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**THE USE OF ACTION RESEARCH AS A MODEL IN THE  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF AN ENGLISH TEACHER: A CASE  
STUDY**

**Saadet KORUCU**  
**Master of Arts Thesis**

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**Saadet KORUCU  
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	Tez Danışmanı	Yrd. Doç. Dr. Abdülhamit ÇAKIR	
	Tezin Adı	Model Olarak Eylem Araştırmasının Bir İngilizce Öğretmeninin Mesleki Gelişiminde Kullanılması: Örnek Olay Çalışması	

### ÖZET

Bu çalışma, model olarak eylem araştırmasının kullanımının bir İngilizce öğretmenin mesleki gelişimine katkıda bulunup bulunmadığını araştırmaktadır. Öğretmenin mesleki gelişimini oluşturan; alan bilgisi, inanç ve tutumlar ve öğretim uygulamaları çalışmanın ana yapılarını oluşturmaktadır.

Çalışmada hem nitel hem de nicel veri analiz teknikleri kullanılmıştır. Nitel veriler eylem araştırmasını uygulayan İngilizce öğretmenin süreç boyunca tuttuğu günlük girdilerinden ve araştırmacı ile yapılan röportajlardan elde edilmiş olup kodlama tekniğiyle analiz edilmiştir. Öğrencilerin uygulama öncesinde ve sonrasında yapılan sınavlardan aldıkları sonuçlar nicel verileri oluşturmuş ve T-test tekniğiyle analiz edilmiştir.

Çalışmanın sonuçları; eylem araştırmasının, mesleki gelişimin öğeleri olan alan bilgisi, inanç ve tutumlar ve öğretim uygulamaları üzerinde değişiklikler ve gelişmeler sağlayarak bir İngilizce öğretmenin mesleki gelişimine katkıda bulunabileceğini göstermiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öğretmenin Mesleki Gelişimi, Eylem Araştırması



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	Tez Danışmanı	Yrd. Doç. Dr. Abdülhamit ÇAKIR	
Tezin İngilizce Adı	The Use of Action Research As a Model In the Professional Development of an English Teacher :A Case Study		

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates whether action research as a model can contribute to the professional development of an English teacher. The three specific areas of investigation are content knowledge, beliefs and attitudes and teaching practices of teachers that consist of professional development.

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques were employed in the study. Qualitative data analyzed by coding system were collected from the reflection journal of the subject and the interviews conducted by the researcher with the subject. Quantitative data were collected from the quiz and exam results of the students and analyzed by T-test technique.

The results of the study show that action research can contribute the professional development of an English teacher with respect to increasing content knowledge, bringing about changes in beliefs and attitudes and leading to improvements in teaching practices.

Key Words: Teacher Professional Development, Action Research

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching process has a very complicated nature and it is affected by numerous factors. Teachers are expected to meet the needs of a substantial number of students with varied cognitive and behavioral properties, with diverse learning styles, different cultural and personal backgrounds simultaneously. Moreover, teachers are also expected to adapt the latest developments in pedagogical and subject matter knowledge which is constantly growing. Political, economic and technological changes of the contemporary world place their effects on education, which cannot be ignored by teachers, according to Ur (1996), particularly language teachers as investigating the EFL teachers professional development adds a particular angle to the general issue of teacher professional development, because language teaching encompasses specific aspects different from teaching other subjects (in Atikler, 1997)

Second and foreign language teaching provides a career for hundreds of thousands of teachers worldwide, and the vast educational enterprise of English language teaching could not operate effectively without the dedication and effort of such teachers day by day and year by year throughout their careers. Maintaining the interest, creativity, and enthusiasm of experienced language teachers in their profession is of great concern. Teachers need to expand their roles and responsibilities over time if they are to continue to find language teaching rewarding and to develop longer-term career goals and opportunities over time. (Richards and Farrell, 2005: vii)

The field of language teaching is subject to rapid changes, both as the profession responds to new educational paradigms and trends and as institutions face new challenges as a result of changes in curriculum, national tests, and student needs. As a result, teachers need regular opportunities to update their professional

knowledge and skills, that is, their opportunities for professional development. Teachers need to be able to take part in activities such as:

- engaging in self-reflection and evaluation
- developing specialized knowledge and skills about many aspects of teaching
- expanding their knowledge base about research, theory, and issues in teaching
- taking on new roles and responsibilities, such as supervisor or mentor teacher, teacher-researcher, or materials writer

developing collaborative relationships with other teachers (Richards and Farrell, 2005: vii)

There are three main stages in language teachers' preparation history : teacher training, teacher education and teacher professional development. In a teacher-training program, teachers are taken as the media for realizing education aims and goals, and teacher preparation is to familiarize student teachers with teaching techniques and skills to be applied in classroom. While in a teacher-education program, the student teachers are not only taught the specific teaching techniques and skills, they also take such courses as general linguistics, applied linguistics, language examination and evaluation, and research methods. To sum up, the former aims at teachers teaching crafts training, while the latter strengthening teachers comprehensive professional qualifications. Based on teachers' teaching qualification education, the teacher-professional development encourages the teachers to reflect on their own teaching practice, observe their own class activities and evaluate their own teaching effects and advocates active action research to form their own teaching belief. (Quan, 2006: 4)

Action research is a term used to describe the process of identifying a question or problem in the classroom, collecting data, and interpreting that data. This process is beneficial to teachers and students, since it is concerned with improving the immediate learning environment. action research is thus a practical tool which every EFL practitioner can use as a means of improving the teaching/learning environment, since it involves qualitative and subjective reflection on the learning process as perceived by the main participants – teachers and students. (Finch, 2005)

As Burns points out (2000) action research "... emerges from concrete problems, issues, puzzles or questions that are of importance and concern to people involved..." (p.3) . It is also a way for teachers to develop professionally and investigate their classroom practice. She goes further to suggest that "... the research should provide a sense of personal meaning and development for those involved" She also adds that it enables teachers who act as researchers to develop personal goals, values and beliefs about practice.

