Action Research for Curriculum Development: An Alternative Approach in the Algerian Centralised Framework.

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الملخّص

يتطرق الأدب في مجال المناهج إلى ما ينبغي على المدرسين أو ما يمكنهم القيام به قصد المشاركة في عملية تطوير المناهج التي يعتمدونها ، لذا أصبحت المشاركة الفعّالة للمدرسين في سنّ المناهج جد ضرورية ، فهم من يساهم في عملية تطوير المناهج الدراسية المعتمدة من خلال الممارسة التطبيقية لها ، كما يوظفون نظريات المناهج في البحث العلمي ، ويستهلكون معارف المناهج ، وعلاوة على ذلك فهم من يقوم بإنتاجها وتطويرها من خلال الممارسة.

تسلط الدراسة الضوء على مقاربة تتمحور حول مشاركة الأساتذة في إعداد البرامج والمتمثلة في "البحث العملي" ، "البحث الإجرائي" ، "البحث التدخلي" أو "البحث العملي الميداني".

تهدف الدراسة إلى تحقيق هدف أساسي ينقسم إلى شقين ؛ الأول: استعراض الأدب بخصوص "المناهج" ، "تطوير المناهج" و"البحث الإجرائي" من ناحية ؛ فيما يستعرض الشق الثاني التشديد على ضرورة مشاركة الأساتذة في إعداد البرامج ، مع التركيز على إصلاح التعليم الثانوي بالجزائر الذي يخضع لمركزية تامة ورقابة شديدة.

الكلمات المفاتيح: المناهج الدراسية ، تطوير المناهج ، البحث العملي الميداني ، إصلاح التعليم الثانوي بالجزائر ، المركزية.

Résumé

La Littérature dans le domaine du curriculum s'interroge sur la mesure dans laquelle les enseignants devraient ou pourraient participer au processus de développement du curriculum qu'ils adoptent. Etant les praticiens, les enseignants sont ceux qui transmettent la théorie en pratique. Cependant, ils ne sont pas seulement des consommateurs de connaissances des curriculums, mais aussi des producteurs importants de ce dernier. Ainsi, la participation active des enseignants principaux intervenants dans le processus d'élaboration des programmes est une nécessité. L'article décrit une approche pour la participation des enseignants à l'élaboration des programmes, ce qui est la *recherche-action*. L'objectif principal de cet article comporte deux volets: en premier lieu, il explore la littérature sur *les curriculums*, *le développement du curriculum* et la recherche-action; et en second lieu, il met en valeur la prédominance de la participation et de la recherche des enseignants dans l'élaboration des programmes, en accordant une attention particulière à la réforme de l'enseignement secondaire en Algérie, qui est très contrôlé et centralisé

Mots clés : recherche-action, réforme de l'éducation algérienne, la centralisation, curriculum, développement des curriculums.

Summary

Literature in the field of curriculum is debating the extent to which teachers should or could participate in the developmental process of the curriculum they enact. Being the practitioners, teachers are the ones who transmit theory into practice. However, they are not only consumers of curriculum knowledge, but also significant producers of it. Thus, teachers' active participation as primary stakeholders in the curriculum development process is a necessity. The paper outlines one approach for teacher participation in curriculum development, which is action research. The main aim of this paper is twofold; first: it explores literature about 'curriculum', 'curriculum development' and 'action research'; and second, it emphasizes the prominence of teachers' involvement and research in curriculum development, paying specific attention to the Algerian secondary school educational reform, which is highly controlled and centralised.

Key words: action research, Algerian education reform, centralization, curriculum, curriculum development

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Introduction

Curriculum development, as one way of educational reform, continually undergoes review, revision, and constant change (Johnson, 2001)[1]. The process can be initiated and carried out by various stakeholders in the society, such as government, administrators, teachers union, media, and academics. This process can be challenging, therefore active participation of all stakeholders is one of its prerequisites. The stakeholders, with their assorted roles, may add varied feedback to the process. However, the success of the whole process depends on teachers as they act as the passage between what is planned, what is taught and what will be obtained as a result of the implementation process. In order for curriculum development to be effective and schools to be successful, teachers must be involved in the developmental process. Being the individuals, who are directly involved in learners' instruction, teachers views and work are to be taken into consideration for successful curriculum development. Moreover, curriculum development through teacher action research can reduce the distance between policy-makers in charge of planning the curriculum theory on the one hand, and teachers-practitioners in charge of implementing the curriculum on the other hand.

Teachers are the major pillars in any centralised curriculum improvement effort. Thus, in this paper, reasons behind the necessity of their involvement in curriculum development, through action research, will be highlighted. But, before discussing this point literature on 'curriculum', 'developing curriculum' and 'action research' will be first considered. Then, the article will discuss the links between action research and teacher involvement in curriculum development, with particular reference to the Algerian secondary school English language curriculum development.

