

## **ACTION RESEARCH STRATEGY FOR TEACHER EDUCATORS**

*Prof. K.P. Pandey*

In the last six-seven decades paradigms of research have shown a visible shift from the traditional hypothetico-deductive patterns to empirio- inductive-qualitative moulds. Action research form belongs to the latter category as its prime concern is to improve both the practices and the practitioners. In the present write up an attempt has been made to orient the young teacher educators with a view to empowering them to undertake qualitative researches with focus on depiction of educational reality as it obtains and as it should move in the context of global to local priorities.

The contention of the advocates of action research is that teachers, supervisors and administrators would make better decisions and engage in more effective practices if they too were able and willing to conduct research as a basis for these decisions and practices. The process by which practitioners attempt to study their problems scientifically in order to guide, correct, and evaluate their decisions and actions is known as 'action research'.

Stephen M. Corey, one of the proponents of action research observed in 1953 as follows:

"I have lost much of the faith I once had in the consequences of asking only the professional educational investigator to study the schools and to recommend what they should do. Incorporating these recommendations into the behaviour patterns of practitioners involves some problems that so far have been insoluble. This leads to my third belief: Most of the study of what should be kept in the schools and what should go and what should be added must be done in hundreds of thousands of classrooms and thousands of communities. The studies must be undertaken by those who may have to change the way they do things as a result of the studies. Our schools cannot keep up with the life they are supposed to sustain and improve unless teachers, pupils, supervisors, administrators, and school patrons continuously examine what they are doing. Singly and in groups, they must use their imaginations creatively and constructively to identify the practices that must be changed to meet the needs and demands of modern life, courageously tryout those practices that give better promise, and methodically and systematically gather evidence to test their worth.

---

\* Former Vice Chancellor, M.G. Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi



This is the process I call action research. I hold no especial brief for the name, but it has some currency and is sufficiently descriptive. What I will talk about is research that is undertaken by educational practitioners because they believe that by so doing they can make better decisions and engage in better actions."

### **The background**

According to Corey the expression action research has originated from at least two somewhat independent sources. One is the activities and writing of Collier during the period (1933-45) when he was Commissioner of Indian Affairs and who was convinced that since the findings of research must be carried into effect by the administrator and the layman, and must be criticized by them through their experience, the administrator and the layman must themselves participate creatively in the research, impelled as it is from their own area of need.

The second source is Lewin and his associates, many of whom have attempted to study human relations scientifically and to improve the quality of human relations as a consequence of their enquiries. In the field of education, most of the practices of the evaluation staff of the Eight Year Study were close to action research. As early as 1949, Wrightstone used the term 'research action' in describing one of the functions of curriculum bureaus. Stephen M. Corey (1953) popularised the term by his excellent book entitled "Action Research to Improve School Practices". The action research form has now been utilized in a variety of educational, social and management related situations with a focus on remedying or improving the decision making and decision implementing processes.

### **The goal of enquiry**

Louis Cohen and Lawrence Manion (1980) observe that 'action research is a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention. Its usage may range at one extreme from a teacher trying out a novel way of teaching social studies with his class to a sophisticated study of organizational change in industry using a large research team and backed by Government sponsors.

The goal of enquiry in action research is not to arrive at generalizations. It is rather to obtain a solution to an immediate issue and to better the actions and decisions pertaining to a complex reality frame. It is pertinent to quote in this connection from John W. Best (1970) who avers as follows:

"Action research is focussed on the immediate application, not on the development of theory, nor upon general application. It has placed its emphasis on



a problem, here and now, in a local setting. Its findings are to be evaluated in terms of local applicability, not in terms of universal validity. Its purpose is to improve the school practices. The purpose of action research is to combine the research function with teacher growth in qualities such as objectivity, skills research processes, habits of thinking, ability to work harmoniously with others, and professional spirit."

Cohen and Manion have identified the following five purposes of action research in relation to school and class room :

- (1) It is a means of remedying problems diagnosed in specific situations, or of improving in some way a given set of circumstances;
- (2) It is a means of in-service training, thereby equipping the teacher with new skills and methods, sharpening his analytical powers and heightening his self-awareness;
- (3) It is a means of injecting additional or innovatory approaches to teaching and learning into an ongoing system which normally inhibits innovation and change;
- (4) It is a means of improving the normally poor communications between the practising teacher and the academic researcher, and of remedying the failure of traditional research to give clear prescriptions; and
- (5) Although lacking the rigour of true scientific research, it is a means of providing a preferable alternative to the more subjective, impressionistic approach to problem-solving in the classroom.