Although it may seem difficult to bring about change to values, beliefs and attitudes of teachers as some teachers may not be open to changes, Somekh (1993) mentions, action research is a powerful tool to bring about change and development since it investigates and makes an impact upon our perceptions, beliefs and values about our own teaching. She also states that we do this through collecting evidence in our classrooms, "... because we are investigating solutions which we have the best possible opportunity of gaining access to beliefs and values which underpin what we do and say." (p.36)

Action research is also effective in bringing about theory and practice into the classroom environment. Many language teachers may complain about not being able to transfer their knowledge in the field into their teaching. Many research studies in the field of education may also be insufficient in enabling teachers to bring theory into practice since they can not apply directly the findings in their classes. At this stage, language teachers may try carrying out action research since it bridges the gap between theory and practice. It is the teacher who tries to solve current problems in his/her classroom by implementing certain strategies that she/he has read in related literature. According to Hollingsworth and Sockett (1994) teacher research is not a passing trend but instrumental in creating the groundwork and vision needed to further "professionalize teaching and rethink... schools" (p. 17). Lawrence Stenhouse once said, "It is teachers who, in the end, will change the world of the school by understanding it" (in Beverley, 1993). As teachers engage in action research they are increasing their understanding of the schooling process. What they are learning will have great impact on what happens in classrooms, schools, and districts in the future. The future directions of staff development programs, teacher preparation curricula, as well as school improvement initiatives, will be impacted by the things teachers



learn through the critical inquiry and rigorous examination of their own practice and their school programs that action research requires (Beverley, 1993). Teachers engaging in action research have a more critical and reflective eye for their own teaching practices.

Action Research consists of a spiral of cycles of (a) planning, (b) acting, (c) observing, (d) reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Teachers can use action research and reflection to reshape their knowledge, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and improve their teaching practices. Danielson and McGreal (2000) stated, “Few activities are more powerful for professional learning than reflection on practice” (p.24). The use of reflective practice in teacher professional development is based on the belief that teachers can improve their own teaching by consciously and systematically reflecting on their teaching experiences (Farrell, 2004). Richards and Lockhart (1994) say that teachers should “collect data about their teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching” (p.1). Reflective practices are such entwined with action research that McNiff (1997) says “It is a form of self-reflective inquiry that is now being used in school-based curriculum development, professional development, school improvement schemes, and so on, and, as such, it actively involves teachers as participants in their own educational process” (p. 1). Teachers as researchers critically assess their actions in order to bring changes and improvements to their instructional practices.

The element of change is a key feature with regard to the purpose of professional development. Learning something new is believed to take place only if it is implemented and used in practice. In other words, development is supposed to bring about change in practice. Receiving positive results from changed practice patterns affects teachers' knowledge; only when teachers see improvement in their classes as a result of changed practice, they get a reason to change previously held knowledge and beliefs (Goodson 1. 1992). The relationship between teacher beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and instructional practices is not straight; on the contrary, it is dialectic. Change in one of them influences the others thus leads teachers to professional development. Turnbull and Pinder's (2003) statement “..... professional development brings about change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes,

content knowledge, and instructional practices, leading to improved student learning” reinforces what has been said so far. As regards, this study investigates whether action research as a professional development model can be effective on them.

Change in content knowledge of a teacher can help the teacher to develop a background of important and relevant theoretical concepts and become conversant with new methods and techniques in ELT (Finocchiaro, 1988). Change in instructional practices encompass many aspects of teaching, including the roles of teacher and student for the day, instructional materials that will be utilized, the tasks to be completed, and the method of assessing student learning (in Cooper-Twamley U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The study of teachers’ beliefs and attitudes forms part of the process of understanding how teachers conceptualize their work and how they behave. Teacher beliefs influence the way they design and interact in their classes. Richards (1998) stated “A primary source of teachers’ classroom practices is belief systems—the information, attitudes, values, expectations, theories, and assumptions about teaching and learning that teachers build up over time and bring with them to the classroom” (p. 66)

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

This study is a case study. Case studies involve a systematic inquiry into a specific phenomenon, e.g. individual, event, program, or process. Action research is also defined as a systematic inquiry that can be conducted by teachers with vested interest in the teaching and learning process to gather more information about how they teach and how their students learn. It is truly a systematic inquiry into one’s own teaching practice (Johnson, 2005). Action research allows teachers to study their own classrooms— for example their own instructional methods, their own students, their own assessments— in order to better understand them and be able to improve their quality or effectiveness. It focuses specifically on unique characteristics of the population with whom a practice is employed or with whom some action must be taken. This is ,in turn, results in increased utility and effectiveness for the practitioner (Parsons& Brown, 2002).

Both case-study research and action research are concerned with the researcher's gaining an in-depth understanding of particular phenomena in real-world settings. The two types of research seem quite similar in their focus on the field or the world of action, while embracing considerable diversity in theory and practice. Several authors argue that action research should rely on the case-study method. Also, many action researchers adopt the specific guidelines for doing research which the proponents of case-study research offer. (Blichfeldt and Andersen, 2006)

In a similar vein, a single subject was worked with for this study. The researcher who acted as a guide and facilitator throughout the research process initiated the project with an English teacher (Action Research Practitioner: ARP) who teaches elementary levels. The ARP determined to carry out the action research study regarding the problem of students' vocabulary learning. Although the students' overall performance was very good, they weren't able to retain vocabulary items for a long time. Therefore, the ARP carried out an action research study in which she changed her classroom management and teaching techniques during vocabulary activities in order to enhance students' retention of vocabulary. The details of the action research project will be presented in chapter three.

