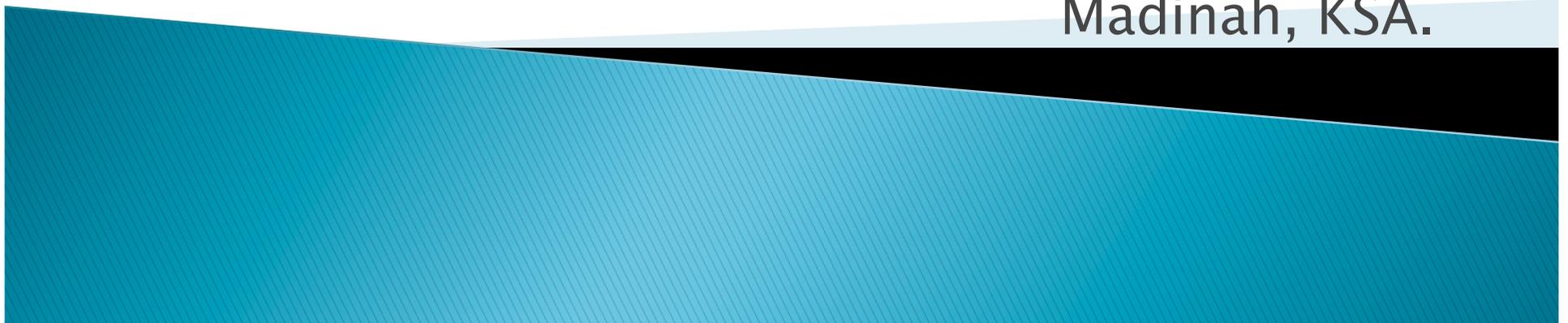


Action research for teacher development: Opportunities and challenges

Dr Fauzia Shamim
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Outline

- ▶ Clearing grounds:
 - What is action research?
 - Why do action research?
 - What are the benefits of action research for language teachers?
 - ▶ Opportunities and challenges
 - Experiences from Pakistan
 - Experiences from Saudi Arabia
 - ▶ Questions for discussion
- 

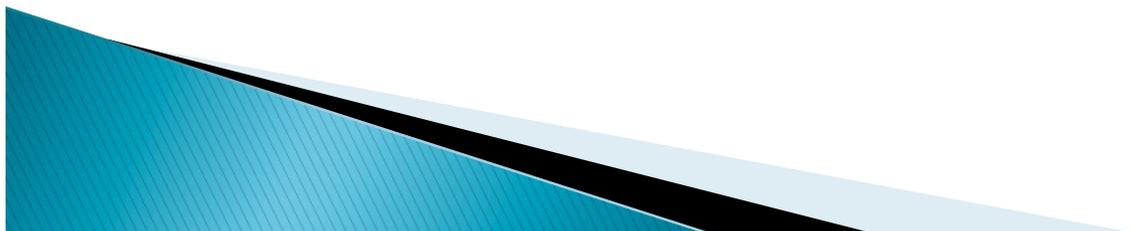
CLEARING GROUNDS



- What is action research?
- Why do action research?
- What are the benefits of action research for language teachers?

Action research ...

- ▶ is the study of a social situation with a view **to improving the quality of action within it.** (Elliott, 1991)
- ▶ **decentralizes the production of knowledge** which serves the practitioners by giving them 'voice' and helping others to find their 'voices'. The generation of knowledge is **participatory** rather hierarchical to them which is prescribed by 'others'. (McNiff, 2002)



Action research . . .