1. Curricular Conceptualisations

Curriculum plays an important role in education. It considers guidance of teachers' instruction, what learners will learn and when will they learn. It offers teachers strategies to assess how well the learners' progress (outcomes). It is the 'heart' of any educational system. Moreover, every time changes or developments take place around the world, schools curricula are automatically affected in order to fit the society's needs. As an umbrella term, curriculum includes a lot of matters due to the different meanings and interpretations the term has received by different writers. Yet, providing an accurate meaning of what the term implies is hardly conclusive. While there is no universally accepted definition of curriculum, the multicity of meanings given to the term portrays its dynamism. In this vein, this section briefly clarifies different conceptualisations of the term.

In a narrow view, curriculum is regarded as a means for achieving specific educational goals and objectives. In this sense, the focus is on products or ends, as the curriculum takes the form of a checklist to desired outcomes. Based on this objectivist approach, Kerr (1968)[2] views curriculum as a learning which is government-oriented, also called top-down. Curriculum can also be understood as a process of selecting courses of study or content (Beauchamp, 1977[3]; Wood and Davis, 1978[4]). Compared to the first definition, the focus here is on course content rather than learning objectives. Moreover, a curriculum can be seen as a plan, or a blue print for systematically implementing educational activities. Similarly, Pratt (1994, p.5)[5] conceives curriculum as *'a plan for a sustained process of teaching and learning'* with specific focus on content and the process of teaching and learning. Other researchers view curriculum as a document or a written outline of a course program (Brady, 1995[6]; Barrow and Milburn, 1990[7]).According to Kelly (1999)[8], curriculum is negatively seen as a *'syllabus which may limit the planning of teachers to a consideration of the content or the body of knowledge they wish to transmit or a list of the subjects to be taught or both'* (p.83). In this sense, curriculum is synonymous with the term 'syllabus', which is not fair.

Instead of considering the narrow view of curriculum as classroom content or prescriptive learning objectives, a different conceptualisation

considers curricula as programs of experiences. In this regard, curricula refer to the totality of individuals' learning experiences, not only in school but society as well (Bilbao et al., 2008, cited in Alvior, 2014)[9]. It is either *'the range of experiences, both indirect and direct, concerned in unfolding the abilities of the individual'* or *'a series of consciously directed training experiences that the schools use for completing and perfecting the individual'* (Bobbitt, 1924, cited in Wiles and Bondi, 2007[10], pp.2-3). Similarly, Taba (1962) defines 'curriculum' as *'all of the learning of students which is planned by and directed by the school to attain its educational goals'*. To Tyler (1957), it is *'all of the experiences that individual learners have in a program of education whose purpose is to achieve broad goals and related specific objectives, which is planned in terms of a framework of theory and research or past or professional practices'* (Taba, 1962; Tyler, 1957 cited in Wiles & Bondi, 2007, pp.2-3). Definitions under this conceptualisation share the idea that curricula are 'planned' and they are the whole of 'experiences'.

The nature of curriculum can be identified in one of three forms: planned curriculum, received (delivered) curriculum and hidden (experienced) curriculum (Kelly, 1999, Quinn, 2000[11]). The planned curriculum refers to what is set down in the syllabus that is the document which contains the plan of school activities. The received curriculum refers to the students' real experiences. Whereas, the hidden curriculum refers to the implicit knowledge learners acquire in school. Morris and Adamson (2010)[12] raise the idea of null curriculum and outside curriculum above the three types stated by Kelly (1999). The null curriculum refers to what is not taught but actually should be taught in school according to the needs of society. Outside curriculum means the knowledge students learn outside classroom and school.

As far as the Algerian context is concerned, the term curriculum in the country is often associated with a course of study at school. It is commonly understood to be a document or a plan imposing a specific educational policy, which emanates from the top of the hierarchy, and is mailed to schools from the ministry of education. In the Algerian system, both curriculum and textbooks are centrally created and published. A single textbook completely controlled by the country is the only one used under the country's education policy. Additionally, there is neither a place for a decentralised curriculum development, nor curriculum adaptation to local needs. To the best knowledge of the present writer, Algerian curricula exclude practitioners' voices. This situation serves a great disincentive for the country's reform. This view differs from situations elsewhere, say, USA or UK, where teachers select from whatever set of curriculum materials that are available, and develop them further for use in their classrooms. For a successful curriculum change, curriculum in Algeria should not be understood as a 'product' but as a 'dynamic process4. It should also engage all participants in its active construction through their work, just as team sports players dynamically construct the game as they play it.

