

## CHAPTER ONE

---

### What is Action Research?

**S**chooling plays an important part in the life of any individual. Reflecting its memories often call anybody to go back to relive those unbridled joyous childhood days. Curious and successful teachers have influenced not just the learning of students but their personality on the whole. The long term impact of school probably relies upon the effective and ineffective teachers in schools. The lacunae arise when the teachers and students participate in teaching learning activities as endured and not treasured. While teachers complain it as lack of support from community, administrators, inadequate facilities, parents' wrong perceptions, students argue it as teachers' failure to grab their attention, monotonous preaching of lectures and lack of quality teachers.

Action research has the power to bridge these differences in the learning environment where a teacher can reflect on the classroom strategies and create an exciting growth oriented environment replacing the routine process and avoiding stagnation. An ambitious teacher with a source of insight can climb up the mountain of despair and design the change required for the transformation of defeatist school to propitious environment which is marked

with new habits of mind, new forms of collegial interaction and creation of a climate and culture that supports true professionalism. Action research is not just a magical cure, but a strategic scientific method bringing transformation in all that ails education.

Action research is a dynamic process where teachers find continuous opportunities to improve their educational practices. In this process, teachers analyze and understand the students' needs in a better way through interaction, reflect it and enhance their professional development. This approach also empowers the teachers in resolving the problems such as access, enrolment, retention and learning, and helps in achieving the educational goals envisioned by the nation. The significant aspect of this research lies in its power to bring transformational changes in the quality of teacher and teaching-learning process in the whole educational set-up. Teacher who adopts a systematic and orderly way to observe, explore and define course of action for real school or classroom situation, could be entitled as reflective practitioner (Johnson, 2012).

Holistic development of students is the goal of education. Practitioners' desire and involvement in research is inculcated through the culture of action research at all educational levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) which foster and propagate professionalism and implementation of the curriculum in a better way by the teachers. Innovations in educational organization are not possible without research. Government extends its financial aids through various funding agencies to encourage teachers

embark on researches to improve their teaching practice and to enhance the students' learning process.

### Origin of Action Research

History of action research traces back to 1940's. The first identifiable starting point for action research was laid by John Collier, who was the commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1933-1945 (Susan Noffke, 1997). Kurt Lewin (1890-1947), who is often referred as the originator of action research, was the first to apply psychological ideas to practical endeavours. His action research revealed that by means of developing social relationship of groups and within groups one could sustain communication and cooperation. Lewin also included action research for minority groups to overcome the forces of exploitation and colonialization. Kurt Lewin, set out his first ideas on what he named as 'action research' in about 1934 (Marrow, 1969). After a series of practical experiences in 1940, he concluded action research as "No action without research; no research without action". In the 1950s, Stephen Corey in USA applied action research in educational circles, specifically by the teaching profession, to research into educational issues and advanced it in his book *Action research to improve school practices* (1953).

In Britain, action research was initiated by Schools Council's Humanities Curriculum Project (1962-1972) and following it Elliot and Adelman (1976) examined their classroom practice by applying action research method as a teaching project. But in late 1950, due to much focus on

other research methods, action research lost its popularity and faced a decline. Later in 1970s a well-known proponent Lawrence Stenhouse through his work 'An introduction to curriculum research and development' appealed action research as a supporter of teachers and higher education personnel for bringing in fruitful development theory in the practice of teaching and in the field of curriculum. Stephen focused action research as an emancipatory research with intellectual, moral and spiritual autonomy (Koshy, 2009).

In Australia, an active researcher named Stephen Kemmis influenced the world by evoking a practical outlook on action research with a participatory and critical focus. The action research legitimized teachers' efforts to rethink about their practice and explore their own ideas through hands on experience about their own practice eliminating the stereotyped research on learning. This self-inquiry research gained momentum worldwide and has been recognized as a potential source contributor of knowledge and theories across various disciplines. From the day of its origin, its adoption in various disciplines to sustain itself as action research has been developed and has also brought some changes in its basic tenants. From participatory, it bloomed to cooperative inquiry and action science.