- ▶ **WHAT?**

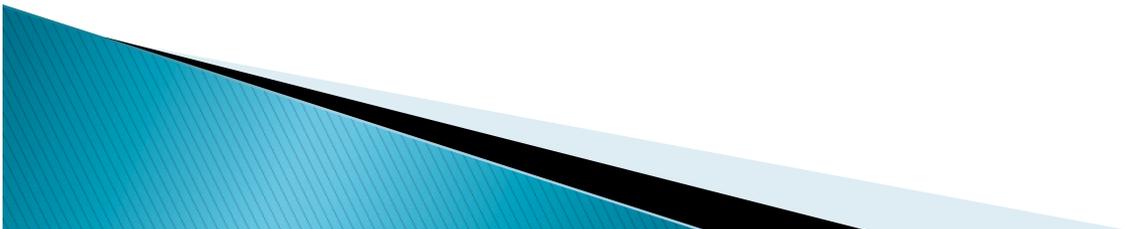
a form of individual or collective **self-reflective enquiry**

- ▶ **WHO?**

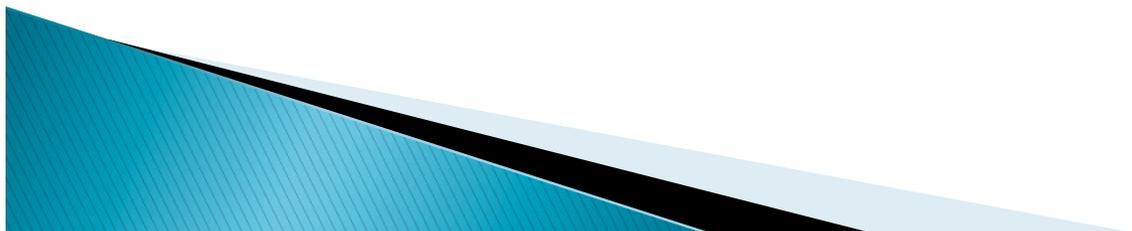
undertaken by **participants in social or educational practices**

- ▶ **WHY?**

in order **to improve** the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices as well as their **understanding** of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out.

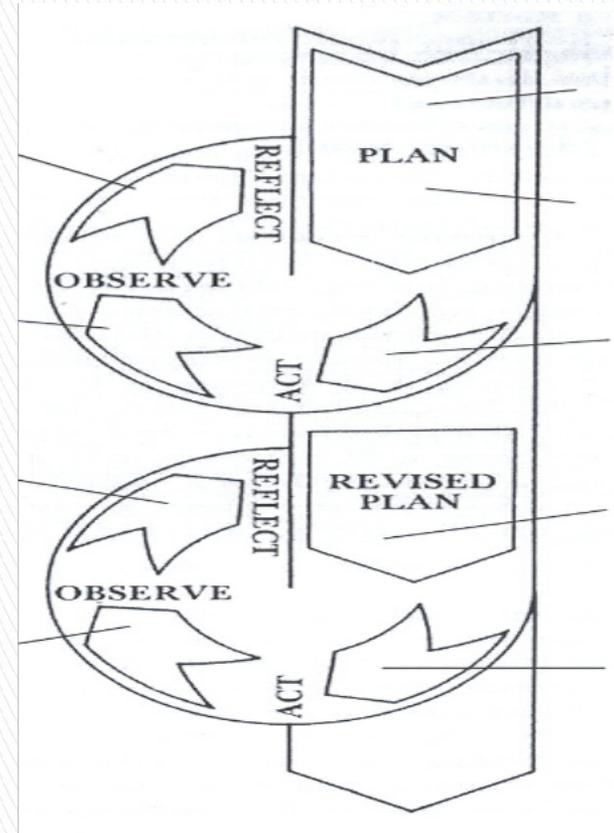


- ▶ Doing action research can:
 - Reinvigorate our teaching
 - Lead to positive change
 - Raise our awareness of the complexities of our work
 - Show us what drives our personal approaches to teaching. (Burns 2010,7)



Cyclical Process of Action Research

- ▶ PLANNING
- ▶ ACTION
- ▶ OBSERVATION
- ▶ REFLECTION



Steps in Action Research

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988)

Action Research for Teacher Development PAKISTAN EXPERIENCE



1. Action research as part of course work in post graduate programs
2. Teacher Development Program: SPELT & British Council