## **1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Professional development models such as workshops, conferences, and in-service meetings, are aimed at improving teachers and teaching. However, teachers are not always impacted by professional development activities (Yoon, Park, & Hong, 1999). Even some teacher development activities leave teachers feeling frustrated that their time has been wasted as they don't meet teachers' immediate needs in their own classrooms and can be irrelevant to their concerns. Considering the needs of teachers, one can argue that action research is an appropriate model of professional development to teachers since it is concerned with improving the immediate teaching/learning environment. Because of its practical and applicable nature, it enables teachers to delve into any skill or topic area that they may wish to work on and provide them with guidelines as to how to identify problems and seek solutions for them in their own classroom situations.

### **1.3.PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Many conventional forms of professional development are seen as too top-down and too isolated from school and classroom realities to have much impact on practice. As a result, hoped-for improvements are seldom realized. That's why teachers need more practical tools to meet their individual needs and action research can be an efficient tool in responding to teacher needs which paves the way for their professional development. As regards,

The purposes of this study are:

- 1) To discover whether action research as a model is effective on the professional development of an English teacher.
- 2) To investigate whether action research brings about changes in an English teacher's beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and instructional practices.

### **1.4.RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Fullan and Miles (1992) state that what teachers hope to gain through professional development activities are specific, concrete and practical ideas that directly relate to the day-to-day operation of their classrooms to improve the teaching/learning environment in their classes. In this respect, this study investigates whether action research is a practical tool bringing about changes in the professional development of an English teacher. Pinder (2003) states that "..... professional development brings about change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes, content knowledge, and instructional practices, leading to improved student learning." In other words, changes in teachers' beliefs and attitudes, content knowledge, and instructional practices lead a teacher develop professionally. Thus, the research questions of this study are as follows:

1. When teachers conduct action research :
  - a) What changes does it bring about in teacher attitudes and beliefs?
  - b) What changes does it bring about in teachers' content knowledge?
  - c) What changes does it bring about in instructional practices?

### **1.5.SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The findings of this study provide information on how action research may assist a language teacher to improve her own classroom teaching and learning practices. It contributes to our understanding of a teacher's experiences as she progresses through the implementation cycle of action research in her classroom and the subsequent effects on her instructional practices and content knowledge focusing on inner changes in beliefs and attitudes. Johnson (1993) agrees that teachers should be researchers in their own classrooms and this study showed that research can be conducted by a teacher rather than an outside researcher. Therefore, this study can be a model for teachers who want to conduct action research and empower themselves professionally through it.

### **1.6.LIMITATIONS**

This study is a case study. Case studies centre on individual units like an individual student, teacher or a particular event. Therefore the results can not be generalized to the others statistically. Similarly, action research is primarily an approach relating to individual or small group professional development. It is an "informal, qualitative, subjective, interpretive, reflective and experiential model of inquiry. The specific focus of case study hence becomes advantageous for action researchers. As regards, this study is restricted to an English teacher's class at elementary level which means that the results cannot be generalisable to other classrooms or schools. The time framework of the research was another limitation of this study as having more time could have enabled more elaborated data. Teacher's content knowledge, teacher's beliefs and attitudes and teacher's instructional practices are the main constructs determined for the research that professional development directly affects and is directly affected by changes in them.

#### **Definitions of Terms:**

**Professional Development:** A process of continual intellectual experiential, and attitudinal growth of teachers. (Bailey et al., 1998)

**Action Research:** An inquiry-based form of professional development, which requires an "identification of a problem; collection of data; analysis and

interpretation of data; implementation of changes based on the interpretations; and evaluation of the effects of the intervention” (Jones, Lubinski, Swafford, & Thornton, 1994, p. 29).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In this chapter, first teacher professional development will be presented. Next, the interplay between teacher professional development constituents will be explained. Then, action research will be discussed in detail. After that, the relationship between professional development and action research will be studied. Finally, the vocabulary teaching activities that enhance retention in young learners will be discussed, since the action research practitioner focused on it for the action research process.

#### **2.1. Teacher Professional Development**

These are changing times in education systems around the world. With the start of the new millennium, many societies are engaging in serious and promising educational reforms. One of the key elements in most of these reforms is the professional development of teachers; societies are finally acknowledging that teachers are not only one of the ‘variables’ that need to be changed in order to improve their education systems, but they are also the most significant change agents in these reforms. This double role of teachers in educational reforms being both subjects and objects of change – makes the field of teacher professional development a growing and challenging area, and one that has received major attention during the past few years (Villegas-Reimers, 2003: 7). More specifically, the theme professional development has been recurring in language teaching settings in recent years and it is of importance in these circles as a result of the emergence of initiatives that have been led by teachers and it is for these teachers that professional development opportunities are needed. Wallace (1991) explains us a good deal about the word “professional”. He states “People use the adjective ‘professional’ to describe

something that has been well done, whereas ‘an amateur job’ is something that has been badly done...Those engaged in a profession also ‘professed’ to have a knowledge not available to the public at large, but a knowledge that could be of great public use... Thus in ‘profession’ we have a kind of occupation which can only be practiced after long and rigorous academic study, which should be well rewarded because of the difficulty in attaining it..., but which is not simply engaged in for profit, because it also carries a sense of public service and personal dedication.” (p. 5). He further states that any occupation aspiring to the title of ‘profession’ will claim at least some of these qualities: a basis of scientific knowledge; a period of rigorous study which is formally assessed; a sense of public service; high standards of professional conduct; and the ability to perform specified demanding and socially useful tasks in a demonstrably competent manner. As regards, teaching is definitely a profession. The term development is defined as “the growth or change of someone or something to become more advanced in many contemporary dictionaries. In the related literature, professional development of teachers is defined as changes of the behavior, knowledge, beliefs, or teaching practices. Teacher is one of the fundamentals in education and the key variable of the effective education program at all levels and environments (Miller & Miller, 2002).

