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Exploring the Dynamics of Action Research and Alternatives to the Reconnaissance Model

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Introduction

The origin of action research is generally credited to Kurt Lewin, who sometimes, is referred to as the Father of Action Research (Andronic, n.d.). It is said that he resolved the social conflicts and field theory in social science by focusing on three key questions: i.e. *What is the present situation? What are the dangers? What shall we do* (Lewin, 1946, p. 34)?

The punch-laden statement, “no research without action, and no action without research” (Lewin, 1946) summed up the affiliation between theory (research) and practice (action), particularly in the field of social science. Put simply, Lewin constructed a theory of action research, which described action research as “proceeding in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990, p.8). By doing so, Lewin argued that to “understand and change certain social practices, social scientists have to include practitioners from the real social world in all phases of inquiry” (McKernan, 1991, p. 10).

Although action research was initially used to solve workers’ problems in factories (Lewin, 1946), the practice soon got acclaim in education. Review of literature indicates that Lewin’s action research was first “brought into education in the USA in the late 1940...and then into the UK in 1950” (Messikh, 1955, p. 484). Today, it is not only implemented in the UK and the US, but also in Australia, Canada, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, China, Thailand and Malaysia (Zeichner, 2005; Somekh & Zeichner, 2009, as cited in Rabgay, 2021). However, despite decades of debates on action research, its definition continues to differ, and it means different things to different people with some even considering ‘evaluations and reflection-on-action reports’ as action research (Maxwell, 2003). However, these days, the action research in education can refer to studying any

school situation or classroom practice with an attempt to deeply understand it and improve the quality of education (Hensen, 1996; Johnson, 2012).

It is useful to understand how ‘action research’ came into Bhutanese education system. A glimpse into its genesis reveals that in principle, ‘action research’ was practiced since 1998, although the term was not explicitly used in education. For instance, Maxwell (2003) contends that action research was the main methodology adopted to find out if ideas that Bhutanese teachers have adopted and adapted from Australia have led to any improvements in multi-grade teaching in rural Bhutanese schools. Findings from Maxwell’s study also show that action research has been effectively implemented in Bhutan within Bhutanese Multi-grade Attachment Project (BMAP) (Maxwell, 2003). Nevertheless, after the discontinuation of BMAP, little is known whether those who went to Australia still practiced action research or not. What can be inferred for certain is that the action research did take a foothold in the Bhutanese education system after some remote and rural Bhutanese school principals and teachers returned from multi-grade training in Australia.

Maxwell’s groundbreaking article titled, “Action Research for Bhutan,” published in *RABSEL* (2003, Vol. III) reignited the importance of action research amongst educators and educationists. In the beginning of 2008, when the B.Ed programmes were reviewed, the two teacher training colleges at Paro and Samtse introduced action research for “the in-service and pre-service teachers as a tool for improving teaching practices” (Gyamtsho, 2020; Maxwell, 2003; MoE, 2013a; PCE, 2009; REC, 2018; RUB, 2018; as cited in Rabgay, 2021, p.10). Although it was initially designed as an optional module, it was later offered as a compulsory module, both in B.Ed primary and B.Ed secondary programmes. Considering its importance, it was also included in the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PgDE) and B.Ed Dzongkha programmes. The idea was that these graduates would have a multiplier effect once they began teaching in schools, particularly in how action research could be used to identify and solve classroom problems.

With the intention of motivating more teachers to conduct action research and to build a research culture in schools, the erstwhile Ministry of Education ((MoE) instituted a seed capital of Nu. 10 million as Sherig Endowment Fund (SEF), exclusively meant for conducting action research, on December 2, 2013 (Teacher Professional Support Division, MoE, 2019). Six years after the establishment of a separate fund for action research, the first-ever Action Research Seminar was conducted on September 30, 2019, during which seven teachers, among others, shared the outcomes of their action research (Lhamo, 2019). Today, around 40 action research proposals are selected annually on a competitive basis each year.

