of The Research ix. Limitations of The Research x. Definitions And Terms 	

<p>Chapter 2: Review Of Relevant Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Review of the Related Theories And Models ii. Review of the Related Research iii. Conclusion 	
<p>Chapter 3 : Methodology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Action Research Framework ii. Target Group iii. The Action Research Plan iv. Instrumentation v. Data Collection Procedures vi. Data Analysis vii. Conclusion 	
<p>Research Costs Schedule of Research Implementation References and Bibliography Appendices</p>	

Activity 1.2: Checklist for completing the action research proposal

RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

The research schedule is another detail to be included in your research proposal. Having an implementation schedule prevents you from procrastinating. It will also tell you how much time you have to implement each stage of your research and to complete your whole action plan. The time-line of events allow you to pace yourself over the allotted period of time, so that you do not rush to finish everything when the submission date approaches. At the same time, it serves as a contractual agreement with your supervisor on how you plan to complete your research exercise.

ACTIVITY

Planning the Research Implementation Schedule

Here is a suggestion of schedule that you may be able to utilize. Using the suggested activity steps, determine the time frame for each event till completion of research project.

No.	Activity	Implementation Period (dates)
1.	Reflection on teaching and learning and identify research focus	
2.	Submit the research proposal	
3.	Preparation for Research Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action plan • Implementation steps • Determining the data collection techniques and instruments • Determining the data analysis procedures 	
4.	Action Research Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing cycle 1 • Implementing cycle 2 and so on 	
5.	Monitoring the action and data collection	
6.	Processing the data and data analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual analysis/analysis using software • Deriving conclusions 	
7.	Reflection on action effectiveness	
8.	Writing the research report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft 1 • Editing • Review • Draft 2 and so on 	
9.	Sharing the research findings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminar presentation • Journal publication 	
10.	Planning for follow-up action research	

Activity 1.3: Planning the research implementation schedule

BUDGETING FOR YOUR RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

Unlike research proposals that are submitted for funding and grants, your research proposal will not provide you any form of monetary gain. It is however, a wise move to budget for your research so that you will have a fair idea of how much you are expected to set aside to carry out your research successfully. You are expected to include budgeting in your research proposal.

ACTIVITY

Budgeting for your Research Implementation

Below is a suggestion on how you may indicate some examples of items that you may need. Work on the estimate quantity and the costs you may incur. Do amend or add onto the list with relevant items necessary to implement your action.

No.	Items	Quantity x Cost per Unit	Total Cost
1.	A4 paper		
2.	Printer Ink		
3.	Photostating cost		
4.	Log book/Journal		
5.	Manila card		
6.	Color papers		
7.	Cellophane tape		
8.	Color pencils		
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
14.			
15.			
Total			

Activity 1.4: Budgeting for your research implementation

THE ACTION RESEARCH REPORT FORMAT

Unlike most conventional research, the action research report need not follow a rigid format. However, for a beginning researcher, you may wish to take comfort in a given structure. The subsequent chapters in this book guide you through your research report writing based on the format with conventional headings. Below is the format for your action research report with suggested conventional headings. Also included is an example of how you can write using unconventional headings and yet retain the basic structure of an action research report.

ACTIVITY

Checklist for Completing the Action Research Report

You may want to use the following headings as a guide and checklist to chart your progress as you embark on gradually building up your research report. Take note of the use of unconventional headings on the right.

ACTION RESEARCH REPORT WITH CONVENTIONAL HEADINGS	Done (✓)	EXAMPLE OF REPORT USING UNCONVENTIONAL HEADINGS
Title Table of Contents List of Tables List of Figures Abstract Acknowledgement		Collaborating With Learners: Exploring The Role Of The Facilitator
Chapter 1: Introduction 1.1 The Context Of The Research 1.2 Reflections About Past Teaching Experiences 1.2.1 Statement of the Problem 1.2.2 The Initial Survey 1.3 The Research Focus 1.4 Research Objectives 1.5 Research Questions 1.6 Importance of The Research 1.7 Limitations of The Research 1.8 Definitions And Terms		1.0 The Old Became The New 1.1 Bridging Theory And Practice 1.2 What I Wanted To Know

