



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# **Action Research in Primary Schools in Ethiopia**

**July, 2006**

**This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by the Ministry of Education and Academy for Educational Development.**



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Academy for Educational Development (AED)

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**BASIC EDUCATION STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE**

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## **Abbreviations**

AED	Academy for Educational Development
BESO I	Basic Education System overhaul I
BESO II	Basic Education Strategic Objective II
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
MOE	Ministry of Education
ETP	Education and Training Policy
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region
D. D	Dire Dawa
B.Gumuz	Besnishangul Gumuz
A. A.	Addis Ababa
REB	Regional Education Bureau
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
CRC	Cluster Resource Center
CTE	College of Teacher Education
TTI	Teacher Training Institute
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
DEO	District Educational Office

# **Part I:**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1. Background**

Relevance, quality, access and equity are most prominent and complex problems in Ethiopian education. These problems and the strategy to reduce them were discussed in a number of policy documents and research papers. In this regard, the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (ETP) which was issued in 1994 by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia states that, "our country's education is entangled with complex problems of relevance, quality, accessibility and equity" (TGE, 1994). The ETP proposed nine overall strategies to meet these challenges. These are curriculum; educational structure; educational measurement and examination; teachers; languages and education; nexus between education, training, research and development; educational support inputs; educational organization and management; and educational finance. With reference to research and development, the ETP states that research of practical societal impact will be given

priority and the necessary steps will be taken to facilitate the coordinated efforts of all those concerned.

In 1994, the Education Sector Strategy document was separately issued by the government to facilitate the implementation of the policy. This document identifies the main constraints of Ethiopian education in a similar way with the ETP and elaborates on the strategies proposed by the ETP. With specific reference to research and development, the document states that research into curriculum development, instruction methods and evaluation techniques shall be encouraged and assisted. It expresses the need to integrate and coordinate the teaching/learning process with research, and facilitate the participation of teachers and researchers in getting the necessary experience.

From the above description, it is clear that the focus of the ETP in meeting the challenges of the teaching-learning process and tackle the problem of quality in education is not only by producing teachers who are qualified to teach, but also by facilitating conditions to conduct research in classroom situations. This means

teachers are encouraged to do action research which can be done at all educational levels. In this regard, it is expected that primary school teachers conduct research for improving the teaching learning process, the curriculum as well as their professional competence.

Action research can be appropriately integrated with education if teachers are able to conduct it at all levels and use the findings to solve practical educational problems. Moreover, action research can help teachers to be collaborators in tackling educational problems. Specifically, it can help teachers to collaborate on the revision of the curriculum, improve their work environment, professionalize teaching, and suggest ideas for the development and revision of educational policy.

Although the provision of clear policy is a primary step to get activities done, it is not a guarantee for implementation at school level. In line with this understanding, it has become significant and necessary to explore the status and experience of doing action research in primary schools in Ethiopia. Findings from

such research would enable policy makers, teacher training institutes and other stakeholders to improve the research capability of primary school teachers, to know the quality of action research conducted by primary school teachers, to assess the knowledge and skills of primary school teachers in using action research methods, to understand the limitations and strengths of the action research reports produced by primary school teachers, and to identify the problems encountered by primary school teachers in conducting action research.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

In the Ethiopian educational system, primary school extends up to Grade 8 with two tiers. The first tier is the lower primary school, which includes Grades 1-4, and the second tier is the upper primary school, which extends from Grades 5-8. The lower primary school is self-contained where teachers are assigned the responsibility to teach all subjects for one class. The second cycle is a departmentally organized classroom where teachers teach one subject across grades. In addition to the responsibility of teaching, teachers are expected to conduct action research in order to solve

the day-to-day problems of education. This is a professional requirement for all teachers at all levels. Moreover, teachers are obliged to conduct action research for their professional growth and development, and promotion to the next professional career is based on teaching and research outcomes.

At primary schools, it is believed that teachers can do action research to solve actual classroom problems. To this effect, primary school teachers in short term training and workshops or in their pre-service training programs have taken orientations and trainings on how to conduct such studies. However, there is no evidence that indicates the extent to which teachers conduct action research to solve real educational problems in Ethiopian classrooms. Nor is there any systematic attempt made to study the conditions under which primary school teachers do action research to the above end. Since schools are known to be the primary beneficiaries from action research, it is expected that they provide teachers with sufficient support. Nevertheless, evidence is required as to the extent to which such support is given to teachers, the types of support made available, and the satisfaction of teachers with the support given so that others learn

from useful experiences. More significant than all the above concerns, there is an issue of the purpose for which action research is carried out by teachers. Given the multiplicity of problems that school teachers face in schools, it is interesting to know which problems attracted the utmost attention and how they were prioritized for research.

Obviously, teachers are expected to conduct action research, but doing action research requires adequate knowledge and skills that are to be acquired through training and practice. It is not yet documented to what extent teachers feel that the knowledge and skills they acquired have helped them to conduct action research in actual classrooms, and to improve school situations. Therefore, there is a need to document the knowledge and skills of primary school teachers in using action research for improving the teaching learning process and then develop along the career structure.

### **1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The main aim of this study is to explore how action research in primary schools is carried out in Ethiopia by taking the experiences of schools that are known to

have been engaged in the task. It is an attempt to analyze the competence of teachers in doing action research in primary schools and how well they practice it for the purpose of improving the teaching learning process and their own professional competence.

The objectives of this study are the following:

1. To assess the knowledge and skills of primary school teachers in doing action research.
2. To document the extent to which primary school teachers conduct research using action research methods.
3. To find out the extent to which action research findings are used in supplementing the curriculum, improving teaching and learning process and solving educational problems.
4. To identify the main factors that motivate school teachers to conduct action research.
5. To assess the focus of research conducted by primary school teachers using action research methods, and explore the strengths and weaknesses of research procedures adopted by primary school teachers, and

6. To recommend actions to be taken by stakeholders of primary schools to improve the capacity of primary school teachers in using action research to solve classroom educational problems.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Research on the status of action research in primary schools in Ethiopia provides valuable information to decision makers at primary schools including school administrators, supervisors, primary school teachers, promotion committees, institutions of teacher training, and policy makers who are concerned with the quality of teachers in general and that of primary school teachers in particular.

Primary school teachers benefit from this study since they get information about the quality of the research they conducted using action research methods. By identifying the strengths and weakness of action research done by such teachers, the result of the current study would enable them to improve their skills and knowledge to conduct action research.

Other stakeholders who are involved in the training and preparation of primary school teachers can also benefit from the findings of the current research since they obtain information for the improvement and development of appropriate training schemes that take into consideration the capacity of primary school teachers in conducting action research.

## **1.5 Basic Research Questions**

The current study on the status of action research in primary schools is conducted to address the following basic research questions.

- Are primary school teachers knowledgeable and skilful to conduct action research?  
Were primary school teachers trained in doing action research? If so what kind of training did they obtain with regard to action research?
- To what extent are primary school teachers involved in doing research using action research methods?
- To what extent do teachers apply action research methods in developing curriculum,

improving teaching and learning and solving educational problems?

- What are some of the focuses of action research done by primary school teachers? How many of the teachers do, present and use action research in primary schools?
- What is the degree to which primary school teachers are satisfied in doing action research?
- Are primary school teachers encouraged to conduct action research?
- Are facilities available for primary school teachers to conduct action research?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of action research reports produced by primary school teachers?
- What steps are to be taken to improve the status of action research in primary schools?

## **1.6 Limitations of the Study**

Although all teachers at different levels of education are expected to conduct action research in Ethiopia,

this study is focused on the practice of teachers doing action research in primary schools. This is due to the focus of AED/BESO II project on this level of education as well as because most of the efforts for improving the skills and competence of teachers in action research are focused on primary school teachers in Ethiopia.

A research project may have many objectives. According to Dane (1990), for instance, the goals of research can be exploratory, descriptive, predicative, explanatory and action. This research is limited to exploratory purposes in its orientation, and as such it focuses on how far action research is conducted in Ethiopian primary schools as a practice. It is hoped that further studies would do more investigations covering other goals of research.

The number of primary schools is rapidly expanding in Ethiopia from one year to the other. The selection of samples requires reflecting this number as well as the type of schools. The samples of the current study cover a limited number of schools and the representation of the type of schools does not include such important

school features as size. Future studies may need to take these features in to account because such measures improve the empirical generalizability of results and the representativeness of samples.

## **Part II**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Emergence and Need of Action Research**

Research has been used to develop knowledge and solve perceived problems for a long period of time in history. Different approaches have been also proposed and used to this effect. The most widely used approach for long period of time has been the scientific technocratic approach. This approach was applied to serve both natural and social sciences. However, most social scientists criticised that the traditional social science-scientific approach could not satisfy the need to improve practical problems in context; hence the need for action research.

Though some scholars claim the origin of action research was in the 1950s, its emergence seems to have been earlier. According to Kemmis (1990), the term action research was first used by the Social Psychologist Kurt Lewin around 1944. He used the term to describe a form of research which could mean the experimental approach of social science with

programs of social action in response to major social problems of the day.

Action research, according to Lewin (in Kemmis, 1990) consists of analysis, fact finding, conceptualization, planning, execution, more fact-finding or evaluation and then a preparation of this whole circle of activities; indeed a spiral of such circles. Clearly, Lewin's formulation was pressed against the boundaries of the prevailing ideas of scientific truth.

Some authors (like Corey, 1953) suggest that action research is an idea which was formulated by Collier, between 1933 and 1945. Corey (1953) advocates for 'research and then more research' as essential to the program of improving the lot of the then-oppressed American Indians by democratic means. The kind of research needed was field research which responded to pressing social problems. Kemmis warned that it would be a mistake to see Collier as the sole originator of so grand conception of social research. He used the term, 'research -action' to describe his idea of the process.

Hodgkinson (in Kemmis, 1990), in critique of action research, argued that the ideas which took shape in action

research can be traced back to the beginning of the scientific study of education at the turn of the century, that is, the use of scientific methods to study educational practices. In particular, he draws attention to the works of Dewey. He quotes him:

The answer is that (1) educational practices provide the data, the subject-matter, which form the problems of inquiry.... These educational practices are also (2) the final test of the value of conclusions of all researches... Actual activities in educating test the worth of scientific results... They may be scientific in some other fields, but not in education until they serve educational purposes and whether they really serve or not, can be found out only in practice.

But the continuity of concern for research on education and its application in practice is far from adequate as an explanation of the emergence of action research as a new species of inquiry in education. In fact, it was precisely the continuity of that concern which stood on the way of the development of action research as a distinct species of inquiry (Kemmis, 1990).

The idea of action research was absorbed into education almost as soon as it was originated. Lewin himself worked in action research programs with teachers and

teacher educators. But his ideas were taken up most evidently in the work of the Horace Mann Lincoln Institute of Teachers' College, Columbia University. As Kemmis (1990) states; the institute was already engaged in curriculum development for social reconstruction and collaborative research with teachers, schools and school districts. Action research was a method which synthesised a range of contemporary concerns and provided a dynamic for collaborative programs of action in schools. It was taken quickly and influenced many of the Institute's projects in curriculum, teaching practice and supervision.

Though the years 1953-1957 marked a decline in concerns with action research, the years through 1960s and 1970s showed continuity with action research. It re-emerged in education in the early seventies in Britain, partly because there had been a continuing interest in it and in other fields (Kemmis, 1990).

