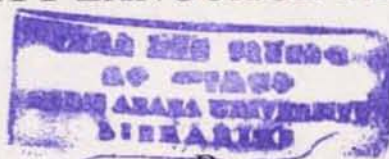


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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE STUDIES**

**ACTION RESEARCH PRACTICES IN TEACHING ENGLISH
AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN ETHIOPIAN UNIVERSITIES:
IMPLICATIONS FOR
QUALITY LANGUAGE TEACHING**



By

FIRDISSA JEBESSA AGA

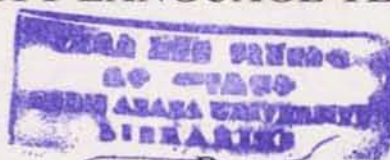
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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN
LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE, ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Dedication

To the memory of my Mother, my Father, and my Brother Mr File, who sowed in me the seeds of the quest for knowledge and for the legitimacy of truth and wisdom. They gave me life and the reason for what I do with life, but they passed away without seeing the fruit of their altruistic vision and effort for my success.



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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS USED

AAU – Addis Ababa University
BDU – BahirDar University
CLT – Communicative Language Teaching
CSAE - Central *Statistical Agency of Ethiopia*
CTE – College of Teacher Education
DELE- Department of English Languages Education
DF – Degree of Freedom
DFLL- Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures
EELTNET – Ethiopian English Language Teachers' Network
EFL - English as a Foreign Language
ELDs – English Language Departments
ELIC- English Language Improvement Center
ELID- English Language Improvement Department
ELIP – English Language Improvement Program
EMPDA – Educational Materials Production and Distribution Agency
ESDP – Education Sector Development Program
FA – Fine Arts
FDRE – Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
HarU – Haramaya University
HDP – Higher Diploma Program
HEIs – Higher Education Institutions
HESO – Higher Education System Overhaul
KCTE - Kotobe College of Teacher Education
MoE – Ministry of Education
Nd (nd). –No date
OAVPAA – Office of the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs.
OSSREA - Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa
P – Significance level
r - Correlation coefficient
Ria – Reflection- in – action
Roa – Reflection- on – action
SD – Standard Deviation
SIL – Summer Institute of Linguistics
TDP – Teacher Development Program
TEFL – Teaching of English as a Foreign Language
TEs – Teacher Educators
TESO – Teacher Education System Overhaul
TESOL – Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language
TGE – Transitional Government of Ethiopia
Tkia – Tacit knowing-in-action
TTI – Teacher Training Institutes
UP - Unpublished
 $\bar{X}$ - Mean Average

ABSTRACT

This study intended to investigate the extent to which EFL teachers in Ethiopian public universities know and practice action research to bring change and betterment of their practices and the quality of student learning. To this end, EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change, environment; and perceived roles of action research for quality teaching have been addressed. Inasmuch as the English language is the medium of instruction at universities in Ethiopia, and action research is catalyst for enhancing quality teaching and learning; linking and addressing the two epitomize the pragmatic assumption that it is whatever actually happens in the classroom that really makes a difference to the quality of student learning. The assumption is underpinned by the perspective of *reflective rationality*, which supports the notion of empowering and committing the frontline implementers -teachers.

In addressing the issue, a blend of both qualitative and quantitative methods was used following dominantly descriptive approach (at the reconnaissance stage), somewhat descriptive and more of exploratory approach (at the pilot stage), and both exploratory and explanatory approaches (during the main study). Data for the reconnaissance were collected through a questionnaire from 25 language instructors at AAU. The pilot study data were collected through questionnaires from 33 instructors and 104 students at Hawassa and Jimma Universities; through focused group discussions (FGDs) with six EFL teachers at the two universities; and through interviews with three people at the Ministry of Education (MoE). Data for the main study were generated through questionnaires from 57 teachers and 214 students at Addis Ababa University (AAU), Bahir Dar University (BDU), and Haramaya University (HarU); through interviews with eight persons (two each from the three universities and from MoE); and through FGDs with 20 persons (7 each at AAU and BDU, and 6 at HarU).

Whereas the data collected during the reconnaissance and the pilot study were analyzed by interspersing the qualitative data with the quantitative data, during the main study the analyses and interpretations were made separately both for the quantitative and the qualitative data. By way of mixing the results of the two in the Discussions Chapter, two purposes were achieved: producing more comprehensive answers to the research questions than they might appear separately, and triangulating the different data or results for validation purpose. Apart from this, a validation group of 7 EFL teachers at AAU participated in scrutinizing the research work right from the start and mainly at critical stages (at proposal, pilot, and main study).

It has, therefore, been learnt that even though EFL teachers claimed to have high theoretical knowledge and medium practical skills of action research, their actual practice of it was little. Similarly, whereas the teachers' knowledge of action research coincided

with the perspectives of *reflective rationality* as opposed to that of *technical rationality* (see Chapter Three Table 2), their *tacit knowing* was the lowest rated in comparison with their reflection-on-action (Rao) and reflection-in-action (Ria). Similarly, whereas the power of action research for change and betterment was highly valued (pragmatic validity), a number of internal and external environmental factors have limited EFL teachers' practice of it. Equally in the journey of the research work, some doubts and debates had inspired me for further readings, explorations, and lessons. As a result, I have revitalized my earlier beliefs and perspectives that action research has got credibility, visibility, recognition, rigor and acceptance. My earlier over expectation of the practices of action research by EFL teachers, nonetheless, were abated. Equally, it has been learnt that the 'traditional' research approach still has dominance over action research.

On the basis of the findings and the lessons, implications have been drawn to: a) quality of EFL teaching and learning; b) policy and practice; c) the field of action research in EFL teaching; and d) scope of applicability of the results of the research. It is believed that the overall results, lessons and the actualization of the implications: a) contribute to enhance EFL teachers' action research knowledge and practice to bring betterment of their practices and themselves; b) enhance the teachers' active participation in arguments/debates and in research culture related to the area; c) entail the changing landscape of EFL teaching; and d) inspire reflective thinking and practice in the field of TEFL. This is because English has a pragmatically dominance role and place in the world communication, business, politics, education (teaching, learning, and research), technology, science and advancement. In addition, the national as well as the global ideological and professional environmental trends seem to advance democratic outlooks whereby practitioners are empowered, committed, and energized to take ownership of changing themselves and their classroom practices for better quality.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This Dissertation has six chapters. Chapter One presents background and rationales, problem statement, objectives, significance, scope and delimitation, and limitations; operational definitions of terms/phrases; conceptual framework, and research questions of the study whereby five questions have been formulated for investigation.

Chapter Two deals with research setting and context. It, therefore, presents a bona fide account of the country's context, education, HEIs and the English language, and action research. It also introduces five Ethiopian public Universities where the research took place: two for pilot study (Jima and Hawassa Universities), and three for the main study (Addis Ababa, BahirDar, and Haramaya Universities).

Chapter Three presents review of related literature. It describes action research conceptions, importance, characteristics, dimensions, foundations, places within the typologies of research approaches, validations, implications for quality EFL teaching; and some empirical findings on action research in and outside Ethiopia.

Chapter Four deals with design and methodology of the study. It has eight sections. The first section presents briefings on guiding purpose and decisions with justifications. The second and the third sections deal with detailed descriptions of the research methodology and its rationales respectively. Following this, the fourth section presents data collection sites, sources, procedures and justifications. The fifth and the sixth sections deal with data gathering tools (two types of questionnaires, two types of interviews and a FGD) and procedures, and methods of data analyses respectively. Finally, the seventh and the eighth sections deal with ethical considerations and validation procedures respectively.

Chapter Five deals with presentation, analyses, and interpretation of the data generated through the questionnaires, interviews and FGD. The Chapter sets out the analyses and interpretation by classifying both the quantitative and the qualitative data (separately) under five subsections. The first subsection presents and analyzes the data on EFL teachers' knowledge of and/or about action research. The second and the third subsections

address respectively EFL teachers' actual involvement in doing action research and their perceptive views on the level of the changes /improvements that might happen on themselves and their practices as a result of doing action research. The fourth and the fifth subsections deal respectively with issues of environment for conducting action research and the roles of action research for quality language teaching as perceived by the research participants.

Finally, Chapter Six presents discussions; Doubts, Debates and Lessons (DDL) in the journey of the study; summary of the major findings; conclusions; and implications of the results (see Chapter Six, Section 6.6).

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This Chapter deals with background and rationales, problem statement, objectives, significance, scope and delimitation, limitations, operational definitions, and conceptual framework and research questions of the study.

1.1. Background and Rationales of the Study

This study was designed to investigate action research practices and implications in EFL classrooms of Ethiopian public universities. To this end, EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change, environment, and action research perceived role for quality teaching and learning have been addressed. The study assumes that there is dynamism in the curricula of TEFL, particularly in these days of volatile and unpredictable professional environment. In such an environment, EFL teachers are expected to: a) do the right things right- to be alive in changing EFL classroom practices for better quality; b) continually reexamine assumptions against evidences and interpretations related to teaching rather than taking one approach as an *attainable ideal*; c) deabsolutize accustomed traditions and rituals; and d) take a fallibilist view of truth.

The dynamism implies a pragmatic and critical reflection of the teachers upon their practices and contexts guided by some explicit and implicit aspects of teaching as a profession. The explicit aspect refers to the teachers' professional actions in line with their profiles embedded in their training and career specifications. The implicit dimension, on the other hand, implies the teachers' 'tacit knowing' which contains their values inherent in their professional lives and practices. It implies qualities, and dispositions of the teachers not objectified, but are simply inherent in the already embedded ones- informing their practices and entailing the independence of the world of objective mind (Habermas, 1986; McNiff, 2002a).

Such independence opens space for the teachers to hold implicit assumptions, theories and hypotheses in addition to the explicit ones. As a result, much of their day-to-day routines can be operated based on invisible sensibilities that constitute tacit knowledge. Inherent in

and accruing from the tacit knowledge is 'unconscious competence' which is one of the four cycles that Mann (nd. P. 11) identifies as movements in the process of a teacher's personal development: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence. The habitual and routines of knowledge resulting from the unconscious competence are not accessible to reflection unless activated and brought into sight through action research. Such activation results in a growing critical consciousness whereby EFL teachers get energized and empowered to take ownership of enhancing the quality of their practices and student learning (Bradbury & Reason, 2001, cited in Mattsson & Kemmis, 2007). Empowerment, in this sense, entails professional autonomy, accountability and commitment of the teachers to do the right things right.

Inherent in the notion of empowerment are moral, epistemological, ontological, and methodical positions of the teachers to invest much effort and many talents for the betterment of their classroom practices. These positions demand professional autonomy to think and act rationally and consensually as opposed to a forced or manipulated one-entailing the close relationship between rationality and knowledge (Kemmis, 1995; Habermas, 1986). This line of thought: a) qualifies EFL teachers as logical, sensible and capable professionals to make prudent decisions and take wise actions to bring change based on intelligent thinking and understanding rather than on emotion or on established norms and rituals; and b) challenges the notion that 'teachers teach as they were taught' using a taken-for-granted approach. This is because, life and environmental situations change from day-to-day making teaching a complex craft, one class never being quite the same as another and today's method may not work for tomorrow's situation (Allwright & Bailey, 1991).

Analogously, whereas it is possible for medical workers to prescribe the same/similar medicines as others in the profession, it is unfair for teachers to replicate an approach of teaching that they have not experienced in their actual work environments. This is because settings as well as learners are unique- demanding language teachers to be mindful of the dynamism in their day-to-day activities rather than taking one approach, for instance CLT, for granted. In the dynamism, CLT may not be as effective as it claims to be. Arguably,

there is no systematic proof that typical CLT techniques work well or works at all under all conditions and with all learners (Lindsay & Knight, 2006; O'Neill, 2000). In O'Neill's views, pluralist methodologies are more likely to be successful than any single orthodoxy. Although the concept of *best practice* on a principled individual basis remains encouraged, the search for a best method for TESOL in terms of a priori procedures and principles is dismissed from current practices (Mann, nd.). This is because teachers, unlike artists, deal with human beings having different physical, physiological, intellectual, emotional, and moral makeup. It demands them to learn how to do things in new ways by putting themselves in debates related to their specific professional environments and being responsive to individual differences within their classrooms.

By implication, there is no single method or approach that can work for all teachers or for all students at all times, places and in all contexts. EFL teachers are, therefore, expected to recognize the fact that current and new understandings about their practices are always open to revision, disproof, and criticism in the light of as yet undiscovered knowledge or understandings and a view that truth must always be justified discursively through argument. The quality of the argument, and the ways people participate in it is what gives life to being *critical* (Hoy & McCarthy, 1994; Noffke & Somekh, 2009; McNiff, 2002a; Selinger & Shohamy, 2007).

By implication, EFL teachers' knowledge is "never static and complete" as the topics, themes, and circumstances of their communicative action will forever be changing, leaving all their professional competencies incomplete and partial— halting steps and limiting achievements on a path towards an unattainable complete agreement, complete understanding, and perfect consensus about what to do (McNiff, 2002a; Kemmis, 2007).

CLT, to be relevant in such a dynamism, needs to be responsive to the theory-driven research (extant literature) and data-driven research (the research situation and the people in it), and to the dual commitment of action research-action (change and improvement) and - research (learning and understanding). By implication, EFL teachers are expected to include research into their range of skills and are conceptualized as language researchers and practitioners. There are basic assumptions for this. The assumptions are grounded on

the perspectives of *reflective rationality* (as opposed to *technical rationality*) (see Chapter Three Table 2).

The assumptions are foundations for action research as it brings together the researcher and the actor. Equally, as the part of the world to be acted on is something more than a mental construction, action research holds an existential position (Dick, 2002) and is often teacher-initiated as a forum designed to open communicative space whereby emerging agreements and disagreements, understandings and decisions can be problematised and explored openly to effect change for the better. Such standpoints, potentially and actually, threaten routinely established ways of doing things and any single orthodoxy that is taken for granted.

The notion of teacher-initiated research parallels Chomsky's 'I-language' and/or 'internalized language'. It deals with some element of the mind of the person who knows the language acquired by the learner, and used by the speaker-hearer. This is in contrary to "E-language" which is 'externalized language' for Chomsky. The latter, referring to the emphasis in traditional American linguistics in the 1970s and 1980s, has remained on the sound and word structure of sentences (Chomsky, 1965, cited in McNiff, 2002a). In McNiff's view, "action research leads to the generation of I-theories of knowledge, theories which are already located in the practitioner's tacit forms of knowledge, and which emerge in practice as personal forms of action and knowing" (McNiff, 2002a: 22). Inherent in line of this thought is the worth of enhancing authentic language classroom practices through critical reflection, emphasizing the *doing rather* than the *planning* for it is whatever actually happens in the classroom that really matters, that makes a difference to learning. This is a pragmatic stance in point for the English Language as the medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels; as an international system of communication, diplomacy; and as the language of opportunity opening the door to higher education, a better job, and upward social mobility in the world (Mann, nd: 4; Prabhu, 1987: 6).

Historically in Ethiopia, the need for the language had ensued with the desire to produce Ethiopians who could serve as interpreters, diplomats, and modern administrative personnel, along with the concomitant commencement of modern education in 1908 in

general and with the establishment of the University College of Addis Ababa in 1950 in particular. Consequently, there has been a wide spread general desire to learn the language at all levels of schooling, and an already established and long-term system of working in and through English in the country. It has been the medium of instruction for secondary, technical/vocational- and tertiary -education since long and is currently being taught as a subject starting from grade one in the country (TGE, 1994; MoE, 2005).

It also has a potential prominent position beyond its current educational value in the country. This is because in addition to its pragmatic functions and roles to enhance individual and societal development in the competitive world, it is a “neutral language to all ethnic groups” in Ethiopia and is consequently favored by all (Hailom, 1993:7).

The current trend, in Ethiopian universities, also seems to open new opportunities for EFL teachers to reflect on and assess the level of effectiveness of CLT approaches with a purpose to make adaptations to their classroom environments rather than taking it, which may have different environmental implications, for granted. Such opportunities have necessitated provision of action research to teacher educators through Higher Diploma Program (HDP), and as a course at the level of pre-service undergraduate program and as part of research course and work in MA programs. Consequently, all level schoolteachers are expected to do action research as one of the many requirements for career development, and students also get acquaintance to action research practices through different mechanisms one of which is practicum placement at secondary schools.

Corollary to the purposes mentioned earlier, this study is expected to enhance learning and understanding of action research practices; and to create knowledge, draw implement able implications geared to improve the quality of EFL teaching practices and performances of the teachers in the universities where English language is given as a field of study in particular and the nationwide school system in general.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Current trends demand building bridges between language teaching and research by empowering the teachers to be critical thinkers, originators, and responsible practitioners for their professional decisions following action research approach. Action research brings together *research* and *action*, the *researcher* and the *actor* with the purpose of enhancing quality EFL teaching and learning through empowered, informed, motivated, and committed teachers.

There is, however, a doubt to find empowered and committed EFL teachers with profound knowledge of the art and craft of action research. This could be due to low or no deliberate efforts by universities to link teaching and research by empowering teachers to cross-fertilize the two. As *the data for human science research are human experiences* (Van Manen, 1990), my experiences as a student; a teacher at secondary schools, TTIs, CTEs, and AAU; and my participation in HDP as Tutee, Tutor, and Leader at AAU have given me solid experiences that there remains a long journey in terms of linking research and teaching.

Particularly as a Tutor of HDP, I used to observe classrooms of instructors of different disciplines and different backgrounds. From such observations, I have come to learn that instructors (of EFL and other subjects) were facing challenges to create authentic and pragmatic learning activities and to reflect on their classroom practices, understandings, and situations. Language teachers' creation of authentically task-based learning environments was minimal. Their reflections on their language classroom practices and teaching contexts that Rossa (1997, cited in Burns, 1999: 22) considers as "something which can, and should be considered by language teachers, as a realistic extension of professional practice"; was invisible. They were observed cautiously presenting their contents following pre-specified models and activities rather than enhancing contextual, pragmatic, and functional language learning avenues that the learners would need in their world of work and life.

Instructors of other subjects were also observed facing challenges to enhance pragmatic use of the English language. In principle, they would be expected to create avenues that enhance the learning knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the students using the language. This is because it is the medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels in the country; and it is also decisive for the learners' successes in academic, economic, and social life in the world. "Every subject teacher is", therefore, "a language teacher" as well (Seime, personal communication, 23-Feb, 2009). Failing to pragmatically reflect on their own classroom practices, the instructors, in most cases, used to resort to blaming students' secondary school English language background.

At the extreme end, it was my observation that some teachers could not properly generate, organize, and express their ideas and thoughts in the English language let alone to create authentic and pragmatic language-learning environments. Students were also observed facing problems to effectively use the English language to communicate in socially and culturally appropriate ways and to demonstrate achievements in academic content areas. Inescapably, their low level of English proficiency might be reflected in their academic performances (exams, term papers, and project works). Even though the situation is more serious these days than before, the problem is not new. In line with this, Hailom (1993: 7) indicates, "university graduates are criticized by employers for inability to write simple progress reports".

Inability to use the language of instruction properly (both by instructors and students) has remarkable effect on the quality of teaching learning in general and on the learners' overall development in particular. In such a situation, it is unlikely for the teachers to be effective in fulfilling their double responsibilities: learners and teachers of the English language.

As a reconnaissance stage, I made a short assessment by collecting data from 25 language instructors who were attending HDP in the year 2005 at AAU. The main concern of the study was to investigate the teachers' level of understanding about action research, and the state of the affairs of their overall reflections on their practices, settings and contexts. Dominantly, descriptive approach was employed. The findings have shown that even

though the teachers had awareness about action research, they were not actually doing it due to: lack of motivation; time constraint; paucity of research fund, facilities and materials; enrolling below standard students; rushing for content coverage; large class size; and work load.

Possible causes for the problem could be EFL teachers' lack or low level of action research knowledge and their limited reflections (if at all) upon their practices and upon the challenges that might encounter them in their classrooms. This problem might accrue from the teachers' skimpy empowerment, commitment, and the nominal and prominence places given respectively to praxis-related research¹ and pure or basic research. Current practices in our country show that more efforts and concomitantly resources are invested in the pure or basic research approach at the expense of praxis-related research.

The situation reminds me of the relative standing between theory and practice that Somekh states particularly in Britain: "the more abstract and theoretical your work, the higher your status in the academic hierarchy; and the more useful and applicable to practice, the lower your status in the academic hierarchy" (Somekh, 1993: 33, cited in Mann, nd: 4). Consequently, people influenced by such thinking and working in traditional forms of scholarship find it difficult to accept the legitimacy of I-learning (I-theories) and consider research, which is rooted in personal knowing as unscientific and lacking rigor; research which demonstrates causal relationships as good scientific research (McNiff, 2002a: 103). Such a situation, in addition to the above challenges, might have affected the teachers' level of practicing action research and bringing change in their EFL classroom environments.

Even though the legitimacy of action research has been widespread today than ever before, it seems that very little conscious efforts have been made by our universities to put in place clear roles and responsibilities to plan and implement it by empowering and energizing the frontline practitioners (Firdissa, 2006).

¹ Praxis-related research' includes action research, dialogic research, cooperative inquiry, and R & D projects of a variety of kinds (Mattsson & Kemmis, 2007: 186).

The situation is exacerbated by the practice of teacher selection in Ethiopian HEIs, which does not consider pedagogical skills, practices and interests of the candidates. It is a common practice in Ethiopian universities to hire instructors mainly based on cumulative grade point average. The newly employed instructors are, thus, expected to adapt themselves and their practices to the culture of the employing institution, as they do not have their own inbuilt and research-based pedagogical arts and crafts. Such a situation, in addition to scanty empowerment and commitment of the teachers to explore their professional practices and lives, is an area of serious concern (Seime, 1998).

In general, the observed state casts potentially serious concerns about the level of EFL teachers' empowerment, commitment, and vigour to invest much effort and many talents by: a) fully involving in authentic and pragmatic reflections; b) problematising their practices; and c) de-absolutizing taken for granted approaches and ideals with a purpose of enhancing the quality of their practices and themselves.

The implication of all thus far mentioned potential and observed shortfalls is low quality of EFL teaching in particular and the education system in general. This in turn might have resulted in students' low proficiency in English, low academic achievement and consequently low performance at the world of work and life, symbolizing a sort of vicious circle. The issue has been addressed by way of investigating EFL teachers' action research practices and deriving implications to: a) the quality of EFL teaching and learning, b) policy and practice, c) the field of action research in EFL teaching, and d) scope of applicability of the knowledge/lessons accruing from the research. (For detail, see Chapter Six, Section 6.6)

1.3. Objectives of the Study



Within the broad purpose mentioned above, the study intended to investigate the extent to which EFL teachers know and practice action research to bring improvement and change in their specific work environments, and the perceived roles of action research for quality language teaching in Ethiopian public universities. Whereas the issue might have been treated piecemeal previously, attempts have been made in this study to examine it anew in

the light of current developments about action research and EFL worldwide and in our universities. Implied in the attempts are learning and enhancement of effective implementation of EFL teaching by adapting CLT approach to specific classrooms of Ethiopian universities. Consequently, the study intended to achieve the following objectives:

1. To find out how widespread the knowledge of and/or about action research is among EFL teachers in Ethiopian universities;
2. To explore the level of EFL teachers' actual practice of action research;
3. To investigate whether EFL teachers who practiced action research were changing/improving (their practices) in the light of the new knowledge gained from their research (pragmatic validity);
4. To find out what motivating and /or de-motivating environments were there for EFL teachers to conduct action research; and
5. To investigate the different level stakeholders' perceptions of the role of action research for the quality of language teaching in Ethiopian universities.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The outcomes of this study are expected to benefit all parties who are involved in and/or affected by the practices of EFL teaching. More specifically, the results and implementation of the implications of the study are expected to:

1. enhance the awareness of EFL teachers and students, DFLL heads, ILS deans, and MoE officials about the roles of action research to create and sustain the quality of TEFL;
2. enlighten those people working on leadership posts in the universities including DFLL heads and ILS deans to empower and energize EFL teachers (in giving enough training, time, materials, facilities, finance, and recognition) and put the teachers into commitment to practice action research in their classrooms to bring change and/or improvement;

3. inspire EFL teachers to develop a sense of ownership as originators and responsible practitioners for their own classroom realities and actions rather than taking CLT, which may have environmental implications, for granted;
4. inspire EFL teachers to design and implement research-based teaching of English which is derived from and is relevant to their normal classroom practices;
5. serve as an answer to practical questions asked by different level stakeholders about the feasibility and the potential contributions of action research to enhance the quality of language teaching; and
6. serve as a contribution for further investigation in the area following action research approaches in general, and as a basis for EFL teachers' CPD in particular.

1.5. Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The scope of this study has been delimited in three ways. First, out of the 22 universities today in the country, only nine functioning before 2005 have been included as population of the study. Out of these, only five universities (two for pilot, three for the main study) have been included. At each of the five universities also, only DFLL was the target of the study. Ideally, investigating the issue under discussion at all the universities, faculties, schools, departments and institutes in the country could give an accurate picture of the practices and prospects of action research in EFL classrooms of Ethiopian universities. Practically, however, this was not feasible.

Second, of the many potential variables that might have direct and indirect linkage with action research practices in EFL classrooms of Ethiopian universities, only five, namely, EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change/improvement, environment, and perceived roles for quality language teaching have been addressed in this study.

Third, in addressing the variables, more focus was given to the constructs related to EFL teachers. This was mainly because EFL teachers are the forerunners and key implementers of the currently practiced CLT in Ethiopian HEIs.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

This study has some limitations. For the sake of simplicity, the limitations have been divided into two major levels. Whereas the first level deals with the actual shortfalls of the study or what it failed to consider, the second level deals with limiting constraints that appear as threats to the quality of the study. The former level, among others, includes the following:

1. It was impossible to actually observe whether EFL teachers who claimed to have done action research were delivering quality language instruction or not. Consequently, their opinions, perceptions and claims were taken for granted. Even though attempts were made to some extent, it was found difficult to identify the changes quantitatively leading to quality. So, it is left as my and other EFL instructors' topic of further research as an aspect of CPD and post doc.
2. The issue under investigation could be more appropriate for case study taking only one university rather than taking three. This is because some data from the three universities tend to repeat. But this was discovered late during the pilot study. I, therefore, decided to explore the pattern with fresh data from the three settings and come up with conclusions and draw implications of the trend to EFL classrooms of all the universities in the country, of course backed by the intents of 'political dimension of action research' (see Chapter Three, Section 3.5.3) and post-positivist paradigm.
3. One of the research questions up until the Pilot Study read, "How often do EFL teachers actually practice action research, if at all? Why?" This had created a crack that it was practically impossible to delineate the *frequency* of staff engagement in doing action research. It has, therefore, been changed during the main study to explore the *extent* to which the teachers were practicing action research and the rationale for that.

The other level of the limitations includes:

1. Time constraint: Time constraint, which was due to different reasons, has a major limiting effect on the quality of the expected research outcome. Among others, the exigency and the complexity of the variables in the research and its settings made me spend much of my time on reading a lot of literatures, refining the conceptions, and

rationalizing my choices and my conceptions which still might have remained not convincing for some readers of the research work.

2. Due to rare relevant empirical research on action research in TEFL locally, adaptation of foreign literature also have some limiting effect on the outcome of the study. Other than piecemeal practices, I could not find a comprehensive study on EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change, environment, and perceived roles for quality language teaching, locally as well as elsewhere. Moreover, since I could not find validated and readymade data collection tools, I developed new instruments for the purpose. These instruments are not error free and flawless.
3. Inasmuch as action research in the context of CLT is a new dimension particularly in Ethiopian context, lengthy explications and justifications of the underlying paradigms were made in the Introduction, the Methodology, the Analyses, and Discussions Chapters. Even though following this approach was purposive for me: to match and compromise the features of action research and that of CLT, and the methodological tools to suit the exigencies of the case; these Chapters might not be palatable for some people who are influenced by the traditional research approach and who are "working in traditional forms of scholarship" (McNiff, 2002a: 103).

In sum, even though the factors mentioned under both levels could be the major limiting factors, unreserved efforts were made to minimize their effects and to come up with the required findings. Basically, this Dissertation is 'a slice of a cake' in the many problems in the area; it is not self-indulgent activity. It, therefore, leaves space for my and other colleagues' further investigation of the different aspects and dimensions of the issue of the research. Particularly, whether the staffs who claimed to have done action research deliver quality EFL teaching or not could be a fertile ground for our investigation as part of CPD.

1.7. Definitions of Key Terms/Phrases

Some terms and phrases that may have different connotations in other contexts have been defined as used in this paper. They are alphabetically presented hereunder.

1. **Action Research:** is a systematic, flexible, context-based, eclectic and pluralistic form of research whereby EFL teachers (individually or in group/collectively) diagnose, monitor, and analyze their classroom practices for learning, problem resolution and quality improvement instead of relying on CLT alone.
2. **Change:** refers to the learning, betterment, and improvement that EFL teachers have gained for themselves and for their EFL classroom practices as a result of conducting action research.
3. **Descriptive Research:** In the context of the current study, *descriptive research* deals with finding out information on whether EFL teachers in Ethiopian universities in general and at the study sites in particular were practicing action research. This was done by posing some 'factual' questions, mainly during the reconnaissance stage, and the pilot study.
4. **Discussants:** participants in the FGD from all the three universities.
5. **Empowerment:** Refers to EFL teachers' professional autonomy, freedom, and leeway to sense ownership of the improvement of their classroom practices, among others, by choosing and employing TEFL methods they regard as relevant; investigating their classroom practices so as to generate authentic and compelling data; and contributing to the process of making changes in their classroom practices. It also deals with equipping EFL teachers with pertinent knowledge, skills, policies, guidelines, and roles; and allotting enough resources like time, material, and financial for the teachers to conduct action research for learning and for EFL classroom practical problem resolution.
6. **Environment:** As used in this study, *environment* has two connotative implications. First, it deals with policies, guidelines, support, understanding, and empowerment offered to EFL teachers to do action research. Second, it deals with EFL teachers' work situations. In this context, it refers to specific situations of the teachers where their knowledge, practice, change and perceptions are developed, molded, and shaped. In both cases, environments could be motivating if they enhance EFL teachers' action research practices or they could be de-motivating if they hinder the practices.

7. **Explanatory Research:** *Explanatory Research*, in the context of this study, deals with looking at cause-and-effect by raising questions like *what*, *how*, and *why* the observed EFL teachers' action research practices had come to exist. This research approach has further delved in depth with the information obtained from 'descriptive' and 'exploratory' approaches. *Explanatory Research* focuses on meaning making. It, therefore, has resulted in drawing some implications from the results of the study (see Chapter Six, section 6.6).
8. **Exploratory Research:** It is an approach whereby some factual questions were raised on EFL teacher's action research knowledge, practices, change, environment, and perceived roles for quality. The approach enabled me to make use of the information obtained following the questions and to examine the reasons for why the observed practices have happened.
9. **Higher Diploma Program (HDP):** A practice-based training program for teacher educators at higher education institutions in Ethiopia. It has one year duration whereby teachers attend 2 hours discussion classes for 2 days per week, supplemented with additional classroom observations and secondary school visits for a week or two. To graduate, the participants are expected to conduct action research.
10. **Knowledge about Action Research:** refers to theoretical knowledge (knowing that) which EFL teachers had claimed that they possessed implicitly /tacitly or explicitly. It deals with the information, theoretical reasoning, and understanding about action research, which EFL teachers think they possessed.
11. **Knowledge of Action Research:** This has two connotative meanings. In the first place, it refers to practical, procedural (know how) knowledge, competence and skills that EFL teachers claimed that they possessed for conducting action research. Second, it also stands as a generic phrase for the sake of simplicity, where there is no need to differently indicate EFL teachers' theoretical and the practical knowledge of action research.
12. **Practice of Action Research:** As used in this study, *Practice of Action Research* has two connotative implications. The first epitomizes the title of the study. In this sense, the term 'Practice of Action Research' refers to the level of EFL teachers'

action research knowledge, and actual involvement in doing it; and their valuation of the contributions of their research for quality. The word 'practice' is, therefore, both the key concern and the source of the research data, and practice in the area into which the research results could feed, causing change of the practitioners and their professional engagements. Second, the term 'Practice of Action Research' deals with the EFL teachers' actual exercise, involvement, and doing change-oriented research on themselves and their classroom practices. It is about the teachers' investigation of their existing practices and identifying elements for improvement and problem resolution through the process of gathering evidence on which to make informed; instead of intuitive or taken for granted or forced; judgments and decisions.

13. **Quality:** In this study, quality is perceived as 'fitness for purpose' and customer satisfaction. It deals with the purpose and satisfaction of all parties who have a stake in the research process and outcomes: EFL teachers, students, DFLL heads, ILS deans; and MoE officials in particular and the society at large.
14. **Reconnaissance:** refers to precursor activities whereby data were gathered with a purpose of gaining better understanding of the nature and context of the research problem followed by my engagement in reflection, description, and explanations of my own beliefs against the preliminary information; and resulting in foresight and planning the overall research work.
15. **Subjects:** This stands for all the research participants who engaged in the study as data sources (respondents, discussants, interviewees, validation agents, and an informant). It is interchangeably used with 'participants'.
16. **Stakeholders:** This generic term designates all parties who have a stake in the research process and outcomes (EFL teachers, students, DFLL heads, ILS deans, MoE officials, and the society at large).
17. **Sustaining Quality:** refers to creating and managing quality in a sustainable manner by the EFL teachers themselves through action research.
18. **Theoretical Perspectives:** as used in the context of the Conceptual Framework of the study, *theoretical Perspectives refers to the dynamism* of the field of action research. It suggests the discovery of previous and current work, and determination

of debates, discussions and key theories that underpin the overall Framework and the research questions.

19. Validation: In this study, *validation* is related to the claims and the practices that are derived from the study. It, therefore, refers to the value or meaning that the parties who have a stake in the research (EFL teachers, students, DFLL heads, ILS deans, colleagues and MoE officials) attach to the processes, procedures, and the findings of the study.

1.8. Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

Action research enables EFL teachers to do substantial things rightfully and instrumentally. Doing the things in such a manner demands of the teachers to possess clear vision of what, why and how they do the things in discharging their professional roles. The teachers' vision also needs to match with their beliefs, knowledge, values, and intentions, which in turn are underpinned by sets of paradigms and perspectives. Notably, 'positivist' and 'post-positivist' paradigms direct teachers' world views and the truth-values of their practices. The Positivist paradigm views the world as definable, fixable, discoverable, and describable. Knowledge is predictable and provable through testing or sensing following 'traditional forms of scholarship' and/or 'traditional research'; and 'knowing is the only legitimate form; the only justifiable belief in an objective reality' (McNiff, 2002a: 103; Wisker, 2008: 68, 69). The Post-Positivist paradigm, on the other hand, claims that 'knowledge is constructed' rather than proved. Research, in this sense, deals with learning and improving practice. The researcher is a practitioner who systematically investigates his/her practices and produces evidence for the critical scrutiny of others and to show how the practice can be judged to have been improved (McNiff, 2002a: 103; Wisker, 2008: 50, 68; Pollard, 2002: 37).

This study mainly follows the *post-positivist* paradigm which is also in consonance with the perspectives of *reflective rationality* and *pragmatic constructivism*. This is because, not all the issues of *action research practices, challenges and prospects* in EFL classrooms of Ethiopian universities are provable, fixable, and predictable. It is, nonetheless, possible to explore the teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change, environment, and

perceived roles for quality by collecting data from relevant stakeholders. Rejecting a single, static or objective truth, the framework has concerned itself with the meanings and personal experience that I, as a researcher, and other participants derive from the findings. It views reality as the negotiation of *truths* through a series of subjective accounts whereby meanings, experiences, values, beliefs, and ideas of the teachers could be gauged dominantly through qualitative approach and substantiated by quantitative analyses.

The research process, therefore, consisted of back -and- forth movements in which I first started inductively from my own perceptions, interactions, and interpretations by way of conducting reconnaissance, and moved to developing a Conceptual Framework of the study (see Figure 1 and Appendix 15, which is a simplistic version of the Figure). The Framework has underpinned the main ideas and concepts within the research questions, and designs of the study. In doing so, it followed the paradigms of 'Post-positivism', 'reflective rationality', and 'constructivism' all of which advance critical theory, 'foliblist truth', teacher empowerment and commitment, flexibility and openness for new ideas and new ways of doing things (Wisker, 2008). For Wisker, "Constructivism and critical theory rely on relationships between people and ideas, things and events, for instance on argument and dialogue and the reconstruction of knowledge, rather than its recording and re-creation" (P. 256). In line of this thought, the *Theoretical perspectives* and the *post-positivist paradigms* could be seen, respectively, as the right and left ears, the right and left eyes, and the right and left heads of the *Conceptual Framework*. Equally, 'reflective rationality' following pragmatic constructivism could be the 'heart' for the *Conceptual Framework*.

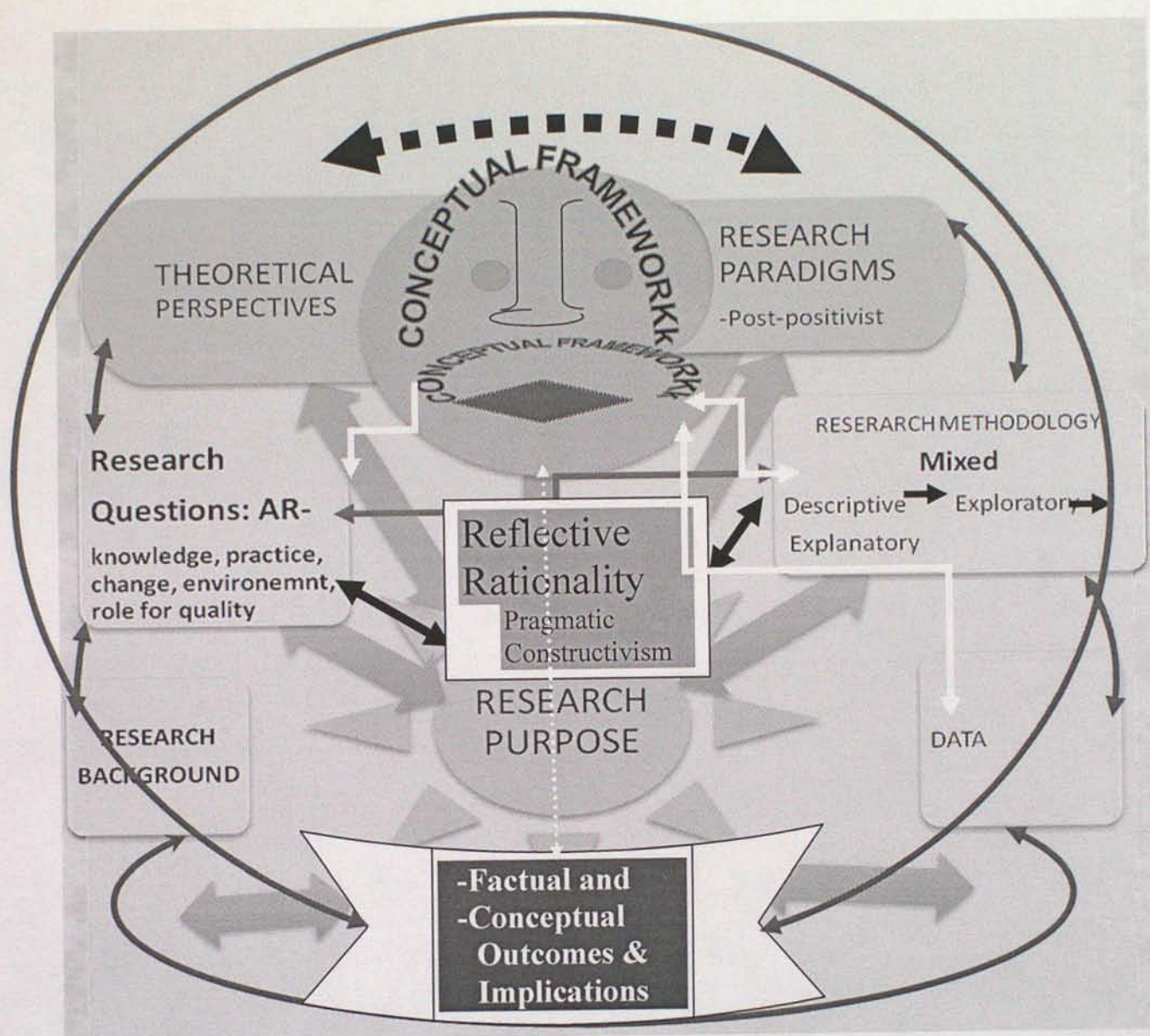


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study (see with Appendix 15)

Mainly the *post-positivist* paradigm along with the perspectives of *reflective rationality* and *constructivism* informed the Conceptual Framework of the study. The Framework in turn: a) has helped me to formulate, clarify and organize research questions that address the issues of EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change, and environment; and action research roles for EFL teaching quality as perceived by the research participants; b) has underpinned the research methodology; and c) is augmented and enabled by the research methods, the data and the outcomes (factual as well as conceptual).

Both the research questions and the methodology have, therefore, been resulted from the way I see the field of action research in EFL teaching. They as well have symbiotic relationships. They have been informing each other back-and-forth in the effort of exploring EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, understanding and change, environments/situations, and stakeholders' perceptions of the roles of action research for quality. These have been framed as conceptual interconnection of the basic research questions for this study. (See Figure 2, below).



Figure 2. Conceptual Interconnections of the Basic Research Questions

The pattern in Figure 2 entails attainment of action research objectives of: 1) developing the knowledge and practical understanding of those involved in the research process; 2) improving classroom practices through research in the interests of all those concerned; 3) developing the professional knowledge of teachers as a whole; and 4) improving TEFL in particular and education as a discipline in general (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993).

Implied in the *Conceptual Interconnections of the Basic Research Questions* (Figure 2) are both critical-and transformative - understandings of the practices and prospects of action research in EFL classrooms of Ethiopian universities. The critical aspect gives space for

the refinement of the knowledge basis of EFL teachers on a continuous basis leading to transformation and change. Whereas knowledge serves as a surface symptom about the EFL teachers' actual practice of action research, criticality implies the level of using the knowledge and understanding that accrues in the light of the new insights gained from their research in specific EFL classroom contexts. Inherent in the critical aspect is, therefore, transformation of the teachers and their practices for better quality as perceived by different level stakeholders. The notion of transformation entails a continuous process of the teachers' empowerment and stakeholder/customer satisfaction through improved quality of teaching the English language. Both transformation and customer satisfaction are among the five different but interrelated dimensions of quality: quality as transformation (an ongoing process that includes empowerment and enhancement of customer satisfaction), quality as fitness for purpose (conformance to customer specifications and priorities), quality as exceptional (high standards), quality as consistency (zero defects/error free), and quality as value for money (accountability for the 'bucks' and for the 'bangs') (Harvey & Green, 1993; Firdissa, 2006; 2007a, citing Harvey & Knight, 1996, and Owlia & Aspinwall, 1996).

There is also an assumption that knowledge may not directly lead to practicing action research and yet, change and improvement may happen as a result of informal interactions of the staffs. (See the broken arrows in Figure 2). This case of course, is not the main concern of this study, rather an ancillary issue.

On the basis of the Framework of the study and the discussions made, the following five basic questions have been formulated for investigation.

1. Do EFL teachers in Ethiopian universities have knowledge of and/or about action research?
 - 1.1. Is there correlation between the teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research?
 - 1.2. With which does the observed level of EFL teachers' knowledge align: *Technical rationality*? *Reflective rationality*? Or both?

2. To what extent do EFL teachers practice action research?
 - 2.1. Why?
 - 2.2. Is there correlation between the teachers' knowledge/skills of action research and doing it?
3. To what extent are EFL teachers who practice action research changing/improving (their practices) in the light of the new knowledge gained from the research?
4. What motivating and/or de-motivating environments (policy guidelines, support, and understandings) are there for EFL teachers to be engaged in researching their own classroom practices?
5. How do the different level stakeholders perceive the extent to which action research can enhance the quality of EFL teaching in Ethiopian universities?

The first question aligns with the *interpretivist's* line of thought which advances the notion that human behavior is affected by the knowledge of the social world (Wisker, 2008: 69). In the same vein, I believe that EFL teachers' action research knowledge (theoretical as well as practical) can influence their practice of action research for (re)constructing knowledge rather than recording and assigning it. For Wisker (2008: 256), "interpretive perspective enables an examination of relationships and values in context...." This view, basically advanced by constructivism and critical theorists, has been manifested in the framework and the interconnection of the basic research questions of this study. This is because EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, and change are seen in relation to environmental contexts. Implied within the contexts are the perceptive judgments of the stakeholders about the role of action research for quality language teaching. Consequently, the five basic questions can be grouped to three patterns.

First, questions 1 and 2 form a pair as they deal with EFL teachers' action research knowledge and practice, both of which are interrelated. This is because EFL teachers' classroom decisions, practices and actions are rooted in their personal knowing (I-knowing), intentions in their minds, and their explicit knowledge and the likely changes evident in their actions. Equally, their knowledge is derived from their practice. Such a practice, which is informed by their knowledge in an ongoing process, is a cornerstone of action research (McNiff, 2002a: 102; O'Brien, 2001). This truth reminds me of Noffke and Somekh's (2009) words: "...how we think influences what we do...after a dynamically

relational form of logic that enables the thinker to appreciate the ecological nature of the transformational relationships between what goes on in the individual mind and what goes on in the social world" (P. 314).

Consequently, the level of EFL teachers' action research knowledge serves as a surface symptom to surmise their level of practicing it purposefully. Inherent in this line of thought is the fact that the teachers' knowledge involves their 'whole-body practice' beyond cognitive activity. Considering the teachers' claim to knowledge, therefore, does not mean to study their brain, rather considering what they claim they can do to inform their practices (McNiff (2002a: 106).

The assumption for the pair (questions 1 and 2) advances the notion of EFL teachers' empowerment as practical knowledge makers rather than simply as consumers and venders of knowledge produced elsewhere. In this line of thought, the pair aligns both with *Constructivism*, which is a pragmatic perspective based on the belief that people can create knowledge to fill a practical need; and *Empiricism*, which supports the notion that we know the world via our experience. To this effect, the study upholds the view that teachers can access their implicit and tacit knowledge through action research approaches, and recapitulate their received knowledge (research-based theories and techniques), and experiential knowledge (the development of knowledge-in-action) (Mann, nd). In the same vein, as there is close relationship between rationality and knowledge, the pair partly concurs with the view of *Rationalism* or *mentalism* which asserts that knowledge is derived from the logical power of the mind (human reasoning) (Flint, 2003).

Second, questions 3 and 4 also form a pair as they deal with the investigation of the power of the EFL teachers' action research knowledge and practice to result in learning, and understanding to bring the teachers' improvement in thinking and action within the environmental context of teaching EFL. The pair entails the inevitability of the research aspect of action research (learning and understanding). It, nonetheless, implies the action aspect (change) as hoped for, but not essential outcome of the current study. Even though suggesting for intervention by way of deriving some implications are a core agenda of the

study, working to bring change instantaneously is beyond the scope of the current research. This is because change entails investing many talents and much effort in a specifically enabling environment and time.

Environment implies “a dual commitment in action research to study a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction” (O'Brien, 2001, citing Gilmore, Krantz & Ramirez, 1986:161). The current research has examined the environments that might have influenced the observed and/or claimed level of practices of action research positively or negatively and has suggested some change by way of the implications (see Chapter Six Section 6.6). Whereas the negatively influencing environments might have been sensed as painful experiences of the level of action research practices in EFL classrooms and also might have served as hidden opportunities, the positive aspects might have offered possibilities for enabling action and improvement of the practices and prospects of action research in EFL classrooms of Ethiopian universities.

Thirdly, the perceptions of the different level stakeholders about the roles and purposes of action research for quality language teaching has direct or indirect effect on the improvement of the intended practices and the development of the practitioners as well. This underscores the need for consideration of the relative consent of all concerned parties (customer satisfaction) to bring effective change in practice and quality in line with their interests, needs, priorities, requirements, values and views about quality-‘fitness for purpose’ and ‘fitness of purpose’ (what the purpose needs to be). This is because quality with its indicators is a matter of finding the middle ground apposite for the parties involved in and /or affected by the observed practices in classrooms (Firdissa, 2007a; 2006).

In sum, whereas the Conceptual Framework is underpinned mainly by the post-positivist paradigms, reflective rationality and pragmatic constructivism; attempt has been made to use this research as a transient from my previously more of positivist outlook to the current approach. Consequently, the current research is not entirely free from positivist paradigms. Dominantly, nonetheless, the Conceptual Framework, following the post-positivist

paradigms, underpins the research methodology; and the research questions on EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change, environment, and perceived roles of action research for quality EFL teaching. Equally, the research methodology and the data generated from different subjects have enlivened and enabled the Conceptual Framework.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH SETTING AND CONTEXT

2.1. Introduction

The research took place in five Ethiopian public universities. Whereas the pilot study was conducted at Jima and Hawassa Universities, the main study was carried out at Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar, and Haramaya Universities. This Chapter, thus, presents a brief account of the Ethiopian context, education, HEIs, and the English language and action research.

2.2. Ethiopia: Country Context

Ethiopia is located in the horn of Africa between 3 and 5 degrees north latitude and 33 and 48 degrees east longitude within a total area of about 1.1 million square kilometers. It is bordered by Eritrea in the North and North East, Djibouti and Somalia in the East, Kenya in the South, and Sudan in the West and South West (see Appendix 12). The topographic features of the country range from the highest peak, Ras Dashen (4,550 meters above sea level) in the north east down to the Affar Depression at 110 meters below sea level in the east. The climatic condition of the country varies with the topography, ranging from 47°C (116.6°F) to 10°C (50°F). The capital city of the country is Addis Ababa, which was founded in 1889. Currently the City has a population of around 3 million people out of the total 77,127,000 population of the country (CSAE, 2007).

Ethiopia is the home to about 80 ethnic groups that vary in population size from 1000 to about 30 million persons. It is, therefore, a multilingual, multicultural, and multi-ethnic country with a great variety of languages. Around 80 to 83 languages are spoken with 200 dialects. Whereas English is the most widely used foreign language (as a medium of instruction particularly at tertiary and secondary education), *Amharic*, *Afan Oromo*, and *Tigrigna* are the major languages.

Ethiopia uses the Julian calendar, which consists of twelve months of thirty days and a thirteenth month of five days (six days in a leap year). The New Year of the country is in the month of September. The calendar is seven years behind the western or Gregorian

calendar. The local currency is Ethiopian Birr, one of which equals 0.13324 US \$ (February 10, 2010, data from Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, Arat Kilo Branch).

Agriculture is the backbone of the country's economy. The principal exports from the sector are coffee, oil seeds, vegetables, sugar and flowers. About 90% of the population earns their living from land, mainly as subsistence farmers. The country has among the highest fertility, infant mortality, and maternal death rates in the world (Adriance, 2007).

2.3. Ethiopian Education

The Ethiopian Education has both traditional and modern features. Whereas the traditional one has religious elements, modern education in Ethiopia has both African and world features, remarkably Western Education system.

2.3.1. Traditional Education in Ethiopia

Traditional education has been supported and enhanced by home, the society, the Church and the Mosque. Particularly the Church (after the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia in the 4th century A.D) and the Mosque (after the flourishing of the civilization of the Arabs from the 7th to the 15th centuries) made contributions to educational development in the country. These two religious institutions have comparable curricular issues- structures, objectives, and contents. (For detail, see Appendix 10).

2.3.2. Modern Education in Ethiopia

Modern western public education came to the country in the beginning of the 20th century (1908) with the establishment of the Menelik II School. Since its introduction, the Ethiopian education as a system passed different impetus - sometimes progressing other times regressing at different times, notably, from 1908-1935, 1936-1941, 1942-1950, 1950-1974, 1974-1991, 1991-to-date.

2.3.2.1. The Ethiopian Education from 1908 to 1935

This period covers from the introduction of modern education to Ethiopia up to the Italian invasion. It was during this period that the second modern school in Ethiopia, *Tafari Mekonnen School* was formally inaugurated on 27 April 1925. Next Menen School was opened in 1931 (MoE & FA, 1961). In 1932, Ambo and Jima schools followed suit while in 1934 a teacher training school, where French was the medium of instruction, was founded in Addis Ababa. In the same year, Gonder and Debremarkos and in 1935 Adwa and Mekele schools were founded.

By 1935, a school of Orphans, which included in its curriculum handicraft such as leatherwork and rope making, and two more primary schools with instruction in French, had been opened in the Capital. Close by, at Holleta, a military Academy was opened.

Overall, internal and external forces activated the introduction of modern education in Ethiopia. Internally, to provide educated Ethiopians who could speak foreign languages and serve as interpreters, diplomats, and modern administrative personnel. It was also sought to produce citizens who would be loyal to the Ruler and the country; the emphasis that might have been derived from the Swedish and American Mission schools. Externally, the world development and trends pressurized the country to open opportunities for the citizens. In both cases, the objectives of education during the early times were influenced by the orientations from Egypt (1908-1924), French (1925-1935), and the Swedish and American mission schools (which remained up until 1950). The main emphasis of the period was, therefore, teaching foreign languages as they had pragmatic functions.

2.3.2.2. The Ethiopian Education from 1936 - 1941

The five - year Italian occupation (1936-1941) seriously disrupted the educational system that had just begun to emerge. Whereas many of the then available schools were either closed down or were taken over for military purposes, other Italian- oriented elementary schools (grades 1-4) were opened. Some changes were also made on the medium of instruction. The Italian language (using interpreters), and Amharic, Afan Oromo,

Tigrigna, Harari, Sidama, Somali, and Arabic (in Muslim areas) were used as media of instruction. After the 5 years distraction by the Italians, Ethiopia was liberated in 1941 and the British oriented education was introduced to the country (Edessa 1991:113).

2.3.2.3. The Ethiopian Education from 1942-1950

This period is commonly known as the *British-oriented education in Ethiopia*. This is because the British Government supported Ethiopia to revive the educational provisions that were disrupted during the war. The Ethiopian Government felt that it was beyond the economy and resource of the country to restart the system and to satisfy the demands of the time. The medium of instruction became English starting from the elementary grades. The teaching of English was scaled up along with the rapid expansion of modern education. To be educated was equivalent with being able to speak, read, write, and understand English. The reason for scaling up the English language was pragmatic as it was and is a catalyst in supporting development endeavours. French continued to be given as a subject in limited schools. Italian was offered in Italian supported schools (Hailom, 2009: 5). Final examination (Matriculation) at the end of grade twelve was coming from the universities of Great Britain. Also a structure of six years of elementary and six years of secondary schooling was adopted with the objective of training technicians and professionals who would serve the government and /or the country.

Efforts were made to overcome the major problems of the period: lack of clearly stated educational policy; absence of uniform curricula; shortage of teachers, textbooks, furniture, equipment, and lack of coordination among schools. Consequently, in 1947 a Board of Education was constituted to control future developments, particularly it sought to have formulated a uniform curriculum for the whole country. The efforts resulted in standardizing teaching in different schools in the country (MoE & FA, 1961: 11).

2.3.2.4. The Ethiopian Education from 1950-1974

The period from 1950-1974 is popularly known as *American Oriented Education in Ethiopia*. By the beginning of the 1950's, Ethiopia's relation with Britain was loosened and with the United States was strengthened. Consequently, many Ethiopians got chances to study in USA at different times mainly by two Programmes: *Point Four* (from 1951 to 1959) and *Field Service* (1960). The already established University College at Addis Ababa (in 1950) successively grew in capacity. By the mid 1960, the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate (ESLC) had become the only valid diploma in the country and the *General Certificate* from Britain ceased.

During the 1950's and 1960's the broad policy of the Ethiopian Government with regard to education was two fold: a) to see that every Ethiopian, irrespective of class or sex, receives at least education that could prepare individuals for responsibilities and to enjoy benefits obtainable only through literacy and basic general knowledge; and b) to provide sufficient trained personnel to: i) Government and commercial services; ii) operate technical activities; iii) produce works of scholarship and art; and iv) generally to perform all those functions which characterize a progressive and developing country (MoE & FA, 1961:12).

Concomitant with the policy, the structure of the education system was changed from (6+6) to (8+4) whereby the first eight years were designated as Elementary (4 years primary and 4 years Middle schools), and the next four years as post elementary education. After 1963, nonetheless, the grade structure was changed from the 8+4 year combination to six years of primary school, followed by two years of junior secondary and a four-year secondary program, that is, a 6+2+4 year combination. With the new structure, Amharic became the only language of instruction at the primary level (1-6) for the first time (MoE & FA, 1961; Edessa, 1991; Tekeste, 1996).

The changes and reforms made, nonetheless, could not stop the long-standing challenges, which internally and externally, caused dissatisfactions pertaining to irrelevancy of curriculum, low quality and quantity of teachers, the problem of employment facing

secondary school graduates, and poor performance to achieve universal literacy by 1980 (a pledge entered at the Conference on African Education held in Addis Ababa in 1961). As a response to the dissatisfactions, the Imperial Government made one of its most daring policy decisions, particularly to conduct a thorough review of the Education Sector Review (ESR), which was officially constituted in October 1971 with the aim of analyzing the education and training system, identifying and suggesting priority areas and resources to expand and improve the system, and finding ways to investments in education and training.

ESR had a brief existence (1971 to 1972). It, with the then crisis of the education sector, had been cut short by the successive waves of national strikes that began early in 1974 and continued unabated until the overthrow of the Imperial system in September 1974 (Tekeste, 1996:107, Edessa, 1991).

2.3.2.5. Ethiopian Education from 1974 - 1991

The Ethiopian education from 1974-1991 was socialist-oriented, based on the *National Democratic Revolution* (declared in April 1976). Among others, the system had such policies as: equal rights of education for all members of the society; education for 'all-sided personality'; and general and compulsory education for all children of the society.

Concomitantly, efforts were made to achieve the objectives of education for *production*, for *scientific inquiry*, and for *socialist consciousness*. These objectives as well as the above policies were based on the fundamental principles of socialist education. Consequently, the contents of education focused on ideological, moral, intellectual, polytechnic, aesthetic, and physical aspects of education.

Next in 1980, the Ministry of Education produced a five-volume document named the *General Directives of Ethiopian Education*. The document further elaborated the view of education expansion, and implementation strategies stipulated in the *National Democratic Revolution*. Consequently up until 1982, junior and secondary school enrolment expanded well beyond the absorption capacity of the economy. The quality of education was, nonetheless, jeopardized. Cognizant of this fact, the Government passed a resolution in

1983 to review the formal education system in the country and MoE initiated a project called the *Evaluative Research of the General Education System in Ethiopia* (ERGESE). The project made a general evaluation of the status of primary and secondary schooling in 1984 and produced findings and recommendations. Though efforts were made according to the findings and recommendations, they did not avert internal and external grievances about the inefficiencies, mismanagement, and bigotry of the education system in particular and the overall governance of the regime in general. As a result, the overall dissatisfactions led to overthrow of the socialist-oriented Dergue regime in early 1991.

2.3.2.6. The Ethiopian Education Since 1991

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) has adopted an Education and Training Policy in 1994 and is implementing it. The Policy has resulted in restructuring the education system based on the following general objectives:

1. Develop the physical and mental potential and the problem-solving capacity of individuals by expanding education and in particular by providing basic education for all.
2. Bringing up citizens who: a) can take care of and utilize resources wisely; and b) are trained in various skills, by raising the private and social benefit of education.
3. Bring up citizens who respect human rights, stand for the well-being of people, as well as for equality, justice and peace, endowed with democratic culture and discipline.
4. Bring up citizens who differentiate harmful practices from useful ones, who seek and stand for truth, appreciate aesthetics and show positive attitude towards the development and dissemination of science and technology in society.
5. Cultivate the cognitive, creative, productive and appreciative potential of citizens by appropriately relating education to environment and societal needs (TGE, 1994: 7-8).

Within the framework of these general objectives, 15 specific objectives have been stipulated in the policy document. Similarly, issues pertaining to curriculum; educational

structure; measurement and examinations; teachers; language and education; nexus among education, training, research and development; educational support inputs; organization, management and finance have been addressed under the 'overall strategy' of the policy document (TGE, 1994: 12-32; FDRE, 1994: 19). Consequently, the education structure, which was 6+2+4, has been changed to 8+ 4 (4+4+2+2) combinations (TGE, 1994:14-15; FDRE, 1994: 14). Concomitantly, nationality languages have become the media of instruction at kindergarten, primary education, and teacher training institutes of the respective nationalities.

2.4. The Ethiopian HEIs and the English Language

2.4.1. Historical Accounts and Progressions

Although the Western type modern education had been introduced to Ethiopia in 1908, it took 42 years to launch the University College of Addis Ababa on March 20, 1950. Within the following decade, the College of Agriculture at Alamaya (now Haramaya University), the College of Engineering, the Institute of Building Technology, and Theological College of the Holy Trinity in Addis Ababa; and the Gondar Public Health College (now University of Gondar) were opened. In February 1961, a Charter brought all these faculties and colleges together to form the Haile Sellassie I University (HSIU), and at the inauguration ceremonies on December 18, 1961, the former palace ground (Sidist Kilo) became the Main Campus of the University.

As of 1962/63, the Faculty of Education, the School of Social Work, the College of Business Administration, the School of Law and the Faculty of Medicine were established. In 1963, the Division of Continuing Education, incorporating the extension sections of the University and the Engineering College in Addis Ababa, expanded its activities.

As of 1974, many of the programs in Education, Social Work and Arts were restructured following the revision of curricula designed to reflect the principles of socialism. New colleges and faculties were opened and existing ones expanded. The Bahir Dar Teacher's College (now Bahr Dar University), the Junior Agriculture College at Awassa (now part of

Hawassa University) and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Debre Zeit were opened and reorganized. The Medical Faculty in Addis Ababa was expanded; the Gondar Public Health College was raised to College of Medical Sciences.

In spite of all the reforms and endeavors made so far, however, the Ethiopian education system has not gone far from producing graduates of dubious quality programs. Particularly in the recent years, the Ethiopian education system in general and tertiary level in particular has been criticized for low quality. Unprecedented rapid expansion at tertiary level have brought poorly prepared students into the system, scarcity of resources, and low proportion of qualified and committed academic staff.

Currently in Ethiopia, there are 22 public universities (see Appendix 9). Among these, nine were functioning before 2005/06 (the time when this research was launched) whereas the rest have newly emerged due to the need for higher education expansion in the country. Particularly, AAU, BDU, and HarU are the forerunners in the history of teacher education including TEFL in Ethiopia. TEFL in Ethiopian HEIs has long history and profound basis. It has utilized the British (1942-1950) and the American (1950-1974) experiences. Whereas the British period paved the way following the end of the Second World War and Ethiopian liberation from Italian invasion, the American period scaled up the growth of the English language and expanded opportunities for many Ethiopians to study abroad. Also many American educators had come to teach and render different services in Ethiopian HEIs whereby English language was re-strengthened. American political, cultural and strategic interests in Ethiopia and the Red Sea strengthened the position of English (Hailom, 2009: 5).

Recently, however, the quality of education in general and TEFL in particular has declined. The reason could be the rapid expansion of HEIs which has resulted in enrolling poorly prepared students and scarcity of qualified manpower, facilities, and instructional materials. The case in turn has called for an urgent need to enhance the English language ability of both teachers and students at all levels. To this end, English Language Improvement Program (ELIP) was launched in 2002 with an overall goal of improving the

quality of teaching in the Ethiopian education system by “bringing about a significant improvement in the English language competences of all teachers in the Ethiopian education system by raising their language proficiency in relation to their professional needs as teachers (ELIP, P.1; MoE, 2005: 1). To coordinate the activities of ELIP, a department: ‘English Language Improvement Department (ELID)’ has been established in the premises of MoE as of 2006. Also English Language Improvement Center (ELIC) has been established at all the nine public universities.

Currently, English Language is given as a field of study in almost all the universities. The interest here is on the nine already functioning public universities.

Table 1. The Nine Universities and Years of Commencing TEFL

No	University	year
1	Addis Ababa University (as UCA)	1950
2	Bahir Dar University	
	a) Diploma (12+2) plus minor degree	1972
	b) Degree	1999
3	Haramaya University	1996
4	Jima University	2001/02
5	Hawassa University	2002/03
6	Arba Minch University	2003/03
7	Mekelle University	2004/05
8	University of Gondar	2004/05
9	Adama University	2006/07

As can be seen from Table 1, Addis Ababa University is a pioneer Institute in the country followed by Bahir Dar, Haramaya, Jima, and Hawassa Universities in commencing English language as a field of study. That is why the first three universities have been selected for the mainline study, whereas pilot study was conducted at the next two - Jimma and Hawassa Universities. The first three universities (Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar, and Haramaya) have been briefly discussed hereunder in the context of TEFL.

2.4.2. Addis Ababa University (AAU)

Addis Ababa University, the oldest and leading institution of higher education in Ethiopia, is located in the capital city of the country. It started with an initial name “University

College of Addis Ababa" (UCA) on March 20, 1950. Then, following the 1961 Charter to bring all the then HEIs together, UCA was renamed Haileselassie I University in 1962 and has become Addis Ababa University since 1975. The University has been the focus of many key changes in the country.

UCA started its operations as a two-year College with the Faculties of Arts and Science and an enrolling capacity of 33 students. Whereas training programs in Diploma, bachelor degree and different professional certifications commenced soon after the establishment of the College, the first MSc and PhD programs were launched in 1979 and 1987 respectively. The University is now engaged in a mission to enlarge the nation's capacity in higher education. It, therefore, constitutes nearly 90% of the country's capacity to provide post-graduate education (World Bank. 2003: 55; 58).

Currently, the University runs 115 Masters, 42 PhD, 74 BA/BSc, 14 Clinical Specialty, 6 Sub-specialty, 1 Specialty Diploma, 1 Postgraduate Certificate, and 1 Postgraduate Diploma. It also offers different tailor-made training programs. The University strives to enhance the quality of teaching, research, and scholarship, creative application of existing knowledge and provision of services to the community. To this end, AAU has a vision "to promote excellence in the production, growth and dissemination of advanced scientific knowledge through teaching and research..." (AAU, 2007: 1).

Administratively, the University is led by a President and 5 Vice Presidents: *Academic Vice President; Vice President for Research and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies; Vice President for Business and Development; Vice President for External Relations, Strategic Partnerships and Planning; and Executive Director of College of Health Sciences* (with the rank of Vice President). Parallel to the rank of Vice President is also *Governing Boards of Institutes of Technology* (See Appendix 11). There are also 6 chief academic officers, 2 chief managing officers, 29 directors, 21 deans, 3 associate deans, a librarian, a registrar, and a chief executive officer (CEO) at Tikur Anbessa Hospital.

AAU has nine campuses, seven of which are in the capital city of the country, Addis Ababa, within 8 Km of the main campus. Two campuses are at Debrezeit and Akaki (south of Addis Ababa) at a distance of 45 Km and 25 Km respectively from the center.

The official and instructional language at the University is English. English has also remained a field of study since the establishment of the University College of Addis Ababa in 1950. By then, a two-man Department of English was situated at Arat Kilo within the Faculty of Arts, which, together with the Faculty of science, constituted the University College (ILS, 2004: 10). In 1961 the Department of English, still under the faculty of Arts, was brought into Haile Sellassie I University, Sidist kilo campus.