A significant contribution of action research in the field of education is the development of democratic teaching practice in par with the normal life style of teacher and students. In this fast changing world, one could see the growing interest of action research as a research

methodology across world. The potential of action research in producing applied knowledge as per situation context is well explored in the educational field by all educationalists, teachers, policy makers and administrators (Koshy, 2009).

### Action Research - Defined

"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, individually and in groups. They should use their imaginations creatively and constructively to identify the practices that must be changed to meet the needs and demands of modern life. "Courageously try out those practices that give letter promise and methodically and systematically gather evidence to test their worth" (Stephen M. Corey).

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) define action research as a 'form of collective reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations 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'. Carr and Kemmis (1986) describe action research as 'a deliberative process for emancipating practitioners from the often unseen constraints of assumptions, habit, precedent, coercion and ideology'. In the words of Rapoport (1970) 'action research aims to contribute both to the practice concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration

within a mutually acceptable ethical framework'. McTherrie says, "Action research is an organized investigative activity, aimed towards the study and constructive change of given endeavour by individual or group concerned with change and improvement". In the words of Sara Blackwell, 'Research concerned with school problems carried on by school personnel to improve school practice is action research'. According to Corey, "Action research is a process for studying problem by part owners scientifically to take decision for improving their current practices."

### **Action Research: Connotation**

In simple terms, action research has two constructs, the first is 'action' and the second is 'research' which exhibits the links between them (Hall & Keynes, 2005). 'Research without action and action without research is quite impossible' is the uniqueness of action research and distinguishes it from other forms of conventional inquiries. It bridges the gap between theory and practice while addressing the practical problems. Action research is conducted in diverse contexts like social sciences, organization, administration, management and education by means of learning through action and reflection (Mc Niff & Whitehead, 2002). Action research is a process where systematic integration of theory, application and evaluation is involved (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). The evaluation process of action research is based on the importance of educational decisions and adjusting practices on making best use of its usefulness (Raja & Rajathi, 2005). It could also

be described as an approach with common sense, in terms of personal as well as professional development, as it enables the practitioners to investigate and evaluate their own work and create new theories for their practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). This school improvement strategy investigates the problems by the practitioners themselves to take decisions for improving their current practices (Corey, 1949).

'Teacher research' or 'Practitioner research' is the term often interchangeably used for 'action research' (Johnston, 2005). It could also be described as an organized inquiry which aims to study and develop a constructive change for progress and improvement in the given endeavour by the individual or a group. Teachers or administrators reflect their problematic situation and choose the most effective teaching strategy to suit their situation and hence called as situational research, as it focuses on one particular or specific situation. In general, action research could be termed as application of common sense or good management. Kemmis and Mc Tagger (1988) view action research as a collaborative process of practitioners who work with a shared concern. Action research enables researchers to self-reflect their practice to orient positive changes in their practice (Holter & Frabutt, 2012).

A classroom is a place where multiple opportunities are congregated for the success of students. The teachers are facilitators in demonstrating these opportunities for their enhancement in learning and understanding. The teachers push their students as engaged learners by greater

understanding of their learning style. Examining and understanding the learning process, along with the support of the teacher, enables them to flourish in all areas of their academic career. Determining the ways and means to enhance the lives of students in an educational setup is considered to be the main goal of action research (Mills, 2011). Students who are participants and leaders of a classroom environment are motivated and engaged to become successful learners.

### Action Research: Aims

Improvement in practice rather than production of knowledge is the fundamental aim of action research. This aim conditions and sub-ordinates the production and utilization of knowledge. The practitioner's capacity for handling and discriminating complex human situations before judging paves the way for improvement in practice. This aims to make practical judgement on concrete situations. 'It informs professional judgement and thereby develops practical wisdom, i.e. the capacity to discern the right course of action when confronted with complex and problematic states of affairs' (Elliott, 1991).

- *Focus towards improvement of school on whole.* Action research envisages a positive dimension to the regular teaching practice by encouraging and assisting teachers in conduction of action research and to bring effective social and educational changes in their immediate environment as well as in the spheres of influence.