According to Çeliköz (2000), the general characteristics of a teacher who is regarded as the key variable of education are as follows:

- taking into consideration of the individual differences
- supporting all students and groups in the classroom to participate in the activities,
- encouraging group work,
- planning teaching strategies,
- using suitable and different methods and techniques,
- evaluating the students with appropriate method and tools,
- preparing teaching materials,
- using appropriate technologies,
- directing students to correct behavior, and
- teaching students to reach information ( in Çakır, 2008: 40).

Teacher professional development can be seen both as an individual and collective process that contribute to the development of the teacher's professional skills, by means of formal and informal experiences. As the importance of teaching to learn processes increased, the concept of professional development has had many changes and it is now regarded as a continuing-long term process covering different types of opportunities and initiatives that are systematically planned to stimulate the development and evolution of the teacher. It is a construction of the professional I, which is based on personal commitment, the availability to learn to teach, beliefs, values, knowledge on the subjects they teach and how they teach them, past experiences as well as professional vulnerability (Marcelo, 2005)

Rudduck defines professional development of the teacher as “the teacher's ability to maintain the curiosity of the class; to identify significant interests in the teaching and learning processes; to value and seek dialogue with experienced colleagues as a source of support in the analysis of situations” (Rudduck, 1991: 129). Following are some of the definitions of the concept of teacher professional development :

“The professional development of teachers goes beyond a merely informative stage; it implies adaptation to change with a view to changing teaching and learning activities, altering teacher attitudes and improving the academic results of students. The professional development of teachers is concerned with individual, professional and organisational needs” (Heideman, 1990: 4);

“The professional development of teachers is a broad area which includes any activity or process intent on improving dexterity, attitudes, understanding or involvement in current or future roles” (Fullan, 1990 : 3);

“It is defined as the entire process that improves knowledge, dexterity or teacher attitudes” (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990 : 234-235);

“It is the process by which teachers, whether alone or accompanied, review, renew and further their commitment as agents of change, with moral teaching aims. Moreover, they acquire and develop knowledge, competencies and emotional intelligence that are essential to professional thinking, planning and practice with children, adolescents and colleagues throughout each stage of their teaching lives” (Day, 1999 : 4);



“Work opportunities that encourage creative and reflective skills in the teachers, thus, enabling them to improve their practices” (Bredeson, 2002 : 663);

“The professional development of teachers is the professional growth the teacher acquires as a result of his/her experience and systematic analysis of his/her own practice” (Villegas-Reimers, 2003: 19 ).

Lange ( 1990, in Bailey et al. 2001:4) defines teacher development as “a process of continual, experimental, and attitudinal growth of teachers.” To Head and Taylor (1997: 250) teacher development is associated with the process of becoming “the best teacher that I personally can be”. It is centred on personal awareness of the possibilities for change but it also builds on the past, since recognizing how past experiences have or have not been developmental helps identify opportunities for change in the present or future.

To the extent that teachers are regularly asking themselves ‘How can I become a better teacher?’ ‘How can I enjoy my teaching more?’ ‘How can I feel that I am helping learning?’ they are thinking about ways of developing. They are acknowledging that it is possible to change the way they teach and perhaps also the preconceptions that they have about teaching and learning. Professional development means becoming a student of learning, your own as well as that of others. It represents a widening of the focus of teaching to include not only the subject matter and the teaching methods, but also who are working with the subject and using the methods. It means taking a step back to see the larger picture of what goes on in learning, and how the relationship between students and teachers influences learning. It also means attending to small details which can in turn change the bigger picture. Teacher development, as we understand it, draws on the teacher’s own inner resource for change. It is centred on personal awareness of the possibilities for change, and of what influences the change process. It builds on the past, because recognizing how past experiences have or have not been developmental helps identify opportunities for change in the present and future. It also draws on the present, in encouraging a fuller awareness of the kind of teacher you are now and of other people’s responses to you. It is a self-reflective process because it is through questioning old habits that alternative ways of being and doing are able to emerge (Sabuncuoğlu, 2006).

Throughout their professional lives, teachers need changes and improvements as they don't want to suffer from burnout, disillusionment or dissatisfaction with their professions. Teachers engage in professional development activities because professional development:

- focuses on teachers as central to student learning, yet includes all other members of the school community;
- focuses on individual, collegial and organizational improvement;
- respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity for teachers;
- reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning and leadership;
- enables teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies and other essential elements in teaching to high standards;
- promotes continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools;
- is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development;
- requires substantial time and other resources;
- is driven by a coherent long-term plan,
- is evaluated ultimately on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning; and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts (Underhill, 1995).

Professional development has a crucial role in revitalizing education and realize educational reforms. Professional development is essential because “Students learn only from teachers who are themselves in the process of learning” (McCall, 1997, p. 23, in Sally 2008). According to Abdal-Haqq (1996), effective professional development that ensures learning:

- is ongoing;
- includes training, practice and feedback; opportunities for individual reflection and group inquiry into practice; and coaching or other follow-up procedures;
- is school-based and embedded in teacher work;

- is collaborative, providing opportunities for teachers to interact with peers;
- focuses on student learning, which should, in part, guide assessment of its effectiveness;
- encourages and supports school-based and teacher initiatives;
- is rooted in the knowledge base for teaching;
- incorporation of available knowledge bases;
- time to work on staff development and assimilate new learning;
- designs built on principles of adult learning and the change process;
- appropriate incentives and rewards;
- integration of individual goals and district goals,
- leadership and sustained administrative support;
- experimentation and risk-taking;
- appropriate participant involvement in goal setting, implementation, evaluation and decision-making;
- formal placement of the program within the philosophy and organizational structure of the school and district;
- incorporates constructivist approaches to teaching and learning;
- recognizes teachers as professionals and adult learners;
- provides adequate time and follow-up support; and
- is accessible and inclusive.