When the Institute of Language Studies (ILS) was established in 1978, the former English Department became Department of Foreign Languages and Literature (DFLL) and remained until now. The Department used to offer BA degree in English and non-credit certificate level trainings in Arabic, French, German, Italian, and Russian. In addition to the training of teachers, DFLL catered for those who would join the non-teaching professions after 1986. The objectives of the two streams at the BA degree level, therefore, were to train teachers of English for senior secondary schools and colleges of higher learning and professionals in the use of English for mass communication. The teaching stream has been the major undertaking of the Department for many years resulting in launching MA and split PhD programs both in TEFL and literature in 1978 and 1988 respectively. Whereas the MA has been full in-house as of its establishment, the PhD was split up until "it has been replaced by a full in-house PhD starting from 2002/2003 academic year" (ILS, 2004: 11).

As of the beginning of 2003/04 academic year, the teaching stream has been taken over by the College of Education and named *English Language Education* (ELE). All the programs commenced earlier, however, are still run by DFLL, which still continued offering applied courses. ELE, therefore, focused on the pedagogical trainings by admitting students by itself rather than taking the package from DFLL.

2.4.3. Bahir Dar University (BDU)

Bahir Dar University is located in Bahir Dar town of the Amhara Regional state which is 565 km northwest of Addis Ababa. Historically, BDU is the second next to Addis Ababa

University in offering Teacher Education programs whereby English as a field of study was one. The history of the Department of English Language at BDU dates back to the history of Bahir Dar Teachers' College (BDTC) following the establishment of the Academy of Pedagogy in 1972. The Department started giving courses at a 12+2 Diploma to train teachers for junior schools and minor BA level to train teachers for senior secondary schools and TTIs.

Bahir Dar University was inaugurated in May 2001 when Bahir Dar Teachers College and Bahir Dar Polytechnic Institute amalgamated to become the Education and Engineering Faculties, respectively, of the new University. Bahir Dar Polytechnic Institute and Bahir Dar Teachers College were functional as of 1963 and 1972 respectively. Currently, BDU is offering degree courses in the regular program and degree and diploma level courses in the evening program. It also offers on-job degree courses in the summer for high school teachers. MA program in TEFL, and Literature was launched in the 2005/6 academic year; and in other fields recently (Bahir Dar, 2007).

2.4.4. Haramaya University (HarU)

Haramaya University is located at 510 Km from Addis Ababa in the Eastern Hararghe Zone of Oromia Regional State, at a distance of about 20 km and 40 km from the two nearby towns: Harar and Dire Dawa respectively. Currently, the University is running 30 programs at PhD, MSc/MA, BSc and Diploma levels. Historically, Haramaya University had been one of the three universities in Ethiopia prior to 1991, namely, Addis Ababa University, Haromaya University (formerly named Alemaya University) and Asmara University (currently belongs to Eritrea).

Alemaya University was initiated in September 1953 with the establishing of *Alemaya College* as higher learning institute in agricultural sciences. On May 27, 1985 the College was upgraded to a full-fledged University of Agriculture. On 18 August, 1994 the council of Ministers issued a regulation to provide for the reorganization of the University as an autonomous Higher Education institution having its own legal personality governed by a Board. In late 1999, it was renamed (by the Board) as 'Haramaya University'. The change

of the name has historical rationale and has come with the transformation of the University from a purely agricultural to a multi-disciplinary University.

Currently Haramaya University offers Teacher Education programs in Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, and English as a field of study particularly since 1996; and the Oromo Language as of 2002. Particularly two events created fertile ground to commence English as a field of study in 1996 at the University: the upgrading of the Division of Natural and Social Sciences to the Faculty of Education of the University as of 1996/97 academic year and the establishment of the Department of English in the same year. One of the aims was to train high school teachers in natural sciences, language and social sciences academic streams. Previously, English Department was just a service-rendering unit for other departments under the Division of Natural and Social Sciences.

To date, the Department of English at Haramaya University has contributed a lot towards the objectives of the University to raise the standard of English in the country. First and foremost, the Department has produced a number of graduates for junior and secondary schools, both at the diploma and degree levels through its regular, distance and summer programs. Besides this, it has been offering several academic and general English skills improvement courses across the several faculties of the university (Haramaya University, 2007).

2.5. Action Research in Ethiopian HEIs

Action research is a recent phenomenon in Ethiopian education system in general and in education of teachers in particular. Whereas there have been several studies carried out on action research by different individuals (see Chapter Three, Section 3.9), action research in a coordinated effort and deliberative manner in teacher education programs has come with the launching of *Higher Diploma Program* (HDP) in 2003 at all HEIs in Ethiopia.

HDP is a nationally initiated program for teacher educators in Ethiopian HEIs with a purpose to improve the quality of education through a licensing training program that would develop the skills and professionalism of teacher educators. Consequently, HDP is

now a compulsory certification for all teacher educators and is run in every Teacher Education Institution (TEI) in the country. It is a practical program and takes one academic year to complete, alongside the candidates' teaching commitments whereby the candidates may get 50% load reduction at their respective departments.

The Program has a Handbook/portfolio, prepared at national level to maintain standards. The Handbook contains information and procedures required for its delivery and completion. The contents and activities in the Handbook have been categorized under four interactive Modules, namely, *Module 1: The Reflective Teacher Educator*; *Module 2: Developing Active Learning*; *Module 3: Improving Assessment*; and *Module 4: Action Research, Making a Difference*.

The Module on Action Research intends to enable teachers in TEIs to understand and to practice action research by identifying problems that need solutions, and taking specific action to implement the possible solutions. To this end, candidates are required to complete an action research project (individually or in group) with the aim of improving an aspect of their practices. Different stakeholders take part in the implementation of the HDP, among others, Higher Diploma Leaders (HDLs), Tutors (HDTs), candidates, TEI leadership, VSOs and the Ministry of Education.

Overall, the program is delivered through a school placement, lesson observations and feedback and working on the four Modules, each of which is divided into sessions using active learning and continuous assessment.

2.6. Chapter Summary

The Chapter has briefly discussed an account of the country's context, education, HEIs and the English language, and action research. It has been indicated that Ethiopia is a multilingual, multicultural and a multi-ethnic country with a great variety of languages. It has also been presented that the country's education has both traditional and modern features. Whereas the Church and Mosque as traditional institutions could be credited for making contributions to educational development in the country, many events also deserve

recognition for the commencement of modern education in 1908 with the establishment of Menelik II School and its progressions passing different momentums of ups and downs at different times, notably, from 1908-1935 (early foundational developments), 1936-1941 (Italian-oriented education in Ethiopia), 1942-1950 (British-oriented education in Ethiopia), 1950-1974 (American-Oriented Education in Ethiopia), 1974-1991 (socialist-oriented education in Ethiopia), and 1991-to-date (Education System of FDRE which espouses for inculcating democratic culture and discipline).

Whereas English language is currently given as a field of study in all the universities in the country, Addis Ababa, BahirDar, Haramaya, Jimma, and Hawassa Universities were the pioneers in commencing English as a field of study respectively in 1950, 1972, 1996, 2001, and 2002. That is why the first three Universities have been selected for the mainline study, whereas the next two- Jimma and Hawassa Universities have been taken for the pilot study. Furthermore, it has been argued that action research is a recent phenomenon in Ethiopian education system in general and in education of teachers in particular.

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

3.1. Introduction

This Chapter presents a review of literature related to the study. In writing this Chapter, I had two main purposes to: a) understand relevant theories that might provide underpinning perspectives and ideas for my line of thought in the course of the research work, and b) to envision how my work could contribute to the existing knowledge and meaning in the area. Whereas the first purpose served to provide theoretical and empirical backstage to the study, the second served to drive some implications of the research findings. Accordingly, action research conceptions, importance, characteristics, dimensions, principles, foundations, places within the typologies of research approaches, validations, knowledge implications for quality language teaching; and empirical findings on action research have been reviewed.

3.2. Concepts and Importance of Action Research

Over the years, different people have developed various conceptual interpretations characterizing action research. Some of them used to prioritize technical aspects in action research, believing that it is important to get the method right. Others are interested in the values that underlie action research: a belief that practitioners should be in control of their work and the way they conduct that work, and how research can lead to live one's own values. Still some others conceive action research based on its purposes, its processes, and the nature of its participants. These different perspectives generate vivacious debates all implying flexibility, practitioner empowerment and commitment for learning and change. This section, therefore, deals with the concepts and importance of action research.

3.2.1. The Concepts of Action Research

As hinted above, action research is conceived differently by different writers, under different contexts and at different times. Whereas 'school-based research' could be a generic term for 'action research', it is also known by many other names such as teacher

research, practitioner inquiry, teacher professional development, teacher as researcher, and teacher self-evaluation (Gay & Airasian, 2000: 593, 603). The reasons for naming it differently could be due to: a) the settings and processes of action research are dynamic; b) the philosophy, perspectives, and experiences of the researchers; c) the contexts in which action research is sought may vary; d) the theory motivating the research; and e) objective factors such as the conditions under which the research is being conducted and the question being investigated. These, however, do not prohibit finding some conceptions that have relevance to the study.

In traditional sense action research is considered as simple and routine activities of teachers in their classrooms. Current developments, nonetheless, show that it "is not the usual thing that teachers do when thinking about teaching"; it is planned, more systematic and more collaborative (Mertler, 2009:19). In this sense, action research is a deliberate and systematic endeavor by the self into the self. The word 'self' may mean individual- or collective- self. Both individual and collective selves, nonetheless, have symbiotic relationships. This is because, whereas action research inevitably involves "working with other people to discuss, plan, test, retry, and ensure validity, and so on" (Wisker, 2008:231); the level of individual empowerment, commitment and efforts are central for its success.

Currently, action research is viewed as: a) any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others with vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn (Mertler, 2009: 27, 241); b) a disciplined enquiry whereby a practitioner systematically investigates how to improve practice and produce evidence for the critical scrutiny of others to show how the practice can be judged to have been improved (McNiff, 2002a: 103); c) a research conducted by practitioners in applied fields (teaching, counseling, etc) for the purpose of solving a specific problem (Suter, 2006); d) a practical activity of a practitioner within the environment in which he/she works (Moon,1999: 36); and e) an experientially based and usually set up to try and solve a problem, or try out a hypothesis that could improve a practical situation (Wisker, 2008: 74).

More broadly, Walker (2009: 310) views action research as a methodology for development and change. It can also be viewed as engaging with opportunities and constraints in local contexts, using academic and local theoretical understandings and reflexive sensitivities to create possibilities for varied understandings of the term 'improvement' (Noffke & Somekh, 2009: 525). Inasmuch as action research "is based on a way of seeing the world that invests in practice, engagement, change, collaboration, ongoing development and ownership", it can be viewed as a methodology (Wisker, 2008: 228-229). This conception in turn calls for viewing action research "as a channel for voicing multiple educational perspectives and ideologies and for managing divergence and duality in differing teaching contexts" (Keiny & Orland-Barak, 2009:166). In line of this thought, "action research is not only a means of conducting classroom-based research. It is also a mechanism for engaging teachers in reflective practice and customizing professional development opportunities in order to capitalize on the unique interests of individual teachers or teams of teachers." Action research is, therefore, "about reflexivity: about theory-in-practice aimed at changing social practices and relations, provoking reflection on how well the change effort is working, followed by rethinking/ re-practicing" (Zipin & Hattan, 2009: 518)

A Reflection is, therefore, an integral aspect of action research. In support of this view, Lomax (1996:138) views action research as including a strong tradition of critical reflection on one's own values and actions. Similarly, Mertler (2009: 27) indicates, "[t]eacher reflection is an integral part of action research". It is about active learning and is viewed as "learning by doing" whereby individuals or a group of teachers identify a problem, do something to resolve it, see how successful their efforts were, and if not satisfied, they try again (O'Brien, 2001:1).

The above accounts imply that different people define action research in different ways, but the "universally agreed characteristic is that it is research designed to improve action" (Pollard, 2002: 39). It is an approach in which practitioners deal with their clients/customers/students/colleagues- those with whom they work or have been brought to work with – in order to: a) find out if, how and why developmental program or activity is

effective and in what ways; b) try out an idea or an innovation; c) plan about learning or practices; d) solve a problem; e) initiate change; and f) observe and reflect on the consequences of an action (Wisker, 2008: 228).

The above conceptions entail that action research is based in practice, on practice, through practice, and so requires and establishes a more sustained and explicit examination of: decisions, relationships, the knowledge base for decisions, the critical interpretation of evidence/data, and the learning that can be developed from practice (Ibid. P. 232).

In fact, action research is more than the traditional interpretative research in the sense that the researcher is directly involved in the research setting and in the experience itself through systematic inquiry, which results from spiral research cycles, involving processes of identifying a problem area, planning- involving reconnaissance, taking actions, and fact-finding about the results of the action.

Recently, the term action research is conceived as a practical way of looking at one's own individual, professional, and environmental concerns with a purpose of understanding these and causing betterment and /or cope with the demand of the day related to one's professional life. Consequently, it is referred to as practitioner- based research, self-reflective practice, catalyst for reflection and development in professional practice, a systematic inquiry conducted by the self into the self in order to come to some decisions about what one's future practice should be (Noffke & Somekh, 2009; McNiff, 2002b; Burns, 1999). Gay and Airasian (2000: 603) also view action research as "a type of practitioner research that is used to improve the practitioner's practice." This definition aligns with the line of thought by Carr and Kemmis (1986); Kemmis (2007a, b; 1995; 1993); and Kemmis and McTaggart (2005; 1988) whereby action research is viewed as a form of practitioners' self-reflective enquiry undertaken in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of: (a) their own social or educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations in which the practices are carried out.

Inherent in all the conceptions discussed so far are eight basic themes: empowerment of participants; self-reflective practice; collaboration through participation; acquisition of knowledge; change-orientation; a critical dimension involving reflection on the practices and social milieus that surround classrooms; context-specific; and a continuous cyclical or spiral process.

Overall, action research is not a rigidly definable form of practice. The usage of the term varies with time, place, setting or contexts. In this study, it is viewed as a process and practice of investigating and enlightening EFL classroom practices for betterment. It is viewed as a task of EFL teachers to initiate classroom investigation to learn, understand and change their practices following a reflective cycle of: identifying an issue, clarifying, planning, acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning. Consequently, they derive its real meaning as they do the research and explain what they are doing and why they are doing. This in turn enhances their learning, understanding, knowledge, and transforms them and their EFL classroom practices and the performances of all those involved in and affected by the practices. By implication, the different conceptions of action research by different people entail implicitly or explicitly, that it is research designed to improve practices, practitioners and /or to enhance the quality of action.

3.2.2. Importance of Action Research

Different writers acknowledge the purposes of action research for betterment of practices and practitioners. There, however, is a debate on the way these purposes are epitomized. Whereas some view the purpose of action research as observing and describing individuals' action in order to understand how they behave (E-theories), others view it as living, experiencing, and influencing change through the production of descriptions and explanations by individuals themselves to account for their educational practices (I-theories) (McNiff, 2002a). The latter view aligns with current thoughts and practices in the field. It underpins the overall conduct of the current research in general and the way action research roles are valued in particular. In consonance with this view, Mertler (2009: 20-22) presents four broad but vitally important ways in which action research can be used successfully in educational settings: to effectively connect theory to practice, to improve

educational practice, to empower teachers, and as a means for promoting professional growth.

- 1) **Connecting theory to practice:** Action research is a means of connecting theory to practice. It provides one possible solution to bridge the gap between theory/research (e.g. research done by researchers) and practice (classroom situations) by creating a two-way flow of information. In this sense, teaching decisions are shaped by theory and research, and in turn give shape and new directions to educational theory and research (Ibid. P. 21).

By implication, action research helps to narrow down or avoid the gap between (language) theory and practice following a series of steps in which an idea or focus of the study has been identified followed by reconnaissance (observation) and data collection; reflection; and construction of a plan for the overall research work. Equally in the field of language teaching, action research tries to test ideas in practice as a means of increasing knowledge about language curriculum, teaching and learning in particular and professional and policy development as well as institutional improvement in general with the desired outcome of an improvement in the teaching/learning situation.

- 2) **Improvement of classroom practice:** The “main focus of action research is the improvement of classroom practice” (Mertler, 2009: 21). This is because; action research offers a process by which existing practices can be transformed to better ones. This is achieved by allowing “teachers to study their own classrooms – for example, their own instructional methods, their own students, and their own assessments – in order to better understand them and be able to improve their quality or effectiveness” (Ibid. P.4). The issue calls for constant and systematic reflection of teachers on their actions and the consequences of those actions. It, therefore, results in the acquisition of new knowledge as it pertains to the teaching and learning process.

Virtually, teachers deal with individual differences in the same classroom, in different classrooms, and at different times. This is because each human being has different needs, desires, motivations, interests, styles and rates of learning, strengths, weaknesses, perceptions, intelligence, maturity level, and responses to the demands of the society.

Systematic reflection in the form of action research is, therefore, important to provide stimulus for changing and improving practice in order to make it appropriate for the unique individuals with whom teachers work (Ibid. P. 21).

For Wisker (2008: 238), action research is important to cause lasting and useful change in practice and in the practitioner researcher's work place; it can have impact and lead to change; and ensure sustainable development of practices and practitioners. Therefore, action research is viewed as a powerful tool for change and improvement at local levels with the purpose of developing those researched through their involvement and through their subsequent reflections (Wisker, 2008: 231; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000: 226).

By implication, improvement of practitioner's classroom practice and work place depends on the power of action research to identify and solve a problem within the process of the research. In the context of teaching EFL, it contributes both to pedagogical knowledge of the language and to subsequent modification of teachers' teaching practice and their students' learning of the language.

- 3) *Teacher empowerment –teacher as decision maker*: Action research advances the notion of *teacher empowerment –teacher as decision maker*. It 'allows teachers to bring into their classrooms their own unique expertise, talents, and creativity so that they can implement instructional programs to best meet the needs of their students' (Johnson, 2008, cited in Mertler, 2009:21). As Mertler (Ibid) indicates, "[t]eachers are allowed-even encouraged- to take risks and make changes to their instructional practice whenever and wherever they believe it to be appropriate." This thinking, in contrary to the 'standard top-down, administrative-driven leadership', calls for changing the leadership roles as 'facilitators, supporters, and mentors' (Ibid).

Such supportive environment empowers teachers to revisit and to challenge their self-concept, particularly those who view themselves as pawns and dependent on external forces and underestimate their potential contribution, empowerment, and autonomy. It, thus, invites them for:

- a) exploring possibilities for action,

- b) enhancing their self-image as originators, and
- c) developing strategies geared to improve their situations and to enhance change in some aspect of their classrooms with subsequent monitoring of the effects of the change (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993; Richards & Lockhart, 1994: 6, 12; Gregory, 1988; Firdissa. 2006).

4) **Professional growth:** Action research has remained catalyst for professional growth. It is a means of improving teachers' problem-solving skills and their attitudes toward professional development and institutional change, as well as of increasing their confidence and professional self-esteem (Parson & Brown, 2002, cited in Mertler, 2009: 22). Equally, action research affirms the professionalism of teaching by giving teachers a real voice in their own professional development, as opposed to being told by someone else (Schmuck, 1997, cited in Mertler, 2009: 22).

Similarly, Altrichter and Posch (2009: 213) argue that "[a]ction research has some reputation as a powerful strategy for professional development of teachers and other professional practitioners". These authors are of the opinion that action research helps and stimulates individuals or groups of professionals who are keen on learning about and changing their practice to: a) develop aspects and instances of their practice in order to better understand them and to elaborate their professional knowledge and competences; b) build up supportive networks which give them some backing when they try to bring their improved knowledge and competences to their home organization; and c) to change thinking, styles and conditions of work in their classrooms in particular and in their institutions in general (Ibid). The change in thinking can be considered situated learning'; learning in the workplace and about the workplace; openness to learning is a necessary condition for action research (McNiff, 2002a: 42-43; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000: 228).

In more concrete terms than the above points; Burns (1999: 48-49) has provided five rationales for why EFL teachers need to do action research.

- 1) If TESOL is to enhance its status as a real profession, ESL institutions need a stance, which encourages practitioner research. This provides a base for strengthening the relationships between theory and practice in relation to actual contexts of [language] pedagogy.
- 2) If the field of second and foreign language teaching is to make claims to a recognizable professional field, practitioners within this field would need to be able to make principled statements and judgments about teaching. These judgments need to be based on concepts about curriculum practice, which are shaped, by classroom enquiry and critical reflection. Otherwise bureaucrats or 'experts', whose expertise may be based on the notions of traditional research rather than knowledge of classroom practice, reduce teachers to being simply the unthinking deliverers of the developed curricula.
- 3) Placing greater demands for accountability on educational institutions and teachers in a centralized climate results in eroding teachers' scope for decision-making and autonomy (Apple, 1982, in Burns, 1999: 48) and the danger of teacher 'deskilling' is increased. This, therefore, calls for the need for language teachers to develop practical activities and strategies for self-reflection and critical enquiry to resist this trend.
- 4) In tandem with increasing centralization, in many countries, schools are, paradoxically, being required to undertake local restructuring initiatives, which involve measures such as teacher appraisal, local curriculum evaluation, local responsibility for professional development and school improvement. These requirements may result in piecemeal and fragmented activities which amount to no more than 'tinkering at the edges' of schooling, unless improvement in teaching is integrated with research into classroom practice. There is growing evidence that the most successful school-restructuring initiatives are those that link teaching to whole-school activities (Hopkins 1993, in Burns, 1999: 48).
- 5) Quality measures introduced by government requirements in a number of countries are placing schools and other teaching institutions in insecure funding situations, which often involve competitive tendering processes. In such situations, institutions, which have a strong professional development and curriculum research base, are likely to be in a stronger position to compete successfully for program delivery.

Moreover, Altrich, Posch, and Somekh (1993: 74, 207); McKernan (1996: 30); Wisker (2008: 232); and Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000: 226) have enumerated a number of points that support the rationales for teacher research. Among these, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000: 226) have warned that though the importance of action research is high, action research should not be typified simplistically. Viewing action research simplistically is to distort its complex and multifaceted nature. For Gay and Airasian (200: 603), the main reason teachers engage in action research is to understand and improve their own teaching activities. A Teacher is, therefore, at the center of action research.

Overall, action research:

- a) improves the congruence between theories and practices;
- b) is a basis for problem solving, change and improvement in teachers' definitions of their professional skills, roles, practices, values, beliefs and lives;
- c) enables teachers to research their own practice with whom they work- clients, students, and others; and
- d) increases teachers' feelings of self-worth; views on teaching, schooling and society and confidence; awareness of classroom issues, their dispositions toward reflection.

Action research from the context of the study is, therefore, a disciplined process of inquiry in which language teachers individually or collectively investigate their practices with a purpose of improving their own and their students' learning and enhancing transformation in language teaching policy and practice so that they get empowered to adapt CLT principles to their specific contexts rather than taking them for granted.

3.3. Characteristics and Processes of Action Research

3.3.1 Characteristics of Action Research

A closer look at the discussions on the conceptions and importance of action research in the preceding sub-sections shows that there are many aspects of action research that characterize its 'uniqueness' within the broad range of educational research (Mertler, 2009:18). Many of the aspects characterize it as zigzag and demanding practice. This is because there are times when practitioners move back and forth seeking adjustments, as it does not begin with a fixed hypothesis or questions. It, therefore, follows the

developmental process of identifying an idea, seeing how it goes, and continually checking whether it is in line with what the practitioner(s) wish(es) it to happen. Equally, the scope of action research may be broad or narrow; the issue may be general or specific. Areas that teachers might consider researching include aspects of students' learning (teacher's ability to match the work to their abilities and interests, their learning strategies, their perceptions, their experience, their involvement in learning, developmental issues and so on), teaching issues (changes in classroom organization, patterns of interaction, issues in equal opportunities, time management and so on) or institutional issues (Ashcroft & Foreman-Peck, 1994: 190).

For Day and Townsend (2009: 178-179) there are three characteristics which are regarded as 'identifiers' of action research in the context of professional 'networking': those dealing with participation and voice; collaboration and ownership; and the interface of these with change. In the same vein, Wisker (2008: 23) presents two key features of action research:

- a) The researcher and those being researched are in partnership. The aims, practices, strategies and findings of the research are shared at each stage.
- b) The research often aims to develop those researched through their involvement and through their subsequent reflection.

Furthermore, action research for Mertler (2004) is "characterized as a research that is done by teachers for themselves". This notion characterizes action research as a form of self-study and active participation of the practitioners to do research on themselves, their lives, and their practices in identifying problems, making decisions on actions, and keeping notes of the consequences and is considered both innovators and implementers (McNiff, 2002b; Verma & Mallick, 1999: 91).

Compiling from several sources, Mertler (2009:18) also presents the following list as an attempt to characterize action research:

- a. Action research is a process that improves education by incorporating change;
- b. It is a process involving educators working together to improve their own practices;
- c. It is persuasive and authoritative, since it is done by teachers for teachers;

- d. It is collaborative; that is, it is composed of educators talking and working with other educators in empowering relationships;
- e. It is practical and relevant to classroom teachers, since it allows them direct access to research findings;
- f. It is developing critical reflection about one's teaching;
- g. It is planned, systematic approach to understanding the learning process;
- h. It is a process that requires us to "test" our ideas about education;
- i. It is open-minded;
- j. It is a critical analysis of educational places of work;
- k. It is cyclical process of planning, acting, developing, reflecting, and re-planning;
- l. It is a justification of one's teaching practice.

Even though variations in wordings and expressions are unavoidable, similar characterizing features of action research have been given by different writers, among others, Pollard (2002); Wisker (2008); Elliott (1978a, cited in McKernan, 1996); Kemmis (2007); Carson (2009); Burns (1999); Somekh (1993, in Burns, 1999); Lomax (1996); Altrichter, Posch & Somekh (1993); Gay and Airasian (2000); Dick (2002); Mattsson and Kemmis (2007); Allwright and Bailey (1991); and Firdissa (2009; 2006).

For instance, Kemmis (2007a, b) and others in his circle characterize action research as an approach that opens 'communicative space' beyond the sphere of immediate participants in a project or group. Particularly critical participatory action research initiatives are inclusive, collective, and transformative in nature. A 'communicative space' for Kemmis (email communication, 24 July 2007) means a space that 'is opened up for conversation, discussion, dialogue with other people who may also be concerned to participate in the discussion about a proposed change or the issues that we might want to take into account in deciding what to do'. Kemmis went on discussing:

This is a practical discussion – that is, a discussion about what to do. Discussion or deliberation about what to do may shape and guide what we want to do and what we might decide to do – but the doing itself is separate, and it may turn out to be different from what we had intended, and it might turn out to have unanticipated or unintended consequence. The discussion is the discussion; the doing is the doing. Action research is interested in what is (or should be) done, and what we can learn from observing the process and consequences of what is done.

Similarly, Carson (2009: 347) characterizes action research as an approach that: a) is rooted in the transformative possibilities of personal and collective action; b) is a form of inquiry that uses the experience of being committed to improve some practical aspect of a practical situation as a means for developing our understanding it; and c) is culturally embedded practice, taking somewhat different forms in different countries, positioned differently in relation to national manifestations of political oppressions or opportunity (Ibid. P. 524). The same source (P. 337) indicates that “[t]he defining characteristic of action research is that it involves an attempt to create new understanding through negotiation and implementing improvements in the quality of social practices”.

Above all, action research is a flexible approach in terms of being eclectic and pluralistic in the means (research methods and theories) and ends (improved practice), and in being responsive to the social, cultural and ideological contexts whereby the practitioners find themselves and their personal and professional identities. It is considered as possessing a “chameleon-like quality”. Such quality helps it to be powerful for effecting action, and for maintaining its integrity by meeting the needs of participants and responding to the unpredictability of the social, educational and political settings in which it is exercised and used as well as by their personal and professional values, beliefs and histories (Somekh, 1993, in Burns, 1999; Burns, 1999: 30-32; Lomax, 1996).

For Gay and Airasian (2000: 603), “[a]ction research differs from most other forms of research because it aims to find and correct problem of practice, it is designed, conducted, and interpreted by the teacher researcher, and it is value-based rather than value-neutral in approaching a study”. This implies that action research is characterized as participatory and collaborative practice, usually empowering practitioners who have a stake in the action to have a real say to reflect on their practices being data driven in their daily actions and in how they interpret their successes and failures, and ensures that what it does and how it does it are relevant for all concerned. Such features involve a number of phases, which often recur in a spiral of self-reflective cycle. In the cycle, one issue forms the basis of another whereby addressing one issue rightly generates new questions for further exploration, learning, and change. Equally, specific methods or techniques do not distinguish action research and ‘no one method is preferable and no single approach will

suffice' for carrying out research in second language acquisition (*Selinger & Shohamy, 2007: 258*).

3.3.2. Processes of Action Research

Processes of action research are dynamic, vibrant and lend themselves to different ways of viewing them. Whereas "action research has long been part of research in education, as well as in multiple social science fields", there are "...differences in the processes as well as the purposes of the research" (Noffke, 2009: 6). The same source further indicates:

... some forms highlight new strategies for data collection and analysis which correspond to varied theoretical frameworks underpinning the research, while others look remarkably similar to 'traditional' form of empirical/analytic or interpretive research. Some focus on relatively narrow aspects of classroom work, while others seek connections to larger social visions and social movements. (pp. 6-7)

The above accounts entail variations and flexibility in action research approaches. Flexibility, nonetheless, does not preclude action research from possessing some valid processes. For instance, Mills (2007, cited in Mertler, 2009: 4-5) presents basic process of conducting action research consisting of four steps:

1. Identifying an area of focus;
2. Collecting data;
3. Analyzing and interpreting the data; and
4. Developing a plan of action.

Using almost similar terms as above, Gay and Airasian (2000: 603) also present four steps that characterize action research: problem or topic identification, data gathering, decision making, and resulting action.

The above two cases are somewhat simplified accounts of many action research processes and models. For instance, Wisker (2008: 232) linearly presents the action research processes going beyond the above simplistic accounts as:

Experience – reflect and evaluate – PLAN $\Longrightarrow$ ACT $\Longrightarrow$ OBSERVE $\Longrightarrow$
REFLECT $\Longrightarrow$ REVISED PLAN $\Longrightarrow$ ACT $\Longrightarrow$ OBSERVE $\Longrightarrow$ and so
on.

Similarly, there are some topical broad stages: finding a starting point, clarifying the situation, developing action strategies and putting them into practice, and making teachers knowledge public as illustrated in Figure 3, below.

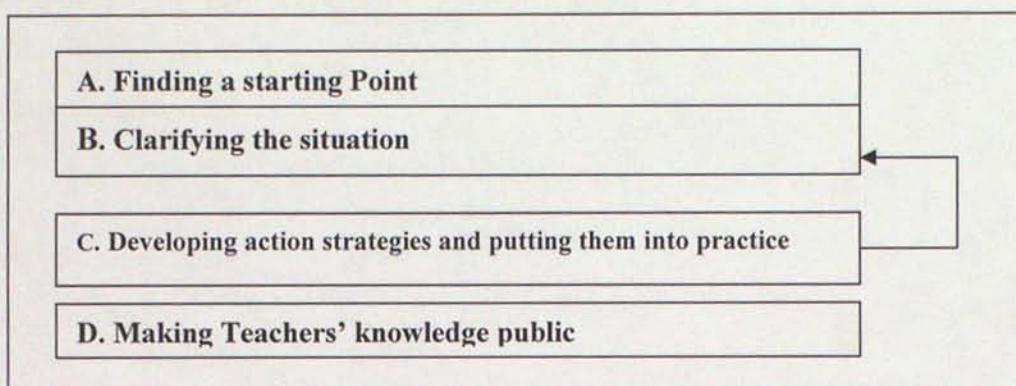


Figure 3. Stages of Action Research Processes (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993: 7)

Stage A of Figure 3 shows that action research begins with the finding of a starting point for development within one's practice and having the will to invest energy in pursuing it. Then, through conversations, interviews and other methods of collecting evidence, and through analysis of the information gained, the situation is clarified (stage B). Consequently, action strategies are developed and put into practice (stage C).

The new action strategies, nonetheless, need not be expected to be panacea for all the problems. They may not solve a problem immediately. This is because their effects and side effects need to be monitored in order to learn from experience and further improve the action strategies. The research process, therefore, enters a new stage of clarification of the situation, which will lead to the development and putting into practice of further action strategies (circular process between Stages B and C).

Teacher-researchers finish their projects by making their professional knowledge accessible to others, for example, by oral presentations to the group in in-service courses; by the production of written case studies; by putting brief accounts of their research results in newsletters, leaflets, brochures, or by publishing in journals or in the form of monograph. By these means, their insights are opened up for critical discussion (stage D in Figure 3) (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993:7).

In the context of higher Education, Wisker (2008: 234) presents a spiral of cycles of action and research as follows.

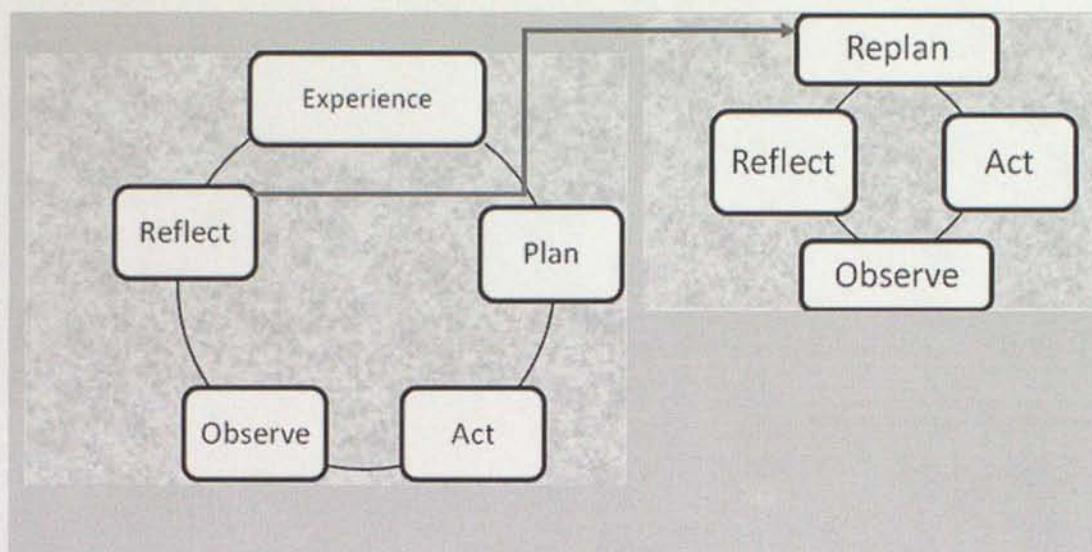


Figure 4. A Spiral of Cycles of Action and Research (adapted from Wisker, 2008: 234)

The Figure depicts that there is no end to the action research process. When one cycle ends, another cycle starts making use of the observations and reflections of the former cycle. In the same vein, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) have developed a model showing self-reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning as the basis for understanding how to take action to improve an educational situation (Figure 5).

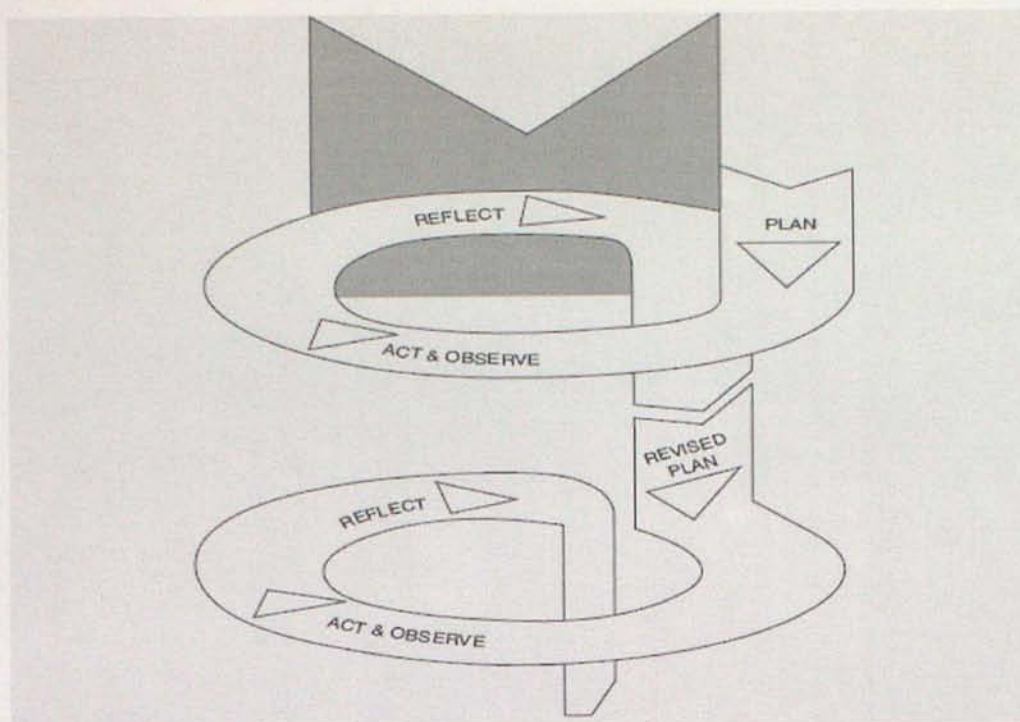


Figure 5. Kemmis' Individual aspect in Action Research Spiral (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005: 564; also email attachment from Kemmis on 24-July-2007).

This Model is adapted and cited in different sources, among others, in McNiff (2002a: 45), Mertler (2009: 15), and O'Brien (2001). On the other hand Mertler (2009: 13-18) credited the Model to 'Bachman (2001)'. Including this Model, which he named as '*Bachman's Action Research Spiral*', Mertler (2009: 13-18) exhaustively reviewed 7 Models, namely, *Stringers' Action Research Interacting Spiral*; *Lewin's Action Research Spiral*; *Calhoun's Action Research Cycle*; *Riel's Action Research Model*; *Piggot-Irvine's Action Research Model*; and *Hendrick's Action Research Process*.

Overall, even though there is no correct order to be stuck with, some cyclical steps are evident in the above discussions on the processes and models.

1. Diagnosing/initial reflection;
2. Identifying an idea/issue/ interest or focus/problem;
3. Limiting and clarifying the selected issue;
4. Seeking knowledge/ reconnaissance or fact-finding;
5. Developing Research plan including questions, designs;

6. Implementing the plan /intervention;
7. Observing the intervention (Evaluating the results of the intervention);
8. Reflecting on the observations;
9. *Developing an action Plan; and*
10. Revising/amending the plan, if necessary (Mertler, 2009: 14; Wisker, 2008: 235; Allwright & Bailey, 1991: 41-45; Noffke & Somekh, 2009; *Ashcroft & Foreman-Peck, 1994:186*; Richards & Lockhart, 1994: 12; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005: 563; Coghlan & Brannick, 2001).

The Processes and/or Models of action research presented so far situate action research in the transformative possibilities of personal and collective actions. The process is triggered by willingness on the part of participants to take action on questions of interest, with a commitment to systematically and continuously observe, reflect and act on what happens as a result of this engagement (Carson, 2009: 347). Equally, though the processes and/or models of action research present a simplified representation of the values, practices, and perspectives implicitly, if not explicitly; they are not free from criticism. This is because, the assumptions that underpin them lack contact with practice, particularly as this shows in: (a) their prescriptive nature, (b) their ignoring of the values base of practices, and (c) their sociological rather than educational perspective (McNiff, 2002a).

3.4. Foundations of Action Research

This section glosses over the epitomizing historical, epistemological, ontological, and methodological back-stages of action research (see Figure 6 below).

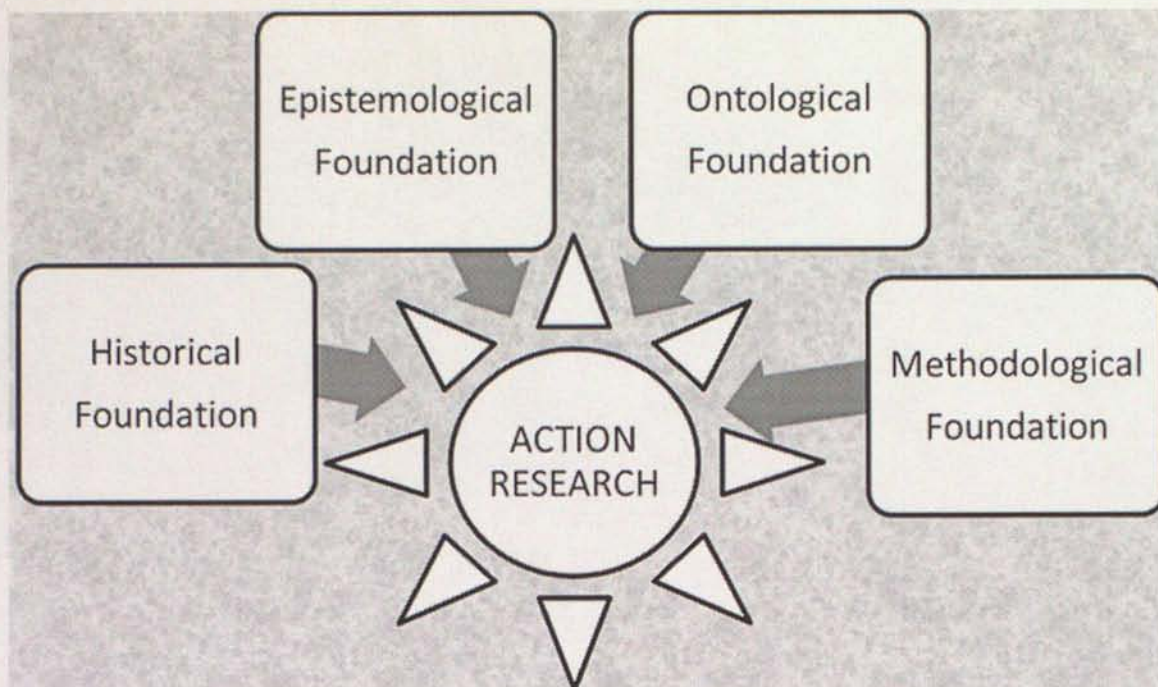


Figure 6. Foundations of Action Research

Figure 6 shows that historical, epistemological, ontological, and methodological foundations underpin the essence of action research. Action research, in turn reflects back on the foundations from philosophical and perspective points of view whereby the foundations are epitomized from the specific context, field, time and space.

3.4.1. Historical Foundation of Action Research

The origin of action research is blurred and is hazy. This is because there are different views to answer a question “where did action research come from?” Whereas Kurt Z. Lewin² (1890 - 1947) is often considered as the originator of action research (Day & Townsend, 2009: 179; Mertler, 2009: 13; Mckernan, 1996: 8), it is also essential to consider earlier works of other educators. This is because; there are evidences of the use of action research by actionists and a number of social reformists prior to Lewin.

² He was a German-American psychologist, known as one of the modern pioneers of social, organizational, and applied psychology; and one of the founders of the Gestalt school.

McKernan (1996: 31) categorizes the works of action researchers into three types: *Type 1- action research tradition* (Dewey³, Corey, Lewin, Taba, and recent Research and development proponents); *Type 2- tradition called 'practical'* (Stenhouse, Elliott); and *Type 3- action research called 'critical'* in that it leans heavily upon the critical theory of the Frankfurt School of philosophy (Carr, Kemmis, Freire, Habermas).

It, nonetheless, seems logical to go beyond this classification by considering other earlier and recent contributors to the field. For the sake of simplicity in this study, the historical development of action research has been categorized into four traditions and/or generations: foundational antecedents; formalizing and transforming it; decline and resurrection; and action research legitimacy and critical interest.

3.4.1.1. The First Generation of Action Research: Foundational Antecedents

This generation includes the precursor efforts and moves that had paved the way for subsequent interests in action research before and in the early 20th century. Particularly the works of Aristotle, J.L. Moreno, John Dewey, John Collier, Kurt Lewin, and *experiences of participatory research* in education have laid foundations for action research. Consequently, the origin of action research can be traced back to Aristotle⁴ (384-322 BC). He 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 and called it "practical deliberation" (Noffke, 2009: 7; Elliott, 1988, in Somekh, 2005).

Many commentators also argue that the seeds of action research are to be found as early as the late nineteenth century in the Science in Education movement and a variety of other social reform initiatives. For instance in describing the 'emergence of action research in Spain', Gomez et al (2009) indicate, "[e]xperiences of participatory research in education have been developed in Spain since the 19th century, promoted by socialist and anarchist

³ *John Dewey (1859 – 1952) was an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer whose ideas have been influential in education and social reform.*

⁴ *The 4th century BC Greek Philosopher, a student of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great .*

currents, although popular movements were aborted during the Civil War [18th July 1936-1975] and quelled throughout the Franco dictatorship” (PP. 481-482). This is an indication that there were antecedents of action research practices prior to the 20th century action research developments.

Whereas the early works of Aristotle, Moreno, Dewey, Collier, and others could serve as background bases for the current thinking about action research, the works of Kurt Lewin had paved the way to the next generation of action research. That is why Lewin is generally considered the originator and ‘father’ of action research. He is known for ‘coining’ the term ‘action research’ (Mertler, 2009: 13) during the 1940s and introducing it in the fields of social psychology and social work as a collective problem-solving cycle for improving organizations in the USA. Lewin’s early years in North America coincided with a period of immense political, social and ideological upheaval. He derived his model of action research from his observation of the pattern of Allied bombing during the World War II, which graphically illustrated the basic processes involved in learning and acting in systematic and directed ways in order to get things done. He used a process of “a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action; and giving impetus to the action research movements in many different disciplines. Above all, he made action research respectable inquiry (Noffke, 2009: 9; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005: 560; O’Brien, 2001: 8; Ashcroft & Foreman-Peck, 1994: 185; McKernan, 1996: 8).

3.4.1.2. The Second Generation of Action Research: Formalizing and Transforming

In this generation, the works of Abraham Shumsky, Hilda Taba, Eric Trist, Stephen Corey, Kurt Lewin, and others at the *Horace Mann Institute* in New York come. As Noffke (2009: 10) indicates, Abraham Shumsky (in the 1950s) developed action research as a form of self-development, a way for teachers to understand themselves and their work better. The same source goes on indicating that “[a]t around the same time, Hilda Taba, perhaps in response to the then salient teacher shortage, found that action research not only could have an impact on professional problem solving, but it was also a way for teachers to become more skillful” (Ibid. PP. 10-11).

Eric Trist, another major contributor to the field from immediate post-war era, was a social psychiatrist whose group at the Tavistock *Institute of Human Relations* in London engaged in applied social research, initially for the civil repatriation of German prisoners of war. He and his colleagues tended to focus more on large-scale, multi-organizational problems. Particularly with Lewin, Trist applied his research to systemic change in and between organizations. They emphasized direct professional - client collaboration and affirmed the role of group relations as basis for problem solving. Both were avid proponents of the principle that decisions are best implemented by those who help make them.

In USA the work of Stephen Corey in the early 1950s was clearly directed towards including “teachers in the process of theorizing, through their research, the intended ends as well as means of educational work” (Noffke, 2009: 9). The earlier ideas of Lewin were also applied in education in USA through the works of Corey who initiated action research in education soon after Lewin’s work was published (Noffke, 2009: 10-11; O’Brien, 2001: 8; Corey, 1949, 1953; Scott & Usher, 1996: 107; Verma & Mallick, 1999: 91; Lomax, 1996:50; Smith, 2001; Ashcroft & Foreman-Peck, 1994: 185).

3.4.1. 3. Third Generation of Action Research: Decline, Resurrection and Flourishing

This generation of action research deals with the temporary decline of action research in US and its reincarnation in different parts of the world. The decline was mainly due to two reasons: concerns on practitioner identity conflict; and attention to a post-Sputnik Research, Development and Diffusion model. As Carson (2009: 349) indicates a complicated effect of action research on the identities of practitioners had been written earlier by Abraham Shumsky (in 1958). He was a notable exception among the early action research writers in foregrounding this fact. Shumsky warned that regarding ‘the methodology of research [solely] as a logical subject matter, without exploring the aspects of behavior and feelings will result in a meager harvest’ (p. 2’. His concerns for identity conflict in teachers becoming researchers proved to be well founded, as this was a contributing factor in the subsequent decline of action research in America in the following

two decades. Shumsky might have also been influenced by the efforts to reinterpret and justify action research in terms of the prevailing positivistic ideology in the United States which led to a temporary decline of action research in the late 1950 and early 1960s.

Equally, action research faced a decline and its idea lost momentum and replaced by a post-Sputnik Research, Development and Diffusion Model (McNiff, 2002a: 43; McTaggart, 1991). As McNiff (2002a: 43) indicates, *Development and Diffusion Model* was much favored in the 1960s in the USA and Britain whereby the separation of research and practice was emphasized. It was centrally funded and undertaken on a large scale rather than the individualized, small-scale approaches of action research.

After a while, however, action research enjoyed rebirth in UK and USA, and new impetus in other parts of the world, notably Australia and Spain. In UK: a) the tradition of action research in organizational development championed by researchers at the *Tavistock Institute of Human Relations*; b) the Ford Teaching Project, directed by John Elliott and Clem Adelman; c) the criticisms of the then centralized and 'teacher-proof' curriculum development; and d) the work of Laurence Stenhouse, John Elliott, and the Humanities Curriculum Project in the 1970s were instrumental for the resurrection of action research (Elliott & Adelman, 1973, and Rapaport, 1970 in Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Noffke, 2009).

During the last ten years of Stenhouse's life, and for a while after his death in 1982, teachers in Britain played an increasingly important role in curriculum research and development. Stemming from the work of Stenhouse (1975), Elliot founded the *Classroom Action Research Network* (CARN) in 1976, with funding from the *Ford Foundation* to follow up the work of the Ford Teaching Project. Consequently, teacher-researchers got a forum for publication through the conferences and publications of CARN. Since 1993 CARN has been strengthened by the launch, in association with CARN, of Educational Action Research (EAR). EAR is an international Journal, which has broad focus, conceiving of action research as a methodology appropriate to a broad range of research

questions in a wide variety of social situations (Somekh, 2005: 1-3; Verma & Mallick, 1999: 92).

As Noffke (2009) indicates “[a]ction research in Australia was also developed in the late 1970s, partly influenced by the ideas of Stenhouse, but also enhanced by a political context in which much curriculum work was being done around issues of educational equity” (P. 9). At the same period (late 1970s) and early 1980s, calls for practitioner enquiry were enhanced by publications such as Schon’s *Reflective Practitioner* (1983) and was renewed and strengthened in the North American educational context (Burns, 1999: 26, 27; Corey 1953; McNiff, 2002a: 43; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005: 560). Equally, W. Carr, S. Kemmis, D. Hamilton, B. MacDonald, J. Rudduck, H. Sockett, R. Stake and R. Walker had contributions during early and later action research renaissance and developments. As an instance Carr and Kemmis (1986) worked to situate action research within the realm of critical theory.

The concept of action research has, therefore, gradually influenced both progressive teaching practices and theory in Spain over time since 1982. Following the suit, the first *Action Research Training and work seminar* was held in 1986 in Malaga (in Spain), developed by J. Elliott and Bridget Somekh. Subsequently, throughout the rest of the 1980s, seminars and workgroups proliferated and extended the ideas and practices of action research through other Spanish universities and regions. In 1986, Carr and Kemmis’ book, *Becoming critical*, was published in Spanish with great repercussions in the university sphere, and soon after Kemmis was invited to the University of Oviedo to attend a seminar. Next in March 1992, the 2nd International Symposium on *Critical Theory and Action Research* was held in Valladolid, bringing together consolidated research groups from the universities of Barcelona, Malaga, Oviedo, Basque Country, Valencia and Valladolid, along with researchers and teachers from other regions (Carson, 2009: 349).

3.4.1. 4. The Fourth Generation of Action Research: Legitimacy and Critical Interest

This generation, termed as *Action Research Legitimacy and critical Interest*, deals with the latest developments and vested interests in action research from the perspectives of the three dimensions of action research (see 3.5 of this Chapter). Recent years have seen a remarkable growth in the acceptance, popularity and legitimacy of action research with a sound theoretical basis founded on critical-, reflective-, participatory-, and praxis- related-interests. As McNiff (2002a: 107) indicates “[m]any paradigmatic battles have today been won; action research is now recognized as a legitimate research methodology in its own right.” It has gained credibility, visibility, recognition, and acceptance:

- a) through its inclusion in prominent texts, handbooks of research methodology, the host of journals, and other publications in many countries;
- b) being situated as central approach for teacher professional development in many countries; and
- c) has become “a legitimate research strategy for doctoral degree” (Noffke, 2009:12-13).

Many of the varied ‘streams’ of action research have, therefore, flourished, opening up new ways to see salient issues in the field, especially those addressing equity, justice issues (Ibid p. 13), and recently quality. Concomitantly, an invigorated interest in *critical theory* has been fore-grounded. Critical theory strives to: a) improve practical living and so also has given action researchers new insights into the different ways in which visions, values, and knowledge are produced; b) to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors (importance of meanings and interpretations); and c) interpret knowledge of the world (epistemology) as transactional (recognising that one set of actions causes other instructions and responses) (Cohen, Manio & Morrison, 2000; Wisker, 2008).

Such lines of thought have given birth to critically informed action research. Critical action research understands identity, to be in principle, transparent and fully accessible to the rational subject who is dedicated to achieving understanding and social justice through a critically informed praxis. To be sure, critical theory acknowledges that identities are constructed and the identifications with social class, gender, and race historically structure identity. But while a critically informed action research might be open to more complex

understanding of subjectivity; the identity of the reflective practitioner is once more affirmed as the intact and fully rational self (Carson, 2009: 349- 350).

Overall, action research has come to its current status through different momentums. Different antecedents paved the way for the today's action research legitimacy and critical interest. Following the early foundational antecedents, practitioners' interpretations of their situations has been a common theme of action research since the beginning with Kurt Lewin's early experiments in community action and development in the 1930s and 1940s, and the teacher as researcher movement in the United States in the 1950s and in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s (Noffke, 2009: 9). Remarkably, therefore, though Lewin is generally credited with the development of the idea of and coining the term 'action research', the foundational and evolutionary agendas of and recent developments in action research have been influenced by many earlier and recent educators in the field.

3.4.2. Epistemological Foundation of Action Research

3.4.2.1. Epistemology within the Framework of Action Research

Action research embodies 'various epistemologies' and 'varied ways of establishing its knowledge claims' (Noffke & Somekh, 2009: 21). As the same source further explains "[w]hile the strategies for data collection and the ideas that guide data analysis (method and methodology) across the various forms of action research vary, they share an epistemology that sees knowledge as essentially connected to practice". Epistemology, therefore, underpins the origins, nature, methods, limitations, and validity of knowledge and belief. Inherent in such roles of epistemology are its conceptions as: a) a theory of knowledge, most particularly of the ways in which different disciplines construct, interpret and present knowledge in the world; and b) how we understand knowledge, including how knowledge is acquired (Noffke & Somekh, 2009; McNiff, 2002a; Wisker, 2008).

For Noffke and Somekh (2009: 7), action research takes us much further in ways very useful to understanding epistemology than its usual interpretation as 'theory of knowledge'. With a purpose of examining assumptions, epistemology raises questions

such as: a) *Who can be a knower?* b) *What strategies count as 'means to be legitimated as knowledge?* c) *What kinds of things can be known?* d) *How is knowledge possible?* E) *What can we know beyond the information provided by the senses?*

Noffke and Somkh (2009: 7) argue that the varied forms of action research address these questions quite markedly. Some assert a 'grassroots' form of knowledge production and challenge existing research methodologies while others expedite the existing power relations from which they emanate. The three dimensions of action research (see section 3.5 of this Chapter) are evident in addressing the above questions. Consequently, there are two debating categories of people in the effort to answer these and similar questions. People in the first category view knowledge as a 'given', something to be acquired; consider action research as a methodology which can be applied to practice, and view its purpose as observing and describing the behavior and actions of people in order to understand how they behave (E-theories).

People in the second category, on the other hand, view knowledge as something, which people generate for themselves as they work out their dilemmas and issues; consider action research as a methodology that is developed from within practice, and a process of trying to understand how values may be lived in practice; and view the purpose of action research as finding ways of influencing social change through the production of descriptions and explanations by individuals themselves to live, experience, and account for their educational practices (I-theories) (McNiff, 2002a: 39-40).

3.4.2.2. Typologies of Knowledge

Basically, there are different forms of knowledge and different ways of knowing. For Selinger and Shohamy (2007: 13-17), knowledge can come from four different sources: belief, authority, apriori hypothesis or theories, and empirical evidence. Related to and accruing from these, there are three main kinds of knowledge: *know that*, *knowhow* and *personal knowledge* (McNiff, 2002a: 28). These are the basis, processes, and means of knowing.

- 1) **Know that:** This, also termed as *propositional and technical rational knowledge*, refers to knowledge about facts and figures, and to bodies of public knowledge which are external to the knower. It is, therefore, likened with the idea of E-theories. In this view, knowledge: a) exists 'out there' external to the knower; b) is an abstract body of information about the world which is found in books and other retrieval systems; and c) is often seen as a commodity to be acquired, moved around and exchanged for other goods.

- 2) **Know how:** This refers to procedural knowledge and capabilities. *It is not a fixed body of knowledge external to the knower, but involves practical knowing; and is often linked with skills and competencies, though knowing how to do something does not guarantee that one can do it. Know how is similar with 'knowledge of a field', which includes knowledge of the craft of the science and is more than knowledge about the objects of the field* (McNiff, 200a: 28; Mattsson & Kemmis, 2007: 39).

- 3) **Personal knowledge:** This refers to tacit, and *internalized (or individual and implicit)* knowledge. Basically it is a subjective way of knowing that may not be necessarily rationalized. Often we cannot articulate what we know; 'just know'. It seems that we all have a vast fond of tacit knowledge; possibly gleaned from experience, possibly part of our genetic inheritance that enables us to act in particular ways without recourse to external facts or authority. Personal knowledge is linked with the idea of *I- theories*, and refers to the latent knowledge, which is within the individual's mind- brain (McNiff, 2002a: 28, 102-103). *Personal knowledge* is inherent in *tacit knowing-in-action*, which has been addressed at length in Section 3.4.2.4.A of this Chapter.

Overall, these three kinds of knowledge are acquired through either or both of the two main systems of knowing or form of logic/epistemological traditions by which knowledge is acquired and expressed: *propositional (formal)* and *dialectical*. *Propositional (formal)* logic is an abstract and conceptual way of knowing whereby reality and knowledge are viewed as external objects to be studied. It regards theories as static models of reality which may be understood intellectually. This form of logic, often associated with Aristotle who wanted to eliminate contradiction from rational thought, is much valued by the

Western intellectual tradition and informs most of its social, particularly institutional, practices (McNiff, 2002a: 28-29).

The *Dialectical logic*, on the other hand, refers to rational forms of knowledge whereby reality is viewed as something we are part of. Knowledge is a process of creating new forms of previous ones, and a process of becoming. It is a to-and-from, rise and fall or ebb-and-flow process in which one thing transforms into another; one answer generates a new question, so nothing is ever complete or final. This way of knowing is embodied in the knowers and their practices. It is embodied, not abstract; real life, not conceptual. This view is part of an ancient tradition, often associated with but existing long before *Plato*⁵ (428/427 BC – 348/347 BC), who saw contradiction as part of life process, the need to hold the one and the many together at the same time, and it is at the heart of many non-Western ways of knowing (McNiff, 2002a: 29).

3.4.2.3. Views on Professional Rationality: Reflective versus Technical

In these days of professional accountability, teachers are expected to change their practices for the better through action research. This is because action research is primarily concerned with change, being grounded in the idea that development and innovation are an essential part of professional practice. It sees change as an inevitable and important part of being a professional. This view, in the context of curriculum, implies that teachers explore the implications of the changes for their own educational values, and finding out how to make any necessary alterations to the routines of their practice. This approach to change for Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993: 201) presupposes a *reflective* view of professionalism, which is very different from the commonly held *technical rational* view.

Reflective rationality entails empowerment, ownership and commitment of the practitioners as opposed to the *technical rationality* (produced through the technical

⁵ A Classical Greek philosopher, mathematician, writer of philosophical dialogues, and founder of the Academy in Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world.

interest) that is based on the idea of power control. For clear elucidation, a comparison of the two rationalities has been presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Reflective Rationality versus Technical Rationality

Contrasting points	Reflective rationality	Technical rationality
Complex practical problems	Demand specific solutions	Demand general solutions.
These solutions can be developed	Only inside the context in which the problem arises and in which the practitioner is a crucial and determining agent	Outside practical situations (in research or administrative centers)
The solutions	Cannot be successfully generalized to other contexts but they can be made accessible to other practitioners as hypotheses to be tested or read	Can be translated into teachers' actions by means of publications, training, administrative orders, etc
Views about knowledge	Knowledge is something, which people generate for themselves as they work out their dilemmas and issues	Knowledge is a 'given', something to be acquired; it exists external to the knower
The purpose of action research	Finding ways of influencing social change through the production of descriptions and explanations by individuals themselves to account for their educational practices (I-theories)	Observing and describing the behavior and actions of people in order to understand how they behave (E-theories)

Adapted and synthesized from Altrich, Posch, and Somekh (1993: 202-203); McNiff (2002a: 28-29); Ghaye & Ghaye (1998: 4-11)

Understandably, the features of *reflective rationality* align with that of action research. It presupposes *I-approach*, which encourages the teachers to produce their own descriptions and explanations for their own learning, among others, by undertaking their action enquiries into their own teaching practices, producing evidence to show that they have improved the practices, and having that evidence validated by the critical scrutiny of others. Such a view is situated in educational enquiries (I-systems of knowledge) that lead to knowledge of self within a world which the researcher co-creates with others who are similarly occupied (and develop I-theories of practice). The reflective practice which characterizes these efforts is a form of practical theory which can lead to the evolution of good social orders (McNiff, 2002a; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998).

In the context of *Technical rationality*, on the other hand, knowledge is generated somewhere such as in universities and in research centers or institutes, and classrooms are places of practice. Practice is separated from theory and the teacher being a technician with a task of applying or implementing the theoretical knowledge or knowledge generated somewhere else (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998: 4).

Inasmuch as the former rationality aligns with action research approaches, it espouses for I-Theory whereby knowledge is generated by the practitioner within their respective classrooms for the betterment of themselves and their practices. It, therefore, backs action research to follow the process of systematic learning in a specific practical context based on evidence (rather than habit, intuition, or custom and practice), and a clearly specified problem or focus following moments of planning, action, observation, reflection and evaluation with a purpose of gaining practical experience and improving practice.

3.4.2.4. Professional Knowledge and Action

Teaching as a profession involves complex decisions (at planning, interaction, evaluation, and follow-up) and social interactions implying that there is always opportunity for improvement and change. Change in the context of action research is an inevitable and important part of being a professional. Specifically in the context of curriculum development for effective teaching, teachers are expected to explore the implications of the changes for their own educational values, and find out how to make any necessary alterations to the routines of their teaching practices. Understanding such a change, nonetheless, is not an easy task. It demands an adequate description of the complex professional actions of the teachers in the spirit of reflective practice individually or collectively. Reflective practice which characterizes these efforts is a form of practical theorizing which can lead to the evolution of good social orders in general and improved professional action in particular.

Virtually, practice can be enhanced when we reflect on what we are doing and decide to improve it. In this sense, we raise our deep tacit knowledge which contains our values base

to an explicit surface level where we try to live our values in our practice. By so doing, we come to understand how our I-knowledge is embodied within and informs our practices in the world as illustrated here under.

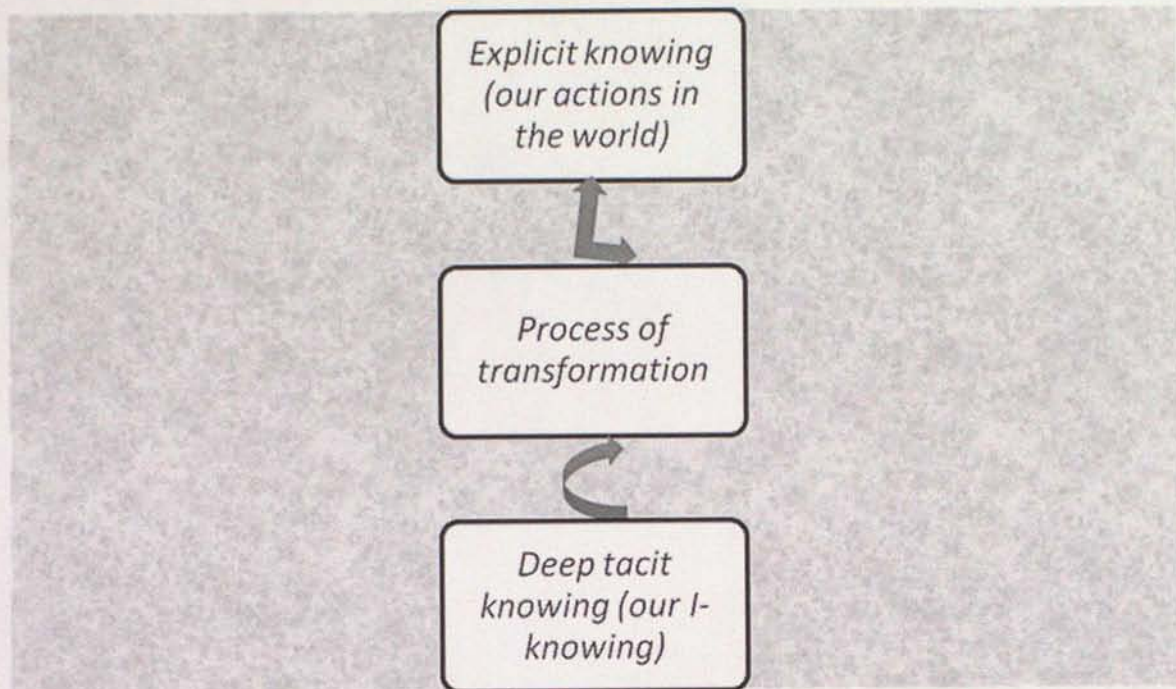


Figure 7. Transforming Tacit into Explicit Knowledge (adapted from McNiff, 2002a: 102-103)

In the process of transforming tacit into explicit knowledge, three key ideas (generations of professional knowledge and improvement of practice) are interwoven, namely, *Tacit knowing-in-action (Tkia)*, *Reflection-in-action (Ria)*, and *Reflection-on-action (Roa)*. The terms Reflection-on-, and in-Action were coined by Donald Schon, in his book 'The Reflective Practitioner' (1983), connecting Lewin's group dynamics⁶ with the personal practical knowledge that practitioners develop as they reflect on their practice (Noffke & Somekh, 2009: 174; McNiff, 2002a: 102-103; Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993: 203-207; Burns, 1999:154; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998: 4-5).

⁶ Kurt Lewin, often regarded as the originator of action research, utilized [the] approach to involve communities regarded as underprivileged, in developments which would directly impact on their life and work (1946, 1948). His explicit intention was to encourage groups who were the most likely to be influenced by potential change to have a voice in saying exactly how proposed changes should be designed and implemented. (Noffke & Somekh, 2009)

A) Tacit knowing-in-action (Tkia)

Knowing- in- action is “about the professional knowledge that we use in our daily practice” (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998: 4). It exists in two forms: reflection and utilization of knowledge. In the first place, reflection on what we actually do, on our own teaching and experience: a) causes improvement of teaching and teacher development; and b) generates rich and detailed knowledge base derived from practice. Second, this knowledge is used by us in our teaching. It then becomes knowledge or ‘knowing-in-action’. Our knowing as teachers is reflected in what we teach, how we teach and how we encourage children to learn. For Ghaye and Ghaye (Ibid), knowing is often described as unconscious, tacit and even unarticulated commonsense, but it reveals itself in our teaching action.

