



Danuta Wiśniewska,
Action Research in EFL Pedagogy:
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Broadly understood as a process of inquiry, action research is firmly grounded in current social needs, connecting theory with practice, encouraging and stimulating reflection and researcher engagement, and enhancing multidisciplinary research. It transpires, then, that *Action Research in EFL Pedagogy: Theory and Analysis of Practice* by Danuta Wiśniewska may constitute an important contribution to the development and understanding of studies on groups, structures, and organizations, especially in relation to the context of teaching English as a foreign language. With its multitude (636 entries) of source texts and 128 papers collected for the needs of analysis, it appears to be the first monograph that incorporates such an in-depth analysis of action research, both from the theoretical and empirical perspectives. As the title suggests, the book can be treated as a solid theoretical reference source devoted to action research in the context of foreign language teaching and teacher training. However, it also centers on the analysis of practical aspects of the research carried out by teachers. The focus of the monograph is deeply grounded in academic research, though it is not only limited to the professional education of the teacher. It comprises a vaster perspective, from education management and political economy, to pragmatic philosophy and social development. The extensive tome comprises 414 pages, 362 of which constitute a consolidated text that is divided into theoretical and empirical parts that reflect on the research carried out for the purpose of understanding the research design in question.

Chapter One includes a discussion of the concept of action research presented from the point of view of its historical development, typology, and main methodological aspects. This part of the volume allows the reader to understand fully the specificity of the concept under scrutiny, presented against the background of related terminology. The Author then studies origins of action research from a historical perspective, as built upon the works of Lewin. The examination of the role of social sciences in legitimizing the application of this research method allows for comprehending its real value, which consists in taking action in order to produce desired effects (research through intervention). This is clearly visible in the earliest developments in this field, limited to the research carried out in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland. The next part of the chapter focuses on theoretical aspects, starting from the typology of action research that elaborates on various approaches to action research. It moves on to its methodology, where the process, models, and methods are presented. Naturally, action research has its drawbacks, among which validity can be placed. Hence, this aspect of action research was reliably addressed, scrutinizing the dissemination of action research, viewed as its central component warranting transparency in research procedures.

Having discussed the theoretical background of action research, in Chapter Two the Author describes the main research context, that is, the EFL teacher pedagogy. Among the selected issues, teacher knowledge and reflection are presented. Although the discussion of reflection appears slightly limited, the Author certainly manages to conjoin the areas of knowledge, practice, and research. Yet, the prominent place in the chapter is rightfully taken by the discussion of teacher research competence. Departing from defining the concept of teacher research, the Author, aware of its constraints, skillfully stresses the importance of contextuality of educational practice for adequate research. The ways in which teachers engage in research are also commented upon, which leads to the culminating point in the chapter: a discussion of the approaches to teacher research. Here, aside from reflection on the most common studies carried out by teachers, self-study of teaching and teacher education as a reasonably new approach is highlighted, discussing studies done by teacher-educators on their own teaching and research.

Chapter Three presents the theoretical considerations on action research in EFL pedagogy as a logical consequence of the material included in the previous two chapters. It describes the way action research is implemented in EFL pedagogy “as a means of teacher development and a tool for solving problems concerning the teaching and learning of English” (p. 109). The first focus is on the theoretical aspects of the issue, including its definitions, typology, and approaches and functions of action research in this field. It is made clear that the social sciences are regarded an important source of this valuable research tradition, which is continued by practitioners in the EFL classroom and beyond.

Obviously, there are problems reporting the findings from action research due to the marginalization of this research method. Nevertheless, the benefits connected with disseminating its findings are numerous; hence, there is a need to follow a rigorous procedure in order to validate its results. The final part of this chapter is devoted to a review of EFL action research from the perspective of themes and methods.