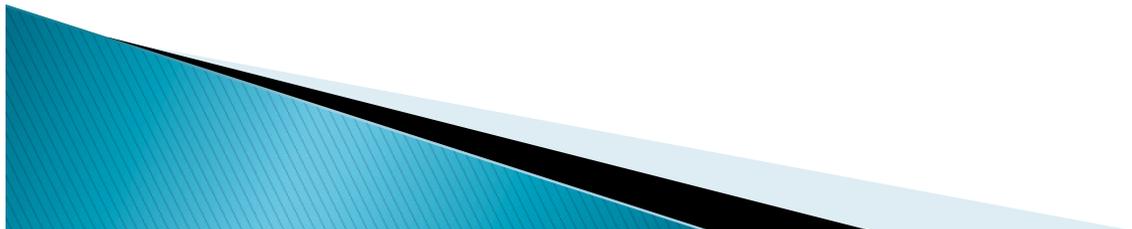
EXAMPLE #1: Action research as part of course work

1. Teaching and Learning English in Large Classes
2. Post-graduate Diploma/M.Ed programs



Opportunities and Challenges

- ▶ Opportunities (as stated by these students)
 - Mirrored those in international literature (e.g. Dean et.al, 2005, Joldoshalieva 2009, Burns 2000, 2011)
- ▶ Challenges
 - Time constraints, work overload etc.



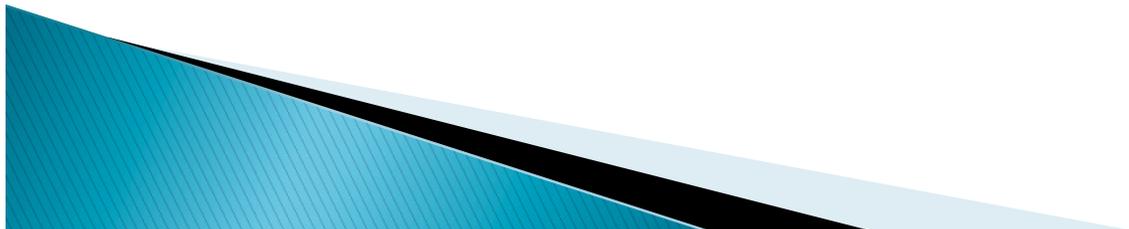
Example # 2: SPELT & BC Teacher Development Program

- ▶ **Aim:** To facilitate teachers professional development through researching their own practice
- ▶ **Participants:** 22 teachers from a variety of educational settings and levels– voluntary participation
- ▶ **Characteristics of the program**
 - One year long with support structures:
 - Introductory 3 days workshop with foreign and local consultant (LC)
 - Fortnightly meetings throughout the year with mentor (LC)
 - Final 3 days writing workshop with foreign and LC
- ▶ **Outcomes**
 - More than 50% participants dropped out before the end of the program; **Only 2 action research reports were completed**



Example # 2: SPELT & BC Teacher Development Program

- ▶ Opportunities
 - Teachers felt it could have been beneficial ONLY IF . . .
- ▶ Challenges for teachers
 - Action research was not part of the teachers' overall development plan; hence, no institutional support and/or acknowledgment of teachers' efforts
 - Competing priorities such as marking exam papers
 - Problem in focusing on ONE problem
 - Lack of skills and experience in systematic data collection/documentation
 - Extra time and effort required for lesson planning, reflection etc.