It is on the basis of the last argument that the term ‘tacit’ is prefixed to ‘Knowing- in- action’. ‘Tacit knowledge’ comes from the works of the philosopher Michael Polanyi who sums the concept in his memorable phrase “we know much more than we can tell” (Sallis, 2002:82). In this sense, *tacit knowledge* highlights the importance of a subjective dimension to knowledge as it is personally and socially embedded knowledge containing hunches, insights, intuitions, feelings, imagery, metaphors, emotions, descriptions, and perceptions. It is deeply rooted and situated in an individual’s experience and consciousness and is morphed by his or her experiences, values, beliefs and culture. It is the knowledge that helps individuals make sense of their world and as such is often deeply affected by personal beliefs and values.

For Sallis (2002: 38), tacit or personal knowledge is:

- a. socially constructed knowledge;
- b. the folklore of the organisation;
- c. stored in people’s heads;
- d. the knowledge of the mastery of a skill;
- e. a mix of values, insights, hunches, prejudices, feelings, images, symbols and beliefs;
- f. difficult to codify and to store on databases and intranets;
- g. often difficult to communicate and share; and
- h. a valuable and rich source of experience and learning.

Though tacit knowledge is often seen as too difficult to handle, the solution is not to dismiss it, rather ways need to be found to make it more generally accessible and easier to manage, among others by using 'storytelling or learning conversations' (Ibid. P. 87) or other action research approaches.

Tacit knowing-in-action is a (research) process that follows a very different route from that anticipated in traditional research. In Tkia, teachers do not just receive and apply someone else's theory to their practice, but they hold and develop their own theories about practice. They have their own personally tailored 'theories' about what does and does not work for them in their teaching (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998: 4). In the process, teachers take action in a situation, they gain experience from which routines of action and assumptions that are not always conscious and accessible to reflection develop. Basically, Tkia is not the action itself, but that action really indicates what the actors know. In other words, Tkia is often that tacit information that the actors know about doing something - it is often left unexplained or unmentioned when they describe what they do.

As Gomez, A., Fernandez, Gomez, E., & Mas (2009: 485) indicate, professional knowledge of teachers should form a complex and prolonged process of knowledge in action, 'savior-faire' and of reflection in and about *action*. This type of action is akin with 'technical action research' which is designed to render an existing situation more efficient and effective (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000: 231).

Tacit knowing-in-action is, therefore, characterized as follows.

- a) Thinking and action are not separate (skilful, practical activities take place without being planned and prepared intellectually in advance).
- b) The professional is frequently unaware of the sources of his or her practical knowledge or how it was learnt.
- c) The professional will usually not be able to give a straightforward verbal description of this practical knowledge.
- d) The actions and assumptions in Tkia can be activated and become accessible to self-reflection by introspection, by conversations, by ordering conscious knowledge, by reading one's own actions, by involving in narrative inquiry, lesson

study, reading, debating, journal enquiries, documenting, arguing, disseminating findings, and the like. Tkia, consequently, draws on accumulated practical knowledge under simple or routine circumstances (Mattsson & Kemmis, 2007: 16; Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993: 203-204; McNiff, 2002a: 102-103; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998: 4-5).

B) Reflection-in-action (Ria)

Reflection-in-action: a) is a reflection on the adequacy of our 'knowing-in-action'; b) occurs in the midst of action; c) is based upon a rapid interpretation of the situation where rapid decisions are required; and d) guides further action (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998: 5). It is called forth whenever new and complex situations have to be dealt with or disturbances and problems disrupt the smooth flow of routine action; and when a surprise, which causes one to question, appears in the process of accomplishing the task. The one who reflects-in-action, therefore:

- a. becomes a researcher in the practice context;
- b. constructs a new theory of the unique case rather than being dependent on the categories of established theory and technique;
- c. is not limited to a prior agreement about means and ends, rather he/she defines means and ends interactively as he/she frames a problematic situation without separating them;
- d. does not separate thinking from doing;
- e. follows a problem solving approach in an on-going experimentation to find a viable solution in complex situations;
- f. does not use a "trial-and-error" method, rather his/her actions are much more reasoned and purposeful;
- g. reflects-in-action and finds out what is different and how s/he can change her/his thinking to address this new task; and
- h. handles and resolves his/her difficulties and concerns about practice (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993: 205; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998: 5; Schon, 1983: 68).

In short, reflection-in-action begins whenever practitioners find themselves in more complex and multifarious situations that cannot be coped with by routine actions, and where and when rapid decisions are required.

C) Reflection-on-action (Roa)

We reflect on action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome (Schön, 1983: 26).

Reflection-on-action: a) consists of reflection after the event; b) is deliberate, conscious and public activity principally designed to improve future action; c) is a research process as the *reflective practitioner is a researcher*; d) is akin to *practical action research* which is designed to promote teachers' professionalism by drawing on their informed judgment; and e) is generated through reflection on the characteristics and processes of one's own practice, in all its aspects and dimensions: design, development and assessment (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998: 5; Noffke & Somekh, 2009: 485; Grundy, 1987:154, in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000: 231).

As an important feature of professional action, Roa occurs when it is necessary to formulate knowledge explicitly and verbally by distancing oneself from action for some time and to reflect on it. The one who reflects-on-action:

- a. improves one's ability to analyze and reorganize knowledge;
- b. makes knowledge and professional action communicable and/or visible to colleagues and clients (pupils, parents and others) by putting forward rational arguments for them and inviting critical discussion;
- c. distances reflection itself from the flow of activities, interrupts it, and concentrates upon data that represent the action in an objectified form;
- d. can cope constructively with serious problems or complex new situations; and
- e. can take responsibility for the educational, induction and sustainability purposes.

For Ghaye and Ghaye (1998: 34) reflections on action are five types:

- 1) *descriptive reflection-on-action*, which is personal and retrospective;

- 2) *perceptive reflection-on-action*, which links teaching to feeling;
- 3) *receptive reflection-on-action*, which relates our view of things to others' views;
- 4) *interactive reflection-on-action*, which links learning with future action; and
- 5) *critical reflection-on-action*, which places individual teaching within a broader 'system'.

A closer look at these types shows that Roa encompasses a broader spectrum of the generation of professional knowledge and improvement of practice. It deals with personal and professional thinking, feeling, linkages, and situating all these within the broader 'system', which is the fifth type in Ghaye and Ghaye's typologies. In this sense, the three dimensions of action research- personal, professional, and political (see Section 3.5 of this Chapter) - form the basis of professional knowledge, action (practice) and improvement.

In sum, *epistemological foundation* expounds the theoretical and practical issues related to practitioners' knowledge and beliefs. It is evident from the discussions made so far that action research supports the notion that knowledge does not exist outside the knower/practitioner. The view that knowledge is found somewhere outside the knower is linked with the traditional forms of research whereby researchers do research on other people. In action research, on the other hand, researchers do research on themselves, for themselves so as to (re)create knowledge and change their ways of thinking and doing things.

3.4.3. Ontological Foundation of Action Research

3.4.3.1. Conceptual Introduction

Ontology, which is the branch of philosophy, deals with: a) how we experience, construct, situate and perceive ourselves in the world; b) basic reality, the nature of existence and phenomenon we are seeking to understand and gain knowledge; and c) the nature of being in the world (Wisker, 2008: 67; Noffke & Somekh, 2009: 250). In brief, McNiff (2002a: 16) has described *ontology* as 'the way we view ourselves, a theory of being'.

For Wisker (2008: 238), *ontology* is looked at by *phenomenology*, which is a philosophical system that 'begins by considering being in the world (ontology)'. From *phenomenology* is derived 'phenomenography' which is a research method that explores experience and interactions in the world. As Wisker (Ibid) succinctly indicates, phenomenography considers:

- a. being in the world, preconceptions, perceptions, experience, feelings and attitudes;
- b. situations in the world, in context;
- c. focusing on interactions in this space/activities/context between these people;
- d. a reference to focus at the level of the group, not individual; and
- e. using a variety of methods to look at some of the interactions.

These considerations align with the qualities of action research. Action research from this point of view deals with the practitioner's world views in relation to his/her professional practices, classroom presumptions, observations, knowledge and skills, feelings, attitudes, situations contexts, and interactions. In short, action research from ontological point of view is the way the researchers/practitioners view their practices, values, themselves or what they believe in and the way they perceive themselves and their practices in the system.

3.4.3.2. What do Action Researchers Believe in?

Action researchers believe in the notion that people are able to create their own identities and allow other persons to create theirs. Consequently, they:

- a. try to find ways of accommodating multiple values/perspectives, and live together (by understanding other's point of view) in spite of their potential differences;
- b. need to have personal commitment to create the kind of societies they feel are good ones;
- c. accept the responsibility of ensuring that their own lives are in order before they make judgments about other people's;
- d. believe that learning will transform into purposeful personal action for social benefit;

- e. often express these ontological assumptions in the language of values- to do with truth, social justice, compassionate ways of living, respect for pluralistic forms of life;
- f. often live in social contexts where these values are prized in principle; and
- g. hold a vision of future, which is embodied in the present- to be better than the present, characterized by creative, life- affirming ways of living.

In general, action researchers believe in and aim to understand these issues and to improve what they are doing in relation to others (in the present) and morphing the present realities into future directions which are more in tune with their values (McNiff, 2002a). The ontological basis of action research, therefore, feeds the researcher(s) with basic reality, human nature, free will and determinism, and personal and collective values and faith within the research work and professional practices. It is within such a manner that action researchers experience and construct meanings from the context and the world in which they were, are, and will be.

3.4.4. Methodical Foundation of Action Research

3.4.4.1. Conceptual Introduction

Basically, methodology deals with how people do things. From action research point of view, it is how the researchers go about understanding their practices and solve their practical problems. The methodology of action research is that people ask questions such as 'How do I do this better? How do we understand?' (McNiff, 2002a: 16-18).

Wisker (2008: 51, 67-68), however, has gone deeper than the above conceptions of the term 'methodology'. She has argued methodology from the ontological and epistemological view points. In her line of thought, methodology springs from the way the researcher knows and sees the world. It is considered as the rational and philosophical assumption underlying and informing our research and leading to and informing methods,

which help practitioners as vehicles to: a) ask their questions, and b) to gather data for their research.

3.4.4.2. Methodological Characteristics of Actions Research

Neither the practices of action research nor the study of 'all second language acquisition phenomena' is distinguished by specific research approach. In both cases, research methodologies may be determined by the philosophy and world view of the researcher, the theory motivating the research, and objective realities such as the conditions under which the research is being conducted and the questions being investigated (Selinger & Shahomy, 2007: 23; O'Brien, 2001; Dick, 2002; Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993).

Action researchers regard learning and experience as processes, which enable individuals to make choices about who they are and how they are together; and find ways of creating spaces for tolerance to negotiate differences. This can happen because reflection on action is an inherent part of an action research methodology, which is more of holistic (not single) approach to problem solving. It, therefore, allows for several different research tools and procedures which are generally common to the qualitative research paradigm, including, among others, keeping a research journal, data collection and analysis, participant observation recordings, questionnaire surveys, structured and unstructured interviews, and case studies (McNiff, 2002a: 18; O'Brien, 2001).

Consequently, any method can be adopted as long as the practitioners think that it gives them useful and reliable evidence of the impact of their action so as to enhance their practices, understandings and situations.

Methodologically, therefore, action research is characterized as follows.

- a. It offers a range of simple methods and strategies for researching and developing practice, which are characterized by a sensible ratio of costs to results. Methods are tailored to what is achievable without overly disrupting practice.
- b. Specific methods or techniques do not distinguish action research.

Inherently, therefore, methodology in action research is characterized by a continuing effort to closely interlink, relate and confront action and reflection, to reflect upon one's conscious and unconscious doings in order to develop one's actions, and to act reflectively in order to develop one's knowledge and skills. Reflection opens up new options for action and is examined by being realized in action. In the continuous process, an ending implies a new beginning. Consequently, methodology in action research is purposive and deliberative whereby the researcher can go back and forth based on the emerging data.

Overall, the four foundations of action research epitomize the historical antecedents, the knowledge bases, and perceptions of selves as subjects in the world, and the arts and the crafts of action research.

3.5. Dimensions of Action Research

The dimensions of action research can be seen from different angles. In some cases they are considered as types or varieties of action research, and in other cases they are seen as individualistic-, collective-, and stream-based-action research. Still they are viewed as approaches customized for some specific purposes. Such variations spring from the way people view action research itself. Whereas some people view action research dimensions as an individualistic activity, others argue that it can be individual as well as collective to meet different purposes. In relation to the former view, Pollard (2002:34) argues, "...teacher research, in the form of action research, is often encouraged and carried out as a lonely, isolated activity." He suggests that "[t]hose who are concerned with the promotion of action research— with the development in teachers of well-tested professional knowledge —must equally be concerned to develop the professional networks and communities in which it can be fostered." (Ibid).

On the other hand, Calhoun (1993) succinctly presents that action research involves three approaches: *individual teacher practitioner's research*, which is carried out by an individual teacher; *collaborative action research*, which is carried out by teams of

colleagues who analyze the data to improve their own practice; and *school-wide action research*, which is carried out at the entire school level. In the same vein Mertler (2009: 182-183) presents the levels of action plan within the steps of action research as individual, team and school- or district wide action research and/or plans. Similarly, O'Brien, (2001) indicates that by the mid-1970s, the field had evolved, revealing four main 'streams' that had emerged: traditional, contextural (action learning), radical, and educational action research. Furthermore, Cohen, Manio, and Morrison (2000:231) have identified *technical action research*, *practical' action research*, and *emancipatory action research* respectively dealing with rendering an existing situation more efficient and effective, promoting teachers' professionalism by drawing on their informed judgment, and for developing participants' understandings of illegitimate structural and interpersonal constraints that are preventing the exercise of their autonomy and freedom.

And yet, more relevant classification of the dimensions of action research to the study has been given by Noffke (2009) as: professional, personal, and political dimensions of action research. The author has acknowledged that these dimensions had been derived from his historical study of action research with the purpose of finding a way to explore the multiple layers of assumptions, purposes, and practices leading to see the complexities and interconnectedness across the dimensions.

3.5.1. Professional Dimension of Action Research

The professional dimension of action research deals with the instrumental roles of action research to: a) produce knowledge; b) add to understanding of a knowledge base for teaching; c) sustain different ways of knowing; d) bridge theory and practice; e) generate new ways of understanding practice, f) enhance the professional quality and status of the profession; g) professional problem solving; and h) enhance recognition of the importance of teachers' voices in generating knowledge for educational practice (Noffke, 2009: 8-10).

This dimension concurs with the purpose of the study as it focuses directly on issues related to developing the teaching profession and the professionals. The works in this dimension are rich in their implications for action research in the profession of education in

many ways. First, they show the rich possibilities that can emerge when the 'methodologies' of action research, along with their underlying 'epistemologies' are not seen as fixed. Rather, these respond to the cultural contexts of the participants. In addition, these works are examples of how, in the process of action research, the 'facilitators' of teacher learning also problematize their own assumptions. Finally, they show ways in which concepts around 'the professional' are not taken for granted, but rather must be examined and redefined in relation to their cultural, and indeed, global context (Noffke, 2009:14).

For Zipin and Hattan (2009: 522), action research within the 'professional' dimension is a powerful means of educational transformation – for learners, for schools and colleges and for teachers and administrators. In this view, action research-based education practices become more oriented towards learners through a transformational shift in relationships. This is because systematic inquiry brings a new process of action and investigation to the powerful model of bottom-up improvement for schools and practitioners are able to develop and learn through a meta-cognitive process focused directly on their own practice and relationships, leading to knowledge that is able to inform action. The professional status of educators can be clarified through the public acknowledgement of teachers' knowledge and the development of new partnerships between teachers, administrators, parents, policy makers and university faculty.

3.5.2. Personal Dimension of Action Research

The personal dimension deals with the roles of action research: a) for the growth and development of those who engage in it individually or collectively or institutionally; b) as a form of self-development, a way for teachers to understand themselves and their work better; c) as a way for teachers to become more skilful; and d) as the form of working with teachers to explore closer connections between their personal beliefs about teaching and learning practices (Noffke, 2009: 10-11).

As the author indicates, personal belief systems play into this, and issues of 'development' take on new aspects in looking at how individual teachers take into account their own life

experiences as they explore these in relation to working with children whose experiences are different from their own.

This dimension promotes the views that the individual process of examining one's own practice is the core of action research. It questions individual action, how one might do things differently to improve one's practice, initiate research with a central emphasis on the value of his/her own voice along with being accountable (in that same sense) to others. This can be done through personal narrative and self-study to change one's own teaching practice. One of the major agendas of self-study is working to help others in education and in policy circles understand the complex and important work of teacher educators (Noffke, 2009: 15, 16).

The personal dimension of action research is, therefore, characterized by interpretation and meaning making in relation to identity, social situations and activities. In this sense, educational transformation is observable in the enrichment of human experience through action research work that is informed by a strong theoretical or methodological base. Particularly, the transformative impact of action research work on learners, teachers and educational organizations is respectful of differences and diversity (Noffke & Somekh, 2009: 522-523).

3.5.3. Political Dimension of Action Research

The political dimension of action research deals with the role of action research as:

- i. a tool to create democratic processes in schools (which was a concern in the 1930s-1950s) - searching solutions to social problems, the development of collaborative processes, locally developing curriculum, and more social conscious schooling process;
- ii. a means to leverage social change by informing social action, particularly ones directed at and redress of social inequities – may be gender, racial, justice, cultural identity, language, marginalization, queer identity, and color; and
- iii. highlighting the potential to transform understandings of professional practice (Noffke, 2009: 11-12).

Influenced by the works of Paulo Freire⁷ (1921-1997) and Orlando Fals Borda⁸ (1925-2008), and other critical thinkers and participatory researchers, this dimension espouses to the notion:

- a) that teachers are generators of knowledge in such a stance that challenges hierarchies of knowledge production and power relations they maintain;
- b) that action research is about local knowledge production for civic purposes, an idea not always seen as part of educational action research work, but very common in the forms of action research that have developed in health, human services, and the social sciences;
- c) of pushing the thinking about action research beyond classrooms and schools, toward connecting with the communities they are intended to serve, as well as the students whose lives are deeply affected by the education they do (and they do not) 'receive' and might instead 'construct'; and
- d) of constructing action research beyond the usual notions of the professional, instead recognizing the wealth of knowledge in communities that can be used to educate young people (Noffke, 2009: 15, 16-18).

Understandably, therefore, the works in the political dimension share the sense that learning the skills of research provides not only means to deal with current issues, but also develops a sense of agency in dealing with life issues over the long haul. These efforts are part of the development of a sense of civic participation in the building of more democratic social and political relations. In this sense, the political dimension of action research is characterized by opening up a wider range of action research work with a strong social justice orientation. In Noffke's (2009: 19) view, action research can be better seen in its global context, one in which the production of local knowledge is viewed along the emergence of global knowledge economies. As to this author, professional knowledge (which is in a state of flux) and the process of teaching and learning are transformed through action research, but they are also transformed through transactional policies driven by the growing emphasis on the knowledge industry.

⁷ Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was a Brazilian educator and influential theorist of critical pedagogy.

⁸ Orlando Fals Borda was a Colombian researcher and sociologist, one of the most important Latin American thinkers, and one of the founders of participatory action research.

Overall, the classification of action research as professional, personal, and political' dimensions situate *action research* rightfully within multiple layers of assumptions, purposes, and practices whereby individual, professional and environmental perspectives are kept on board. It should, however, be noted that the three dimensions are not exhaustive and are not exclusive to each other. Each dimension can be seen as transforming and enhancing the other. There are inter-connections between and among the dimensions. For instance, professional practice is clearly enhanced through action research in quite political ways, and the 'political' dimension is reframed and clarified to expand the practitioners' understandings of the ways in which power works both for and against learners, teachers, institutions, and societies. Moreover, a focus on the 'personal' allows one to look at the students and not at the 'structure'; whereas without the personal orientation social justice may seem abstract, theoretical and not grounded in a concern with actual lives. Consequently, attention to the personal dimension is important because without it we may advocate for things that in the long run might not subvert the structures of oppression, but actually solidify them. Analogously, without the personal commitment to children (their families, their communities), the educational aspect of action research is meaningless (Noffke & Somekh, 2009: 524). Understandably, therefore, the three dimensions supplement and corroborate each other.

3.6. The Place of Action Research within the Research Typologies

There are many different kinds of research. There, however, remains a considerable controversy as to which scheme for classifying them is acceptable and which research type is of most value. This could be due to the fact that the borderlines between /among the divisions are not always clear-cut. Figure 8, nonetheless, gives the place of action research in terms of its alignment, methods, importance and application within the field of 'Educational Research'.

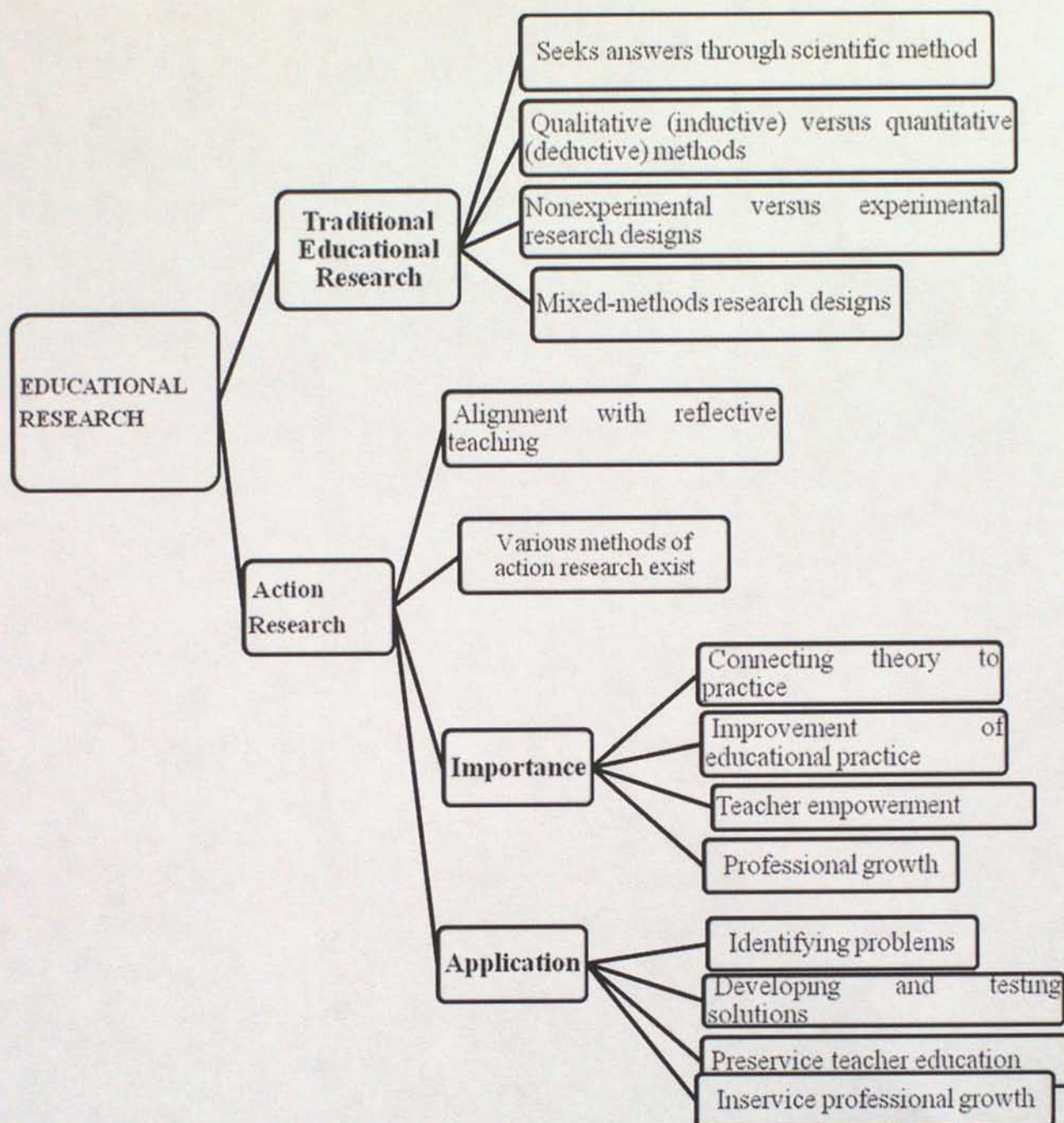


Figure 8. The place of Action Research within the overall Educational Research (adapted from Mertler, 2009: 3)

As can be seen from Figure 8, action research is one type of the broad field of educational research. In contrary to the traditional approach which follows rigid procedures to test

hypotheses, action research is flexible, deliberate, premeditated and purposive. Consequently, it aligns with reflective teaching; follows cyclical models; serves to connect theory to practice, to improve educational practice, to empower teacher educators, and enhances professional growth. Furthermore, the principles of action research can be applied at least in four ways: identification of educational problems, development and testing of possible solutions, pre-service teacher education, and in-service teacher professional growth (Mertler, 2009: 22).

Apart from the classifications shown in Figure 8, attempts have been made in this section to review the paradigms and various ways of classifying the broad arena of educational research with the purpose of finding an answer to the question: "Where is the place of action research within the typologies of research approaches?" The review works are based on the following classifications.

- I. Qualitative versus Quantitative (the Two broad contrasting Types of Research Methods);
- II. The Types of Research when defining Science in a broad sense (Pure-, Basic-, Applied-, Evaluation- or Action-research);
- III. The Three Paradigms of Educational Research (the Positivist/normative, Interpretive, and the Paradigm of Praxis/Action Research/Critical theoretic)
- IV. Classroom Research types (Experimental Studies, Naturalistic Studies, and Action Research).

The above four classifications are among the various combinations mainly treated in this paper; though do not represent discrete categories of all the research types available in the literature. There are also other classifications by: method (historical, descriptive, experimental); area of academic discipline (sociological, psychological, anthropological, etc); type of data collection procedure (psychological tests, observation, questionnaire and so on); purpose (whether contributing to knowledge or having policy implications); and sources of information (secondary and primary). These are not treated in this paper, as they are not directly related to the purpose of the study (Verma & Mallick, 1999: 74; McNiff, 2002a; Brown, 1988: 1-2; Allright & Bailey, 1991; Mattsson & Kemmis, 2007; Selinger & Shahomy, 2007: 17).

3.6.1. Action Research and the Two Contrasting Types of Research Methods

In most cases, a 'binary distinction is commonly made between two major contrasting research paradigms: qualitative and quantitative research' (Burns, 1999: 20). On the other hand, Wisker (2008: 68-69) considers 'Positivistic and post positivistic' research approaches as 'the two main paradigms of research'. She has also outlined the approaches and methods that the two involve as illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Positivistic Paradigm versus Post Positivistic Paradigm

Positivistic paradigm	Post positivistic paradigm
• Concerned with hypothesis testing • Uses large samples • Data are highly specific and precise • Produces quantitative data • Highly reliable • Low validity • Generalizes from sample to population	• Concerned with generating theories • Uses small samples • Data are rich and subjective • Produces qualitative data • Reliability is low • Validity is high • Generalizes from one setting to another

Source: Wisker (2008:68, adapting from Hussey & Hussey, 2003, 2nd ed.)

A closer look at Table 3 shows that both Positivistic and Post-positivistic paradigms are akin respectively with quantitative and qualitative approaches to research. Basically, quantitative research methodologies require the collection and analysis of numerical data. They utilize deductive approach to reasoning. Qualitative methodologies, on the other hand, necessitate the collection and analysis of narrative data (e.g. observation notes, interview transcripts, journal entries, and the like) (Mertler, 2009: 7). It, therefore, suffices to make a comparison between the two with a purpose to know how action research relates to either or both of the two.

Table 4. Quantitative versus Qualitative Approaches to Research

Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
• Require the collection of numerical data and utilizes a deductive approach to reasoning • Values objectivity through the discovery of facts or truth • Tests pre-established hypotheses through the collection and measurement of data • Establishes cause and effect relationships • Intervenes in the research context and controls variables • Reduces data to measurable quantities • Ensures reliability through the consistency and explicability of methods • Generalizes beyond the research population • Focuses on research outcomes that confirm or disconfirm hypotheses	• Require the collection of narrative data and utilizes an inductive approach to reasoning • Encompasses socially subjective and relative interpretations of phenomena • Draws on data to develop and refine hypotheses • Interprets human behavior from participants' perspectives • Explores naturalistic cultural settings without controlling variables • Gathers 'rich' data and interprets them through 'thick' description and analysis • Ensures validity through multiple data sources • Does not seek to generalize beyond the research context [but generalizes from one setting to another] • Focuses on processes as well as the outcomes of research

Source: (Mertler, 2009: 27; Burns, 1999:21-24)

It can be discerned from Table 4 that quantitative research methodology is based on a 'positivist' paradigm claiming that the behavior can be explained through objective facts. The qualitative approach, on the other hand, is based on the assumption of post-positivist paradigm and its variants, namely 'phenomenological', ethnomethodology and symbolic interactions acknowledging multiple realities that are socially defined (Selinger & Shohamy, 2007: 257, Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000: 23). 'Phenomenology' is a philosophical system, which looks at ontology. It begins by considering being in the world (Wisker, 2009: 238).

In more specific terms, Winter (2000: 7) identifies two major differences that exist between quantitative and qualitative research: In terms of what they attempt to research, and test or validate claims. In the first place, quantitative research limits itself to what can be measured or quantified and qualitative research attempts to 'pick up the pieces' of unquantifiable, personal, in depth, descriptive and social aspects of the world. Many of the allegations of invalidity from both sides can be attributed to a failure to recognize the purposes to which each methodology is suited (Ibid.). Second, unlike quantitative research,

there are no standardized or accepted tests within qualitative research and often the nature of the investigation is determined and adapted by the research itself. As Winter further explains,

There may not be any hypothesis or even any findings as such. Instead the 'validity' of the research resides with the representation of the actors, the purposes of the research and appropriateness of the processes involved. The only similarity between the two research methods is that, at some point, questions will be asked and data will be collected. Likewise, commonalities within definitions of 'validity' only exist within its concern for the research process and its appropriateness to the phenomena investigated (Ibid).

Qualitative research for Dornyei (2007: 220) is "far from being a uniform approach but is characterized by diversity". The same source citing Punch (2005) points out that "perhaps nowhere is that diversity more apparent than in approaches to the analysis of qualitative data". In principle, qualitative data analysis is language-based, iterative process, subjective intuition versus formalization generic analytic moves versus specific methodologies (Ibid. P. 222).

Inasmuch as action research is "likely to be interpretive and constructivist", it is conducted primarily using the methods common to qualitative research such as narrative inquiry, observing and recording events and behaviors, interviewing, and conducting discussions, instead of, or in addition to, the more quantitative methods (Wisker, 2008: 231; Pushor & Clandinin, 2009:293; Nunan, 1992, cited in Burns, 1999:24; McKernan, 1996). Particularly, 'narrative inquiry' as a genre of qualitative research has connection with action research. Both lead to action and change in the researchers; in the institutional, social - or cultural - landscape; and in the participants in the research process, and actual and potential audiences of the outcomes (Pushor & Clandinin, 2009: 293).

Overall, even though both qualitative and quantitative approaches are useful depending on the topic or problem examined, action research more often employs the qualitative approach focusing on posing and answering questions in a particular classroom or school (Gay & Airasian, 2000: 597). In this sense, action research: a) focuses primarily on concrete and practical issues of immediate concern to particular social groups or communities; b) is conducted by and with the insiders; and c) holds particular appeal for

classroom teachers and a promising direction for the building of theories related to teaching and learning.

3.6.2. Action Research within the Three Broad Types of Research

In this sub-section, the connection of action research to pure/ basic/theoretical-, applied-, and evaluation- research has been briefed. By so doing, some critical differences between researches that are oriented to the development of and/testing theory and that which is designed to deal with practical problems have been highlighted.

- a) **Pure/Basic/theoretical Research:** is typically oriented towards the development of theories by discovering broad generalizations or principles, and building the structure of knowledge and ideas that constitute the discipline. It has drawn its pattern and initiative from the physical sciences emphasizing a rigorous, structured type of analysis. The main purpose of 'pure' or 'basic' research is to discover facts, which are fundamental and important in the sense that their discovery will extend the boundaries of our knowledge in a particular area or discipline (Selinger & Shohamy, 2007: 17-20; Verma & Mallick, 1999: 11; Coleman, 1990).
- b) **Applied or Field Research:** is concerned primarily with the:
 - i. application of new knowledge for the solution of day-to-day problems;
 - ii. improvement of a process by testing theoretical constructs in actual situations;
 - iii. designation of a sociological research which has the aim of illuminating some social phenomenon that can be affected by informed action; and
 - iv. contribution of the structure of knowledge and ideas of the discipline, but any such contribution will be a by-product of its central aim, which is to provide information for affecting action (Verma & Mallick, 1999; Coleman, 1990)..
- c) **Evaluation research:** refers to the systematic procedures, which are adopted over a period of time to collect and process data concerning the effectiveness of a particular program or set of events. For example, a teaching program can be evaluated at several stages. Whereas an evaluation carried out at intermediate stages to cause better-finished product is called a 'process' or 'formative' evaluation, an evaluation that comes the

completion of the planning program serving a final decision is known as 'summative' evaluation (Verma & Mallick, 1999: 12).

- d) **Action research:** is known for its concern more with the immediate application rather than the development of theory; and for its focus on a specific problem in a particular setting. It is similar to applied research in many ways but the fundamental difference is that: a) applied research allows generalization of its results (from sample to population) whereas the findings of action research are judged (mostly) in terms of their applicability in a specific situation (though generalizing from one setting to another is possible); and b) applied research usually involves a large number of cases for studies whereas action research can be conducted in a modest way by using a very small sample (e.g. a single classroom or a group of children within it).

3.6.3. The Three Paradigms of Educational Research (the Positivist/Normative, Interpretive, and the Paradigm of Praxis/ Action Research/Critical Theoretic)

Within the broad arena of educational research, there are three main research paradigms: the empirical, the interpretive, and the critical theoretic (McNiff, 2002a: 30). Such divisions are not holistic as other ways of classifying the same thing are available in the literature. For instance, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000), and O'Brien (2001) classify the same as: The positivist (normative) research paradigm, the interpretive research paradigm, and the action research paradigm/ paradigm of praxis. For the sake of simplicity, the two have been interspersed into each other reflecting the categories of technical, practical and emancipatory interests as can be evidenced from each descriptions hereunder.

a) The empirical research/Positivist Paradigm:

- i. is rooted in the Newtonian-Cartesian worldview, which understands the natural world as a set of interrelated parts, and one part causes certain effects in the other;
- ii. is always challenged when applied in social settings and from the point of view of learning and its epistemological basis as it limits the participation of practitioners/learners, and it enhances the notion that theory determines practice;

- iii. is based on a number of principles, including: a belief in an objective reality, knowledge of which is only gained from sense data that can be directly experienced and verified between independent observers; and
- iv. is the main research paradigm for the past several centuries (Logical Positivism). In this sense, phenomena are subject to natural laws that humans discover in a logical manner through empirical testing, using inductive and deductive hypotheses derived from a body of scientific theory. Its methods rely heavily on quantitative measures, with relationships among variables commonly shown by mathematical means. Positivism, used in scientific and applied research, has been considered by many to be the antithesis of the principles of action research (McNiff, 2002a; Susman & Evered 1978, Winter 1989, Wisker, 2008; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

b) The *Interpretive Research/Paradigm*: grew out of sociological enquiry as the social sciences began to dislodge/ to break out of the constraints imposed by positivism, that is, a worldview of human action as deterministic. It arose initially out of the *hermeneutic tradition*; the name given to the practice of the interpretation of religious texts by protestant theologians in the seventeenth century, and which later came to be associated with literature and the arts. It emphasizes the relationship between socially engendered concept formation and language. It is characterized by a belief in a socially constructed, subjectively based reality, one that is influenced by culture and history. Nonetheless it still retains the ideals of researcher objectivity, and researcher as passive collector and expert interpreter of data.

During the 1960s and 1970 a type of ethnographic research arose in education studies, which was known, among other terms, as *illuminative evaluation* and gradually evolved as *case study* (McNiff, 2002a: 32). This approach is also challenged as there is little difference from the traditional empirical research with regard to power relationships as to who is regarded as a legitimate knower, whose practice is studied, and whose knowledge counts. As a result of more efficient communications and travel opportunities from the nineteenth century onwards, an interest in anthropological and naturalistic research rose. Consequently, researchers began to study people in their own settings. A number of perspectives developed including phenomenology and 'ethnomethodology', and debates arose within the movement as to whose voices should be heard-the researchers' or the 'researchees'. At about the same time, critical feminist research and liberationist theology,

as well as action research have emerged from- and have been strengthened by- critical theory that developed as a systematic approach to offer both an oppositional response to dominating influences and emancipatory hope as it has amazing power for social renewal. In view of the above, it is criticized for the reason that it aims at critiquing, not to manage change entailing changing management. That is, while critical theorists say what ought to be done to 'right wrongs', they do not show how it can be done or what needs to be done to realize the potentialities of their theories to turn them into living realities. The critical theoretic paradigm, nonetheless, remains powerful for enhancing action research as a form of enquiry (along with other research programs such as feminist research and liberation theology) (McNiff, 2002a: 32; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000: 23; O'Brien, 2001).

- c) *The action research paradigm/ Paradigm of praxis*: Sharing a number of perspectives with the *interpretive paradigm*, a paradigm of praxis is where the main affinities of action research lie. Praxis, a term used by Aristotle, is the art of acting upon the conditions one faces in order to change them. It deals with the disciplines and activities predominant in the ethical and political lives of people. Aristotle contrasted this with *Theoria* - those sciences and activities that are concerned with knowing for its own sake. Inherent in the paradigm of praxis is knowledge which is derived from practice, and practice informed by knowledge, in an ongoing process, is a cornerstone of action research (Mattson & Kemmis, 2007).

3.6.4. Action Research within the Three Types of Classroom Research

Action research is one of the three types of classroom research: experimental studies (intervention and control), naturalistic studies (seeing what happens), and action research (intervention and observation) (Allright & Bailey, 1991: 35).

- a) *Experimental studies*: are defined as a whole range of different possible studies that investigate the language behavior of groups under controlled conditions and a high degree effect of the researcher's intervention, which is regarded as 'treatment' administered to some subjects (the 'experimental group') in order to test a hypothesis about a cause-and-effect relationship. Relatively, nonetheless, few 'true experimental

designs' have been carried out in classroom research on language teaching and learning. This is due to the: a) desire to understand what goes on in naturally occurring language classes, and b) difficulty to control all the factors to replicate the laboratory conditions called for by experimental research (Brown, 1988: 3; Allwright & Bailey, 1991: 41).

- b) *Naturalistic enquiry*: In *Naturalistic enquiry*, the researcher tries not to intervene in the research setting and does not try to control naturally occurring events. This is purposefully done not to influence the normally occurring patterns of instruction and interaction. Description and understanding of the process, rather than to test specific hypotheses about cause-and-effect relationships, is an important aspect.
- c) *Action research involves*: a) a direct intervention with only limited possibilities for control; and b) taking an action and systematically observing what follows in a series of repeated steps/cycles (see Section 3.3.2. of this Chapter) with the purpose of achieving local understanding and developing viable solutions to problems (Allwright & Bailey, 1991: 41-45).

Figure 9 presents a synthesis of the contrasting features of action research against other typologies of research approaches discussed so far.

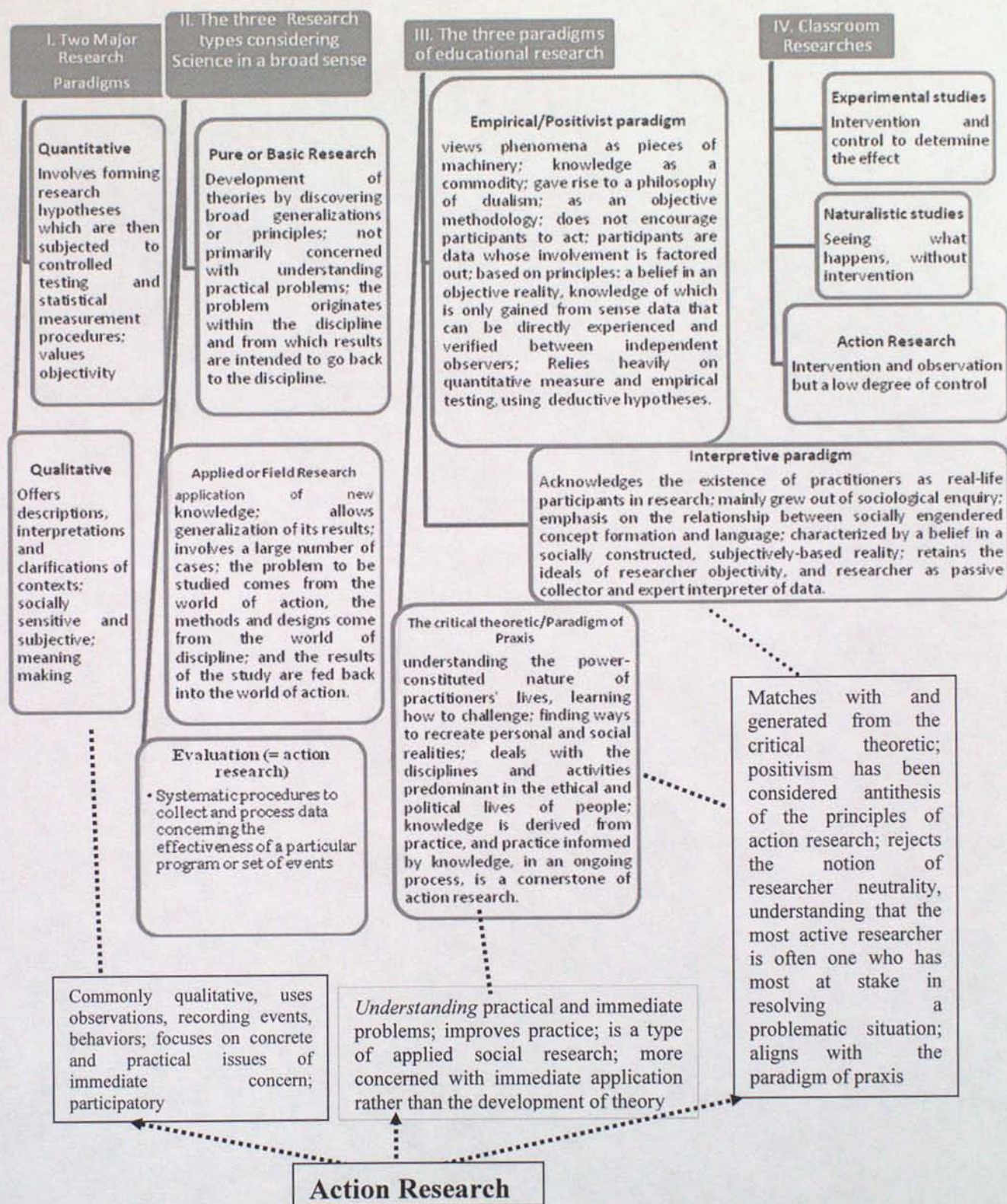


Figure 9. Summary of the Comparisons between Action Research and the Typologies of Research (see with Appendix 17)



Figure 9 shows that there are several ways of classifying research. It also shows that action research has affinities with qualitative, applied or field research, and paradigm of praxis. Equally, the varied ways of classifying research entail the complexities in which the term 'research' is used and conducted. This is because the requirements differ in different research approaches and traditions. In the natural sciences: a) there is an emphasis on research methods and empirical findings that contribute to theory building; and b) the research is framed to test an hypothesis which predicts an outcome already framed in terms of what is known and what should be expected on the grounds of existing knowledge and theory. In other paradigms, for example, in the *Hermeneutics*, on the other hand, there is a focus on perspective, analysis, interpretation and unique knowledge. When it comes to praxis-related research including action research, there is a focus on context and praxis rather than relying on a single research method and empirical findings that contribute to theory building. The methodology in action research, therefore, is: a) both a form of research and a means of supporting change, and b) purposive, eclectic and holistic mainly following the qualitative research paradigm.

Seen from the broader context, however, many studies follow mixed approach. Very few studies can be confidently characterized as being purely qualitative, quantitative, experimental that can be structured and controlled, or purely naturalistic that cannot be structured and controlled, praxis-related, etc. This is a matter of academic dispute especially in forums where researchers from one tradition are required to evaluate the products of researchers in other traditions. Each category of the research has legitimate purpose or value by itself; can contribute to the development and/or revision of the content and structure of the other categories; and may also complement each other. This calls for the consideration that under whatever condition research is undertaken; it is essentially an intellectual and creative activity, all are expected to contribute to the broad discussion about perspectives, research methods, theory of science and our perceptions of the world. The case, therefore, calls for considering mixed research methods (Dornyei, 2007; Reason, 2006, in Mattsson & Kemmis, 2007; O'Brien, 2001; Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Verma & Mallick, 1999; Mattson & Kemmis, 2007; Selinger & Shohamy, 2007; Janeiro, 2002)

Overall, regardless of the classifications of research methods discussed so far, our choice of research methods depends upon: a) the methodology we are using, and the research questions we are seeking; and b) the discipline area in which we are studying and our view of the world (Wisker, 2008:186). Even the dichotomy or polar position between positivist methodology (deductive, quantitative data collection and interpretation) and the post-positivist (which is inductive, develops theory and uses qualitative methods) is an easy rule of thumb to determine world views and approaches; some researches combine across the inductive and deductive, qualitative and quantitative, and change from one approach to another in the process.

3.7. Validating Action Research

Though action research has got recognition than ever before, still some debates remain recur. First, though the legitimacy of action research is being popularized, the criteria and standards of judgment used for action research works are still those of the traditional approach to research and the academy is still the highest authority in what counts as legitimate knowledge. In support of this view, McNiff (2002a: 106) indicates, “[s]ome new paradigm researchers... complain that their work is still judged in traditional terms; for example, the quality of reporting is still often considered more important than the quality of the practice recounted in the report”.

Second, the fact that action research is teacher determined, teacher conducted, and teacher interpreted raises important issues about validation in relation to the claims and practices that derive from the study. By implication, validation is an important feature of action research and can encompass both quantitative and qualitative oriented approaches. Whereas quantitative aspects of validity include using clear criteria to focus data collection, building a comparison into the study, and examining the effects of practices altered on the basis of the research; the qualitative aspects include the formation of validation groups and the extent to which teachers and administrators in school concur with the research results and changes in practice (Gay & Airasian, 2000: 600, 603).

Third, this research is basically a research on action research mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches. Equally, whereas some believe that qualitative approaches and constructivist philosophies require their own assessment criteria distinct from those that characterize quantitative research, others think otherwise. Attempts have been made in this section to make the debates clear by briefing the ways of assuring the *believability, trustworthiness, and credibility* of one's interpretations and claims on the procedures and the results. In doing so, the conceptions and criterion of validity have been viewed from the immediate and local meanings of action research as they are defined from the participants' point of view, which is the feature of action research. Such new concepts of validity have fuelled by the development of the qualitative approaches in educational research (Burns, 1999: 161; Dick, 2002: 13-14; Mertler, 2009: 114-116).

3.7.1. The Concept of Validity

The term 'validity' and its nature are highly debatable and there is no single, fixed or common definition of the term, but rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects" (Winter, 2000: 1). Consequently, "establishing a common definition or even core concept of 'validity' is an immensely difficult process" (Winter, 2000: 10). Whereas many people view validity as a *unitary concept*, Winter (2000:3) argues that "'validity' is not in any simple sense a unitary concept. There is no single form, construct or concept that can universally be claimed to define or encompass the term. Neither, however, can validity be said to be a discretely identifiable element of any research project, which is capable of being located at multiple and specific stages within the research.

The concept of 'validity' defies extrapolation from, or categorization within, any research project. For the purpose of situating some conceptual understanding attached to the term 'validity' in terms of the purpose of the study, nonetheless, some definitions of the term given by leading authors have been reviewed in this subsection.

For Mertler (2009:436), validity is "the meaningfulness of scores, which is often assessed by the accuracy of inferences made on the basis of test scores. It also refers to the extent to

which a test measures what it is supposed to measure". Wisker (2008: 322) has extended the concept of 'validity' to the whole issue of cohesion in a research work between conceptual framework, methods, questions and findings. She argues, "[i]f your methods, approaches and techniques really fit with and measure the issues you have been researching, then the findings are likely to be valid" (Ibid). Whereas Burns (Ibid.) argues that the purposes of practitioner research as more to do with using the knowledge gained from the research in specific practical contexts than with creating knowledge or generating theories in order to disseminate them to the wider academic research community; Mertler (2009: 24) gives space for possibility of producing a 'scholarly academic output' that can be disseminated using action research approach.

Since action research follows methods common to qualitative research, it does not necessarily follow the notion of validity in the sense that is applied in experimental research. In the first place, action research is a form of investigation, which aims to describe and explain events and activities in a specific context rather than to establish relationship between variables or to isolate causes and their effects. Second, because of its highly local nature, action research is interested in specific participants and phenomena with a purpose of gaining insights in one specific situation that may be useful or relevant in illuminating issues for other teachers and/or the end users of the research results who may demand them to confirm the validity, rigor and credibility of their investigation.

3.7.2. Validity Criteria to Judge Legitimacy Claims

Different authors present different ways of viewing and classifying validity criteria to judge legitimacy claims. For example, Winter (2000: 3) classifies validity criteria as descriptive, interpretive, theoretical, generalizability, and evaluative; Habermas (1979; 1984, 1987a, 1987b, reiterated in Habermas, 1986, and cited in Kemmis, 2007: 6 and in McNiff, 2002a: 104) classifies them in relation to comprehensibility, correctness, truthfulness, morally rightness and appropriateness; and Maxwell (1992: 285) identifies five typologies of validity: descriptive validity, interpretative validity, theoretical validity, generalisability, and evaluative validity. For Anderson et al. (1994:30-33) the criteria for validity in 'practitioner' research differ from academic concepts of validity in 'qualitative'

research more generally, as they will need to respond to the rather different purposes and conditions of practitioner research. They, therefore, classify them as *democratic validity*, *outcome validity*, *process validity*, *catalytic validity*, and *dialogic/communicative validity*. A synthesis in line with the validity criteria by Anderson et al (1994: 30-3), therefore, gives the following validity types.

3.7.2.1. Pragmatic validity: refers to the: a) determination of the evidence of the validity of new knowledge to cause change in practice; b) authenticity of the new knowledge to lead to new actions and patterns of activity and confirmed by participants; and c) notion that action speaks louder than words.

3.7.2.2. Democratic validity: refers to the extent to which all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation participate and multiple voices and perspectives and interests are taken into account. It deals with the extent to which the research is done in collaboration with all parties involved in and affected by the research.

3.7.2.3. Process validity: raises questions about the 'dependability' and 'competency' of the research process. Key questions here include: *How adequate was the process of conducting the research? Are the research participants able to go on learning from the process? Are events or behaviors viewed from different perspectives and through different data sources to guard against simplistic or biased interpretations?*

3.7.2.4. Outcome validity: refers to the extent to which action research outcomes:

- a) lead to a resolution of the problem under study or to the completion of a research cycle that results in action;
- b) lead to outcomes that are 'successful' within the research context;
- c) involve a resolution of a problem and the reframing of the problem in such a way that it would lead to new questions; and
- d) are valid in the process of conducting the research.

3.7.2.5. Catalytic validity: refers to: a) the degree to which the research energizes participants to know and transform reality; b) relates to the extent to which the research allows the participants to deepen their understanding of the social realities of the context and how they can make changes within it; and c) addresses the actions taken as a result of

these changes, or by monitoring other participants' perceptions of problems in the research setting.

3.7.2.6. Dialogic/communicative validity: This: a) is the degree to which the research promotes a reflective dialogue among all participants in the research for the fact that reality is consensually validated as it is shared through language; and b) deals with communication between researchers and participants owing to the fact that good communication between the parties is a prerequisite for determining the authenticity of the participants' views, insights and perspectives.

These kinds of criteria are applicable to action research. They shed lights on making professional judgments about the quality of action research in terms of accuracy, credibility, and dependability of the procedures, data and the findings. It should, however, be noted that these criteria are suggestive and are 'in flux' reflecting the emerging status of action research. This is because action research reports still tend to be judged by traditional criteria most of which are technical, asking whether the research shows a systematic process of data gathering, analysis and interpretation. They, nonetheless, offer alternative concepts of validity for action researchers (Anderson et al, 1994; Burns, 1999).

3.7.3. Validating Agents

In the attempt to answer a question: "Who validates claims?" three major agents can be cited: self-validation; colleagues' validation (critical friend, validation group, and peer examinations); and academic validation.

3.7.3.1. Self-Validation: Action researchers need to be stringent critic of their own works and claims to knowledge. They need to learn to interrogate the assumptions underlying their own thinking, and to check that they are speaking out the values of respect for others and need to see each point as worth. They should stand for the right of others, as they also should defend their values assertively. Against these values, they can test their claims to knowledge. Consequently, if they feel that they are living them out, they are prepared to defend their claims (McNiff, 2002a: 104-105).

3.7.3.2. Colleagues' Validation: Even though action researchers' judgment of their work is decisive to enhance their own values and claims, there is a need to make the work available to the critical scrutiny of others, such as critical friends, and validation groups (McNiff, 2002a: 105-106).

3.7.3.2.1. A Critical Friend: A critical friend (also called a 'critical colleague' or 'learning partner'): a) is someone whose opinion is valued and who is able to critique another's work to enable him/her see it in a new light; b) may be asked/invited from the start of a research work and becomes familiar with the research and offers advice and criticism; and c) needs to be supportive, but not so supportive that he/she does not point out real or potential flaws. Since critique is essential, one should be open and listen to the critical friend's advice; sometimes one becomes too close to the action to see potential problematic, and fresh perspectives are to be welcomed (McNiff, 2002a; Mertler, 2009).

3.7.3.2.2. A Validation Group: This refers to convening a validation group of 4–10 people for the duration of the research; or at critical points, such as when one feels he/she is making real progress in terms of is/her identified success criteria and have powerful evidence to present. It may or may not include a critical friend. The group meets with the researcher periodically to listen to his/her progress reports and to scrutinize his/her data. Although the groups might not be entirely familiar with the researcher's works, they would be able to make professional judgments about the validity of his/her report, and would offer critical feedback. The researcher should listen carefully to their advice, though he/she is not compelled to act on it (McNiff, 2002a; Metler, 2009).

3.7.3.2.3. Academic Validation: This deals with validating the extent to which a formal report of a research adds to an existing body of knowledge. As the academy is still the highest authority in what counts as legitimate knowledge, action research has to stand in terms of its academic rigor. The "determination of rigor", nonetheless, "is often contingent on the intended audience for the sharing of action research results" (Mertler, 2009: 24).

As the same source further exemplifies,

...if the research is intended for limited dissemination (e.g. sharing with members of the action research group or building staff), the necessary level of rigor is much different than if the dissemination is intended for scholarly academic output (e.g. formally presenting the results at a national research conference or publishing the study in a journal). It is necessary for the broader dissemination to be concerned more with *generalizability*, meaning that the results of the study extend beyond its scope to other settings and people (P. 24).

Overall, validity is increased if the findings and interpretations of the research data and/or findings are acknowledged by the above-mentioned audience to be plausible. Qualitative researchers including action researchers are, therefore, expected to be familiar with all or any of the validating criteria and the validating agents discussed so far, and some techniques of validation.

3.7.4. Techniques of Validation

In this sub-section, some techniques drawn from qualitative approaches for providing validity checks on (that can help ensure trustworthiness of) action research data have been discussed. Whereas Burns (1999: 162-166) classifies the techniques as: triangulation, member checks, rival explanations and negative cases, peer examinations, and monitoring researcher bias; Mertler (2009: 115-116) classifies them as: triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Triangulation is common in both classifications, and is the most commonly used and the best-known approach of checking for validity. It has been developed in qualitative research methodology to meet purposive requirements of reliability and validity. The introduction of the concept of 'triangulation' into the social sciences in 1970s has brought a real break through in combining the quantitative and qualitative research, resulting in what is called mixed methods of data analysis (Dornyei, 2007: 37; 245).

Triangulation is a term, which is used in different senses by qualitative researchers. It is defined as:

- a) a process of relating or using multiple data sources, multiple data collection methods, and multiple teacher - researchers in order to establish their *trustworthiness*; used with qualitative research methods (Mertler, 2009: 115-116, 249);
- b) a method used in qualitative research that involves cross-checking multiple data collection sources and procedures (Suter, 2006: 435);
- c) a cross-checking of the existence of certain phenomena and the veracity of individual accounts by gathering data from a number of informants and a number of sources; and
- d) is a procedure for organizing different types of evidence into a more coherent frame of reference or relationship so that they can be compared and contrasted.

Implied in the above definitions of triangulation is its aim to gathering multiple perspectives on the situation being studied through combining multiple research methodologies (e.g. observation and interviews) and different kinds of data (e.g. quantitative and qualitative). In most cases, researchers see whether multiple research methodologies corroborate by gathering data on a particular situation from three perspectives (corners): the teacher's perspective; the learners' perspectives, and the participant observer's perspective (the perspective of a third party) as illustrated in Figure 10. The purpose is to see the perspectives of various actions within the research setting.

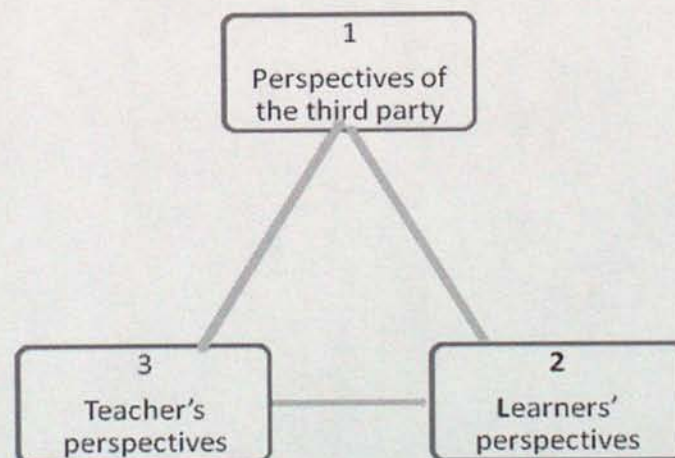


Figure 10. Triangulation of Three Sources (adapted from Mertler, 2009: 116; Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993: 115)

Figure 10 illustrates that a teacher researcher may collect data on a particular situation from three perspectives (corners), namely, the perspectives of the teacher, an individual learner, and a neutral third party. The inherent purpose is employing multiple methods to solicit multiple perspectives of different participants whereby rich and less subjective data can be obtained than one may obtain by relying on a single data gathering technique (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993: 115; Cohen & Manion, 1994; Scheerens, Glas & Thomas, 2003: 46; Denzin, 1978: 291, in Jick, 1979; McKernan, 1996: 184; Burns, 1999: 272; Silverman, 1993:156, in Burns, 1999:163 and in McKernan, 1996: 184-186).

Besides using the above multiple methods and perspectives, there are different forms of triangulation. Among others, time triangulation, space triangulation, investigator triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and methodological triangulation are valuable forms of validating action research. The methods and perspectives with the forms ensure increased validity and back up or cast new light, each on the other.

In sum, validation of the claim of action researcher considers the issues of validity, reliability and rigour to be addressed in different ways in different fields of science (especially the natural versus the social sciences) and that questions of trust and meaningfulness may be at least as important to action research participants as are questions of validity, reliability and rigour within the communities of practice of natural sciences (Mattsson & Kemmis, 2007: 31-33).

3.8. Action Research Implications for Quality Language Teaching

Action research has a pragmatically lasting impact on the quality of classroom practices. To bring the required impact, the research itself needs to have quality, meeting “standards of sound practice” (Mertler, 2009: 24). In support of this view, Somekh (2005) indicates, “[i]mpact upon practice is the first marker of quality in educational research, but the value of this impact is, of course, grounded in the knowledge the research generates”. Reiterating action research importance in the context of this sub-section is, therefore, essential to presume its decisive roles to bridge the gap between language theory and practice, to improve EFL teaching practice, to empower teachers, to provide professional

growth opportunities for the teachers, to identify classroom problems, to develop and test solutions to the identified problems, and to expand the knowledge base of EFL teachers.

Above all, action research gives choices for language practitioners and learners to engage in *authentic practices* in a purposive and flexible manner. It also ensures transparency, trustworthiness and pragmatic validity as it empowers teachers and learners to be change agents of their own agendas in their specific contexts and settings.

Action research, therefore, has immense implications for quality language teaching as it transforms EFL classroom practices and the practitioners in terms of the above points. Such transformation entails quality language teaching, which can also be manifested through reviewing CLT pedagogical principles within the broad range of methods/approaches; language teachers' roles; communalities of CLT and action research in enhancing the quality of language teaching; and action research for sustaining quality language teaching. These points have been discussed in the following sub-sections.

3.8.1. Action Research Vis-à-vis Pedagogical Principles in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Current trends in language pedagogy enhance the notion that the sources of the theoretical activity of language teaching should be the teacher's own practice as opposed to theories derived from educational thinkers. This, in principle, is grounded on the features of action research, which also assert that improved practice involves teachers developing their own theories through reflection on the tasks of: selecting learning activities, preparing students for new learning, presenting learning activities, asking questions, conducting drills, checking students' understanding, providing opportunities for practice of new items, monitoring students' learning, giving feedback on student learning, and reviewing and re-teaching when necessary (Ashcroft & Foreman-Peck, 1994: 188; Richards & Lockhart, 1994: 29).

To accomplish these tasks appropriately, EFL teachers need to examine and clarify *taken-for-granted assumptions, worldviews and theoretical orientations* about the tasks. By

implication, they are demanded to learn how to do the tasks in new ways through action research, which empowers them for sustainable improvement of their pedagogical practices based on identified needs and functional principles of CLT pedagogy.

CLT is a hybrid and a generally accepted approach to language teaching today. It started in UK in the late 1960s (by British language educators and linguists) and continues to evolve (Lindsay & Knight, 2006: 20; Wright, 2000: 7; Hailom, 2009: 8). It was very much in the hands of the private sector in the UK during the 1960s and until the early 1970s (Wright, 2000: 9). During the same time, the explosion in linguistic knowledge and theorizing took place in British Universities. Consequently, many ELT practitioners were pursuing postgraduate qualifications. CLT, thus, found both a theoretical basis and an institutional home. Later on in 1973, it spread and grew with the 'Oil Shock' and the subsequent demand for English particularly in the Middle East.

In the 1970s educators began to question if they were going about meeting the goal in the right way. Some observed that students could produce sentences accurately in a lesson, but could not use them appropriately when genuinely communicating outside of the classroom. Others noted that being able to communicate required more than mastering linguistic structures or linguistic competence. It requires knowing when and how to say what to whom (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:121). Such observations contributed to a shift in the field in the late 1970s and early 1980s from the linguistic structure-centered (American structuralisms) approach to a communicative approach (Widdowson, 1990, in Larsen-Freeman, 2000:121; Hailom, 2009: 8).

CLT for Larsen-Freeman (2000:121) aims broadly to apply the theoretical perspective of the Communicative Approach by making communicative competence the goal of language teaching and by acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication.

For Lindsay and Knight (2006: 20), CLT "is not actually a method but an approach to teaching based on the view that learning a language means learning how to communicate effectively in the world outside the classroom." This capitalizes the inherent nature of

CLT focusing on real-life situations and communication in context whereby learners are placed at the center. It is, therefore, 'progressive' rather than 'traditional' (Wright, 2000: 7).

Lindsay and Knight (2006: 20) present the following main features of CLT.

- a) The goal is to learn to communicate in the target language.
- b) There is an emphasis on meaning and using the language rather than on the structure and form of the language.
- c) Oral and written activities may be used from the start, for example, role-plays, dialogues, games, and problem solving.
- d) One role of the teacher is that of a 'facilitator' who helps learners to communicate in English and motivates them to work with language.
- e) Learners often interact with each other through pair or group work.
- f) The four skills of language are developed simultaneously.

Related to these features are the following pedagogical principles of the Communicative approach to language teaching.

- a) Teaching is learner-centered and responsive to learners' needs and interests.
- b) The target language is acquired through interactive communicative use that encourages the negotiation of meaning.
- c) Genuinely meaningful language use is emphasized, along with unpredictability, risk-taking, and choice making.
- d) There is exposure to examples of authentic language from the target language community.
- e) The formal properties of language are never treated in isolation from use; language forms are always addressed within a communicative context.
- f) Learners are encouraged to discover the forms and structures of language for themselves.
- g) There is a whole - language approach in which the four traditional language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are integrated (Finocchiaro & Brumfit's, 1983, cited in Beale, 2002).

In line with the aforementioned features and principles: a) *Pre- communicative activities*, which are accuracy - based and focus on presentation of structures, functions, and vocabulary; and b) *communicative activities*, which are fluency – based and focus on information sharing and information exchange are often evidenced in CLT (Littlewood, 1988, cited in Richards, & Lockhart, 1994).

Understandably, teaching different skills may demand different sequencing of activities. The different sequencing, nonetheless, acknowledges the unpredictable developmental process of language acquisition requiring a communicatively interactive and cooperative negotiation of meaning on the part of learners and teachers. For instance, in teaching of writing according to the *process approach*, a sequence of: 1) pre – writing activities, 2) drafting activities, and 3) revising activities- is often recommended (Proett & Gill, 1996, cited in Richards, & Lockhart, 1994). Similarly, the teaching of reading in ESL is often divided into three stages: 1) pre – reading activities, 2) while reading- activities, and 3) post- reading activities (Nuttall, 1982, cited in Richards, & Lockhart, 1994:120).

3.8.2. CLT within the Broad range of Language Teaching Methods/Approaches

Whereas it is too difficult to: a) capture the dynamics of methodological change, b) exhaustively show the similarities that exist among the different methods/approaches, and c) reveal certain areas of differences by treating categories globally; it is possible to show which aspects of language/culture are focused upon, how the method seeks to promote language learning, and the associated language teaching aspects (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 177). The aspects can be discerned from the following summary of 11 methods/approaches in terms of language /culture, learning, and teaching.

Table 5. A Summary Chart of some Methods/Approaches to Language Teaching

Method/Approach	Language/Culture	Language Learning	Language Teaching
Grammar-Translation	Literary language Culture: literature and the fine arts	Exercise mental muscle	Have students translate from target language (TL) texts to native language
Direct Method	Everyday spoken language	Associate meaning with the TL directly	Use spoken language in situations with no native-language translation
Audio-Lingual Method	Sentence and sound Patterns	Overcome native language habits; form new TL habits	Conduct oral/aural drills and pattern practice
Cognitive Code approach	Grammar rules	Form and test hypotheses to discover and acquire TL rules	Do inductive/deductive grammar exercises
Silent Way	Unique spirit/melody	Develop inner criteria for correctness by becoming aware of how the TL works	Remain silent in order to subordinate teaching to learning. Focus student attention; provide meaningful practice
Desuggestopedia	Whole, meaningful texts; vocabulary emphasized	Overcome psychological barriers to learning	Desuggest limitations: teach lengthy dialogs through musical accompaniment, playful practice, and the arts
Community Language Learning	Student generated	Learn non-defensively as whole persons, following development stages	Include the elements of security, attention, aggression, reflection, retention, discrimination
Comprehension Approach: Natural Approach, the Lernables, and Total Physical Response	Vehicle for communicating meaning: vocabulary emphasized	Listen; associate meaning with TL directly	Delay speaking until students are ready; make meaning clear through actions and visuals
Communicative Language Teaching	Communicative competence Notions/functions Authentic discourse	Interact with others in the TL; negotiate meaning	Use information gaps, role plays, games
Content-based, Task-based, and Participatory Approaches	Medium for doing/learning	Attend to what is being communicated, not the language itself, except when form-focused	Engage students in learning other subject matter, tasks, or in problem-solving around issues in their lives
Learning strategy Training, Cooperative Learning, and Multiple Intelligences		Learn how to learn	Teach learning strategies, cooperation: use a variety of activities that appeal to different intelligences

Source: Larsen-Freeman (2000:178)

It can be understood from Table 5 that the essential features of the English language teaching methods manifest salient differences and similarities in significant ways. It can

also be discerned that the language teaching methodology has remained dynamically changing. While it is true that all of these methods are being practiced today, it is also true that they are not equally distributed in classrooms around the world. Whereas in some parts of the world, certain older language teaching methods have endured for years, interest in developing students' communicative competence reunified the field in the 1980s and the Communicative Approach is widely used today. In Larsen-Freeman's (2000) view, the Communicative Approach has not been universally adopted in certain contexts, especially where the target language is spoken in the environment. Equally, how it is implemented varies from context to context.