Nonetheless, whenever teachers conduct action research in Bhutan, without exception, they follow Kurt Lewin’s reconnaissance model. In fact, ever since its introduction in 1998, this has been the only method Bhutanese teachers have adopted. Hence, it is worth reckoning why Bhutanese researchers only follow Kurt Lewin’s reconnaissance action research model. Is it because Bhutanese people are only exposed to Lewin’s reconnaissance model? Is it because Lewin’s model best fits into the jig-saw of Bhutanese education system? Is it because there are no other action research models besides Lewin’s reconnaissance model? Is it a taboo to use other models of action research? Or, is it because other contemporary models of action research are simply not introduced to Bhutanese researchers?

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide answers to all the questions posed above, but considering the lack of evidence of Bhutanese teachers learning other models of action research or

adopting other models (other than Lewin's reconnaissance model) to conduct action researches, it can be more or less deduced that Bhutanese teachers are either not acquainted with other models of action research or are so used to Lewin's reconnaissance model that they are not truly motivated to practice other models.

But nothing beats the fact that alternatives to reconnaissance model are much needed, not only because there exist other models of action research, but also because it is time to bring some innovations in research and researching. Furthermore, there is also an ardent need to offer choice of methodology to the field practitioners so that they can choose from a range of methods and apply it at their workplace.

However, to innovate or initiate something new, one must "begin with an introduction to a plan of an idea," (Tohidi & Jabbari, 2012, p. 535) – something this paper strives to do. Keeping this in view, this paper delves into the nuances of some prominent action research paradigms which are available to Bhutanese researchers. Such contemporary paradigms not only provide an informed choice to researchers, but also empower them within the research community, particularly with regard to research funding, opportunities, and access to resources. Besides, the introduction of multiple approaches encourages a more inclusive and diverse approach to action research (Macniff & McTaggart, n.d.) besides promoting alternative models of Action Research. A brief description of the five alternative action research models along with their templates are provided below in addition to Kurt Lewin's reconnaissance model.

Name of the Model: Context Model

Origin: LAB-Northeast and Island Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University

Proponent: Eileen Ferrance

The Context Model of Action Research emphasises understanding the context of the study (Eileen, 2020), sets clear objectives, effectively designs the study, and interprets the data as "artifacts". This approach is useful in education where the context can vary greatly from one classroom or institution to another. Here is a more detailed breakdown of each phase, along with suggestions for the type of data to collect and how to interpret these datasets as artifacts.

Template of the Context Model

Context:

Central Question

Sub-questions

- i. _____
- ii. _____

Objective/s

- i. _____
- ii. _____

Literature Review

Method

Data Analysis

- i. Survey
- ii. Observation
- iii. Interview
- iv. Document (Journal)

Intervention

Discussion and Recommendations

Conclusion

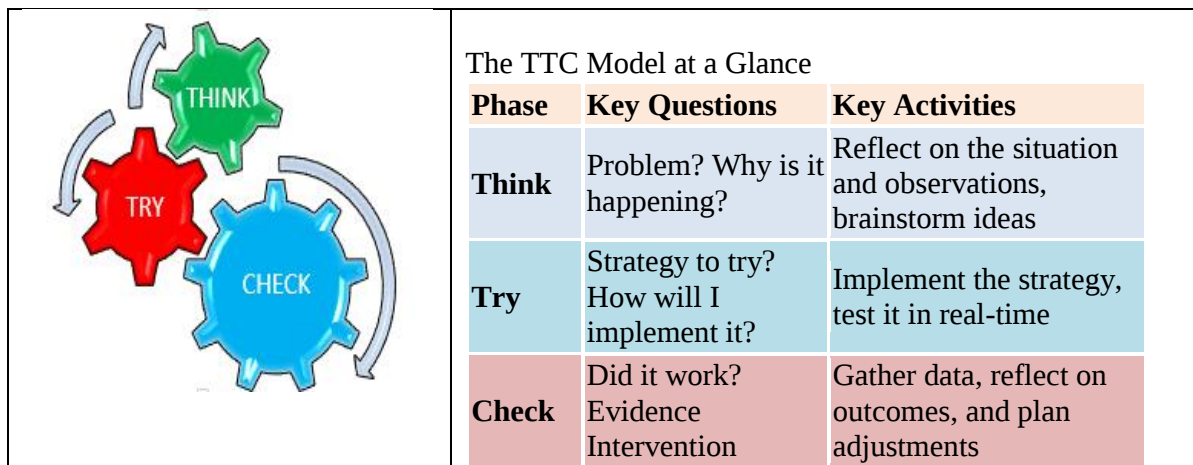
References

Name of the Model: Think, Try, and Check (TTC)