Part Two of the monograph includes the results of the practice of action research performed by teachers, based on a corpus of 128 studies published in academic and teacher journals worldwide. The purpose of Chapter Four, which can be viewed as introductory, is to elaborate on the rationale of this part of the volume because, as the Author rightfully suggests, knowledge about action research in the EFL field is biased and has not been systematized. However, due to an increased interest in studying scientific research practice, action research has been gaining popularity despite its complex, confusing, and frequently challenging character. Aside from a description of the main methods that the Author has chosen for the analysis of the selected action research practice, there is a concise description of the corpus. It is unfortunately unclear how the journals have been selected. The most relevant part of the chapter is devoted to an examination of the scope and nature of action research in the EFL field. It concentrates on its three interrelated features: teaching, researching, and reporting. As they correspond to the main stages of the research process, the analysis of action research publications can be divided into three larger stages: pre-empirical, empirical, and post-empirical, which are included in the three consecutive chapters.

Chapter Five is strictly devoted to the analysis of the pre-empirical phase presented in the discussed studies. Here, the Author's primary focus is directed to the exposition of the role of basic background issues involved in action research at this stage. Thus, the primary aspect to be taken into consideration is the teaching/research context, a crucial criterion in conducting and reporting action research. The next factor of paramount importance in this phase is the description of research participants, especially the relationship of the researcher to the partakers. Aside from the role the participants play as sources of knowledge, it is the researcher's position in the research that requires explication. Next, the reasons for carrying the study need to be described, whether internally or externally. The outline of research aims is another important issue because it determines the type and conduct of the research. As the Author suggests, the identification of purposes should reveal the real aims pursued by EFL teachers in their teaching practice. Finally, there are research areas and topics that render information on teachers' professional interests and problems. Following this theoretical background, the next part of the chapter analyzes these key pieces of information (following the sequence presented above) in the journal publications outlined in the previous chapter. It turns out that for the most part

the participants were mere subjects of the study, even when the researcher was part of the context. The research areas and topics were primarily related to the teachers'/researchers' context, and mostly stemmed from the teachers' position and institutions' curricula.

The analysis of the empirical stage is undertaken in Chapter Six. As in the previous chapter, there is a clear theoretical overview of the categories that are analyzed followed by a presentation of the findings from the above-mentioned papers. The primary construct under consideration is the method and description of units of the analysis. Here, the description of researchers' conceptualization of action research is considered. EFL practitioners may depend on theory, empirical observation and life experience. In the next step, the focus shifts to the rationales for using action research as a research method. Research design used in action research usually centers on actual components, instead of prescribed ones, with a research question organizing the design. The question that instigates the research may arise from different sources, theoretical, professional or private. The data collected in action research may be of qualitative or quantitative nature and may need to be examined from the perspective of its types, functions, sources, and roles. As far as usefulness of action research is concerned, it is important to identify which usefulness aspects are most significant to researchers. The last factor included in the analysis is utilization of results. It was the Author's intention to find out if the research results had any consequences for practice. As the most important outcomes of the extensive analysis of the empirical stage of action research presented in the selected publication have shown, action researchers are teachers who constructed their knowledge of this research design from literature. The most frequent design implemented in the studied publications was a single cycle of action research, which was most probably affected by time constraints and resource limits. Finally, conducting action research turned out to produce more elaborate consequences, exceeding simple solutions to classroom problems.

Chapter Seven focuses on the final, post-empirical stage of the action research process. As in the previous chapters, it opens with theoretical considerations of the researched issues. The main point of interest here is how the structures of the analyzed articles provide information about the reported action research. The specific topics include article sections and their headings, their macro-structure, and moves representing action research and its procedures. It appears that, similarly to other research papers, most action research publications include all the necessary components. Moreover, many teacher researchers were revealed to locate their practical problems in the existing state of knowledge, despite the presumed practical nature of action research. A considerable variety in the action research papers in EFL pedagogy is identified, which may be attributed to journal diversity, authorship, and readership.