Innovation in the language teaching field in the late 1980s and 1990s has been enthused by a special concern for the language learning process. The predominant view is that language learning is best served when students are interacting— completing a task or learning content or resolving real-life issues— where their attention is not directed toward the language itself, except when a focus on linguistic form is necessary. In this view, EFL teachers should feel that they can no longer be content to teach language in classrooms ignoring issues in their own and their students' lives outside of the classroom walls (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 179).

3.8.3. Language Teachers' Roles within the Pedagogical Principles of CLT

The way teachers' view their professional roles has implications to quality. Since language teachers may see their roles in different ways, their influence to quality also varies. This is because language teaching and its acquisition involve linguistic, psycholinguistic, socio linguistic, psychological, and educational aspects. In such an interdisciplinary field, language teachers may play the role of: planners, managers, quality controllers, group organizers, facilitators, motivators, transformers, or team leaders. Whereas these roles often overlap, a central task for any teacher is to maintain the quality of language use in and outside classroom among others by enforcing correct- and discouraging incorrect-language use.

In fulfilling this mission, a teacher assumes the following main roles in the spirit of CLT.

1. Facilitating the communication processes between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts;
2. Acting as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group; and
3. Researcher and learner, with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities (Breen & Candlin, 1980:99, in Richards & Lockhart, 1994: 103).

As the same source indicates, the second role is closely related to the objectives of the first role and arises from it. The third role is the main concern of this study encompassing the ingredients of both the first and the second as it deals with exploration and development of practical theory governing the whole enterprises of communicative language teaching. Inherent in these roles are a set of implicit roles for the teacher; first, as an organizer of resources and as a resource him(her)self, second as a guide within the classroom procedures and activities (Ibid).

3.8.4. Communalities of CLT and Action Research in enhancing Quality of TEFL

Whereas CLT is progressive inasmuch as it enhances authentic learning, action research is also progressive as it situates EFL teachers at the center of their works so as to setup situations that students are likely to encounter in real life and work environment. Action research, therefore, enables teachers fulfill their pedagogical roles within the features and principles of CLT. This is because action research can be used in a variety of areas, for example:

- a. *teaching methods* — replacing a traditional method by a discovery method;
- b. *learning strategies* — adopting an integrated approach to learning in preference to a single-subject style of teaching and learning;
- c. *evaluative procedures* — improving one's methods of continuous assessment;
- d. *attitudes and values* — encouraging more positive attitudes to work, or modifying pupils' value systems with regard to some aspect of life;

- e. *continuing professional development of teachers*— improving teaching skills, developing new methods of learning, increasing powers of analysis, of heightening self-awareness;
- f. *management and control* — the gradual introduction of the techniques of behavior modification; and
- g. *administration* — increasing the efficiency of some aspect of the administrative side of school life (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000: 226).

Similarly, Wisker (2008: 232) lists that action research:

- a. is based in practice and thus avoids the problem of needing to be ‘implemented’ later somewhere else – it is causing the changes and reflecting on the experiences as part of the actual research;
- b. enhances morale (individual and collective) because it encourages practitioners to develop, reflect on and use their strengths; and
- c. uses validity criteria and validation processes based on involvement in the practice situation, so it is rigorous and internally valid, but cannot be argued to be reliable or generalized, as each situation and context in which practitioners carry out it is necessarily different.

On the bases of the aforementioned applications of action research, it is possible to draw some aspects that are meant to compare CLT and action research (see Table 6).

Table 6. Communalities of CLT and Action Research

Contrasting aspects	CLT	Action Research
Approach	Learner-centered and responsive to learners' needs and interests	Practitioner-centered and responsive to their needs and interests
Target	Interactive communicative use that encourages the negotiation of meaning.	Collaborative and communicative space among the practitioners are enhanced
Emphasis	Genuinely meaningful language use; unpredictability, risk-taking, and choice making	Contextual meaning; unpredictability; empowerment and commitment for risk-taking, ownership and accountability
Exposure	To authentic language from the target language community	To lived experiences of colleagues through narrative inquiries, conversations and story telling, learning communities, etc
Functional Properties	The formal properties of language are treated in relation to use; addressed within a communicative context to create authentic meaning and understanding	The overall conduct of action research is seen in relation to its pragmatic function to enhance learning, understanding and betterment of oneself and one's practice
Encouraging Participants	Learners are encouraged to discover the forms and structures of language for themselves	Practitioners are encouraged to continuously inquire their professional environments
Integration	The four language skills follow whole-language approach	Personal, professional and political dimensions of action research are concerns for practitioners

Table 6 presents a synthesis of the communalities of CLT and action research in enhancing the quality of EFL teaching. The contrasting aspects are the pedagogic principles of CLT. A closer look at the Table enlightens the common features that CLT and action research share in enhancing the quality of language teaching and learning. Both of them:

- a. value participant (learners' as well as teachers') empowerment;
- b. enhance interactive and cooperative ways of working both by students and teachers both as learners and inquirers;
- c. challenge orthodoxy and taken-for granted ways of doing things both in learning and researching;
- d. enhance authenticity which in turn enhances quality of both learning and research;
- e. emphasis on meaningful use over form. This, from CLT point of view, means fluency and ability to get something across comprehensibly to a native speaker than 'accuracy' and acquisition of the formal features of the language. Equally from action research

point of view, the idea entails the meaning that EFL teachers attach to their actual classrooms rather than conducting research for the sake of its name;

- f. recognize the importance of teachers' specific contexts and acknowledge the fact that different teaching settings involve teachers in different kinds of roles for teaching and research roles. This calls for dealing with concrete and practical issues of immediate concern to particular classroom or institutional communities. Particularly, action research holds particular appeal for the roles of EFL classroom teachers and a promising direction for the building of theories related to specific teaching and learning as its practical nature and focus on immediate concerns.

Virtually, as there is no one best method of teaching EFL, there is no one-way to conduct action research. By implication, specific method or technique does not distinguish both teaching EFL and conducting action research. Equally, it is not possible to investigate second language acquisition from any single perspective. It varies according to:

- a) the circumstances under which the research is conducted;
- b) the methodology used in the research as there is no one preferred research approach for the study of all second language acquisition⁹; and
- c) the tools used to study second language (Selinger & Shohamy, 2007: 22-23)

Similarly, 'no one method is preferable and no single approach will suffice' for carrying out research in second language acquisition (*Ibid* P. 258). Consequently, multiple approaches are used to conduct action research. This is also true for CLT as it is a hybrid and progressive approach emphasizing real-life situations, and communication in context. Such a feature provides opportunities for learners to focus not only on language, but also on the learning process itself, and on linking classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

Overall, within both language teaching since the 1960s in general and CLT since the 1970s in particular, action research has got recognition as a catalyst for reflection and development. Whereas CLT empowers learners for authentic language use, action research

⁹ Research methodologies may be determined by such factors as the philosophy of the researcher, the theory motivating the research, and objective factors such as the conditions under which the research is being conducted and the question being investigated (Selinger & Shohamy, 2007)

empowers EFL teachers to be committed and feel responsible for their activities/practices by directly participating in planning, implementing, monitoring and reflecting for sustainable improvement of the quality and standard of their language classroom practices and themselves. The Communicative approaches, thus, demands teachers to be researchers in carrying out particular roles in the classroom in order to facilitate the language acquisition processes that the method is designed to activate (Burns, 1999: 24; Sanders 1987: 222, in Baele, 2002; Richards & Lockhart, 1994: 104).

3.8.5. Action Research for Sustaining Quality Language Teaching

It is possible to presume from the discussions made so far that action research is both a means of conducting research and engaging teachers in debates on issues of their practice. Mertler (2009: xiii) argues, "...action research is not only a means of conducting classroom-based research. It is also a mechanism for engaging teachers in reflective practice and customizing professional development opportunities in order to capitalize on the unique interests of individual teachers or teams of teachers". The term 'interest' in Mertler's argument can be capitalized. This is because the term reiterates Sallis's (2002: 15) definition of quality as "that which satisfies and exceeds customers' needs and wants". The term 'customers' in this definition can be taken as EFL teachers' purpose, interest, priorities, and needs for learning and betterment. Inasmuch as action research fulfills the following features, it is responsive to customers'/ EFL teachers' needs, and priorities.

- a. Action research is carried out by people who are directly concerned with the practical situation;
- b. It starts from practical questions arising from stakeholders;
- c. It is compatible with the values of the institutions, individuals, and groups;
- d. It fits the interests and skills of those involved so that it is not 'value free';
- e. It allows flexibility emphasizing the inclusive, participation, collective, transformative nature of its aims;
- f. It is an authentic;

- g. It embodies values like freedom, justice, democracy, truth, care, and inclusion of spiritual, aesthetic and ethical judgments in the creation and testing of educational theory; and
- h. It improves practice through intervention and demands rigorous planning, observing, collecting data, reflecting on it, re-planning, and validating claims to learning.

By implication, action research has the features and rigors to sustain quality of education in general and that of EFL teaching in particular. This is because it empowers EFL teachers to teach the right contents, using the right approach, in the right time. Many of the action research features raised so far relate to the concept of quality as 'fitness for- and /or of-purpose'. Action research expounds authentic use of the language, which is instrumental for assuring the quality of functional language. Here, one may ask: Whose purpose?

The answer to this question may be *all stakeholders' purpose*. Even though the first purpose is to find answers to EFL teachers' classroom puzzles, the practices of the teachers are not value free. Consequently, the concept of quality as 'fitness for purpose' deals with the purpose of students, teachers, employers, the Government and the society at large. Inasmuch as quality, with its indicators, is a matter of negotiation between and among parties involved in and affected, fulfilling the functional demands of all stakeholders qualifies EFL teaching as possessing the required quality. Every stakeholder formulates his/her wishes, values, priorities and requirements that are to be reconciled with ultimate suppliers- here, universities. If the requirements of all stakeholders are translated in the mission, the goals and the objectives of a faculty or a department in its curriculum, the functional services that the institute provides have quality. This fact has been illustrated in figure 11 below.

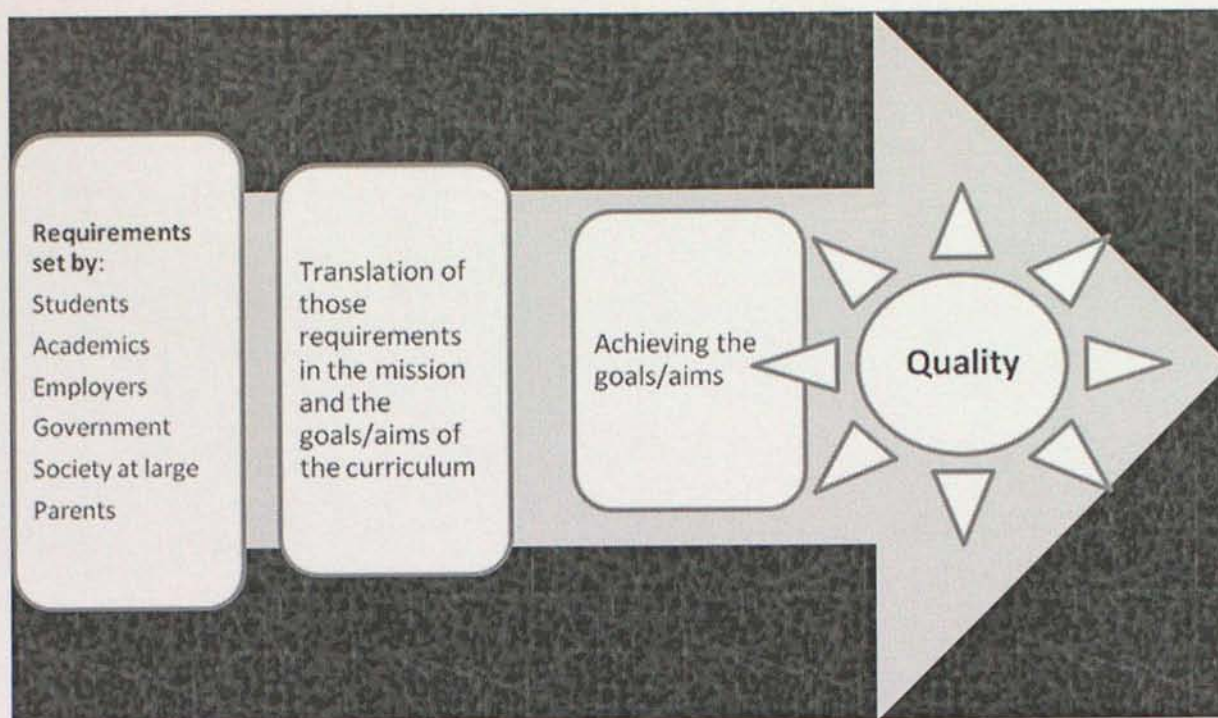


Figure 11. Quality as a matter of Negotiation among Parties concerned (adapted from Vroeijenstijn, 1995: 15)

Figure 11 shows reflective departures and destinations of quality. Analogous to the fact in the Figure, the quality of EFL teaching depends on what the stakeholders' objectives are and what they are going to do with the outcomes of the teaching. Consequently, defining a quality language teaching depends on the stake we have at all levels including the institution that provides the education as a function of organizational culture within.

The power of action research for enhancing the quality of language teaching can also be judged from its claims for validity and trustworthiness. This is because issues of rigour and quality in praxis-related research go beyond the conventional view of the quality of traditional research. If action research: a) addresses the questions of validity, reliability, trustfulness, meaningfulness, and rigour differently in different contexts; b) enhances transparency (that the stakeholders can see how the research has been carried out and on what grounds the claims are made); and c) enhances the notion that knowledge is socially constructed through active participation rather than 'waiting out there' to be discovered; then it has the power to sustain quality. Action research, therefore, enhances knowledge production and change of praxis, which is a process, not an event. Consequently,

researchers and participants change their practices, which in turn and often indirectly, change them in a dialectical process of mutual constitution. With this and other pertinent functions, action research has gained a significant foothold as a legitimate form of research with a sound theoretical basis for enhancing the quality of language education (Burns, 1999: 51; McNiff, 2002a; Mattsson & Kemmis, 2007).

Action research, therefore, has got the ability:

- a) to explore, resonate with, explicate and improve practice, and consequently narrows down the dysfunction between research, policy and practice; and between theoretical and practical aspects of EFL professionalism;
- b) to empower EFL practitioners with the idea of openness to new possibilities, of responsible choice in diversity of language classroom rather than orthodoxy ways of doing things and taking an approach (e.g. CLT) for granted;
- c) to change language classroom practices for the better and consequently considered as high quality educational research;
- d) to give the researcher a focus augmented by theories of education that can be tested within the classroom, analyzed, synthesized and developed into clearly defined definitions and results that allow for comparing and contrasting successful versus unsuccessful reform practices with the intention to improve language practices in the change processes;
- e) to link EFL teaching with values and beliefs with the sense 'we are what we do and say' resulting in possible changes in language practitioners' classroom practices;
- f) to investigate EFL classroom reality in order to transform it' and transform EFL classroom reality in order to investigate it; and
- g) to encourage shared deliberation about important issues for the practitioners' shared fate and future (Kemmis, 2006: 470-471; Borda, 1979, cited in Kemmis, 2006; Somekh, 2005; Summerford, 2002; Lomax, 1996).

In today's professional accountability, HEIs that have a clear stand to empower staff to conduct action research are likely to be in a stronger position to deliver quality teaching, research and services. Particularly, the quality of language classroom practices is more likely to be achieved when the teacher himself /herself is operating in reflective and

empirical modes by 'challenging pupils' schemas, setting problems and investigations, posing questions and engaging himself /herself and the learners in critical, 'Socratic conversation' following action research approaches.

In such approaches, reciprocal communication of ideas is encouraged whereby the learners are encouraged to bring to the forum of learning what they thought is important than using language to gain control and focus attention on what teachers thought is important. In this view, the language of teachers is strongly influenced by the classroom contexts and informal settings. Teachers operating in this way cease to be tiresome intervening variables and become self-conscious instruments of educational process (Altrich, Posch & Somekh, 1993: 201; Eggleston, 1979 cited in Verma & Mallick, 1999: 184; Somekh, 2005).

Equally to sustain quality, action research allows language teachers to sense changes and improvements even when there are no deficiencies or failures related to their practices. In this sense, change is seen as an inevitable and important part of sustaining quality. It means learning new ways of doing things. This in turn involves teachers in exploring the implications of the changes for their own educational values, and finding out how to make any necessary alterations to the routines of their practice leading to the improvement of their practices and their learning new ways of doing things. As a result, action research remains a powerful tool for simultaneously improving the quality of language teaching and the health of the respective HEI. This calls for the 'fitness of purpose' aspect of quality. It implies critiquing what the purpose under investigation needs to be.

In critiquing the role of educational action research, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005: 470-471) have given three messages in relation to: the theme 'Quality in Practitioner research'; where to undertake educational action research; and the themes of 'Critical participatory action research'. The authors are of the opinion that educational action research goes beyond traditional research in terms of these themes. In the first place, the quality of practitioner research is not just a matter of its technical excellence as 'research'; it is a matter of addressing important problems in thought and action, in theory and practice—problems worth addressing in and for our times, in and for our communities, in and for our shared world. It is a matter of addressing important problems for education, for the good of

each person and for the good of our societies. Second, educational action research is undertaken both inside and outside schools crossing boundaries. This in relation to the study under discussion is expanding the scope of action research application from its real place in EFL classroom to the wider environment, considering the three dimensions of action research: personal, professional and political (see Section 3.5 of this Chapter). Third, action research explores the constitution of practice in a deep, rich way, and brings to light and encourages communication about the variety of ways practices are understood, from a variety of standpoints and perspectives informing wise and prudent collective decisions and actions (Kemmis, 2006).

3.9. Some Empirical works on Action Research in and outside Ethiopia

There are different empirical studies on action research in different settings, situations and contexts. This sub-section presents some of the studies first from Ethiopian and next from world points of view.

3.9.1. Some Action Research works in Ethiopia

Action research is a recent component in Ethiopia, particularly in teacher education programs. Teacher initiated research has long been considered as unimaginable activity in Ethiopia. The main reason for this was considering research as exclusively the duty of researchers believing that it would demand special knowledge and skills. Consequently, it is not so simple to find many empirical findings particularly related to the study. Eight cases deemed relevant to the study have been synthesized in this subsection: *Developing Dictionary Reference Skills for Increasing Vocabulary Knowledge and Use- an action Research Report with Pedagogical Implications* (by Fekadu Mulugeta and Hailu Gutema, 2008); *An exploration for a critical practicum pedagogy: dialogical relationships and reflections among a group of student teachers* (by Kedir Assefa, 2008); *Effects of action Research on the Professional Development of Female EFL Teachers* (by Rukya Hassen, 2007); *Experience gained through engaging student teachers in a developmental reflective process* (by Jeylan Wolyie, 2007); *A First-Timer's Impressions of Engaging in Action Research: A Case in Ethiopian Pre-service Teacher Education* (by Adnew Tadesse, 2007); *Sustaining Education Quality through Self Reflection on Practice in Ethiopian*

Higher Education Institutions, taking Addis Ababa University as a case (by Firdissa Jebessa, 2006); *Hopes and challenges in using action research: the outcome of attempting to help in-service teachers learn how to design, evaluate and use reading comprehension questions collaboratively* (by Jeylan Wolyie, 2006); *Active Learning versus the Traditional Lecture Methods of Teaching at HE: A Case Study on Learners' Preferences at the Department of Business Education, Addis Ababa University* (by Firdissa Jebessa, 2005).

The first action research by Fekadu and Hailu (2008) was conducted on 30 second year English Language Education students at Addis Ababa University. The study had an objective of improving the students' ability to use English-English dictionary effectively. Data for the study were gathered through observation checklist and the pre-and post-intervention tests. Consequently, students' practice and experience in dictionary use, their beliefs and awareness about the use of dictionaries and their speed and accuracy in dictionary use were investigated in pre-intervention test. The authors reported that the target group was given practical lessons on effective English-English dictionary use and referencing skills for two hours. Finally, in order to assess any progress, a post intervention test was given. Analysis of the data revealed that there was improvement in the students' awareness of dictionary use, task achievement and the time they had taken in finding words and their meanings correctly. Based on this findings, the researchers suggested that it would be essential to give due training to students on the various aspects of effective dictionary use and minimize the students' misconceptions of dictionary use and referencing skills. They also underscored the need to incorporate tasks or activities which might demand immediate dictionary use in the students' different English language courses.

Second, the study by Kedir Assefa (2008) was conducted at Haramaya University in the 2005/06 academic year. It was an exploratory practicum pedagogy in which the researcher, as a teacher educator practitioner, and eight student teachers as pedagogical and research participants, seized opportunities of collaboration and dialogical relationships. The researcher has indicated that the potential to change and reflect could be positively influenced by the opportunities created in teacher education programs. He has explored an educative opportunity with himself and his practicum advisees by facilitating a continuum

of reflective school-based activities through a dialogical relationship. The researcher has reported that in the process, the participants had examined pedagogical issues which emerged out of continuous and intimate discussions. Furthermore, he has indicated that the process had affirmed the possibility of engaging educatively in contexts where resources are inadequately provided.

The third case by *Rukia (2007)* intended to explore the effects of action Research practice on female EFL Teachers' professional development. In the study, nine female EFL teachers participated from 3 primary schools in *Debre Markos*. She selected the participants purposively because they had done action research. Reflection, interview, and document analysis were the major data collection instruments employed. Based on the analysis of the data, Rukia reported that: a) the teachers thought that the engagement in actionresearch helped them improve their professional status; b) the teachers' perception has changed positively; c) the teachers' interest towards action research has increased; d) they changed their practice and made use of strategies generated from the inquiry; e) they developed innovative thinking and systematic investigation; and f) as a result of the experiences they gained, their awareness about TEFL increased and brought them opportunities of promotion and award. Based on the findings, she has recommended that college/university teachers should work in collaboration with school teachers with the purpose of intensifying the impact of action research on EFL teachers' professional development. She has also suggested that award bearing action research projects should be prepared to break the reluctance of teachers' involvement in action research.

Fourth, Jeylan (2007) has reported his study titled 'Experience gained through engaging student teachers in a developmental reflective process'. The data for the study were generated from the student teachers themselves and from the diaries he had noted through out the inquiry. He analyzed the data and has come up with some understandings. He reported that while lack of previous experience on reflection and poor command of English language hampered the quality of the student teachers' reflections, the developmental processes used to engage the students in the reflective process and the opportunities made available for them to reflect on their own reflections enabled them to develop gradually the quality of their reflections and awareness about the complex nature of the reflective

process. He further hinted that it is difficult for one to use frameworks of reflections designed under different social, educational and cultural contexts to evaluate the reflections made by student teachers in countries like Ethiopia where deficiency in the English language hinders their ability to generate, organize and express their professional as well as personal thoughts adequately in English. The researcher tied the implications of his findings that teachers need to use such frameworks as general guidelines rather than as ultimate touchstone to fix the attributes of their student teachers' reflective thoughts.

Fifth, Adinew (2007) presents a report of a study on the impressions of 10 pre-service education degree teachers at Haramaya University about their engagement in action research as part of their practicum courses. He explored the insights gained by the pre-service teachers from their experiences of undertaking action research during this assignment. As a research advisor, he had involved the student teachers in a series of individual and group meetings in the course of the project to get their reflections regarding the usefulness and challenging aspects of their engagement in individual action research. He also asked the student teachers to write progress reports and reflections in the course of undertaking their individual action research projects. Further, he kept reflection notes on his experiences of facilitating action research as a teacher educator without prior similar experience. He, then, concluded that although there were some challenges, many student teachers found their experiences positive. He reported that the student teachers had remarked that their involvement in action research helped them understand the complexities involved in teaching and how to deal with them through an inquiry approach. Finally, he has indicated the implication of the study that the role of training teacher candidates in action research and the measures that need to be taken to promote it in pre-service teacher education where the approach is not yet well established, as in the Ethiopian context.

Sixth, the study by Firdissa (2006) intended to investigate the existing practices and challenges to sustain quality through self-reflection action research at HEIs by taking the Education College of the Addis Ababa University as a case. Data were generated from 76 instructors and 194 students through questionnaires. Sixty-six of the students were studying for their second degree while 128 students were in their final year of the

undergraduate program. Interview was also used to collect data from 5 officials at the MoE and 3 people from AAU central leadership. The results have shown that there was lack of staff empowerment, support, recognition, and clear policies to link teaching with research; and there were top-down prescriptions, and staff members' low commitment and conviction to improve their professional practices through self-reflection action research.

Seventh, the study by Jeylan (2006) was conducted at Haramaya University with a group of in-service teacher trainees in the Department of English Language and Literature. The researcher has demonstrated the hopes and challenges evident in his attempt to use action research as an approach to engage student teachers in reflective processes. He collected data from the trainees' reading comprehension exercises and their analyses of the cognitive categories of the questions collaboratively designed in the classroom. He then kept a reflective diary to record events and to reflect on them. Finally, the researcher has come up with three major findings: a) the trainees developed better understanding of the pedagogical values of reading comprehension questions when they had the chance to design, evaluate and use hierarchically ordered questions themselves; b) the use of small-group learning as a strategy to promote collaborative learning; and c) action research should not be conducted with a predetermined problem in mind, but flexibly, to address issues that arise through the research itself. The experience recounted suggests that a community of learning does not happen just by putting trainees together into a group; and action research is much more than the technical things we do in classrooms as it also helps generate new knowledge.

Eighth, Firdissa (2005) has presented a case study on learners' preferences of the methods employed by their instructors at the Department of Business Education, Addis Ababa University. It was designed to determine the method most commonly utilized and the level of the learners' satisfaction about the methods and the reasons for the identified level. Detailed questionnaire was dispatched to a purposively selected 45 third year students of the Department. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data disclosed that many of the teachers at the Department were most commonly using the lecture method of teaching. The learners, however, preferred the active learning to the traditional lecture method of

teaching. The results have further pointed out that the lecture method is less effective in inspiring curiosity, upholding ingenuity, or helping the students develop responsibility, imagination, and skills in synthesizing, internalizing, or self-expressions. The researcher recommended that teachers at the Department in particular and those in the University-wide in general should be able to consider learners' preferences and use educational strategies which take students out of the passive role and place them in active thinking and acting roles.

The above cases are among the many pieces of work on action research at different levels and in different fields including education in Ethiopia. These are believed to have direct or indirect, explicit or implicit relevance to the study. The cases have followed comparable approaches, but with different degrees of complexity.

3.9.2. Some Action Research works outside Ethiopia

In this subsection, five action research cases outside Ethiopia have been briefed. These are: 'Action research in the university to develop teacher education curriculum' (by Keiny & Orland-Barak, 2009 in Israel); *Action Research: a culturally acceptable path to professional learning for university teachers?* (by Harland Staniforth, 2000, at *University of Sheffield, United Kingdom*); 'Teacher-student interaction in EFL Classroom at Toyo Women's College' in Japan (by Snell, 1999); 'Student evaluation practices of 13 "exemplary" teachers in Ontario, Canada' (by Ross, Rolheiser & Hogaboam-Gray, 1999); and Small-scale study in Singapore with six teachers who had undertaken research as part of a course of study (by Brindley, 1991).

The first case has been reported by Keiny and Orland-Barak (2009:166-168) that Orland-Barak (one of the authors and a course professor) managed emergent discrepancies and dilemmas that arose when teaching action research course at university level. It illustrates how the process by which the researcher attended to the insights gained as he engaged in a critically reflective process before, during and after a situation he was facilitating, could shape a curricular journey and uncover the challenges and tensions of teaching and evaluating action research in Israel.

The authors have indicated that the course 'Action Research in Education' was a one-semester course. The student participants were involved in educational practices at school or community levels, both in Jewish and Arab sectors. Orland-Barak's first years of teaching had been guided by traditional views of action research, emphasizing a more technical, problem solving approach to reflection on action. It has been reported that Orland-Barak himself realized that it was a *course about action research*, rather than an *action research course*. In the students' final action research projects there was almost no indication of an ongoing process of reflection 'on action', evident of how reflection and theory informed subsequent actions as the cycles developed. Likewise, the theoretical basis for the research project constituted one separate section, with no evidence of ongoing dialogue between theory and action or theories as emergent from practice.

In the following year, Orland-Barak introduced a change based on the insights gained from the first year. He was using the sessions as spaces for students to interact on their respective action research project and to examine the assumptions underlying their practice. He began to put more emphasis on documenting and representing the process that students were going through raising questions.

By way of reflecting on the case, the authors have indicated that a major insight gained from the inquiry pertained to the tensions surfaced by the encounter between two rigid competing discourses. One was the professor's constructivist discourse, pushing toward a deeper understanding of one's action, prioritizing the articulation of dilemmas over the solving of problems, and re-examining assumptions that underlie participants' stance. By contrast, the participants' discourse pushed toward a more technical, problem-solving orientation to action research, stressing the need to arrive at clear-cut answers about 'what to do', to evaluate performance as 'right' or 'wrong', and included background reflection at personal and autobiographical levels. Finally they implied the fact that being aware of potential dangers when pushing students from different cultural backgrounds into becoming personal and autobiographical in their reflections; and the importance of keeping a balance between divergent and convergent reflective processes. Another aspect pertaining to the importance of providing models for representing process revealing how

one cycle of action grows out of the other to generate personal theories. The process entails helping students to move from a positivistic paradigm of representing research, to a qualitative, interpretive one.

The second study by Harland and Staniforth (2000) was conducted at *University of Sheffield, United Kingdom*. The authors asserted that the starting point for their article was the authors' ongoing collaborative enquiry into professional practice, which primarily aimed to improve and develop their roles in Staff and Educational Development in Higher Education (HE). As the authors have reported, part of this action research cycle includes an empirical study carried out in the authors' institution to find out how academic colleagues view their work practices. They have identified the major difficulties faced in supporting the professional development of the staff and have argued that to be effective within a culture that encourages individualism, and that is driven by a disciplinary research agenda, those who have responsibility for academic professional development should promote the idea of teachers as researchers. The authors have further argued that a research approach to development, centered on individual practice and learning should be considered by those who engage in professional learning. Beyond these issues, the study also provides a snapshot of academic values in a research-led Higher Education Institution in Britain in the late 1990s.

The third case is about an action research that Snell (1999) carried out with the intention to improve teacher-student interaction in the EFL Classroom at Toyo Women's College (Japan) and has reported as follows:

The class observed was a group of twenty-three sophomores majoring in Japanese at a small private Toyo women's college. The teacher was an American male with several years teaching experience at Japanese universities. The goal of this required class is to teach the students basic conversation, reading, listening and writing skills. Their ability level ranged from upper beginner to intermediate. During the observation period, the students appeared motivated and attentive, and they seemed to be enjoying the class. (Snell, 1999)

The author has come to learn that there were some areas where the results of the action research were not as successful as hoped. As an instance, he has indicated that the students

needed to be prompted with eye contact and a repeated question from the teacher to answer a question. When they did not understand something, they had not interrupted the teacher with a question. He further indicated in the stage of reflection that the action research project forced both the teacher and the observer to remember that ESL teachers in Japan were not just teaching a language, but also a culture, and it includes instructing the socio-linguistics appropriate for the native English-speaking classroom. This led to questioning the conventional notion that Japanese students simply do not like the native English speaking classroom culture. He went on rationalizing that teachers, especially native English speaking ones, often become frustrated with a lack of initial success in obtaining an interactive dialogue with the class. This often leads them to mistake a lack of familiarity with a lack of interest, and to teach within the students' culturally conditioned classroom expectations, instead of introducing the expectations commonly found in classrooms in English speaking countries.

He concluded the case that most students did not study English just for linguistic competence. They would also want to develop socio-linguistic competence for communicating in different situations in English speaking countries, and this includes the classroom.

Forth, Ross, Rolheiser and Hogaboam-Gray (1999) have reported the case of five experienced teachers in Ontario, Canada who joined a school-university partnership to study the student evaluation practices of 13 "exemplary" teachers selected for their expertise in using cooperative learning (Phase 1). Data were collected by 2 semi-structured interviews. Participation in Phase 1 of the action research left the teacher-researchers in a state of positive dissonance: dissatisfied with their evaluation methods, aware of attractive new strategies, and confident of their ability changed their practice. In Phase 2 the teacher-researchers conducted inquiries in which they developed and enacted strategies for teaching students how to self-evaluate. Data sources included student surveys of attitudes toward evaluation, student focus-group interviews, and individual interviews with teacher-researchers, observations of team deliberations, action research reports, and storyboards created by the teacher-researchers. Each teacher-researcher used the Phase 1 findings in different ways, with every teacher ignoring some results, modestly adapting others, and

most frequently reconstructing the intent of the exemplary teachers without adopting their specific methods. The 2- phase approach to action research contributed to the knowledge base of teaching (creation of a framework for teaching self-evaluation) and to the personal practical knowledge of the teacher-researchers (how to enact the framework in their classroom) and enhanced teachers' expectations about their ability to bring about learning. These benefits might not accrue in action research projects without the involvement of teachers with average or high efficacy beliefs, collaboration in the design and analysis of the projects, or supportive university professors sharing research skills.

Fifth, Brindley (1991) has reported a small-scale study conducted in Singapore with six teachers who were undertaking research as part of a course of study. Some observations are borne out from his study that the kinds of questions asked in action research are different from those, which emanate from other forms of research. He has observed that action researchers need to be highly reflexive, immediate, and referenced to particular children and classroom contexts. On the basis of his observations, Brindley asserts that action research differs from the more traditional academic research, which reflects theoretical and empirical concerns.

Brindley's aim was to investigate the teachers' perceptions of the research process and to explore the relationships between teacher-conducted research and professional growth. He, then, suggests that in identifying a focus for their research, all the teacher researchers began with a concrete or practical teaching concern, which was generated by questions they had already been asking themselves about aspects of their own teaching and its effect on learners.

Brindley has come to conclusion that an initial focus for teacher research could arise: with concrete teaching interest, from particular incidents that may highlight a researchable issue, from teachers who wish to validate experiential knowledge or beliefs, and from issues that teachers have puzzled about for some time.

Overall, the cases that have been briefed above are among the many action research undertakings bearing relevance to the current study. Whereas some of them are unique, others shed lights on the practices in our universities. They, nonetheless, do not

exhaustively present all researched works and the different processes of action research. It should also be noted that several studies have been carried out on action research at different levels and in different fields including education. They, however, have no or low direct relevance to this study. This is because action research and the knowledge accruing from it duly vary depending on the settings, and environments where the research is conducted and the knowledge generated. Equally, whereas many of the cases had followed action research cycles implicitly or explicitly, some did not follow the trend.

3.10. Chapter Summary

In this Chapter eight main topics have been addressed under eight sections. These are action research: concepts and importance; characteristics, processes, and principles; foundations; dimensions; places within the research typologies; validation; implications for quality language teaching; and empirical works in and outside Ethiopia.

Two subtopics have been reviewed in the first section: action research conceptions and importance. First, various conceptual interpretations characterizing action research were reviewed. Whereas in traditional sense action research is considered as simple and routine activities of teachers in their classrooms, current developments have, nonetheless, shown that action research goes beyond just the simplistic thinking and activities that teachers do in classrooms. It is a planned, systematic, rigorous, and a deliberate endeavor by the self, into the self, and for the self.

Second, whereas there was a debate on the way the purpose of action research is epitomized (E-theory versus I-theory), a synthesis of the literature has illuminated that action research: a) connects theory to practice; b) is a basis for problem solving, change and improvement; c) empowers teachers to advance their own professional practices; and d) increases teachers' feelings of self-worth and their dispositions toward reflection.

Two subtopics have been reviewed in the second section: characteristics and processes of action research. First, action research is characterized as: a) a process that improves practice by incorporating change, involving stakeholders, and requiring them to "test" their

ideas about education in general and about their classroom practices in particular; b) a collaborative and participative endeavor; c) a practical and relevant undertaking; d) an avenue to develop critical reflection about one's teaching; e) a planned and systematic approach; f) a justification of one's teaching practice; g) a flexible approach; and h) an eclectic and a plural approach inasmuch as specific method or technique does not distinguish it.

Second, whereas the processes of action research are dynamic and lend themselves to different ways of viewing them, there are some cyclical steps that are evident in many action research models. These are: a) diagnosis/initial reflection; b) identification of an idea/issue/ interest or focus/problem; c) limiting and clarifying the selected issue; d) seeking knowledge/ reconnaissance or fact-finding; e) developing research plan including questions and designs; f) implementing the plan/intervention; g) observation of the intervention (evaluating the results); h) reflection on the observations; i) developing an action plan; and j) revising/amending the plan, if necessary.

The third section has introduced the historical, epistemological, ontological, and methodological foundations of action research. In the first place, whereas the origin of action research is unclear and is cloudy, its historical development has been categorized into four traditions and/or generations: a) foundational antecedents; b) formalizing and transforming it; c) decline and resurrection; and d) action research legitimacy and critical interest.

Second, under the sub-section '*epistemological foundation of action research*' a lot of issues have been addressed. Among others, laying conceptual framework of epistemology; typologies of knowledge; schools of thought on how knowledge is best obtained; views on professional rationality (reflective versus technical); and professional knowledge and action have been thoroughly reviewed.

Third, ontological foundation of action research has been seen as dealing with concerns like: a) the way we experience and perceive ourselves in the world/ a theory of/ nature of being in the world, self- subjects-how we experience; and b) basic reality, the nature of

existence and phenomenon we are seeking to understand and gain knowledge. In the context of the study, ontology raises questions like: *What do EFL practitioners believe in?* From this line of thought, ontology espouses for the notion that EFL teachers are able to create their own identities and allow other persons to create theirs.

The sub-section on *methodical foundation of action research* has briefed how practitioners go about for understanding their practices and solve their practical problems. It has been argued that methodology springs from the way the researchers see the world, their world whereby they are informed to ask their own questions and to gather data for their research following purposive and deliberative approach by going back and forth.

The fourth section has reviewed: professional, personal and political dimensions of action research. The *professional dimension of action research* deals with the instrumental roles of action research for pertinent knowledge creation, preservation, dissemination, extension and application by way of connecting theory to practice, and enhancing recognition of the importance of teachers' voices in generating knowledge for educational practices and betterment.

The *personal dimension of action research* deals with the roles of action research for practitioner's individual and group development whereby they can understand themselves and their work better; make meanings in relation to identity, social situations and activities; and transform themselves and their practices. The *political dimension of action research* has espoused for creating democratic processes in schools; leveraging social change by informing social action by way of extending action research findings to the wider environments; highlighting the transformative power of action research beyond classrooms by recognizing the affluence of knowledge, skills, and values within the wider context. In the context of this study, the case entails extending the results from the three universities to the rest universities in the country.

In section five, many different kinds of research have been reviewed with the purpose of situating action research within the typologies. Whereas a considerable controversy as to

which scheme for classifying the different kinds of research remains, extensive reviews have been made on the basis of the following classifications.

- a) qualitative versus quantitative (the two broad contrasting types of research methods);
- b) the types of research when defining science in a broad sense (pure-, basic-, applied-, evaluation- or action-research);
- c) the three paradigms of educational research (the positivist/normative, interpretive, and the paradigm of praxis/action research/critical theoretic); and
- d) classroom research types (experimental studies, naturalistic studies, and action research).

Within and apart from these typologies, action research: a) uses mainly methods common to qualitative research (though recent trends show that it tends to mix qualitative with quantitative); b) is more concerned with immediate application rather than the development of or testing theory; c) focuses on concrete and practical issues of immediate concern; d) matches with and generates from the critical theoretic paradigm as a form of enquiry (along with other research programs such as feminist research and liberation theology); e) rejects the notion of researcher neutrality; and f) espouses for intervention and observation but a low degree of control

In Section six, *validating action research* has been reviewed. The rationale for using the concept 'validity', its meaning, validity criteria to judge legitimacy claims; validating agents; and techniques of validation have been dealt with. The term 'validity' and its nature are highly debatable and contestable. Following the purpose of the study, the term has been conceived as: a) the extent to which the data collection procedure and the findings are sound enough to claim authenticity; and b) the meaningfulness and correctness of the conclusions and claims from the findings of the study. Among others, pragmatic, democratic, process, outcome, catalytic, and dialogic/communicative validity have been addressed as the criteria to judge legitimacy claims. Furthermore, self-, colleagues'-, and academic- validations are among the validating agents. In the processes of validation, techniques such as triangulation, member checks, prolonged engagement and persistent

observation, rival explanations and negative cases, peer examinations, and monitoring researcher bias are employed.

In section seven, attempts have been made to situate action research within the pedagogical principles in communicative language teaching (CLT) with a purpose of deriving some implications for the quality of language teaching. In doing so, the main features and principles of CLT have been reviewed. Communalities of CLT and action research in enhancing the quality of TEFL have also been derived from the review. Both: a) are participant-centered and responsive to the needs of their respective audience; b) are interactive and collaborative in nature; c) value context-based, empowerment, commitment, genuine, authentic, meaningful deliberations and learning; d) value pragmatic function to enhance learning, understanding and betterment; e) encourage continuous inquiry; and f) value holistic skills and dimensions in learning and application of the learning outcomes. Equally, action research is said to play pivotal roles in sustaining the quality of language teaching.

The final section of the Chapter has presented reviews of some empirical works on action research in and outside Ethiopia. Whereas action research is a recent element in Ethiopian context, eight cases have been reviewed for the current purpose. Similarly, whereas many action research studies are unique, five cases that are believed to shed lights on the practices in our universities have been briefed from outside Ethiopia. Whereas the cases (both in and outside Ethiopia) do not exhaust the wider range of approaches that are included under the aegis of action research, they, nonetheless, do demonstrate different data collection strategies, different lengths of action research, descriptions of the areas of practices being researched, and questions and criteria to spotlight the issue under discussion in different settings, contexts and places. Some are unique whereas others shed lights on the practices in our HEIs.

Overall, two main purposes were achieved in reviewing the literature in this Chapter: consumption of insights and perspectives of others, and situating my own perspectives and the outcomes of the research work within the existing knowledge and meaning by igniting some implications. Much of the main ideas and concepts in the eight sections of this Chapter have reappeared in the other chapters. Mainly, in the Discussions Chapter, many

ideas and concepts related to action research knowledge, practice, change, environments, and roles for quality language teaching and learning have been interspersed leading to factual and conceptual conclusions and implications.

CHAPTER FOUR: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

This Chapter comprises eight sections. The first section presents briefings on the guiding purpose and decisions. The second and the third sections deal with detailed descriptions of the research methodology and its rationales. The fourth section deals with data collection sites, sources, procedures and justifications. The fifth and the sixth sections deal with data gathering tools and procedures, and methods of data analyses. Finally, the seventh and the eighth sections deal with ethical considerations and validation procedures respectively.

4.2. Guiding Purpose and Decisions

Basically, this study is a research-on-research with an implicit purpose of narrowing down the almost complete separation between language research and language teaching. Inasmuch as: a) extant literature on action research had been reviewed extensively; b) I have been learning a lot in the course of the research work (change aspect of action research); and c) the implications that had been born out of the research findings could be taken as part of my and other EFL teachers' continuous professional development (the action aspect of action research); the study could be considered as action research. Practically, nonetheless, it did not strictly follow the cyclical steps of action research in a specific setting and there was no intervention. To consider a research work *action research* requires consistent reflection on the means and ends of the practice following cyclical steps of action research (see Chapter Three section 3.3.2). Efforts have, however, been made to explore conceptual, theoretical, and foundational bases of action research. The study, thus, followed a holistic approach with a purpose of enhancing learning and understanding, and drawing implications that could shed light on the ways of improving the quality of language teaching through action research in particular and the teaching-learning process in the Ethiopian education system in general.

4.3. The Research Methodology

A blend of both qualitative and quantitative methods was used in this study following descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory survey approaches. The methodology moved from purely descriptive (at the reconnaissance stage) to somewhat descriptive and more of exploratory approach (at the stage of pilot study), and to both exploratory and explanatory approaches (at the main study). Whereas such divisions are to show the dominance of one approach at a specific phase, descriptive approach, nonetheless, is manifested at all the phases particularly in analyzing the quantitative data. More specifically, at the Reconnaissance stage, efforts were made to find out whether EFL teachers were doing action research by posing 'factual' questions. During the Pilot study, nonetheless, both 'factual' and 'why' questions were raised and explored but with less rigor than they were during the main study. Consequently, descriptive approach was employed at the earlier stages by explicating facts and figures- what was said and done- in extant literature and in the data generated through questionnaires, interview schedules, and focused group discussion guide. At the main study, 'factual', 'why', and 'how' questions were raised and explored with rigor and in depth. This was done first by raising factual questions on EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change, environment, and perception; and then complementing them with 'why' and 'how' the observed levels of action research practices had come into being. At this stage (main study), explorations, explanations and interpretive approaches had been dominant approaches. Particularly, the interpretive approach was used to clarify and justify what had been said and done based on subjectively, objectively, and dialectically (sub-objectively) constructed realities in line with the generated data.

The move from purely descriptive approach at the reconnaissance stage to exploratory and explanatory approaches at the main study shows the gradual development of my voices within the long journey of the Dissertation work. Whereas the quantitative approach was a dominant method at the pilot stage, the qualitative method became the major approach at the final part of the research. Even though the emphasis shifted from earlier quantitative to latter qualitative, the qualitative-quantitative combination has remained evident at all the stages.

The qualitative method was employed to look at, understand and describe meanings, interpretations, experiences, ideas, beliefs and values that EFL teachers attach to action research knowledge, practice, change, environment and perceived roles for quality language teaching. The quantitative method was also evident at all the stages. It was employed to ask EFL teachers about the above issues against some constructs and to triangulate with the meanings/perceptions that had been generated through the qualitative method.

In all cases, qualitative/quantitative and descriptive/interpretive, the methodology pursued in the course of the research work was a blend of both theory-driven and data-driven, and action and research- following pragmatic perspectives and cyclical stages of reconnaissance, monitoring, and evaluation (see Figure 12 below).

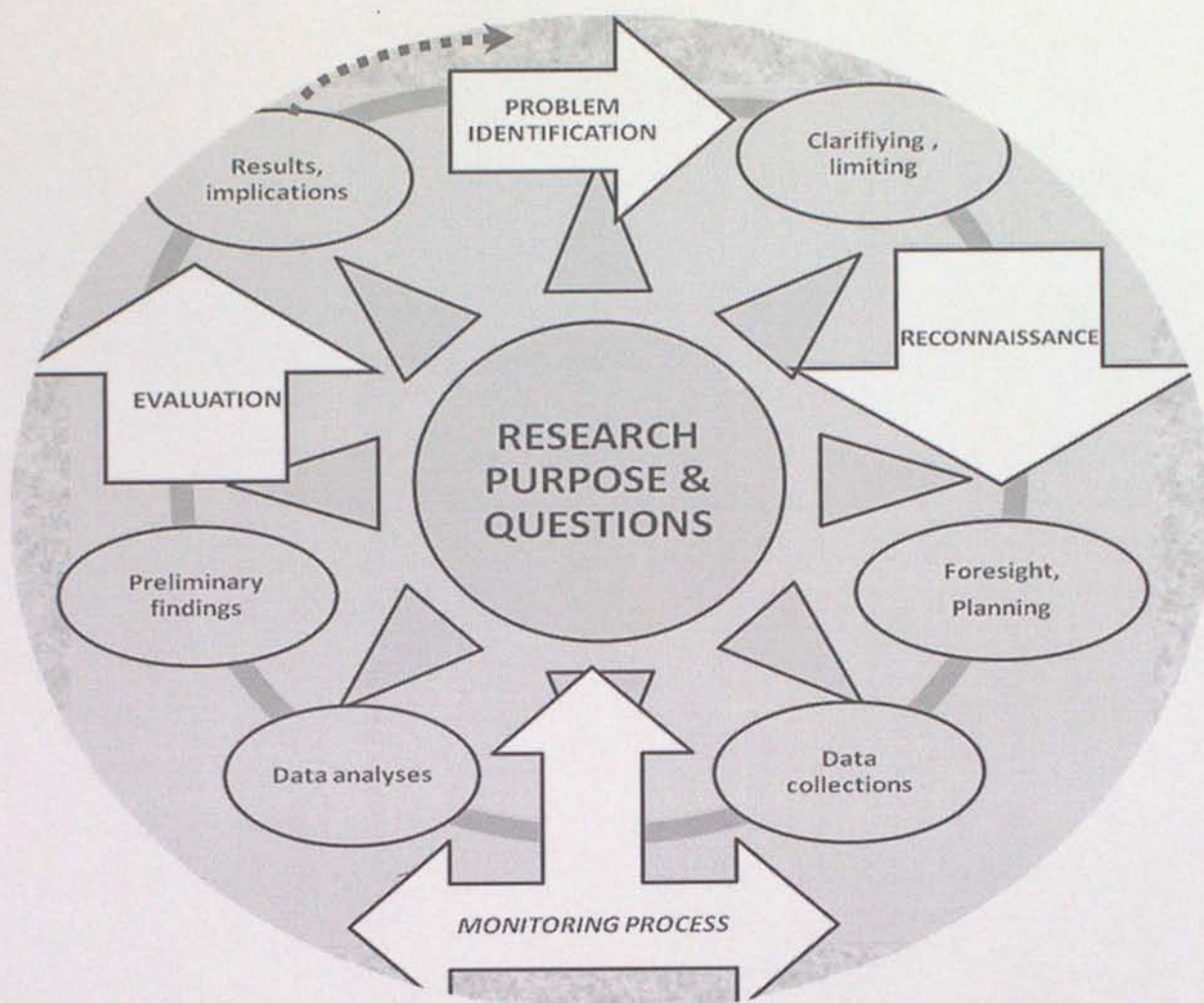


Figure 12. The Cyclical Steps of the Research Methodology

As can be seen from Figure 12, problem identification was followed by clarifications and limiting the area through readings and consultations. This gave way to a reconnaissance stage, which in Wisker's (2008: 244) and Mertler's (2009: 33) terms refers, respectively, to 'initial enquiry' and 'gathering information'. At this stage, data that would illuminate the spotlight for the study were collected through documentary analysis, and dispatching a questionnaire to 25 language instructors who were attending HDP in the year 2005/06 at AAU. Based on the results of the preliminary findings, reflections and re-conceptualizations took place and led to making some decisions about the way forward-foresights and planning. This forward-looking consisted of a review of possible alternatives from which a single viable plan for the next action had emerged for the whole

research work. The plan followed fine-tuning and clarifying the objectives, basic questions, related literature, data sources, instruments, and the procedures.

This, then, was followed by data collection. This stage involved consulting resources, skills, guidelines for the success of the long journey. Following the consultation process and data refinements based on the action plan, the data were analyzed, interpreted and preliminary findings were set for evaluation through different mechanisms such as *triangulations, self- and colleagues' - validation* in the light of the purpose and the basic research questions of the study. Finally, results were substantiated and implications were drawn. The final results and the implications phase has involved decisions that might either lead to implement the implications or follow the cycle of the research re-sounding the issue which may serve as continuous professional development for me and for other EFL teachers.

Overall, the stages of Reconnaissance, Monitoring and Evaluation has reminded me of Dick's (2002) statements in justifying the advantages of data-driven action research in the process of choosing methodology:

You can begin action research by asking initially fuzzy questions using initially fuzzy methods, thereby gaining initially fuzzy answers. You may then use those initially fuzzy answers to refine your methods as you proceed. To say it differently, research content and research process both develop as the research proceeds (P. 5).

In the same vein, the initially somewhat fuzzy answers from the reconnaissance stage were used to refine the conduct of the research. Reflections and re-conceptualizations followed the suit through fact-finding, and analyses, leading to constant recurring in the spiral of the whole activities of the research work - embodied in the monitoring and evaluation.

The monitoring stage has been worked out right from the problem identification through out the process of the research work whereby feedbacks within and between each cycles were evidenced. It has encouraged me to be more mindful (with stamina) of all aspects of the research by continuously reexamining, making modifications, eliminations or additions

- all to suit the procedures to the exigencies of the research and the research environments. In doing so, *reflective rationality* (see Chapter Three, section 3.4.2.3) has been followed as an epistemological framework in which, I used to contextually learn about and consequently modify all or some aspects of the research work process as required.

Evaluation on the other hand, has come at the stage of validation and judgment about the processes and the outcomes of the research work. It, thus, has more of a summative purpose. It may also continue whereby the research problem is re-assessed against the findings and the process may begin another cycle serving as a continuous professional development (CPD).

Overall, the processes of reconnaissance, monitoring and evaluation resulted in refining and leading to the achievement of the objectives of the study on the basis of the notion: “each turn of the spiral” in action research “is an opportunity for learning and change” (Dick, 2002: 6) whereby an ending can be reformulated for a new beginning.

4.4. Rationales for the Methodology Chosen

The blending of the quantitative and the qualitative research methods was underpinned by the design principle, “form follows function: decide what you want to do, then decide how best to do it” (Dick, 2002: 2). It was believed to be consistent with the research purpose whereby a continual learning has been viewed as part and parcel of the methodology. It has, therefore, embodied: a) a multiplicity of stakeholders’ perceptive views; b) the ‘principle of audience sensitivity’ (see Chapter Six section 6.2); c) the complexity of language research and the context-specific nature of action research; and d) multiple ways of collecting and analyzing data leading to epitomize rich picture of the practices and prospects of action research in EFL classrooms of Ethiopian universities.

Above all, being a holistically theory- and data-driven research, following stages of reconnaissance, monitoring and evaluation, the methodology has enhanced learning, my own personal and professional development, and led to derive some implications.

More specifically, the reconnaissance stage has shed lights on the appropriate directions of the overall research work. It enabled me to sense some deficiencies in my earlier plan and to make some modifications in planning action for data collection, analysis, interpretation, drawing conclusions and implications – supported at all stages by monitoring process, and followed by evaluation as validation and as part of continuous professional development.

The stage of monitoring, following *reflection-in-action* (see Chapter Three section 3.4.2.4m, B), entails the notion of “learning by doing” which is an important feature of action research (O'Brien, 2001: 1). In so doing, I with the participants that have been involved in and/or affected by the level of the practices of action research in the EFL classrooms of the universities and the possible outcomes in general have got some inputs that improve us and our practices. By implication, the methodology has enabled me to engage different stakeholders as key informant, participants, evaluators (by way of validation and scrutinizers), and beneficiaries of the results and the later implementations of the implications.

4.5. Data Collection Sites, Sources and Procedures with Justifications

In this section, data collection sites and rationale, sources and procedures have been presented, and followed by a brief description of the rationales for selecting the subjects.

4.5.1. Data Collection Sites and Rationale

My initial intention was to take EFL teachers who had practiced action research at all the nine public universities functioning prior to the time when this study was launched. The result of the reconnaissance stage, however, had changed my mind. It was learnt from the results of the reconnaissance that EFL teachers, who participated as data sources from AAU, were not actually doing action research due to a number of reasons. It was a clear indication that it would be unlikely to get reasonable number of EFL teachers who might practice action research in other universities owing to the fact that the practices at AAU would signify the practices at other universities in the country. This is because AAU is the

oldest HEI where the teaching of the English language had started with the establishment of the University College of Addis Ababa (Hailemichael, 1993: 42; Awol, 1997) in 1950. AAU is also known throughout the country as a research university and constitutes nearly 90% of the country's capacity to provide post-graduate education and to produce academic staff for all the HEIs in the country (World Bank, 2003: 58). Since major public universities of Ethiopia were once affiliated colleges of AAU, it is my belief that whatever evidenced in EFL classrooms of AAU might be reflected in that of the rest universities in the country. Some deviations, nonetheless, would be unavoidable. Equally in view of the 'political dimension of action research' (see Chapter Three section 3.5.3), knowledge produced through action research in AAU could be transactional by the growing emphasis of 'knowledge economy'. The latter point entails the need for juxtaposing the 'local' nature of knowledge in action research within the wider context and global issues (Noffke & Somekh, 2009: 19).

Consequently, I decided to explore the issue under discussion taking both practicing and non-practicing EFL teachers in senior universities. Accordingly, from among the nine public universities, three (1/3rd) were selected for the main study and two for the pilot study on the basis of seniority in offering English as a field of study. In doing so, a blend of systematic and purposive sampling techniques was employed.

The selection was preceded by solicitation of information about the time of commencing English as a field of study at all the nine universities. Attempt was made to get the information through email, telephone, internet, literature searches, and personal experiences.

In response to my email query, six universities: Arba Minch, Gondar, Haramaya, Hawassa, Jima, and Mekelle Universities responded promptly. Whereas information from Adama University was obtained through telephone call, from AAU and BU it was obtained through literature and internet search, and personal experiences. As an instance of the literature search, it was learnt from Hailom (1993: 3) that three institutions of higher learning had been responsible for training secondary school teachers: AAU as of "1955", Kotebe College of Teacher Education (KCTE) as of 1969, and the then Bahir Dar College

of Pedagogical Science (BCPS) and (now Bahir Dar University) as of 1973. It was, therefore, learnt that until recently, three Departments, namely, the DFLL of AAU, the Department of English Language of KCTE, and that of the BCPS were engaged in the training and education of English language teachers for secondary schools, teacher training institutes (TTIs), colleges and universities in the country (Awol, 1997: 12; Hailom, 1993: 4).

Next, all the nine universities were registered in a descending order of their years in offering English as a field of study. Accordingly, taking the upper from the sequence, Addis Ababa, Bahirdar, and Haramaya Universities were selected for the mainline study, whereas Jimma and Hawassa Universities were selected from the rest for the baseline (pilot) study. Valuable experiences and data for the study were obtained from these universities. It was my belief that whatever evidenced in these universities could be reflected in the other universities owing to the fact that there was and is experience sharing even at the extent of taking *lecture notes* from senior universities. Consequently, I had decided to leave out the rest four, as they did not have long years of services in offering English as a field of study let alone to conduct action research in TEFL (before 2005). They have come into existence recently as a response to the demand for the expansion of tertiary education in the country, since 2000/01.

Overall, the main reasons for selecting the five universities (three for the main and two for the pilot study), among others, include representational nature of these universities in offering English as a field of study in terms of years; and resource limitations (budget and time) to include all other universities. Although I do not wish to generalize the case on the basis of the data from the three universities, I support Pollard's (2002: 33) view that "... action research in one classroom or school can illuminate or be suggestive of practice elsewhere". In this sense, the findings from the three universities can be suggestive of the practices of action research in the EFL classrooms of the other universities in the country.

4.5.2. Data Sources and Selection Procedures

4.5.2.1. Data Sources

Since “there are no strict rules to follow” for clearly defining the target population, I relied on “logic and judgment” in identifying the data sources in “keeping with the objectives of the study” (StatPac Inc. 1997-2007). Accordingly, the different level stakeholders who participated in and/or may be affected by the practices and the outcomes of the study have been included as data sources. Consequently, 57 EFL teachers: 30 (52%), 18 (32%), and 9 (16%) from AAU, BDU, and HarU respectively; 214 EFL students: 118 (55%), 66 (31%), and 30 (14%) from AAU, BDU, and HarU respectively participated as data sources. In addition, 20 discussants (7 both at AAU and BDU, and 6 at HarU); eight interviewees (two each from the three universities and from MoE - ELID Coordinator and Senior expert for English Language Curriculum Development Section at the General Education Curriculum Framework Development Department [GECFDD]) participated. (For detail, see Appendix 8). Though an Official in charge of HE was contacted for interview during the main study, he actually failed to show up.

Whereas the teachers’ data included department heads, deans, and associate deans of DFLL and Institutes/faculties at the three universities; the student data included 180 undergraduate students (94, 56, and 30 respectively from AAU, BDU, and HarU), 28 MA students (18 at AAU and 10 at BDU), and five PhD students at AAU (For detail, see Table 7).

4.5.2.2. Selection Procedures of the Data Sources

The selection procedures of the data sources followed a mix of purposive, convenience, and availability sampling techniques. The decision to employ these techniques followed the shift of emphasis from quantitative approach (during the pilot study) to qualitative approach (during the main study). The teacher respondents at the three universities, and the interviewees from MoE were taken based on purposive and availability sampling techniques. The selection of the student respondents from the three universities, on the other hand, followed more of convenient sampling techniques considering mainly

manageability and accessibility. This is because the actual conditions at the universities were not as I had dreamt earlier to systematically select students as data sources. Moreover, the discussants and interviewees at all the three universities were selected after their consent had been solicited to willingly participate. Moreover, eight EFL teachers who had understanding about action research were voluntarily drawn from AAU and participated in validation process of the research procedures and findings. The selection was exclusively purposive.

4.5.3. Rationale for Selecting the Subjects

The rationale for selecting the data sources was founded upon the popularly claimed notion that *stakeholders should be the subjects of their own agendas*. This is because a consideration of stakeholders' views and concerns are decisive for the success of any implementation endeavors.

Accordingly in this study, EFL teachers were the main data sources. Since they were directly involved in and were affected by the practices of action research, relevant and accurate data could be obtained from them, as is getting tangible information 'from the horse's mouth'. This is because they lie at the heart of language teaching and learning. What they gave as information in relation to knowledge and practice of action research to bring understanding and change in their respective work environments/situations were reflections of what they actually did or would like to do in their classrooms. I believe that their knowledge and beliefs could guide their classroom decisions, behavior, and actions—all founded on the goals and values they, as language practitioners, held in relation to the content, approach, and evaluation of teaching and learning, and their understanding of the systems in which they used to work and their roles in it (Firdissa, 2007b).

For the very reason that EFL teachers are the key implementers of the CLT approach in particular and are the frontiers for enhancing the quality of language teaching in general, all the basic research questions concern them. Their action research knowledge and practice to bring understanding and change in their respective environments, and their

perceptions about the contribution of action research to enhance the quality of language teaching in particular and education system in general enhance the dual commitment in the process and outcomes of action research- research and action. Their perceptive views on the research questions appeared invaluable and served as core data for the study.

Almost all the EFL teachers at the three universities were taken with a purpose to get different views from those who had varying ranges of services and those who did (not) practice action research. Equally, the number of EFL teachers at all the universities was manageable within the resources I had for the research-time, budget, and expertise. Also heads and deans of DFLL and institutes/faculties respectively had equal (if not more) understanding about the issues of the study under discussion, as did teachers. This is because they were not totally free from teaching EFL. They had also been fulltime teachers and would also continue to be after termination of their positions by the time of data collection.

Similarly, there are strong justifications for the inclusion of students as data sources. It was based on the notion that 'the material of a teacher, unlike that of an artist, is a living creature' with power to give judgments. Currently in Ethiopia, students have exposure to action research conceptually as well as practically through practicum. They are expected to produce action research report after their stay at secondary schools as teaching practice. The selected students were, therefore, the prime beneficiaries of the EFL teachers' practices of action research. Consequently, their views on the EFL teachers' level of practicing action research and on the extent to which action research could contribute to enhance quality were valuable.

The type and number of students at the three universities had been purposively decided on the basis of manageability, accessibility, convenience, and resource. Consequently, whereas all available senior students were taken at BDU, 30% to 50% of the students were included from AAU and HarU. This is because the number of students at BDU was small, whereas at AAU it was very large, and at HarU reasonably large. Also, PhD students from

AAU were voluntarily selected and filled in the student questionnaire. This is because TEFL at PhD level was exclusively offered at AAU in Ethiopia.

The rationale to include the data sources from MoE was to corroborate and triangulate some issues related to policy/practice, and their perceptions about the extent to which action research could make a difference in creating and/or sustaining quality of language teaching in Ethiopian universities. It is, therefore, to solicit ample experience-based information of the practices and prospects of action research in TEFL at the universities in particular and in the overall education system of the country in general.

4.6. Data Gathering Tools and Procedures

Five data gathering tools were utilized in the course of the research work: two kinds of closed and open-ended questionnaires; two semi structured interview schedules, and focused group discussion guide. The data generated through these different tools were used to back up or cast new light, each onto the other.

4.6.1. Questionnaires

With a purpose of generating data on EFL teachers' and students' attitudes and points of view about action research practices in EFL classrooms of Ethiopian universities, two kinds of questionnaires with both closed and open questions were prepared: one for EFL teachers; the other for the students selected from the 3 universities. Of the two kinds of the questionnaires, that of teachers included all the contents of the basic research questions and was the dominant one. Whereas the closed questions demanded the subjects to choose the answers that apply to them, the open questions demanded them to freely formulate answers.

In developing the questionnaires, formats developed by Airasian and Gullickson (1997) have been consulted. Decisions on the contents, wordings, formats, and sequencing in the questions of the questionnaires were based on the basic research questions. The items in the questionnaires were, thus, listed in a logical order following the basic research questions pertaining to EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change,

environments, and perceived roles of action research for quality language teaching in Ethiopian universities. Specifically, the contents of the teachers' questionnaire cover all the issues of the five basic research questions. The questionnaire for the students covers only the issues of practice, and perceived roles of action research for quality language teaching.

Accordingly, 18, 11, 12, 21, and 12 questions, respectively, for EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change, environments, and the perceived roles of action research for quality were set as items of the questionnaire for teachers. Similarly, 9 and 12 questions, respectively, for the EFL teachers' action research practice, and the perceived roles of action research for quality language teaching were set as items of the questionnaire for students. The final questions in both questionnaires were generally stated if there was/were anything(s) additional they would like to state about the issue under discussion.

The rationale for using questionnaire as the main tool for data collection in this study had come from its advantages, viz:

- a) it could easily be dispatched to all the data sources- EFL teachers and students at the three universities, and could be filled simultaneously by all;
- b) since the subjects had been advised not to write their names on any page of the questionnaires (see Direction I. b, both in Appendices 1 and 2), answering anonymously/impersonally could make it confidential; and
- c) since the respondents were given some time, they could internalize and reflect on the questions before answering .

4.6.2. Interviews

Following the logical order of the basic research questions, two kinds of interview guides with both open and semi-structured questions had been prepared. The first was administered to the two people at MoE. The second interview was administered to six people (two each at all the three universities). Whereas the contents of the interview schedules for the people at the universities cover all the research questions, the one for the people at MoE covers only the research environment including policy provisions and the perceived roles of action research for quality TEFL.

The rationale for employing interview schedules include, among others, to investigate the feelings of the interviewees through face-to-face deliberations on the issues specified above, and also to get access to all the interviewees' experienced and perceptive views pertaining to the extent to which action research could contribute to sustain the quality of language teaching in Ethiopian universities.

4.6.3. Focused Group Discussion (FGD) Guide

A semi-structured focused group discussion guide had been prepared and presented to 20 EFL teachers (seven both at AAU and BDU, and six at HarU) (see Table 7). The contents of the FGD guides cover four of the research questions: EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change in the light of the new knowledge gained from research, and the research environment for doing action research. (For detail, see Appendix 3). The rationale for using FGD emanated from its merits for providing valuable and spontaneous information in a short period of time and at a relatively low cost; giving in-depth clarifications for – and obtaining in-depth information - from the discussants; exploring their ideas, attitudes, and concerns, and making them talk freely about the issue of the research guided by pre-prepared questions.