Origin: NIE Singapore, Nanyang Technological University (NTU)

Proponent: Soh Kay Chang

Think, Try, and Check (TTC) Model of AR, developed by Soh Kay Cheng, is a simple yet highly effective framework for action research. It simplifies the research process and makes it more accessible for educators who may find complex AR models overwhelming. This streamlined approach focuses on reflective thinking, practical experimentation, and evaluation, encouraging a continuous cycle of improvement without unnecessary complexity (Cheng, 2015).



Template of the TTC Model

Think Planning: Problem? Why is this happening? Reflect on the situation and observations Brainstorm for ideas
Try Action: Strategy to try? How will I implement it? Implement the strategy Try it in real time
Check

Check (Fact-finding). Did it work?

Evidence
Intervention
Gather data
Reflect on outcomes
Plan adjustments

Name of the Model: Theme-based Model

Origin: Handbook of Research on Teacher Education

Proponents: Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, D. John McIntyre and Kelly E. Demers

It is an innovative approach that involves focusing on a specific theme or issue within a community. This approach offers flexibility and adaptability, allowing the research process to be more targeted, context-driven, and practical in its application. The action research is organised around central themes that are pertinent to participants' needs, goals, or challenges. This model encourages collective inquiry into a shared problem or concern, making the research highly relevant to the context in which it is applied. It is useful in sports fields for change with intervention. Data and information are interpreted as artifacts. There is a feedback loop where commentaries, discussions and interventions can be provided.

Template of the Theme-based Model

Study: _____

Theme:

Literature Review

Method

Central Question

Sub-questions

- i.

- ii.

- iii.

Artifacts

- i. Survey
- ii. Observation
- iii. Interview
- iv. Document (Journal)

Commentaries

Discussion and Intervention

Report

References

Name of the Model: CADMAR (Current practice, Alternative, Design, Measure, Analysis and Report)

Origin: NIE Singapore, Nanyang Technological University (NTU)

Proponent: Soh Kay Chang

The CADMAR model is a succinct and effective way to capture the essence of Soh Kay Cheng's Action Research process. It breaks down the research process into easily understandable steps and makes it user-friendly for teachers and practitioners. CADMAR, as an action research framework, includes a clear explanation of each phase and possible innovations to make it more flexible and adaptable (Cheng, 2006). It provides a structured, step-by-step framework for teacher-driven action research. Furthermore, it is adaptable, collaborative, and data-driven, making it relevant for both individual teachers and teams. By emphasizing reflection, measurement, and collaboration, this framework can lead to sustained improvements in teaching practices, fostering a continuous cycle of innovation and growth in education.

Template of the CADMAR Model

Study:

Current practices

Central Question

Sub-questions

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____

Objective/s

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____

Alternatives

Design

Measure

Analysis (Intervention)

Report

References

Name of the Model: RECCE

Origin: ALAR (Action Learning and Action Research) Journal

Proponent: ALAR Journal, Australia

The RECCE Model is a comprehensive, structured framework for action research and it is flexible enough to be adapted in various contexts. By following the steps of RECCE which is an acronym of 'Look out, Exploration, Contextualisation, Change Implementation, and Evaluation', researchers can systematically address problems and implement meaningful changes while continuously improving their approaches (Margaret & Connell, 2008).