The current revival of interest in action research reflects contemporary trends and issues not unlike those of the mid-1940s. Firstly, there is a strong interest among educational researchers in helping practitioners deal with

problems of practice. Secondly, a broad methodological interest has developed in recent years in interpretive methods which indicates a growing interest among researchers in defining the problems of the field in ways which represent the understanding of practitioners. Thirdly, there is a growth of collaborative curriculum development and evaluation work. At least one of the aims of collaboration is to build practitioner commitment to the research enterprise. Fourthly, there is an explicit ideological commitment to address social and political problems of education through participatory research carried out by practitioners on problems of immediate and more general public concern, for example, in school – level evaluation as an aspect of local general public accountability or in research on the use of language in classroom learning.

## **2.2 Concept of Action Research**

Although different authors give different definitions, it seems that there are general agreements in the conceptualization. According to Greenwood and Morten (1998), for instance, action research is a social research carried out by a team encompassing a professional action researcher and members of an organization or community

seeking to improve their situation. As such action research promotes broad participation in the research process and supports action leading to a more just or satisfying situation for the stakeholders. Reason and Bradbury (2001) say that action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory world view. They note that the basic assumption of action research is that people can learn and create knowledge on the basis of their concrete experience, through observation and reflecting on that experience, by forming abstract concepts and generalizations, and by testing the implications of these concepts in new situations, which will lead to new concrete experience and hence to the beginning of new cycle.

Reason and Bradbury (2001) further explain that action research is an alternative to rational social science research. Action research is an alternative approach to traditional social science research in that it is:

- *Practical* - The results and insights gained from the research are not only of theoretical importance to the advancement of knowledge

in the field, but also lead to practical improvements during and after the research process.

- *Participative and collaborative* - The researcher is not considered to be an outsider expert conducting an inquiry with 'subjects', but a co-worker doing research with and for the people concerned with the practical problem and its actual improvement.
- *Emancipatory* - The approach is not hierarchical; rather, all people concerned are equal 'participants' contributing to the enquiry.
- *Interpretive* - Social enquiry is not assumed to result in the researcher's positivist statements based on right or wrong answers to the research question, but in solutions based on the views and interpretations of the people involved in the enquiry. Research validity is achieved by certain methods.
- *Critical* - The 'critical community' of participants not only search for practical improvements in their work within the given socio-political constraints, but also act as

critical and self-critical change agents of those constraints. They change their environment and are changed in the process.

Action research, according to the above authors, is only possible with, for and by persons and communities, ideally involving all stakeholders both in the questioning and sense making that informs the research, and in the action which is its focus. By so doing, action research represents the current shift from modernism to post modernism.

### **2.3 Concept of Educational Action Research**

The origin of action research is the social setting where social settings have to be improved. Hence the context becomes an important part of the issue under consideration. The state of educational research shows that the great majority of educational investigators are primarily interested in traditional scientific or what some call fundamental research. The reports of these imply that they believe that the primary purpose of educational research is to establish new generalizations stated as observed uniformities, explanatory principles or scientific laws. They try to test hypotheses in such a way as to

justify conclusions extending beyond the populations and situations studied. They make extensive use of sampling theory and describe, within stated limits, population or situation universes. They are interested in discovering 'the truth' (Corey, 1988).

The efforts of an educational investigator who is engaged in action research have different primary purposes. He/She is not immediately concerned with adding more 'truth' to that body of educational knowledge which appears in articles, monographs, and books. The action researcher is interested in the improvement of the educational practices in which s/he is engaged. S/he undertakes research in order to find out how to do her/his job better-action research means research that affects action. His/her investigations are conducted in the situation which s/he wishes to handle more capably (Corey, 1988). This does not mean that the action researcher denies the importance of research which establishes generalizations describing within stated limits. The educational action researcher works in a specific, dynamic situation and with specific and identifiable persons. In her/his studies the researcher tries to find out whatever s/he must in order to do a better job of, let us

say, teaching a class of primary school pupils or specific classroom situation. These intentions modify the nature of the statistics s/he uses in treating her/his data.

Context may dictate the working definition of educational action research (Reason and Bradbusry, 2001). Accordingly, situations in which action research may occur may include the following.

- When teachers have to reflect and improve (or develop) their own work and their own situations by tightly interlinking their reflection and action.
- When teachers are to make their experience public not only to other participants but also to other persons interested in and concerned about the work and the situation.
- If data-gathering by participants themselves (or with the help of others) in relation to their own questions is required.
- When participation (in problem-posing and in answering questions) in decision-making is significant.
- If collaboration among members of the group as a 'critical community' ( of teaching) is required.

- When self-reflection, self-evaluation and self-management by autonomous and responsible persons and groups is considered.
- When learning progressively ( and publicly) by doing and by making mistakes in a 'self-reflective spiral' of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, re-planning, etc. are valued.
- If reflection which supports the idea of the '(self-) reflective practitioner is needed.

The above description elaborates the concept of educational action research. Zuber-Skirt (1986) uses the acronym "CRASP" to describe action research. According to him, educational action research is critical (and self-critical), collaborative, reflective, accountable (making the results of their enquiry public), self-evaluating and continuing professional development.

## **2.4 Characteristics of Action Research in Schools**

The school is a social setting where different constituents interact to achieve a common goal. The achievement of this dynamic social setting is influenced by the nature and changes occurring in its constituents. The teacher, as a

professional with other actors, is expected to strive to improve the functioning of the school situation. As stated earlier, action research is a mechanism to improve a working situation and this is also true in school. Kemmis and his associates (1990) have argued for, and successfully introduced, action research in teacher training at the primary and secondary levels. At the school level action research is not only possible, but also appropriate particularly for at least five reasons which may again be summarized in the acronym "CRASP" model mentioned above. Action research promotes a critical attitude, research into teaching, accountability, self-evaluation and professionalism. All of these are important goals anywhere in the world. These goals have been stated and demanded frequently in recent years, but they have not been achieved satisfactorily, because they are difficult to put into practice. Action research may provide a practical solution to this problem. Through systematic investigation, teachers can become more professional, more interested in pedagogical and other aspects of the school and more motivated to integrate their research and teaching interests in a holistic way. This, in turn, can lead to greater job satisfaction, better academic programmes, improvement of student learning

and practitioners' insights and contributions to the advancement of knowledge in education. Elliot (1988) provides the following characteristics of action research in schools.

1. Action research in schools investigates human actions and social situations which are experienced by teachers.
2. The aim of action research is to deepen teacher's understanding of her/his problem.
3. Action research espouses a theoretical stance in which action intended to change the situation is temporarily suspended until a deeper understanding of the practical problem has been achieved.
4. In explaining what is going on, action research tells a story about the event.
5. Action research interprets what is going on by relating it to a context of mutually interdependent contingency.

## **2.5 Activities of Action Research in Schools**

Action research encompasses research, action, participation and reflection. Elliot (1990) presents a

practical guide to do action research at school. Following are descriptions of the activities involved in the action-research cycle from his/her perspectives. These are primarily written in light of his/her experience of trying to help teachers do action-research.

### **2.5.1 Identifying and Clarifying the General Idea**

The general idea is essentially a statement which links an idea to action. In other words, the general idea refers to a state of affairs or situation one wishes to change or improve. One should avoid issues which one can do nothing about. The argument is that questions like the relationship between socio-economic status and achievement, between ability and a tendency to ask questions in class, may be interesting but they have tenuous links with action. There are certainly ideas which cannot easily be linked with one's actions and should be avoided, even though one may find them theoretically interesting.

However, there are states of affairs which one can link with actions but remains unsure about the extent to which something can be done about them. For example, if pupils are dissatisfied with the way they are assessed, this

obviously affects the teacher's capacity to help them learn. But he or she may feel that the mode of assessment which prevails is something little can be done about. Nevertheless, it is worth to suspend the teacher's judgement for a time in order to explore whether there is some action he or she could take to ameliorate the worst effects of the system he or she is constrained to operate with.

The important criteria for selecting a general idea are whether the situation it refers to (a) impinges on one's field of action, and (b) is something one would like to change or improve on. The extent to which one is able to change or improve on it is a question which action research should address, rather than assume an answer to.

Another thing to take into account in selecting a general idea as a focus is that one may have misunderstood the nature of the problem, or what needs to be improved. Thus pupils' dissatisfaction with the way they are assessed may merely be a symptom of a much deeper problem, which needs tackling the problem rather than merely treating the symptom. The original general idea may need to be constantly revised during the process of

action research. This is the way it is allowed for this possibility in every cycle of the spiral, rather than 'fixing' the focus of the research at its beginning.

### **2.5.2 Reconnaissance**

Reconnaissance is a process where a preliminary exploration about the issue under consideration is made. This activity can be sub-divided into two components; describing the facts of the situation and explaining the facts of the situation.

#### **(a) Describing the facts of the situation.**

One needs to describe as fully as possible the nature of the situation one wants to be changed or improved on. For example, if the problem is 'pupils wasting time in class' one will want to know things like:

- Which pupils are wasting time?
- What are they doing when they are wasting time?
- Are they wasting time doing similar or different things?
- What should they have been doing when they are wasting time?

- Is there a particular point in the lesson, or time of day, or set of topics, where pupils waste time the most?
- What are the different forms in which 'wasting time' manifests itself?

The collection of this information can provide a basis for classification of the relevant data, e.g. generating categories classifying the different kinds of time-wasting which goes on.

#### (b) Explaining the facts of the situation

Having collected and described the relevant contingencies, or critical factors, it is possible to pose questions which have a bearing on the state of affairs described. In asking these questions one moves from a description of the facts to a critical analysis of the context in which they arise. This involves:

- (1) Brainstorming and generating explanatory hypotheses.
- (2) Hypothesis testing.

A hypothesis may be cited for a relationship between the facts of the problem situation and some other factor(s) operating in its context. When teachers introduce factual information in person, either in written or verbal form, pupils may be prevented from evaluating it, since they will tend to interpret such interventions as attempts to get them accept its truth. However, through brainstorming around a problem, generating some hypotheses; one can then proceed to gathering information which is relevant to testing them. For example, evidence can be gathered about the extent to which one uses terms like 'good', 'interesting', 'right', their effects on pupils' classroom responses; and the ways pupils interpret their use. The gathering of this evidence may also suggest further explanations of the problem situation, which in turn leads to more gathering of information.

Even when one has tested hypotheses and found them to apply, they should retain the status of 'hypotheses' rather than 'conclusions' since one can always encounter instances where they do not apply, and which will prompt a search for more comprehensive explanations. The process of analysis is an endless one, but in action research it must be interrupted for the sake of action. And

the point of interruption should be when one has sufficient confidence in the hypotheses to allow them to guide action. Thus, the 'introducing factual information' hypothesis does not tell one not to introduce factual information in person, and instead to give pupils independent access to it, e.g. looking it up in the library or resource centre. But it does provide some guidance. It suggests, for example, that an alternative strategy would be to make one's expectations of how pupils are to use the information one introduces much clearer to them.

### **2.5.3 Constructing General Plan**

The general plan of action should contain:

1. A revised statement of the general idea, which by now is likely to have changed, or at least been clarified further.
2. A statement of the factors one is going to change or modify in order to improve the situation, and the actions one will undertake in this direction, for example ; ' I will modify the way I introduce factual information to pupils by clearly explaining what they are to do with it.'
3. Although some models suggest one action step per cycle should be taken, others' experience tells that

it is often necessary to undertake a cluster of steps every cycle.