Table 7. Summary of the Data Sources and Data Collection Tools

No.	Data sources	AAU	BDU	HarU	Total	Tools
1	EFL teachers	30	18	9	57	Questionnaire
		7	7	6	20	FGD
		6	-	-	7	Validating (colleagues)
2	Deans /Department Heads	2	2	2	6	Interview
3	Undergraduate students	94	56	30	180	Questionnaire
4	MA students	18	10	-	28	
5	PhD students	5	-	-	5	
6	MoE Officials	-	-	-	2	Interview
	Total	162	93	47	314	

4.6.4. Data Collection Procedures

Both of the questionnaires were dispatched to the subjects by hand delivery. The interviews and FGDs were administered through face-to-face deliberations. In both cases pre-prepared questions were posed and the answers were tape recorded. I moderated the discussions and kept the focus on the areas to be explored.

In administering all the tools, I stayed as close as possible to the data as it was emerging raw. So I could get a feel from what was emerging. Particularly whenever I did observe unusual responses or whenever I did encounter misunderstandings on the part of the interviewees and discussants, I used to interrupt, stand back and clarify the areas of the questions, the underlying theories, and the conceptual framework of the study. Consequently, I collected rich data.

Coding of the contents of the tools took place before data collection. That is, nominal code numbers were assigned to alternatives of the questionnaires (originally), and names of all the teacher respondents were coded against numbers before dispatching the questionnaire. Secondly, the coding of the sites, tools, interviewees and discussants was made after the event as soon as they were collected. In the latter case, coding was made in relation to the following.

- a) Site/Institution/university: IAAU, IBDU, IHarU, and IMoE standing respectively for interviews at AAU, BDU, HarU, and MoE ; and FAAU, FBDU, and FHarU standing respectively for FGDs at AAU, BDU and HarU;
- b) Tools-Subjects: I, F, and R stand respectively for interviewee, discussant and respondent;
- c) Cases: $C_1, 2, 3, \dots, n$ for all the interviewees and discussants, and C_1 to C_5 for each member of the validation group who participated in validating the Pilot Study Data (see Appendix 14);
- d) The identities of the respondents of the open-ended questions of the questionnaires (numbers 11, 28, 29, 71, 82.1-82.5 of the teachers' questionnaire; and numbers 15 and 26 of the students' questionnaire) were coded as *TR* for *teachers* and *SR* for *students*.

- e) Returned copies of the questionnaires were consecutively numbered separately for teachers and students. Also the already assigned codes against each teacher respondents were matched against the returned copies of the questionnaire.

Care was taken to make the codes exclusive; exhaustive, and to apply consistently to maintain ethical principles (see section 4.8 of this Chapter). The lists of the respondents and the returned copies of the questionnaire were kept (codes relating the two) in an entirely safe place. This was done for: 1) follow up, 2) clarifications, and 3) protecting the identities of the respondents.

4.7. Methods of Data Analyses

Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data were employed. The quantitative approach had been the dominant method during the Pilot study, and the reverse was true during the main study. The shift of emphasis from quantitative to qualitative was purposive: to give meaning to the observed states of the affairs and to add depth to the overall results and thereby “putting flesh on the bones” (Dornyei, 2007: 39). The Discussions Chapter has blended the qualitative and quantitative results that had been analyzed separately in Chapter Five. In the Discussions Chapter, the qualitative approach has become the dominant one; and the quantitative to supplement the former. By all means, the analysis followed the sequence of the basic research questions and the items in the teachers’ questionnaire.

4.7.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

The data generated both from EFL teachers and students through close-ended questions of the questionnaires were quantitatively analyzed and interpreted. They were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and analyzed. Accordingly, analyses of simple frequency, percentage and descriptive statistics were made. Both univariate and bivariate statistical analyses of data were made following both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics is used to describe the main features of EFL teachers’ action research knowledge, practice, change, environments, and the perceived roles of action research for quality language teaching. Inferential statistics, mainly,

correlation coefficient has been used to indicate the directions and strengths of the relationships between EFL teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research, their action research knowledge and practicing it, and their practicing it and the resultant change of themselves and their practices.

4.7.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

In this study, qualitative data analysis had been supplemental to that of the quantitative data during the pilot and was a dominant one during the main study. That is, whereas the qualitative one had been to triangulate and to complement the quantitative data during the pilot study, the reverse was true during the main study. The qualitative data were generated through the open-ended questionnaires, the FGDs, and the interviews. They were pulled together under themes and annotations were made on the basis of the five basic research questions.

As mentioned previously in 'Data Collection Procedures' (see section 4.6.4 of this Chapter), coding has been succinctly utilized in presenting and analyzing the data. As the purpose of all the tools was the same: to generate data to answer the basic research questions, all the qualitative data were interspersed into the analysis of the quantitative data (the dominant one during the pilot study) and the reverse was true during the main study; where the two did match and where appropriate. The Discussion Chapter (during the main study) has blended the qualitative and quantitative results. More weight, however, has been given to the qualitative approach. All the basic research questions have, nonetheless, been addressed both by the quantitative and qualitative data.

Inasmuch as the methodology employed was a 'mixed approach', the common contents of both types of the questionnaires, FGD, and interviews were brought together under pertinent research questions and analyzed accordingly. The approach has lent itself for comparisons of the different kinds of data (qualitative and quantitative); the different data collected through the different tools; and the responses from the different sources (students, teachers and officials). Finally, discussions, conclusions were made and implications were drawn (see Chapter Six, section 6.6).

4.8. Ethical Considerations in the Research Work

In the journey of the study, efforts were made to protect the research participants, to improve the validity of the data gathered, and to maintain rigor of the overall research procedures and findings. Since the journey of the study has involved many subjects in different capacities: as respondents, interviewees, discussants, and validating agents; utmost efforts were made to protect the identities and moral values of these research participants. Equally, validity and procedural rigor has been taken care of as part of maintaining ethical standards of the research work. Among others, efforts were made: a) to give clear, understandable and focused directions and criteria for data collection procedures; b) to maintain anonymity of the data sources; c) to form a validation group from among the staff at AAU who offered feedback and advice (See Section 4.9 of this Chapter); and d) to corroborate the research results and interpretations by way of mixing the qualitative and quantitative results (see Chapter Six, Section 6.2).

Consequently, five ethical principles have been considered in this study: 1) Informed consent, 2) Attendant moral values, 3) Anonymity, 4) Confidentiality, and 5) Procedural rigor.

- 1) **Informed consent:** consent and cooperation of data sources were secured through different mechanisms. In the first place, a) the procedures to be followed in giving information on the basis of specific data collection tools; b) the approximate time investment to answer the questions; c) the envisaged confidentiality of the responses; and d) utilization of the data and contributions of the study were clearly articulated. Particularly, in relation to the last point as 'principle of beneficence' (Mertler, 2009: 90-91; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000: 246), the potential contribution of the research 'to our common goal' - *quality language teaching* was clearly addressed in the preliminary part of the Questionnaire for teachers. The values of the required responses for the success of the study had been duly acknowledged in advance, followed by a statement of promise to give a summary report of the findings to the teacher respondents' respective departments (see Appendix 1).

2) **Respect/Attendant Moral principles.** Respect as an ethical standard is related both to *caring* and to *accountability* (Noffke & Somekh, 2009: 263). Efforts were made to treat refuters and participants without prejudice. In the first place, I refrained from blaming, offending, and embarrassing those who had refused to participate as data sources. Specifically, a higher official at MoE, five staff members at AAU (two highly senior), two academic staff members at BDU, and four at HarU did not volunteer to participate in any one of the data gathering procedures. I rather thanked them. Second, those who participated in any process of the study were acknowledged with heartfelt and compassionate compliments. Third, during the actual interviews, FGDs, and validation deliberations, care was taken to maintain the moral and psychological makeup of the subjects as groups and as individuals. To the extreme case, the ideas of two *deviant* discussants were entertained with utmost care. During FGDs particularly at AAU and BDU (FAAU and FBDU), I found at each someone whose behavior was typical, whose response and behavior had fallen into a set of extremes or contrasts. The one at AAU (C₃FAAU) was persistently arguing that “action research has no rigor”. The one at BDU (F₁BDU), on the other hand, was strongly insisting the participants to acknowledge the contribution of HDP and trying to induce as if HDP was a panacea for all ills. Paradoxically, nonetheless, he was trying to undermine the participants' action research knowledge.

These extreme ideas, among others, were managed with care at both places, without violating ethical boundaries, and without offending the individuals and the groups. This was done by systematically injecting some innovative dimensions of action research rather than thinking only from one direction. As a result, common understandings were created and maintained so that the discussions were kept on at both places as planned. After the event, I kept on reading different sources. Consequently, I have been re-convinced that action research “is a highly rigorous procedure producing validated evidence from systematically monitored practice” (McNiffa: 101). Similarly, Wisker (2008: 236) underscores, “[r]igor is immensely important” in action research. The ideas from both sources are in contrary to the idea of the discussant at AAU.

Since I also have had moral obligation to enlighten the individual who had cloudy vision on the rigor of action research, I gave him some of the materials that show the rigorousness of action research.

- 3) **Anonymity:** utmost efforts were made to maintain the anonymity of the research participants. The information the research participants provided by no means could reveal their identities. This was done in the first place by politely warning the respondents (both teachers and students) not to write their names “on any page of the questionnaire” (see *Direction I. b* of Appendices 1 and 2). Second, the identities of the subjects were succinctly coded against numbers. The returned copies of the questionnaires were also consecutively numbered and matched with the already assigned codes, and then the lists relating the two were kept in an entirely safe place. Similarly, the identities of the respondents of the open-ended questions of the questionnaires, the interviewees’, and the discussants’ were coded (see section 4.6.4 of this Chapter). Consequently, except the researcher (me), another person cannot identify the participants from the data they had given. My involvement as a researcher has been underpinned by the norms of qualitative research that allows for the “ethical researcher who is involved with participants, and who affects and is affected by events in the research setting....” (Noffke & Somekh, 2009: 255).
- 4) **Confidentiality:** Efforts were made to protect the research participants’ rights to privacy. This was adhered to a promise statement, which was made on the data collection tools particularly the Questionnaires: “All the information to be obtained from you will be treated with complete confidentiality and will be used only for the research purpose.” (See Appendices 1 and 2).
- 5) **Procedural Rigor:** Care was taken to maintain the rigor of the procedures in relation to preparing and administering the tools for data collection, in selecting appropriate participants, in collecting data, in meticulously sorting out and analyzing the data, and validating the findings.

Overall, utmost possible ethical rules have been considered to ensure that the research is conducted in an ethical manner maintaining consent, respect/moral principle, anonymity,

confidentiality, and procedural rigor. This was done among others, through coding the data collection tools, responses, and anonymously maintaining the identities of individuals and groups, and in making the codes exclusive, exhaustive, and consistent; in systematically handling deviants and those who refused to participate as data sources without offending and/or embarrassing them.

4.9. Validating the Procedures and the Findings

This study was conducted with people, by people, and for people. It engaged many people as it took place and would be consumed within the large community of people. The research is, therefore, value laden whereby people could have leeway to give their judgmental ideas in relation to the extent to which the procedures and findings reach standards of sound practice for the intended audience. This is the research 'rigor', which in Mertler's (2009: 24) terms refers to "the quality, validity, accuracy, and credibility of action research and its findings"

This sub-section, therefore, deals with attempts made to involve the different level people in judging the rigor of the research procedures and the findings. The attempts, basically, were part of the monitoring and evaluation process of the research work with a purpose of enhancing its authenticity and credibility. Presented here, therefore, are validating processes and techniques, validating questions, and rationales for the validation and the participants.

4.9.1. Validating Process and Techniques

The validating process has been a continuous endeavor within the journey of the Dissertation work. It, mainly, took place at critical stages and has remained part of the monitoring and evaluation processes. This is because validation can be fruitful when it is formative venture for the realization of new potentials rather than appearing as summative point in a program that leads to closure (McNiff, 2002a: 108). Consequently, different deliberative activities were undertaken at different stages.

4.9.1.1. Colleague Validation at Critical stages: A validation group of 7 professionals had been drawn from staff members at AAU to participate in scrutinizing the research work at critical stages (at Proposal, Pilot, and main study). The selection was entirely purposive. EFL instructors (who attended HDP) were asked to voluntarily participate in the validating process. Consequently, 9 had agreed (but actually 7 participated) to meet with me and used to listen to my progress reports, claims, etc, and were giving inputs and feedbacks. All, except one, were males. Qualification wise, four had PhD and equally four had MA in TEFL.

Right from the start, the group members were encouraged to influence my works and claims by suggesting about how I could modify or add or drop any part(s) of the research work, procedures, and the findings. Although they might not be entirely familiar with my research, they could make insider professional judgments about the validity of my report, claims, and could offer critical feedbacks. Equally, even though I would not be compelled to act on all the feedbacks, I listened carefully to their advices for learning and appropriate actions. In most cases, I have taken care of their advices, suggestions and inputs.

4.9.1.2. At Proposal level: a detailed proposal was purposefully prepared and submitted for evaluation at the earliest stage. The evaluators' comments and that of the audience during the proposal defense were seriously taken care of. Equally, the comments and inputs from the validation groups were duly considered and incorporated.

4.9.1.3. Data Collection Tools: all the tools were validated by different individuals other than me. Particularly, the Questionnaires were given (for comment and inputs) to three measurement specialists with a rank of assistant professorship (2 at AAU and the other at Hawassa University). One of them (from AAU) had given me nothing except a statement: "Go ahead, it has no any problem". Even though this had given me confidence about the questionnaires, I did not hesitate to push the rest two to give me critical comments. Consequently, I got valuable inputs from both professionals who critically commented the formats and the contents of the questionnaires. Whereas the scrutinizer from Hawassa University had sent me his inputs and comments through email attachment, the one from AAU came to my office and we had brief discussions on his inputs and comments.

4.9.1.4. Pilot study

Data for the pilot study were generated through questionnaires from 33 EFL teachers and 104 students at Jimma and Hawassa Universities; and by conducting focused group discussions with six EFL teachers at the two Universities, and interviews with three Officials at the Ministry of Education. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data were made, giving more space to the former approach. Consequently, the following lessons were obtained, actions were taken and documented.

- 1) Major and minor modifications, additions, omissions, rewordings and reformatting of the data collection tools have been made. More specifically:
 - a. ten and five questions of the teachers' and students' questionnaires, respectively, have been polished, reworded, and reorganized in new forms;
 - b. two questions from the teachers' questionnaire have been merged to form one coherent question;
 - c. ten questions from the teachers' questionnaire have been deleted altogether;
 - d. some instructions in both types of the questionnaires have been refined; and
 - e. FGD and interview guides were polished, amended, and adapted to suite the requirements of the main study that were envisioned by the pilot results.
- 2) Whereas the overall purpose and the intents of the basic research questions of the study have been maintained, a need arose to reformat and reword the contents of two basic research questions. First, the question that asked about the "frequency" of the EFL teachers' actual practice of action research has been changed to ask the level and extent of their practices. This is because it was learnt from the analysis and from the evaluators' comments that the alternatives used to generate data for the former research question (*1. Hardly ever, 2. Sometimes, 3. Most of the time, and 4. Always*) could not generate objectively measurable data. Whereas many of the respondents chose 'sometimes' for the specific question, I found it difficult to measure in qualitative terms.

Second, some reformatting and additions were also made on two basic research questions (one is the above), particularly to see the level of relationships between:

- a) EFL teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research; and
- b) the teachers' action research knowledge/skills and doing it.

- 3) The preliminary findings and the research procedures in general are proved to be valid from the criteria of democratic, process, outcome, catalytic, and dialogic validity.
- 4) The roles of FGDs and the interviews were underestimated during the pilot study. That is, they were simply sought to fill the gap of data generated from the dominant tool- questionnaires, and to serve for triangulation purpose. This has created some cracks to get in-depth and thorough information. Consequently, due emphases were given to qualitative data during the main study.
- 5) It was also learnt that there would be a risk of unforeseeable delay and absence of the potential participants in FGDs. During the main study, therefore, the number of potential participants of the FGDs was raised so as to overcome the risk of low number of discussants that might turn up for the actual discussions (see Appendix 8).
- 6) The environmental factors had observed and potential effects on the level of EFL teachers' involvement in doing action research. Whereas the findings have shown that the subjects had highly valued the roles and purposes of action research to enhance the quality of language teaching, the low level of the enabling environments limited their level of practicing and the concomitant change of EFL classroom practices for better quality. Environment has, thus, remained an umbrella variable for it substantially influenced all the other variables: knowledge, practice, change/improvement, and action research perceived roles for quality.
- 7) In the course of the analysis and interpretations, interspersing/integrating the data generated by FGDs and interviews into that of the questionnaires (following the mixed research approach) has made the data from the FGDs and interviews less visible. During the main study, therefore, the data from all the tools were made to stand by themselves. The inherent roles of interspersing for triangulation purposes following the sequence of the research questions has, therefore, come at the level of



Discussion Chapter whereby the differently analyzed results have been brought together. This also entails giving less space to some sections, mainly preliminary data during the main study analyses and giving more space to meanings obtainable from open-ended questions of the questionnaires, FGDs and interview schedules.

- 8) The data generated by the students' questionnaire did not contribute any depth to the findings rather than complementing and triangulating the other data. Consequently, more spaces were given to the FGDs and interviews than the students' questionnaire during the main study following the shift of emphasis from quantitative to qualitative results.

Four different validation efforts were made during the pilot study. First, the comments of the pilot study by examiners and the audience during presentation were seriously considered and incorporated as part of the ongoing validation process. Second, attempts were made to validate the preliminary findings of the pilot study and the overall research procedure by generating data from five (4 males and 1 female) members of the 'validation group' (see Section 4.9.1.1 of this Chapter). Twenty close-ended and six open-ended questions were presented to the group and their responses were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively (see Appendices 13 & 14). The analyses of the data proved that the research procedures and the tentative findings were valid from the point of view of democratic, process, outcome, catalytic, and dialogic validity criteria (see Chapter Three, section 3.7.2).

Third, 1/5th of the findings of the Pilot study was modified and presented at the *International Conference on Educational Research for Development* organized by the College of Education, AAU that was held from 13-15 May 2009 in Ethiopia. Inputs were solicited during the presentation. Subsequently, the findings were assessed, edited and published in the *Proceedings of the International Conference on Educational Research for Development*, (PP. 135-163). Addis Ababa: AAU Printing Press.

Fourth, an abstract and an abridged version of the findings of the Pilot study were sent to a Peer Review Panel for an International Conference in Australia. The Panel had accepted the abstract as well as the paper for the '*Australian Learning Communities Network*

National Conference - Connecting Faces, Places and Space's that was held from 26 to 28 October 2008 in Adelaide, South Australia. The Conference Organizing committee had invited me and sent me a Book of Abstract including the final presentation schedule to go and present my paper (see Appendix 16). However, I did not go due to a delay of confirmation of my passport from Australian High Commission in Nairobi, Kenya. The inputs given by a Peer Review Panel before the conference data, nonetheless, were valuable and were incorporated.

4.9.1.5. After two anonymous assessors had commented, and their comments and inputs had been incorporated; the result of the Reconnaissance stage has been published in *The Ethiopian Journal of Higher Education (EJHE)*, Vol. 4 No. 2 December 2007, pp. 1-21.

4.9.1.6. Consultations with Key informant: Attempts were made to recapitulate and validate my own understandings, and to get new insights from known professors in the field of action research. Notably, Professor Stephen Kemmis of Australia was instrumental to give me some inputs, resources and conceptual clarifications through email on 24 July 2007, and on 2 May 2008. His inputs and advices helped me to sharpen my understanding and to reshape my perspective in relation to the issue under discussion (see Chapter Three Section 3.3.1).

4.9.1.7. Enhanced Ethical Considerations: As mentioned previously (see section 4.8 of this Chapter), efforts were made to enhance the validity of the procedures and the results by making the responses anonymous; giving clear and understandable directions for the data collection; collecting tangible data; and triangulating the different data, and methods.

Overall, the above validation endeavors were efforts made beyond the weekly (Wednesdays seminar presentations) and the regular consultations and inputs that were being obtained from my supervisors. In all cases, the advices and critiques up until pilot study had been utilized to reshape the procedures of the main study. The inputs/scrutiny after the pilot study were incorporated into the main study and served to come up with factual and conceptual results from which four implications have been drawn (see Chapter six, Section 6.6).

4.9.2. Validating Guide Questions

On the basis of the purpose and basic questions of the study, validation questions were prepared and administered to the validation group. It was meant to validate the tentative findings of the pilot study and the overall research procedure. The contents of the questions were synthesized from the set of validation criteria set by authors in the area (see Chapter Three section 3.7.2). Equally, the validation questions could provide evidence of: a) *content validity* (whether the data collection tools were good representations of the purpose and basic research questions of the study); b) *criterion validity* (whether the data collection tools could be judged from the point of view of Alpha reliability; and c) *construct validity* (whether the data collection procedure was a good representation of and is consistent with current theories and practices about EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change, environment, and perceptions). Above all, the criterion of democratic validity has been exhaustively addressed in the contents of the validation questions. It dealt with whether all parties who had a stake in the problem under investigation participated and multiple voices and perspectives and interests were taken into account.

4.9.3. Rationales for the Validation and the Participants

Inasmuch as this study was a research-oriented research, the validation process was an instrumental arena to enhance the rigor of the overall research approach and its procedures. Equally, inasmuch as the determination of rigor is often contingent on the intended audience for the sharing of research results, perceptions of the research participants about the validity of the research procedures and findings are decisive to contribute for the quality of the end results of the study.

The rationales for involving the validation group from AAU were based on the popularly claimed notion that 'two heads are better than one'. Equally, I support the notion that 'research participants or implementers of its end products are the judges' of the extent to

which the research procedures and findings reach a standard quality related to the usefulness of the research findings for its intended audience (Noffke & Somekh, 2009: 24). The validation groups were the key implementers of and the ones who might be affected by the observed practices and the results of the study. This rationale aligns with the conception of quality as 'fitness of purpose' (what the purpose needs to be) and 'fitness for purpose' (the participants' and audience's perceptive views of the role of action research to enhance the quality of language teaching). Whereas some of the validation groups had shown disagreement to the idea of action research I did claim (ontological perspective), they did contribute to and did comment on the methodological and epistemological rigor of the research procedures and findings.

Overall, the validation process enabled me to work out the potential implications of the ongoing works and the findings for the quality care efforts in Ethiopian universities, to justify for doing so, and to derive some implications whereby interventions and/or the likely actions by different level stakeholders have been interspersed.

Specifically, whereas the inputs from the validation group and critique up until the pilot study had contributed to enhance the quality of the overall research procedures and had shed lights on the future directions for the main study, the inputs after the pilot study led to make decisions to refine or modify the contents, outcomes, discussions, conclusions, and implications that had been born out of the continuous and developmental cycle of the research work.

4.10. Chapter Summary

Eight sections have been addressed in this Chapter. First, guiding purpose and decisions of the study have been described. It addressed the fact that though some aspects of the research could put it in the category of action research, it did not strictly follow the cyclical steps in a specific setting and there was no intervention. Second, the research Methodology has been detailed revealing that a blend of both qualitative and quantitative methods were used following pragmatic perspectives and cyclical stages of reconnaissance, monitoring, and evaluation all guided by the research purpose and questions.

Third, the choice of the methodology has been justified to have been underpinned by the design principle that espouses for *planning what to do and trying how best to implement the plan*. This was then followed by detailed descriptions of data collection sites, sources and procedures with justifications for each. Fourth, the five data gathering tools, namely, two kinds of closed and open-ended questionnaires; two kinds of semi structured interview schedules, and a focused group discussion guide; have been described. The purposes, contents, rationales and uses of each tool have been briefed followed by detailed descriptions of the procedures for data collection and analyses.

This then was followed by, detailed explications of the ethical considerations by delineating five principles: informed consent, respect/attendant moral values, anonymity, confidentiality, and procedural rigor. These principles are meant to protect the research participants, to improve the validity of the data gathered and to maintain rigor of the overall research work and its findings.

Finally, the attempts to validate the procedures and the findings by involving different people in judging the authenticity and credibility of the research procedures and the findings were detailed as part of the monitoring and evaluation process of the research. The section, therefore, presented validating processes and techniques, validating questions, and rationales for all. Finally, it has been noted that the validation process could have helped in working out the potential implications of the ongoing works and the findings for the quality care efforts in Ethiopian universities in general and EFL classrooms in particular.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION, ANALYSES, AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

5.1. Introduction

This Chapter deals with presentation, analyses and interpretation of the data generated through questionnaires, interviews and FGDs. The questionnaires' data were collected from 57 teachers and 214 students from AAU, BDU, and HarU. Similarly, 20 people participated in FGD (7 both at AAU and BDU, and 6 at HarU). Eight people were interviewed (two each from the three universities and from MoE). (See detailed information from Appendices 6, 7, and 8). Particularly, Appendix 6 presents preliminary data of the teacher respondents categorized in terms of gender, university, teaching load, teaching experience at HEIs, responsibility, qualification, professional rank, and HDP attendance.

The Chapter comprises two major parts: Qualitative and Quantitative data Analyses. Both parts consist of five sections. In both cases, section one is analysis of data on EFL teachers' action research knowledge. The second and the third sections deal respectively with the teachers' actual involvement in doing action research, and their perceptive views on the level of the likely changes /improvements that might happen on themselves and their practices as a result of doing action research. The fourth and the fifth sections deal respectively with issues of environment for conducting action research and the role of action research for quality language teaching as perceived by the research participants themselves.

Table 8, therefore, shows the relationship between research questions and the tools utilized to generate both the qualitative and quantitative data.

Table 8. Relationships among the Research Questions, Tools and the Data

No	Basic research questions	Teachers' Questionnaire		Students' Questionnaire		FGD	Interviews	
		Quali- tative	Quanti- tative	Quali- tative	Quanti- tative		MoE	University
						Quali	Quali	Quali
1	Do EFL teachers in Ethiopian universities have knowledge of and/or about action research?	√	√	-	-	√	-	√
2	To what extent do EFL teachers practice action research? Why?	√	√	-	√	√	-	√
3	To what extent are EFL teachers who practice action research changing/improving (their practices) in the light of the new knowledge gained from the research?	-	√	-	-	√	-	√
4	What motivating and/or de-motivating environments (policy guidelines, support, and understandings) are there for EFL teachers to be engaged in researching their own classroom practices?	-	√	-	-	√	√	√
5	How do the different level stakeholders perceive the extent to which action research can enhance the quality of EFL teaching in Ethiopian universities?	√	√	√	√	-	√	√

As can be seen from Table 8, all the basic research questions have been addressed quantitatively and qualitatively. Whereas the questionnaires have generated both quantitative and qualitative data, the FGDs and interview schedules have, nonetheless, generated only qualitative data.

The contents of the teachers' questionnaire and interview guide questions presented at universities cover all the issues of the five basic research questions. The questionnaire for the students covers only the issues of practice, and the perceived roles of action research for quality. Similarly, the FGD guides cover four of the research questions: EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, changing/improving in the light of the new knowledge gained from the research, and the research environment for doing action research. Finally, the contents of the interview schedules for people at MoE cover only the research environment including policy provisions and the perceptions of the roles.

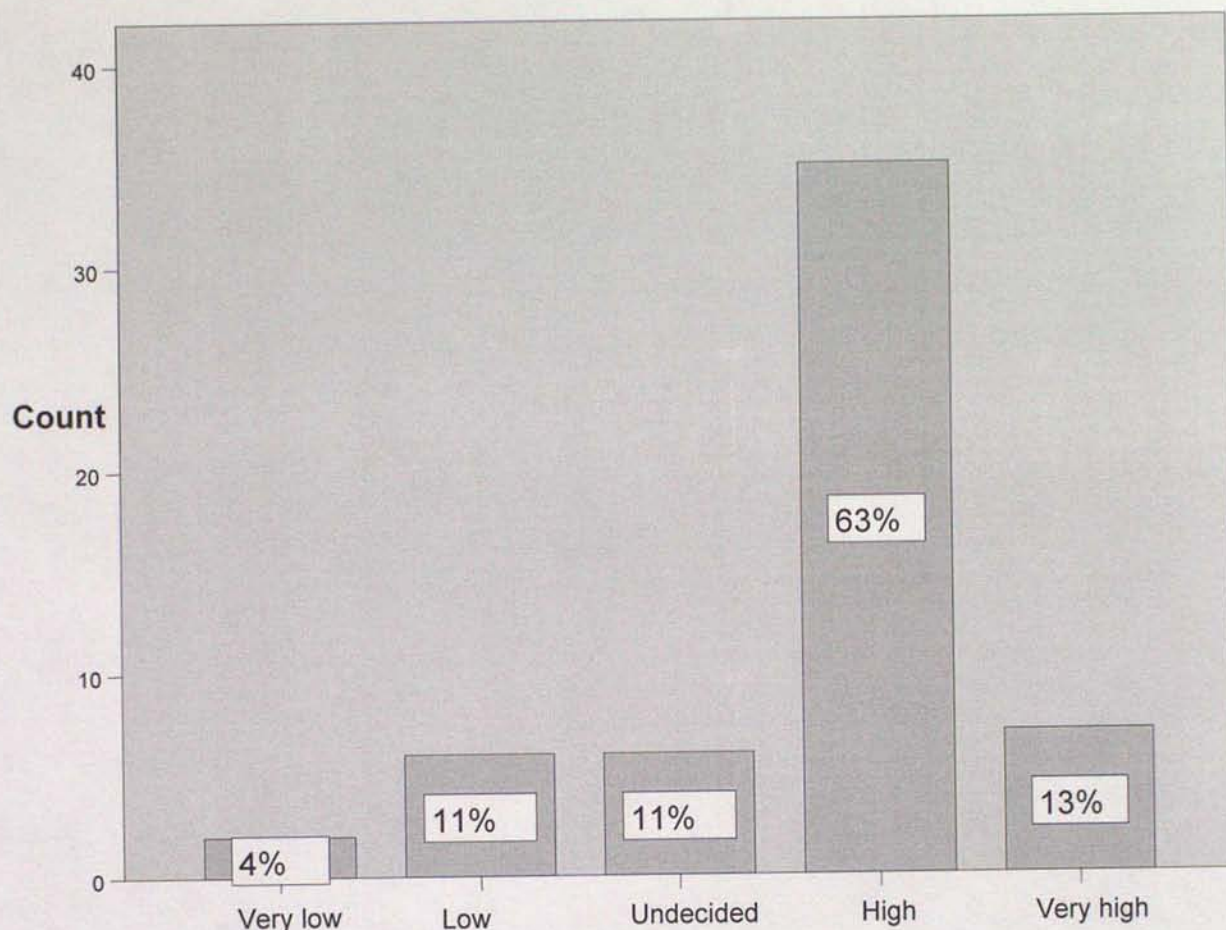
5.2. Quantitative Data Analysis

In this sub-section, the quantitative data generated from EFL teachers and students through questionnaires on the teachers' action research knowledge/skills, practice, change, environment, and action research perceived roles for quality language teaching have been presented and analyzed.

5.2.1. EFL Teachers' Action Research Knowledge

EFL teachers' action research knowledge was examined through data from the teachers using a questionnaire. Eighteen (18) questions were included in the questionnaire. Some of them were direct and factual questions demanding the teachers to rate and respond with a purpose of examining the level of their action research knowledge. Others were indirect questions to gauge their knowledge and skills by exploring the sources of their observed knowledge and skills, and some classroom action types stemming from the thinking that there are "multitude ways of learning" and gaining knowledge and skills (Barnett, 1997: 3, cited in Betts & Smith, 1998: 1). In all themes, some data are graphed and described whereas others are simply described. The decision to graph and describe or simply describe is purposive based on the importance attached to the data within the particular theme.

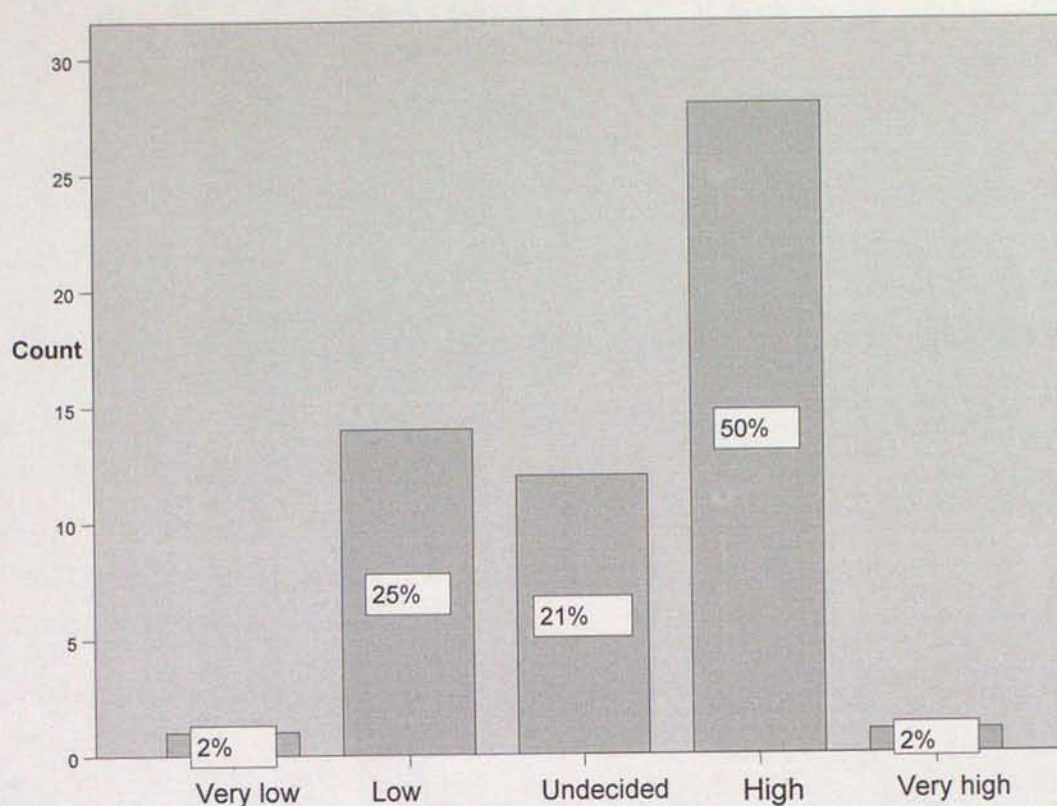
The respondents were asked to rate their theoretical knowledge of action research on a scale of 1-5, where 1 = very low, 2 = low, 3 = undecided, 4 = high, and 5 = very high (see Graph 1 below).



Graph 1. EFL Teachers' Theoretical knowledge of Action Research

Graph 1 shows that 63% and 13% of the respondents rated EFL teachers' theoretical knowledge to be high and very high respectively (in sum 76%). On the other hand only 4% and 11% (in sum 15%) of the respondents rated their theoretical knowledge as very low and low respectively. Equally, 11% of the respondents remained neutral as they chose 'undecided'.

Similarly, the teachers were requested to rate EFL teachers' (including theirs) practical skills in doing action research on a scale of 1-5, where 1= very low, 2 = low, 3 = undecided, 4 = high, and 5 = very high (see Graph 2 below).



Graph 2. EFL Teachers' Practical Skills of Action Research

As can be seen from Graph 2, 50% and 2% (in sum 52%) of the respondents indicated that EFL teachers' practical skills of action research were high and very high respectively. On the other hand 25%, 21% and 2% of the respondents respectively rated it as low, undecided, and very low.

Therefore, it seems that the respondents had high theoretical knowledge and practical skills in action research. Relatively, nonetheless, they had more of theoretical knowledge than practical skills to do action research. This has also been supported by a descriptive analysis of the same data. The result has shown that the mean score of the respondents' theoretical and practical skills of action research were 3.70 (SD = 0.95) and 3.25 (SD = 0.92) respectively (see Table 9 below). The same Table has also presented a correlation analysis of the same data to examine the degree of association between the EFL teachers' claimed theoretical and practical skills of action research.

Table 9. Correlation between EFL Teachers' claimed Action Research Knowledge and Skills

EFL Teachers' Action Research:	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
• Theoretical knowledge	56	3.70	0.95
• Practical knowledge/skills	56	3.25	0.92
<i>r</i>		.43(**)	
<i>p</i>		0.01(2-tailed).	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 9 shows that there is a positive association between EFL teachers' claimed theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research ($r = 0.43$, $DF = 54$, $p = 0.01$). As p is low, chance influence is unlikely. The association observed from the data can, therefore, be manifested in the population. The probability of getting the observed correlation by chance is very small (1%) and the result due to attribute is 99%. On the other hand one might consider the association as insignificant due to the fact that most teachers (76%) claimed to have theoretical knowledge, whereas it is only a few (52%) that claimed to have practical skills of action research. By all means, however, the observed association implies that EFL teachers with more theoretical knowledge have also more practical skills to do action research.

To further assess the knowledge of the respondents' theoretical knowledge of action research, some factual statements were included in the questionnaire. The respondents were requested to show their agreement by selecting '3' for 'agree', '2' for 'somewhat agree', '1' for 'disagree', and '0' for 'do not know' against their choices for each statement (see Appendix 1, Numbers 12 to 19). The data have been analyzed in Tables 10 and 11 below.

Table 10. EFL Teachers' ratings of Factual Statements about Action Research (Positive)

No	Positive Statements about action research	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
1	Action research is learning by doing	56	2.80	0.62
2	Action research deals with immediate application rather than the development of theory	49	2.59	0.71
3	EFL classroom practical problems demand specific solutions	56	2.73	0.49
4	The solutions to EFL classroom practical problems can be developed only inside the context in which the problem arises	57	2.19	0.79
5	The choice of the methods for action research work should be a choice about the empowerment of participants/teacher researchers	55	2.64	0.56
Total		55	2.59	0.63

Table 10 shows that the mean average of the responses to the factual questions intended to assess EFL teachers' action research theoretical knowledge is 2.59 (SD = 0.63). Whereas the maximum rating was '3' (agree), the minimum was '0' (do not know), in between the two were '2' (somewhat agree) and '1' (disagree). The observed mean, therefore, is above 'somewhat agree'. Specifically, the means for the statements about the conceptions of action research as *learning by doing*; *the specificity of the solutions for EFL classroom practical problems*; *the empowerment of participants/teacher researchers for choices of the methods for action research work*; *the immediacy nature of action research*; and *the development of the solutions for EFL classroom practical problems only inside the context in which the problem arises* are 2.80; 2.73; 2.64; 2.59 and 2.19 respectively.

This finding is an indication that the respondents were in favor of *reflective rationality* as opposed to *technical rationality*. (For conceptual understanding of the two, see Chapter Three Table 2). This is specifically because they favored the arguments that *EFL classroom practical problems demand specific solutions*, and *the solutions to EFL classroom problems can be developed only inside the context in which the problem arises*, all of which are the features of *reflective rationality*.

On the other hand, the respondents had shown little agreement to three incorrect statements (see Table 11 below). These questions align with the arguments of the supporters of 'technical rationality'.

Table 11. EFL Teachers' ratings of factual Statements about Action Research (Negative)

No	Negative Statements about action research	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
1	Action research is not responsive to specific EFL classroom situations	54	1.39	0.69
2	The solutions to EFL classroom practical problems can be developed outside the practical situations (in research or administrative offices)	53	1.58	0.72
3	The choice of the methods for action research work should be guided by scientific considerations in a restricted sense	52	1.90	0.80
Total		53	1.60	0.73

As can be seen from Table 11, the mean average rating of negative statements about action research is low ($\bar{X} = 1.60$ and $SD = 0.73$) in comparison to the result given in Table 10. Specifically, the mean of the first statement '*Action research is not responsive to specific EFL classroom situation*' fall below all the rest ($\bar{X} = 1.39$ and $SD = 0.69$). On the other hand, the statement: "The choice of the methods for action research work should be guided by scientific considerations in a restricted sense" has a mean of 1.90 ($SD = 0.80$), which falls between 'somewhat agree' and 'disagree'. This is because the issues were rated as '3' (agree), '2' (somewhat agree), '1' (disagree), and '0' (do not know). Implied within the finding is mixing or misleading the context-responsiveness nature of action research to the terms '...restricted sense', and considering "the solutions to EFL classroom practical problems can be developed outside the practical situations (in research or administrative offices)" as appropriate, may be influenced by the traditional research approach. This is an indication that the respondents were not keen in accurately fine-tuning the specific characteristics of action research. One may, therefore, argue that the teachers' observed theoretical knowledge could be external to their tacit and deep knowledge.

To further gauge EFL teachers' action research knowledge and skills, six indirect questions were included in the questionnaire for teachers. They dealt with examining the extent to which some action types, namely, *Tacit knowing in action (Tkia)*, *Reflection-in-action (Ria)*, and *Reflection-on-action (Roa)*, characterize EFL teachers' classroom practices. The questions were rated on a scale ranging from 1-5, where 5 = very high, 4 = high, 3 = medium, 2 = low, and 1 = very low. A descriptive analysis of the data has given the following results whereby the expected minimum and maximum scores generated for each of the action types are 2 and 10 respectively.

Table 12. The extent to which some Action Types characterize EFL Teachers' Classroom Practices

Classroom Action types	N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD
Tacit knowing in action (Tkia)	54	2	3.43	3.01
Reflection-in-action (Ria)	54	2	3.72	0.84
Reflection-on-action (Roa)	54	2	3.87	0.90

Table 12 shows that the mean average of the results for the three action types were high ($\bar{X} = 3.87$ and $SD = 0.90$, $\bar{X} = 3.72$ and $SD = 0.84$, and $\bar{X} = 3.43$ and $SD = 3.01$)

respectively for *Roa*, *Ria*, and *Tkia*. Understandably, the teachers claimed to possess the three action types. The case implies that the teachers had multiple knowledge sources for that. Relatively, however, their engagements in *Roa* and *Ria* were very high. *Ria* happens during an action whenever strange situations disrupt the smooth flow of the action. *Roa* occurs after the action mainly when formulation of explicit knowledge and reflections are required in the form of synthesis and judgment. *Tkia*, nonetheless, is personal, and deep-rooted knowledge, and I-theory. (See Chapter Three, 3.4.2.4.A-C; read Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; McNiff, 2002a; and Wisker 2008).

The relatively observed low mean of *Tkia* in comparison to the other two, nonetheless, indicates that the respondents were less clear about their personal knowing. By implication, their 'I-theories' (McNiff, 2002a: 28) were not grounded and not situated on tacit knowledge in which routines run smoothly and skillfully without planning. The teachers, consequently, might not be efficient in the unpredictable situations of everyday professional practices.

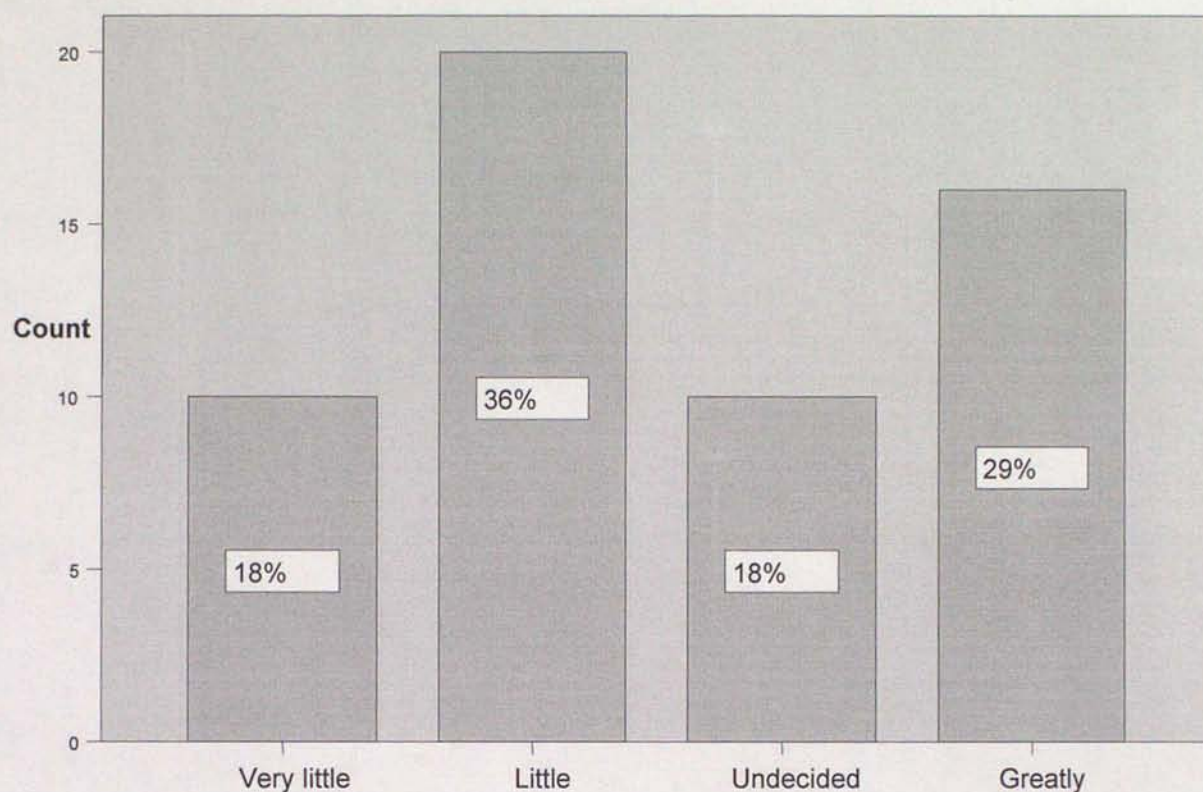
Overall, however, the finding aligns with the thinking that there are multitude ways of learning and consequently there are multiple sources of knowledge, particularly in this modern world. Among others, process knowledge, tacit knowledge, action learning, and experiential learning point to the multiplication of our ways of knowing these days. The explicit intent of the first theme, therefore, was to explore EFL teachers' action research knowledge and skills from different angles. Implicitly, it was meant to gauge the impact of the observed knowledge and skills on practicing action research and its consequence on classroom actions and activities.

5.2.2. EFL Teachers' Action Research Practice

EFL teachers' action research actual practice was explored using 11 items. Whereas 2 of the items were open-ended 9 were closed. The reliability of the 9 items is 0.79. This is moderately high from statistical point of view.

The first question in this subsection intended to assess the extent to which EFL classroom actions were informed by their action research findings. The question was rated on a scale

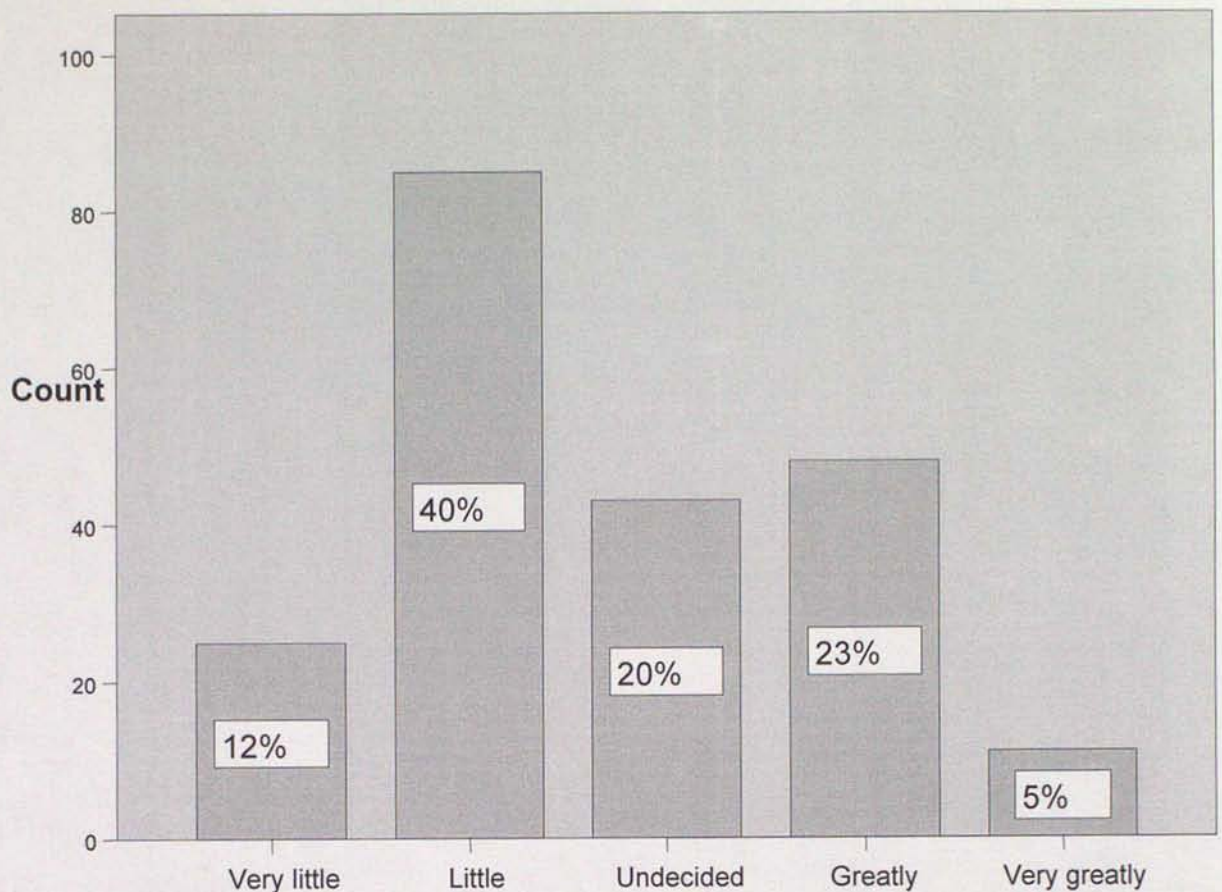
of 1-5, where 1 = Very little; 2. =Little; 3= Undecided; 4= Great; 5= Very great. The following Bar Graph presents the result of the data analysis on the particular item.



Graph 3. The extent to which EFL Teachers' Classroom Actions were informed by Action Research findings (Teacher-rated)

As can be seen from Graph 3, only 29% rated the extent to which EFL teachers' classroom actions were informed by action research findings as *greatly*, and no one rated it as *very greatly*. On the other hand the majority (36% and 18%) of the respondents rated the cases as *very little* and *little* respectively, whereas 18% chose 'undecided'.

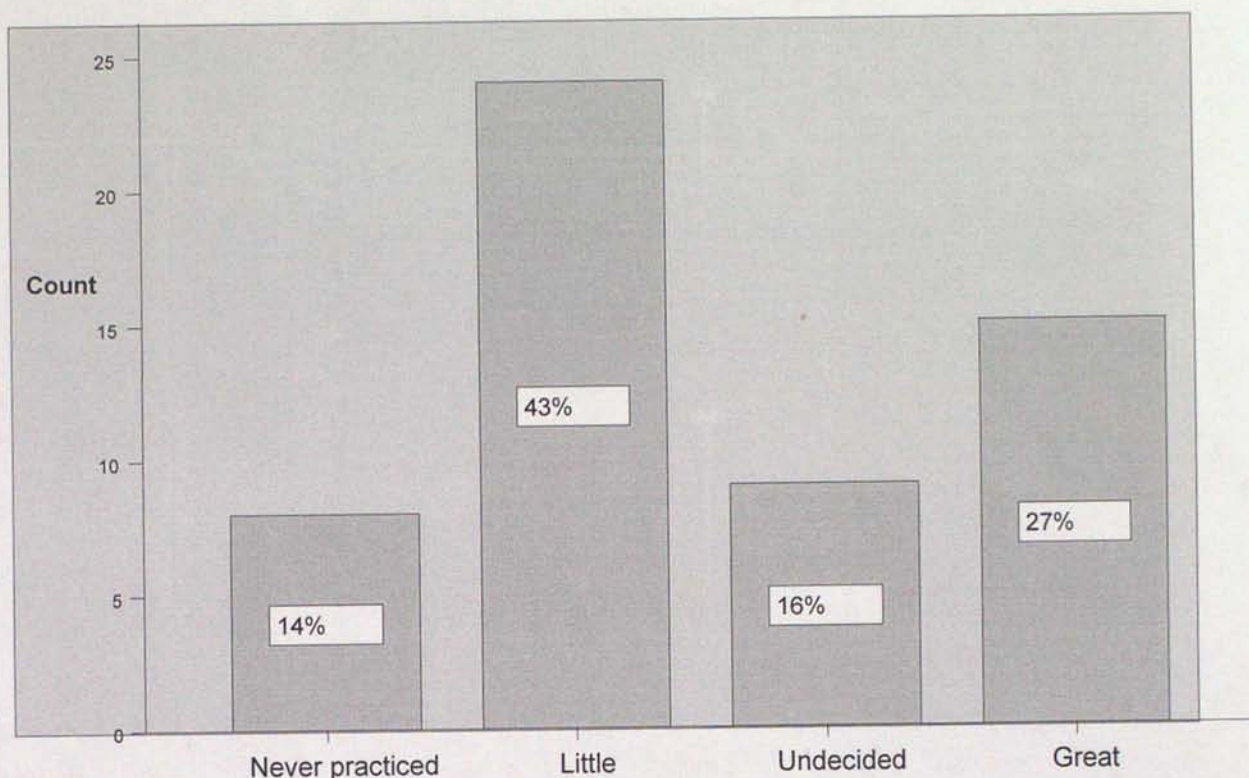
The same question was presented to the student respondents and the results have been presented in Graph 4 below.



Graph 4. The extent to which EFL teachers' Classroom Actions were informed by Action Research findings (Student-rated)

Graph 4 shows that 12%, 40%, and 20% of the student respondents rated the extent to which EFL teachers' classroom actions were informed by action research findings as *very little*, *little*, and *undecided* respectively. On the other hand, only 23% and 5% of the respondents rated the required practice as *greatly* and *very greatly*.

Moreover, the level of EFL teachers' actual practice of action research was examined on a five point scale, where 5 = *very great*, 4 = *great*, 3 = *undecided*, 2 = *little*, and 1 = *never practiced*. The ratings of the teacher respondents for these items are presented hereunder in Graph 5.



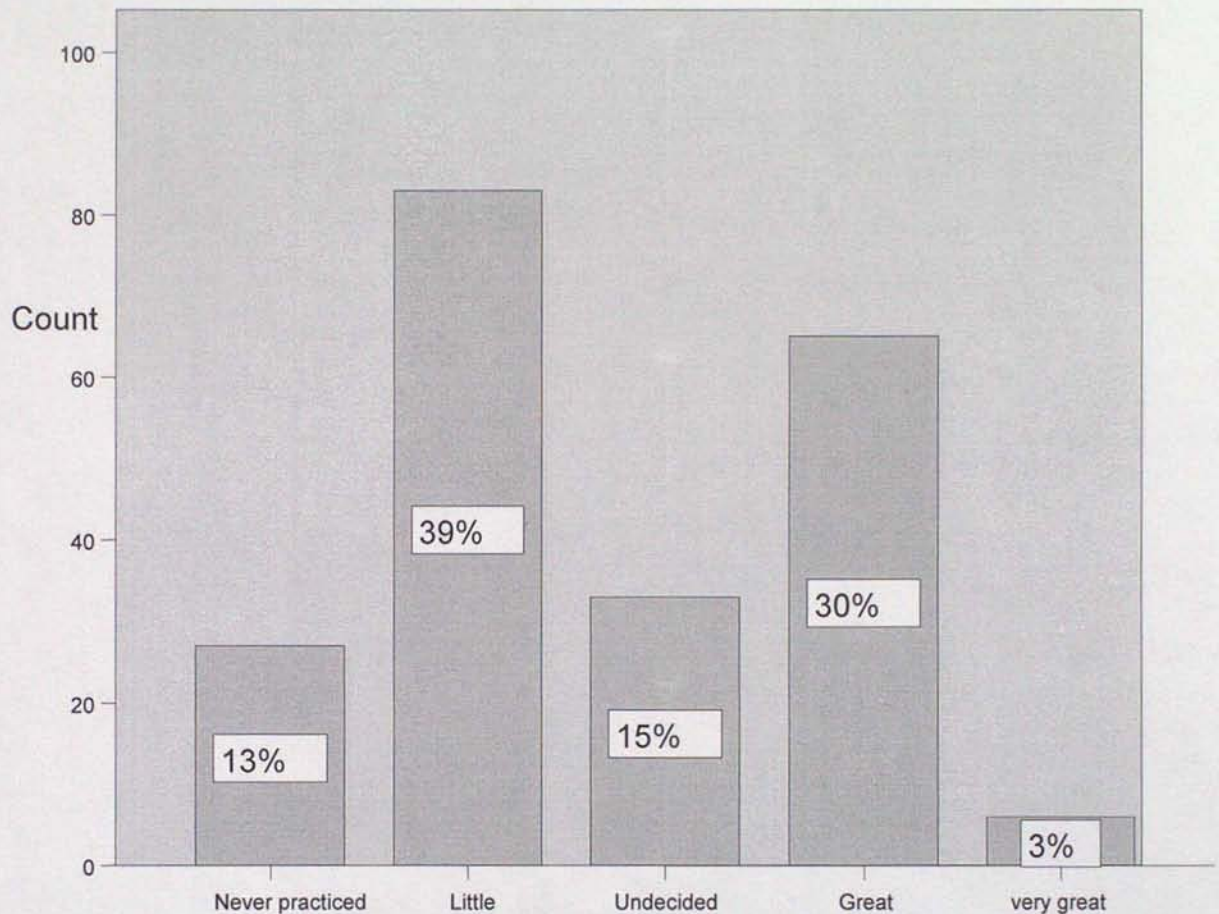
Graph 5. EFL Teachers' Actual practice of Action Research (rated by Teachers)

As can be seen from Graph 5, 43% and 14% of the respondents respectively rated their actual practice of action research as *little* and *never practiced at all*. Whereas only 27% of the respondents rated their actual practice of action research as *great*, 16% chose 'undecided', and no one rated as 'very great'. The latter case shows that they were not clear whether some of their practices could be considered as action research or not. Similar results were manifested in the qualitative data. Overall, as 57% (14+43) underrated their actual practice of action research at their respective universities and 16% remained silent, EFL teachers' actual practice of action research could be judged as *little*.

A descriptive analysis of the same question has also given similar finding ($\bar{X} = 2.55$ and $SD = 1.04$). If the data for 'undecided' is omitted, even the observed mean could be by far below the middle rater as the case was examined using a five point rating scale. This implies that EFL teachers were not practicing action research when need might arise. The

expected minimum and maximum scores generated for each of the action types are 2 and 10 respectively.

The same question (of the teachers on the above issue) was presented to student respondents. The ratings of the student respondents for the item are presented hereunder in Graph 6.

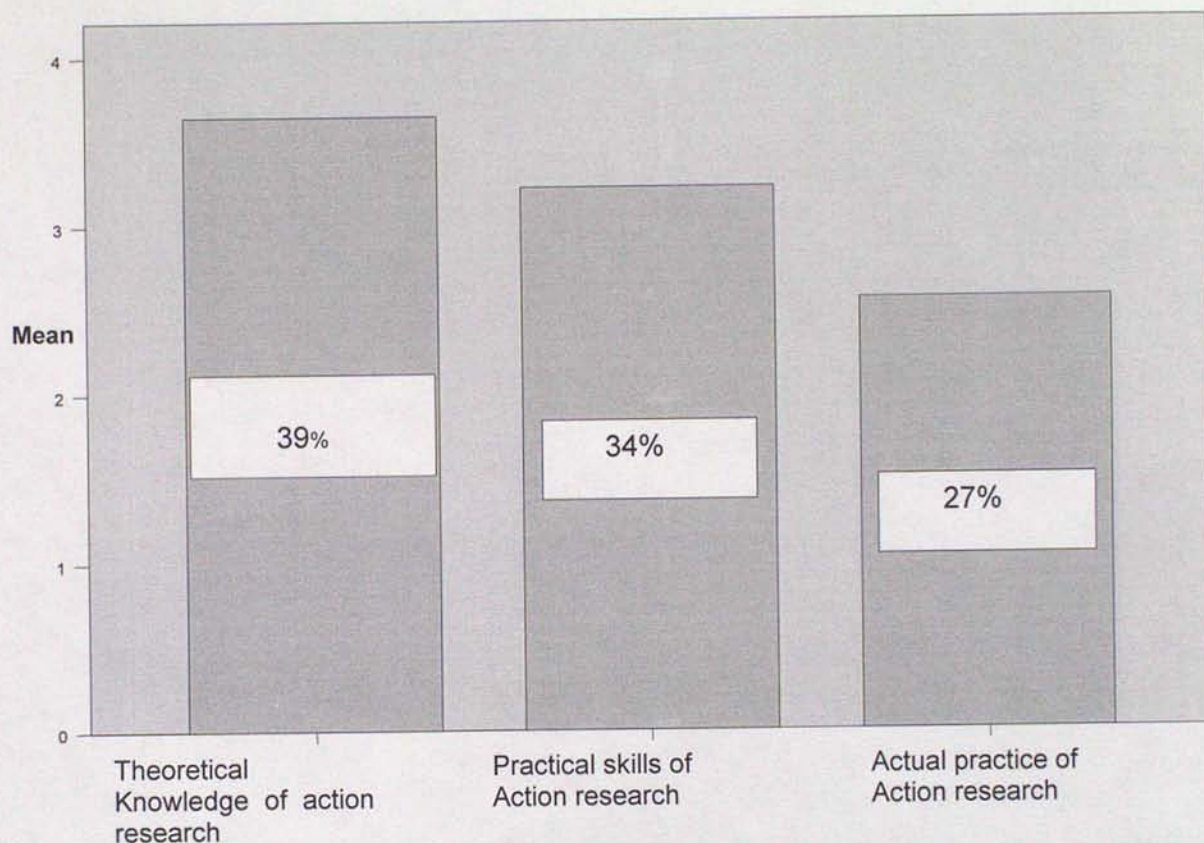


Graph 6. EFL Teachers' Actual Practice of Action Research (rated by Students)

Graph 6 shows that 13%, 39%, and 15% of the student respondents respectively rated the level of their EFL teachers' actual practice of action research as *never*, *little*, and *undecided*. On the other hand 30% and 3% of them rated the level of the required practice as *great* and *very great* respectively.

Further more, a synthesis of the data generated by open-ended questions of the teachers' questionnaire shows that 30% of the teacher respondents: TR (3, 8, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, 29, 32, 35, 37, 42, 47, 49, 51, 52, and 55) rated EFL teachers' actual practice of action research as 'very low'.

Also a comparison of the EFL teachers' action research theoretical knowledge, skills and their actual involvement in doing it has been presented in Graph 7, actually based on mean average of the data from teacher respondents.



Graph 7. EFL teachers' Action Research Theoretical knowledge, Skills and Practice

Graph 7 shows that EFL teachers' theoretical knowledge of action research is relatively the highest (39%) followed by their practical skills (34%). Their actual involvement in doing action research, however, was the lowest (only 27%) from among the three. More specifically, though EFL teachers had relatively high theoretical as well as practical skills, their actual practice of action research was the least in comparison with their knowledge and skills.

The issue of EFL teachers' actual practice of action research was further explored using a descriptive analysis of the data collected from teachers and students. The mean scores and the standard deviations of the ratings of the two types of respondents for the issue are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics on EFL Teachers' Action Research Practice

Respondent	N	Items	Minimum	Maximum	$\bar{X}$	SD
Teacher	56	2.00	2.00	10.00	2.56	1.80
Student	212	2.00	2.00	10.00	2.71	1.92

Table 13 shows that the mean scores for EFL Teachers' action research practice were 2.56 (SD=1.80), and 2.71 (1.92) for teacher and student respondents respectively. Since the items that generated the data both from the teachers and students ranged from 1 to 5, where 5= very great, 4 = great, 3 = undecided, 2 = little, and 1 = very little, all the mean scores are between 'little' and 'undecided'. By implication, EFL Teachers' action research actual practice was not as such satisfactory and the teachers did not have clear vision of what counts to be considered as 'practice of action research'.

Table 14. Correlation between EFL teachers' Action Research Knowledge and practicing it

	Theoretical knowledge and doing action research	Practical and doing action
Pearson Correlation	0.29(*)	0.14
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.029	0.31
N	55	55

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 14 shows that EFL teachers' action research theoretical knowledge and doing it have positive association, though the index appears to be small ($r = 0.29$, $DF = 53$, $p = 0.029$). The probability to get the result by chance is low and unlikely. The association observed from the data can, therefore, be manifested in the population.

On the other hand, there is no significant association between EFL teachers' action research practical skills and doing it ($r = 0.14$, $p = 0.31$). Here, the chance influence is likely as the p value is above 5%, which is one of the conventional critical significance

levels (including 0.01) and serves as a cutoff (the scientific standard) (Suter, 2006: 352). The case was further explored through the massive qualitative data that though the teachers had knowledge of action research, the little enabling environment remained bottleneck to do action research.

5.2.3. EFL Teachers' Change as a result of their Action Research

The issue raised in this sub-section is founded on the belief that "action research can often cause lasting and useful change in practice and in the practitioner researcher's work place" (Wisker 2008: 228). An assessment was made to validate this fact by exploring the extent to which EFL teachers were changing/improving (their practices) in the light of the new knowledge gained from their research. In doing so, 12 items on the issue were rated on a scale of 1-5, where 5 = very greatly, 4 = greatly, 3 = medium, 2 = little, and 1 = very little. This particular section was answered only by those teachers who claimed to have practiced action research.

The Alpha reliability for the 12 items is 0.94. This is very high from statistical point of view. This is because "the higher the coefficient, the more reliable the procedure is" (Selinger & Shahomu, 2007: 187). It can, therefore, be judged that the data collection procedures and the items on EFL teachers' level of change/improvement in the light of the new knowledge gained from their action research were consistent in eliciting the required information (pragmatic validity).

A descriptive analysis was made for the data on the above theme. The result has shown that the new knowledge gained from EFL teachers' action research has brought significant change and improvement to EFL teachers and their practices ($\bar{X} = 3.77$, $SD = 0.66$). By implication, the respondents highly valued the role of the new knowledge gained from their action research to bring betterment of themselves and their practices.

Furthermore, with a purpose to measure the degree of the association between doing action research and the resultant change, Pearson's correlation analysis was made. The result has been shown in Table 15.