Template of the RECCE Model

Proposed approach	Alternative approach
Introduction to the AR Project (Reconnaissance) Genuineness of the AR problem statement Clarity of the research questions and objectives Overall clarity of the introduction to the AR project Personal competence	Context of the study
Literature Review Extent of literature reviewed Relevance of literature to the study Critical analysis of the literature APA citation and referencing	Literature review
Methodology Research site and participants Data collection tool development Data collection and analysis procedures Clarity of the intervention strategies Suitability of the intervention strategies	Methodology
Presentation of AR Findings Presentation of data Quality of data analysis Interpretation of the data Reflection and conclusion	Artifacts: Qualitative and quantitative

Relevance of research findings Appropriateness of the action for the situation Ease of use of the actions in terms of simplicity and clarity Adaptability of the action to the current practice	Commentaries, discussion & recommendation Policy, practices & pedagogy
Language and Format Use of academic language (vocabulary and syntax) Accuracy of grammar Accuracy of spelling Accuracy of punctuations Adherence to the APA page format	

The RECCE Model is built to be iterative and cyclical, allowing researchers to reflect, adjust, and continuously implement improvements as they work through their research. It can be used to explore and solve practical problems within various settings such as education, community development, or organisational change. The model emphasises the iterative nature of action research, ensuring that findings from one cycle inform the next, creating a dynamic and responsive research process. In this model, it is about investigator's self-exploration of beliefs and behaviours within a particular investigation context and in the exploration of the particular context (Margaret & Connell, 2008, p. 4, 6, 44).

The "RECCE" emphasises clarity in defining the problem, articulating research objectives, and establishing the researcher's personal competence. The accompanying 'Self RECCE' and 'Situational RECCE' indicate how internal reflection (self) and environmental context (situational) interconnect to set a clear foundation for the study.

The Literature Review section evaluates the depth and relevance of previous research, demanding critical analysis. The figure in this section shows a cyclical model of reviewing, synthesizing, and applying knowledge, indicating how literature supports theory-building and contextual understanding. In the Methodology section, focus lies on participant selection, tool development, data handling, and appropriateness of intervention strategies. The visual representation contrasts outsider (academic) and insider (practitioner) positions within different research paradigms (positivist v/s living theory), suggesting the researcher's stance affects methodology.

Presentation of AR Findings includes qualitative and quantitative data, analysis, and interpretation, culminating in reflection. This phase bridges data artifacts with actionable recommendations for policy, practice, and pedagogy. Relevance of research findings assesses how applicable, clear, and adaptable the actions are.

Name of the Model: Reconnaissance Model

Origin: Kurt Lewin, Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead

Proponent: Kemmis and McTaggart (adapted from Kurt Lewin's AR model)

Reconnaissance model of action research is a comprehensive approach to guiding researchers through the process of addressing complex educational or organisational problems. With a focus on collaboration, contextualisation, and sustainability, this model encourages meaningful, long-term changes that are relevant to the stakeholders involved (Maxwell, 2003). The template of the reconnaissance model is given under:

Template of the Reconnaissance Model

Introduction

Objectives

Reconnaissance

- i) Situational analysis (baseline data collection and analysis)
- ii) Competence
- iii) Literature review

Action Research Question

Plan

Act and Observe

- i. Intervention
- ii. Fact gathering
- iii. Research Personal observation
- iv. Participants' attitude

Reflect

Conclusion

References

Conclusion

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, adopting a flexible action research model is increasingly valuable. Allowing for a range of action research templates and approaches can empower researchers (particularly teachers) by encouraging creativity and adaptability in both the design and presentation of their studies. This openness not only encourages innovative thinking but also allows for a more diverse range of methodologies and presentation styles, ultimately enriching the field of educational research.

Whether different colleges of education currently employ Theme-based, CADMAR, RECCE, TTC, or the more widely used reconnaissance model, there is a clear need for innovation and expansion in how action research is conducted within school classrooms. Providing researchers with alternative frameworks and methodologies can lead to more meaningful and impactful studies, tailored to the unique needs and contexts of their educational environments. Such flexibility can inspire fresh perspectives and foster a culture of continuous improvement in both research and classroom practice.

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