- *Bring effective personal/ professional practice of teachers.* The teacher's involvement in the process of action research reveals the professional and personal development of the participants. The proactive and responsible behaviour of teachers bring in effective changes in their academic and personal career.
- *Provide research opportunities to faculty as a prelude to research projects.* The expertise of teachers through action research enables them to collaborate with other staff members to solicit for specific projects.
- *Make an upsurge in community engagement and research profile of the faculty.* Engaging in projects in collaboration with schools/educators raises the community engagement profile of the faculty and also provides opportunity for both faculty members and students to become involved in research projects for higher degree and/or for publication purposes.
- *Provide stakeholders with opportunities for research.* The students, parents, administrators, teachers and other stakeholders are provided an opportunity to work in collaboration with teachers to improve the educational practice.

### Action Research: Objectives

The main objectives of action research are:

- To bring an advancement in the infrastructural components and working conditions of a school;

- To cultivate research vigour and scientific attitude among teachers;
- To motivate the teachers to address the students' problems in a scientific way;
- To promote a democratic environment where teachers and students together understand and solve their problems;
- To bring excellence in educational institutions;
- To develop the ability and understanding among administrators to improve and modify school conditions with a scientific outlook;
- To eradicate the existing static and conservative school environment;
- To generate a healthy school environment for effective learning;
- To elevate the level of aspiration and performance of the students;
- To improve the current practices in the schools;
- To confiscate the notion that professional researchers can only conduct educational research;
- To enable the regular teachers and administrators to utilize the research method;
- To stimulate the confidence among the practitioners to involve in research to solve their academic problems;
- To create consciousness about the problems and application of the research methods for immediate solutions among the student teachers;

- To inculcate cooperation and democratic values among the schools or the educational personnel in their work;
- To instill the desire and needed attitude among the school personnel to bring excellence in their work; and
- To create a conducive learning environment for effective teaching and learning.

### **Dimensions of Action Research**

Education acts as a vehicle for social advancement and an instrument through which social forces are perpetuated to build a new social order. Action research recognizes and addresses the educational responses to profound structural changes in society. Action research has long been a part of research in education as well as in various social science fields. Literatures divulge the difference in process and procedure from fundamental and applied research. Action research promotes opportunities to improve their learning environment and their own practice, in educational situations through self-inquiry. It could be an individual or collaborative research among teachers or in partnership with university researchers.

Epistemology of action research enables us to have a cross section of action research. Action research addresses the epistemological questions of: Who can be the knower? Which counts as legitimate knowledge? and What kind of things can be known? Its vision is unpinned with a notion

to care for lives of children who form the future society. It explores the grass-root knowledge to construct the education system in recognition with the globalization and neo – liberal polices of education. Based on the extensive review and research, Noffke (1997) prescribed three dimensions for action research to reveal the multiple layers of assumptions, purposes and practices that entangle it. These dimensions emphasize complexities and interconnectedness across themselves. They are: *professional*, *personal* and *political*.

### ***Professional***

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while there was a struggle among the feminist in Europe and USA scholars in creating a form of research which connects social struggle and solving social problems, action research emerged with a potential to enhance the science of education and status of professionals who involved in teaching learning process. A research by and with teacher forms the highlighting feature of action research. The context and nature of action research develop the knowledge base to reframe the nature of teaching with conscious and contrasting efforts, and highlighting the professional deliberations throughout the educational process. Action research focuses on building the body of knowledge about educational practice along with the conception of teaching based on self-reflecting practice which articulates it as a knowledge generating activity. Thus a transformation in the educational research was embodied through established link between theory and practice, which underpinned professional development of teachers.

Professionalism of a teacher is clearly emphasized by his/her potential to produce new knowledge. Teacher's voice form a significant strand in generating vision for educational practice. Professional dimension of action research signifies the core understanding of bridging the theory and practice and generating new ways of understanding practice rather than mere production of knowledge base for teaching. Action research enhances the professional quality of teachers and the status of profession to support the changing demands of qualified teachers.

### ***Personal***

The core form of this action research lies when an individual examines his own practice for improving it. The distinct aspect of this personal dimension of action research is its impact on the personal growth of the teacher conceived with inquiry. The goal of action research for a teacher is to learn and dive in knowledge generating process. According to Abraham Shumsky, action research is a form of self-development where the teachers understand themselves and explore more to work better (Noffke & Somekh, 2010). Further as per the view of Hilda Taba, action research not only influences the problem solving ability but also equips the teachers with required skills. Action research impacts on personal growth when:

- Teachers engage in research;
- Work as individual vs collaborative in nature; and
- Individual participation or conduction in action research process.