4. A statement of negotiations one has had, or will have to conduct with others before undertaking the proposed course of action.

A teacher may need to negotiate some of the actions he or she proposes with colleagues, or a supervisor, whose capacity to do their job properly could be influenced by the effects of the proposed change, or perhaps even intervene unconstructively if not consulted.

As a general principle, the initial action steps proposed should lie within areas where the action researchers have the maximum freedom of decision. Later, if it becomes clear that the only solution to the situation lies in 'negotiated action', then the planning should involve the relevant people. However, it is worth noting on the initial general plan what negotiations will have to occur later if certain actions are to be undertaken.

1. A statement of the resources one will need in order to undertake the proposed courses of action, example materials, rooms, equipment, etc.

2. A statement of the ethical framework which will govern access to and release of information.

One must ask the question: can the information I gather about other people's activities and views be misused by me and those I disseminate to (and whom could such misuse harm)? If the answer is 'yes'; then one should try to give people a measure of control over one's access to their activities and views, and over the extent to which the information one gathers should be released to others. The key concepts here are confidentiality, negotiation and control.

It may not be only those immediately involved in the field of action who should have a say in these matters. Others only indirectly involved may nevertheless be harmed by the misuse of information. For example, a head teacher may have to reap some of the consequences of information released about classroom practices in his or her school. One may therefore need to state clearly what his or her rights are over the release of information about the school.

The general plan, therefore, should include a description of an ethical framework which has been discussed and agreed upon with the relevant persons.

#### **2. 5. 4 Developing the Next Action Steps**

Here one decides exactly which of the courses of action outlined in the general plan one is going to implement next, and how both the process of implementation and its effects are going to be monitored. It is important to remember the following:

- a) One needs to use monitoring techniques which provide evidence of how well the course of action is being implemented.
- b) One needs to use a range of techniques which provide evidence of unintended as well as intended effects.
- c) One needs to use a range of techniques which will enable one to look at what is going on from a variety of angles or points of view.

### **2.5.5 Implementing the Next Action Step**

It may take some time to succeed in implementing a course of action. It usually implies changes in all the participants' behaviour. For example, a teacher cannot change his or her role (or some aspect of it) without corresponding changes in his or her roles in the classroom. And this may take time if the proposed action involves a fairly radical shift of teaching role. The length of time necessary to secure implementation may depend on the frequency of contact the teacher has with the group of pupils involved. Or it may depend on the extent to which he or she is able to analyse the cause of the implementation problem. In other words, he or she may have to shift away from simply monitoring the extent to which the action is implemented and undertake some reconnaissance into the underlying causes of the difficulties experienced. As a result the general idea of what the problem is, and what needs to be done about it, may have to be modified or changed.

Even if the action step is implemented with relative ease, it may create some side-effects which require a shift in reconnaissance in order to understand how these arise.

And this in turn may require some modifications and changes to the general idea and the general plan of action.

As the action researcher shifts from simply monitoring the implementation and effects of an action step into a period of reconnaissance, he or she may need to select a wider range of monitoring techniques from the battery outlined later in this chapter. Multi-techniques will help to secure a more penetrating grasp of the situation. When the need for an amended plan of action begins to emerge from the reconnaissance undertaken, the writing of a case-study can help to generate ideas about future possibilities for action at the next cycle.

## **2.6 Impending Factors**

Action research is part and parcel of teachers' professional development. It requires teachers reflection 'on' as well as 'in' action. Undertaking action research and its effectiveness could be influenced by a number of factors. Some, but not exhaustive, are presented below.

### 2.6.1 The Capacity to Reflect

Neither the process of reflection nor its outcomes are entirely rational. The capacity to reflect (which is one of action research attributes) can be affected by situational constraints as work overload, innovation, phase of development, knowledge or skill level, self confidence, esteem, response to negative criticisms etc. Serenity can also be regarded as an impeding factor to initiate action research and exercise reflectivity.

*Professional learning culture:* Although reflective practice and action research can occur in environments which are alien to adult learning, it is clear that they will be more effective in those that promote the culture of inquiry for students and teachers (Day, 1999). This includes the nature of state and school policy on continuous professional development of teachers. Stenhouse (in Day, 1999) states that in the long term improvement of education through the utilization of research and development on the creation of different expectations in the system will be generated only as schools come to see themselves as research and development institutions rather than clients of research

and development agencies. It is not enough that teachers' work should be studied; they need to study it for themselves. It is possible to argue that it is not enough for the education system to leave the need for educational improvement to teachers and interpret the school as simply the location of teachers' work. Teachers' professional autonomy needs to be re-conceptualized in terms of the professional development of the school community.

*Time:* Most commonly it is possible to say that the mind is always under the impact of time while performing its activities. Time pressure erodes our freedom of thinking and performing of activities. Day (1999) argues that the mind works at three different speeds:

- i. *Rapid thought* –This 'unconscious level of working is the most common in the classroom, where teachers must often react instantaneously to a multitude of demands. It involves reflection on action.
- ii. *Deliberative* –this involves figuring matters out, weighing up the pros and cons, constructing arguments and solving problems

- iii. *Contemplative thought*-less purposeful, clear-cut and more playful. In this mode we are ruminating or mulling things over.

Because teachers' work has been regarded as 'contact time' with students, they have had few built in opportunities or expectations placed upon them. For example, to collect data, share practices with colleagues, collectively reflect in depth 'on' and about their teaching and its context. They have no control over time.

Hargreaves (in Day, 1994), discusses three dimensions of time in teaching: the micro-political, relating to the distribution of time in relation to status; the phenomenological: relating to the way the use of time is constructed in school; and the socio-political: relating to the claims on teachers' 'discretionary' time made by administrators.

## **2.7 International Perspectives on Educational Action Research**

Though the idea of action research dates back to the 1950s, its adages could not be developed to its contemporary notion and principles, and serve all sectors

of development. Its geographical expansion also seems unsatisfactory. However there are some areas around the world that are exercising and developing its practices, especially in improving the learning situation and the function of schools. The following section presents an overview of action research in different parts of the world, specifically in North America, Australia and some developing countries.

### **2.7.1 North America**

The question posed by Sanford (1990) 'Whatever happened to action research?' is particularly interesting in view of Lewin's influence in North America in the immediate post-war period and the subsequent prominence of Stephen Corey's conceptualization of action research in education. Kemmis and Robin (1988) disclose that the decline in research in North America during the 1960s is especially curious given that it had been an expression of the progressive democratic spirit of the 'New Deal'.

The idea of action research was swallowed by other traditional research thoughts until 1980s. Nevertheless, Sanford (1990) is able to report some examples of action

research which were liberating for people who participate in them. He concludes with some proposals for further action research by academics in their teaching roles. Vito Perrone's (1978) supporting teacher growth records some of the practical wisdom from the experience of action research in in-service action research for teachers at the University of North Dakota.

Scholars like Taba (1990) and Sanford (1990) in America have written on action research that has developed the techniques and practice of teachers in schools to improve learning situations. This has nowadays brought to the narrowing of the differences in Britain, Australia and elsewhere in Europe.

### **2.7.2 Australia**

According to Grundy and Kemmis (1988), action research has been developed as a discipline in the 1980s in its own right. And it has developed an epistemology, rooted in critical social science with a characteristic set of research problems of its own, distinguishing it from the research problems of other approaches to educational research and educational theory. These research problems are actively

pursued by a widening community of action researchers and action research facilitators around Australia.

The major activities and approaches include, language across curriculum, school based curriculum and evaluation movement, school level (school initiated) evaluation for school change projects, in-service consultancy, etc. These projects were assisted by Schools Commission, and the conducting of action research took the forms of:

- a. Individual action and reflection
- b. Individual action and, collaborative reflection
- c. Collaborative action and reflection

The National Seminar on Action Research of Australia identifies a variety of facilitators as Members of support services and research units within state education departments, members of federal education projects, university staff, teacher trainers and coordinators of in-service education, subject consultants and classroom teachers.

### 2.7.3 Developing Countries

In the developing nations, the pioneer in producing the essence of action research is pointed by Kemmis and Robin (1988) as Paulo Freire. Through his work on 'consientisation' (roughly, 'consciousness-raising') among oppressed groups in South America, he demonstrated that by using the language and perception of the oppressed it was possible to draw out new ways of understanding the social world and its structures, and plan social and political action arising from this educational process.

In creating alternative research methods, he introduced his methodology of '*Learning to do it by doing*'. An educational action researcher has much to learn from this methodology for working with teachers, students or with the school community. The development of the techniques and practice of educational action in the developing world seems at its embryonic stage that demands a great deal by facilitators and sponsoring organizations to which Ethiopia is no exception. In this regard, it is becoming an educational fashion that teachers

need to undertake action research to improve the teaching situation, while the practice is under question.

#### **2.7.4 Europe**

The United Kingdom was the site for the resurgence of interest in action research in education in the 1970s. The Ford Teaching Project was an important marker in British conception of action research. In this project, the use of action research in the development of inquiry teaching strategies brings the curriculum impulse and the teaching impulse into line. The idea of developing the hypotheses about classroom from teachers' practical constructs was one of the issues of the project.

An account of the work of the Ford Teaching Project by John Elliot (1976-77) describes the substance of the project. In particular, it illustrates the importance of constructing ways of identifying and clarifying the key concepts by which educational practice and its rationale are to be described. Preparing teachers for classroom accounting by John Elliot (1990) is an attempt to use the positive experience of the Ford Teaching Project to forestall the imposition of technocratic modes of evaluation on British teachers. Remarkable articles were

produced by scholars in the UK which is pervasively expanding.

As Elliot (1978) states, today, in-service education in U.K is increasingly becoming focused on practical problems facing schools and the teachers who work in them. The trend is accompanied by a concern to help teachers reflect more about the practice of education in their schools. 'Self evaluation', 'action research' and 'decision making' are becoming part of the language of improving school situation.

## **Part III**

### **Methods of the Study**

#### **3.1 Design and Procedures**

The diverse origin of action research and its background in different paradigms and world views required the adoption of a multi-method research approach that employed both quantitative and qualitative designs. In the quantitative design, the survey method was used to collect data from teachers through questionnaires. In the qualitative aspect of the design interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect in-depth data from school directors regarding the use of action research by primary school teachers and the implementation of these research outcomes in solving educational problems.

The current study was carried out in four stages. The first one of these was the preparatory stage. It involved proposal development, review of related literature, development of instruments of data collection, selection of samples and training of data collectors. The second phase was the

administration of instruments and collection of data. In third stage, data organization, coding, entering, cleaning, analysis and interpretation were accomplished. In the fourth, draft report writing, provision of feed back to the draft, finalization of the draft, publication of the final report and dissemination activities were accomplished.