In this section, curriculum was broadly defined. Relevant literature on the term is thoroughgoing, and the endeavour to bring discussion of all the definitions goes beyond the scope of this paper. Moreover, probing into the relevant literature does not make the main thrust of the present paper. This, however, paves the way for a broader view of curriculum and curriculum development process. Also, no matter how curriculum is defined, be it learning, experiences, contents, objectives, or courses (Hyun, 2006)[13]; definitions matter mainly because clarification of meanings and operational terms is imperative for the curriculum to change. In other words, curriculum design and development will chiefly depend on how stakeholders employ and use the term. In the next section of this paper, theory on curriculum development is reviewed.

1.1. Curriculum Development

Curriculum development is the process of putting in place precise guidelines of instruction for the curriculum. It is something undertaken by

authorities. It is crucial to understand what curriculum reform means and within which contexts do reforms generally take place. According to Kennedy (2007)[14], *'curriculum reform is about changes to the content and organization of what is taught, within the constraints of social, economic and political contexts'* (p.173). This definition clearly shows that one country may differ in its formulation of curricular reforms from another. Nevertheless, all countries, in their processes of curricular development, comply with the same rule of thumb that is consistency with their own society values (Kennedy, 1995). Moreover, all curriculum development processes are subject to various challenges. These challenges are generally classified into three categories. The categories comprise:global or external challenges (globalization, accelerated pace of scientific and technological process), internal challenges of the country's education system and challenges specific to regions.

Similar to curriculum, definitions for 'curriculum development' also vary, chiefly depending on the period they have been provided. Johnson describes curriculum development as *'all the relevant decision-making processes of all the participants'* (Johnson, 1989, p.1, cited in Segovia & Hardison, 2009[15], p.154). Graves (2008, p.147)[16] describes it as *'the processes and products of planning, teaching and evaluating a course of study or related courses'*. Nunan (1988, p.10)[17] describes it as *'the systematic attempt by educationalists and teachers to specify and study planned intervention into the educational enterprise'*. This list of definitions is not exhaustive, yet it includes all aspects of curriculum development from design, dissemination, implementation, to evaluation. Additionally, in line with the emergence of new theories and innovative approaches in the field, what was understood by planning, designing, teaching, implementing and evaluation has continued to change and grow.

Throughout its history, and starting with Franklin Bobbitt's Curriculum, the curriculum development process has been improved. Tyler came up with four basic steps of the process; namely aims and objectives, content, organization and evaluation (Tyler, 1949, cited in Richards, 2001[18]). Taba came up with a system of curriculum development that encompasses diagnosis of needs, formulation of objectives, selection of content, organization of content, selection of learning experiences, organization of learning experiences, and determination of what to evaluate and means of doing evaluation (Taba, 1962, p. 12,cited in Ibid., p.8). Furthermore, in1988, Nunan, in his 'learner-centred curriculum', contributed to the field by adding original touches to the curriculum development process. He discussed the pre-course planning procedure (needs analysis, grouping learners); planning content; methodology; material design; and evaluation. This is similar to Carl's (1995)[19] definition, in which curriculum development has been viewed as a *'continuous process in which structure and systematic planning methods figure strongly from design to evaluation'* (p. 40).Richards (2001) added more steps to the process of curriculum development, which are situation analysis and ways of improving teaching.

Curriculum development may happen in a centralised (top-down) or decentralised (bottom-up) initiative. The literature presents many reviews of centralised and decentralised educational systems in terms of their benefits and drawbacks, different ways of adapting them, and outputs they produce (Bezzina, 1991[20], March, 1992[21], Roehrig et al., 2007[22]; Fullan, 1998, cited in Hargreaves et al, 1998[23]). The centralised curriculum, on one hand, refers to the design whereby decisions pertaining to content, planning and implementation are taken by a central national office, usually the ministry of education. In a centralised approach, policy makers engage education experts who might not have had experience of school system and are therefore detached from classrooms' realities (Wedell, 2009[24]). The secondary education national curriculum in Algeria is one example of a centralised curriculum development initiative .Decentralised initiatives, on the contrary, originate from individuals or groups within educational institutions, usually referred to as the 'grass-roots'.

These initiatives are self-directed by the people involved in the implementation (mainly teachers). Moreover, all stakeholders in the system being reformed will share decision-making power.

Both centralised and decentralised curriculum development initiatives have their benefits and shortcomings. Centralised curriculum is more structured, orderly, and ensure uniformity and a standard approach to teaching and learning. Besides, it has a uniform mode of certifying learners. Indeed, it is in the interest of governments that control of content of the curriculum and the manner of its delivery are in their hands so that they can monitor progress. However, a top-down initiative is usually less sensitive to local needs. It is described by Goodson (2003, p.xiii)[25] as *'brutal restructuring'* delivered in *'ignorance or defiance of teachers' beliefs and missions'*. Centrally initiated curriculum change is unlikely to be successful unless it actively engages the *'practitioners who are the foot-soldiers of every reform aimed at improving student outcomes'* (Cuban, 1998, p.459)[26].