Another important aspect of action research is that it advances the notion of teacher's personal empowerment. Academic dialogues among colleagues regarding personal beliefs on pedagogical practices also facilitate improved self-esteem and self-concept among the practitioners. Self-study of teaching through their past experience leads to personal and professional emancipation. Involvement in action research also provides rich insights into progress in character and nature of individuals. Individuals act as learners and start applying scientific principles for solving issues at hand. Teachers become adept in making adjustments to tackle learner's needs, systemic problems and gains more satisfaction in their profession. Critical understanding of complex situation based on reflection is imbibed. Impelled with reflective thinking skills, the teachers start to search for knowledge beyond immediate and individual experience. Visible raised aspiration among the teachers develops an integrated approach to analyze and evaluate all the actions pertained to their control. Working systematically through a circle of planning, action and fact-finding is applied in personal life too.

The teacher takes up decisive decisions based on the critical analyzes on the data collected in their own teaching experience about their own students and classroom situations which make them an empowered decision maker. Teacher brings her own unique expertise, talents, and creativity into the classroom situation where it is implemented along with the instructional programs for bringing better learning outcomes. The risk taking nature of

the teacher to try with new strategies widens the creativity and thought flow for new changes. The originality and diversified thinking skills are allowed to spread its wings with teacher as change maker. This action research approach brings a change in the standard top-down, administrator-driven leadership and induces for collaborative leadership. The leadership skills of these individuals are quite valued and individuals are encouraged to take on different roles (e.g., facilitator, supporter, and mentor).

### ***Political***

Political dimension of action research highlights a new purpose though it is also embedded in the personal and professional dimensions. In the political perspective, action research searches for solution to bring democratic practices in education system and there by promoting it in the society. It attempts to:

- solve the social problems;
- redress social inequalities;
- develops collaborative process;
- create democratic process; and
- leverage social change.

Thus action research focuses to work on social and economic justice in local community. It is deeply concerned with marginalized people and stay deeply connected with social struggles. It also challenges the political economy of knowledge and knowledge generation process and engulfs itself not as a sole tool for professional development but as a

tool for exploring research methods for social and economic struggles. During 1980s and 1990s, educational action research works were deeply tied with political dimensions. It reflected through included efforts to find solution for gender inequity, racial discriminations, etc., that prevailed in educational set up. The democratic impulse in action research was enhanced through development of social theories. Embracing social justice in educational situation took the agenda of accounting for local and global manifestation of oppressed. It's the impetus from community reform some effective action research projects have focused for school reforms. Specific courses and modified curriculum included teaching of research skills to empower the students to apply their research skills to address their concerns that exist outside the educational settings too.

All these dimensions reveal that familiarizing with research skills does not provide a mean to deal with current issues but also to face the life issues in a longer haul. These also enable the sense of civic participation in building a democratic, social and political development of a nation. The action research knowledge and experience push everyone to think beyond classroom environment and connect the societal situations and is intended to serve for its enrichment. Collaboration which is central to action research empowers the people to reach each other and work towards change.



## Principles of Action Research

Action research is a systematic investigation on the self-practice for the teachers' professional development. Its uniqueness emanates from the set of principles that guide it. Winter (1989) gives comprehensive overview of six key principles.

### ***Reflexive critique***

Evidence based inquiry is conducted to form judgements. This process of inquiry has its roots from self-awareness and situational understanding with personal filters in a social location. It reveals what is factual and true through the process of self-reflection of one's own perceptual bias. The reflexivity insists on framing judgements exclusively based on the personal experiences and not on universal theories. The practitioner with his dual role as researcher reflects on the issues and process and makes explicit interpretations, assumptions with a critical view to make some conclusions. The process of self-criticism fosters improvement in future cycles. A document about the situation, such as written, oral, video transcripts or official documents will make implicit claims to be authoritative. The successful reflection and critique by the practitioners about the action taken form a basic constituting principle in an action research.

### ***Dialectical critique***

Truth is brought to light through the process of discussion and scrutinizing. Dialectical critique refers to the dialog between the practitioners and the participants.