### **3.2 Sources of Data and Selection of Samples**

The sources of data for the present study were teachers and primary school administrators (directors or deputy directors). They were selected from primary schools identified by regions and AED/BESO II regional officers for their action research experiences in Ethiopia. Depending upon the size of each region a maximum of two to three schools were selected. The selected schools were identified on their previous record of conducting action research. From each school, 25 teachers were randomly selected if the number of teachers in that particular sample school was greater than 25. If the number of teachers in the sample school was less than or equal to 25 all the teachers in that

sample school were included. Because of the unfavourable conditions in Gambella and Afar regions during data collection, the current study did not include schools from these regions. The total number of teachers included in the sample was 517. The directors (deputy directors in case of absence) of sample schools were also included in the sample, and the total number of sample school administrators was 20. The total number of teacher participants in focus group discussions was 110 and that of students was 54. Table 1 presents the number of sample schools, directors, and teachers included in the study. Among the participants of focus group discussions, the total number of teachers was 130. This comprised 78 male and 52 female teachers. Similarly, the total number of students who took part in the focus group discussions was 93. Of these female students were 54 and males were 39. The pupils were selected from Grades 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Table 1. Sample schools, teachers and directors by region

No.	Region	Number of Selected Schools	Sample	
			Directors	Teachers
1	Tigray	2	2	50
2	Amhara	3	3	76
3	Oromia	4	4	99
4	Somali	2	2	50
5	Benishangul -Gumuz	2	2	60
6	SNNPR	1	1	25
7	Harari	2	2	46
8	Addis Ababa	2	2	49
9	Dire Dawa	2	2	62
	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>517</b>

### 3.3 Instruments of Data Collection

The instruments used for data collection in this study were questionnaires and structured interview/focus group schedules. These instruments were developed in such a way that they maximize the possibility of generating answers to the basic research questions.

The major contents of the questionnaire were the extent of teachers' training in action research, extent of teachers' involvement in action research, extent of the implementation of action research in solving educational problems, availability of

environment which is conducive for action research, and presence of motivational factors to do action research. Another instrument used in collecting data was a structured interview/focus group discussion guide for school directors and administrators. The guide also included items that reflect the basic research questions. Finally, samples of selected action research reports by primary school teachers were collected to determine the quality of the research done by primary school teachers.

### **3.4 Administration of Instruments and Data Collection**

The questionnaires were filled by the sample teachers. Eleven field workers were recruited and trained to collect data from each region. The field workers also collected data from school principals /administrators by the use of interview guides.

The collected data from the questionnaires were organized, entered, cleaned and analysed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, mainly percentages, mean

and standard deviations were used as appropriate to the collected data. Other data collected by interview guides were analyzed qualitatively. Narratives, quotations and the use of thematic categories were the main approaches to illustrate main results. In addition, findings were also demonstrated using tables in order to create convenience for summary.

### **3.5. Issues of validity and reliability**

According to Yin (1994) four tests are used to establish the quality of any empirical social research. These are construct, internal and external validities and reliability. Since this study was a multiple case study, the four tests were relevant. One way used to ensure construct validity was to use multiple resources. As it has been indicated in the sampling section, different sources of data including teachers, directors and student were used. Another way has been the use of expert reviews of the research report. External and internal reviewers as well as the Ministry of Education were invited to assess the draft report.

Although internal validity is more appropriate for explanatory case studies, the current study attempted to meet this criterion by doing the matching of patterns from thematic analysis. Generalizations were made after patterns of findings from different sources were analyzed and summarized. These were followed by explanations in relation to theories and practical experiences for external validity. Research procedures were planned in a research proposal from the outset. Separate files were developed for documenting responses from data sources. It is hoped that this will help for replicating the study for reliability.

## **Part IV**

# **Data Analysis and Major Findings of the Study**

As already mentioned, the purpose of this study was to investigate how action research is done in some primary schools in Ethiopia. For this, twenty schools in nine regions were used. The preliminary information was gathered from teachers, directors, and students using teachers' questionnaires, focus group discussions and directors' interviews.

In this part, data from these participants are presented in tables followed by major descriptions of results as demonstrated in the tables. As it was made clear in the previous description, the data are quantitative and qualitative. The qualitative data are presented in narrations and tables under categories pertinent to the issues addressed through questions. The first presentation is based on the data presented for all teachers of the sample schools followed by focus group discussion of teachers, directors and students. Whenever relevant, results from quantitative and qualitative

data supplement each other in the presentation. Since the same issue is presented for the purpose of triangulation, the summary of major findings are given after presenting data from each category.

#### **4.1 Profile of Teachers and Schools**

In the teachers' questionnaires, teachers of sample schools were requested to provide information on their personal profiles including their years of service, average number of periods they taught per week and the average number of students they taught in the classroom. A detail of this analysis is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Profile of teachers and schools

Region	Average year of service		Average number of periods taught /week		Average number of students/class	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Addis Ababa	49	20.1	48	21.5	49	67.9
Amhara	70	16.3	75	29.0	76	66.6
Benishangul Gumuz	60	11.4	60	23.3	60	66.2
Dire Dawa	61	13.5	61	24.9	62	68.8
Harari	44	24.9	43	19.0	46	49.1
Oromia	97	19.0	96	25.4	99	82.8
SNNPR	25	15.1	25	24.1	25	72.4
Somali	50	14.6	47	17.7	50	87.3
Tigray	50	12.2	50	28.0	50	54.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>69.6</b>

Service year of teachers has an influence on teachers doing action research. This could be in terms of perceiving a wide range of problems and seek solutions. As indicated in Table 2 above, the average service year of the teachers is almost 16 years. The idea of improving school situation through action research is a very recent understanding. Accordingly the inclusion of action research in pre-service teacher training either as a course or unit of course is not more than a year long, after the introduction of Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO, 2000). Therefore, it

would be difficult to expect those teachers who have graduated prior to the introduction of action research to carry out such a study unless they are provided with some sort of training pertinent to action research.

The teaching load of teachers per week indicates the time teachers may have to undertake action research. The average teaching load as depicted in Table 2 is 23.6 (almost 25) per week. This indicates that teachers have only one free period per day (s/week). The number of students in a class has also an influence on teachers' load of work. The average class size is almost 70 in the sample schools. As the number of students increases in the class, the engagement of teachers to assist these students may also increase.

## **4.2 Training of Teachers in Action Research**

An important variable to investigate the status of action research done in school is teachers' know-how of how to do action research. This could be acquired either during the initial training or through short term trainings provided on the job.

The following table presents the status of training teachers on action research across regions as indicated by teachers in questionnaires.

Table 3. Training of sampled teachers in action research

Regions	Reponses		Total
	Yes	No	
Addis Ababa	20 (3.9%)	29 (5.6%)	49 (9.5%)
Amhara	37 (6.0%)	45 (8.7%)	76 (14.8)
Benishangul Gumuz	33 (6.4%)	27 (5.2%)	60 (11.7%)
Dire Dawa	30 (5.8%)	32 (6.2%)	62 (12.0%)
Harari	19 (3.7%)	27 (5.2%)	46 (8.9%)
Oromia	74 (14.4%)	25 (4.9%)	99 (19.2%)
SNNPR	8 (1.6%)	17 (3.3%)	25 (4.9%)
Somali	9 (1.7%)	39 (7.6%)	48 (7.3%)
Tigray	19 (3.7%)	31 (6.0%)	50 (9.7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>249 (48.3%)</b>	<b>266 (51.6%)</b>	<b>515 (100%)</b>

Table 3 shows that 515 teachers responded to this question. From these, 52% of the teachers do not have any training while 48% have training of different level pertinent to action research. The table also shows that schools in Oromia, Amhara and Benishangul Gumuz-Gumuz have relatively

better proportion of trained teachers on action research. In general, Table 3 shows that much more is desired in terms of training teachers for conducting action research in primary schools. Moreover, it also shows that action research is done by either untrained teachers or little action research is done in reality in each school.

### 4.3 The Extent to which Training on Action Research Assisted Teachers

Teachers were asked to provide information on the extent to which the training they took has helped them in doing action research. The following table shows the responses in this regard.

Table 4. The extent to which training on action research helped teachers

Extent of assistance	Number of Teachers	Percent
To the greatest extent	31	12.8
To a greater extent	29	11.9
To some extent	89	36.6
To less extent	6	2.5
To the least extent	3	1.2
No response	85	35.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 shows that 243 trained teachers have responded to the above question. From these respondents, nearly 37% said that the training has helped them to some extent to carry out action research. Though this is highly dependent on the perception of teachers, the figure indicates that there is no as such deep confidence developed as result of the training provided. The fact that the number of those who responded “to less extent” and “to the least” comprised 2.5% and 1.2% respectively implies that negative outlooks towards the training efforts were minimal.

Although skills in doing research could be developed with frequent engagements, high quality or relevant training becomes crucial, especially with such new approaches of social science research including action research. The training could be in a form of cascade or colloquial.

Results from focus group discussions of teachers are not very far from what has been obtained from questionnaires. Among teachers who have conducted action research, teachers of eight (40%) schools indicated that they had no training for doing action research. Teachers in 12 (60%) schools have training;

some of them were trained during their initial training at their respective training institutions or at the cluster centres in their schools. Teachers in one school indicated that such training programs lasted only one and half days. The following table summarizes teacher responses during the focus group discussions.

Table 5. Teachers' responses in focus group discussions on training

Region	Name of school	Response on training of teachers
Addis Ababa	Bete Mengist	Two had training - the training has helped them
	Africa Andinet N	No training, except a formal course on research
Amhara	Amber	No training.
	Dembecha	No training.
	Ayalew Mekonen	For one and half days-it has given hint.
Benishangul Gumuz	Dibatie	Six teachers have taken training- helped them to do action research.
	Bulen	All have taken training-helped them to do action research.
Dire Dawa	Melka Jebdu	No training.
	Addis Ketema	Took training-helped them to do action research.
Harari	Aboker	No training except 1 teacher for 4 days- helped to do action research.
	Kundudo	No training.
Oromia	Bedelle	Had training - helped in conducting action research.
	Bokoji -Tigil fire	Had training- the training helped to some extent in doing research.
	Seqo	Yes there was training - it created interest.
	Olanchiti	Yes, it helped in identifying 35 school problems and to seek solutions.
SNNPR	Gangawa	It helped a lot.
Somali	Hussien Gire	No training.
	Wilwal	Yes, through distance course.
Tigray	Negash	Yes, contributed to some extent.
	Agulae	No training.

Among those who took the training there were some who reported that their training was useful to some extent while others said that it motivated them to undertake action research, helped in exposing school problems to the public and seek solutions. Since doing action research requires training, the outputs of the significant proportion of teachers who claim to have done such a study might not have done high quality or even proper action research. Perhaps this finding relates to the finding that reported the dominance of “traditional/ descriptive research methods in the action research already carried out by teachers in primary schools.

#### **4.4 Action Research in Practice**

From the previous reports in Table 3 and from experience, it is possible to understand that action research is conducted both by trained and untrained teachers. Although doing research which is not action research by itself is a positive step in the education system, doing “action research” without training might have other quality influences on the outcomes of the research undertaken. In order to get the impression of the

extent to which teachers claim to have done action research and thereby understand indirectly the quality of those research efforts, teachers were requested to provide information on whether or not they have undertaken action research. Results from the acquired information are provided in the table below.

**Table 6. Proportion of teachers who did action research by region**

Regions	Response of teachers				Total	
	Yes		No		No.	Percent
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent		
Addis Ababa	16	3.1	33	6.5	49	9.6
Amhara	20	3.9	56	11.0	76	14.9
Benishangul Gumuz	37	7.3	23	4.3	60	11.8
Dire Dawa	18	3.5	44	8.6	62	12.2
Harari	17	3.3	29	5.7	46	9.0
Oromia	37	7.3	59	11.6	96	18.9
SNNPR	2	0.4	23	4.5	25	4.9
Somali	4	0.4	41	8.1	45	8.8
Tigray	35	6.9	15	2.9	50	9.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>36.5</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>509</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table depicts that from 509 teachers who responded to the question, 186 (36.5%) claim to have done action research and 323 (63.5%) did not do action research. In fact, the ones who claim

to have done action research can either be trained or untrained. The most significant and bigger message from the above finding is that most teachers irrespective of whether or not they had training have not done action research. This implies that teachers show less effort to understand and reflect on their everyday problems in schools. This less effort is very serious in SNNP and Somali.