Chapter 2: Review Of Relevant Literature 2.1 Review of the Related Theories And Models 2.2 Review of the Related Research 2.3 Conclusion		2.0 What The Experts Say
Chapter 3 : Methodology 3.1 The Action Research Framework 3.2 Target Group 3.3 The Action Research Plan 3.4 Instrumentation 3.5 Data Collection Procedures 3.6 Data Analysis 3.7 Conclusion		3.0 The Way It Was Done
Chapter 4 : Discussion of Findings 4.1 The Implementation of Research 4.2 Report of the Findings 4.3 Discussion of Findings 4.4 Reflection On The Research Action 4.5 Conclusion		4.0 Exploring The Facilitator's Role 4.1 Three Phases Of Facilitator Role I. Control ii. Letting Go iii. Collaboration 4.2 Facilitator Qualities 4.3 A Model? 4.4 A Friend? 4.5 A Mentor
Chapter 5 : Conclusions, Suggestions and Recommendations 5.1 Summary of the Findings 5.2 Conclusions of the Research 5.3 Suggestions and Recommendations		5.0 A Learning Experience
References and Bibliography Appendices		

Activity 1.5: Checklist for completing the action research report

HELPFUL INFORMATION

You will notice that the conventional headings of the first three chapters of the action research report are similar to the action research proposal. The contents can of course be recycled if they are still relevant. You should, however, be mindful of the different tense forms to be used in the proposal and the final report. In your research proposal, you usually use the future tense in reporting your forthcoming plans. If you wish to re-use the chapters in your proposal for your final report write-up, be very sure to change the future tense to the past tense. This is because your final write-up reports what you have already carried out.

WRITING THE ACTION RESEARCH ABSTRACT

The research abstract is usually written after you have finished writing your research report. It contains a summary of important points from each chapter. It should be written in a single paragraph. The following elements should be included in the abstract:

- (a) Brief introduction of research problem, research focus, research objectives/research questions
- (b) Brief description of action plan and action implementation
- (c) Methods of data collection
- (d) Focus on summarizing the results and important conclusions that answer the research objectives/research questions
- (e) Recommendations and follow-up actions

An abstract should stand on its own, and not refer to any other part of the paper such as a figure or table. Usually, the research abstract has to be written in a limited number of words – about 150 to 200 words. Economy of words is therefore important, but you should write in complete sentences and do not sacrifice readability for brevity. Be sure that what is included in the abstract is aligned with the contents of your full report.

EXAMPLE

Elements in a Research Abstract

Here is an example of research abstract.

Research Abstract	Elements included in the Research abstract
<p><i>This is an {action research^[1]} using message cards {to encourage writing among a group of students^[2]} {in G Institution^[3]} (pseudonym). {The research aimed to use message cards to obtain participants' feedback on their learning effectiveness and to enable them to improve their writing skills^[4]}. {I am the researcher with 35 learners, 28 females and 7 males.^[5]} {I used four data sources: message cards and message replies, participant initial and concluding reflections, interview and reflection journal.^[6]} {The students wrote on message cards during lesson and handed up to me. I encouraged them to inform me of their needs. This also provides them with an authentic context to practice their writing skills.^[7]} {I learnt that carrying out the lesson slowly and systematically, giving explanations step-by-step, and using translation when necessary worked.^[8]} {The participants felt they had improved their writing skill.^[9]} {I learnt that an effective lesson is not just about strategies. The combined teacher characteristics encouraged them to show commitment in the teaching and learning process.^[10]} {Future research may examine the message cards to analyse the errors learners made in writing. Other forms of writing activities like dialogue journals, emails and blogs may also be employed using similar techniques.^[11]}</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] Research design [2] Research purpose [3] Research location [4] Research Objectives [5] Research participants [6] Methods of data collection [7] Research Implementation [8] Research Findings [9] Summary of Findings [10] Important conclusions [11] Recommendations

Figure 1.8: Example of research abstract

TAKE NOTE

Correct spelling, clarity of sentences and phrases, and proper reporting of quantities (proper units and significant figures) are just as important in an abstract as they are anywhere else. Generally, you should use past tense for procedures and present tense for results.

Identifying Elements to be included in a Research Abstract

ACTIVITY

Here is another example of research abstract (Goh & Izyan, 2009). Identify the various elements of the research abstract by matching the correct sections of the text to the elements listed on the right column. The first one is done for you.

Research Abstract	Elements included in the Research abstract
<p><i>This is an {action research^[1]} on developing language fluency through dialogue journal. My students were reluctant to write. The research aimed to study how the dialogue journal helped to develop student's English language writing fluency and generate students' interest in learning. The research was conducted in SMK KLB involving 40 lower secondary students in the 1 Putra class that I was teaching.. I utilized four different techniques for the data collection: 1) survey questionnaire; 2) interview; 3) student's dialogue journal and 4) teacher's reflective journal. I introduced the dialogue journal and related their writings with class lessons. I wrote comments as feedback and a way to correct their mistakes. Findings showed that the dialogue journal helped to develop students' language fluency by providing linguistic modeling, giving freedom in writing, enhancing reading confidence as well as enriching student's vocabulary. The students gain knowledge and insights through the teacher's comments. They were motivated to write longer. The research has impacted the teaching and learning environment, students' learning and researcher's own experience. Dialogue journal can be a tool in developing language fluency among students. It should be carried out over a longer period of time to thoroughly develop student's development in writing skills</i></p>	<p>[1] Research design [2] Research purpose [3] Research Objectives [4] Research location [5] Research participants [6] Methods of data collection [7] Research Implementation [8] Research Findings [9] Summary of Findings [10] Important conclusions [11] Recommendations</p>