In educational action research, it means the teacher and the students. Thus the reality is understood on the basis of the relationship between the phenomenon and its context, and between the elements constituting the phenomenon. The discussion with the students or the participants helps the teacher or the practitioner for better understanding of the social reality and validates any research. The unstable element of the action, opposing phenomenon involved in the plan, and an adverse aspect that hinders improvement could be shared through interaction, which further enables the scope and insight for further improvement.

### ***Collaborative resource***

Action research process is never individualistic in nature. The action plan itself calls for the collaboration with colleagues, administrators and students in particular. Student participants in an action research project can also become co-researchers of it. This principle of collaborative resource enables and presupposes that every individual's ideas which are used for the development of the action plan are given equal significance and considered as a potential resource. It strives to avoid the skewing of credibility stemming from the prior status of an idea-holder. It especially gives an acknowledgement for all the minds worked in collaboration to contribute for the betterment of educational practices.

### ***Risk***

A practitioner involves in action research when he does not feel happy or desires to bring improvement in his practice.

The newly designed action research to be implemented in place of previously established ways of doing things emanates a kind of psychic fears in the researcher. Testing the workability of the new plan by practitioners involves risk, but without taking challenges in hand, no development or progress is possible. Any action researcher should cross this risk, feel and try for new solutions and improvement when one finds a lacunae in the current practices. In some situations, the ego could stem among colleagues in workplace by one's interpretations, ideas and judgments. Initiators of action research should apply this risk taking principle and support the new ideas and battle the fears and invite participation and show their readiness to such research in a voluntary basis.

### ***Plural structure***

The nature of the action research due to its collaborative quality embodies for a multiplicity of views, commentaries and critiques, which in turn leads to changes in action plans and interpretations. Thus a plurality while reporting an action research is inevitable. This plural structure in action research accounts for many explicit commentaries and their contradicting views with a range of options for the action to be executed. Hence, instead of final conclusion, the entire process reporting with the ongoing discussions among collaborators enables a perfect report for action research.

### ***Theory, practice, transformation***

Continuous transformation is made through the practice of action research. Here the theory informs a new practice and

it refines and contributes for the development of a new theory. Any action is planned based on idea with implicitly held assumptions, theories and hypotheses and the theoretical knowledge being enhanced by the findings of research. When explicit judgments are given empirically proved action, it deduces the farthing in the formation of theory. The ensuing practical applications that follow are subjected to further analysis, in a transformative cycle that continuously alternates emphasis between theory and practice.

### Components of Action Research

Borgia and Schuler describe the components of action research as 'Five Cs' - *Commitment, Collaboration, Concern, Consideration* and *Change*.

#### **Commitment**

Action research is a time consuming process. The dedication and commitment of the researcher and participant is a pre-requisite of this process. The participants must be provided with enough time to think, understand and come to conclusions regarding their participation in the research process. The researcher must inquire and observe practice and evolve with new strategies suitable to the situation. They should be made aware of the new strategies to be tried and must be prepared to endure the process throughout the research with willingness. The acquaintance with the fellow participants, the analysis and the duration of the research are the important aspects of the research process. If it is one year, the participant must have to accept it with full

commitment and sincerity. The reflection, documentation and interpretation process should align with literature review, which also involves the researchers' patience and sincere efforts. The participants must be involved with the informed consent explaining the time duration. The observation by the researcher should be done with the permission of the participant. Commitment towards time factor should be given due consideration with care by the participants before giving consent to participate in action research.

### ***Collaboration***

Egalitarian and democratic environment prevails in action research, providing that every member contributes and has equal play in reaching the goal. Every member co-operates and functions in co-ordination with each other. The cyclic process of action research enables and ensures the sharing of expertise and changing roles among its members to attain shared objective of the project. The members constructively explore new ideas, actively listen to others' views in order to reflect upon it and credit the contribution towards solving or attaining the goal.

### ***Concern***

Action research which is interpretive in nature depends on the support group which comprises of people with close association and with common attributes, knowledge base and good conversational exchange. Such relationships are vulnerable as well as risk taking to some extent but the trust

that exists between the team and value that underpins the project, forms the basic component of an action research.