Decentralised curriculum tends to be more appropriate to learners' local needs, owing to the fact that differences may exist from community to another. This kind of initiatives often ensures better ownership of the course by teachers. However, the extent to which decentralisation reduces the central power of ministries can lead to failure of efforts to carry out functions and a collapse of decisions. Though the line between centralised and decentralised approaches to curricula is blurred in reality, both initiatives can be highly successful under certain conditions. Also, successful initiatives that have brought sustainability to curriculum have always consisted of both bottom-up and top-down activities (Ryan & Cotton, 2013)[27].

Based on the discussion provided herein, one can notice that the curriculum development process is a key component of the changing education system. The process turned out to be more challenging at times. Nowadays, as an attempt to address societal demands and legislative dictates to prepare a workforce for the 21st century, policies around the world are reforming their curricula. According to David Hopkins, *'the amount of change expected of schools has increased exponentially over the past 15 years. Yet, even this situation is beginning to change. Change is now endemic, it is becoming all pervasive'* (2001, p.35)[28]. The phenomenon of change came in an era where top-down strategies of curriculum development have become popular both in the developed and developing countries (Punia, 1992)[29]. Curricula innovations in Africa and a few other parts of the world were initiated top-down (Ramparsad, 2001[30]), through 'power coercive' or 'unilateral administrative decisions' (Zhao et al., 2002[31]), in utter negligence of the much 'powerfully-embraced' 'grassroots' (Begg, 2004[32]; Rogers, 2003[33]). This phenomenon forms part of a wider trend, and is not limited to Algeria per se.

1.2. Curriculum Development in Algeria

After the independence in 1962 and with the creation of the Ministry of Education in 1963, Algeria embarked on a process of building an inclusive national education system. Since then, the country lived a series of reforms. The most significant reform was that of 1971. Issues such as inclusion of democratization, insurance of free education for all, arabisation, and employment of Algerian teaching staff characterized that reform. Moreover, the Algerian educational system of the 1971was structured on a 5+4+3 schooling years model: five years for primary school level, four years for middle school level, and three years for secondary school level (Benrabah, 1999)[34]. In 1976, a new schooling system called the fundamental school was applied. The period of compulsory education has been extended from six to ten years. Therefore, the construction of the school system was restructured on a 6+3+3 model (six years for primary school level, three years for middle school level and another three years for secondary school level). In the school year 1992-1993, English was introduced alongside French as a second foreign language. Moreover, English has been granted more prominence in that it was introduced in the first year of the middle school level (Order n°76-35 of April

16th, 1976, organizing the education and training in Algeria)[35].

In 2002, Algerian authorities felt the need to reform the educational system, which was described as being 'doomed' by president *Bouteflika* prior to his election as a president. Thus, an executive decree (Order n°03-08 of August 13th, 2003)[36] that amended the 1976 reform was passed by the government. There was a strong desire from the part of authorities to depart from the previous teaching methodologies which aimed at developing the learners' communicative competencies. So, after trying many approaches and methods; such as the Grammar-translation, the direct method and the communicative approach a new reform took place in 2003. Following the recommendations set by the National Commission for the Reform of Education, the Algerian educational system has adopted the Competency-based Approach (CBA).Through the use of the CBA in Algeria, Algerian authorities sought to achieve a new vision about teaching and learning English as a means to respond to global needs for communication and modernization. The 2003 reform represents the current educational system. In nutshell, this educational system is still highly centralized. It still heralds unmatched control over curriculum content and teaching methodology, because the national education policy is ultimately decided at the top.

The implementation of educational change involves change in practice. This change should occur at many levels. One of the most significant levels is the teacher, because he is the closest one to daily instruction. The importance of the teacher as an agent of change in the reform process is widely undeniable. Fullan (2007)[37] affirmed that without teachers, making critical changes in instructional practice will simply not prepare learners to meet the 21st century demands. Indeed, *'educational change depends on what teachers do and think; it is as simple and as complex as that'* (Fullan, 2007, p.129). Although, the emergent view of teachers' roles are often in conflict with the traditional view of teachers' performance, the leadership roles of teachers is becoming more prevalent and more challenging (Monson & Monson, 1993[38], Hargreaves, 1995[39], Scott, 1994[40]). However, threats to teacher involvement typically come from a top-down control of curricula. As educational systems generally mandate change from the top, this can leave teachers feeling powerless to implement the change.

The emergence of action research as a teacher-based form of curriculum development might be an alternative response to the growth of top-down education systems. It might also be an alternativet o hierarchical control over teachers' professional practices. Action research has been defined differently by different scholars in the field, but regarding curriculum development, it resulted as a reaction to the traditional view of curriculum as a product. The dimensions added to curriculum development by educational action research, particularly its critical-emancipatory version, can shape a decentralised orientation (McKernan, 1996)[41]. In other words, a decentralised atmosphere will provide teachers with operating conditions that allow them to actively participate in shaping the curriculum development process. By focusing on teachers' reflection through action research, and viewing teaching as a process that not only implements theory but also produces knowledge, action research actually established this alternative approach to curriculum. The next section of the present paper provides a review of what action research is and the process that can be used to implement this kind of research in curriculum development.