#### **Exemplification:**

The examples of action research from classroom, school and other educational context may be multiplied. In such a research form the practitioners - either the teacher, the headmaster or the principal individually or in groups may become researchers. The following examples, as given by Cohen and Manion, while by no means exhaustive, give some idea of the contexts in which the action research strategy may be employed. They are not mutually exhaustive so there may be considerable overlap between some of them. There is the kind,

- (1) Which acts as a spur to action, its objective being to get something done more expeditiously than would be the case with alternative means;
- (2) Which addresses itself to personal functioning, human relations and moral and is thus concerned with people's job efficiency, their motivations, relationships and general well-being;



- (3) Which focuses on job analysis and aims at improving professional functioning and efficiency;
- (4) Which is concerned with organisational change in so far as it results in improved functioning in business or industry;
- (5) Which is concerned with planning and policy-making, generally in the field of social administration;
- (6) Which is concerned with innovation and change and the ways in which these may be implemented in ongoing system;
- (7) Which concentrates on problem-solving virtually in any context in which a specific problem needs solving; and
- (8) Which provides the opportunity to develop theoretical knowledge, the emphasis here being more on the research element of the method.

It may be observed that equally diverse are the situations in which these different kinds of intervention may be used almost in any setting, infact, where a problem involving people, task and procedures cries out for solution, or where some change of feature results in a more desirable outcome. Notable instances of the use of action research may be found in such starkly contrasting worlds as insurance, prisons, social administration, ships, hospitals, community projects, education, industry, coal-mining and business management.

### **Critical features**

The characteristic features of the action research strategy as given by Corey (1953), Best (1970) and Cohen and Manion (1980) may be summarised as follows:

1. Action research is 'situational' as it is concerned with diagnosing a problem in a specific context and attempting to solve it in that context. In other words, it is essentially an on-the-spot procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem located in an immediate situation.
2. The context of action research is informal and flexible. It deals with the ongoing reality context and hence it has a highly dynamic frame of reference.
3. The goal of action research is to bring about an improvement in a given situation by bettering the actions and decisions.
4. The problem of an action research is derived from the grass root level of reality and it is by its very nature as concrete as the local situation itself.
5. The hypothesis in action research is in the form of a proposed action and the



anticipated result or consequence. It is, therefore, designated by a special term 'action hypothesis: It is usually in the form of a conditional if-then' proposition.

6. The design of an action research is quite adaptive. It allows for flexibility and variation in its implementation. Since the very context of action research is dynamic, it is impossible to have a rigid approach in the execution of its design.
7. In the action research, formulation of a generalization is not the goal. At the most generalizations, if any, have a relevance to the future situations and hence they are known as vertical rather than lateral generalizations as in the case of fundamental and applied research.
8. Action research is usually, though not inevitably collaborative which means that teams of investigators and practitioners work together on a project. It is also said to be participatory in the sense that members of the team themselves take part directly or indirectly in implementing the research.
9. The action research is self-evaluative which implies that modifications and effects are continuously evaluated within the ongoing situation, the ultimate objective being to improve practice in some way or other.
10. The reporting of action research outcomes is not done in a formal manner. It is instead, in the shape of a communication which has a ring of informality. The action researcher may transmit his findings to his colleagues even orally.
11. The use of action research is quite direct and immediate. It has a dual purpose: to improve, remedy or ameliorate the situation, to enhance the professional expertise of the practitioner and to increase his grip over the functional knowledge of the phenomena he deals with. The use of action research in the social sciences can be resolved into two stages: a diagnostic stage in which the problems are analysed and the hypotheses developed and a therapeutic stage in which the hypotheses are tested by a consciously directed change experiment, preferably in a social life situation.

### **The rationale of action research:**

The logic of action research is quite simple. It is aimed at minimising the gap between theory (knowledge) and practice. One of the reasons why fundamental or applied researches do not influence educational practice is the fact



that they are not adopted by the practitioners but by the professional students of education, the university professors and staff members of research bureaus or other agencies. In the action research the practitioner is the researcher. He is both the producer and the consumer of research findings. Therefore, the improvement that accrues through research to both the practitioner and his situation is direct and immediate.

The rationale underlying action research strategy may be summed up in the words of Stephen M. Corey thus:

"Learning that changes behaviour substantially is most likely to result when a person himself tries to improve a situation that makes a difference to him. He then does his best to obtain and interpret some evidence describing the consequences of his presumably more adequate practice. When he defines the problem, hypothesizes actions that may help him cope with it, engages in these actions, studies the consequences, and generalizes from them, he will more frequently internalize the experience than when all this is done for him by somebody else, and he leads about it".