The focal point of Chapter Eight is the analysis of training programs in action research in the EFL field, among which there is a description of the Author's own three-year study of teaching action research on foreign language teacher trainees. First, there is a description of the few written accounts of action research courses performed in Poland and abroad. Their usual approach was to include a theoretical overview of action research, encouraging students to conduct their own action research projects in genuine EFL classrooms either on a regular basis or as part of their teaching practice. Yet, the greatest part of the chapter was devoted to a description of the Author's project, whose role was to design and evaluate action research training that might be included in an EFL methodology course. The participants were three consecutive groups of third year students of regular EFL methodology classes. The results of the study proved that the students gained basic knowledge of action research and its procedures, which enabled them to understand teaching and their learners better. What is more, they considered using action research for the purpose of their bachelor's thesis. In future, they might also take advantage of this research design to boost their creativity and curiosity. Unfortunately, the description of the study and its implications appears sketchy, despite the Author's adherence to her own model. Sadly, this part of the volume, unlike its other sections, leaves the reader unsatisfied due to its brevity.

The final chapter provides a general discussion, concluding remarks, and further directions of action research. The Author, aware of the possible drawbacks of this research design, argues in favor of the research design as a valuable instrument in teacher training, improvement, and life-long learning. The comments on the practical application of action research in EFL pedagogy are neatly organized into the three-phase division of stages of action research. The critical analysis of basic trends is accompanied with suggestions and recommendations. As far as further directions are concerned, it is made clear that additional inquiry into action research is needed to place it within broader philosophical frames. The volume is concluded with a bibliography of more than 600 entries, followed by a list of the articles analyzed, appendices with journal sources, two questionnaires used in the Author's own empirical research, a list of tables and figures, and a two-page abstract in Polish.

The book, as the Author suggests, derives from humanistic psychology and constructivism, which can clearly be seen in the ways the results of her own study are interpreted, the selection of research aims, criteria of analysis, and their explanation. Also, the application of the qualitative research method allows for the examination of deductive categories deriving from the research questions, as well as inductive ones connected with the individual, idiosyncratic characteristics of the research sample and the study context. Among the most important advantages of the work is its subject matter. It constitutes a relatively new research area that is necessary to contemporary education with its focus

on reflectivity, autonomy and life-long learning. The Author demonstrates unsurpassed knowledge of the theoretical issues connected with action research, discussed against the broad background of social and second language acquisition studies. With its bibliography, the book is not only an appropriate reflection of the theoretical investigation connected with action research, but also a rich corpus of empirical texts presenting diverse contexts and research aims. Moreover, the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Author's original program of teaching action research in EFL methodology courses deserve praise because they enable teacher trainees to be more reflective, stimulated, and creative in their future work. Finally, the Author has shown great ability in organizing and systematizing knowledge of theoretical and empirical models and considerations and conclusions in neat tables and diagrams that make difficult material easy to follow.

Aside from its strengths, *Action Research in EFL Pedagogy* suffers from several drawbacks in content, structure, and editing. The Author's own empirical study is greatly condensed, undermining the real importance of her research, which has significant consequences for teacher trainees. The scope of the volume gives room to a multitude of strands, but some get out of control. For the sake of clarity, it would be better to focus on the most important, hierarchically organized themes. Also, the selection of action research publications appears unorganized, which detracts from the depiction of research results. As to the volume's structural disadvantages, it appears that the empirical part of the tome is not homogenous. The inclusion of the analysis of publications implementing action research and programs of teaching, together with the Author's original research, greatly impedes the formulation of a clear conclusion. The reader cannot always easily decipher or follow the Author's intentions. The editing of the volume, on the other hand, seems careful and elaborate, though saves a few grammatical and stylistic mistakes accompanied by several bibliographical errors. However, such typos are inevitable in such a large book, hence their presence can easily be ignored.

Overall, *Action Research in EFL Pedagogy* is a very good work. The Author has managed "to contribute to the state of the art regarding action research in EFL pedagogy and to raise awareness of these aspects of action research which require further examination" (pp. 12–12?). Additionally, her meticulous craftsmanship, eye for detail, and genuine interest in student-teacher progress make the book a valuable acquisition for anyone with an inquisitive mind. The book is highly recommended not only for EFL teacher trainees and their instructors, but also for all teachers of English who help others excel. By applying action research, teachers have a greater chance making a different future.