Professional development need to be job-embedded, promote discussion and supported through peer coaching, study groups, action research and other forms of learning from the work of teaching (Sally,2008).

Although teachers of English participate in many teacher training courses for professional development all over the world, they are generally not able to benefit from them effectively. The reasons for failure are summarised by Turney (cited in Sabuncuoğlu, 2008, 1982) as follows:

- One-shot workshops are widespread but are ineffective.
- Topics are frequently selected by people other than those for whom the inservice is intended.
- Follow-up support for ideas and practices introduced in in-service programs occurs in only a very small minority of cases.

- Follow-up evaluation occurs infrequently.
- In-service programs rarely address the individual needs and concerns.
- The majority of programs involve teachers from many different schools, but there is no recognition of the differential impact of positive and negative factors within the systems to which they must return.

- An inadequate theory of implementation, resulting in too little time for teachers and school leaders to plan for and learn new skills and practices;

- Too many competing demands or overload;

- Failure to address the incompatibility between project requirements and existing organizational policies and structure;

- Lack of awareness of the limitations of teacher and school administrator knowledge about how to implement the project;

- The turnover of teachers in each school;

- Lack of technical assistance and other forms of intensive staff development;

- Under-funding the project or trying to do too much with too little support.

Nevertheless, the need for developing professionally has brought about the emergence of teacher-led initiatives such as action research and reflective teaching. According to Craft (2000, p.10) the opportunities for teacher development includes the following:

- action research

- self-directed study as well as teacher research linked to awards such as the

Education Doctorate

- using distance-learning materials

- receiving and/or giving on-the-job coaching, mentoring or tutoring

- school-based and off-site courses of various lengths

- job shadowing and rotation

- peer networks

- membership of a working party or task group

- school cluster projects involving collaboration, development and sharing of experience/skills

- teacher placement including those in business but also those in other schools

- personal reflection

- experiential 'assignments'
- collaborative learning
- information technology-mediated learning (e.g. through e-mail discussion groups, or self-study using multi-media resources).

Teacher professional development serves a longer-term goal and seeks to facilitate growth of teachers' understanding of their teaching as well as of themselves as teachers. It often involves examining different dimensions of a teacher's practice as a basis for reflective review and can hence be seen as "bottom-up. Strategies for teacher development often involve documenting different kinds of teaching practices; reflective analysis of teaching practices, examining beliefs, values, and principles. Teachers are constantly exposed to a great variety of possibilities for professional development (Richards J. and Farrell T., 2005), some of which are obligatory and even imposed by authorities (Hargreaves A and Fullan M,1992), like certain in-service courses, workshops and lectures of different nature. Other PD possibilities are of a more personal character, undertaken by the teachers out of their own initiative. These could include reflection, peer teaching, collegial sharing, professional reading (Guskey T. and Huberman M., 1995) and action research. Some teacher development activities are directed at the whole school or district pedagogical staff dealing with matters of broader vision, while others are concerned with practical every-day classroom functioning of an individual teacher (Guskey T. and Huberman M., 1995) like action research.

## **2.2. The Interplay Between Teacher's Content Knowledge, Beliefs and Attitudes and Teaching Practices**

Studies conducted in educational fields show that two fundamental elements of schools systems are students and teachers. It is pointed out that there would be no education or schools without them. Likewise, the facilities, class, tools, and equipment, educational and industrial training programs designed to meet the basic needs of the students make up the programs' needs. However, an effective teacher is of major importance for a dynamic and successful training program. Teacher is the key variable of the effective education program at all levels and environments (Miller & Miller, 2002). As Prawat (1992) indicates, teachers are expected to play a crucial role in

changing schools and classrooms. Paradoxically, however, they are also viewed as major obstacles to change due to their traditional beliefs. According to Bandura (1986), an individual's decisions throughout his/her life is strongly influenced by his/her beliefs. In their study, Bingimlas and Hanrahan discuss that there is a complex relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs and classroom practices. Similarly, Pajares (1992) asserts that beliefs are best indicators of the decisions that individuals make throughout their lives and teachers' beliefs influence and play a fundamental role in their knowledge acquisition and interpretation, task selection, and course content interpretation. Mansour (2008) suggested beliefs controlled the gaining of knowledge but that knowledge also influenced beliefs. Thompson (1992) argued that distinguishing between beliefs and knowledge was very difficult but that the distinction needed to be understood by educators and researchers since teachers may treat their beliefs as knowledge. Zembylas (2005) argued that teacher beliefs are important components of teacher knowledge and like teacher beliefs, teacher knowledge is needed in understanding teachers' teaching. In coming to an understanding of teachers' practices, the significance of teachers' knowledge and how it impacts on teachers' thinking should be considered (Standen, 2002). The notion of teaching as a thinking activity, which has been characterized as a common concern with the ways in which knowledge is actively acquired and used by teachers and the circumstances that affect its acquisition and employment is now making its way into SLTE. An examination of the goals of teacher education reveals a considerable deemphasis of skills and behaviors in favor of an emphasis on the formation or transformation of teacher thinking and reflective processes, dispositions, knowledge, and beliefs.