On the other hand, Oromia has relatively shown better efforts than other regions. It has been implied in Table 1 that lack of adequate skills on how to do action research has significant influence on teachers' effort to do action research and improve school/situation. In Table 2 there were also indications that trained teachers lack confidence in doing action research. This may require at least a sort of training that may develop confidence on the practitioners.

Directors were asked to provide information during focus group discussions on the percentage of teachers who did, presented and used action

research in their respective schools. The following table summarizes the information they provided.

Table 7. Percent of teachers who presented and used action research – directors' response

Region	Sample schools	Teachers who did and presented action research		Teachers who used action research	
		N	%	N	%
Addis Ababa*	2	1	6.6	8	53.3
Amhara	3	5	9.4	3	5.6
Benishangul Gumuz	2	2	6.2	8	25.0
Dire Dawa**	2	2	13.3	-	0
Harari**	2	1	3.1	-	0
Oromia**	4	12	24.0	-	0
SNNPR**	1	2	100.0	-	0
Somali**	2	3	3.0	5	0
Tigray	2	4	12.5	18	56.2
<b>Total/average</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>15.6</b>

\* Data was obtained only from one school.

\*\* Used data not provided

The above table shows that from those teachers who did action research 19.8% presented the results to stakeholders and 15.6% used their research results to improve their teaching situation. The highest two regions to have presentations were Oromia and Dire Dawa. One can not talk of SNNPR since the research done in the region was minimal. Seen from the

perspectives of communicating results and utilization, therefore, the status of action research is still very low in the regions. Again these results are complementing the results obtained in Table 6. Action research has to be developed as school culture and it has to be collaborative to bring change to the situation. For this it has to be presented to different stakeholders to orchestrate the efforts. It seems that the presentation and utilization of the results were inadequate with 19.79% and 15.56% respectively. In many regions directors have not demonstrated for what purposes teachers used their research. Perhaps this could be from lack of proper documentation or from the assumption that completed research is equivalent to used research.

#### **4.5 Collaboration of Teachers in Doing Action Research**

Action research is a collaborative and participatory enterprise in which participants have equal responsibility in the process. This is because its implementation requires a collaborative act. Thus, it is recommendable that teachers do action research collaboratively with colleagues or others as may be

required. The following table shows the number of teachers who did action research with their colleagues.

Table 8. Number of teachers who did action research with other by school type

School type	Responses					
	Yes		No		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Rural	14	7.6	23	12.4	37	20.4
Urban	119	64.3	29	15.7	148	80.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>71.9</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>28.1</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>100</b>

The table shows that among the teachers who reported to have done action research 71.9 % have said that they did action research collaboratively. This seems encouraging since it leads to better implementation of action research results if done collaboratively. According to Reason and Bradbury (2001), action research is a participatory worldview where the reality we experience is co-created and co-authored. The effort of doing action research collaboratively is more pronounced in urban schools than in rural schools. This might be due to the fact that urban school teachers may have better opportunities to different means of communication and documents than the rural ones.

## 4.6 Purposes of Action Research in Schools

The purpose of research may indicate the type of prevailing problems in schools as well as the level of understanding of teachers concerning action research. The following table provides the purposes for which action research has been carried out by the teachers.

Table 9. Purposes of action research conducted by teachers

Purpose	Yes		No		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Improve classroom Instruction	90	17.4	142	27.5	232	44.9
Curriculum Improvement	44	8.5	190	36.8	234	45.3
Improve school administration	40	7.7	194	37.5	234	45.3
Solve every day practice	103	19.9	131	25.3	234	45.3
Facilitate conditions for teaching	43	8.3	191	36.9	234	45.3
Promote students learning	119	23.0	115	22.2	234	45.3
Promote remediation and enrichment	64	12.4	170	32.9	234	45.3
Promote school-community relations	55	10.6	179	34.96	234	45.3
Others	6	1.1	228	44.1	234	45.3

As Table 9 shows, 234 teachers responded to the question with regards to the purposes for which action research was done by teachers. From the alternatives

presented, the most frequently perceived and addressed objectives by the research were to promoting students' learning (23.0%), solving everyday practices (19.9%) and improving classroom instruction (17.4%). In fact, these issues are interrelated and could be summarized as promoting students' learning, since the whole effort of the school is to accomplish this purpose. Hence the emphasis on 'improving classroom instruction, solving every day practices, facilitating conditions for teaching and promoting students' learning' have direct and close relations with improving the learning situation, which is the ultimate purpose of educational action research. Table 10 below is a summary of teacher responses on the main issues or problems addressed by researchers/teachers/ from focus group discussions. Most of the issues teachers tried to investigate and aspired to improve were the same across schools. Moreover, most of the topics investigated were related to students learning in a broader sense. It confirms the findings reported in Table 9 above.

Table 10. Teachers' responses during focus group discussions on main issues addressed by action research

Region	Name of school	Response on main issues addressed by action research
Addis Ababa	Bete Mengist	Dismissal of some students, disciplinary problems of students, the importance of teaching materials, causes of students' weakness in grade 6 Geography, problems of teaching in self-contained classroom-Grade 2 Civics Education, Problems and causes of poor academic performance of female students
	Africa Andinet No.1	Causes of students' low achievement; participation and utilization of teaching aids
Amhara	Amber	Stationery Support from school
	Dembecha	Poor grades in maths, lab, problem of application of student centred Method
	Ayalew Mekonen	Female education, students discipline
Benishangul Gumuz	Dibatie	Students' misbehaviour in school, problems of self-contained classes, comparison of male and female students' achievement
	Bulen	Why students repeat in the class, advantages of continuous assessment, causes of conflict and resolution mechanisms
Dire Dawa	Melka Jebdu	Why students perform low (1-4), increase of female students drop outs
	Addis Ketema	Impact of textbook price on students' performance, causes of students misbehaviour.
Harari	Aboker	Student-teacher relationship, students' performance in grade 8, factors increasing absenteeism, the significance of KG for primary education
	Kundudo	Female students' dropout, content analysis social studies, relevance of social studies textbook to the region, repetition of grade 8 students
Oromia	Bedelle	Issues related to teaching maths, mathematics achievement, absenteeism
	Bokoji Tigil fire	The problem of teaching speaking skill in English, poor academic performance of students, dropouts of students, misbehaving in classroom, school-community relationship
	Seqo	Female students' participation, comparison of female and male students' academic achievements
	Olanchiti	(Misunderstood answer)
SNNPR	Gangawa	Participation of female students, the gap in teaching listening skills in English
Somali	Hussien Gire	Problems of orphan children, repetitions, dropouts
	Wilwal	Student discipline, wastage
Tigray	Negash	Absenteeism and late coming; the impact of age difference in grade 1; dropout and socioeconomic
	Agulae	Dropout at lower grades, low achievement of girls, shortage of classroom

Table 10 shows that a variety of issues hampering the learning-teaching process were investigated by teachers who did action research. Some of the most important issues include disciplinary problems of students, causes of students' underachievement in different subjects and grades, problems of teaching in self-contained classes, causes of poor academic performance of female students, utilization of teaching aids, application of learner-centred approach, causes of dropouts in Grade One, problems of school pedagogical centres, comparison of female and male students' academic achievement, why students repeat grades, advantages of continuous assessment, causes of conflict and resolution mechanisms, impact of textbook price on students' performance, factors causing absenteeism, significance of kindergartens for primary schools, relevance of social studies curriculum to the region, repetition in Grade 8, problems of teaching the skills of speaking in English, school-community relationship, participation of female students in school, the impact of age difference in Grade One, and late coming to schools. Among these, students' discipline, issues related to female students, and curricular issues were dominantly addressed.

## **4.7 The Process of Action Research**

The process of action research involves those activities followed by teachers and other stakeholders while teachers did the research. These include motivating factors to do or not to do action research, support and contribution to doing action research, main procedures followed, communication of results to colleagues or community, contribution to the school in the improvement of teaching-learning, and problems encountered to undertake action research. The findings below were obtained from focus group discussions with teachers who did action research, directors and students of the sample schools mentioned above.

### **4.7.1 Teachers Perception of Motivating Factors to Conduct Action Research**

According to the responses from teachers who did action research, problems observed in school, push from education offices, curricular issues, career structure, performance evaluation, research done by others, the topics from BESO II, the training on action research, and discussions in schools motivated them to undertake the activity. From these factors career structure, performance evaluation and perceived

school problem/s are the major ones. The following table is a consolidation of teacher responses on the motivating factors during focus group discussions.

Table 11. Teachers' responses in focus group discussions on factors initiating action research

Region	Name of school	Initiating factors for action research
Addis Ababa	Bete Mengist	The training, school problems, push from education office, curricular problems in Environmental and Civic Education.
	Africa Andinet No.1	Problems observed in the school
Amhara	Amber	Career structure and girls education
	Dembecha	To be exemplary for other teachers, research done by other teachers
	Ayalew Mekonen	Perceived problems of the school, topics given from BESO, deficiency of textbooks
Benishangul Gumuz	Dibatie	Observed problems of the school, career structure
	Bulen	Observed problem of the school, career structure
Dire Dawa	Melka Jebdu	Observed problems of the school, career structure
	Addis Ketema	Observed problems of the school, career structure
Harari	Aboker	Career structure
	Kundudo	The problems at school, performance evaluation criteria, individual interest
Oromia	Bedelle	Daily problems, the training given on action research
	Bokoji Tigil fire	Requirement for performance evaluation; understanding that it is helps to improve students' learning, deals with everyday teaching encounters; strengthens school-community relationship
	Seqo	Interest to solve school problem, Push from the Education Office, ,DEO a and the training given
	Olanchiti	Day to day problems of the school
SNNPR	Gangawa	Some problems in school
Somali	Hussien Gire	Some problems in school and discussions in school
	Wilwal	Career structure, staff discussion
Tigray	Negash	Career structure perceived classroom problems
	Agulae	Performance evaluation

Some of these issues such as career structure and push from education offices are external factors that may work provisionally and may not be sustainable. It is, however, encouraging that school internal factors gave rise to the initiation of action research. This is because this type of research is meant primarily to improve school work. The fact that career structure and performance evaluation serve as initiating factors imply how much policy makers may need to ground action research in these areas. It is, after all naïve to think that teachers would do action research only for solving instructional problems. Both internal and external factors are important elements to initiate and carry out action research in schools.

#### **4.7.2 Procedures and Instruments of Data Collection Used by Teachers**

Almost all teachers followed the same procedures in all schools. The descriptive method which includes identification of the problem, background, objective, research hypothesis, provision of conclusions and recommendations was commonly employed. The instruments include questionnaires, observations, interviews, and discussions. The only exceptional case

in terms of research design is the one in Olanchiti primary school in Oromia. In this school, a quasi-experimental design was put in practice. Dane (1990) writes that research with the purposes of action can use different styles or designs of research having different aims. Thus, the use of quasi-experimental design enriches the experience of teachers in doing action research. The following table summarizes the information from focus group discussions in each school.