2. Action Research

The origins of action research are unclear within literature. However, despite the clouded roots of the term, a number of researchers (Adelamn, 1993[42], Gitlin et al., 1993[43], Hart and Bond, 1995[44]; Holter and Schwartz-Barcott, 1993[45]; Kemmis, 1993[46],Kemmis and McTaggert, 1990[47],Noffke, 1994[48],Somekh, 1995[49],Zuber-Skerrit, 1993[50]) seem to attribute the termto Kurt Lewin's pioneering work in the 1940's amongst factory workers and immigrants affected by post-war social problems in

the USA. Similarly, McKernan (1996) traces the roots of action research to the science of Education Movement and Dewey.

Kurt Lewin's methodology describes the theory of action research as '*proceeding in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action'* (Kemmis & McTaggert, 1990, p.8). McKernan (1991)[51] states that action research as a method of inquiry has evolved over the last century and careful study of the literature shows *'clearly and convincingly that action research is a root derivative of the scientific method'* (p.8). Kurt Lewin was also persuasive in developing theories of group dynamics and social change. He advocated the use of field experiments alongside surveys but he also emphasized the role of social science in initiating changes in social practices (Lewin, 1948)[52]. Lewin highlighted the necessity of action research on the grounds that it has to be done locally. He stated that no general laws can prescribe the strategy for change (Ibid., 1948). According to Lewin, cooperation of social researchers and practitioners with externally decided problems is advantageous. Group work within workplaces increases the likelihood of successful permanent changes in work practice (Ibid., 1948).

Though Lewin's work has, according to Somekh (1994), been criticized, it emphasized the importance of democratic participation. It also emphasized the fact that action research could be carried out in four different approaches. Similarly, Adelman (1993), drawing upon the work of Marrow (1969)[53], described four approaches of action research. These approaches are: experimental action research (which investigates the relative effectiveness of different techniques); empirical action research (which involves the accumulation of evidence in daily work from similar groups); participant action research (that investigates a local problem); and diagnostic action research (where external change agents would intervene to produce a needed plan of action). These four different approaches have, according to Kemmis (1993), *'presaged three important characteristics of modern action research: its participatory character, its democratic impulse, and its simultaneous contribution to social science and social change'* (p.179).

McKernan (1988)[54] states that there is evidence of the use of action research by a number of social reformists prior to Lewin, such as Collier in 1945, Lippitt and Radke in 1946 and Corey in 1953. Similarly, Altrichter and Gestettner (1993)[55] draw upon the work of two German writers who argued that *'not Lewin but J.L. Moreno should be seen as the founder of action research'* (p.323). Further, Reason and Bradbury (2006)[56] point to Marxism and the work of Freire as the basis for action research. The central point of Marxism's influence on Action Research is the idea that the important thing is not to understand something, but to try to change it. Freire is also recognised as influential in the development of Action Research. He developed an educational methodology designed to enable illiterate people to understand and articulate a critical view of the world and is a founder of what has become known as critical pedagogy.

Despite the contradicting views about the founder of the approach, there was a great interest in action research for curriculum development in many parts of the world. In USA during the post war period, the work of Corey and Taba was influential. However, the interest declined at the end of 1950s and after that the gap between educational research and teaching practice widened (Holly, 1991)[57].

In the UK around the late 60s and early 70s the 'teacher-researcher' movement advocated by Lawrence Stenhouse in the secondary education sector appeared (Holly, 1991). Somekh (1994) asserts that John Elliott had an influence upon Stenhouse's thinking in the Humanities Curriculum Project. He has established a tradition of curriculum action research which has been adopted elsewhere. This tradition sought to bring the practicing classroom teacher into the research process as the most effective person to identify problems and to find solutions. Stenhouse (1975)[58] maintained that effective curriculum development depended upon

the teachers' capacity to inquire into their practice in a critical and systematic way. He compared the classroom to a laboratory where the teacher's crucial role as a researcher aims improving his practice. Stenhouse did also explain how teachers and academic researchers may work together. He stated that research should be done with but not on teachers. ForStenhouse, research was educational only if it could be related to educational practice (Stenhouse, 1981)[59]. Last but not least, Stenhouse (1975) saw reflection through action research as the key to school development.

The fundamental aim of action research has always been the improvement of practice rather than the production of knowledge (Elliott, 1991)[60]. Elliott (1991) stressed the fact that teachers felt a need to initiate change in their practice as a necessary precondition of action research. Thus, in his view, action research combines teaching, research, evaluation, and improvements of teaching and professional development. Likewise, Elliott highlighted action research as qualitative research using methods such as diaries, documents, photographs, videos, interviews and observations.