### **THE ACTION RESEARCH METHOD**

In the action research the emphasis is laid on the direct participation of the practitioner, on collection of evidence, on the action hypothesis and upon the collaborative or cooperative approach. The significant elements of the action research process may be shown in the following five steps as suggested by Corey:

1. The identification of a problem area about which an individual or a group is sufficiently concerned or want to take some action.
2. The selection of a specific problem and the formulation of a hypothesis or reduction that implies a goal and a procedure for teaching it. This specific goal must be viewed in relation to the total situation.
3. The careful recording of actions taken and the accumulation of evidence to determine the degree to which the goal has been achieved.
4. The inference from this evidence of generalizations regarding the relation between the actions and the desired goal.
5. The continuous retesting of these generalizations in action situations.

It may be interesting to note that the action research strategy is acquired best by trying it. In this connection, it will be pertinent to reflect on the following observation of a team of action researchers:

"We feel that the only way we can become more competent in classroom research is to do classroom research, even though we may lack many needed skills and insights."

### **WHEN IS THE APPLICATION OF ACTION RESEARCH AS A STRATEGY APPROPRIATE?**

When is the use of action research fitting and appropriate? Cohen and Manion (1980) provide the following answer to this question.

"Action research is appropriate whenever specific knowledge is required for a specific problem in a specific situation; or when a new approach is to be grafted on to an existing system. More than this, however, suitable mechanisms must be available for monitoring progress and for translating feedback into the ongoing system. This means that. Other things being equal, the action research method may be applied to any classroom or school situation where these conditions apply."

Some of the specific areas in school life where action research may be regarded as appropriate may be indicated as follows:

- (1) Teaching methods—perhaps replacing a traditional method by a discovery method;
- (2) Learning strategies—adopting an integrated approach to learning in preference to a single subject style of teaching and learning;
- (3) Evaluative procedures—improving one's methods of continuous assessment;
- (4) the realm of attitudes and values—possibly encouraging more positive attitudes to work, for instance, or modifying pupils' value systems with regard to some aspect of life;
- (5) the personal in service development of teachers—improving teaching skills, developing new methods of learning, increasing powers of analysis, or heightening self-awareness, for example;
- (6) Management and control—the gradual introduction of the techniques of behaviour modification;
- (7) administration—increasing the efficiency or some aspect of the administrative side of school life.

#### **Action research for school teachers:**

The use of action research for modifying teacher behaviour is specially advised. It improves the teacher's perception, diagnosis and action with reference



to the classroom interactional setting. The handling of cognitive, social, managerial and linguistic skills by the teacher and his understanding or insight into the dynamics of classroom situation may also be considerably improved as a result of participation in action research projects.

### **Limitation:**

The action research strategy is sometimes assailed as representing nothing more than a common sense approach to solving a problem. It is also criticized because of its fluid and informal frame of reference where application of scientific method may be hazardous if not totally erroneous. Another serious limitation attached to the strategy of action research is that it does not yield generalizations of wide applicability. Also, as Corey observes, 'making action research cooperative introduces all complications involved in group work.'

### **To Conclude:**

Action research strategy is highly dynamic and practitioner friendly. It requires constant visioning and re-engineering of the systems and approaches with an intent to assure quick and prompt delivery of desired results. The 21<sup>st</sup> century world with its ever widening challenges and tasks needs to further capture and capitalise, assimilate and sophisticate and regulate and refine this strategy in all sectors of life where humans and human institutions are involved.

### **References:**

- Best, John W. (1970): *Research in Education*, Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Cohen, Louis and Manion Lawrence (1980), *Research Methods in Education*, Croom Helm, London.
- Corey, Stephen M. (1953): *Action Research to Improve School Practices*, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.
- Kerlinger, Fred N. (1973), *Foundations of Behavioural Research*, Surjeet Publications, 7K Kolhapur Road, Kamla Nagar, Delhi.
- Varma, M. (1965), *An Introduction to Educational and Psychological Research*, Asia Publishing House.
- Pandey, K. P. (2010), *Fundamentals of Educational Research*, Vishvidyalaya Prakashan, Varanasi.
- Pandey, K. P. & Bharadwaj, Amita (2008), *Sikshha Mein Kriyatmaka Anusandhan*, Vinod Pustak Mandir, Agra.