Table 15. Correlation between Doing Action Research and Change

		Actual practice of action research	Change
Actual practice of action research	Pearson Correlation	1	0.38(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.025
	N	35	35
Change	Pearson Correlation	0.38(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.025	
	N	35	35

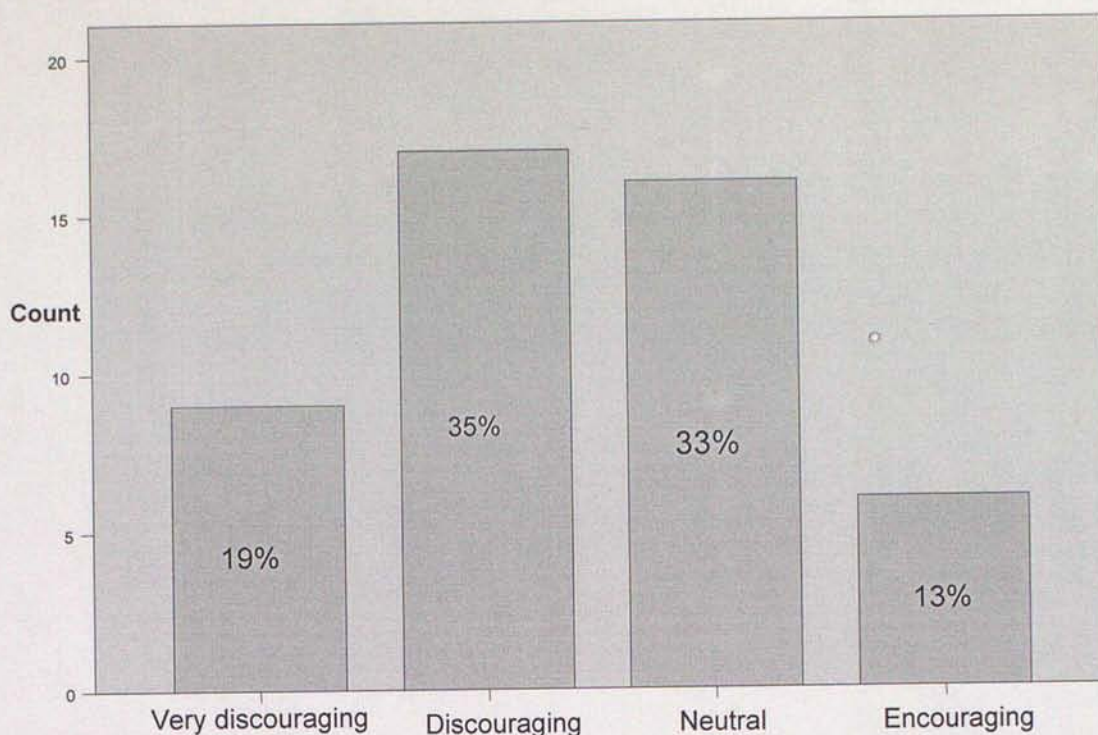
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 15 shows that there is a positive association between *actual practice of action research* and EFL teachers' change ($r = 0.38$, $DF = 33$, $p = 0.025$). Though the figure appears to be small, the association between EFL teachers' actual practice of action research and change is positive and significant. Equally, the probability of getting the result by chance is only 0.025. As p is low, therefore, chance influence is unlikely. By implication, a relationship or connection may exist between EFL teachers' *actual practice of action research* and their change in the population similar to those in the sample.

5.2.4. Motivating and /or De-motivating Environments for EFL Teachers to do Action Research

The environmental situations for EFL teachers to do action research were examined using 21 items. Of the items, 8 were positive environmental situations and 13 dealt with constraints to do action research. The Alpha reliability for the 8 positively formulated items is 0.62. In the same vein the Alpha reliability for the 13 negatively formulated items is 0.79. Whereas the statistical significance of the latter is higher than that of the former, both imply that the items and the procedures for the theme were moderately reliable in eliciting the required information. The reliability for all the items also ranges from 0.51 to 0.74 for the 8 items and 0.77 to 0.79 for the 13 items.

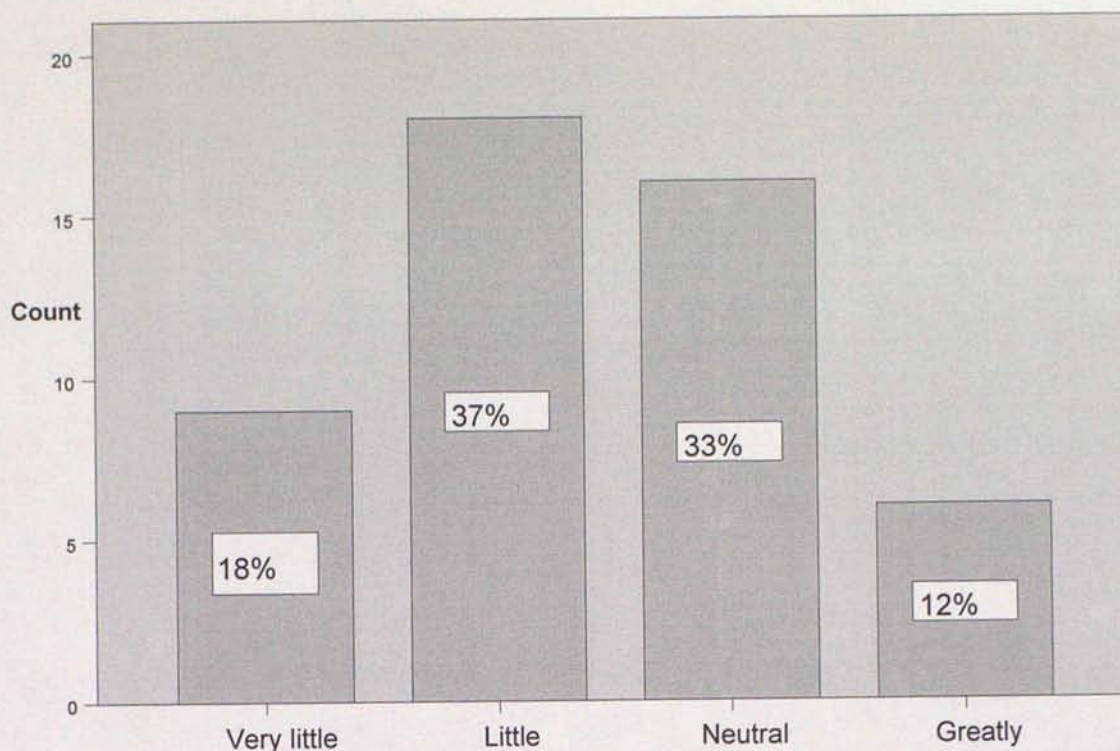
The first question in this sub-section asked the teacher respondents to rate the encouragement level of the environmental situations to practice action research. The results have been presented in the following Bar Graph.



Graph 8. Environmental situations for EFL teachers to practice action research

As can be seen from Graph 8, the majority of the respondents (35%) rated the environmental situations for EFL teachers to do action research as discouraging. Also, fairly a large proportion of the respondents tempted to take the middle ground (as 33% chose neutral). This might be due to the culture in which we have been brought up to be silent or neutral when sensitive matters or issues come. A further look at the Graph shows that 19% rated the environment to be 'very discouraging'. On the other hand whereas no one rated the environment to be 'very encouraging', 13% rated it to be 'encouraging'. It can, therefore, be judged that the environmental situations for the EFL teachers to do action research were discouraging as the majority, 54% (19%+35%) rated as (very) discouraging.

Also a question on the extent to which the teachers were empowered to conduct action research to improve their EFL classroom practices was presented to the respondents. The results have been presented in Graph 9 below.



Graph 9. The extent to which EFL Teachers were Empowered to conduct Action Research

Graph 9 shows that the majority rated their empowerment to do action research as 'little' (37%). A large proportion also chose the option 'neutral' (33%). Whereas only 12% indicated that they were greatly empowered, 18% rated their empowerment to be 'very little', and no one rated as 'very greatly'. The trend, therefore, is not far from being little empowerment for EFL teachers to do action research.

A descriptive analysis was made by combining the data on environmental situations whereby a five point rating scale of 5 (very encouraging), 4 (encouraging), 3 (neutral), 2 (discouraging), and 1 (very discouraging); and empowerment whereby a five point rating scale of 5 (very greatly), 4 (greatly), 3 (neutral), 2 (little), and 1 (very little) were used. The resultant mean score is 2.39 (SD = 0.74). This result, therefore, is below the middle rater ('neutral') in both cases. It can, therefore, be judged that the environmental situations and the level of EFL teachers' empowerment to do action research were not satisfactory.

In the same vein, a descriptive analysis of 6 points on the availability of motivating environments for EFL teachers to do action research was made. The mean average of the analysis result is 2.54 (SD=1.032). Since a five point rating scale of 5 (very greatly), 4 (greatly), 3 (neutral), 2 (little), and 1 (very little) was used, the mean average is in between 'little' and 'neutral'. It is, therefore, not far from being 'little' as being 'neutral' by itself is an indication of indifference of the teachers to their professional concerns. Ideally to do action research, there should be sufficient motivating situations above and beyond the middle ground. It can, therefore, be judged from the findings that the availability of motivating situations for EFL teachers to do action research was not encouraging.

The degree of the influences that some selected constraints put on EFL teachers to do action research were examined using 13 items rated as "1" for small, "2" for medium, "3" for great. A descriptive statistics for the items has been presented in Table 16 below.

Table 16. Some Constraints and their influences on EFL teachers to do Action Research

No	Constraints	N	Mini	Max	$\bar{X}$	SD
1	Time constraints	56	1	3	2.80	0.44
2	Large class size	57	1	3	2.51	0.69
3	Additional work load	57	1	3	2.51	0.71
4	Lack of resources	57	1	3	2.33	0.66
5	Viewing action research as threat to accepted norms and conventions	55	1	3	1.71	0.79
6	Beliefs in the traditional roles of lecturers- to impart knowledge	56	1	3	1.71	0.78
7	Limited support for publicizing the research findings	54	1	3	2.15	0.71
8	Anxiety about revealing the limitations of one's teaching practices	56	1	3	1.80	0.77
9	Mandated and centralized curricula contents	56	1	3	2.07	0.74
10	The contexts in which teachers work were not conducive to do action research	54	1	3	2.20	0.76
11	Lack of clear roles/responsibilities for EFL teachers to do action research	55	1	3	1.95	0.78
12	Nominal place is given to action research in comparison to other forms of research approaches (e.g. pure or basic research)	57	1	3	2.25	0.714
13	EFL teachers' low commitment	57	1	3	2.21	0.773
Total		47	1	3	2.19	0.38

Table 16 shows that the listed constraints highly influenced EFL teachers' involvement in doing action research ($\bar{X} = 2.19$ and $SD = 0.38$). Since the rating was on a scale of 1-3 (as

indicated above), this result is between 'medium' and 'great'. When seen issue wise, *time was rated as* the most crucial constraint for EFL teachers to conduct action research ($\bar{X} = 2.8$). Next, *large class size* ($\bar{X} = 2.51$), *additional work load* ($\bar{X} = 2.51$), *lack of resources* ($\bar{X} = 2.33$), *giving nominal place to action research in comparison to other forms of research approaches* ($\bar{X} = 2.25$), *EFL teachers' low commitment* ($\bar{X} = 2.21$), *less conduciveness of the contexts in which they work to do action research* ($\bar{X} = 2.20$), *limited support for publicizing the research findings* (2.15), *mandated and centralized curricula contents* ($\bar{X} = 2.07$), and *lack of clear roles/responsibilities for EFL teachers to do action research* ($\bar{X} = 1.95$) were among the major constraints for EFL teachers to do action research.

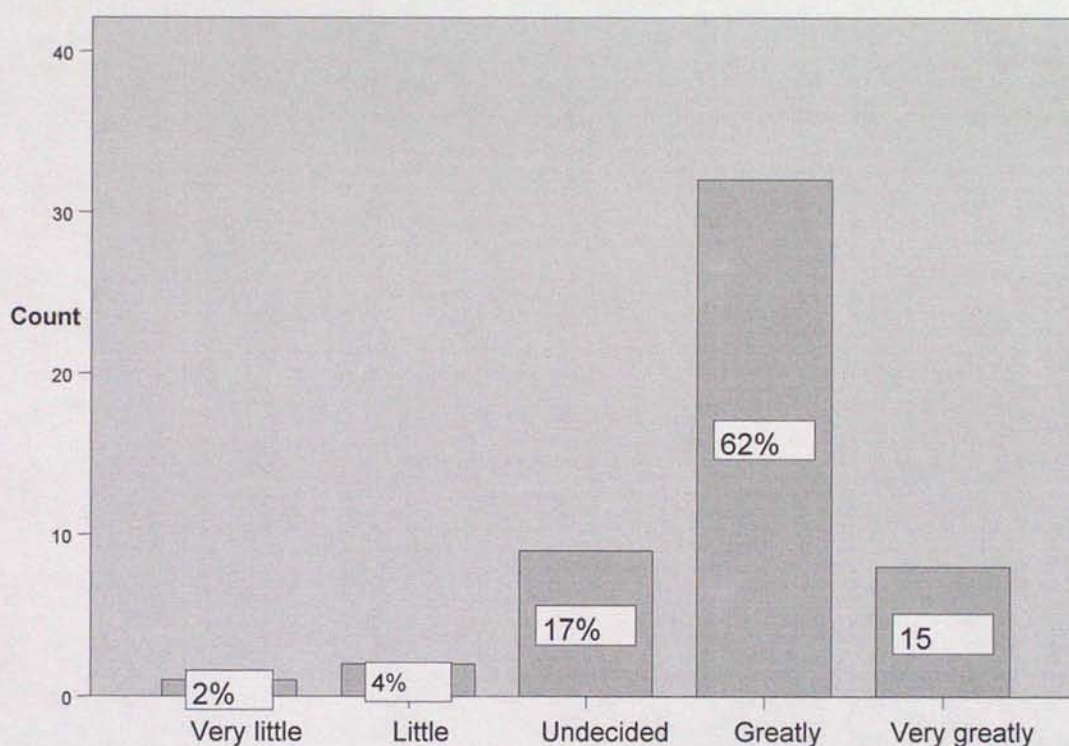
In principle, the institutional and environmental situations need to be supportive for teachers to conduct action research responsive to their and their institution's recurrent needs and priorities. In Wisker's (2008) words, "[t]he organization in which ... action research is taking place needs to be supportive and willing to take on board the ideas, information and suggestions that it will produce" (P. 230). As the same source indicates, "... action research is very often a stage in enabling change in practice in organizations..." consequently, "those who have the power need to be behind the research and willing to consider what it discovers and suggests" (Ibid). This is because action research thrives in an enabling environment and serves as a catalyst for bringing change and improvement in classrooms.

5.2.5. Perceived Roles of Action Research for Quality of EFL Teaching

EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of the extent to which action research could create and sustain the quality of language teaching was examined using 12 items in both questionnaires- for teachers (see Appendix 1, Nos. 70 to 81) and for students (see Appendix 2, Nos. 14 to 25). In both questionnaires on the specific issue, one question was open-ended. The reliabilities of the rest 11 close-ended questions are 0.96 and 0.91 for teachers' and students' questionnaires respectively. These indices are very high. By

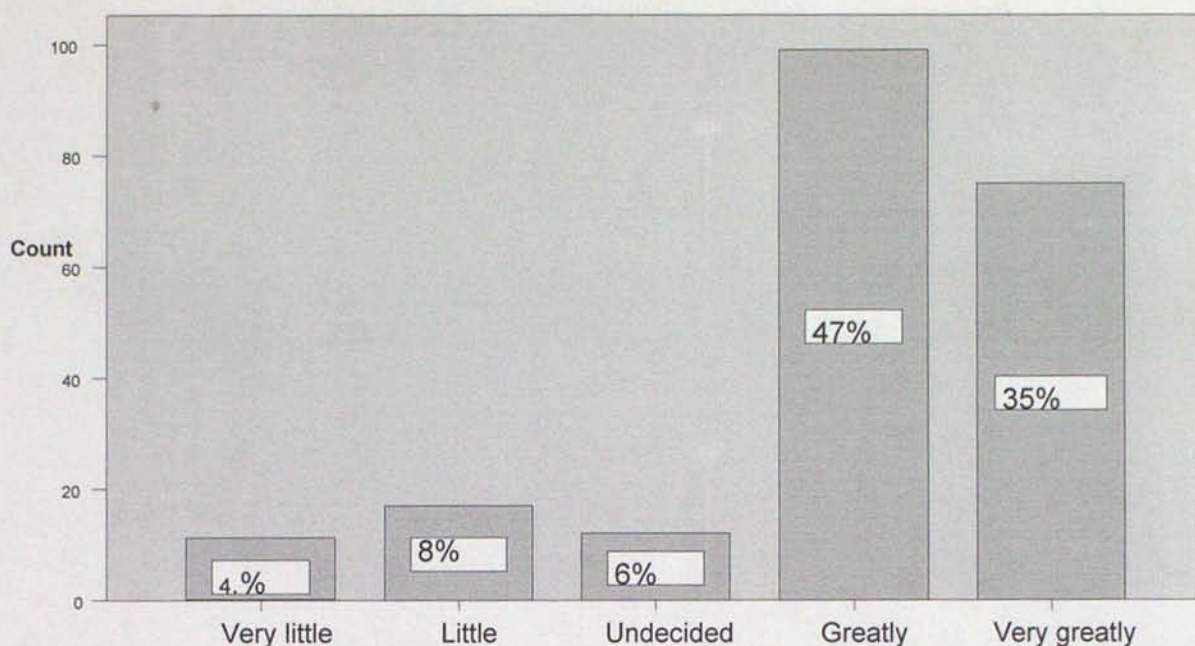
implication, the items and the procedures for the theme were reliable in eliciting the required information.

In the following two Bar Graphs (Graphs 10 and 11), the data generated from the teachers and the students respectively on the extent to which action research enhances quality language teaching have been presented.



Graph 10. The extent to which Action Research enhances the Quality of Language Teaching (Teacher-rated)

The data in Graph 10 were generated from teacher respondents. The Graph shows that action research can make a difference to a great extent (62% +15%) in enhancing the quality of language teaching. Similarly quite a large number of student respondents valued the role of action research for quality language teaching (see Graph 11).



Graph 11. The extent to which Action Research enhances the Quality of Language Teaching (student-rated)

The data in Graph 11 were generated from student respondents. The Graph shows that 82 % (47% + 35%) of the student respondents highly valued the role of action research in enhancing the quality of language teaching.

Furthermore, the contributions of action research in sustaining quality in EFL classrooms of Ethiopian universities were examined using 10 items on a rating scale of 1-5, where 5 = Very high; 4 = High; 3 = Medium; 2 = Low; 1 = Very low. A descriptive analysis was made and the result has been summarized in Table 17 below.

Table 17. The Role of Action Research for Quality Language Teaching

Respondents	N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD
Teacher	51	10	4.00	0.72
Student	188	10	3.87	0.80

Table 17 shows that both teacher and student respondents greatly valued the role of action research in enhancing the quality of language teaching ($\bar{X} = 4.00$, SD = 0.72 for teachers, and $\bar{X} = 3.87$, SD = 0.80 for students). These findings align with the several claims for

action research as the basis for professional development (situated learning in the workplace and about the workplace); problem resolution; and change and improvement. Furthermore, the findings concur with the fact that “[r]espect for educational practitioner has given rise to the development of action research” (Pollard, 2002: 33). Implied in this quote is the need for educational practitioners' empowerment and commitment to conduct action research with a purpose of enhancing the quality of themselves and their practices for the better.

5.3. Qualitative Data Analysis

In this sub-section, the qualitative data have been presented and analyzed. The data were generated through open-ended questionnaires for EFL teachers and students, through FGD with 20 people (7 both at AAU and BDU, and 6 at HarU), and through interview with eight people (two each from the three universities and from MoE). Whereas the data from interviewees and discussants were tape recorded and transcribed after the events, the data from the respondents were collected from the open-ended questions of the questionnaire. These qualitative data have been interspersed with each other to get more coherent result than they appear separately. In presenting and analyzing the data, coding has been succinctly utilized (See Chapter Four, section 4.6.4). The data have been classified under five themes on: EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change, environment, and action research perceived roles for quality.

5.3.1. EFL Teachers' Action Research Knowledge

The qualitative data meant to examine EFL teachers' action research knowledge and skills were generated through open-ended questionnaire for teachers, FGD, and interviews. The results showed that there were mixed beliefs by the respondents, discussants and interviewees. The majority had the view that EFL teachers had knowledge and skills of action research. Others were not sure, and still some others (small in number) clearly indicated that EFL teachers did not have the required knowledge and skills to do action research. This sub-section, therefore, presents a bona fide account of those who claimed EFL teachers' possession of action research knowledge and skills, and sources/evidences

for the claim; and those who articulated lack of EFL teachers' action research knowledge and skills, and reasons/evidence for that.

5.3.1.1. Supporters of the view that EFL Teachers' Possess Action Research Knowledge

A closer look at the qualitative data gives that 51%, 49%, and 44% of the interviewees, teacher respondents, and discussants respectively generalized the overall possession of theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research. On the other hand 23%, 41%, and 39% of the interviewees, teacher respondents, and discussants respectively limited their claims only to their own lived (experienced) practices.

Among those who claimed the overall possession, an interview at BDU indicated, "[m]any teachers are familiar with the theoretical concept of action research" (C₁IBDU). A discussant at the same university also indicated, "since we are trained as teachers, we have exposures to action research; also as we were exposed to HDP, we have acquaintance to action research. In HDP, one of the most important things I have learnt is the fact that action research is one way of professional development" (C₅FBDU). Also another discussant at the same university indicated, "[w]e have theoretical knowledge of action research for we attended [research courses] at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and action research in HDP. We, nonetheless, lack the practical skills" (C₄FBDU).

Similarly, one discussant at AAU expressed the case with mixed feelings:

I guess action research is the language of the day; many people knew about it by attending HDP, different seminars, conferences. In fact there is a difference between talking and trying to know more about it and doing it at classroom levels. So I would say that many people seem to have ideas about it but how much of what they know can be taken to classroom is a different thing, in fact. (C₂FAAU)

In the same vein, one respondent replied to the question on the issue: "knowledge is adequate but practice is very low" (TR55). Another respondent also indicated, "[w]e have the awareness about it" (TR49).

Among others, the following statements were given by six respondents who claimed to have action research knowledge.

“I think I have a good knowledge to start with” (TR 16).

“I have enough knowledge about action research” (TR 18).

“I think I have adequate knowledge gained from reading, HDP (learning about it and doing it myself) and advising students in my department” (TR32).

“I have read on it, conducted one so far, and got training in the area and advised students” (TR33).

“Surely I have gained the basic knowledge that can help me conduct action research” (TR52).

“Theoretically I am aware of what action research is and does” (TR47).

Whereas some reservations were witnessed from few of the respondents on their skills to do action research (for instance TR 18, TR 47), the above claims entail the confidence of the teachers in their possession of theoretical knowledge of action research. The case has called for triangulating these claims with the quantitative data (see Chapter Six, section 6.2).

5.3.1.2. Sources and Basis for EFL Teachers' Observed Knowledge and Skills of Action Research

Teacher respondents, interviewees, and discussants were requested to mention the sources and the basis for the observed EFL teachers' knowledge and skills. A synthesis of the data from the subjects (interviewees, discussants, and respondents) gives us the following list as the sources for the observed levels of EFL teachers' action research knowledge and skills.

- 1) HDP Training (2-4 months to cover 1 Module of the 4 Modules that usually take 10 months) [by 63% of the teacher respondents and all the discussants and the interviewees at universities];
- 2) Trainings on topics or full-fledged courses at undergraduate and graduate levels, (for example ' Research and Report writing' in DFLL, and Action Research as undergraduate course and as a topic in (research method) courses in MA studies (1 semester of the 2 years duration) [by 7 teacher respondents];

3) Whereas one respondent from HarU claimed to have studied Critical Practitioner Inquiry (2 years MA abroad), almost all the discussants and the university level interviewees had consensus on the following as sources for the observed level of action research knowledge and skills.

- a) Tailor-made short-term professional development training programs as part of TDP, CPD, ADRC, Guest speakers;
- b) Personal reading and practicing;
- c) ELIP (KELTA) (1 year); and
- d) Self-help (independent learning).

Furthermore, three respondents also indicated that they had taken a number of courses, but they did not indicate the types and durations. A discussant at AAU has also indicated his acquaintance with action research:

The first time I came to know more about action research was when I attended a module on action research in HDP. ...I had to read and know more about it, and as a requirement I had to conduct it with a partner. That is the only thing I can mention as far as conducting action research is concerned. Later I also had chances at different times to observe my HDP trainees [he had become HDP tutor] who had actually for various reasons had exposures to action research and who I think really know very well theoretically what action research is and how to select topics for considering in action research. (C₃FAAU)

This discussant, however, had a reservation: "I am not very sure of the extent to which these people really do action research beyond certain requirements. He went on indicating, "HDP participants are required to conduct action research and whether that experience continues after they complete the training program is not known as long as my knowledge of these people is concerned".

Another discussant argued that there were many ways [other than HDP] through which teachers could learn about action research.

There are many different ways by which people could be exposed to the idea of action research. May be HDP, reading, full-fledged courses at undergraduate and graduate levels. In one of the courses I offer at the University, for example, we have at least one heading on action research. So there we treat elements of action research and see what it is all about. So all together I think people can be exposed to it in different ways. So it is difficult to say that people do not have any idea about action research, but when it comes to practice.... (C₄FAAU)

It is evident from the preceding discussions that EFL teachers had action research knowledge coming out from different sources among others, HDP, pre- and in-service courses, short and long term trainings, involvement in practicing it though (in rare cases).

5.3.1.3. Views on EFL Teachers' Little and/or No Knowledge of Action Research

Many of the participants acknowledged EFL teachers' profound and medium possession of theoretical and practical knowledge of action research respectively. Others, however, argued that many teachers did not have confidence in conducting action research. This was due to their low skills and competence to do so. In relation to the latter case one discussant (who was HDP Leader) at BDU strongly argued:

I do not [confidently] say that teachers have knowledge of action research. The concept of action research is not as we see on pages. It goes beyond that. From my interaction with participants of HDP, I do not say that teachers have clear understanding of basic theoretical foundations of action research.... they do not have clear understanding of action research, but ideas..... (C₁FBDU)

Even though a bit generalized, the above views have some grain of truths. Evidently, "it is difficult to say that all EFL teachers are aware of action research...." (TR45). In fact, differentiating action research conceptually as well as practically from the traditional research paradigms was a big challenge. The following ideas from one of the discussants at AAU reflect the fact:

The conventional research is highly dominating at our department. There are times when we, as action research advisors, tried to help students by adopting the conventional research methodology to action research approach. There are times when as advisors we ourselves tried to find out what students are really doing by going to schools, what they observed...and we really discovered that the conventional research method is dominating. So we tried to adopt. The idea of action research is new even for us, advisors. (C₅FAAU)

The discussants and interviewees at AAU did not have faith even in the 2 credit hours' course on action research given for undergraduate students to qualify its name. Indicating his grievance on the administration of the course which was being handled by the Department of Psychology, CoE, one discussant indicated, "though the course is said to be action research, it looks like the conventional approach" (C₄FAAU). Similarly, an interviewee at AAU indicated, "regardless of the exposures EFL teachers had to HDP and to trainings at under- and post-graduate levels, their knowledge base of action research is not as expected. Consequently, some instructors, even those who teach action research confuse it with the conventional research approach" (C₁IAAU).

Similarly, in addressing the low status of the teachers' understanding and competence of action research, one respondent indicated, "I think some of our staff members have still problems about what action research is all about. I know that these people took HDP, but they have problem about its conception and practice...." (TR25).

Moreover, the insufficiency of EFL teachers' practical skills of action research can be discerned from the following comments by seven respondents.

"We need more training and practical experience" on action research (TR8).

"Though we have the basics [about action research], we need a lot" (TR21).

"My action research knowledge is very [little]" (TR36).

"Our action research skills are not sufficient" (TR37).

"Old staff may not possess knowledge of action research" (TR40).

"As far as I am concerned, EFL teachers have no adequate knowledge of action research" (TR42).

"Instructors need training on action research so that they can upgrade their knowledge" (TR44).

5.3.1.4. Reasons for EFL Teachers' Little or No Knowledge and Skills of Action Research

Different reasons were given for EFL teachers' little and/or lack of knowledge and skills of action research. Many of the reasons stem from the fact that English language

departments were the owners of neither action research courses nor HDP. It was learnt that action research course for undergraduate students and HDP for teacher educators were not managed or handled by English language departments at all the three universities.

The discussants and interviewees at the universities complained that their respective departments had no mandate on the action research as course for undergraduate students (pre-service) and as part of CPD for TEs (in-service). The discussants and interviewees also complained the fact that the action research course for undergraduate and HDP were beyond their control to plan and to implement as they might wish and could, as they were in the hands of others (as indicated in the above paragraph). They had the opinion that the English Language Departments at the universities could have adapted action research trainings (pre- or in-service) in specific contexts to language teaching. In relation to this, one respondent asked: "Is there a possibility to make action research specific to English language pedagogy? Students in our department are attending action research which is designed by Pedagogy Department and that created a gap" (TR25). Another respondent commented, "[n]ot similar type of knowledge is expected in different departments and disciplines, it is confusion" (TR26).

There are also other factors attributable to EFL teachers' lack of practical skills of action research. The deficiencies partly emanated from poor application of action research because of different reasons one of which is large class size, which remained as constraint to apply action research. One discussant at BDU indicated that in a class they had "more than 80 undergraduate students" (C₅FBDU). Similarly, seven respondents also had the opinion that because of the large classes and heavy loads they had, it would be unthinkable to develop their action research knowledge and skills through practice. Moreover, the little application of action research results also has a far reaching impact. One discussant argued, "I have not used the result of the action research training of HDP, ELIC, and what I had from my undergraduate and postgraduate trainings on action research. Why do we conduct action research where no action is followed for what is done?" (C₄FBDU). This in turn limits EFL teachers' competence in and efforts to conducting action research.

Regardless of the familiarity of the very idea of action research these days, there are still limitations and gaps in many ways when we scrutinize the reality. EFL teachers might have heard of the term action research and probably read many things about it and they might have been teaching it for so many years, but when it comes to practice, the idea of action research has not been deep-rooted as we think it to be. This issue was strongly argued during the FGD at all the universities and particularly at AAU:

Even though the idea is there, theory is there, when it comes to practice there is a long way to go still about action research. This is because we see weaknesses; we see combination of action research with conventional research in the papers that our students produce.... Also there are courses in action research that bear the title *action research*, but actually which are not action research. They are conventional if you look at the methodologies, they are typically conventional. Our students usually combine whatever they have as background and what they have learnt in some courses previously. So I think there is a problem still... we see some elements of conventional research mixed with action research.
(C₇FAAU)

Even though the participants acknowledged that good jobs had been done in publicizing action research, they did not deny the unavailability of 'good models' for students as well as for teachers. There were differences in the way EFL teachers understand action research itself.

This above issue was further argued as follows:

Sometimes I wonder whether we have the same literature or we look at the same thing in different ways. Once upon a time I encountered a challenge that an examiner of a student's final action research taking different position than that of mine with regard to what should be there, what should not be there. The way we understand action research, therefore, should be examined during oral presentations of our graduating classes. It is very difficult to validate action research. I observe either confusions or misunderstandings or perhaps we are not reading to update our understanding of action research. (C₅FAAU)

It was also argued that there were variations as far as the formats for action research were concerned. During final research examinations, debates used to come about. There were differences among teachers as to what to consider or not to consider as action research. Students were said to be complaining about lack of uniform models and modalities to follow.

Students usually argue with their advisers and examiners: 'give me the right model. This is the way I have been taught, so what else do you expect me to do and give me model'. And they can not find any model of action research in the library. So it is difficult to prove in a very valid and reliable manner. I really doubt the theoretical knowledge of the staff itself. Yes, those who passed through HDP have better understanding of what action research is (when we informally discuss). But at ground level I really doubt, it is very difficult to validate. Particularly practical skills and competence in conducting action research is questionable. (C6FAAU)

Finally, one respondent commented: "The university system does not encourage action research, so teachers are not so keen about it" (TR53). Generally, therefore, EFL teachers claimed to possess profound knowledge and reasonable practical skills of action research resulting from different sources. Claimers of both possession and non-possession of action research had justified their respective stands with evidences. The reasons that the claimers of the EFL teachers' little or lack of action research competence enumerated are five in nature: a) English Language departments' lack of control on both action research courses and HDP; b) large class size; c) little application of action research knowledge and results; d) unavailability of 'good models' to follow for students as well as for teachers; and e) unavailability of systems at universities to empower and put teachers into commitment.

5.3.2. EFL Teachers' Action Research Actual Practices



EFL teachers' action research actual practices were explored using questionnaires (both for teachers and students), FGDs and interviews. Whereas the majority of the research participants indicated that action research was not practiced by EFL teachers due to different reasons, only a small number claimed the other way. In the sub-sections that follow, the views of both positive as well as negative claimers of EFL teachers' action research practices have been presented.

5.3.2.1. Supporters of the View that EFL Teachers Have Practiced Action Research

Many of the supporters of the view that EFL teachers' did action research could only express their own practices rather than generalizing or telling the overall status of

practicing action research by other fellow teachers. They attributed the reason to lack of mechanism of knowing other teachers' levels of practicing action research as there was: a) no system of encouraging teachers to conduct action research, and b) no established system of disseminating and reporting the findings publicly. In relation to this, one among the discussants at AAU indicated, "[a]s far as my department is concerned, I have not seen any report of action research some conducted and presented at any forum, I do not know, really...." (C₄FAAU).

An interviewee at the same university also replied: "actually, not formally institutionalized and no formal reports are observed except for the requirement of HDP" (C₁IAAU).

The above interviewee further explained his own experience in conducting action research:

Personally, I attempted to conduct action research twice. The first was as a requirement for HDP where I, with other colleagues, explored how to conduct a class with inconveniences in the course *Advanced Composition*. We identified a problem, we planned to tackle it, we implemented our plan and we observed changes on our students that collaborative writing could be successful even in inconvenient classes. Second, based on the lessons gained from the action research practice from HDP, I did another research with a purpose of helping visually impaired students. I tried to identify their actual problems; I planned and sought ways of helping them. (C₁IAAU).

Similarly, three respondents told their own experiences in conducting action research:

- "I have conducted only one action research for the fulfillment of HDP" (TR23).
- "I do action research on my teaching practice, and I advise students to practice [it]" (TR45).
- "....actually most of my seminar papers are action research- arising from and focusing on classroom" (TR53).

Efforts were made to validate the last claim from the above. Using the code that had already been given, matching their identities and the returned copies of the questionnaire, the respondent was requested to show me some of his seminar papers that were said to be

“arising from and focusing on classroom”. Consequently, he gave me two seminar papers. A closer look at the papers had shown that the papers did not go beyond suggesting some interventions. They, therefore, did not fulfill many of the characteristics of action research. Particularly, it does not follow the cycles of action research whereby planning, intervention, observation, reflection and re-planning are inherent as indicated in Chapter Three, Section 3.3.2. This, however, is too little to generalize the case as if the other claimers’ works not meeting the processes of action research. The case might be an issue of further investigation.

The subjects who claimed to have done action research were further requested to give the reasons for their observed status of the practices. Accordingly, a number of reasons were enumerated. For the sake of convenience, the reasons and impulses to do action research have been grouped into four categories: HDP requirement, problem resolution, learning and improvement, and expected roles as teachers.

- A. **HDP Requirement:** Almost all the claimers attributed the very practice of action research to a requirement for HDP. Not only its practice but also the very concept of action research was said to have originated by and become familiar to many of the teachers through HDP.
- B. **Problem Resolution:** The problems that teachers were facing in relation to discharging their professional roles had become motivating factors for the teachers to do action research. An interviewee indicated: “as there are practical problems in EFL classes, I conduct action research” (TR14). Similarly, one respondent indicated: “because I find problems of various kinds while I am teaching, I try to tackle them as immediately as possible” [through action research] (TR21). In relation to this, an interviewee at AAU indicated:

You do research when there is a problem [in classroom]; when you feel that exploring the case has some kind of significance. Because research is expensive, you do not do it for the sake of its name. There is an issue which is either vague and needs clarification, clarity, or there is a problem that is... affecting students or teachers and you want to know the cause of this and... whenever there is a significant issue, significant case to be examined through research. (C₂IAAU)

C. Learning and Improvement: For many research participants, learning and improvement of practices were the major driving forces to conduct action research. One respondent indicated: "action research ends in action improvement" (TR22). Similarly, another respondent claimed possession of theoretical and practical skills of action research and the need to further improve his own practice by so doing: "I have clear theoretical as well as practical understanding [of action research]. I can improve my practice when I make practical and context-sensitive inquiry on my teaching and the learning process (one problem) of my learners" (TR27).

Furthermore, one respondent indicated: "I believe that learning partly develops from practicing activities and research" (TR39). Another also pointed out, "I always reflect on my teaching and identify my weaknesses and strengths" (TR40). Still, two respondents attributed the reasons for doing action research to: "its practicality" (TR3); and "...passion and commitment, the belief I have about the power of action research" for improvement (TR5).

D. Expected Roles as Teachers: The subjects (mainly the teacher respondents) seemed to conduct action research as part of fulfilling what is expected of them in relation to discharging their professional roles. In relation to this, one respondent indicated:

I think my role in classroom is not only teaching. I usually observe how students learn; react and what issues change the normal behavior of the students and related cases. Therefore, 'most of the time' I try to solve learners' difficulties in the teaching and learning process through action research. (TR 6)

Using the codes that bring the identities of the respondents and the data, follow up was made to validate the phrase 'most of the time...' in the above quote. The person was asked to justify his words. He responded that he used to solve learners' difficulties in the teaching and learning process through 'reflections'. As it has been learnt from the words of the respondent, however, his reflections were intuitive and tacit without being systematic, planned, and data based. Such reflections that are "spurred spontaneously during classroom activities happen so fast that it tends to be momentary, fleeting, intuitive, and tacit"; and diminish their uses in action research (Gay & Airasian, 2000: 595). The claim by the respondent was, therefore, below what is expected as action research practice.

Another respondent claimed, "I have involved in action research as part of my facilitation role of action research done by student teachers" (TR20). Still another respondent gave reason for doing action research: "it is because I am a trained teacher [to teach and conduct action research]" (TR 35).

Even though it seems to appear unique, one respondent claimed doing action research "... is the way I was raised/educated" (TR1). I further explored the identity of the respondent and found that she was a foreigner/VSO serving at BDU. Efforts were made to get her action research outcomes. Consequently, it was found out that she had documented 3 cases on issues of active learning, reading, and female students' participation. Three of the cases had followed similar patterns whereby she had tried to problematize the respective issues, to plan, implement with intervention and to document that the approach was successful.

5.3.2.2. Refuters of the view that EFL Teachers Practiced Action Research

Whereas few subjects claimed to have done action research (as discussed in the preceding sub-section), many rated EFL teachers' action research actual practice both as *non-existent* and *minimal*. Among the subjects who claimed the *non-existence* of EFL teachers' action research actual practice, one discussant generalized the case as: "[a]pparently to me there is no action research exercise" (C₃FAAU). The following generalizations by 7 respondents also conform to the idea of the discussant.

- "No actual practice [of action research] so far because of lack of interest" (TR18).
- "Practically, action research is non-existent" (TR20).
- "I am not sure that I practice [action research] at least to my knowledge" (TR 35).
- "I often see that teachers are not interested to do action research for various reasons" (TR45).
- "There is no tradition in AAU to encourage action research and therefore, the necessary commitment is lacking" (TR47).
- "We do not practice it due to [different] reasons..." (TR49).

- “Most of our teachers focus on traditional ways of teaching and they do not give emphasis to action research and they simply focus on chalk and talk” (SR18).

Inherent within the above views are less enabling or conducive environments to do so. The internal and external environments were said to limit EFL teachers’ action research practice to be little. As an interviewee at AAU indicated, “nobody normally conducts [action] research when there is an issue to be researched” (C₂IAAU).

Similarly, an interviewee at MoE clearly addressed the fact that doing research in general and action research in particular was very weak in our HEIs (C₂IMoE). One among the discussants at AAU also indicated that theoretically, action research was disseminated, but haphazard in practice: “...particularly practicing action research is very negligible. So I do not think much has been done really in practice” (C₄FAAU). An interviewee at AAU also indicated, “Most teachers lack the courage to conduct action research. Even though they have theoretical understanding of action research, usually they do not have confidence to conduct it in their actual classrooms (C₁IAAU).

The accounts in the preceding paragraphs witness the *non- or little- existence* of action research practices. This, nonetheless, does not mean that no action research was practiced by EFL teachers at all. Even though inconsistent and unsystematic, there existed some practices of action research by teachers. Two respondents (one after the other) indicated the cases as: “EFL teachers’ action research actual practice is low” (TR 3), and “I believe that [action research practice] is not satisfactory...” (TR21).

Overall, it can be judged that EFL teachers in Ethiopian universities were not that much doing action research due to different reasons. The reasons could be classified as: less empowerment and support; consternation, mentality and commitment problems, and lack of models/culture.

A. Less Empowerment, Support and Incentive

Different issues were raised in relation to lack of appropriate empowerment, support and incentive. In the first place, lack of tangible incentives that motivate teachers to do action

research was considered as the reason for not doing action research. Stemming from this reason was unavailability of the culture of systematically publishing the research outcomes at different levels.

An interviewee at AAU reported the case as follows.

I think [action] research is very weak in the university for there is no tangible incentive for doing that. Doing research produces a kind of product that may not be published. If it is not published, you do not get promotion. So you can not do research for its own sake. There are some instructors who tried to do research works but their works are not published. Publishing is a big challenge.... So we focused much on teaching.... So people do not get the reward from doing research and consequently they are not motivated to do so. (C₂IAAU)

The interviewee went on justifying his stands, "to conduct research requires a number of conditionalities to be satisfied because to conduct research any time you need financial support, you need something to motivate you to do that in the system" (C₂IAAU). The issue, nonetheless, implies that there is little chance of publishing, less probability of being considered for promotion, and absence of strong pushing factors or motivation to do action research. These were said to de-motivate teachers when it comes to doing action research. Similarly, one among the discussants at BDU indicated, "even though we have training on action research through HDP, ELIC, etc we do not practice it" (C₃FBDU). The discussant attributed the reason to lack of system and culture of using action research outcomes as action does not usually follow the research.

The issue of empowerment and support deals with the level of time allotment for research, the overall institutional climate, direct rewards as a result of research engagement incentives, and other provisions that EFL teachers are availed or not availed beyond the training through HDP. One discussant referred to the case as "[t]he dynamism in the university does not give stability to conduct action research". He further indicated, "[t]here are frequent changes, teachers are preoccupied with a lot of things, and are worried about their sustainability. Specifically, recall the reform agendas, the strategic planning works, expansion agendas and the currently going on BPR works". (C₄FAAU)

In relation to time constraint one discussant at BDU indicated "I do not conduct action research because: 1) I am busy, I have a lot of loads". Similarly, one among the discussants at AAU stated:

In the first place, every one of us has quite enough workload, there is no time left and it is very difficult to conduct action research in addition to the required [teaching] load. Second, no incentive connected to it and also no any punishment connected to it as well. Even if some teachers decide to sacrifice many things and conduct action research, they do not get the result published and reach people. We teach a group of students for a semester. At this time we do not really have enough time to identify and assess problems, and to plan on how to go about. May be if people have 2 semesters' course, they could try, though I am not suggesting that. (C₂FAAU)

Time constraint was also raised by 49 (86%) of the teacher respondents. A synthesis of the reasons that the respondents gave has resulted in the following list.

- a. Pressure of direct pedagogy, that is too much usual/semester loads-teaching, advising, assessing, grading;
- b. Too much routine work (trying to make ends meet);
- c. Poor time management on the part of the teachers;
- d. Running here and there (elsewhere) for extra work for pay; and
- e. The cyclical nature of action research takes time.

In the same vein, an interviewee at AAU indicated, "...I think instructors are too much occupied by doing routines and sometimes even fail to do the routines. That is the challenge" (C₂IAAU).

The issue of low support/incentive/motivation/recognition seems to be brought out of the scanty attention given to action research by respective university leadership in particular and the overall policies in general.

An interviewee at MoE indicated the reason for EFL teachers' not doing action research as follows:

May be all universities do not have a uniform kind of guidelines and policies. And the departments/administration may not insist [teachers] to do action research. So this is the case for not doing action research. Otherwise, they have the capacity to do and the knowledge as well, but they are not doing as it ought to be. This is because of lack of guidelines and lack of principle to do that. So, I think departments or the university administration as the whole has to work on producing guidelines so that every teacher can carry out action research in practice. (C₂IMoE)

Two respondents attributed the observed status of little practice of action research to "... the place given to it... Action research is not given importance by leadership including teachers themselves" (TR45, TR54).

The subjects further argued that there were no planned and systematic encouragement and practices made in place for EFL teachers to do action research. One discussant also commented: "Let alone encouraging and supporting teachers to do action research, overload and part-time works are not paid on time and even sometimes over-passed without being noticed" (C₆FAAU). Similarly, four respondents enumerated the following:

- "There are no resources including time to practice action research in a systematic way. However, techniques are developed always when encountered" (TR33).
- "I do not see any kind of incentive scheme proposed/practiced by the management" (TR47).
- I do not do action research "because I believe that I am not encouraged" (TR37).
- Limited/lack of (financial and material) resource (TR19).

It was also suggested by an interviewee at AAU that there is a need to introduce a grant system for research work in general and action research in particular (C₂IAAU). This, in the context of this study, is to say, a system that requires teachers to do action research; and enabling work situation like in the western universities.

B. Consternation, Mentality and Commitment Problems on the Part of Teachers

There are dismaying practices that had ruled out the thinking and practices of the teachers. Some of the practices are related to the fact that there were no actions following research. At the same time solving one problem was considered insignificant as there were a number of problems in classrooms. One discussant at BDU pointed out:

We have thousands of problems; solving one problem takes us nowhere. So why do I bother? At the same time our mentality has problem. People do research merely to get money not to solve practical classroom problems. We can not solve problems; we have thousands of problems so why do I conduct action research? (C₄FBDU).

Similarly, another discussant at the same University indicated, "I think conducting action research is simply getting money not to solve problem" (C₆FBDU).

It was also commented by one discussant at AAU that "some instructors do not take initiatives to sacrifice their time for improving practice. Doing action research demands time investment with a purpose to bring improvement. It is part of one's internal feeling to do some new thing and/or improve practice" (C₆FAAU). Similarly another discussant at the same university strongly argued,

I would say that [EFL] teachers hardly conduct action research. My observation is with the overall situation. Instructors and professors seem not to be motivated. Action research demands different procedures. The level of the teachers' motivation, nonetheless, is low. I believe that the staffs have the capacity... but low commitment. They ask about what comes then, afterwards, what about my personal life, aspiration, ambitions. So it has to do with motivation. (C₄FAAU)

In relation to mentality, one respondent said, "We often tend to think doing big research, instead of practical plus focused classroom research" (TR34). Similarly, another respondent indicated "We have not been given the chances or opportunity to conduct action research" (TR23). This is arguable. One may raise a question on this issue, "Who gives the opportunity?" HDP and other CPD provisions could be opportunities and chances opened to everyone. Even though the issue bears some truth, throwing stones at each other takes us nowhere.

C. Lack of Action Research Model/Culture. It was argued that lack of action research models/cultures was one among the reasons for not doing action research. The issue of lack of uniformity and model has been thoroughly discussed (in sub-section 5.3.1.4 of this Chapter) as one of the many reasons for EFL teachers' little or no knowledge of action research. The issue has been readdressed here as one of the reasons for EFL teachers' not doing action research. The case entails unfounded culture of doing action research. Implied in it is, therefore, low training and awareness. On this issue, some of the teacher respondents indicated the following:

- a) 'The idea of action research is not practiced widely; it has not been a culture among the university staff' (TR16).
- b) "I am not an HDP graduate, but I am a candidate of the program" (TR17).

- c) "I solve most practical problems by taking actions without undertaking action research" (TR18).
- d) "There is no clear procedure for conducting action research" (TR26).
- e) "The low level of my involvement in conducting action research" (TR 28). This, itself is a vicious circle.
- f) "I did not receive any proper training on action research (TR42).
- g) "Lack of good knowledge and consciousness towards it" (TR 43).
- h) "Lack of theoretical orientation" (TR36).

Inherent in the above issues are low research orientation, training, awareness, practical experience, and poor tradition. Using different terms, an interviewee at AAU indicated the case that there were hectic situations and practices that influenced EFL teachers not to do action research as expected (C₁IAAU). This interviewee explained the case as follows:

The Department [of ELE] has practicum course meant to develop the practical skills of the prospective teachers. The students work on practicum for three semesters: 1) Practicum I, they observe schools and school environments and produce action research proposal; 2) Practicum II, they implement their proposal; and 3) Practicum III, they finalize the action research activity and report. To implement this program, there are problems from internal and external [sources]: 1) There is a gap between school and university schedules, 2) The hectic practices at the university (TEs are expected to teach and observe students' practicum classes at the same time), 3) teachers do not strive to alleviate problems but to cover contents as given, 4) No concern from any where, 5) Students are sent to different schools, 6) Schools sometimes do not allow [action research] due to their tight schedules to cover portions, 7) Lack of consistent follow-up as instructors are preoccupied with other activities, 8) Even the supervisors/mentors disappear from the schools to be observed. (C₁IAAU)

Overall, the participants mentioned that there were different factors that influenced EFL teachers not to do action research as expected. Many of the factors are attributable to institution, individual teachers, and resource-related constraints.

5.3.2.3. Hesitancy to React on EFL Teachers' Level of Doing Action Research

Sixteen percent of the teacher respondents chose 'undecided' on EFL teachers' level of doing action research. Requested to reason out their choices, five of them enumerated the following.

- a) "Because action research is only one dimensional" (TR38).

- b) Action research activities were not encouraged by the responsible bodies-departmental or institutional. There were also other problems like heavy workload and lack of incentives (TR47).
- c) "Since I do not usually conduct [action research]" (TR55).
- d) "Because it would be better if others assess my level of action research practice" (TR29); "...this should be done through peer evaluation" (TR54).
- e) "[Action research] in our campus is only on paper not in practice" (SR61).

The case implies that the teachers did not have courage and confidence. As a result, they were not doing action research whenever researchable issues encounter. The reasons were attributed to low conduciveness of the teaching learning environment, learners' low capacity and readiness, and low commitment of the teachers themselves. The situation implies that nominal place was given to action research by university leadership in general and teachers in particular. In principle, action research needs to be given central place as it is instrumental approach to improve practice and practitioners. It is expected to be part of one's internal feeling to do new things and/or improve practice and oneself.

5.3.3. EFL Teachers' Change as a result of their Action Research

An assessment of EFL teachers' level of changing/improving (their practices) in the light of the new knowledge gained from their researches was made through the data from teachers' questionnaire, FGDs and interviews. The assessment results concur with the belief that "action research can often cause lasting and useful change in practice and in the practitioner researcher's work place" (Wisker, 2008: 228). Even though very few hesitations were manifested, the results proved a pragmatic value of doing action research. EFL teachers who did action research claimed to have changed/improved themselves and their practices for the better.

5.3.3.1. Supporters of the View that EFL Teachers' Changed due to their Researches

The data generated on the theme can be categorized under two levels: genera level, which deals with what the subjects enumerated in relation to the overall role of action research for change; and specific level, which presents the cases of the EFL teachers who claimed to

have done action research and consequently changed themselves/their practices for the better.

The group in the first level generally acknowledged the roles of action research for betterment without specifically indicating cases. In relation to this, one respondent indicated "there is no doubt that change will be attained" from action research (TR54). Similarly, an interviewee at AAU generally articulated the importance of doing action research as follows.

Because teachers will be better informed, they will have better knowledge, better understanding of the students, better understanding of the material, better understanding of the teaching, evaluation, and ... be able to use their ingenuity to be effective, they also develop confidence that is important in teaching learning. They do not operate on happy relativities; they do not operate on recycling information. They have their own information. That all motivate them as well.... If one simply uses available information and merely recycles what is available in textbooks all the time, he/she does not do any added value apart from transmitting available information. So research is important. (C₂IAAU)

The interviewee further addressed the fact that action research is concerned with real challenges that we face in classrooms. Therefore, it has immediate and lasting impact on the teaching learning process.

The second (specific) level subjects acknowledged that their own action research had led them to better information about their classrooms, better understanding of themselves and their practices, using better strategies, and had enabled them to carry out their work effectively (TR53). In relation to this, one discussant at AAU who (with a colleague) actually did action research acknowledged the change that had resulted following the research:

In 2008, I and my colleague conducted collaborative action research on 30 second year English Language Education students. The purpose was to improve the students' ability to use English-English dictionary effectively. To do so, we investigated the extent to which the students had used dictionaries and the teachers' modest attempt to solve the problems in using the dictionary by students. We planned, implemented and intervention went well. We then observed. The students had shown improvement in using the dictionary. (C₅FAAU)

Another discussant at the same University indicated,

In my case, I tried to conduct a mini kind of action research on extension students at Business Education Department. The need for the research had come out of my observation that some students were extremely de-motivated, they were coming to classroom without their textbooks, and they were coming late to classroom. Absenteeism was also rampant. In most cases I found one or two students speaking in the classroom. They were not doing whatever they were supposed to do. Following my initial observation, I planned and employed continuous assessment as a strategy. In every class there was an assessment. It could be reading, it could be grammar, or any language item. But every day there was an assessment. Therefore, they started carrying their textbooks; absenteeism also dramatically decreased. They understood that if they were absent, they would lose something. I knew that it was a demanding task but I tried my best and I reported the result and I advised other colleagues to use it as a strategy. (C₄FAAU)

Similarly, an interviewee at AAU indicated:

I do not have any clear idea of who did action research. From my own two attempts, however, I can say that I have improved my practice and enhanced my own understanding and learning. I have found that it is possible to implement active learning even within inconvenient situation and enhance collaborative writing. (C₁IAAU)

It can further be understood from the words of some respondents who did action research: a) "I have acquired a lot [of evidences] about my students" (TR33); and b) "I have gained much knowledge how to handle and change classroom problems which are related to teaching" (TR23). Furthermore, the following data were generated from the subjects. Doing action research helped those who did it to:

- a) know about and adopt new approaches and methods of teaching;
- b) solve problems by themselves;
- c) learn about the existing problems and new ways of solving them;
- d) raise the teachers' confidence in identifying problems encountering their students, intervening and contributing to the solutions;
- e) improve oneself and one's practice from time to time;
- f) investigate their classroom and deepen their knowledge of research;
- g) be more reflective, productive and experimental; and
- h) bring change to the way of teaching.

It is evident from the preceding discussions that many of the respondents acknowledged the role of action research to bring change. The claims on the role of action research match with the findings that action research has pragmatic roles, contributions and lasting consequence to improve practice and practitioners.

5.3.3.2. Hesitancy on EFL Teachers' Change due to their Researches

A certain hesitance was observed on EFL teachers' changing/improving themselves and their practices in the light of the new knowledge gained from their researches. Even though few in number, some subjects chose the alternative "undecided" on the issue and gave some reasons for that. The reasons stemmed from the recurring challenges to conduct and to apply action research findings. In addressing this issue one respondent indicated: "applying research outcomes may be difficult because of lack of innovativeness plus lack of institutional support" (TR34). Another respondent also argued that change or improvement as a result of action research is "not that much" (TR14).

Three respondents indicated that the role of action research to change EFL teachers and their practices is "little" (TR42), not as such significant and not very much encouraging due to lack of commitment, support, and time (TR29; TR 32). Other two respondents, nonetheless, were not sure about who did action research. They indicated that "there was no any research done/practiced" as to their knowledge (TR35; TR40).

Furthermore, other two respondents commented that "usually research findings are not incorporated into our daily teaching" (TR45); "I don't believe that many teachers did action research; I do not know who practiced action research" (TR49). At the extreme case, one respondent indicated, "action research has no significant contribution so far" (TR50).

Inherent in the above accounts on the hesitancy on action research contribution to change or betterment is doubt and lack of clear visions of the inherent nature of action research. The doubts, in turn, led to some debates and learning. (This issue has been addressed in Chapter Six, Section 6.3).

5.3.4. Motivating and /or De-motivating Environments for EFL Teachers to do Action Research

The environmental situations for EFL teachers to do action research were examined through the data from questionnaire for teachers, interviews and FGDs. The results have shown that there were both motivating and de-motivating environments for EFL teachers to do action research. A statement from an interviewee at MoE conforms to this, "... both motivating and de-motivating environmental factors are there" (C₁IMoE).

5.3.4.1. Motivating Environments for EFL Teachers to do Action Research

The motivating environments were more of extrinsic in nature. They were related to the problems themselves, scanty available opportunities, incentives, and policy intentions.

5.3.4.1.1. Problems as Motivating factors to do Action Research

The problems that EFL teachers faced in discharging their professional roles were said to trigger EFL teachers to be curious. In relation to this, one respondent indicated: "The practical problems that I see in classroom motivate me to do action research" (TR 34). In line of these thought, many problems could be seen as fertile grounds for investigation. They, thus, motivated teachers to conduct action research. A discussant at AAU indicated, "... there are a lot of problems in classrooms. Teachers may strive to solve them partly if not fully. In doing so, they may ask, 'What should I do?' 'Where should I start?'" These are questions of choice from among the many problems because they are serious" (C₁FAAU).

An interviewee at AAU also mentioned the following:

- a. Students' problems themselves are motivating factors: language problem, challenges related to learning styles, learning strategies, etc trigger teachers to investigate practices ;
- b. Administrative constraints, gender issues, diversity and the like are fertile grounds for research; and
- c. The environment where teachers work itself forces them to be cautious (C₁IAAU).

Another interviewee at the same university indicated, "You do not need to mention [action] research, but if there is a challenge, automatically [action] research is there" (C₂IAAU). This finding goes with the results in relation to justifying the reason for doing action research (see section 5.3.2.1 of the same Chapter).

5.3.4.1.2. Meager Opportunities (somewhat empowerment- training, and policy intentions)

Basically, today's EFL teachers at universities were yesterday's EFL students. They were trained on action research at undergraduate and graduate programs mainly at AAU. Today also, they have chances of attending HDP. They also teach (action) research and supervise research works done by their students. Moreover, there were possibilities to get exposures to information sources through different mechanisms. These show that there were some opportunities for teachers to investigate their practices. By implication, EFL teachers had exposures to different kinds of research techniques.

As one interviewee at AAU indicated,

Today, access to HE is increased very much and people are accessing research in training programs. So I would fairly say that teachers have chances for training on language teaching, to understand issues from within and learn from international side. We have internet system that really is another source of information to see what is done around the world. Teachers can load a lot of information on research.... (C₂IAAU)

Whereas the quote entails the lofty chances to explore world-wide experiences, the popularity of action research these days than ever before is another opportunity. One interviewee at MoE indicated:

Action research was not a concern before ten or so years in Ethiopian HEIs. But in recent years it has become one of the concepts to be taught in [Ethiopian] universities. Our universities are now motivating their students to do action research. The idea of action research is given in one way or another. This was nonexistent in the last education arena. If you take the case during our time, we had never heard of action research. But now students who learn at universities know what action research is. They are told to read, do, and present research papers. And this is the motivating environment for students and the teachers to teach, supervise and grow professionally. (C₂IMoE)

The presence of some sort of institutional and national policy intentions are also opportunities for teachers to do action research. In relation to this, a question on the extent to which the universities in the country empower and support EFL teachers to investigate

their practices for improvement/change was presented to the subjects. Only 30% of the teacher respondents acknowledged the presence of the required empowerment and support whereas the majority argued the case to be the reverse. Still others remained silent. Among those who acknowledged the presence of some sort of empowerment, one discussant at BDU justified the case to "faith/trust to bring change/improvement" (C₃FBDU).

It was also a consensus of all the discussants at BDU that universities in the country were giving some sort of theoretical knowledge for teachers to carry out action research. But whether that was consistently practiced or not in the teachers' actual classrooms is something to be investigated. An interviewee at MoE indicated:

I really did not check whether action research is a course in itself or not. Any way within certain course [teachers] always talk of action research. So I think they empower their students to conduct action research. But the question is whether it is theoretical or practical? May be what we lack always is... the practical side. We do not practice it...." (C₁IMoE)

One mechanism of empowerment is through HDP training. But because of different reasons EFL teachers do not use the opportunity to exercise action research. One discussant at AAU indicated: "Even though the university has given us the opportunity to practice action research through HDP, we do not practice it [beyond the requirement for certification] due to different reasons (C₆AAU).

A discussant at BDU also indicated:

One way of empowering is that the university has organized HDP whereby teachers can pickup a lot of information on action research besides their teaching and normal training. But I have not heard in my stay here at BDU that instructors conducting action research. Most commonly teachers do not conduct and pass the results to other instructors... (C₄FBDU)

Furthermore, the subjects were requested if there were policies and/or guidelines showing clear roles and responsibilities for EFL teachers to do action research. The data generated have shown that there were mixed beliefs among the subjects. Whereas some of them considered the intents in major policy documents and guidelines (for instance ETP, ESDP, TESO, HESO, etc) as policies, the majority of the subjects indicated that there was no any clear policy in relation to action research actual practice. An interviewee from the former

group indicated, "... a lot of space is given to research in ETP, ESDP, etc. Particularly in ETP, new paradigms of teaching whereby research can be integral part have been provided. In every stage there is a lot of space for research work" (C₂IAAU).

The interviewee further concretized the case citing issues of *curriculum integration, student centered approaches, continuous assessment, active learning, activity-based, task-based, and CLT* as contents of policy documents that require doing some sort of research. He had a view that instructors should see how their teaching was really impacting learning in line with these curricula innovations. That means, teachers are expected to examine how students are learning, developing, changing by doing some sort of research. He further argued that the general policy or program documents implicitly or explicitly encourage teachers to do any kind of research. He, nonetheless, indicated that there was no clear policy or guideline that would show specific roles and responsibilities at the level of institutions.

5.3.4.1. 3. Incentives as Motivating Factors to do Action Research

Few of the participants reported that extrinsic incentives motivated EFL teachers to do action research. Though in general terms, some subjects reported availability of some incentives such as funds, presentations of research works on seminar/conference, publishing the works or sharing knowledge and getting recognition or promotion. One interviewee elaborated the case as follows:

... there is to some extent a kind of incentive, a sort of recognition that university instructors get as a result of doing research; although the management of the funding is very bureaucratic. Requests come from different parties to departments, there are also possibilities that people can present their research works at seminars and share their knowledge with other colleagues and I think that is a positive aspect that would encourage them do research, write a paper and submit it to a conference or whatever. (C₂IAAU)

Understandably, therefore, opportunities are increasing for participation in action research. For instance, calls for seminar or conference papers are relatively in a better position now than ever before particularly in our country. Evidently, invitations are seen posted at different places.

5.3.4. 2. De-Motivating Environments to do Action Research

Almost all the subjects raised at least one or another de-motivating environmental factor to do action research. Two respondents indicated that the environments for EFL teachers to do action research were "de-motivating" (TR26, TR29). Also another respondent indicated, "...there are various discouraging factors to conduct action research, such as lack of time, lack of resource, and recognition" (TR45). These environmental factors were from different sources and range from policy to practice, and are attributable to institutions, individuals, situations, and issues.

The de-motivating environmental factors that the subjects raised (with their impacts) can be brought under: diminished hope for change; work and life situation; mismatch between time investment in research and gain; lengthy time for endorsing research request; lack of differentiated publishing opportunities; attitudinal and commitment problems; low practical skills, low empowerment and lack of clear policies and roles.

5.3.4. 2.1. *Diminished Hope for Change*

Some subjects had inadvertent hope and faith in action research contribution and the leeway of EFL teachers to conduct action research. It was a dismaying practice for EFL teachers to do action research under such recurring situation. A discussant at BDU indicated, "we do not have any faith in doing action research. No improvement is expected" (C₅FBDU). There was a general consensus among the discussants that solving one problem through action research could take them nowhere. This shows that there was a diminished hope for change and improvement through action research. Similarly, the discussants at AAU indicated their distressed hope for conducting action research under the recurring condition. As to the discussants, unless there is system-wide empowerment and implementation, piecemeal change and improvement are not expected. On top of this, one discussant indicated:

Even if you conduct action research, what is it at the end of the day? The problems could be something that you cannot change on your own. You may need help from deans, department heads, etc and they may be lenient to support you to bring about change that is suggested by your research result. Also, would doing action research add anything to your life in terms of publication? Promotion? There is nothing that we see. So, all these things are de-motivating factors for professional improvement or development through conducting action research. (C₁FAAU)

5.3.4. 2.2. Work and Life Situations

Many of the research subjects had the opinion that work and life situations were not that much conducive for EFL teachers to conduct action research as expected. One discussant at AAU indicated:

In reality the working situations are de-motivating to many of the staff. So not only action research but also research in general is not conducted in my opinion. There is workload, every teacher has to teach full load in the department. And sometimes there are situations that you are forced to carry more load than you could. All these actually tell us that there is no enough time and support. Teachers are actually advising students, doing this doing that, so they do not actually have time to do action research. (C₁ FAAU)

Within the context of work situations is the life situations that teachers lead. Regarding this, another discussant at AAU argued:

The very life of teachers itself costs them souring every day. Teachers actually find it very difficult to meet. May be instead of thinking of research, one may think of how to bring more coin, make money to survive. I think you have to comfortably live; there is no comfort in terms of material life as far as observed in the university. The very life of what we lead urges us to run here and there rather than doing action research. (C₃FAAU).

Some respondents also reasoned out the case as: a) "The environment is not motivating" to conduct action research (TR54); b) "The academic context does not encourage" (TR55); c) time constraint, "too much load" and engagement in different routines (TR37); d) "Lack of interest and non-existence of conducive research environment" (TR18), and e) lack of support (TR30, TR43). These are among the manifestations of the unfavorable work and life situations of teachers.

5.3.4. 2.3. Mismatch between Time investment in Research and Gain

It was learnt from the data that time invested in research and the benefits gained for doing research did not match. This was argued by many of the research participants as the challenge that discouraged teachers not to persistently do action research. Mainly, the

discussants and the interviewees argued that the time spent in conducting action research and the compensations one gets in doing action research are far apart. Actually, research work is demanding. It needs thinking time, planning time, and practicing time. Even if anyone may sacrifice other gains and does action research and gets it published luckily, the return is little. The only thing is that he/she gets promotion to the next rank. But getting promotion to the next rank by itself is not rewarding as the material gain is below the efforts and resources invested in producing the research. An interviewee argued on this issue as follows.

If you luckily produce research and get promotion to the next rank [for instance to professorship], people may ask your salary. You may say '5000!' But how much time do you spend to do research work that takes you to the rank of professorship? It takes a lot of resources including time. So people say why do I spend such time while I can go on teaching and getting a lot of money and buy my car, build my house, and support my kids to go to schools? Whereas in other universities (abroad) [promotion goes with gains] whenever you do research, you get grant, a lot of money.... You get reputation as well.... But the system in here does not encourage the staff to be engaged in research although it expects every instructor to be involved in any kind of research activities concerning teaching, concerning learning, concerning teaching materials, whatever. (C₂IAAU)

Implied in the above statements is that there was low financial remunerations and gain for research outcomes. Reasonable financial remuneration is important. Because when you do research, you invest your time that might be spent in teaching to get pay for overload, part-time or extension programs. That is, whereas there is reward for doing other part time work, doing action research, however, does not have clear and established reward in terms of finance or material. So instructors prefer to teach in so many colleges and make a lot of money. That is why teachers teach part-time, overload, and extension programs rather than conducting action research (C₁IAAU).

In relation to this one respondent indicated, "The workload and lack of some positive reinforcements can be" de-motivating factors (TR 16). Also another respondent suggested, "I think ... fund has to be allocated to motivate us" (TR14). Inherently, therefore, many teachers prefer to teach to conducting research of whatever sort.

5.3.4. 2.4. Lengthy Time for Endorsing Request for Research Fund

The data from the subjects show that there is a long journey from thinking, identifying the area of research, planning, securing support and cooperation, and conducting research.

An interviewee at AAU explained the case as follows:

....the process of securing support for any sort of research including action research takes a lot of time and it is very bureaucratic. Because of this many instructors try to avoid it. That is why we are not moving forward. Professional efficiency and effectiveness as well as offering quality services demand change so that researchers can get access to fund and then should not really be frustrated by different types of bureaucracy. Currently as it stands, the university is saying that it is a research institute, but less is done.... (C₂IAAU).