There was a shift in action research development from an interpretive stand towards a formation of a concept of critical educational science by Carr and Kemmis (1986)[61]. This latter is based on the social theories of Habermas. Carr and Kemmis (1986) proposed that action research should be grounded on critical or emancipatory educational science. The aim is the transformation of education in a democratic, participatory and collaborative research process. In this process, theory and practice are dialectically related in critical analysis. Carr and Kemmis(Carr &Kemmis, 2009)[62]have recently discussed how action research is always at the same time personal, professional and political. It is political as it inevitably addresses questions about the kind of society that educational alteration should aim to foster and create.

Educational action research has been thriving throughout history. Nowadays, there are different views on action research. Some advocate it for professional development (Furlong & Salisbury, 2005)[63].In a number of countries, it is even recommended as part of educational policy developments for teacher professional development (Burns, 2010)[64]. Other people disagree on whether it is a special research paradigm (Pine, 2009)[65], a methodology of research (Noffke & Somekh, 2009)[66], an influential tool for school and classroom investigation (Burns, 2010) or an orientation towards research (Reason & McArdle, 2003 as cited in Ladkin, 2004[67]). But, at the heart of all these action research should result in improvement of teachers' teaching practices. Although some people may view action research as an informal research since teachers are not academic researchers, it is fair to say that action research is extremely suitable for education.

2.1. Current Practices of Action Research

The current state of the world is characterised by an action-oriented, participative, experimental approach to knowledge creation (Bradbury, 2015)[68]. The contemporary status of action research is toughly connected with a growing belief in teacher professional development; in-service education, possibilities for school-based curriculum development, and professional self-evaluation. Teacher research represents a very direct form of applied, problem-solving approach to curriculum problems. The adoption of action research in second or foreign language education falls in three major categories: action research in formal graduate and postgraduate education; collaborative teacher research projects; and classroom teachers individual projects (Burns, 2009)[69].

The first category of action research refers to small-scale projects undertaken by student teachers. This kind is required in term papers and classroom presentations. Teacher educators who include such action research projects in their courses aim to raise student teachers' awareness of the relevance of research for teachers (Burns, 2009). Moreover, undertaking a unit in action research methodology provides student teachers with a systematic, reflective approach to address areas of need within their respective domains (Hine, 2013[70], Johnson,

2012[71]).Likewise, action research workshops may be used to replace traditional in-service teacher training (Barone et al., 1996)[72] as a teacher development strategy (Johnson, 2012). Action research in teacher education programmes plays an important role in the preparation and professional development of both pre-service and in-service teachers (Hotler & Frabutt, 2012)[73].

The philosophy underlying the second category of action research is basically based on involving teachers in wide-scale institutional curriculum change and continuing professional renewal. In some countries, such programmes are likely to emanate from government grants or educational findings provided that researchers and teachers work together (Burns, 2009). The collaborative nature of action research is highlighted by other writers (Noffke, 1997[74], Reason & Bradbury, 2001[75]). Collaboration, which brings together theory with practice and action with reflection, provides '*practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities'* (Reason & Bradbury, pp.9-10). Put it another way, action research may be geared towards effecting change in either individuals' practices (Holter & Frabutt, 2012), or within broader communities through collaboration (Mills, 2011)[76].

The third category of action research is carried out by individual teachers. Usually much of this type of action research remains localized and unpublished (Burns, 2009). In this category, action research becomes hard since teachers may probably be not able to use a standard format to report their findings. Also, the cyclical nature of action research is time-consuming. Personal teachers' researchers' over-involvement, subjectivity, assumptions, prejudices, and social positions will bias the research findings (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000)[77]. Action research of this type has been criticized as being local and failing to examine broader systemic oppression (Cooke& Kothari, 2001)[78].

3. Prominence of Teachers' Involvement and Research in Curriculum Development

Curriculum development can be stimulating, therefore the involvement of all teachers, who are directly involved in learners' instruction, is a vital piece in successful curriculum development. So, this section will highlight the importance of teachers' involvement in curriculum development, and action research as one approach for this involvement.

3.1. Teachers' Involvement

One of the key elements in educational reforms is the teacher. Without a doubt he is the principal agent in communicating the curriculum. Societies have finally understood that the teacher is not just one of the variables that must be changed if their educational systems are to be improved. However, he is also one of the most significant agents of change in such reforms (Villegas-Reimers, 2003)[79]. Cohen and Hills (2001)[80], and Kubitskey and Fishman (2006)[81] equally maintain that the sustainability of reform initiatives relies on teachers maintaining alignment with the intent of the initiative. Curriculum implementation can only be successful if teachers are involved in its development and implementation. However, in countries where curriculum is still largely centrally-controlled, teachers' experiences and talents are unfortunately untapped. Carl (2002)[82] affirmed that the 'voice' of the teacher is to a large extent ignored or not heard. Thus, policy makers need to acknowledge the experiences and talents of the teachers in the curriculum development process.