Table 12. Teachers' response in focus group discussions on the procedures followed in doing action research

Region	Name of school	Response on procedures used in doing action research
Addis Ababa	Bete Mengist	Identification of problem, and research hypotheses, used questionnaire, observation, interview
	Africa Andinet No.1	Questionnaire, focus group discussion, observation
Amhara	Amber	Questionnaire, focus group discussion, observation
	Dembecha	Questionnaire, focus group discussion, observation
	Ayalew Mekonen	Descriptive research
Benishangul Gumuz	Dibatie	Descriptive research
	Bulen	Descriptive research
Dire Dawa	Melka Jebdu	Descriptive research
	Addis Ketema	Descriptive research
Oromia	Bedelle	Descriptive research
	Bokoji-Tigil Fire	Background, objective, significance, delimitation, statement of the problem, data analysis and interpretation, recommendation
	Seqo	Descriptive research
	Olanchiti	Descriptive, historical, Quasi-experimental
SNNPR	Gangawa	Descriptive(traditional)
Somali	Hussien Gire	Descriptive –traditional research
Tigray	Negash	Descriptive –traditional research
	Agulae	Descriptive –traditional research

The lack of any other indication of the reflective procedures and recycling of the process shows that the currently followed procedures by and large are traditional strategies. This influence might be due to the mode of training and experiences of teachers on using action research to improve the situation. On the other hand, the emphasis given to solutions of problems in the form of recommendations is important as one of the concerns of action research is to provide immediate responses to issues of social significance in a given context.

#### **4.7.3 Teachers Responses on the Communication of Results**

Communication of findings from action research is an essential part of dissemination. Basically action research is a collaborative activity that practitioners do together with others concerned. Hence, if it is done by an individual teacher, the process of doing action research as well as the results need to be known to the immediate consumers such as students, colleagues, and community for the implementation. Most teachers revealed that there is no mechanism to present the results and eventually could not do the dissemination of results. Some of them

say that they have presented it to the education offices through school directors, but no response or feedback was given. Few have said that they presented their findings to the staff (at school or cluster level), students and parents. In Dire Dawa, a regional workshop was organized to publicize the findings. The following table shows the summary of efforts done to communicate results in schools.

Table 13. Teachers response in focus group discussions on the communication of results from action research

Region	Name of school	Response of teachers on communication of results
Addis Ababa	Bete Mengist	Presentation and report to educ. office, but no response The school did not try to endorse and utilize the findings
	Africa Andinet No.1	Communicated to both the school and community
Amhara	Amber	PTA does not know, colleagues know it informally
	Dembecha	The school did not implement the result Colleagues know it informally
	Ayalew Mekonen	The results were presented to 7 primary schools
Benishangul Gumuz	Dibatie	The result was not communicated to anybody
	Bulen	There is no practice to inform the community and colleagues
Dire Dawa	Melka Jebdu	Presented at region level
Harari	Addis Ketem	Workshop was organized by REB
	Aboker	No communication made, the school did not use the result of action research
	Kundudo	No, it was only sent to REB
Oromia	Bedelle	It was communicated the school and community
	Bokoji Tigil Fire	No, some communicated only to colleagues of theirs and neighbouring schools
	Seqo	No formal communication was done
	Olanchiti	The community didn't know
SNNP	Gangawa	Not yet communicated
Somali	Hussien - Gire	PTA have the information at the level of providing information
	Wilwal	
Tigray	Negash	Not communicated to the community
	Agulae	Not communicated to the community

#### **4.7.4 Teachers Responses on Contribution of Results to School Improvement**

The ultimate purpose of action research is to improve school practices and bring change to the situation. For this, the school community is expected to act together among which the school management plays an important role in creating conducive conditions to implement the findings. The findings need to be exercised in action and seen when improving the issue under consideration. In the previous presentations, it has been shown that most of the findings were not well communicated.

When it comes to practice, teachers from the sample schools of Addis Ababa said that the schools did not try to use the results for unreported reasons. The information from schools of Amhara region indicates that the participation of girls in education increased, students' achievement in mathematics improved, and school dropouts decreased as a result of the research done, though it may be difficult to attribute these improvements to action research alone. In Benishangul Gumuz, it is indicated that it is only used for reporting purposes. Table 14 below gives the summary of

responses by teachers concerning the contributions of action research to school improvement.

Table 14. Teacher responses in focus group discussions on the contribution of action research to school improvement

Region	Name of school	Response of teachers on the impact of action research to school improvement
Addis Ababa	Bete Mengist	The school did not try to use it.
	Africa Andinet No.1	Implemented at zone level.
Amhara	Amber	Girls' participation increased.
	Dembecha	Students' achievement in maths improved.
	Ayalew Mekonen	The school arranged the symposium, implemented some of the findings
Benishangul Gumuz	Dibatie	The school did not use the result.
	Bulen	The school leadership used it only for report, number of dropouts and repeaters reduced.
Dire Dawa	Melka Jebdu	The result has improved students performance.
	Addis Ketem	No attempt made by the school, misbehaving minimized.
Harari	Aboker	Not identified in the school.
	Kundudo	The school did nothing to use it, teachers used the research findings for textbook evaluation and to improve the situations of dropouts, some orphan dropout students got support.
Oromia	Bedelle	The school reported the findings to the district education office, we have provided remedial classes for slow learners, parents communicated for this, students improved discipline, absenteeism, decreased, participation of students increased.
	Bokoji-Tigil Fire	Not used much.
	Seqo	The school used the result in preparing tutorial class, organized committee, and dropout decreased.
	Olanchiti	The school has recognized and implemented some it has improved, because additional buildings built to reduce class size it helped in preparing clear exam, students assisted the school in participating in labour.
SNNP	Gangawa	No use has been made for improvement.
Somali	Hussien -Gire	The school presented to the staff for its implementation.
	Wilwal	Dropout decreased Special program organized for female students.
Tigray	Negash	On process tutorial classes are organized.
	Agulae	Not at all.

Teachers from Dire Dawa and Harari revealed that there were no attempts made by schools to utilize the results. However, in Kundudo primary school (Dire Dawa) orphan students got support as a result of research recommendation. In Oromia, remedial (tutorial) classes were arranged for low achieving students, discipline improved, absenteeism decreased, additional classrooms built to reduce class size, and preparation of examinations improved. Despite this, Tigil Fire School (Bokoggi) did not make use of the results.

The situation in schools of Somali indicates that the result of action research brought about a decline in dropouts and the introduction of special programs for female students. The result from schools of South Nations, Nationalities and People State (SNNP) and Tigray shows that there were no attempts to make use of the results of action research. In fact, findings from SNNPR show that the extent to which action research is conducted was too low and there can not be high expectations of use under such circumstances.

#### **4.7.5 Teachers' Responses on Support Rendered and Incentives**

Support for teachers who do action research could be in different forms. Technical support, material support and participating/facilitating in different activities of the research could be a support for the researcher. In Africa Andinet primary school (Addis Ababa) there was financial support for those teachers who did action research (Birr 300) while in Beherawi Betemengist primary school of Addis Ababa, teachers were provided only with stationery. Similarly in almost all regions, the support given was in forms of stationery and clerical service. Schools from Amhara and Benishangul Gumuz regions were supported by teacher associations. In Oromia and Tigray, schools reduced the work load of teachers who were engaged in action research. In the rest of the regions there was no support from anybody. Table 15 below demonstrates the type of responses received from teachers on these issues in different schools.

Table 15 Teachers responses in focus group discussions on the support and incentives rendered for doing action research

Region	Name of school	Teachers response on the support and incentives rendered for doing action research
Addis Ababa	Bete Mengist	The only available and support was paper, - no body supported, Staff members supported in filling questionnaires.
	Africa Andinet No.1	Financial and material support from the school, provision of information by colleagues
Amhara	Amber	Stationery, support from school
	Dembecha	Materials were made available, journals in the school, collegial support
	Ayalew Mekonen	Technical support from colleagues, supervisors the school coordinated the work and typing
Benishangul Gumuz	Dibatie	Colleagues, research committee, the school providing stationery
	Bulen	Stationery service from school, colleagues, different organizations
Dire Dawa	Melka Jebdu	No support as such
	Addis Ketema	Stationery support from the school, advice from colleagues
Harari	Aboker	Provision of stationery from the school, colleagues support in ideas
	Kundudo	The principal encouraged and some colleagues in proof reading, the PTA and parents don't have information
Oromia	Bedelle	Stationery, establishing research team, time arrangement from the school, collegial advice
	Bokoji Tigil Fire	The curriculum didn't support, advise from colleagues, Stationery from school, most of the work was based on individual effort the school did support nothing
	Seqo	Stationery
	Olanchiti	The school in duplicating, availing data, giving spare time there was only moral support from some colleagues
SNNPR	Gangawa	No support
Somali	Hussien Gire	Colleagues and the school in providing stationery
	Wilwal	Provision of stationery from school
Tigray	Negash	Assigning less work load, clerical service from the school
	Agulae	Moral support

#### 4.7.5 Problems to do Action Research

The problems mentioned are lack of support from school, lack of research fund, lack of action research skills, absence of feedback on research results, lack of library and reading materials, and association of action research with performance evaluation.

Among the above problems, lack of support from the school relates to school leadership. School leaders who have no orientation on the significance of action research in the enhancement of school leadership and administration require such training so that they understand and support teachers who do action research. In this relation, teachers' focus on library and reading materials indicates how much this issue is a common problem among schools. Working towards the improvement of school libraries is not something to be kept for tomorrow, but it is a requirement to do research today.

#### **4. 6.7 School Directors' Perception of the Process of Action Research**

School directors were also asked to provide information about the process of action research in their respective schools. Some specific areas for discussion included the focus of action research, training of teachers on action research, reasons for teachers less participation in action research, support given for action research activities, motivating factors for doing action research, communication of the findings of action research, evaluation of the contribution of action research and problems to undertake action research in schools. Their summarized perception on these issues is narrated and discussed below, while the overall summaries of details from these discussions are presented in Appendix 3. Two specific tables particular to the director's perception of focus of action research and reasons for teachers less participation are presented and used to support the narrations.

With reference to the focus of action research in their respective schools, directors' views were not different from teachers. The following table shows the results.

Table16. Directors' responses on the focus of action research in schools

Region	Name of school	Directors response on the focus of action research in schools
Addis Ababa	Bete Mengist	Doesn't know for he has short stay at the school
	Africa Andinet No.1	Why students get low grade in maths, why teachers do not use teaching aids
Amhara	Amber	Girls participation, girls uniform, speech in English
	Dembecha	Application of student participatory learning, impact of lab on learning
	Ayalew Mekonen	student discipline, women education wastage
Benishangul Gumuz	Dibatie	Student discipline, textbook evaluation, drop outs, self contained Classrooms
	Bulen	Textbook evaluation, conflict management, students evaluation, student repetition
Dire Dawa	Melka Jebdu	Self-contained, problems of female students learning
	Addis Keterna	Repetition and low performance of students
Harari	Aboker	Students' classroom, performance dropout, absenteeism
	Kundudo	Repetition of students in some grades, relevance of social study to the region, why students dropout, textbook evaluation
Oromia	Bedelle	Teaching grade 8 maths, why students do not do homework, why female students achieve low in maths, grade 6 increased absenteeism, why grade7 students come late
	Bokoji (Tigil Fire)	Dropout, repetition, late coming, teaching language, pedagogical centre
	Seqo	Less participation of girls; dropout
	Olanchiti	Exam preparation and administration
SNNPR	Gangawa	The gap in teaching skills in Grade 8 English
Somali	Hussien Gire	Orphan children, dropouts and repetitions, student discipline
	Wilwal	Drop outs and repetitions, student discipline
Tigray	Negash	Students late coming and its effect, dropouts, difficulty English, perceived problems of shift system
	Agulae	Awareness of students on HIV/AIDS, Assessment of English proficiency in self-contained class

School directors identified that the major areas on which action research was conducted by teachers were why students perform lower in mathematics, problems in female education, problems in learning English, application of student's participation, the effects of dropout and repetition on achievement, disciplinary problems of students, problems in teaching in self-contained classes, textbook evaluation, why teachers do not sufficiently use teaching aids, problems in school pedagogical centres, preparation and administration of examination, teachers' attitude towards their profession, class size and its effect on teaching and learning, students' late coming and its effect, perceived problems of school shift system. The most frequently treated issues were students discipline, dropout and evaluation of different textbooks.