Particularly, the time of endorsing a request for research is really a frustrating experience. It was also commented during FGD at AAU: "The very long bureaucratic chain one has to pass through in order to get financial assistance from the university itself is de-motivating the staff from conducting action research" (C₂FAAU). On top of this, low support, low encouragement from top management, low collegial forums, negligible incentives, and curriculum related constraints were said to de-motivate teachers to do action research. In relation to low support, one respondent indicated, "Institutional support is often de-motivating (TR34). Similarly, three respondents indicated that lack of encouragement and facilities, incentives and enabling environment, and shortage of time de-motivate teachers to do action research (TR39, TR47, and TR50).

5.3.4. 2.5. Lack of Differentiated Publishing Opportunities

Publishing research outcomes is very important and it is a motive by itself. This can be effective if there are differentiated publishing opportunities opening spaces for different level articles. The data generated, nonetheless, show that our system does not give space for differentiated publication mechanisms of research outputs. On this issue, an interviewee commented as follows.

We do not have different types of journals to publish different levels of articles. For example in the west you can publish wherever your work does fit. One thing is that the levels of journals differ. So if you are requiring a professorship you are required to publish in the first level or classical journals. But still you can really communicate your researched ideas in other level journals.... So the system allows you to work, write, and to communicate. [This is because] people need to be engaged interactively in sharing ideas, understanding problems, suggesting solutions. So even in logging you can communicate in the internet system. We do not have such established culture and system so these are some of the challenges I see in our case. (C₂IAAU)

5.3.4.2.6. *Attitudinal and Commitment Problems*

As learnt from an interviewee's expression at AAU, *attitude* is the next problem to *poverty* from which many people suffer; not to see and/or do what is right and acceptable. Rather than creating whatever possible fertile grounds for themselves "People still suffer from problem of attitude" (C₂IAAU). In the same vein, the following statements by respondents in one way or another reflect the attitudinal problems by some teachers:

- "Teachers should know how to deal with discouraging factors and how to use each other as resources instead of [merely] expecting support" (TR28).
- "Teachers ... do not realize the importance of action research themselves" (TR52).
- "[There were] many belittles [on] action research considering it to be as subjective" (TR10).
- "The university should reorganize the efforts of those who decide to be good teachers, not just good researchers" (TR53).
- "Utilitarian philosophy in AAU, money rules" (TR57).

The issue of attitudinal problem can be discerned from the point of view of accountability to truth as well as to people. The situation of practicing CPD in general and HDP in particular seem less genuine as some of the research participants had less faith in and also less commitment towards their development. At an extreme case, one of the discussants at BDU argued "The HDP training itself is a quick training; it is a 'fake' practice. Data are fabricated to complete the training. This was because of time constraint. For instance,

when I conducted action research, I fabricated data and completed the training. I was very busy”(C₆FBDU).

5.3.4. 2.7. Low Practical Skills and Provisions

It has been learnt that there were opportunities to expose teachers to research through different mechanisms. In practice, nonetheless, there were no clear provisions for EFL teachers to do action research.

In relation to this, an interviewee at MoE indicated:

Teachers are given the theoretical aspect of action research within universities. But when they come out of the university, I doubt if these teachers are conducting action research. Because even in the university they are given the theoretical part and they do not know how to practice. Therefore, that might de-motivate them. (C₁IMoE)

Similarly, two respondents specifically commented on the issue, “lack of clear [practical] knowledge about action research and burden from other activities” (RT35); and “lack of knowledge and motivation” (TR40) discourage EFL teachers to do action research persistently. Another respondent explained: “I think many instructors have fairly good theoretical knowledge of action research, but it is my personal belief that they do not practice it or get involved in the process. Because it does not have value-tag on it” (TR19). By implication, a system should be set up in Ethiopian HEIs to make use of this valuable tool (action research) so as to enhance the teaching learning process.

5.3.4. 2.8. Low Empowerment, lack of clear Policies, Guidelines, and Roles

As the data from the subjects show, there is no great deal and genuine empowerment for EFL teachers to do action research. This in turn has made the teachers less serious about and less committed to their professional development.

It was also specifically commented by one discussant at AAU, “if for instance I ask load reduction to conduct action research, I am sure I will not get. This, therefore, de-motivates me to go further” (C₃FAAU). In the same vein, an interviewee at the same university

responded to a question which directly asked the availability of empowerment for EFL teachers to conduct action research.

No, the university does not really empower teachers to conduct action research. It does appreciate if staffs are engaged in research, it does expect in the sense that staff get promotion when they do research. But there is no problem for the time being the staff is not motivated to spend time on doing research. The university does not make any special obligation for teachers to do research. No, it is up to them. (C₂IAAU)

The same interviewee further reported, 'whereas in the sciences, departments take major international projects because they get fund from outside, it is not common in behavioral as well as humanities to get fund for research work unless it might be obtained from the university in rare cases' The interviewee also had the opinion that even if fund is obtained from the university, it is not satisfactory. At the same time the university structure is not very much motivating; rather it is limiting. The only thinly available hope is, if teachers are lucky, they conduct research and publish in journals and get promotion to the next rank, though that by itself is not attractive in financial or material terms.

Arguably, some subjects considered intentions in national policy documents and institutional formats as guidelines for research. Many of the subjects on the other hand argued that there was no any policy at whatever level specifically referring to action research except HDP portfolio. There are intentions at the level of policies and in our universities that every instructor to be involved in any kind of research activities. Specifically, Higher Education Proclamation (2003), and Legislations of the Universities demand of every teaching and research staff to spare their 25% and 75% time on research respectively. Practically, however, there is neither specific provision nor empowerment for EFL teachers to fulfill the demands, at their respective institutes/departments. There is almost a common consensus on this issue by all the research participants. For instance an interviewee at AAU indicated:

Whereas teachers are expected to conduct research, there is no clarity of what type of research, when and with what support/resource. This shows that there is no clear empowerment [or provision]. At the same time teachers are forced to do this and that and also cover portions expected of them. Even the Modular system is limiting freedom to explore; it is like *plasma TV* which limits teachers' roles as mere supporters to the technology whereas the reverse is expected. (C₁IAAU)

An interviewee at MoE commented that "there are no specific guidelines and policies in relation to action research to enhance and develop English language teaching and teachers (C₂IMoE). Similarly, one respondent indicated that there are "no clear guidelines/policies, and no motivating incentives" (TR42).

Moreover, an interviewee at AAU elaborated the general policy or guideline environment of research in general. As action research cannot be an exceptional approach within the general environment of research, there are some grains of truths applicable to action research.

... the general policy or guideline statements are not specific enough on how to manage university-based research activities. They are just general statements. You can have policies or statements showing intentions. But institutions have to really clarify the time that instructors are supposed to spend to do research and generate knowledge, or evaluate their activities. It does not say or require as a must for teachers to do so. (C₂IAAU)

The above quote entails that whereas there are intents in the general policy provisions, concomitant action-oriented roles and responsibilities are not there for the teachers as a system. Teachers are expected to engage in any sort of research, but it is on paper and on contractual documents as a requirement to renew teachers' contract that they shall do research. The above interviewee went on arguing on the issue:

... universities in other countries require professors to generate knowledge, rather than simply recycling information of what they teach. The generated knowledge has to be published at different levels. It is about 'publish or perish!' Also they do give credit for schools that do research and purposely promote it, assign budget, reward it and give recognition and so on. We have not established that system. That is a drawback. That is why most research activities are funded by external donors. Researches that I participated so far are funded by external funders. We do not see allocation of significant amount of money for generation of knowledge. It could be partly because of our economy and partly because of lack of real understanding of the role of research for development. Developed countries like USA fund research works, even other countries because they know its value. (C₂IAAU)

The interviewee added: "but here I think instructors are too much preoccupied by doing routines and sometimes even fail to do the routines. That is the challenge" (C₂IAAU).

It has also been learnt from the discussants at all the three universities that specific guidelines on action research were non-existent. The available ones were general policy intentions and some guidelines for students, not for instructors. For students' practicum, the universities prepared comparable formats. The formats commonly consist of briefings on the need for the format, followed by suggestions to consider inclusions of: cover page, second page, content, acknowledgement, background, objectives, preliminary investigation, intervention, evaluation, reflection, references, appendices, and page limits.

Regardless of the efforts made to produce the formats for the practicum-based action research by students, nonetheless, the implementation was not effective as expected. Consequently, imprudence was seen, programs were said to be dying (C₁IAA).

Three discussants at BDU also indicated unavailability of clear guidelines on action research:

- a. "I have not heard any guideline so far. I have no any involvement in action research, I have not asked for any guidelines" (C₅FBDU);
- b. "We do not have guidelines" (C₁FBDU);
- c. Rather than simple intentions and provisions in the University's' missions and as HDP requirements, there was no any clear guideline or policy as to my knowledge (C₃FBDU).

In the same vein, one respondent pointed out that there were 'lack of clear roles and shortage of resources" (TR29). Similarly, one interviewee at AAU indicated, "no clearly stated role rather than what is put in the legislation: 75% teaching and 25% research [for teaching staff and the reverse for research staff]. This itself does not indicate the type and time of research (whether conventional or action research). Also there was no system of follow up of the implementation of the provision of the 75%-25%" (C₁IAAU). Another interviewee at AAU had similar view. He articulated that there are general provisions that AAU is a research and graduate university, but no clear indication of the roles of each instructor. As to the interviewee, there was no clear indication of how, when, and which type of research that teachers should conduct (C₂IAAU).

Overall, whereas unavailability of clear roles, policies and guidelines is one problem, ownership of the responsibility to develop them was also a challenge. It seems that there was some sort of diffusion of responsibility in developing clear and implementable guidelines. Whether MoE or the institutions themselves should prepare them is not clear.

In relation to the above, an interviewee at MoE indicated,

....for action research, I do not think there is any guideline or policy. But 'who should prepare the guideline or the policy for action research as such?' is something to be asked. Whether the Ministry or the universities should take responsibility is something questionable. Anyway there is no any policy or guideline. So if you take the Government, it gives general direction. It has not given each and every particular guideline. May be this is something the universities ...should carry out I think. Any way I do not think there is any guideline or policy particularly or specifically for action research. (C₁IMoE)

From the discussions made so far, it has been learnt that there were both motivating and de-motivating factors for EFL teachers to conduct action research. The latter has, however, outweighed the former. Different reasons were given for this. The reasons are attributable to different sources. A synthesis of the findings shows that 57%, 83%, and 79% of the respondents, interviewees, and discussants respectively attributed the de-motivating factors to institutions, individuals, and environmental conditions.

5.3.5. Perceived Roles of Action Research for Quality of EFL Teaching

To the question pertaining to the extent to which action research could make a difference in creating and/or sustaining the quality of EFL teaching in Ethiopian universities, the interviewees, the discussants and the respondents (both students and teachers) had almost similar and comparable views. They valued and justified their valuations of the role of action research as a ground for quality EFL teaching. Only very few individuals hesitated to articulate the enquired roles precisely. The latter case could be due to the impact of the de-motivating environmental factors discussed in the preceding section. As a reason to choose 'undecided', one respondent indicated: "though the situation demands different inputs, I hope [action research] helps, too" to enhance quality language teaching (TR51).

Similarly, another respondent argued: "... action research is a confined practice, and there is a question on the change that it could bring about" (TR45). A view by another respondent who tried to correct others' thoughts also portends the doubt prevalent on the role of action research: "some people think that action research is not that much important. But I hope that should be corrected" (TR55). At the extreme case, two respondents argued that the contribution of action research "to quality of language teaching is minimal" (TR18); and "Very low" (TR35).

The majority of the subjects, on the other hand, highly valued the role of action research for quality of EFL teaching in Ethiopian universities. A number of reasons have been enumerated for their valuations. A closer look at the reasons gives ways of classifying them as action research for: problem resolution; for learning, change and improvement (of profession, practices, methodology, language skills of teachers as well as students); and generating theory and putting it into practice.

5.3.5.1. Action Research for Problem Resolution



In most cases, tackling students' and teachers' problems related to instructional process have been cited by the subjects. Whereas both student- and teacher-respondents enumerated a number of issues related to action research roles for solving problems and enhancing quality language teaching, only some cases have been quoted and paraphrased here.

Among others, one teacher respondent has indicated, "action research enables teachers to identify problem areas and implement corrective measures" (TR39). Also another indicated: "as action research is learning by doing, it helps the instructors to identify [and understand] problems and seek immediate solutions and to get feedback of failure/success" (TR42). Still as to another respondent, "action research enhances the quality of language teaching because instructors: 1) identify the problems that students encounter and try to solve them; and 2) get feedback from their students" (TR44). Similarly, another respondent indicated, "...action research is a means to respond to classroom dynamism and critical and practical problems" (TR33). Furthermore one respondent argued: "For me action research is a panacea for the day-to-day puzzles that we encounter. If we ask: 1) how can I improve

this situation? 2) What should be done to reduce the impact of X on my practice? We will find solutions or at least gain [insights] about the dynamism of the problems" in classrooms (TR 28).

One student respondent also situated the values of action research within the roles of teachers to solve problems and enhance learning: "the teacher is the only problem solver in the classroom. Because he/she is near to the students [he/she teaches]. He/she knows students' problems" (SR114).

The data obtained from interviewees and FGD also highly value the role of action research for problem resolution and enhancement of quality language teaching. For instance an interviewee from MoE indicated:

Action research is something by which we can analyze and see what actually our students lack. It is the means by which we can see the strengths and weaknesses of our students. Therefore, based on the research results, we can give accurate and proper testament for each and every student in the classroom. Therefore, it is very enhancing kind of issue and consequently it counts to bring quality language teaching. (C₁IMoE)

One discussant took the case further, "[teachers] identify problems and find solutions. So I can say that action research is a key practice to solve classroom problem" (C₅FAAU). One respondent also argued, "I believe that conducting action research is the best way to investigate learners' actual performance in the teaching-learning process and also it helps solve their problems" (SR83).

The overall understanding gained from the data generated from the respondents, interviewees and discussants is that action research solves the learners' actual problems; fixes challenges in relation to curricula, teaching approaches, assessment, and adopting learning experiences in line with the trend of the world development.

5.3.5.2. Action Research for Learning, Change and Improvement

The role of action research for learning, change and improvement was acknowledged almost by all the research participants. An interviewee at AAU justified, "...curriculum is always changing. So a teacher who does action research sees and adds some new thing to

the quality” improvement endeavors (C₁IAAU). Similarly, an interviewee at HarU argued that the role of action research for learning, change and enhancing quality “is unquestionable. Teachers who conduct action research know the dynamism in the classroom. They, therefore, update their content, methodology, objectives and the like” (C₁IHarU).

Moreover, another interviewee at AAU extensively explained the case as follows:

Yes! Whenever you do research, you have to do a lot of reading; you are required to read, review literature and get informed and learn the issues in the discipline. Consequently, you will be in a better position. Also at the writing stage, you have to really synthesize ideas and fill them in an order presentable to the reader. That is an important, that develops your professional skills and ability in language as well as your ability to think. Such issues in turn develop your confidence. So any research activity really contributes to early maturity of the researcher. He/she matures early because he/she is getting information, tackling challenges and getting experiences. His/her teaching will be more relevant. ...because he/she identifies what students need and what they do not need to know, and what need to focus on and what students can learn on their own. Consequently, he/she will be in a better position to achieve quality, relevance, efficiency...So I think it does contribute a lot. But it does not mean that you have to do research all the time.... (C₂IAAU)

The above quote has underscored the importance of action research for learning, change and improvement of the practitioners and their practices. It has also contained a warning signal that action research should not be done all the time for the sake of its name. This is because it demands resources: time, manpower, and others. Therefore, there should be an issue demanding investigation.

A discussant at AAU also indicated his belief about the role of action research as: “I strongly believe that action research enhances the quality of EFL teaching as it engages teachers to investigate their own practices... The idea of doing action research should be at the instructors’ disposal” (C₅FAAU).

Furthermore, one interviewee at MoE indicated:

[Action research] gives ways to make the quality of language teaching sustainable. This is because teachers do not always depend on what they are given as a material to teach. They have to see what the strengths and weaknesses of their students by conducting action research. Therefore, they can treat their students, contents, methods, and assessment mechanisms on the basis of the results of their action research work. (C₂IMoE)

The data obtained from the respondents also concur with that of the interviewees and discussants. Among others, the following were the views of some of the respondents on the roles of action research for betterment of practices and practitioners.

- a. Action research makes difference by developing our confidence and methods of teaching as we learn from our mistakes when we are teaching (SR 11).
- b. Action research makes "difference of quality" (SR14).
- c. "[Action research] is great to enhance the quality of language teaching" (SR39).
- d. "Action research helps teachers to gain new things, to improve what they lack and understanding students' needs; they can make their teaching attractive and productive" (SR76).
- e. "...[action research] really enhances the learning teaching [process] in the classroom" (SR115).
- f. "It changes the wrong perceptions of EFL teachers who do not consider the problem of classroom students" (SR204).
- g. Doing action research is important for it: a) develops the learners' ability; it sustains the quality of teaching and learning process (SR 26); b) motivates students and enables achievement of the goal of teaching English as a foreign language (SR 29); and c) encourages learners, and develops their ability (SR 30, SR 42).
- h. "Action research empowers teachers" (TR40).

Inherent in the above quotes are the instrumental roles of action research if and when practiced. Whereas the above accounts are the ideal roles of action research, actually in most cases, it is little practiced. Even if it is practiced, its results are little applied in concrete and practical terms. In relation to this, one respondent argued, "the research outcome is conditioned to library shelves. The culture of using the outcome needs to be developed" (SR130). It, can therefore, be concluded that though the potential role of action research is immense, its practice and applications are not yet our culture.

5.3.5.4. Action Research for Generating Theory and putting it into Practice

It was asserted by the research participants that action research generates theory and puts it into practice and consequently contributes to betterment of the practices and quality implementation. This is a new dimension of the finding. Literature rather put action research as merely dealing with immediate applications by way of connecting theory to practice rather than itself developing theory. In line with the recent thought, action research is considered as an approach to derive theory from practice (TR27). In doing so, action research embodies values of freedom, justice, democracy, truth, care, and inclusion of spiritual, aesthetic and ethical judgments in the creation and testing of educational theory. It is also said to "put what has been learnt [in] theory into practice as it supports every activity by evidence" (SR58). Also another respondent argued, "the practices we experience help us strengthen and prove the effectiveness of the theories proposed by educators and social scientists" (TR47). Furthermore, it was argued that action research is practice-oriented: "as the name indicates it is acting or researching and acting, but only if it is practiced and included in the curriculum" (SR117). Another respondent also justified the case: "because when we do action research we get so many things practically. Theory and practice are not the same things" (SR145).

Overall, action research is instrumental for learning, change and improvement (of profession, practices, methodology, language skills-teachers as well as students).

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1. Introduction

This Chapter comprises six sections. The first section deals with discussions by mixing the qualitative and the quantitative results. Two purposes were achieved in mixing the two results: a) producing more comprehensive answers to the research questions than they might appear separately, and b) triangulating and corroborating the findings as a means of validation. The second section describes some doubts, debates and lessons (DDL) that have been witnessed in the journey of the research work.

The third section presents a brief summary of the major findings leading to the fourth section, which deals with the conclusions that were meant to tie together the tip ends that were drawn from the findings. The fifth section presents some implications whereby contexts have been set under four areas, namely, quality of EFL teaching and learning; policy and practice; the field of action research in EFL teaching; and scope of applicability of the knowledge accruing from the research. The last section has briefed the finale words by reiterating the Conceptual Frameworks, the results and the realizations of the implications and the likely gains in terms of the systems, structures, and cultures of situating action research within the EFL classrooms of Ethiopian universities.

6.2. Discussions: Mixing the Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The discussions are based on mixing the qualitative (inductive) and the quantitative (deductive) results. In mixing the two results, the essence of the research questions, perspectives of participants (the researcher, supervisors, examiners, the key informant, and potential beneficiaries of the Dissertation); and the field of action research in EFL teaching have been duly considered following Dornyei's (2007: 274) three principles: *audience, research design, and result sensitivities*.

- 1) **Audience sensitivity:** Utmost efforts have been made to keep the balance between quantitative-oriented and qualitative-oriented readers of the paper. Nevertheless, the perspectives, assumptions, and values of the participants of the research, and the

potential audience of its final outcomes have demanded in-depth interpretations and theorizations. Consequently, more spaces were given to the qualitative results.

- 2) **Research design sensitivity:** the very Conceptual-and Theoretical-Frameworks of the study which underpinned the design of the study, have been considered in mixing the qualitative and quantitative data analyses results. Following the *Post-positivist* paradigms; and the perspectives of *reflective rationality* and *constructivism*, all of which informed the *Conceptual Framework* and the questions of the study, more weights have been given to the qualitative results.
- 3) **Result (data) sensitivity:** This principle is pragmatic in nature. In consonance with this, the numerous and rich qualitative data results have been given more spaces and weights than the quantitative results. The latter results were, therefore, sought simply for precision. Consequently, in mixing the two results direct wordings from the qualitative results have been used and paraphrased to back up the overall findings.

In support of the above principles, Holly (2009: 273) indicates, "[w]hat you write up depends in part on the audience and what you have to work with what you make of it". Following this view and the three principles, efforts were made to bring on board the perspectives of the audience (potential and who already involved), the design of the study, and the data and the concomitant results. The efforts entail the need to guard the analyses results from simplistic statistical precision at the expense of accuracy (validity). This is because "...over-precision can threaten 'validity'" (Winter, 2000: 3). Consequently, the statistics in the quantitative data (see Chapter Five, Sections 5.2.1- 5.2.5) analysis have been regarded as tools which could add a little finesse to the basic task of answering the research questions (Howitt & Cramer, 2005: 14).

In mixing the two results, therefore, first the qualitative results have been presented followed by interspersing the quantitative data. This, in conformity to Dornyei's (2007) principles, has given contextual meanings; validated and corroborated descriptions of the realities of EFL teachers' action research practices in the 3 universities in particular and the rest in general. Arguments, therefore, went back and forth, using a nonlinear, 'zigzag' pattern with the effort to entertain the different views of the research participants. On the

other hand, the quantitative data analyses results, being linear following some set of statistical rules, have served for precision purposes within the context of the acquiescence roles they rendered to the qualitative results. The approach, therefore, appears pragmatically functional in the context of the current research in particular and EFL teaching and learning in general.

The discussions have followed the sequence of the basic research questions: EFL teachers' action research knowledge, and practice; their change, environment; and perceived roles of action research for quality language teaching.

6.2.1. EFL Teachers' Action Research Knowledge

The results both from qualitative and quantitative analyses have shown that EFL teachers had high theoretical knowledge and reasonable practical skills of action research. Specially, the massive qualitative data had shown that the teachers had more theoretical knowledge than practical skills to do action research. By the same token, it has been learnt from the quantitative data that 63% and 50% of the respondents respectively rated EFL teachers' action research theoretical knowledge and practical skills as 'high' (see Graphs 1 and 2).

A descriptive analysis of the same data has given mean scores of 3.70 ($SD = .95$) and 3.25 ($SD = .92$) respectively for the EFL teachers' theoretical and practical skills of action research. This is a high value as the alternatives that generated the data were rated on a scale of 1 (Very low) to 5 (Very High). (For detail, see Chapter Five Section 5.2.1.)

Similarly, the responses by the teacher respondents on statements that were meant to assess their theoretical knowledge about action research also supported EFL teachers' possession of high theoretical knowledge about action research. Even though not high, there is also a positive association between EFL teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research ($r = 0.43$, $DF = 54$, $p < 0.01$). As p is low, chance influence is unlikely. The association observed from the data can, therefore, be manifested in the rest EFL

classrooms of Ethiopian universities. The trend implies that EFL teachers with more theoretical knowledge also had more practical skills to do action research.

The observed EFL teachers' knowledge and skills of action research align with the perspectives of *reflective rationality* as opposed to *technical rationality*. This is because the subjects favored the arguments that are promoted by *reflective rationality* as opposed to *technical rationality* (See Chapter Three Table 2).

A further scrutiny of the results has also proved that EFL teachers' Tkia was the lowest valued in comparison with their Roa and Ria. The case implies that the respondents were less efficient on and less clear about their personal knowing and deep learning. Even though they might not necessarily be expected to be conscious of their Tkia, it could inform their EFL classroom practices. In addition to the ratings, the indirect questions posed to the teachers to assess their Tkia also proved that there were shortfalls in justifying their tacit and personal knowledge.

The situation was in contrary to the teachers' observed level of knowledge. That means, whereas their theoretical and practical knowledge were rated as high and medium respectively, their Tkia was rated as little. In principle, "[k]nowing involves a dialectical process of making tacit knowledge explicit, becoming aware of embodied knowledge and drawing theories out of practice, so that theory becomes embodied practice and embodied practice has the potential to emerge again as a new theory" (McNiff, 2002a: 103). The situation further implies that the teachers' 'I-theories' (*Ibid.* P. 28) were not grounded and not situated on their tacit knowledge in which EFL classroom routines could run smoothly and skillfully without planning and retrying when need comes. The teachers, consequently, might not be efficient in handling unforeseeable events and unexpected happenstances in relation to the learners, the curricula, and the interactions that might take place in the classroom within the situations of everyday professional practices. Ideally, classrooms are full of uncertainties, and unexpected happenings occur whereby the students, the curricula materials, facilities, and the teachers interact for the same goal – quality student learning. In the interaction, individual differences, learning preferences, classroom situations and the

like may pressurize the classroom running of the teaching learning processes. In such a situation action research plays a crucial role enabling teachers to be alive and active in taking proactive stances. It situates the teachers in matters of professional and personal improvement, and overcoming classroom problems. As learnt from the findings, nonetheless, the teachers were less involved in action research and purposive and deliberative professional development endeavors that could reactivate their tacit and implicit knowing.

It was also learnt that the observed knowledge and skills were external to the knowers, that is, to EFL teachers. They had resulted from attending HDP, full-fledged courses at undergraduate and graduate levels, and ELIP (KELTA). Personal learning through different mechanisms, such as the above involvements, was not vividly reflected from the data. Consequently, the teachers' personal knowing was not well-situated and established in every personal and professional practice. This was apparent from the above paragraph that the teachers' tacit knowing was the lowest in comparison with the two (Roa and Ria).

The case demands that EFL teachers take proactive stances for doing their practices in new ways by introspection, by conversations, by ordering conscious knowledge, by reading one's own actions, by involving in narrative inquiry, lesson study, reading, debating, journal enquiries, documenting, arguing, disseminating findings, and the like. Similarly, creating knowledge communities that "can make tacit knowledge explicit", and initiating learning conversations and storytelling which, among others: a) are effective means of institutional learning; b) build teamwork; c) help overcome fear of change; d) help staff reflect on their experiences; e) promote the sharing of experience and ideas; and f) provide a time for reflection (Sallis, 2002: 85, 88). The transformation of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge foregrounds professional, personal and political dimensions of action research all of which highlight the 'educator's voice' and actions to advance 'knowledge base' for EFL teaching at universities. This issue has been tantalizing the academics since the early 20th century, the time when action research moved into universities, and viewed as a 'knowledge generating activity' (Noffke, 2009: 9, 13, 15).

Apart from the majority (63%) and average (50%) subjects who rated EFL teachers' action research knowledge as 'high', small number of the respondents manifested mixed beliefs as they were not sure which to choose from among the alternatives on the issue and others forwardly negated EFL teachers' possession of action research knowledge. Whereas 32% (11% for the theoretical and 21% for the practical) of the respondents remained silent (chose 'undecided'); 42% of them (15% for theoretical and 27% for practical knowledge of action research) indicated that EFL teachers did not have the required knowledge to do action research (see Graphs 1 and 2). The causes for the respondents' wavering beliefs and undervaluing EFL teachers' knowledge about and/or of action research did come from various sources:

- a) low enabling environments;
- b) rare application of action research findings;
- c) nominal status of action research in comparison to other research approaches;
- d) unavailability of action research models and formats both for students and for teachers;
- e) EFL teachers' low confidence and low commitment to conduct action research; and
- f) limited roles of English language departments at all the three universities in handling action research course for undergraduate students and HDP for teacher educators.

Regarding the last issue, it was learnt that action research course for undergraduate students and HDP for teacher educators were offered by the College of Education at AAU, Pedagogical Science Departments at BDU and at HarU. EFL departments at all the three universities did not have authority to plan, organize, and to implement action research as a course for students and as a training program for teacher educators. This had direct and indirect repercussions on the level of departmental and individual empowerment, commitment, and ownership for learning and change in practices and practitioners following action research approach. The case understandably limited involvement of EFL teachers in action research as individuals, groups or at the level of institution.

oneself and one's profession by conducting action research. The gains could be financial, material or promotion to the next academic rank.

A further look at the results also shows that 16% and 15% of the teacher and student respondents respectively could not decide EFL teachers' level of doing action research. They attributed the reasons for remaining silent to: low understanding and encouragement by the responsible bodies-departmental or institutional, heavy workload, and lack of incentives- all of which resulted in the teachers' cloudy faith in action research contributions for betterment of their practices and themselves.

Overall, it was learnt from the qualitative and quantitative results that EFL teachers' level of investigating their practices following action research approach was very low. The reasons were attributed to: a) EFL teachers' skimpy empowerment and low institutional support; b) consternation, mentality, commitment, and capacity problems on the part of the teachers themselves; c) lack of models/formats/ or established cultures of practicing action research; d) low conduciveness of the teaching learning environment for critical self-reflection and professional debates; and e) learners' low readiness for EFL classroom activities consumed the teachers' time that could be invested on research work. Consequently, EFL teachers' knowledge of action research had not resulted in practicing it. Though the result of the correlation analyses appears positive, there is no strong association between EFL teachers' action research knowledge and actual practice. That is, for theoretical knowledge and doing action research ($r = .294, p < .029$). As p is low, nonetheless, chance influence is unlikely. The association observed from the data can, therefore, be manifested in other settings. On the other hand, the association between practical knowledge and doing action research is prone for chance influence as the p value is above 5%, which is one of the conventional critical significance levels (including 0.01) and serves as a cutoff (the scientific standard) (Suter, 2006: 352), that is, $r = .14, p = .31$. (For detail, see Table 14).

A comparative analysis of the mean average has shown that whereas the EFL teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research were 39% and 34%

respectively, their actual involvement in doing action research, was the lowest, only 27% (see Graph 7).

By way of summary, the reasons for the EFL teachers' observed practice of action research could be classified into three sources: institution-related, teacher-related, and student-related sources. These causal sources had resulted in giving nominal place to action research by university leadership in general and by the teachers themselves in particular. In principle, action research needs to be given central place as it is instrumental to improve practice and practitioners. It ought to be a concern of leadership and individual teachers to enhance the culture of regularly investigating classrooms and making language learning possible, authentic, and pragmatic to individual differences, specific classroom contexts, and pacing with the world advancement in the field. This is because action research plays instrumental role to: a) systematically observe and investigate issues or problems that EFL teachers might confront in their classes and find remedial actions; and b) generate practice-based knowledge for transforming EFL teaching, learners, the language curricula, and the teachers themselves.

6.2.3. EFL Teachers' Change as a result of their Action Research

Change, in principle, 'arises from learning' (Sallis, 2002: 88). EFL teachers' learning as a result of their action research has resulted in changing their practices and themselves. Both qualitative and quantitative results of the analyses on EFL teachers' level of change in the light of new knowledge gained from their researches were pragmatic and valid. The claimers for doing action research (27% of the teacher respondents) highly valued the pragmatic function of action research to bring change in their practices and themselves.

Whereas no one underrated the role of action research for change, 16% of the teacher respondents chose 'undecided'. They attributed the reasons for taking the middle ground to the cloudy beliefs and faiths they had developed in action research power for change and betterment of oneself and one's practices. Their beliefs and faiths were influenced by persistent constraints that could be attributable to institutional, individual teacher and student related factors. In comparison with the data in support of action research for

change and betterment, nonetheless, the percentage of those who hesitated was insignificant. It can, therefore, be argued that EFL teachers who did action research improved themselves and their practices. This argument concurs with Wisker's (2008) statement: "action research can often cause lasting and useful change in practice and in the practitioner researcher's work place" (P. 228).

The mean average in support of the teachers' claims to have gained knowledge and betterment of themselves and their practices as a result of action research practice is high ($\bar{X} = 3.77$, $SD = 0.66$). This is a substantive result as the items that generated the data were assessed on a five point scale ranging from 1 (very little) to 5 (very greatly). Similarly, though the figure is small, Pearson's correlation analysis has shown that there is a positive association between EFL teachers' *actual practice of action research* and their change ($r = .38$, $p < .025$). As p is low, chance influence is unlikely, and there probably exists a relationship or connection between EFL teachers' *actual practice of action research* and their change in the population similar to those in the sample.

On top of this, action research was valued as instrumental approach for betterment of EFL teachers and their practices. Among others, the following gains and catalytic roles of action research were claimed (by EFL teachers who did action research) to have been manifested in their classrooms:

- a. understanding about and adopting new techniques and methods of EFL teaching;
- b. learning about existing classroom problems (related to teaching, learning, curriculum, and administrative issues) and ways of solving them;
- c. raising their confidence, capacities, and commitment to investigate practices and to learn new ways of doing and handling EFL classrooms;
- d. striving to improve oneself and one's practice through involvement and through reflection;
- e. deepening their knowledge of action research and their profession;
- f. being more reflective, productive and experimental professionals in the field of EFL teaching;

- g. improving the congruence between EFL teaching theories and their classroom practices;
- h. creating and advancing knowledge on the basis of their concrete, and practical experience;
- i. creatively improving practice on the basis of their *grounded theory*;
- j. bringing about changes in their values, beliefs, thinking, feelings of self-worth, confidence ;
- k. changing and improving their EFL pedagogical knowledge and practices;
- l. improving and modifying EFL pedagogy itself; and
- m. improving EFL students' learning.

The above claims by the teachers align with Keiny and Orland-Barak's (2009: 175-176) arguments that action research is a tool and a channel for professional growth, and its practices are positioned as "a paradigm of change rather than as solely a methodology of inquiry". A paradigmatic conception of change, in the context of the findings, highlights a 'hermeneutic' orientation (in Keiny and Orland-Barak's term) to action research, stressing the overriding goal of co-constructing new knowledge, along with a search for change and improvement of oneself and one's own practice.

Explicit and implicit purposes have been manifested in the change-oriented results of action research by the teachers. The *explicit* purpose has been manifested in different forms. On the one hand it entails the idealness of HE classrooms for language development and learning enhancement. This is because a classroom in particular and HEIs in general are ideal places for teachers "to carryout action research" (Wisker, 2008: 234) so as to transform the practitioners and their practices for the better. Equally, EFL teachers who claimed to have done action research also claimed to have solved problems encountered in their respective classrooms.

The implicit purpose on the other hand entails EFL teachers' need to enter into critical debates about their practices. This was manifested in the teachers' claims and valuations of the roles of action research for learning, professional development, and quality EFL teaching. The claims could situate action research as a "form of practical philosophy...that

unifies the processes of developing theory and practice” (Elliott, 2009: 28). Inasmuch as action research (being a practical philosophy) was conducted by EFL teachers, it could also be considered as the ‘practical philosophy’ of the teachers. Such a philosophy is underpinned by their moral philosophy, which could trigger individual teachers to do the right things right implicitly and tacitly. Consequently, the teachers could be motivated to take proactive and introspective stances in their professional endeavours. By way of actualizing the endeavours, the implicit motives can be reactivated through personal deliberations following action research approach whereby critical self-reflection, inquiry, reading, journal keeping, narratives, and the like become part of the personal, professional, and practical philosophy of the teachers.

Action research as a practical philosophy for EFL teachers is, therefore, a catalyst and powerful tool for personal and professional development causing real and lasting impact and ensuring sustainable development at the classroom level.

In both cases (explicit and implicit), the three areas of action research, namely, ‘professional, personal, and political’ dimensions (see Chapter Three section 3.5) have been manifested in the findings. Equally within these dimensions, the roles of action research as an effective and immediate way of improving EFL learning and teaching practice in a systematic way; and making changes to the environment, context or conditions in which that practice takes place have been manifested (Wisker, 2008: 234).

As the manifestation of the ‘professional dimension’, the findings have resulted in: a) knowledge production; b) additional understanding of a knowledge base for EFL teaching; c) sustaining different ways of knowing EFL teaching pedagogies; d) connecting EFL theory to classroom practice; e) enhancing professional quality and status of the teachers; f) professional problem solving; and g) enhancing recognition of the importance of EFL teachers’ voices in generating knowledge for educational practice.

Similarly, as the manifestation of the ‘personal dimension’, the findings revealed EFL teachers’: a) personal growth and development through their participation and subsequent

reflection; b) understanding themselves and their work better; c) understanding to become more skilful in handling EFL classroom problems; and d) enhanced personal beliefs about EFL teaching and learning.

Finally, as the manifestation of the 'political dimension of action research', the findings have generated data on the research participants' perceptions of the roles of action research, and on the role of empowering the practitioners to enhance their commitment so that they might take ownership of their professional quality improvement. This dimension could situate the findings and the implications within the wider context in which the teachers' perceived roles of action research could be morphed to match specific EFL classroom situation.

In this sense, the findings have proved the need:

- a. for classroom-based solutions to specific problems;
- b. to leverage environmental change and enhancement for EFL teachers to own the improvement and transformation of their professional practices;
- c. to empower EFL teachers to be generators of EFL classroom knowledge. This challenges the traditional norm of producing knowledge somewhere and imposing on teachers to implement it; and
- d. to derive implications of the findings for the concomitant quality of EFL teaching.

The last point entails connecting the implications of the findings with the needs, priorities, and purposes of EFL teaching beneficiaries. This conforms to the conception of quality as 'fitness for purpose' whereby 'fitness of purpose' is inherent. In this sense, EFL teaching is to be seen in line with the purposes, specifications, needs, and priorities of learners, potential employers, parents, the Government, EFL academics, and the society at large. Implied in here is sustaining the quality of EFL teaching in consonance with EFL academic standards (the level of achievement that an EFL learner has to reach to gain academic award in EFL at different levels) need to be attained and maintained.

Equally, the findings conform to the following statements by Altrichter and Posch (2009):

Action research has some reputation as a powerful strategy for professional development of teachers and other professional practitioners. In the action research tradition instruments and social settings have evolved which help individuals or small groups of professionals who are keen on learning about and changing their practice to do just this: to develop aspects and instances of their practice in order to better understand them and to elaborate their professional knowledge and competences. And action research has stimulated such practitioners to build up supportive networks which give them some backing when they try to bring their improved knowledge and competences to their home organization, to change styles and conditions of work in their school, in their school system, etc. (P. 213).

Gomez et al (2009) also indicate, "...the focus of the research is not only the problem to be resolved, but also the processes of change, the resistance and obstacles, and the procedures for the shared diagnosis and assessment of context, processes and products" (P. 489).

In sum, it has been learnt that practicing action research in EFL classrooms (as part of in-service and continuous professional development programs) is a promising approach to professional development of individual teachers who are keen on changing, reflecting, and developing themselves and their practices for the better quality language teaching and learning.

6.2.4. Motivating and /or De-motivating Environments for EFL Teachers to do Action Research

The qualitative and quantitative analyses results have shown that there were both motivating and de-motivating environments for EFL teachers to do action research. The motivating environments were negligible and were more of extrinsic in nature. They were reactions to some impediments; and were related to meager opportunities/incentives, and policy intentions. Principally, the impediments that EFL teachers had faced in discharging their professional roles inspired some EFL teachers to be watchful of their professional environments.

Similarly, the scantily available opportunities (incentives, empowerment- training, and policy intentions) also motivated some EFL teachers to do action research. There had been

training opportunities at different levels: undergraduate and graduate programs while the subjects were students; and in-service professional development programs through HDP, and other tailor-made programs. The teachers also had chances to teach, supervise and evaluate their students' activities. Some also claimed to have read literature on action research as it has become popular these days. Similarly, institutional and national policies, guidelines, and similar documents were said to be generally inspired the teachers to participate in research activities. But these documents did not show specific roles, types of the intended researches, and the required resources to materialize the intentions.

The above accounts imply unavailability of clear roles and empowerment for EFL teachers. Consequently, the teachers themselves lacked directions and commitment to take initiatives for consistently conducting action research; and for enhancing personal and professional development and problem resolution. The case, thus, entails that there were scanty enabling environments for EFL teachers to conduct action research. Precisely, 54% and 55% of the teacher respondents rated respectively their environmental situations as discouraging and their level of empowerment to conduct action research as (very) little (see Graphs 8 and 9). In fact, the observed environmental factors and the skimpy empowerment suppressed the teachers' freedom and commitment to think, to plan and to do what they might value as right and acceptable for their personal and professional improvement.

In synthesis, 57%, 83%, and 79% of the respondents, interviewees, and discussants respectively attributed the de-motivating factors to overall environmental situations; and institutional, and individual commitments. The de-motivating factors were external and internal to the universities, and also personal. Whereas mismatch between time investment in research and gain, lack of differentiated publishing opportunities for research outputs by teachers, time constraint, large class size, lack of resources, giving nominal place to action research in comparison to other forms of research approaches, little conduciveness of the classroom contexts in which EFL teachers work, mandated and centralized curricula contents, and lack of clear roles/responsibilities were the external de-motivating environmental conditions; skimpy empowerment and lack of clear institutional policies

and roles to do action research, limited leadership support for publicizing the research findings, and bureaucratic journeys and lengthy time for endorsing fund request to conduct research were internal to the institutional leadership of the universities. Both external and internal factors jeopardized the conduct of action research by EFL teachers. There were also factors attributable to individual teachers such as attitudinal problems, little practical skills, and low commitment to take initiatives with a purpose of bringing the issue to the forefront for debate and deliberations.

Overall, the de-motivating environmental factors to do action research were pervasive, stemmed from different sources, and ranged from policy to practice.

6.2.5. Perceived Roles of Action Research for Quality of EFL Teaching

Almost all the research participants acknowledged the pragmatic value of action research for quality language teaching. Specifically, 77% and 82% of the teacher and student respondents respectively highly valued the extent to which action research could enhance the quality of language teaching (see Graphs 10 and 11). In fact, EFL teachers could explore their classroom practices for learning and advancing their profession and themselves based on concrete experiences. Through action research, teachers could reflect, question, try to find answers or solutions to hurdles in their respective classrooms. These inevitably lead to improved quality of EFL teaching and learning. In Wisker's (2008: 234) views, learning and creation of new knowledge and betterment of practices are based on concrete experiences. This happens through "...observing and reflecting on the experience by forming abstract concepts and generalizations; and ...testing the implications of these concepts, in new situations, which will lead to new concrete experience and hence to the beginning of a new cycle" (Ibid.).

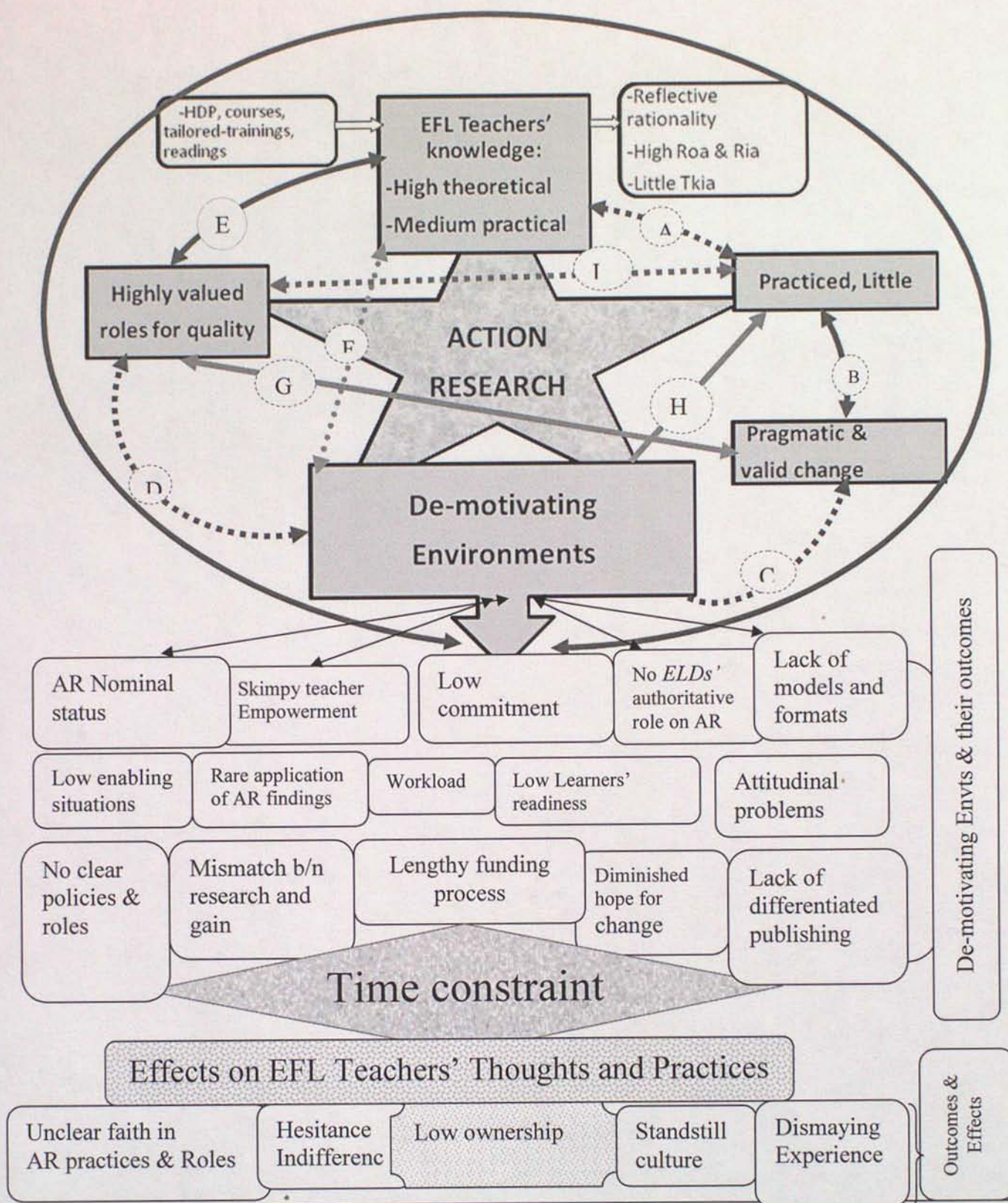
The author further argues:

For academics, the processes of learning are 'a key' to their practice, so researching and embedding the learning about learning not only can cause and enable positive change, but also can add to and enhance understanding about their own learning practices for communities of students and colleagues. (Wisker, 2008: 234)

The above accounts entail the fact that not only the outputs of action research but also its process enhances EFL teachers' knowledge, practical skills, and positive change for betterment of their individual and professional contexts. In both cases (research process and outputs) action research remains instrumental in enhancing the quality of EFL teaching. This is achieved through the process of systematic investigation of EFL classroom environments with the purpose of problem resolution; learning; change and improvement (of profession, practices, methodology, language skills of teachers as well as students); and generating theory and putting it into practice. These all lead to betterment of the quality of EFL teaching and learning. The last point disproved the popularly claimed role of action research simply to deal more with the *immediate application rather than the development of theory*.

On the other hand, very few individuals hesitated to precisely articulate the inquired roles of action research. They attributed their reasons to take the middle ground (to remain silent) on issues of somewhat sensitive to environmental factors, which also resulted in some (of course small number) EFL teachers' cloudy faith in action research roles for improving practice. The number of the hesitant respondents, nonetheless, was by far less than that of the sympathizers of the roles of action research for quality, that is, with the ratio of 0.06: 0.82 (see Graph 11).

The observed and implied roles of action research for quality heighten the key missions of universities and the roles of the academic community to teach, advance knowledge through conducting research, and to render community services. Whereas realization of the mission demands coordinated efforts of all stakeholders, the role of EFL teachers (the frontline implementers) is instrumental. They need to be actively engaged in the implementation of the overall missions without being disconnected from what they really need and value for advancement of themselves and their professional practices. Consequently, their involvements in action research to enhance quality of EFL teaching should be unquestionable and unarguable, provided that they are empowered and committed to do that and value its results. In view of this, and on the basis of the analyses and the discussions made so far, the major results of the study have been synthesized in Figure 13, below.



Keys: AR= Action Research; b/n = between; ELDs = English Language Departments; Envts = Environments

Figure 13. Synthesis of the Major Findings

Figure 13 has presented a detailed illustration of the observed and implied factual and conceptual results of the study. A closer look at the Figure shows that a number of environmental factors negatively influenced EFL teacher's commitment, thoughts and practices regarding action research. The environmental factors appeared both as causes and results for the observed state of affairs of action research practices. The teachers were not empowered; time and support for practicing action research were also not spared for them. The situation was a sort of vicious circle resulting in EFL teachers' unclear faith in action research roles for quality teaching; and little conscious and deliberate efforts to practicing action research; hesitance and indifference on issues of professional development and improvement of one's practices; low commitment and low ownership of the practices; standstill culture; and dismaying experiences.

A further look at the Figure shows that some variables had positive whereas others had negative associations with each other. The trend and status of the associations among the different variables have been summarized in Table 18 below.

Table 18. Trend and Status of Associations among Different Variables in the Findings

Association	weak	strong	Direct	Indirect
Positive	A, I	B, E, G	A, B, E, G	I
Negative	D, F, C	H	D, H	C, D, F

Key (Refer to Figure 13)

A = EFL teachers' action research knowledge and practice

B = EFL teachers' action research practice and change

C = EFL teachers' change and environment

D = EFL teachers' action research environment and perceived role for quality

E = EFL teachers' action research perceived role for quality and knowledge

F = EFL teachers' action research knowledge and environment

G = EFL teachers' action research perceived role for quality and change

H = EFL teachers' action research environment and practice

I = EFL teachers' action research perceived role for quality and practice

Table 18 shows that EFL teachers' knowledge and practice had weak but direct association (A). That means, EFL teachers' knowledge of action research did not result in strong practice. On the other hand, practicing action research and change had strong and direct association (B). Even though the number of EFL teachers who claimed to have done action

research was small, the claimed and the perceived changes as a result of the practice were high. That means, doing action research had pragmatic function. The linking arrow between practicing action research and change is, therefore, unbroken (B) and bi-directional showing that both the practice and the resultant change positively influenced each other. Evidently, action research practices resulted in change. The change in turn motivated those who did action research to value the role of action research for quality.

On the other hand, the line from environment to change is unidirectional (C) as the environments negatively influenced the level of the practice and by implication the level of the expected change. That means, there was negative association between the observed environment and the level of the observed change from the practices. The association, nonetheless, was weak and indirect as the environmental impact is directly on the practices not on the change itself. Moreover, the observed environment and the perceived role of action research for quality had negative, weak, and bi-directional association with both direct and indirect effect on each other (D). This is because the observed environment had negative influence on the perceptions of some participants as their understandings of the roles of action research was darkened and they had cloudy faiths in action research power for quality EFL teaching. At the same time the positive perceptions of the participants might have influenced the environment and yet imperceptibly and indirectly. Consequently, the association between the two variables could be viewed both as direct and indirect.

Furthermore, EFL teachers' action research knowledge and perceived roles for quality had strong and bi-directional association (E). The line between the perceived role of action research and action research knowledge and vice versa is, therefore, unbroken and bidirectional as the majority of the research participants had high and medium theoretical and practical knowledge of action research respectively, and at the same time highly valued the roles of action research for quality language teaching in Ethiopian universities.

A further look at the Figure shows that the observed environment and EFL teachers' action research knowledge had negative, weak and indirect association (F). This is because EFL

teachers' action research knowledge was high regardless of the de-motivating environmental factors and yet the impact of the latter was evident as EFL teachers had little Tkia which could have been resulted from low action research practice due to environmental influences. On the other hand, the perceived roles of action research had positive, strong, and bidirectional association with the observed change (G). This is because action research is highly valued for quality. At the same time, the practice of it resulted in change, though the practice itself was meager. The association between the observed environment and the practice was negative, strong and unidirectional as the observed and implied environmental factors directly influenced the level of the observed practice (H). Furthermore, the association between perceived roles and practices of action research is positive, but weak and indirect (I). This is because, the perceived roles of action research for quality were high and the observed action research practice was little, and yet those who practiced it highly valued the gains from doing so.

Overall, the findings proved the current eminence of action research both as an approach and as methodology. As Noffke and Somekh (2009: back cover) indicate, "[n]ow a prominent methodology, Educational Action research is well situated to exploring, developing, and sustaining change processes both in classrooms and whole organizations such as school, Departments of Education and many segments of universities." In consonance with this fact, the study proved that action research played instrumental role in terms of: a) producing professional knowledge; b) enhancing understanding of knowledge base of EFL teaching; c) disclosing different ways of knowing EFL as a field; d) connecting EFL teaching theory to practice; e) generating new ways of understanding EFL teaching practice; and f) enhancing the professional quality and status of EFL teaching as a profession and the teachers as professionals. Equally, even though things could not be straightforward to predict and demarcate linearly because of the presence of 'multiple realities' (Holly, 2009: 274), environmental factors were the major influencing variables to the observed level of action research practices in EFL classrooms of the three universities. This could also be predicted in the rest universities as there are communalities of and/or comparable inputs, processes and expected outputs of teaching, research, and service delivery across the universities within the country.

6.3. Doubts, Debates and Lessons (DDL)

In the journey of the research work, doubts, debates and lessons have been witnessed. Whereas the doubts and debates were the by-products of the data generated from the different participants and from literatures, the lessons were the upshots of the doubts and the debates. That means, the doubts and debates had inspired me to invest extra efforts whereby further readings and reflections were undertaken resulting in learning. (See Figure 14 below).

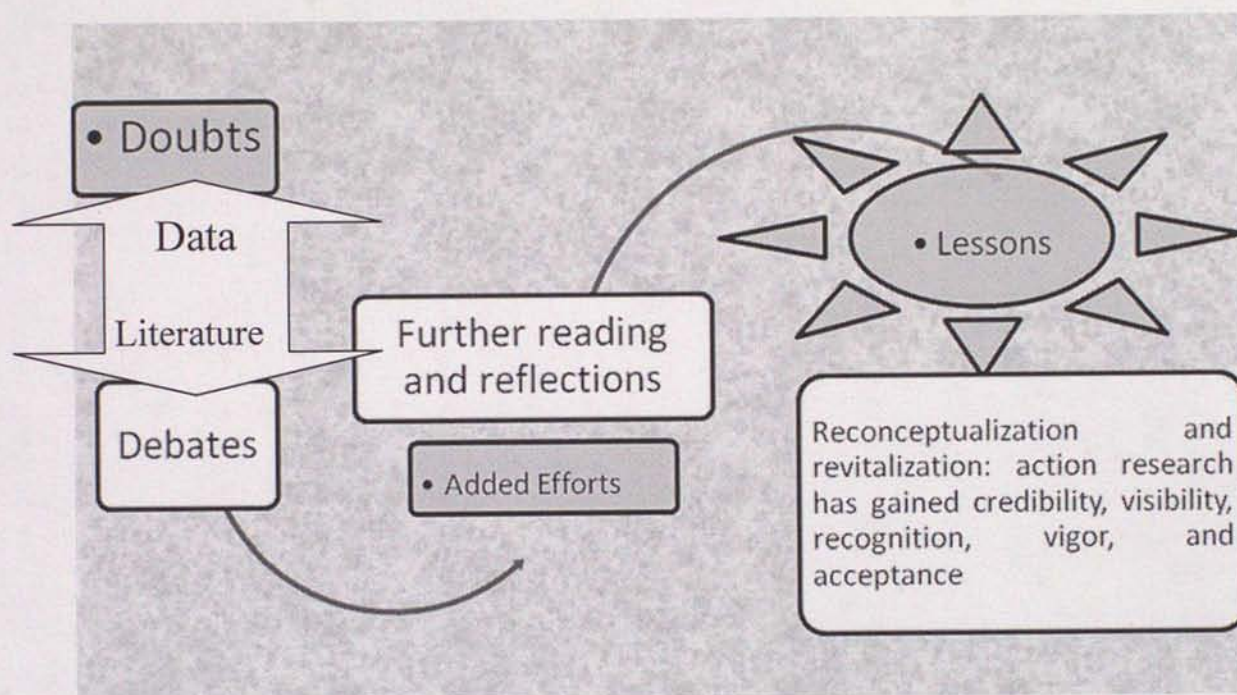


Figure 14. Doubts, Debates and Lessons (DDL) in the journey of the Research work

Many of the doubts and debates have resulted from:

- some research subjects' lack of clear understanding of the salient features of action research and its distinctions from the traditional research approach;
- some research subjects' lack of knowledge of whether what EFL teachers were scantily practicing could be considered as action research or as the traditional research;
- unavailability of the culture of reporting action research works;
- scanty support for the teachers to conduct action research;

- e. mistakenly thinking that basic research (pure) research could bring more improvement than action research could;
- f. low faith in action research contribution; and
- g. lack of reward for doing action research.

A discussant from AAU indicated the challenge of making distinctions between the traditional research approach and action research:

[t]he problem is in drawing demarcations between action research and the traditional one. Many researches are being carried out and presented at different forums, seminars, conferences, etc. But how many of those research works are action research or traditional research is not known; we do not know which is which. To my knowledge, action research is problem focused. Other researches are also problem focused. So where is the distinction between the two? (C₂FAAU2).

Others also had doubts about whether what they were scantily practicing could be considered as action research or as the traditional research. On top of this, one respondent indicated that though he used to teach his students to benefit from the lessons on action research, he confessed that he had a doubt about whether he was applying this concept (i.e., action research) or the traditional approach of research (TR11).

Some others also did not know who did action research:

- “Sorry, I do not even know people conducting such a research [action research]” (C₃FAAU).
- “I do not have any clear idea of who did action research since there is no a culture of formally reporting research findings, low support, and low collegial and interactive discussions on what we do” (C₁IAAU).

Others had of the opinion that the roles of action research were misconceived. A discussant from BDU indicated, “there are misconceptions from the teachers’ point of view including myself. Many of us [teachers] believe that it is the basic research [or pure] research that brings improvement [not action research]” (C₄FBDU).

Almost all the discussants at BDU and one interviewee at AAU had similar beliefs that (action) research culture of Ethiopian universities was very low as compared to other universities in other countries. They had the opinion that much action research work could not be expected from any one in Ethiopia. This thinking has resulted in EFL teachers' low faith in action research roles. In line of this thought, three respondents (TR18, TR28, and TR52) indicated their low faith in action research contribution to take it seriously.

Understandably, the doubts due to lack of clear understanding of the nature and current status of action research could be a basis for some of the debates. One argumentative debate was on the *rigor* of action research. Whereas many of the subjects did not have clear understanding about the *rigor* of action research, three discussants (two at AAU and one at BDU) strongly argued to dismiss the *rigor* of action research. Particularly, one discussant at AAU strongly argued that action research did not have *rigor* and was less demanding:

Action research is a problem solving approach. It does not need as such very rigorous kind of data collection and analysis. But simply we can observe, we can intervene and report. So, not all action research works are reported. So there are some action researches in every class. So I can say that we are always engaged in action research even though they are not reported (C₃FAAU).

Similarly, another discussant at AAU indicated, "there are many differences between action research and conventional research. In action research we do and try to solve problems, we do not report to others" (C₄FAAU). Inherent in this quote is that no need of soliciting support and sharing the results of action research to others.

In the same vein, a discussant at BDU indicated, "there is misconception about action research considering it as sophisticated as the traditional research" (C₁FBDU). The discussant went on arguing, "no need of support for conducting action research as it is simply a classroom reflection" (C₁FBDU). He had the opinion that "action research is classroom research that does not require much money. No need of data collector for action research like the conventional research" (C₁FBDU). On the other hand, this individual seemed to have a mixed belief. Whereas he was strongly insisting the participants to

acknowledge the contribution of HDP and trying to induce as if HDP was a panacea for all ills, he nonetheless, undermined the participants' action research knowledge. Equally, he was accusing teachers as if they were demanding huge money rather than bringing simple proposals.

Arguably, the subjects were considering action research as a simplistic stance and just as an exercise to solve classroom problems. They, in most cases, ignored the learning aspect and the benefit that action research provides, among others, as a way of improvement; as a means of teacher empowerment, professional growth; and as a tool to connect theory to practice.

The majority of the subjects, on the other hand, acknowledged the rigor of action research and the need for support from leadership to conduct it. For instance one discussant at AAU argued "...we need help from deans, department heads, etc to conduct action research. If they become remiss in terms of supporting us, we might be incapable to bring about any change to our practices and also we can not be able to share the results of our research endeavors (if at all)" (C₁FAAU).

In the same vein, an interviewee at AAU reported:

Action research is a demanding approach. There are different procedures to be considered in conducting it. But the level of motivation of staffs is low. I believe that the staffs have the capacity, but low motivation. Many staffs are seen asking about what comes then afterwards from research, about their own personal lives, aspirations, and ambitions. As a result, even conducting conventional research is low which is to my understanding easier than action research. (C₂IAAU)

The same interviewee went on explaining the fact that conducting action research requires a number of conditions to be fulfilled such as resource, motivation, time, skill, clear guidelines, and procedures.

When one discussant at AAU (C₅FAAU) raised the issue of load reduction as an empowerment to do action research, another (C₃FAAU) counter argued: "... my worry here is you can not carry out action research without being highly involved in the job itself. This is because the

problem emanates from the very work which you are trying to improve. So, there is no need for reduction of work load". The one who claimed for load reduction took the argument further:

I am not denying that. But there is a need for reduction because instead of teaching 12 hours in a week and getting involved for three hours in research related activities, I think you could do a better job if you are given just 9 periods a week and then do action research. So when I say reduction that is very different from exemption (C₅FAAU).

The earlier discussant went on debating, "... I still argue, because action research is not rigorous. One thing, there is no need of very detail type of data collection, no refining instruments, and no tabulating, no as such rigorous analysis of the things" (C₃FAAU).

Contrary to the last argument, another discussant at the same university indicated "let alone conducting action research, it is not so easy to conduct the conventional research which is easier than action research to my understanding" (C₆FAAU).

It is clear from the aforesaid arguments that the doubts and debates might have emanated from the illusive visions attached to the inherent nature of action research. Historically, action research endeavors were used to be criticized in the 1960s on the ground that it is undertaken by the practitioners themselves (concerns on practitioner identity conflict).

Erroneously, therefore, some used to embellish the subjectivity involved in and the inherently small scale of the conduct of action research. They, consequently, used to undervalue action research results and to undermine the rigor of the approach. Understandably, therefore, the debate itself is not new. Mertler (2009) indicates,

[h]istorically ...one of the 'weaknesses' of action research has been its perceived lower level of quality. People falsely believe that, since action research is conducted by teachers and not academicians or researchers, it must be of lesser quality. This is, of course, not true though it is critical for the action researcher to ensure that the research is sound. The extent to which it reaches a standard quality is directly related to the usefulness of the research findings for its intended audience. This level in action research can be referred to as its "rigor". In general rigor refers to the quality, validity, accuracy, and credibility of action research and its findings. (P. 24)

Mertler went further by reiterating Melrose's (2001) terms, which has associated rigor with the terms *validity* and *reliability* in quantitative studies, referring to the accuracy of instruments, data and research findings, and with accuracy, credibility, and dependability in qualitative studies. Furthermore, she argued that many action researchers use the term *rigor* in a much broader sense, making reference instead to the entire research process, not just to its aspects of data collection, data analysis and findings. Furthermore, citing Stringer (2007), Mertler typified *rigor* in action research on the basis of procedures of checking to ensure that the results are not biased or that they reflect only the particular perspective of the researcher

It can be understood from the arguments by Mertler that the misconceptions and doubts on action research 'rigor' have (somewhat) gone today and the debates may remain in relation to its methods, principles and applications. Current literature and developmental trends in the field, therefore, witness that action research "is a highly rigorous procedure producing validated evidence from systematically monitored practice" (McNiff, 2002a: 101). Similarly, Wisker (2008: 236) underscores that "[r]igor is immensely important" in action research work.

In sum, the doubts and debates have triggered me for further reading and reflecting on the issue. Whereas the debates may recur in relation to its methods, principles and applications; action research thrives as an approach for betterment, problem resolution, connecting theory to practice, and professional growth. The resultant of the reflections and readings has, therefore, given me ways to learn that action research has gained credibility, visibility, recognition, acceptance, and legitimacy as research strategy with acceptable rigor.

6.4. Summary of the Major Findings

Data were generated through: a) questionnaires from 57 teachers and 214 students at AAU, BDU, and HarU; b) FGD from 20 people (7 both at AAU and BDU, and 6 at HarU); and c) interviews from eight people (two each from the three universities and from MOE). The data were analyzed, interpreted, and discussed qualitatively and quantitatively on the basis

of EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change, environment, and perceived roles for quality. On the basis of the analyses and discussions made so far, the following major findings have been obtained.

1. EFL teachers had high and medium theoretical and practical knowledge of action research respectively. Quantitatively, 63% and 50% of the teacher respondents (respectively) rated EFL teachers' theoretical and practical knowledge of action research as *high*.
2. The observed knowledge of the teachers had resulted from: a) attending HDP, b) trainings on topics or full-fledged courses at undergraduate and graduate levels; c) ELIP (KELTA) (1 year), and d) personal reading and practicing
3. There is a positive association between EFL teachers' claimed theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research ($r = 0.43$, $DF = 54$, $p < 0.01$). As p is low, chance influence is unlikely. EFL teachers with more theoretical knowledge would have more practical skills to do action research.
4. The respondents were in favor of the *reflective rationality* as opposed to the *technical rationality*. This is because they chose the arguments that EFL classroom practical problems demand specific solutions, and the solutions to EFL classroom problems can be developed only inside the context in which the problem arises, all of which are the features of *reflective rationality* (neither in research centers nor in administrative offices).
5. The teacher respondents had high *reflection on action* (Roa) and *reflection in action* (Ria), and relatively little *tacit knowing in action* (Tkia). The case points out the fact that the respondents were less clear about their personal knowing and deep-learning.
6. English language departments at all the three universities had no authoritative roles in managing action research course for undergraduate students and HDP for teacher educators. This had created cracks to own action research planning and implementation in concrete terms responsive to specific EFL teaching and learning.
7. Action research was not practiced by EFL teachers when and where needed. Quantitatively, 57% (14% said 'never practiced', 43% said 'little practiced') and 52% (13% said 'never practiced', 39% said 'little') of the teacher and student respondents

respectively underrated EFL teachers' actual practice of action research. Different reasons were cited, namely, less empowerment and support; consternation, mentality and commitment problems; lack of models; low enabling environment; and low learners' capacity/readiness.

8. Those who claimed to have done action research attributed the motives to: HDP requirement, problem resolution, learning and improvement, and expected roles as teachers.
9. EFL teachers who did action research claimed to have been changing/improving themselves and their practices in the light of the new knowledge gained from their research ($\bar{X} = 3.77$, $SD = 0.658$).
10. Doing action research helped EFL teachers: a) to know about and adopt new techniques of teaching; b) to learn about the existing problems and devise ways of solving them; c) to raise their confidence, capacities, and commitment to investigate practices and to learn new ways of doing and handling EFL classrooms; d) to improve oneself and one's practice from time to time; e) to deepen their knowledge of action research and their profession; f) to be more reflective, productive and inquisitive; and g) to bring change to the way of teaching.
11. Time constraint; large class size; additional work load; giving nominal place to action research in comparison to other forms of research approaches; mandated and centralized curricular contents; diminished hope for change; less conduciveness of the contexts in which the teachers work; mismatch between time investment in research and gain; lengthy time for endorsing research fund request; limited support for publicizing research findings; lack of differentiated publishing opportunities; teachers' low empowerment, low commitment, low practical skills, and attitudinal problems; and lack of clear policies, roles and responsibilities were among the highly rated demotivating factors for EFL teachers to conduct action research.
12. The motivating environments for EFL teachers to do action research were more of extrinsic in nature. They were related to the problems that triggered the teachers to be curious and vigilant of their professional environments; and the meagerly available opportunities, incentives; and policy intentions.