Curriculum development, as stated earlier, is open to many interpretations. However, for the purposes of this article, it is regarded as an encompassing and continual process. The process comprises any form of planning, designing, dissemination, implementation and assessment of curricula (Carl, 2002, p. 44). It is within this process of curriculum development that the teacher can and should become involved. The nature and scope of teacher involvement is often determined by curricular conceptualization (Imber & Neidt, 1990[83], Elbaz, 1991[84],Fullan& Hargreaves, 1992[85],Fullan,

2001[86],Haberman, 1992[87], Carl, 2002). Hence, two main propensities regarding teachers' participation can be distinguished. Firstly, teachers may be regarded as merely 'recipients' of the curriculum that is developed by specialists elsewhere. Therefore, the teachers' role in curriculum remains limited to the right application of what has been developed by those specialists. This so-called 'top-down' approach, as stated earlier, is detrimental to teachers' ownership of the curriculum process. Secondly, teachers may be regarded as partners in the process of curriculum change. There should therefore be an opportunity for their 'voices' to be heard before the actual implementation.

Handler (2010)[88] argued that there is a need for teacher involvement in the development of curriculum. Similarly, Fullan (1991)[89] argued that the core of teacher involvement in curriculum development leads to effective achievement of educational reform. By being the most powerful stakeholder in the process of curriculum development, for the earlier stated reasons, teachers will enable realization of the curriculum. However, teachers must be trained and qualified. Teachers may carry a heavy burden for curriculum development and yet have little time for research. For Nunan, the teacher as a researcher, *'often lacks the appropriate training in the collection and interpretation of classroom data'* (1990, p.63)[90]. Thus, teachers' training is imperative. Being novice or experienced teachers, teachers should also be trained according to their performance (Richwine & Biggs, 2012)[91]. Cohen and Hills (2001) noted that expecting teachers to embrace new instructional approaches without sufficient training and information about the necessity of a change often result in inadequate adoption of it. Vally and Spreen (1998)[92] suggested even massive training for teachers' involvement in curriculum development.

3.2. Teacher's Action Research

Reflections on the above discussions show that the technical view of teachers as implementers of a centralised curriculum is somehow fading away. The view started to be replaced by teachers 'involvement and research in curriculum implementation and development. The view, where the practice of teachers is limited to implementing curricula, which have already been developed elsewhere, holds true for the Algerian context. For Taylor (2013)[93], the technical trend is believed to construct teachers as technicians following existing procedures and allowing only limited teacher agency in curriculum-making. The technical approach to curriculum change privileges the researcher, developer or policy maker and neglects the practitioner who is supposed to carry out the curriculum. This technical curriculum policy implies that the curriculum is developed by one set of people. It is implemented by another set of people and received by yet another set. Nevertheless, this way of perceiving curriculum is sometimes described as a naturally occurring thing (Grundy, 1987)[94].

The curriculum must change with the developing and changing nature of the classroom. Action research is one approach in which teachers' involvement and research can have a prized role in curriculum change and development. Teacher action research in curriculum development challenges certain traditional assumptions of the technical approach. It challenges, for instance, the separation of research from action. Also, action research challenges the separation of the researcher and the researched. Again, traditional approaches to curriculum development place teachers (like learners) on the receiving end of the process. So, the researcher (policy maker or curriculum developer) is separated from the subjects of the research. Thus, action research challenges this separation. Yet what action research challenges is also challenging to teachers.

One challenge to teacher research is the disempowerment of teachers through highly prescriptive curricula and strict regimes of inspection and control in many countries (Priestley & Biesta, 2013)[95]. This latter automatically leads to various implementation difficulties. Teachers in centralised curriculum policies, for instance, expect to receive knowledge produced by others. As a result

of that, they will lose confidence in their ability to produce meaning through action (i.e. teaching) and reflection. This problem was illustrated decades ago by Chittendon et al. (1978)[96]

Historically teachers have been told that the source of knowledge about learning resides somewhere outside their classrooms, perhaps in curriculum or research labs. Given such conditions, it is not surprising to find some teachers so lacking confidence in their own views that they doubt the legitimacy of their experience with children when confronted with 'expert' evidence that goes against it. Insofar as teachers are unable to look critically at their classrooms, their teaching suffers. It becomes uninteresting and takes on qualities of routine and mindless practice …. (p.58).