Referring to training of teachers on action research, directors in most schools said that there wasn't that much satisfactory training given. In Benishangul Gumuzi region teachers have got training at cluster resource centres. In Oromia the training is given and has helped to some extent in doing action research. This

finding is again in line with what teachers have noted earlier in their focus group discussions, and it has to also be recalled that teachers also responded to the questionnaires in a similar way.

Regarding motivating factors towards doing action research, directors said that training on action research, perceived school problems and performance evaluation may contribute to initiate teachers to do action research. Some in Addis Ababa and Benishangul Gumuz said that the incentive (reward) provided could have contributed. Again directors' perception on this issue is similar to previous findings which imply both intrinsic and extrinsic factors for action research to be conducted in schools.

Like teachers, directors also view the support rendered for those who attempted action research as inadequate because such support is predominantly limited to stationery and clerical services. The exception is in Addis Ababa and in one school of Amhara where financial provision and reduction of work load was organized respectively.

As repeatedly mentioned, the purpose of action research is to improve the situation. This is possible when the results are used or implemented by participants. In almost 50% of the sample schools the results of action researches made by teachers are not yet used, while there is an attempt to implement the results in the rest of the schools.

There could be various reasons why most teachers were not motivated to do action research. The factors could be personal and external to the individual. The directors cited the following major reasons why teachers show less participation in action research: lack of interest due to lack of training, lack of incentives, fear of colleagues mocking, lack of facilities at school, perceiving action research as a complex process, large class size and work load, lack of feedback on the research done, and lack of support and recognition from schools and education offices. The following table shows the responses from different directors in different schools.

Table17. Directors' response on the reasons for less participation of teachers in action research in schools

Region	Name of school	Directors response on the reasons for less participation in action research in schools
Addis Ababa	Bete Mengist	Perhaps because many of them lack self initiation
	Africa Andinet No.1	Lack of interest and cease of career structure
Amhara	Amber	Lack of training, fear of mocking colleagues
	Dembecha	Lack of training, fear of mocking colleagues, lack of facilities
	Ayalew Mekonen	Lack of interest, insufficient training
Benishangul Gumuz	Dibatie	Yes, there is participation and it created awareness
	Bulen	Yes at CRC level, it helped to some extent
Dire Dawa	Melka Jebdu	No training
	Addis Ketema	Awareness was given, but less initiated
Harari	Aboker	Lack of training except one teacher, there is no as such identified result
	Kundidit	Only one teacher took short training
Oromia	Bedelle	7 have got training which helped in conducting AR
	Bokoji (Tigil Fire)	Yes, by trained staff members, by BESO-it has developed the possibility of doing research at school
	Seqo	Yes, there is participation and it helped to undertake AR
	Olançhiti	Yes, there is participation; it has helped in solving immediate problems
SNNPR	Gangawa	Trained in their formal course
Somali	Hussien Gire	Some got training from formal courses/distance
	Wilwal	Those from college have training at the college while those from TTIs have not
Tigray	Negash	No training
	Agulae	No Training

Recommendations from directors emphasize that the major problems mentioned above need to be alleviated through different mechanisms. Among these are preparing training manuals and guidelines on how to do action research, establishing mechanisms of motivation, establishing mechanisms of experience exchange and disseminating exemplary works in action research, establishing advisory team, and boosting school capacity. Action research has to make impact on the school as a whole.

#### **4.7.8 Students' Perception of School Problems and the Process of Action Research**

Though teachers do the research, the beneficiaries are all participants in the system. The major ones are students in the instructional process. A group of participants in this study consisted of students. Students were asked to provide their perceived school problems, the activities they observe to alleviate these problems, the progresses they see and data information on whether they have information on the action research done in their respective schools.

Students perceived that the major problems in the school were lack of library, laboratory and facilities. Furthermore, where these were available, inadequacy of seats, shortage of textbooks, failure to cover portions in the academic year, students, disciplinary problems, large class size, dropout and repetition, low performance of teachers, poor relationship between teachers and students, and incompetence of teachers aggravated the situation.

In order to alleviate the problems, they reported that tutorial classes are organized to enhance students' performance, efforts are emerging to use participatory approach of teaching, and additional classrooms are built to reduce class size. As a result of these activities they confirmed that students' academic performance has improved in some schools. However, students of some schools in Addis Ababa, Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Harari and Oromia revealed that they had no idea about the improvements in school. Similarly they stated that they did not have any information about action research conducted in the school.

## **4.8 Discussion**

In this study, data from all teachers in 20 sample schools, focus group discussions (teachers who did action research), sample directors and students were generated and described. Since similar issues were presented to different respondents for the purpose of triangulation, it seems reasonable to thematically analyse and present the issues and trends in a holistic perspective. The following section deliberates on the information obtained from quantitative and qualitative instruments.

### **4. 8.1 The Training of Teachers on Action Research**

Action research skills have been treated as important requirements in this study. It is clear that the idea of action research in general and educational action research in particular is a recent practice in Ethiopia. It is almost two years since it is incorporated in the initial teacher training curriculum. Since training is presumed as an important input to improve instructional practices, it becomes imperative to train those teachers who have prior training. The information from sample schools

reveals that 46 percent of teachers have training in doing action research. The proportion of trained teachers in action research is relatively better in Oromia, Benishangul Gumuz and Amhara regions. Data from the focus group discussion of teachers revealed that most of them got the training during their initial training while some of them got training either at cluster resource centre or centrally organized workshops. This signifies that there is more than half way to go to develop the skills of teachers in action research through training.

Significant number of teachers (20.2%) from those who have got the training said that the training has helped them to some extent and few to a lesser extent. An option was presented also to know whether or not it has helped them to the greatest extent. From the data it becomes clear that teachers have less confidence in doing action research as a result of the inadequate training provided. From these perspectives, the need to improve the quality and relevance of training programs is quite obvious.

#### **4.8.2 Teachers' Doing of Action Research**

It is believed that school practice could be improved and changed through a continuous investigation of a situation that requires improvement, seeking the means of improvement and acting accordingly. In education enterprise, action research is a remedy to this effect. Teachers are the immediate practitioners at school to inquire the routines that may hold back or facilitate the instructional process and the school environment. This could be made possible through action research. School were asked to indicate the number of teachers who did action research in their respective schools. Their responses showed that only 36.5% claim to have done action research. The indication is that there is less effort of action research undertaking. On the other hand, it seems an encouraging effort when compared to the national initiation of doing action research at school level.

If teachers attempt to do action research, it is more advantageous to do it collaboratively. As information from teachers indicates, 71.9 % of them did action research with others. It seems that this collaborative

effort takes place more in urban schools (64.3%) than rural schools (7.6%). Many factors like communication may seem to contribute to such a situation, but it would be more fruitful if conditions contributing to better collaboration are identified and encouraged.

#### **4.8.3 Motivating Factors to Carry out Action Research**

Responses from teachers who did action research showed that the main motivating factors for carrying out action research include problems observed in the school, push from education offices, curricular issues, career structure (performance evaluation), research done by others, the topics from BESO II, the training on action research, and discussions in the school. From these factors career structure (performance evaluation) and perceived school problem/s were mentioned as the major ones. The lesson from these findings is that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors may motivate teachers to carry out action research. Thus, working in both directions as the main engine for moving action research forward is becoming significant.

#### **4.8.4 Reasons for Teachers Not Doing Action Research**

From the previous discussion, it was made clear that all teachers did not do action research. The factors could be categorised as internal and external to the individual. The directors cited the major reasons why teachers show less participation in action research as lack of interest due to lack of training, lack of incentives, fear of collegial mocking, cease of career structure, lack of facilities at school, perception of action research as a complex process, large class size and high work load. Besides this, teachers emphasized lack of feedback on the research done, lack of support and recognition from school and education offices as additional reasons for less participation in action research. Teachers' personal initiation and interest could be negatively influenced by external factors such as lack of training and incentives, high work load, insignificant support provided by the school, and colleagues and others in the work environment. If these are at least at satisfactory level, it would be possible to expect teachers to undertake reasonable school improvement inquiry activities at their respective schools.

The level of training may be an important factor that may motivate or hold back teachers' activity in this regard. Lack of know-how in action research leads to the perception that action research is too complex. It also becomes difficult to differentiate traditional and action research techniques. As informed by teachers, most of them used the procedures of traditional research.

#### **4.8.5 Support Provided to Teachers to Do Action Research**

During this early stage of development of action research in schools, teachers need support of various kinds. This could be taken as a mechanism of disseminating the skills of doing action research and initiating the majority of teachers. The support provided for teachers who did action research seems negligible in many schools.

It is only from Addis Ababa region of Africa Andinet primary school that financial support for those teachers who did action research (Birr 300 for each) was

provided. In almost all regions the support given was in terms of stationery and rarely clerical service. Exceptions are schools in Amhara where support was given from teachers' association, those in Benishangul Gumuz that got support from various organizations, and those in Oromia and Tigray where the school reduced work load. In the rest of the regions there was no support from any source. It should be clear that the enhancement of the support of teachers to do action research is not only for personal gains of the teachers. It has more institutional and social gain as well. Therefore, their engagement in action research has to be regarded as part and parcel of their duties. To this effect, they have to be encouraged not necessarily in terms of financial support, but by creating conducive working conditions.

#### **4.8.6 Purposes of Action Research Done by Teachers**

Responses from teachers showed that the most frequently addressed problems by action research are students learning (23.0%), solving every day practices (19.9%) and improving classroom instruction (17.4%). In fact these issues are interrelated and could be

summarized as the promotion of students' learning since the whole effort of the school is to meet this objective. On the other hand, this emphasis indicates the most frequently appearing problems at school which require due consideration. As it can be compared from the specific problems on which teachers did action research, there is a relationship between what students and teachers perceived as school problems. For instance, students identified that school problems constitute lack of library, laboratory and other facilities. Moreover, inadequacy of classroom seats, shortage of textbooks, failure to cover portions in the academic year, students disciplinary problems, large class size, dropout and repetition, low academic performance of teachers and poor relationship among teachers were all identified.

#### **4.8.7 Presenting and Using Action Research Results**

It is evident that presentation and utilization of the results from action research are not adequately done. According to the responses from directors, from those who did action research, 19.8 percent presented the results to stakeholders and 15.6 percent used their

research for improving the situation. *The highest three regions in doing action research were Somali, Tigray and Harari respectively; while SNNP is the lowest in this regard.* Action research has to be collaborative to bring change to the situation. For this, it has to be presented and shared with different stakeholders to enrich the findings. Thus, the dissemination of findings to the members of school and the public at large becomes significant. Presenting action research result to the public helps to identify possible encounters during its implementation and describe the roles to be played by concerned parties.