Example # 2: SPELT & BC Teacher Development Program

- ▶ Challenges for the 'mentor'
 - Meeting varied individual needs of participants
 - Sustaining teachers' interest in the project



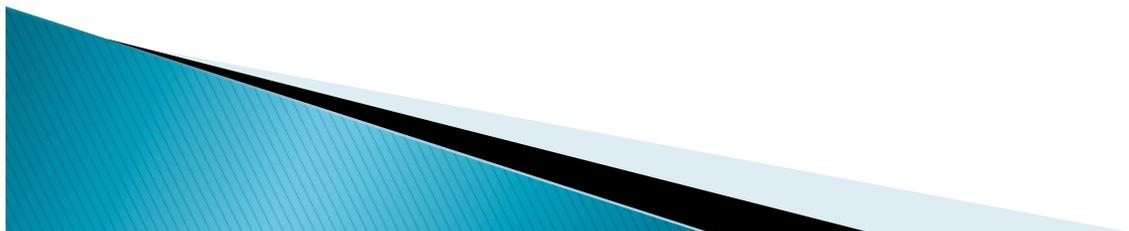
Action Research for Teacher Development EXPERIENCE FROM » SAUDI ARABIA

One-year Action Research
project 2011-12

ELC, TU Action Research Project (Sept 2011–June 2012)

Highlights

- ▶ A year long project
- ▶ Institutional support
 - Training workshops and material
 - Ongoing support from a mentor
- ▶ Voluntary participation



Low teacher participation

- Only 2 teachers participated (out of 60+)

However,

- Several teachers attended AR group's fortnightly meetings to share/discuss their success stories/problems etc.



ELC, TU Action Research Project Opportunities

Feeling empowered

- ▶ What it did for me right from the start was **to mitigate the feeling of helplessness** that was zapping my energy. Here I had been given a means to tackle my problems directly, daily, and in a practical way.

Improved focus:

You begin to know why you are doing– what you are doing at each moment, and **you are always aware of how your activities relate to the aims and objectives of your lesson.**

(Ms Nasreen)



Opportunities (contd.)

- ▶ Developing personalized methods and techniques

“I have gained the confidence to make a choice, where before I was following the book to the letter and the exasperation of my students who already knew what was coming next.”



Overall:

Becoming self-aware as a teacher

“Action Research inspires me to keep learning and refining what I am doing.”(Ms Nasreen)



ELC, TU Action Research Project: Facilitating factors

Institutional and mentor support

- ▶ *[They]“create a safe-zone for us, where we can disclose and discuss our teaching problems, reflect on our own performance, and get the necessary help and support along with personalized professional development and training”.*
- ▶ **A compelling moral purpose i.e., to improve teaching strategies to help the students**



ELC, TU Action Research Project: Challenges

- ▶ **Time constraints**
 - Need lots of preparation & time for documentation
 - ▶ **Lack of background information and training**
 - Finding ways of checking learning/ students' progress
 - ▶ **Admitting weaknesses and inadequacies**
 - “I’m not a ‘perfect’ teacher” : liberating, but also a bit scary
 - Increased self awareness can become unsettling
 - ▶ **Trusting colleagues and “the system”**
 - Need honesty and integrity from all involved
- 

Comparing Pakistan and KSA projects: Facilitating factors

- ▶ Training in 'doing' action research
- ▶ Continuing mentor support
- ▶ Support in writing up the final report

SPELT/BC Project
(Pakistan)

- ▶ Training in 'doing' action research
- ▶ Continuing mentor support
- ▶ **Institutional support**
- ▶ Support in writing up
- ▶ Presenting findings to colleagues & at a national conference

TU AR Project
(Saudi Arabia)

Comparing Pakistan and KSA projects: Major challenges

- ▶ **Voluntary Participation**
- ▶ No institutional support/ recognition
- ▶ No compelling moral reason to sustain interest/ undertake the required effort
- ▶ No accountability
- ▶ **Low-stakes**

SPELT/BC Project
(Pakistan)

- ▶ **Voluntary Participation**
- ▶ Institutional support but not part of teachers' overall development plan
- ▶ No compelling moral reason to sustain interest/ undertake the required effort
- ▶ No accountability
- ▶ **Low-stakes**

TU AR Project
(Saudi Arabia)

How can teacher research be supported at the:



institutional level?



individual level?

Question for Discussion

- ▶ Can action research be institutionalized as a teacher development strategy in teachers' real life and work contexts?