Knowledge is a widely discussed concept in the literature. The definition of knowledge as a term can be traced back to the time of Socrates. According to Calderhead (1996) "... knowledge refers to factual propositions and the understandings that inform skillful action" (p.175). An effective teacher should be aware of the importance of the knowledge of the subject area, other related disciplines and learner needs. Shulman (1987) mentioned that the knowledge base of teachers includes the content knowledge about the subject area of the teacher,

pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge about his/her subject area and other subject areas, knowledge about learners and their characteristics, knowledge about school districts and school culture, and knowledge about educational values, purposes and philosophies determined by the government. As stated in Seviş's study (1998) many researchers have emphasized on the importance of content knowledge in professional development of teachers (Ball, 1990a; Ball, 1990b; Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2007; Borko, 2004; Chinnapan & Lawson, 2005; Even & Tirosh, 1995; Goulding & Suggate, 2001; Grossman, Wilson, & Shulman, 1989; Ma, 1999; McDiarmid, Ball & Anderson, 1989; Shulman, 1987; Wilson & Berne, 1999). The widely known approach to teacher knowledge is the content knowledge classification proposed by Shulman (1986). He divided content knowledge as subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and curriculum knowledge. He regarded knowledge of subject matter or knowledge of content as a prerequisite for someone who will teach. He further states that teachers must have in depth understanding of subject matter, organization of the subject matter, the ways of identifying students' past learning and deficiencies in their past learning, and the ways of facilitating new understanding by the help of teacher education program they followed. In general, this source of knowledge base of teachers is the content knowledge. Grossman (1990) also pointed out that the knowledge of subject matter and the knowledge of students are two basic knowledge components that make a person a teacher. Subject matter content knowledge refers not only to have the knowledge of facts, concepts or accepted truths but also to explain why these concepts are worth learning and to relate the concepts within and without discipline. Shulman's pedagogical content knowledge generally reflects the subject matter knowledge for teaching, and bridges the content knowledge and the teaching as a practice. Pedagogical content knowledge includes the following characteristics: (1) the knowledge of the most useful examples, (2) the knowledge of alternative and various representations, (3) the knowledge about how the subject matter can be made comprehensible and meaningful to students, (4) the knowledge of the topics that students have difficulty to learn and how to make it easy for students, (5) the knowledge of preconceptions and misconceptions of students in different grade levels, and (6) the knowledge of the strategies for overcoming the misconceptions of students (Shulman, 1986). In this

respect, it can be said that, the characteristics of the pedagogical content knowledge deals with “how to teach the subject matter” question. The third category of the content knowledge is the curricular knowledge. The curricular knowledge also refers to the knowledge about the philosophy of the curriculum, organization of the topics in the curriculum, knowledge of variety of the instructional materials for different grade levels and knowledge of alternative programs, textbook and materials (Shulman, 1986). These types of knowledge consist of the main source of teachers’ teaching and they are supported by conceptions and beliefs of teachers. According to Pajares (1992), teachers’ beliefs influence and play a fundamental role in their knowledge acquisition and interpretation, task selection, and course content interpretation. In this respect, researchers’ key vision of the relationship between beliefs and knowledge was that “whether knowledge directs beliefs or beliefs leads to knowledge. For example, teachers may have inappropriate or untrue beliefs despite the years they have spent preparing for their profession and this supports the idea that knowledge is not always the source for beliefs. On the other hand, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether the interpretations of the events are based on what the teacher knows, what the teacher believes, or what the teacher believes he knows (Woods 1996:194). Mansour (2008) suggested beliefs controlled the gaining of knowledge but that knowledge also influenced beliefs and it can be concluded that these two concepts are so entwined that it is almost impossible to pinpoint where knowledge ends and belief begins (Pajares 1992). Abelson (1979) defined beliefs in terms of people manipulating knowledge for a particular purpose or under a necessary circumstance. According to Brown and Cooney (1982), beliefs are dispositions to action and major determinants of behavior. Rokeach (1972) defined beliefs as “any simple proposition, conscious or unconscious, inferred from what a person says or does, capable of being preceded by the phrase ‘I believe that’” (p. 113). Based upon a literature review of beliefs, Pajares (1992) defined belief as an “individual’s judgment of the truth or falsity of a proposition, a judgment that can only be inferred from a collective understanding of what human beings say, intend, and do” (p. 316). Anthropologists, social psychologists, and philosophers have agreed upon a commonly accepted definition of beliefs; “beliefs are thought of as psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that



are felt to be true” (Richardson, 1996, p.103). In educational settings, Haney et al. (2003) defined beliefs as “one’s convictions, philosophy, tenets, or opinions about teaching and learning” (p. 367). Virginia Richardson (1994) considers beliefs to be a component of teaching philosophy. She also defines the term “belief” as a proposition that is accepted as true by the individual holding the belief. According to her it is a psychological concept and differs from knowledge, which implies epistemic warrant.

Goodenough (1963), for example, described beliefs as propositions that are held to be true and are "accepted as guides for assessing the future, are cited in support of decisions, or are referred to in passing judgment on the behavior of others". Eisenhart, Shrum, Harding, and Cuthbert (1988), however, added an element of attitude to Goodenough's definition: "a belief is a way to describe a relationship between a task, an action, an event, or another person and an attitude of *a* person toward it" (p.12). Many studies have been carried to describe the attitudes teachers and learners hold towards educational issues and their impact on teaching and learning process (Krashen 1982 cited in Chastain 1988; Bai and Ertmer 2004; Karabenick and Noda 2004; Kirazlar 2007). Although it has been interchangeably used with beliefs, the distinction is obvious that attitude refers to a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object whereas beliefs represent the information he has about the object (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). The information about a particular “object” forms the beliefs and the set of such beliefs indicates the attitude towards that object (Deryakulu 2004). As a result of observations and received information from outside sources or inference processes beliefs are formed about an object, people or an event. The totality of these beliefs determines individual’s attitudes, intentions and behaviours. (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Deryakulu 2004) Thus in order to measure attitudes researchers tend to assess beliefs (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975:131). As Rokeach’s definition summarises “an attitude is a relatively enduring organization of beliefs about an object or situation predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner” (Rokeach 1965:550). A wealth of research evidence has shown that teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning influence their teaching practices. As Pajares (1992) states “beliefs are the best indicators of the decisions individuals make throughout their lives” (p. 307). He further suggests that there is “a