Likewise, it is often heard nowadays that teachers are too busy to review research studies, let alone conduct research. Research may appear to be a complex set of steps that is difficult and time-consuming for teachers to participate in or conduct. Those teachers may find research irrelevant because there is little research written by practicing teachers. Also, what is written does not often relate to daily classroom activities (Ferrance, 2000[97], McBee, 2004[98]). According to McBee (2004), *'classrooms that become laboratories are better classrooms'* (p.157). Moreover, the teacher research cannot be effective if it is perceived by teachers as a decree that is passed down from the top. It is much more effective when it is constructed with personal relevance (Johnson, 2005)[99]. In other words, action research becomes effective as teachers *'pick up threads suggested in academic circles, and weave them in their own classroom'* (Ferrance, 2000, p.13).Through teacher research, teachers will be allowed to take ownership over their teaching as they are the ones who can identify issues worth addressing in their curriculum (Richards, 2001). Then, they will design a study, execute the study, track data and results, and finally reflect.

Teachers 'action research will put teachers in a position to witness whether the curriculum is at odds or fits their learners' needs and interests. Additionally, teachers' first-hand experience makes them the most capable in bridging the gap between curriculum theory and practice. Teachers having the knowledge and class experience must contribute to the process by conveying their ideas and reflections. They must be primarily involved in the planning stage. Thus, the curriculum development team has to consider the teachers as part of the environment that affects curriculum (Carl, 2009)[100]. Teachers (not to exclude learners) have their own *'perceptions of problems and issues in their classrooms, schools and professional lives';* thus they *'have a right to have their voices heard in creating the curriculum'* (Beane & Apple, 2007, p.20)[101]. The teachers' active participation equally requires and promotes the development of professional skills, such as critical thinking, research approach, creativity, as well as cooperation and decision making skills.

In line with the view of action research as a tool to test curriculum proposals as intelligent hypotheses rather than correct solutions, the relationship between action research and curriculum change is no longer difficult to recognize. Teacher action research is not an end in itself, but a means of nurturing curriculum improvement. The practitioner teacher is not necessarily an authority or expert, but is an inquirer, treating his knowledge as improvable. Action research thus becomes the basis for not only curriculum development but also professional development. Professional development of teachers is an important factor contributing to the success of curriculum development and implementation (Handler, 2010). For that reason, to ensure the success of curriculum reform, it should be in parallel with teachers' professional development. This is why it is claimed that curriculum approach and teachers' professional development are interrelated (Elliott, 1991, p.53). Villegas-Reimers (2003) asserted that *'the relationship between educational reform and teachers' professional development is a two way, or reciprocal, relationship'* (p.24).

Somekh and Zeichner's analysis of forty-six action research publications from the last decade revealed that professional development through action research has also been used as a successful

strategy for educational reform. This latter combines action with research and thereby gives the participants *'a means to develop agency'* to improve practice (2009, p.19)[102]. Other scholars also indicate that action research often leads to curriculum changes in classroom practice (Bartlett & Burton, 2006[103], Kincheloe, 2003[104], Noffke & Somekh, 2009,Somekh&Noffke, 2009[105]). According to McKernan (1996), '*Action research offers exciting new beginnings for the development of the curriculum, the profession and the person… [it] instructs us that practitioners can be producers as well as consumers of curriculum inquiry'* (p.3). Action research offers a systematic approach to introducing innovations. It seeks to do this by putting the teacher in the dual role of producer of educational theory, and user of that theory (Riding, et al., 1995)[106]. These words highlight the key perceptions on action research, its benefits and its usefulness in curriculum change.

Although theories about action research have changed over time, action research is believed to be a helpful tool used for teachers to uncover strategies to improve their teaching practices (Sagor, 2004)[107]. Being a professional development opportunity, teachers doing action research can often test a new instructional strategy, assess a new curriculum program, or evaluate an existing pedagogical method. In many research studies, participation in action research has been found to be the impetus for positive change exemplified by teacher improvement, self-reflection, and overall learning that enhances classroom practices (Ferrance, 2000, Johnson & Button, 2000[108], Ross et al., 1999[109], Sax & Fisher, 2001[110]).In addition, action research proposes a bottom up process not only for curriculum development and production of curriculum theory through constant trial and review, but also for enhancing the process of teaching and learning, benefiting both teachers and learners. Besides, the reflective and cooperative framework shaped by action research allows teachers to become involved in reflection on the curriculum and thus reshape it according to their schools.

Conclusion

Today, the teachers' role is changing rapidly from a traditional to a modern perspective. Instead of being slaves to educational reforms, teachers are becoming a source of the theoretical basis for their own practices. Teachers are supposed to be action researchers within the ground of their own classrooms as well. Action research, already used in different contexts, proved to be a valuable tool to promote curriculum especially in centralised settings. Furthermore, action research promotes teachers professional development. It deals with daily problems that teachers experience and gives them practical mechanisms to improve their practices. By observing and investigating their practices systematically, and understanding and transforming their circumstances critically, teachers will gain ownership of their territories. They will break existing compliance to top-down decisions and open space for self-updating and contentment. In brief, action research is a legitimate means of empowering teachers in the twenty-first century.

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