### ***Consideration***

Action research for professional development and enrichment depends mostly on the critical review of one's own practice. The mindful reflection with care and consideration develops a pattern for positive change in the professional actions. Reflection process should be focused with critical examination of the practical theories, values and real time practices. The practices should be examined reflectively and reflexively to enable and encourage continuous learning and development.

### ***Change***

Growth, improvement and development in life is not possible without change. Change is ongoing and the only consonance in human life. Teacher should be ready to drive reform efforts, adopt changes, and modify teaching practices, to be a dynamic, competent and effective teacher. The diverse changes in social, economic and technological fields call for monitoring and evaluating the real classroom practices to understand the existing theories of changes and develop a system that connects with them. Thus teachers, to remain effective, have to continue and progress along with the changes in the world.

### *Faces of Action Research*

Action research is practitioner's research, which applies evidence-based approach for providing well supported environment. Also it acts as an ideal tool for management of change and maintaining quality human relationships (Nunes & McPherson, 2003). Zuber-Skerritt (1982) identifies action research as critical collaborative enquiry by which reflective practitioners, self-evaluate their own practices and engage in *problem solving* activity in *participation* with other colleagues. Practitioners find their way towards improvement by overcoming the constraints. Action research, because of its flexible nature, adopts and modifies itself in accordance with the changing needs of the exploring situation (Dick, 2000). Action research which is practical and participative tries to resolve the problems of its participants and seeks ways to improve the practice. It is a problem solving technique applying scientific methods. The cycle of action research is ongoing, based on critical reflection to build on professional development. It is methodologically eclectic. It gives a practical perspective of the work at hand enabling an enhanced chance towards positive change. The intention of action research is to attain sustainable transformation and emancipation in any educational or social settings.

The three features associated with action research, identified by Kemmis and Mc Tagger (1988) are: i) the practitioner is the researcher; ii) the research is collaborative; and iii) the output of the research is a change.

Figure 1.1

Characteristics of Action Research



The four essential characteristics of a pure action research identified by McDonough and McDonough (1997) are: Participant-driven and reflective; Collaborative; Context specific; and Improvement of practice. Action research is focused on practical aspects where the educators dynamically research their own practice employing a plan of action to be shared with educational community (Creswell, 2005).

Other descriptors of action research based on literature are given below:

- It is an *enhancer of the competencies* of the practitioners. It equips the practitioners to approach a problem with a clear vision and chart down ways to tackle them.
- *Collaborative* nature of action research assures the recognition for everyone's view and perception in



understanding a particular situation. For instance, the problem faced by practitioners in a specific environment or situation, if seen persisting in another similar environment namely school can collaborate together in finding solutions. It also empowers the individuals who work with the motive to improve their practice to work in collaboration with stakeholders in this research activity.

- This teacher's research follows a kind of *experimental model of inquiry* where all the participants (teachers/colleagues/administrators/students/parents) involved in the study, act in co-ordination and collaboration to contribute for the research in hand.
- Action research is *formative* in nature and aims to enhance the prevailing situation by solving immediate problems. It seeks to diagnose the problematic situation to understand the underlying factors that root the issue especially in class, school or community.
- Action research involves *reflective critique* which acts as a guiding principle for the researchers to be aware of their own perceptual biases and their own practices. This involvement of teachers also assists them in restructuring the existing system.
- Though action research adopts *systematic and scientific processes*, it does not enforce rigorous rules to be followed during the process of research. In this research, the data are collected, analyzed, and

presented in a systematic way with enormous freedom for the researcher.

- *Context specific* nature of action research prevents the researcher from finding solutions to generalized issues. It aims more in finding remedy for a problematic situation, specific to particular class, school, or situation. Narrow focus of action research makes its results less applicable for others in a generalized context. The interventions tested through this are small scale that it fits only to the specific context. This context nature is a unique characteristic of action research.
- The applicability of *mixed method (both quantitative and qualitative methodologies)* is an encouraging factor of action research. But, commonly it is qualitative in nature, as it includes more of verbal aspects rather than quantifying with numbers. As it investigates on problems and issues which are not easily measured and suitable for empirical analysis, it is also interpretative in feature. So, action research facilitates the adoption of simple and suitable method that suits the project (or problem or issue) identified in the classroom by the researcher.
- Action research is based on a *subjective epistemology* where the actual reality is the product of mind or product of individual consciousness. It neglects the existence of real structures in social world and believes in reality as a subjective social construction.