strong relationship between teachers' educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions, and classroom practices" (p. 326). Beliefs of teachers influence their perceptions and attitudes which, in turn, affect their behaviours in the classroom. It is clear that teacher is one of the fundamentals in education. Although the content of the courses are designed by the government or institutions, as practitioners, teachers decide how the learning will take place. In most cases beliefs influence teacher's style, attitudes, decisions and practice both before and after the classroom. The teaching process involves teachers' thought processes (Woods 1996) and teachers' actions and their observable effects (Richardson 2002). Teachers' thought processes include the educational decisions they make throughout their professional lives. First of all, teachers need to decide what to teach both during the course and in a particular class and then they need to organize the environment, the materials and activities in a way which they think proper for successful teaching (Erdem, 1999). In other words, without establishing new beliefs, it is impossible to implement any educational reforms (Tatto and Coupland, 2003). Moreover, teachers' beliefs play an important part in teacher development as they influence the acceptance and uptake of new approaches, techniques and activities (Donaghue 2003). About daily routines, teachers are always under the influence of their beliefs; beliefs strongly affect the materials and activities they choose for the classroom (Richards, 1994). Teacher beliefs might be influential on their classroom practice, expectations for success, and even public policy (Snider and Roehl 2007:873). Classroom practice of a teacher could illustrate the beliefs underlying those decisions and actions. For that reason, researchers should look beyond the teachers' behaviour, their classroom practice, to the beliefs hidden underneath their actions (Fukami 2005). Similarly, Şenel (2006) stated that beliefs are one of the factors that shape teaching as they determine the strongly believed behaviour and practice in classrooms. In her study she mentions, Tobin (1993) have found out that beliefs have a vital effect in teachers' behaviour, and that teachers need to change their beliefs in order to change their behaviour. One of his studies indicate that beliefs can be changed when roles are reconceptualized. In this instance it was not a case of changing specific beliefs one by one, but of making sets of beliefs no longer applicable to a specific role and developing others that are consistent with a new

conceptualization of a role. The futility of attempting to change beliefs one at a time became clear as the potential of using metaphors about roles as a master switch emerged.

Prosser and Trigwell (1997) argue that the study of effective teaching in education has largely been in theoretical and practical manner, involving the teacher's perspective and beliefs regarding the educational process because what teachers think affects what they do. It is frequently observed that teachers are not aware of the implicit beliefs that define their teaching orientations. Reflecting upon their own practice and approaches may make these beliefs explicit. As teaching is a complex process, one should think about it reflectively because reflection enables teachers to challenge their personal beliefs about teaching. This gives teachers the opportunity to examine their thoughts about learning, teaching and educational issues as well as their classroom practices. Hawky (1997) claim that if we are to understand and change teaching practices in adult and higher education, we must start by making clarifying our intentions and conceptions of teaching and learning. Ideally, these conceptions can be made explicit through reflection and discussion within the teaching/learning process. This would help teachers to understand these conceptions, and therefore to approach their learning in an appropriate manner. Change in beliefs and practice is only possible when teachers are willing to criticise themselves and open to new ideas. Several studies have showed that teachers change their beliefs due to the effects of reflection which can be done by staff-development courses, student feedback, keeping journals, trial and error, collaboration with others, action research and so on.

The statement of Zembylas (2005) "Teacher beliefs are important components of teacher knowledge and like teacher beliefs, teacher knowledge is needed in understanding teachers' teaching." and Standen's (2002) "In coming to an understanding of teachers' practices, the significance of teachers' knowledge and how it impacts on teachers' thinking should be considered" (in Bingimlas & Hanrahan, 2010) clearly sums up the interplay between content knowledge, beliefs and attitudes and teaching practices by showing that change in one of the components of professional development influence others as the relationship between them is dialectical rather than unilateral.

## **2.3. Action Research**

Action research can be a powerful way for language teachers to investigate their own practice. It is usually undertaken with the idea of improving a teacher's classroom practice. This type of research requires that the teacher investigate an issue that he or she has been puzzled by for a period of time by engaging in a process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. As a result of insight gained from undertaking an action research project, language teachers learn a lot about their own teaching practices. (Richards and Farrell, 2005)

### **2.3.1. A Brief History of Action Research**

The idea of using research in a “natural” setting to change the way that the researcher interacts with that setting can be traced back to Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist and educator whose work on action research was developed throughout the 1940s in the United States. “Lewin is credited with coining the term ‘action research’ to describe work that did not separate the investigation from the action needed to solve the problem” (McFarland & Stansell, 1993, p. 14). Topics chosen for his study related directly to the context of the issue. His process was cyclical, involving a “non-linear pattern of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting on the changes in the social situations” (Noffke & Stevenson, 1995, p. 2). Stephen Corey at Teachers College at Columbia University was among the first to use action research in the field of education. He believed that the scientific method in education would bring about change because educators would be involved in both the research and the application of information. Corey summed up much of the thought behind this fledgling branch of inquiry. We are convinced that the disposition to study...the consequences of our own teaching is more likely to change and improve our practices than is reading about what someone else has discovered of his teaching. (Corey, 1953, p. 70) Corey believed that the value of action research is in the change that occurs in everyday practice rather than the generalization to a broader audience. He saw the need for teachers and researchers to work together. However, in the mid 1950s, action research was attacked as unscientific, little more than common sense, and the work of amateurs (McFarland & Stansell, 1993, p. 15). Interest in action