13. Action research has been highly valued (by the majority of the research participants) for quality of language teaching in terms of problem resolution; for learning, change and improvement (of profession, practices, methodology, language skills of teachers as well as students); and generating theory and putting it into practice.
14. Only very few individuals hesitated to articulate the inquired roles of action research for quality. The reasons are mainly attributable to the de-motivating environmental factors which also resulted in those teachers' little faith in the role of action research for quality.

6.5. Conclusions

In this section, conclusions have been drawn from the discussions and the findings. My own implicit and explicit assumptions, values, and perspectives on action research in EFL teaching have also been taken on board in making the conclusions.

1. There was no strong association between EFL teachers' observed action research knowledge and practice. Even though it appeared that EFL teachers with high theoretical knowledge had medium practical skills of action research, their actual practice of it was little. Similarly, whereas the teachers' observed knowledge aligned with *reflective rationality*, their tacit knowledge (Tk) was the lowest valued in comparison with their reflection on action (Roa) and reflection in action (Ria). By implication, there is no ground to know as to how their personal or I-knowledge was personified within and could inform their practices.

In principle, the deep tacit knowing goes through a process of transformation to become explicit (see Figure 7). The transformation process demands "trusting and valuing staff" (Sallis, 2002: 83). The observed level of empowerment of the teachers, which could be the basis for trusting and valuing them, nonetheless, was skimpy. This, therefore, resulted in lowering their Tk in contrary to their observed level of knowledge. Consequently, the teachers were not aware of their embodied knowledge and by implication they could barely draw their own theories out of their practices.

It can, therefore, be concluded that there was no a process of transformation of Tk into explicit knowledge. This is because there is no proof that the teachers' theory could become embodied practice as their personal or 'I-theories' were not grounded and not situated on their tacit knowledge in which day-to-day EFL classroom routines could run smoothly and skillfully even beyond the planned activities to meet the demands of unexpected happenstances.

Consequently, the teachers could be less efficient: a) to handle unforeseeable events in their day-to-day professional practices of EFL teaching where the contexts might demand of them to teach different learners (with varying learning styles, rate of learning, background, etc), and b) to tackle the demands of the internal and external environmental forces in terms of teaching methods, curricula contents, assessment mechanisms, and the individual learner deficiencies.

In principle, Tk enables teachers to possess their own personally tailored 'theories' about what does and does not work for them in their teaching (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998: 5). In support of this view, McNiff (2002a) points, "practice", which is rooted in personal knowing, "can be enhanced... when we reflect on what we are doing and decide to improve it" (P. 102). Equally, action research involves commitment to personal and collective actions. By implication, there is a need for commitment of both leadership and the teachers themselves. Whereas the leadership is expected to empower the teachers, the teachers also need to take the 'driver's seat' in the effort to reactivate their implicit and tacit knowing through continuous assessment of professional practices. This demands their personal commitment to take proactive stances, among others through investigating their EFL classroom practices, reading, meeting with colleagues for discussions, debating, keeping journals, documenting, analyzing, communicating the results, narrating, being vigilant and working cooperatively with their students and colleagues; identifying misunderstandings, intervening to change them; and creating a context of language learning that encourages students with the learning tasks in authentic manner.

The observed EFL teachers' action research knowledge, however, did not: a) situate the teachers within the fast running and volatile professional environments that demand

adaptive professional knowledge and skills, and b) further their practice in consonance with their notion of truth values that were manifested through their high perceptions of the roles of action research for quality language teaching. One reason could be due to the teachers' externalized knowledge as it was gained from 'external sources', namely from participation in HDP, a course at undergraduate and graduate levels, and ELIP (KELTA) rather than practicing action research. The teachers' knowledge, therefore, was not assimilated into their inner values and professional cultures.

Consequently, there was lack of 'subjective conceptions of knowledge construction' on the part of the teachers. Two environmental factors could be taken into account for this. First, EFL teachers as well as EFL departments did not have authoritative roles in action research training either in HDP or the course at undergraduate level, the latter of which demands of the students to conduct action research by way of practicum placements at secondary schools. Second, teacher empowerment was scanty resulting in low commitment, dismaying culture, and indifference to be watchful of their personal and professional improvements pacing with the internal and external demands of the day.

Above all, the case calls for: a) engaging the teachers in 'learning conversations' which can contain reports, surveys and notes of actions; and requires personal and team evaluations and critical self-assessments whereby the teachers may reflect on their experience, and have much in common with 'action learning' (Sallis, 2002: 87); b) enhancing the teachers' understanding of their and their students' experiences of learning and bringing their tacit knowing to the forefront for the day-to-day authentic language teaching and learning process; and c) creating educative processes resulting in actions or changes of oneself and one's practices. This last point implies: i) shared epistemological and ontological commitments of the actors within the EFL classroom contexts; ii) reciprocal resonance with the notion of personal growth through reading, writing, and narrative inquiries; and iii) power of shaping and empowering the identity of the teachers for change and betterment of self and practice (Lewis, Perry & Friedkin, 2009: 151 & 152).

Inherent beyond the educative processes and concomitant successes is empowerment. This is because empowerment and commitment are two faces of a coin. Empowerment harnesses commitment whereas commitment inspires creation of 'knowledge communities' which "are repositories of tacit knowledge" and are instrumental for making tacit knowledge explicit (Sallis, 2002: 85). This, however, does not mean that EFL teachers should simply wait for ideal empowerment to happen and/or rely on the benevolence of those who would grant the required empowerment. Practically, waiting for an ideal empowerment to happen in our universities is waiting for ever. Therefore, the teachers have to make use of all available (at least scanty) opportunities and possibilities to conduct action research through purposive and deliberative personal and professional development endeavors. Such an effort results in integrating their knowledge and practice and making authentic language learning possible rather than barely waiting an ideal empowerment to happen and exclusively basing their teaching on CLT principles, which might have environmental implications for granted.

The case reminds me of Day and Townsend's (2009) ideas that action research is undertaken in order to preserve and nurture the key principles of volunteerism¹⁰; choice¹¹; agency and ownership¹²; and it is you who take decision about change¹³. These are so closely related to building capacity for change and reinforcing commitments to improving learning in the classroom and workplace (PP. 180 & 181). By implication, even though empowerment is a fertile ground for their successes, EFL teachers need to take proactive stance and ownership of the case to initiate action research by soliciting support from other players for the common goal, that is, enhanced quality EFL teaching and learning.

2. Internal and external environmental factors limited the EFL teachers' practice of action research. Whereas their theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research were 39% and 34% respectively, their actual practice of it was only 27% (see Graph 7). Internally, skimpy empowerment; unavailability of models, formats, or established cultures of practicing action research; time constraint; and consternation, mentality and

¹⁰ You only join if you want to;

¹¹ You inquire into matters which are of significance to you ;

¹² What you learn belongs to you and those with whom you learn and change ; and

¹³ There is an expectation that things will be better as a result of engagement .

commitment problems on the part of the teachers themselves limited their level of action research practices. Externally, unavailability of clear policies showing roles and responsibilities, and low readiness of students for the EFL classroom activities remained bottlenecks to consistently practice action research. Both internal and external constraints resulted in giving action research a nominal place in comparison with other research approaches.

3. Action research was highly valued as a catalyst for change and quality improvement. It was said to have pragmatic function as it: a) could creatively improve and change EFL teachers' (who did it) knowledge, thinking, learning experiences, skills, teaching practices, and their students' learning; and b) could solve problems related to teaching, learning, curriculum, and administrative issues. By implication, there is a need for enlivening action research as part and parcel of EFL teaching as EFL classrooms at HEIs are ideal places and the instructors in them are the ideal forces for inquiry and systematic investigation of classroom environments with the purpose of problem resolution; learning; change and improvement (of profession, practices, methodology, language skills of teachers as well as students); and generating theory and putting it into practice. These all lead to betterment of the quality of EFL teaching in the three universities in particular and in all Ethiopian universities in general.

Such inquiries for betterment demand perseverance of both EFL teachers and leadership. This is because the inquiries take place not in green pastures rather in harsh arena whereby those who undertake the inquiries face (at least temporarily) discomfort, ambiguities and uncertainties of attempting to change practices, gaining new (and sometimes disturbing) insights into the provisional nature of knowledge, or experiencing difficulties in seeking to create communities of inquiry in school and classroom where none have previously existed (Day & Townsend, 2009: 187-188). Particularly teachers, to courageously and gallantly face the challenges, need to be informed, committed and motivated. In fact, whatever management structure exists for the effective implementation of the curricula and no matter how well the systems and activities are planned, they do not substitute the roles of the frontline implementers- teachers and they have no power of themselves to bring about the required change (Firdissa, 2009a: 23-24).

This is because teachers are the frontline vanguards for change and betterment. In recapping Stenhouse's (1975) works, Saunders and Somekh (2009: 190) indicate that without a teacher, "even the most detailed curriculum specification has no power of itself to bring about change, because learning in classrooms is a process resulting from the enacted interactions of teachers and students, rather than the aspirations set out in a curriculum document" and inspired by leadership. This, therefore, calls for the forefront implementers' empowerment and commitment to take ownership of bringing quality EFL teaching and learning.

4. Doubts and debates stemming from: a) data whereby some research participants lacked clear understanding of the salient features of action research, could not distinguish action research from the traditional research approach, undermined the role of action research, and considered it as an approach with no rigor; and b) literature had inspired me for further reading and reflections. The case had resulted in reexamining my own perspectives that I had in relation to the roles and rigor of action research. As a result, I have revitalized my earlier beliefs and perspectives that action research has got credibility, visibility, recognition, and acceptance as a highly rigorous procedure producing validated evidence from systematically and objectively monitored practice. My over expectation of the practices of action research by EFL teachers, nonetheless, were turned down. This is because action research was not practiced as I had expected while identifying the research topic and planning the overall research work. Equally, it was known that the 'traditional' research approach still has dominance over action research among the research participants.

6.6. Implications of the Results

The findings have implicit and explicit implications to: a) the quality of EFL teaching and learning, b) policy and practice, c) the field of action research in EFL teaching, and d) scope of applicability of the results. The implicit implications are related to my own assumptions, values, and leeway to view the objective data from my own subjective perspectives underpinning the conceptual and factual results. The explicit implications, on the other hand, reiterate directly or indirectly the wordings of the data.

The four implications are not mutually exclusive. They supplement and complement each other. Specially, the first implication (to the quality of EFL teaching) is nucleus as it is inherent in all the other three. Figure 15 shows conceptual interlink of the implications.

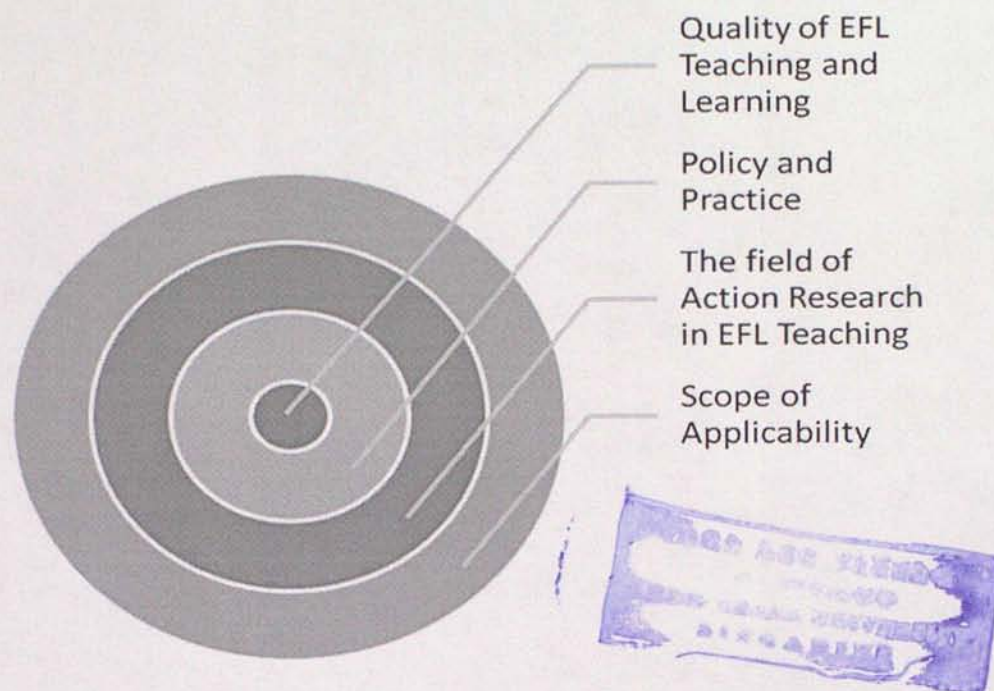


Figure 15. Implications of the Results of the Study

Figure 15 illustrates that each one of the implications (policy and practice, action research in TEFL, and scope of applicability) has repercussions and bearings on the quality of EFL teaching in one way or another. For instance, where clear policies on action research are made in place and duly practiced in EFL classrooms, concomitant professional and personal growths, changes and improvements will be evidenced in life and in the world of work. These changes and improvements are situated within the wider environment of the EFL teaching learning and the resultant outcomes within and outside Ethiopian universities. The classroom initiated changes, therefore, are applied in that environment-physical, social, political, and cultural. At the extreme case too, the scope of applicability of the results encompasses all the rest as it is within the system that the others can be visualized, conceptualized and applied. Equally, the quality of EFL teaching has actual as well as potential bearings to the other three as it is the level of the observed quality that affects the others and/or serves as catalyst and bench mark to be modeled. The following

subsections, therefore, brief the nature, concepts, and realizations of each of the four implications.

6.6.1. Implications to the Quality of EFL Teaching and Learning

Inasmuch as the current research has explored issues on EFL teachers' action research practices following more of post-positivist paradigm, reflective rationality, and pragmatic constructivism; it has immense implications to the quality of EFL teaching and learning. This is because it has addressed important issues worth attending in and for the EFL teachers' classroom practices in particular and for the academic communities within the shared academic world in general.

Whereas the teachers' observed action research knowledge and perceived roles for quality teaching were high, a number of environmental factors (of course stemming from skimpy teacher empowerment and commitment) diminished the teachers' level of practicing it for betterment of themselves and their professional practices. The case, therefore, demands of:

- a. the universities to enhance EFL teachers' empowerment and commitment for full ownership of EFL classroom improvement through action research backed by sustainable support, professional development, and learning. This is a transformative stance whereby the teachers become alive to their classroom practice, alive in the practice, and alive in changing the practice for enhanced quality of EFL teaching and learning.
- b. EFL teachers to take the 'driver's seat to enhance authentic language leaning by soliciting support and basing their teaching on action research rather than waiting for an ideal empowerment to happen, which in practice is waiting for ever. By implication, the teachers need to make language learning authentically possible rather than taking one approach such as CLT, which may have environmental implications, for granted. This needs to be EFL teachers' personal beliefs and values. Their beliefs and values have connections to their commitment to their profession and to others- learners, immediate leadership, the society, employers, academics, and the Government.

- c. both the leadership and EFL teachers to transform tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, among others, through creating knowledge communities, and initiating learning conversations and storytelling which, among others: i) are effective means of institutional learning; ii) build teamwork; iii) help overcome fear of change; iv) help the teachers reflect on their experiences; v) promote the sharing of experience and ideas; and vi) provide time for reflection.

The above three points (a, b, and c) remind me of Day and Townsend's (2009) words citing Zeichner (2003: 318), who in reviewing teacher research programs in the USA has suggested three key conditions or 'working hypotheses' related to their chances of success: a) creating a culture of inquiry that respects teachers' voices; b) collaboration over a sustainable time period in safe and supportive environments; and c) intellectual challenge and stimulation (Day & Townsend, 2009: 185).

The findings, therefore, imply re-strengthening the culture of EFL teachers' empowerment and commitment with a purpose of enhancing the quality of EFL teaching and learning. In Holly's (2009: 275) view, "the reason we do action research is because we want something better". Inherent in this view (from the point of view of the study) is bringing betterment and change to the quality of EFL teaching and learning. Inasmuch as action research is regarded as an approach for change rather than as solely a methodology of inquiry, the change that comes out of it is learning, betterment of the teachers and their practices. Such change and betterment demand openness to the inside-self, to the professional dimension of action research, and to the outsider-environment. This needs to be a necessary condition for EFL teachers' action research whereby situated learning in their classroom and about their classroom becomes a culture of inquiry, change and betterment of the quality of EFL teaching and learning.

6.6.2. Implications to Policy and Practice

The observed levels of the research variables (EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, change, environment, and perceived roles for quality language teaching) give us a mirage of the actual and required policy and practice in the field. In relation to knowledge,

the findings have shown that *reflective rationality* was preferred to *technical rationality*. Equally, there were high perceptive values and pragmatic functions of action research for change and betterment. The case could be a fertile-ground for the teachers to delve in self- and professional development endeavors as these are the routes for betterment of the practitioners and their practices. The teachers' action research tacit knowledge, actual practice and environments, on the other hand, were not satisfactory calling for policy and practice considerations.

Remarkably resonant with the current action research developments world-wide and in Ethiopia, the findings imply the need for national and institution level implementable policies and guidelines that show clear roles and responsibilities of teachers in relation to conducting action research which could also be translated to departmental level and to staff members' job specifications. Particularly, universities need to make in place policies, guidelines, rules, resources, and structures showing clear roles which: a) provide reason and legitimacy for action research, and b) enforce and facilitate coordination, commitment and ownership which are necessary among staff, and between staff and students for a vibrant action research culture to take place.

The envisaged policy and guidelines, among others, should accommodate mechanisms of:

- a. empowering EFL teachers and boosting their commitment, and making action research part of their internal feeling to do new things and/or improve practices and themselves so that they can systematically observe and investigate issues or problems that they confront in their EFL classrooms;
- b. complementing the gain expected of conducting action research with the time and efforts exerted;
- c. shortening the long journey to get fund for action research work;
- d. making action research part and parcel of EFL teaching as learning processes; and
- e. enhancing the congruence between EFL teachers' action research knowledge and their practices.

The envisaged policies and guidelines can be put in practice inasmuch as they exhibit the teachers' empowerment, commitment, and dispositions toward action research. This can be realized by bringing about changes in the teachers' feelings of self-worth to bring betterment to themselves and their practices; rehabilitating their dismayed values, beliefs, definitions of their professional confidence, knowledge, skills and roles; and above all revitalizing and realizing a renewed sense of purpose and ownership of their personal and professional lives.

6.6.3. Implications to the Field of Action Research in EFL Teaching

The findings have far-reaching and immense implications to the field of action research in EFL teaching. Notably, revitalized credibility, visibility, recognition, vigor and acceptance of action research cherish new life in the field of EFL teaching and learning. The findings, therefore, concur with lived theories that are generated from practice, and change through the cycles of action research. By so doing, the findings contribute to professional and personal development of EFL teachers, and to the wider environment of practicing action research and implementing its findings. Whereas the professional and personal dimensions are internal to the universities and the communities in them, the environment is external as it entails the political dimension of action research (see Chapter Three section 3.5). In view of this, the findings are believed to contribute to:

- a. the field of action research in EFL teaching practices, the development of arguments/debates in the area, and the research culture conforming to the popular notion that *universities are ideal places and educators in them are the right people* to take responsibility of investigating their practices for betterment at the frontiers of knowledge and practice;
- b. improve EFL teaching practices at the classroom levels with the capacity of individual teachers and the environmental situations in which they are working and forming coalitions. Consequently, they contribute to the debate about teacher empowerment as a matter of professional sphere of operation, achieving professional autonomy through professional development;

- c. situate CLT to be responsive to the recent developments in the field, and to the context-based and authentic teaching and learning pedagogy whereby research has become part and parcel of the EFL classroom practices;
- d. situate action research as part of a broader agenda of changing language education, changing institution, and changing our society whereby empowerment of EFL teachers could be considered instrumental to enhance commitment and ownership to improve their professional practices within an enabling environment; and
- e. inspire EFL teachers, researchers, students and leaders to use my models (see Figures 1, 2, 6, 8, 9, and 12-15) and the findings by (may be) replicating or feeding them into theirs, or building on them, or developing and generalizing from them or reconstructing them in new form.

The case entails EFL teachers' leading roles to enhance action research practices in their respective classrooms. This is because "[a]ction research does not automatically emerge as a logical choice of methodology: it needs people who advocate for its use, who might know something about its methodologies, and who can make use of connection to where its potential can be embodied in lived projects" (Brennan, 2009: 202). Overall, each EFL teacher's leading roles to own and conduct action research have reciprocal implication to advance the practices in EFL teaching and vice versa.

6.6.4. Implications to Scope of Applicability

Change resulting from ... inquiry is implemented in a political environment in which there will be tensions between policy makers, practitioners, and the schools within which they work. (Day & Townsend, 2009: 184)

The results of the study are socially, politically, professionally, and culturally embedded. The results of action research can be extended "beyond its scope to other settings and people" through different mechanisms, such as through formally presenting the results at national conferences or publishing the study in journals (Mertler, 2009: 24). In line with this thought, the results of this study can be put in libraries and on web, can be published and can also be abridged and given to all the DFLLs in the three universities from where

the data were collected (as per the promise in the preliminary part of the teachers' questionnaire, Appendix 1). Consequently, the results would get dissemination to other settings.

Equally, the three dimensions of action research (see Chapter Three section 3.5.) have been reflected in the findings and the discussions made so far. The observed EFL teachers' action research knowledge, practice, and change represent personal and professional dimensions. Equally, environmental dimension of action research was manifested comprising the observed factors and stakeholders' perceptions of the role of action research for quality language teaching. Inherent in the first two dimensions is, therefore, the teachers' notion of truth and beliefs, of course, underpinned by the observed environments. The third dimension deals with the forces that influence the internal dimensions negatively or positively. The environments are constituents of personal and institutional values, as well as internally and externally regulatory factors of EFL teachers' level of action research practice and knowledge to bring about change in their personal and professional contexts and enhance the quality of their practices and lives. Equally, the teachers' personal and professional contexts and identities go beyond their specific classrooms considering other settings with similar purposes, and also the powers that enhance or inhibit the required action research knowledge, practice, and change.

In support of the above arguments, Noffke (2009: 19) indicates, "... the capacity of those outside the academy to come to understand practices, and their contexts, and to direct those understandings toward actions that will improve" personal and professional development need to be considered in line with the newly generated action research knowledge. The same source takes the case further, "...rather than work solely within the academic norms of identifying, owning, and marketing the ideas of action research, we need to be constantly looking for our 'traveling companions', our allies, our comrades with whom we can form coalitions around our shared interests" (Ibid, P. 20). Equally, the current study is a research- on- action research being underpinned more by the post-positivist paradigm, which gives leeway to generalize from one setting to another.

Inherent in the above viewpoints is the fact that EFL teachers in all the universities and other stakeholders in and outside the country have common and shared interests, that is, *quality language teaching*. By implication, the outcomes of the research could be seen in the wider contexts. They require plurality or the presence of others beyond the actually studied environments. This is because the outcomes deal with bringing some sort of change, which demands much effort and many talents within the local, national or global developments and assumptions shaped by internal and external politics. Particularly in today's information age, competitive and knowledge-dependent world of economic, social and political panorama; the findings need to be seen within the wider context of applicability.

Today's changing, uncertain, uncontrollable, and unpredictable world of the EFL classrooms appear to affect teaching and teacher decisions: planning, presentation, evaluation and follow up of learning. This is because the work of EFL teachers as professionals is full of decision making. The case calls for situating the specific context of action research findings (knowledge) within the wider environmental conditions including valuing the effect of internationalization. Today teaching itself is globalized in many of its forms and knowledge has become a commodity. The process of EFL teaching knowledge and skills production, therefore, has to be customized to the world trend if we want to thrive in the complex and pluralistic world. This is because; the world is becoming a village of competition whereby EFL teaching in particular and universities in general are affected by the external as well as internal environments (Firdissa, 2009a: 24-25).

Our age, therefore, demands taking care of the external environments within which EFL teachers work and the different political, economic, social, and cultural contexts that shape their practices. This in turn calls for juxtaposing the specificity of the findings within the wider settings in general and the universities in the country in particular. The last argument aligns with the current practices of sharing experiences and mobilizing resources from one university to another at least in Ethiopian context. In the present context of Ethiopian HEIs, the three universities in general, and mainly AAU in particular, are entrusted with the task of producing graduates of very high quality for the country in general and for the emerging tertiary education in particular. The situation demands mobilizing resources and

exchanging experiences by constructing bridges and by demolishing boundaries and barriers.

6.7. Finale

From the explorations of EFL teachers' action research practices following the lines of thought set out within the Conceptual Framework (Chapter One section 1.8), it has been learnt that teachers' professional knowledge is potentially dynamic and endless, particularly in these days of unpredictable world. Their practices and learning, therefore, should forever be changing to be responsive to internal and external environmental milieus. Such a change is an inbuilt value and role of action research for the betterment of the practitioners and their practices.

Giving more space to the qualitative approach and following post-positivist paradigm mainly during the main study have enabled me to derive premeditated meaning through investigating EFL teachers' perceptive beliefs, values, and experiences by way of gathering, analyzing and interpreting data on their action research knowledge, practice, change, environment, and action research perceived role for quality EFL teaching. The meanings are both factual and conceptual leading to derive the implications (set in Chapter Six, Section 6.6). The implications complement and supplement one another. The first implication: *to the quality of EFL teaching and learning is* a central element within the array. Its actualization demands clarity in policy and transparency in practice. Implied within the issue of policy and practice are implications to *action research in TEFL* and to *scope of applicability*. Both of these have direct and indirect repercussions to the quality of EFL teaching and learning in Ethiopian universities. Equally, where clear policies on action research are made in place and duly practiced in EFL classrooms, concomitant professional and personal growths, changes and improvements would be evidenced in life and in the world of work. These changes and improvements are situated within the wider environment of the EFL teaching learning and the resultant outcomes within and outside Ethiopian universities. The classroom initiated changes, therefore, are applied in the environment- physical, social, political, and cultural.

Actualization of the four implications is, therefore, believed to provide systems, structures, and cultures of situating action research within the EFL classrooms of Ethiopian universities. This in turn can support the development of thinking and practice of enhancing EFL teachers' empowerment and commitment to sustain the quality of their professional practices. Equally, the implications and the findings remain to be shaped by our (EFL professionals') unending advancement of ontological and epistemological perspectives, and informed by the demands of a specific time and place. The nature, essence and knowledge of the environment and the specific time and place we live- and work- in have normative and regulatory powers on the ways the findings and the implications ought to be envisioned and practiced.

In the same vein, by no means the findings claim to situate action research as a panacea for all deficits. This is because the current study is too small (a slice of a cake) in scale to make a significant enough effect to carve the persistent challenges impinging on the quality of teaching and learning in our country today. Specifically, many of the quality concerns in EFL teaching may have wider coverage and longer-term implications than this study. They may, therefore, demand concerted and much effort of all parties involved in- and affected by- the quality of EFL teaching and learning in the universities in the country.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. EFL Instructors' Questionnaire

Addis Ababa University

Institute of Language Studies, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature

Questionnaire: To be filled by Instructors of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Universities

Purpose: The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information on *Action Research Practices in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Ethiopian Universities*. Since the success of the study entirely depends on your valuable response, you are kindly requested to complete the questionnaire.

Your time investment will be approximately 20 minutes. All the information to be obtained from you will be treated with complete confidentiality and will be used only for the research purpose. Also note that the study is expected to contribute to our common goal-quality language teaching. A summary report of the findings, therefore, will be given to your Department.

Thank you for your valuable time and cooperation!

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DIRECTION

- Please answer each question by circling your choice(s) from the alternatives and by writing when required.
- Please do not write your name on any page of the questionnaire.

A. PERSONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION

- Sex: 1) Male 2) Female**
- Your University: 1) Addis Ababa 2) Bahirdar 3) Haramaya
- Your teaching load per week in hours: 1) under 6 2) 6-12 3) 13-19 4) above 19
- Your experience in teaching English at HEIs: 1) under 5 2) 5-10 3) 11-16 4) above 16.
- Your current responsibility/position (if any) other than teaching:
 - Faculty/Institute Dean 3. Department Head
 - Associate/Vice Dean 4. Others (specify if any) _____
 - No other than teaching
- Your qualification:
 - Bachelors degree 3. Doctorate degree
 - Masters degree 4. Others (specify if any) _____
- Your current rank:
 - Professor 4. Lecturer
 - Associate professor 5. Assistant lecturer/Graduate Assistant
 - Assistant professor 6. Others (specify if any) _____

B. EFL TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE OF AND /OR ABOUT ACTION RESEARCH

- Have you attended Higher Diploma Program (HDP)?
 - Yes 2. No 3. Others (if any) _____ ; 4. Attending
- How do you rate your theoretical knowledge about action research?
 - Very low 2. Low 3. Undecided 4. High 5. Very High
- How do you rate your skill in conducting action research?
 - Very low 2. Low 3. Undecided 4. High 5. Very High

11. If you have had any training to do action research, please list the main types of the training(s) and durations for each.

Titles/Types (names) of the training(s)		Duration
11.1.		
11.2.		
11.3.		

DIRECTION II. Please circle "3" for Agree (A), or "2" for somewhat agree (SW), or "1" for Disagree (DA), or "0" for do not know (DK) against your choice for each statement.

N o	Statements about action research	A	SW	DA	DK
12	Action research is learning by doing	3	2	1	0
13	Action research is not responsive to specific EFL classroom situations	3	2	1	0
14	Action research deals with immediate application rather than the development of theory	3	2	1	0
15	EFL classroom practical problems demand specific solutions	3	2	1	0
The solutions to EFL classroom practical problems can be developed:					
16	only inside the context in which the problem arises	3	2	1	0
17	outside the practical situations (in research or administrative offices)	3	2	1	0
The choice of the methods for action research work should be:					
18	guided by scientific considerations in a restricted sense	3	2	1	0
19	a choice about the <i>empowerment</i> of participants/teacher researchers	3	2	1	0

DIRECTION III. To what extent do the following action types characterize your classroom practices?
[5=Very high (Vh); 4= High (H); 3 = Medium (M); 2=Low (L); 1= Very low (Vl)]

No	Classroom action types	Vh	H	M	L	Vl
20	Your thinking and action take place together skillfully without being planned and prepared in advance	5	4	3	2	1
21	You are frequently unaware of the sources of your practical knowledge or how it was learnt	5	4	3	2	1
22	Rather than depending on established theory, you try to construct a new theory of the unique case of your EFL classroom practice	5	4	3	2	1
23	Rather than keeping means and ends separate, you define them interactively as you frame a problematic situation	5	4	3	2	1
24	You formulate knowledge explicitly and verbally to reflect on it	5	4	3	2	1
25	You can invite colleagues and clients for critical discussion on your professional knowledge and/or action.	5	4	3	2	1

C. EFL TEACHERS' ACTION RESEARCH PRACTICES

26. To what extent are your EFL classroom actions informed by your action research findings? 1. Very little 2. Little 3. Undecided 4. Greatly 5. Very Greatly
27. How do you rate the level of your actual practice of action research?
1. Never practiced 2. Little 3. Undecided 4. Great 5. Very great
28. Why do you think this is the case (for your answer to question number 27)?

29. If you do not do action research, as it ought to be, please list the main factors that hindered you/EFL instructors to do so and suggest the likely solutions.

No	Hindering factors to do action research	Suggestions for solution
29.1		
29.2		
29.3		
29.4		
29.5		

DIRECTION V. How often do you practice the following tasks? Indicate your choices by circling "1" for Never (N), "2" for Sometimes (Sti), and "3" for frequently (Fre).

No	You:	N	Sti	Fre
30	research your classroom practices to bring improvement to student learning	1	2	3
31	reexamine taken-for-granted EFL teaching approaches	1	2	3
32	connect your teaching practice to research	1	2	3
33	assess the effectiveness of your modules/teaching materials	1	2	3
34	examine your success/failure in implementing CLT*	1	2	3
35	identify learners' communicative needs and work for appropriate actions	1	2	3
36	Strive to bring improvement to your practices in direction of your own values	1	2	3

D. EFL INSTRUCTORS' LEVEL OF CHANGE/IMPROVEMENT IN LIGHT OF NEW KNOWLEDGE GAINED FROM THEIR ACTION RESEARCH [ONLY BY THOSE WHO HAVE PRACTICED ACTION RESEARCH]

DIRECTION VI. Please circle "5" for Very greatly (Vg), "4" for Greatly (G), "3" for Medium (M), "2" for Little (L), "1" for Very little (Vl) against your choices for each statement.

No	Your action research and the knowledge gained from it helped you and your colleagues to:	Vg	G	M	L	Vl
37	Learn and understand your EFL classroom practices.	5	4	3	2	1
38	Improve your EFL classroom practices.	5	4	3	2	1
39	Become more efficient in helping learners to make effective use of the English language for academic purposes.	5	4	3	2	1
40	inform your EFL classroom practices with authentic actions.	5	4	3	2	1
41	tailor your teaching to the needs of your learners.	5	4	3	2	1
42	become critical of your own implicit theories related to EFL.	5	4	3	2	1
43	make your personal epistemologies of your own classroom practices public.	5	4	3	2	1
44	shape and guide what you want/decide to do in your classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
45	take actions that lead to a resolution of practical problems in your classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
46	evaluate your action and its consequences against the insights or new perspectives you have developed.	5	4	3	2	1
47	adapt communicative language teaching to your classroom realities.	5	4	3	2	1
48	improve the quality of EFL classroom practices.	5	4	3	2	1

E. MOTIVATING AND/OR DE-MOTIVATING ENVIRONMENTS FOR EFL TEACHERS TO DO ACTION RESEARCH

49. How do you rate the environmental situations for you/EFL teachers to practice action research at your University?

1. Very discouraging 2. Discouraging 3. Neutral 4. Encouraging 5. Very encouraging

50. To what extent are you empowered to conduct action research to improve your EFL classroom practices?

1. Very little 2. Little 3. Neutral 4. Greatly 5. Very greatly

DIRECTION VII. For each statement, circle the number that indicates your level of agreement or disagreement [5=Strongly Agree (SA); 4=Agree (A); 3=Indifferent (I); 2=Disagree (D); 1=Strongly Disagree (SD)]

No	The following motivating situations are available to EFL teachers.	SA	A	I	D	SD
51	Clear policy that formally establishes action research as an integral part of EFL instructors' activities.	5	4	3	2	1
52	Motivating environment to initiate curricula review or change from within the university and EFL staffs	5	4	3	2	1
53	Policies/guidelines showing roles and responsibilities of EFL teachers to do action research	5	4	3	2	1
54	You/EFL staff are made free from routine works to do action research	5	4	3	2	1
55	Direct financial reward for undertaking action research	5	4	3	2	1
56	Promotion as reward for undertaking action research	5	4	3	2	1

* CLT=Communicative language Teaching

DIRECTION VIII. Rate the degree of the influences that the following constraints put on you/EFL teachers to do action research by circling "1" for Small (S), "2" for Medium (M), "3" for Great (G).

No	Constrains/ obstacles to do action research	S	M	G
57	Time constraints			
58	Large class size			
59	Additional work load	1	2	3
60	Lack of resources	1	2	3
61	Viewing action research as threat to accepted norms and convention	1	2	3
62	Beliefs in the traditional roles of lecturers-to impart knowledge	1	2	3
63	Limited support for publicizing the research findings	1	2	3
64	Anxiety about revealing the limitations of your teaching practices	1	2	3
65	Mandated and centralized curricula contents	1	2	3
66	The contexts in which you work are not conducive to do action research	1	2	3
67	Lack of clear roles/responsibilities for you/EFL teachers to do action research	1	2	3
68	Nominal place is given to action research in comparison to other forms of research approaches (e.g. pure or basic research)	1	2	3
69	EFL teachers' low commitment	1	2	3

F. EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH ACTION RESEARCH CAN SUSTAIN THE QUALITY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

70. From your point of view, to what extent can action research make a difference in enhancing the quality of language teaching?

1. Very little 2. Little 3. Undecided. 4. Greatly 5. Very greatly

71. Why do you think this is the case (for your answer to question number 70)?

DIRECTION IX. Please circle your ratings of the following contributions of action research in sustaining quality in EFL classrooms of Ethiopian universities [5 = Very high (Vh), 4 = High(H), 3= Medium (M), 2 = Low(L), 1= Very low(VI)]

No	Action research helps EFL teachers:	Vh	H	M	L	VI
72	sustain the quality of teaching and learning EFL	5	4	3	2	1
73	broaden their professional knowledge base	5	4	3	2	1
74	advance practices for sustaining quality in EFL classrooms	5	4	3	2	1
75	get feedback as to the success or failure of what they are doing	5	4	3	2	1
76	tailor teaching to their specific learners and settings	5	4	3	2	1
77	capture insights about the gap between curricula/modules specifications or ideals and what actually happens in EFL classroom practices	5	4	3	2	1
78	contribute to the process of making changes to EFL classroom practices	5	4	3	2	1
79	develop creative ways of overcoming EFL classroom constraints	5	4	3	2	1
80	Enhance reciprocal communication with the colleagues to improve EFL	5	4	3	2	1
81	adopt their EFL teaching practices in line with their classroom contexts	5	4	3	2	1

82. If there is anything (additional) that you would like to state in relation to:

82.1 EFL teachers' (including yours) action research knowledge,

82.2. EFL teachers' (your) action research actual practice,

82.3. EFL teachers' (your) changing/improving in the light of the new knowledge gained from your action research,

82.4. Motivating and/or de-motivating environments to do action research,

82.5. EFL teachers' (your) perception of the extent to which action research can enhance quality language teaching in Ethiopian HEIs.

Thank you for your time and cooperation!

Appendix 2. Students' Questionnaire

Addis Ababa University
Institute of Language Studies, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature

Questionnaire: To be filled by Students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at universities

Purpose: The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information on *Action Research Practices in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Ethiopian Universities*. Since the success of the study entirely depends on your valuable response, you are kindly requested to complete the questionnaire.

Your time investment will be approximately 10 minutes. All the information to be obtained from you through this questionnaire will be treated with complete confidentiality and will be used only for the research purpose.

Thank you for your valuable time and cooperation!

Firdissa Jebessa, PhD Student, DFLL, ILS, AAU; Tel: 0911546847, Email: firdisa@gmail.com

I. DIRECTION I.

- Please answer each question by circling your choice(s) from the alternatives and by writing when required.
- Please do not write your name on any page of the questionnaire.

A. PERSONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION

- Sex: 1) Male 2) Female
- Your university: 1) Addis Ababa 2) BahirDar 3) Haramaya
- Which of the following indicates your current study program or level?
1. Bachelors degree 2. Masters degree 3. PhD
- Your year of study: 1) 1st 2) 2nd 3) 3rd 4) 4th 5) Other(s) _____

B. EFL TEACHERS' ACTION RESEARCH PRACTICES

- To what extent are your EFL teachers' classroom actions informed by action research findings?
1. Very little 2. Little 3. Undecided 4. Greatly 5. Very Greatly
- How do you rate the level of your EFL teachers' action research actual practice?
1. Never practiced 2. Little 3. Undecided 4. Great 5. Very great

DIRECTION II. How often do your EFL teachers practice the following tasks? Indicate your choices by circling "1" for **Never (N)**, "2" for **Sometimes (Sti)**, and "3" for **frequently (Fre)**.

No	Your EFL Teachers:	N	Sti	Fre
7	research their classroom practices to bring improvement to student learning	1	2	3
8	reexamine taken-for-granted EFL teaching approaches	1	2	3
9	connect their teaching practice to research	1	2	3
10	assess the effectiveness of their modules/teaching materials	1	2	3
11	examine their success/failure in implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach	1	2	3
12	identify learners' communicative needs and work for appropriate actions	1	2	3
13	Strive to bring improvement to their practices in direction of their own values	1	2	3

F. LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH ACTION RESEARCH CAN SUSTAIN THE QUALITY OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION

14. From your point of view, to what extent can action research make a difference in enhancing the quality of language teaching?

1. Very little 2. Little 3. Undecided. 4. Greatly 5. Very greatly

15. Why do you think this is the case (for your answer to question number 14)?

DIRECTION III. Please circle your ratings of the following contributions of action research in making a difference in sustaining quality in EFL classrooms of Ethiopian Universities [**5 = Very High (Vh)**, **4 = High(H)**, **3= Medium (M)**, **2 = Low(L)**, **1= Very Low(Vl)**]

No	Action research helps:	Vh	H	M	L	Vl
16	sustain the quality of teaching and learning EFL	5	4	3	2	1
17	broaden the knowledge base of EFL professionals	5	4	3	2	1
18	advance practices for sustaining quality in EFL classrooms	5	4	3	2	1
19	EFL teachers get feedback as to the success or failure of what they are doing	5	4	3	2	1
20	EFL teachers tailor teaching and learning to their specific learners and settings	5	4	3	2	1
21	capture insights about the gap between curricula/modules specifications or ideals and what actually happens in EFL classroom practice	5	4	3	2	1
22	contribute to the process of making changes to EFL classroom practices	5	4	3	2	1
23	develop creative ways of overcoming EFL classroom constraints	5	4	3	2	1
24	Enhance reciprocal communication with the colleagues to improve EFL	5	4	3	2	1
25	En-culture EFL teaching practices in line with classroom context	5	4	3	2	1

26. If there is anything (additional) that you would like to state in relation to action research practices by your EFL instructors and your perceptions of the roles of action research for quality EFL teaching

The End!!

Purpose: To collect information for a research entitled: Action research Practices in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Ethiopian Public Universities: Implications for Quality Language Teaching. All the information solicited from you will be treated with complete confidentiality and shall be used solely for the research purpose.

1. How do you evaluate:
 - 1.1. EFL teachers' theoretical knowledge of action research?
 - 1.2. EFL teachers' practical skills and competence in conducting action research?
2. To what extent do EFL teachers practice action research? Why?
3. If you think that EFL teachers who practiced action research are changing/improving:
 - 3.1. their practices in the light of the new knowledge gained from the research, in what ways/what are the improvements/changes observed?
 - 3.2. themselves, in what ways/what are the improvements/changes observed?
4. What (de)motivating environments are there for EFL teachers to be engaged in researching their own practices?
- 4.1. If there are policies and /or guidelines that show clear roles and responsibilities for EFL teachers to do action research, please mention them.
- 4.2. If not, why?
- 4.3. To what extent does the University empower and support EFL teachers to investigate their practices for improvement/change? Why?
5. If EFL teachers at the University are not doing action research as it ought to be, why do you think this is the case?
6. If there is anything (additional) that you would like to state.

Appendix 4. Interview Guide Questions presented to some MoE Officials

1. Sex___; B. Post_____
2. What (de)motivating environments are there for EFL teachers of Ethiopian Universities to do action research?
 - Motivating environments...
 - De motivating environments...
- 2.1. If there are policies and /or guidelines that show clear roles and responsibilities for EFL teachers to do action research, please mention them.
- 2.2. If no, why?
- 2.3. To what extent do the universities in the country empower and support EFL teachers to investigate their practices for improvement/change? How often? Why?
3. If EFL teachers in Ethiopian Universities are not doing action research as it ought to be, why do you think this is the case?
4. Do you believe that action research can:

- 4.1. create/enhance the quality of language teaching? How?
- 4.2. sustain the quality of language teaching? How?
5. If there is anything (additional) that you would like to state in relation to:
 - 5.1. EFL teachers' action research knowledge,
 - 5.2. EFL teachers' action research actual practice,
 - 5.3. EFL teachers' changing/improving in the light of the new knowledge gained from their action research,
 - 5.4. Motivating and/or de-motivating environments to do action research,
 - 5.5. Your perception of the extent to which action research can enhance quality language teaching in Ethiopian universities.
5. General comments (if any).

Thank you for your valuable time and cooperation!!

Appendix 5. Interview Guide Questions Presented to some Subjects at Universities

Purpose: To collect information for a research entitled: *Action research Practices in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Ethiopian Public Universities: Implications for Quality Language Teaching*. All the information solicited from you will be treated with complete confidentiality, and shall be used solely for the research purpose.

Thank you for your valuable time and cooperation in advance!

A. Personal Data

1. Sex: ____; 2. Faculty /Institute _____; 3. Your Department _____
4. Your experience in teaching at HEIs in years: 1) under 5, 2) 5-10, 3) 11-16, 4) above 16
5. Your qualification _____; 6. Your current rank _____

B. Main Questions

6. How do you evaluate:
 - 6.1. EFL teachers' theoretical knowledge of action research?
 - 6.2. EFL teachers' practical skills and competence in conducting action research?
7. To what extent do EFL teachers practice action research? Why?
8. If you think that EFL teachers who practiced action research are changing/improving:
 - 8.1. their practices in the light of the new knowledge gained from the research, in what ways/what are the improvements/changes observed?
 - 8.2. themselves, in what ways/what are the improvements/changes observed?
9. What (de)motivating environments are there for EFL teachers to be engaged in researching their own practices?
10. If there are policies and /or guidelines that show clear roles and responsibilities for EFL teachers to do action research, please mention them.
 - 10.1. If not, why?
 - 10.2. To what extent does the University empower and support EFL teachers to investigate their practices for improvement/change? Why?
11. Do you believe that action research can:
 - 6.1. create/enhance the quality of language teaching? How?
 - 6.2. sustain the quality of language teaching? How?
12. If EFL teachers at the University are not doing action research as it ought to be, why?
13. If there is anything (additional) that you would like to state in relation to:
 - 13.1. EFL teachers' (including your) action research knowledge,
 - 13.2. EFL teachers' action research actual practice,
 - 13.3. EFL teachers' (your) (practices) changing/improving in the light of the new knowledge gained from (your) action research,

- 13.4. Motivating and/or de-motivating environments to do action research,
 13.5. EFL teachers' (your) perceptions of the extent to which action research can enhance quality language teaching in Ethiopian universities.
14. If there is anything (additional) that you would like to state.
 Thank you again!!

Appendix 6. Preliminary Information of the Teacher Respondents

No	Variable	Attribute	No	%
1	Sex	M	44	77.2
		F	11	19.3
		No response	2	3.5
		Total	57	100.0
2	University	AAU	30	52.6
		BDU	18	31.6
		HARU	9	15.8
		Total	57	100.0
3	Load	Under 6	2	3.5
		6-12	28	49.1
		13-19	22	38.6
		Above 19	3	5.3
		Missing	2	3.5
		Total	57	100.0
4	Experience	Under 5	17	29.8
		5-10	12	21.1
		11-16	10	17.5
		Above 16	13	22.8
		No response	5	8.8
		Total	57	100.0
5	Responsibility	Faculty/Institute Dean	2	3.5
		Associate dean	2	3.5
		Department head	3	5.3
		No other than teaching	18	31.6
		Others	19	33.3
		No response	13	22.8
		Total	57	100.0
6	Qualification	Bachelors degree	3	5.3
		Masters degree	35	61.4
		Doctorate degree	14	24.6
		Others	4	7.0
		No response	1	1.8
		Total	57	100.0
7	Rank	Professor	1	1.8
		Associate professor	4	7.0
		Assistant professor	16	28.1
		Lecturer	31	54.4
		Assistant lecturer/Graduate assistant	3	5.3
		Others	2	3.5
		Total	57	100.0
8	HDP attendance	Attended	36	63.2
		Not attended	15	26.3
		Attending	1	1.8
		Others	5	8.8
		Total	57	100.0

Appendix 7. Preliminary Information of the Student Respondents

No	Variable	Attribute	No	%
1	Sex	M	173	80.8
		F	38	17.8
		No response	3	1.4
		Total	214	100.0
2	University	AAU	118	55.1
		BDU	66	30.8
		HARU	30	14.0
		Total	214	100.0
3	Study program	Bachelors degree	180	84.1
		Masters degree	28	13.1
		PhD	5	2.3
		No response	1	.5
		Total	214	100.0
4	year of study	1st	26	12.1
		2nd	2	.9
		3 rd	88	41.1
		4 th	93	43.5
		Others	1	.5
		No response	4	1.9
		Total	214	100.0

Appendix 8. Information on Interviewees and Discussants

University/Instituion	Interviewees			Discussants		
	Code	sex	No.	Code	Invited/Volunteered	Participated
BDU	IBDU	M	2	FBDU	10	7
AAU	IAAU	M	2	FHarU	8	6
HARU	IHarU	M	2	FAAU	9	7
MoE	IMoE	M	2	-	-	-
Total			8		27	20

Appendix 9. List of Universities in Ethiopia

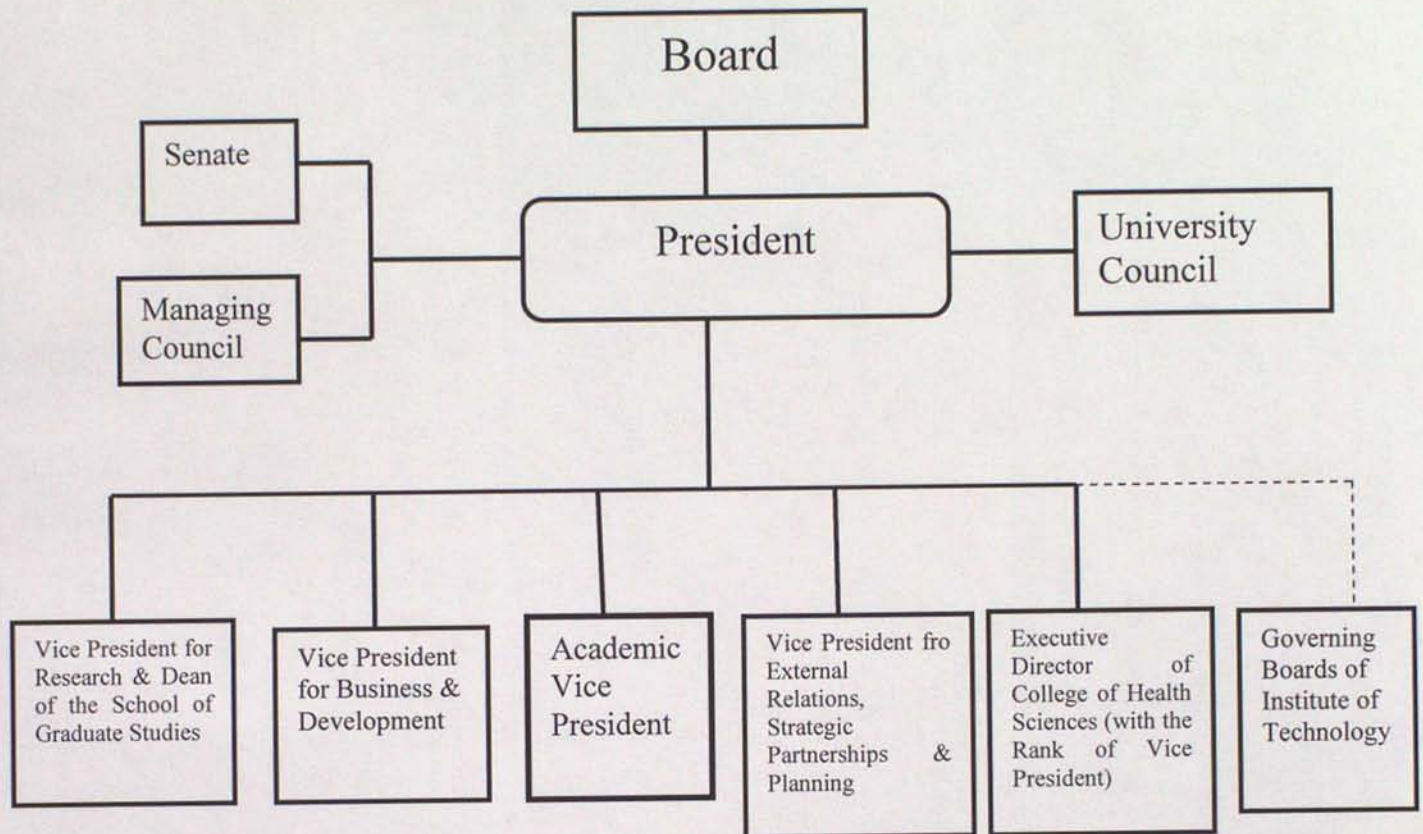
No	University	No	University
1.	Addis Ababa University	12.	Debreberhan University
2.	Bahir Dar University	13.	Debremarkos University
3.	Haramaya University	14.	Diredawa University
4.	Jimma University	15.	Jijjiga University
5.	Hawassa University	16.	Madda Walabu University
6.	Arba Minch University	17.	Mizan University
7.	Mekelle University	18.	Semera University
8.	Gondar University	19.	Soddo University
9.	Adama University	20.	Wellelega University
10.	Ambo University	21.	Wollo University
11.	Axum University	22.	Dilla University

Appendix 10. Curricular Issues of the Traditional Education in Ethiopia

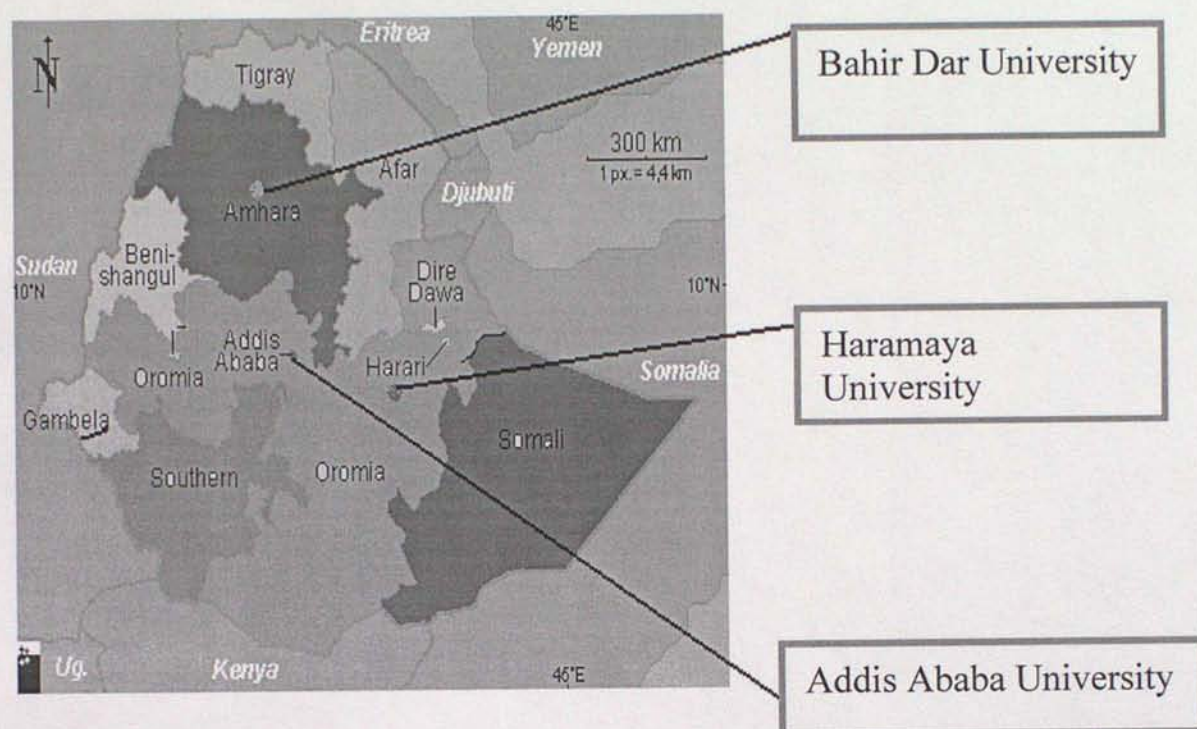
Institution	Objectives & contents	School structures			
		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
The Orthodox church		The Fedel/ Nebab Bet	The Zema Bet	The Kene Bet	The Metshaf Bet
	Objectives	To enable learners master the Ge'ez/Amharic letters and read religious texts which prepare them to serve the Church as Daecons	To produce persons who are well-versed and specialized in the Church music and give service to the Church and its followers	To prepare persons who are well-versed and specialized in Kene and serve the Church	To produce highly educated religious persons who can teach at higher religious levels and lead the Orthodox Church
	Contents	The Ge'ez/Amharic Alphabets, letters/syllabary; the Epistles of Saint John; Psalm of David; moral instructions and prayers	Religious songs, the arts of dancing, and drum-beating	Ge'ez vocabulary & Grammar, Kene composition, verse, and critics	Old Testament, New testament, Church dogma, philosophy, and Theology
The Muslim Education		The Mejilis/Tehaji/Quran	The Fiqh school	The Nahwi school	The Quran Tafsir school
	Objectives	To enable learners master the Arabic and reading the Quran	To introduce/familiarize the learners with basic principles of the Muslim Religion	To prepare persons who are specialized in Arabic vocabulary, grammar, and structure and serve the Mosque/followers	To prepare persons who are highly educated and who can preach the Muslim religion on the basis of the Quran
	Contents	Master/recitation of the Arabic Letters, Luh, Quran	Reading and interpretation of the Quran-belief in Allah, the Angels, Prayers, going to Mecca Medina, Alms to the poor	Arabic Vocabulary, grammar, and structure	Translations, criticism, mastery of the Allah Alkarim

Source: Firdissa (2001: 5)

Appendix 11. AAU Organizational Chart



Appendix 12. Location of the Country and the Universities from where data for the main study collected



Copyright: FOTW Ethiopia map by *António Martins* and boundaries' data by *Jarig Bakker*.
(www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/et.html - 8k)

Appendix 13. Descriptive Statistics of the validation of the Pilot study

Criteria	N	No of Items	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Democratic Validity	5	4	10.00	15.00	3.25	0.47
Processes Validity	5	4	14.00	20.00	4.35	0.60
Outcome Validity	5	5	19.00	24.00	4.24	0.43
Catalytic Validity	5	3	10.00	15.00	4.40	0.68
Dialogic Validity	5	4	16.00	20.00	4.55	0.45

The questions that generated the data were rated on a scale of 1-5, where 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = uncertain, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree. The Table shows that the ratings for all the criteria fall within the range of 'agree' and 'strongly agree'.

Appendix 14. Qualitative Results of the Pilot study Validation

Each member of the validation participants were given a code ranging from C₁ to C₅ (C₁= case 1; C₂ = case 2; C₃= = case 3; C₄ = Case 4; and C₅ = case 5). The wordings and expressions of each of the group members to the questions (on each of the basic research questions) have been maintained for the sake of avoiding favoritism and subjective interpretations.

1. EFL teachers' Action research knowledge: In relation to EFL teachers' action research knowledge, the following are the direct quotes from the responses by the group members.

C₁. I feel that EFL teachers could enhance their action research knowledge by participating in HDP, seminars, and workshops related to action research. Personally, I myself greatly benefited from the HDP that I took about two years ago.

C₂. HDP is one main gate for many EFL teachers to get ideas about action research.

C₃. Make classroom observations in different EFL classes.

C₄. Teachers who have training on HDP might be more appropriate sources in this case. I think you should include the staffs of DELE, College of Education who are actually involved in conducting action research as a course; 99% of the staff members have got training on HDP.

2. EFL teachers' Action Research Actual Practice: Pertaining to EFL teachers' action research actual practice, the following are the direct wordings from the responses by the group members.

C₁. It is obvious that in different universities and colleges instructors are busy because of the workload they have. Thus, it is unlikely that they regularly conduct action research in order to improve the teaching learning process.

C₂. Would it be offending if you ask EFL teachers who claimed to have done action research to give you access to their finished or work in progress?

C₄. It could also be a good input to your study if you find some completed action research works so that you could see their practice and the magnitude or the intensity of their works.

C₅. Doing action research is not that much feasible.

3. EFL Teachers' (practices) Change due to their Action Research: With regard to the EFL teachers' (practices) change/improvement in the light of the new knowledge gained from their action research, the following have been generated from the group.

C₁. I think, to some extent the knowledge gained from action research could improve EFL instructors.

C₂. May be observing classes by teachers who have done action research can give you evidence of good practice which can somehow be due to their research experience.

C₃. I think it is important to check what improvements or changes are shown in the actual classes by asking students.

C₄. The data you collected for the pilot study give clear indication of the likely response you might expect from EFL practitioners.

C₅. Yes, doing action research results in improvement.

4. Motivating and/or De-motivating Environments for EFL Teachers to do Action Research: The following are the direct wordings from the group members on motivating and/or de-motivating environments for EFL teachers to do action research.

C₁. Environment is one major factor that affects [EFL teachers] to conduct action research in different colleges and universities. So, serious attention should be given to it.

*C₂. (i) **Motivating-** a) involving in the HDP could be a motivating factor; b) supervising students' action research might also have the potential to initiate people.*

*(ii) **De-motivating-** absence of incentives associated with improved classroom practices.*

C₃. Use your own experience and try to interview some of your colleagues.

C₄. The materials as well as finance resources allocated for action research purpose are negligible.

C₅. Condition of life, salary is not enough, lack of incentives and moral support suppress teachers' commitment.

5. EFL Teachers' Perception of the Role of Action Research for Quality: The following are the direct wordings from the validation group members pertaining to EFL teachers' perceptions of the extent to which action research could enhance the quality of language teaching in Ethiopian universities.

C₁. I can strongly support the issue that action research can enhance the quality of language teaching in Ethiopian universities and colleges.

C₂. I strongly believe action research can enhance, but given the constraints such as what have been discussed in this work, many teachers (including me) do not really do action research.

C₃. Truly it helps to change the quality of language teaching. However, the social, political, cultural and other factors like economic factors affect the ongoing situation. As a result, everything will be on and off.

C₅. It obviously does if the environment and commitment is there.

6. General comments by the Validating Group: The final question demanded the group members to give whatever general comments deemed relevant to the study. Accordingly, all except one (case 3) filled in the questions as presented hereunder.

C₁. I believe that this study is relevant and timely to our country's context. The information gained from the study could be of great help for all stakeholders mentioned in this study.

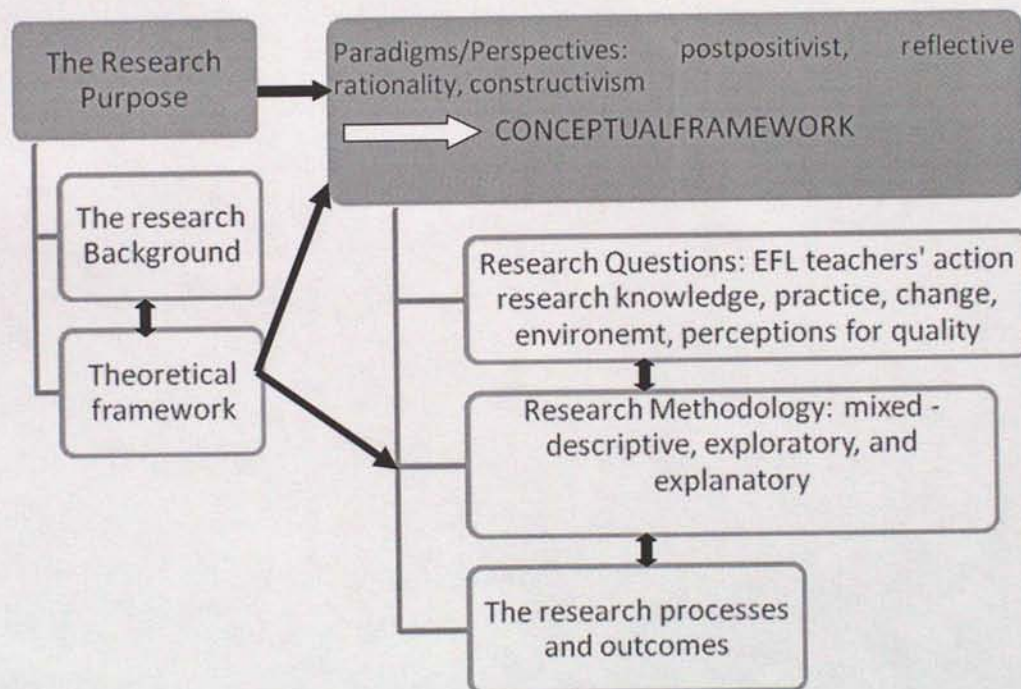
C₂. a) If there is any way you can plan to access the output of the teachers who claim to have done action research. b) How about observing classes to see the data against the opinions of teachers about their classroom practices. (For example classroom data may give you the opportunity to see recurrent problems that need a solution at the classroom level and the teacher's strategies to cope up with such problems).

C₄. In general, the study is on the right track and I expect you would come up with profound output for teacher education in Ethiopia.

C₅. 1) Your basic research question should serve as an umbrella for those 5 specific research questions - Factors that account for the congruence or lack of it regarding EFL teachers.

C₅. 2) The research setting AAU, BDU, HarU,... I have a doubt if every thing that happens in one classroom of the institutions happens exactly under the same condition and therefore the findings can be generalized. As to me I prefer taking one natural setting, preferably AAU.

Appendix 15. Simplistic version of the Conceptual Framework



Appendix 16. Pilot Result accepted for Australian Conference, 26-28 October 2008



2008
AUSTRALIAN LEARNING
COMMUNITIES NETWORK
CONFERENCE
26-28 OCTOBER 2008

Conference Presentations and Workshops Tuesday 28 October 2008 Afternoon Sessions

Workshop 3 1:30pm – 3:00pm, Hyatt Regency Ballroom

Firdissa Jebessa Aga
Lecturer and Researcher, Addis Ababa University

Action Research Practices and Prospects in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Two Ethiopian Public Universities: Implications for Quality Language Teaching

This study intended to explore the extent to which EFL teachers practice action research to bring understanding and change in their specific work environments/situations (pragmatic validity). This, understandably, calls for adapting the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to Ethiopian University classroom contexts rather than taking it, which may have different environmental implications, for granted.

Workshop 4 1:30pm – 3:00pm, Banksia Room 1

Gail Robinson & Bettina Nissen
Independent facilitators, Library Language Outreach Project (LLOP), Gabooture District Library Service

Roly Poly

Bettina Nissen and Gail Robinson have been working together on the Library Language Outreach Project in Deception Bay, Queensland for 3 years. In this workshop they explore the creative ways they have extended the project.

This workshop, with complementary paper providing theoretical background, is based on the stories of four case studies as platforms to explore how a Community Early Literacy program builds human, social and organisational capacity.

Workshop 5 1:30pm – 3:00pm, Grevillea Room 1

Jan Simmons
Morrison House, Mount Evelyn

Jan Simmons is the CEO of Morrison House, the largest ACE provider (Adult Community and Further Education) in the Eastern Region of Melbourne, Victoria. Morrison House has received a number of awards for the organisation, its programs and projects from both government and business sectors.

Jan spearheaded community "buy in" to Mount Evelyn becoming a Learning Town. Her work has an emphasis on a sphere of action in the community to develop the potential of all citizens and to facilitate partnerships that contribute both to community learning and strengthening.

She has set up models of practice adapted from sites visited on previous overseas study tours. These include an intergenerational literacy program, a business training and support network, a youth enterprise program, a careers guidance and life planning program, an interactive exhibition space that encourages disengaged learners to participate in learning programs, and creation of curriculum in partnership with the regional museum for use in secondary schools.

Jan is the current chairperson of the Victorian Learning Communities network.

Economic Development – Interaction with Lifelong Learning

Supporters of Lifelong Learning believe that learning fosters change and improvement on a large scale and that to foster conditions that allow citizens to participate in Lifelong Learning will achieve sustainable economic, environmental and social outcomes.

We will look at situations in large and small communities that demonstrate this thinking and then question the influences and effectiveness of these models of practice.