Action research is not merely to improve the situation, but it is also a means of producing knowledge from practice. As Reason and Hilary (2001:1) said, the basic assumption of action research is that people can learn and create knowledge on the basis of their concrete experience through observation and reflecting on that experience by forming abstract concepts and generalizations; and by testing the implications of these concepts in new situations, which will lead to new concrete experience and hence to the beginning of new cycle.

It is impossible to begin a new cycle of action research unless the result of prior research result is practiced in a new situation. Most of the students say that they have no idea about research made in their school. Teachers on their part say there is no such practice and the school management did not facilitate the situation to present to the staff. In addition to this teachers report that the school is not ready for using the results.

#### **4.8.8 Problems in Doing Action Research**

Teachers say that lack of training on action research, lack of library and reading materials, large class size, work load and shortage of time, and lack of incentives are some of the main problems obstructing action research. Besides this, teachers stipulated that lack of feedback on the research done, lack of support and recognition from school and education offices play negative roles.

Obviously the above findings indicate that teachers' personal initiation and interest could be influenced by external factors such as know-how (training),

incentives, work load, support provided by school, colleagues and the work environment. It is important that the above issues are taken in to consideration if the effectiveness of action research is desired in the primary schools.

Alongside the factors mentioned above, teachers pointed out that lack of conducive conditions to present and implement research results, lack of feedback on the research done, lack of support and recognition from school and education offices unfavourably influence teachers' initiation for action research. A careful look into these impending factors suggests that solving their influence is not expensive. It seems that all could be handled by schools, and school principals need to pay attention to the solutions.

# Part V

## Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Summary

The Education and Training Policy document as well as the Education Sector Strategy document states that research into curriculum development, instruction methods and evaluation techniques shall be encouraged and assisted. This indicates that there is a need to facilitate conditions to conduct research in classroom situation, which is action research by practitioners. Such type of research helps to solve educational problems and improve classroom situation individually and collaboratively.

Primary school in Ethiopia comprises grades 1-4 and 5-8 as lower primary and upper primary respectively. At all educational tiers of education, teachers are expected to conduct action research to solve day-to-day educational problems and for their professional growth and development. To this effect primary school teachers

have taken orientations, short term trainings and workshops on how to conduct such studies.

In Ethiopia at present, however, there is no evidence that indicates the extent of teachers' knowledge and skill and the extents which teachers use action research in solving educational problems and improving school situation. Hence, the main aim of this study was to explore the status of action research in primary schools in Ethiopia. Research on the status of action research in primary schools provides valuable information for decision makers including teachers and other stakeholders.

The basic research questions were:

- Are primary school teachers knowledgeable and skilled to conduct action research? Are they trained in doing action research? If so, what kind of training?
- What is the extent to which primary school teachers are involved in doing action research?
- To what extent do teachers apply action research methods in developing curriculum and solving educational problems?

- Is action research output considered in the promotion of primary school teachers?
- What are some of the research work done by primary school teachers using action research?
- How satisfied are primary school teachers in doing action research?
- Are primary school teachers encouraged to conduct action research?
- What support facilities are available for primary school teachers to conduct action research?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of action research reports produced by primary school teachers?
- What steps should be taken to improve the status of action research in primary schools?

A multi-method research approach was used to secure data. Survey method was used to collect data from teachers through questionnaire. Interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data in depth from school directors. Two to three schools were selected from nine regions summing up to 20 schools, and 25 teachers were randomly selected from each

school which adds up to 517 teachers and 20 school directors for participation as sources of data.

Questionnaires and structured interview schedules were used to collect data in line with the research questions. Eleven field workers were recruited and trained to collect data. The collected data from the questionnaire was organized, entered, cleaned and analysed using statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data secured through interview were analysed qualitatively. The main findings of the study are the following.

1. *The training and skills of teachers in action research are not adequate.*

Regarding teachers' knowledge and skill, teachers and directors revealed that few of them got training during their initial training while some of them got training either at cluster resource centres or at centrally organized workshops. The findings signify that there is more than half way to go to develop the skill of teachers in action research through training. Those who have got the training said that the training has helped them only

to some extent. In addition to coverage, therefore, the issue is also that of providing quality training in action research.

*2. Teachers do not practice action research as much as expected.*

There is less effort of doing action research among teachers in primary schools. Those teachers who did action research are doing without adequate skills, hence, the quality of research is not expected to be satisfactory. On the other hand it seems an encouraging effort when compared to the national initiation of doing action research at school level.

*3. Collaboration in doing action research is encouraging among teachers, but more collaboration takes place in urban schools than rural schools.*

Among those teachers who did action research, about 71% did with others/colleagues. This collaboration is strongly in urban schools than rural schools. Conditions leading to better collaboration are needed to be identified and encouraged.

*4. Both inside and outside school factors motivate teachers to do action research.*

As regards motivating factors for those who did action research, problems observed in school, push or pressure from education offices, curricular issues, career structure (performance evaluation), research done by others, the topics from BESO-II, and the training on action research motivated teachers to undertake action research. From these factors career structure, performance evaluation and perceived school problem/s are the major ones.

*5. Factors inside and outside schools impede doing action research by teachers.*

Major reasons why teachers show less participation are lack of interest due to lack of adequate training, lack of incentives, fear of mockery by colleagues, cease of career structure, lack of facilities at school, perceiving action research as a complex process, large class size and work load. Besides this, lack of feedback on the research done, lack of support and recognition from school and education offices were found to have negative role for doing action research. Teachers'

personal initiation and interest were influenced by such external factors as training, incentives, work load, support provided by school, colleagues and the working environment. If these are at least at satisfactory level, it would be possible to expect teachers to undertake a reasonable school improvement inquiry activity.

6. *Most of the teachers used the procedures of traditional-descriptive research to do action research.*

Although, most teachers who participated in doing action research were expected to apply the principles of this methodology, it was discovered that most used traditional descriptive methods of research in the guise of action research. Seen from this perspective, the claim that action research has been done in schools seems to lack credibility. This means, the training on action research needs not only to be enhanced, but also has to be effective in assisting teachers to investigate their problems and seek solution to them.

*7. Support provided by school and authorities for teachers who did action research seems inadequate.*

Particularly during this early stage of development of action research in Ethiopian schools, teachers need support of various kinds. However, the support provided by schools and authorities for teachers who did action research seems insignificant in many schools. Despite this, Africa Andinet primary school (Addis Ababa) provided financial support for those teachers who did action research. In almost all regions the support given is in terms of stationery and rarely clerical service. Exception is for a school in Amhara where support was given from teachers' association; Benishangul Gumuz from different organizations; and Oromia and Tigray where the school reduced work load. In the rest of the regions there was no support from any individual or organization.

*8. Schools do not use the results or findings of action research in real life situations.*

Though the basic assumption of action research is that people can learn and create knowledge on the basis of their concrete experience through observation and

reflecting on that experience by forming abstract concepts and generalizations, and by testing the implications of these concepts in new situations, which will lead to new concrete experience and hence to the beginning of new cycle, it seems that teachers and schools do not use action research results in a real life situation, This implies the impossibility of beginning new cycle of action research, unless the result of prior research result is practiced in a new situation. Teachers on their part confirmed the absence of such tradition and the school management did not facilitate the situation to present findings to the staff. In addition to this teachers say that the school is not ready for using the results.

9. *Most of the students do not have an idea about research conducted in their schools.*

Students recognize that the problems researched by teachers exist in most of the schools. They also mentioned that some measures have been taken to solve the problems. However, they are not aware of the fact that such changes happen due to action research.

## 5.2 Conclusions

From the above major findings the following conclusions are made.

- Most teachers have no relevant training on action research while few have got training. The training conducted did not develop teachers' competences to do action research.
- The extent to which action research was carried out was low in primary schools. In relation to the novelty of the practice in Ethiopian education, however, the attempts done by teachers to conduct action research were encouraging.
- Almost all action researches conducted by teachers followed traditional descriptive research methods. They were not also collaborative by design.
- Teachers were not rendered appropriate support and recognition from different parties/ stakeholders to do action research.
- Most of the research done was not made public and presented to the staff or beneficiaries. The results were not utilized by teachers and the schools for the improvement of educational efforts in the country.

- The main problems for carrying out action research include lack of quality training, lack of reading materials in school, work overload and shortage of time, lack of support and recognition, and lack of incentive.

### **5.3 Implications of Findings to Practice and Recommendations**

*1. In order to effect school improvement through action research, teachers have to be supported by adequate training.*

Efforts to improve teaching-learning situation through action research is becoming necessary and action research is an important instrument as well as part of the process. However, this cannot be achieved through common sense. Teachers as practitioners are the immediate agents for this purpose. Since the idea of improving school situation through action research is a newly emerging intervention, teachers have to be encouraged and supported by training. Though the training cannot be provided for all at a centre, it seems better to use multiplying effect. However, it should be reliable that the trainers get intensive training so that

skills are transferred to the teachers at large. At the same time, it is better to assess action research courses given during initial training of teachers in terms of whether or not the course is in line with action research principles and is free of traditional influence.

*2. Results from the findings of action research need to be disseminated.*

The issue of not presenting and using results of action research emanate from misunderstanding of the principles of action research. This is not necessarily from the researchers, but also from the education offices and school management. If the results are not made public and clear for the participants/beneficiaries, it is possible that its implementation gets jeopardized at its inception. If the first attempt is not implemented the cycle of doing action research can be blocked. Hence, this becomes a hurdle for the flourishing of action research in school. Therefore, pertinent education officers, teachers and school directors have to have a clear understanding on how to implement the result of action research. This could be done during the various training sessions.

*3. Exchange of experience between schools on action research has to be strengthened.*

Skills in doing action research can be developed through repeated practices of doing it and experience exchange. Therefore, there should be a mechanism through which researchers and schools exchange experience. This could be at cluster resource centre as already started on different issues, but should stress action research as well.

*4. Attention has to be paid to solve problems encountered in doing action research.*

Problems encountered in doing action research could be diverse. The problems may be specific to regions as well as schools. This begins from popularizing the perception and practice of action research. The other important point is to initiate teachers through incentives. This requires a coordinated activity through out the country. The coordinating body needs to investigate means of developing action research practices at school level as well as means of motivating and implementing it.

*5. Motivating teachers using different mechanisms or incentives to do action research is required.*

Teachers can be motivated to do action research when they see or read the research done at different places and levels, therefore, even though it is difficult to furnish schools with reference books, it would be possible to disseminate leaflets on action research to schools to boost their interest.

*6. Integrating action research into the teaching time allows the development of action research in schools.*

Doing action research has to be regarded as part and parcel of teaching activity. Therefore, as far as conditions permit, it is recommended if teachers' action research time is counted as part of teaching time.

*7. Schools and teachers need to use the findings of action research for school improvement.*

Since the main reason to do action research is the improvement of school and teacher practices, it is important that teachers, school leadership and the

school community use the results of the findings to change school situation.

8. *Action research also needs to continue to pay attention to student problems.*

It is encouraging to see that most of the problems addressed by action research in schools are directed towards the improvement of students learning. However, studies seem to lack the reflection of student experiences and this makes findings less inclusive. More attention is required to address very many concerns students express in school situations.

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