Activity 1.6: Identifying the elements in a research abstract

THE ROLE OF REFLECTION IN ACTION RESEARCH

Shulman (1987) defined reflection as a teacher recalling the teaching and learning experience, reconstructing the events, generating alternatives and considering the ethical implications of the teaching event. Reflection is also referred to as a critical reflection. An experience or event in an activity or process is recalled, considered and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose. In the course of your teaching you would have developed sets of questions and ideas about your activities and practice. The deliberate attempt at reflection is the act of you as a teacher questioning your understanding, rethinking your assumptions and considering your options (Grimmett et al., 1990). *“It is this entire process of reflection-in-action which is central to the ‘art’ by which practitioners deal well with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict”* (Schon, 1983 p. 50).

Schon's (1987) Model of Reflection describes three forms of reflection: reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action. He also drew a distinction between reflection-in-action and knowing-in-action.

Reflection in action is when reflection takes place in the midst of action. Reflection-in-action is when you are working, and being aware of what you are doing at the same time. It is the individual's capacity to respond to an unexpected event through improvisation on the spot. The unexpected outcome or behavior challenges one's knowing in action, which is a response to the unexpected by devising an alternative action on the spot to overcome the new problems. Reflection in action research provides insights into yourself – your personality, characteristics, experience, behavior and attitude towards your vocation.

Schon (1987) suggested that when someone has learned how to do something, he can make decisions and adjustments to his action without having to think about it. This *“spontaneous knowledge”* is knowing in action (Schon, 1987). It is the sort of knowledge we reveal in our intelligent action – publicly observable, physical performances like riding a bicycle and private operations like instant mental calculations of a simple multiplications. In both cases, the knowing is in the action. We reveal it by our spontaneous, skillful execution of the performance. Knowing in action is tacit knowledge - knowing more than we can say; the capacity to do the right thing.

Reflection-on-action is what we usually mean when we refer to reflective practice. This is the reflecting you do after the event: thinking through, and often discussing the incident with a colleague or supervisor. To an extent we all do it - whether formally at work, or informally over coffee, over lunch with colleagues or friends and family. Reflection on action happens when the teacher pauses after an activity to see how it went – what went well, what did not, what could be changed.

Reflection for action is the desired outcome of reflection in action and reflection on action. It is a proactive practice undertaken to guide future action.

In the process of conducting your action research, it is advisable that you keep a reflective journal where you may regularly record your experiences, reflections about your practices, ideas for action or changes and evaluation of your actions. Very often mere reflections are transient streams of thoughts that are lost after the moment is past. Writing the reflection may be an arduous task, but the written word can be revisited, explored in depth and analyzed. Writing in this way allows you to verbalize your thoughts, clarify your understanding and explicate your values. According to Laidlaw (1992), the very act of writing enhances the thinking processes and enable you to come to conclusions that would not have been possible without a commitment to the written word.

The reflective practice of the teacher is therefore an important element that sets action research apart from other conventional research. Reflection by the researcher and the participants pervades the whole cycle of action research. Some areas in which you may reflect on in the course of your work are:

- (a) teaching effectiveness
- (b) teaching and learning strategies
- (c) classroom management
- (d) student development
- (e) assessment methodologies

ACTIVITY

Practice in writing Reflection

Reflect on your teaching situation and answer the following questions. It serves as a guide to get you started on the reflective practice.

Your teaching effectiveness	Has your teaching provided your students with better understanding, grades, attitude towards learning, teaching materials and/or acquisition of the key competencies?
How can you teach with increased effectiveness?	For example, the use of information technology - what innovative ways can you use information technology to deliver the content effectively?
Your classroom management and discipline	How can you achieve better student behavior (punctuality, reduced disruptions in class, better attention span)?
Development of students through co-curricular activities	How can you employ such activities to develop leadership skills, self-esteem, and/or personal development?
How do you employ assessment methodologies?	How would the use of alternative assessment tools – for example, student portfolios, checklists, peer assessment, student reflections - improve learning?

Activity 1.7: Practice in writing reflection