- The *responsive* character of action research enables to reflect and respond to every finding of the previous cycle and adapt *flexibility* in plan of action in accordance with it. The researcher emerges upon unbiased observation to enable further development.
- *Reflection* is a main aspect in the action research cycle. Reflection on the action plan enables the practitioner in the development of a new action which is also further researched and reflected. The outcome from each cycle forms the essence for designing the subsequent steps and events of any action research.

The *cyclic nature* of action research makes it a continuous ongoing process. One shot research is not possible, as

**Figure 1.2**

*Action Research Cycle*



one cycle emerges and leads to the second cycle, hence continuous. Thus, action research is an emergent process with dual cycle, an action cycle integrated with a research cycle and each cycle follows four steps such as planning, action, observation and reflection.

- The approach is *eclectic* in nature, which facilitates the researcher to combine various approaches and methodologies in research depending upon the goals and abilities of the participants. This research process adapts changes and modification to suit the requirement of the learners.
- The action research in due course of its process *contributes for the development of new theory*. The action research generates new ideas and perceptions which are validated and tested through repeated cycle of research taking up the role of a theory developer.
- Unlike other researches, action research is like an *open ended research*, it starts with concept and is conducted based on the perception or idea that has been generated through the experience of the practitioner, rather than with a fixed hypothesis.
- There are no specified norms and regulation as far as action research is concerned. This makes it *informal* in nature. It enables the researcher to frame his own guidelines. The framework of which is right and which is wrong, is all decided by the researcher.

- The essential aspect of action research is its *self-evaluative* nature. Its step-wise progress is keenly noticed and constantly checked by means of self-evaluation by the researcher.
- Most of the action researches are planned for *classrooms or small groups*. Local issues are prime concern of action research. Here, the issue is diagnosed by real practitioners to make a deliberate plan in response to it, to be implemented. Its scope flinches from individual development, later gradually to the large scale improvement.
- Though both inductive and deductive reasoning be drawn upon for action research, it also seems to be *abductive* (Pierce, 1940). The inferences of action research are simple explanations derived from observations. Observation leads to plausible conclusions. The actions are guided by the plausible hypotheses, developed to explain the observations and guides the next follow-up plan where it is tested immediately through action.

Action research which is *action oriented* proceeds with an intention to introduce new changes. The change or improvement emerges as result of researchers' understanding, evaluation and reflection of the situation at every stage of the cycle. The domino effect of collaborative action researches though responsive to the situation and local in nature, could also be extended with multiple studies. Action research, builds its theory, methods and action plan gradually as the research is in process. As the

action research cycle moves, the understanding increases, and influences change in methods and plan of action. This, extended support for emerging new research designs and facilitating modifications during the course of research, is yet another distinguishing feature of action research.

In action research, no hypothesis is tested or proved, nothing is compared or contrasted to check or determine the best, no experimentation to support hypotheses, but the ultimate goal is to understand the situation for making enhancement. This feature of action research divests it from the notions of other conventional researches. Though, action research has its limitation with generalizability of its finding, the series of snapshots with various nuances in the existing practices create a vivid view of what exactly is going on, which in turn, enables a teacher to design desired changes in their curriculum and transactional strategies. Thus, enabling professional growth with constant engagement in intellectual pursuits leads to a progressive learning environment.

### **Difference between Action Research & Conventional Research**

Research conducts diligent investigation and arrives with a solution to the problem. Analyzing and interpreting a problem in a systematic way and discovering new truths and facts hidden behind it is called a research. These purposeful attempts help in gaining answers which are objective, valid and reliable. Action research, distinguishes itself from other conventional research in its framework with dual goal of interest towards research and interest in

solving immediate problem. It applies systematic inquiry based on critical reflection of the existing practice with active participation in a changing situation to enhance the lives of children. It also exhibits a direct link with professional growth and development of a teacher. The comparison of action research with conventional research based on various facets is depicted in Table 1.1.