research waned over the next few years as experiments with research designs and quantitative data collection became the norm. By the 1970s we saw again the emergence of action research. Education practitioners questioned the applicability of scientific research designs and methodologies as a means to solve education issues. The results of many of these federally funded projects were seen as theoretical, not grounded in practice. The practice of action research is again visible and seen to hold great value. Over time, the definition has taken on many meanings. It is now often seen as a tool for professional development, bringing a greater focus on the teacher than before (Noffke & Stevenson, 1995). It is increasingly becoming a tool for school reform, as its very individual focus allows for a new engagement in educational change. According to Borg (1965: 313) Action research emphasizes the involvement of teachers in problems in their own classrooms and has as its primary goal the in-service training and development of the teacher rather than the acquisition of general knowledge in the field of education. (in Ferrance, 2000)

### **2.3.2. What is action research**

Language teachers all around the world want to be effective teachers, develop themselves professionally and provide the best learning opportunities for their students. Action research can be a very valuable way for teachers to improve classroom practice, extend teaching skills and gain more understanding of themselves as teachers.

Action research refers to teacher-conducted classroom research that seeks to clarify and resolve practical teaching issues and problems. The term “action research” refers to two dimensions of this kind of activity: The word research in “action research” refers to a systematic approach to carrying out investigations and collecting information that is designed to illuminate an issue or problem and to improve classroom practice. The word action refers to taking practical action to resolve classroom problems. Action research takes place in the teacher’s own classroom. (Richards and Farrell, 2005). Mills (2003: 1) also points out that action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers to gather information about the ways that their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. The information is gathered with the goals of gaining

insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes. So, in action research, a teacher becomes an 'investigator' or 'explorer' of his or her personal teaching context, while at the same time being one of the participants in it (Burns, 2010, p.2).

Action research is a tool that is used to help teachers and other educators uncover strategies to improve teaching practices (Sagor, 2004); it is a viable and realistic endeavor for all educators. Action research requires teachers to design a study in an area of interest that they would like to carry out in their classrooms or schools. Many times, action research is considered a professional development opportunity because, frequently, teachers test a new instructional strategy, assess a new curriculum program, or evaluate an existing pedagogical method. In many research studies, participating 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; Ross, Rolheiser, & Hogoboam-Gray, 1999; Sax & Fisher, 2001). Goswami and Stillman (1987; preface) explains how research influences their roles when it becomes a part of teachers' professional lives:

- Their teaching is transformed in important ways: they become theorists, articulating their intentions, testing their assumptions, and finding connections with practice.

- Their perceptions of themselves as writers and teachers are transformed. They step up their use of resources; they form networks; and they become more active professionally.

- They become rich resources who can provide the profession with information it simply doesn't have. They can observe closely, over long periods of time, with special insights and knowledge. Teachers know their classrooms and students in ways that outsiders can't.

- They become critical, responsive readers and users of current research, less apt to accept uncritically others' theories, less vulnerable to fads, and more authoritative in their assessment of curricula, methods and materials.

- They can study writing and learning and report their findings without spending large sums of money (although they must have support and recognition). Their studies while probably not definitive, taken together should help us develop and assess writing curricula in ways that are outside the scope of specialists and external evaluators.

- They collaborate with their students to answer questions important to both, drawing on community resources in new and unexpected ways. The nature of classroom discourse changes when inquiry begins. Working with teachers to answer real questions provides students with intrinsic motivation for talking, reading, and writing and has the potential for helping them achieve mature language skills.

Similarly, Luitel (2000:57-58) lists a number of advantages which can accrue from involvement in action research processes. They include:

- It increases the teacher's awareness regarding what is happening in the particular class during teaching learning. Normally, teachers remain unconscious towards their own action, but once they are involved in this kind of research, it creates awareness among them towards their actions and learners' participation.

- Action research leads to "improvements in a particular teaching situation" (James & Garrett, 1992). That is to say, the findings of the action research enable the teacher to bring necessary changes in his/her teaching for the improvement of teaching.

- Out of the findings of an action research, the teacher can derive diagnostic measures for the solution of classroom problems.

- As mentioned above, this research makes the link between theory and practice. If the teacher researcher has certain hypothesis in mind, this can be tested in real practice. Unlike a survey research, this is done while working, therefore there are direct and more practical benefits of it.

- Even if teachers do not have any theory/principle/hypothesis in mind, they get an opportunity to think about new ideas, try them out and see their usefulness in classroom teaching.

- Action research creates the environment of innovation for the development of instruction so that the teacher can initiate change or improvement on his/her own effort if it is needed, without depending upon the outside experts or some high level authority.

- By increasing the teachers' innovative teaching skill and experiment-based knowledge, an action research contributes a lot for their professional development. It can change a teacher into a researcher.

Over twenty years ago, Stenhouse (1975: 143, in Burns, 1999) summarised some of the central arguments for teachers carrying out research. These are now gaining greater currency in the field of second language teaching: “The uniqueness of each classroom setting implies that any proposal - even at school level - needs to be tested and verified and adapted by each teacher in his own classroom. The ideal is that the curricular specifications should feed a teacher's personal research and development programmes through which he is increasing his own understanding of his own work and hence bettering his teaching ... It is not enough that teachers' work should be studied; they need to study it themselves.”

According to these accounts, then, action research offers a valuable opportunity for teachers to be involved in research to uncover some of the complexities of the teaching process and thereby to improve their professional lives.

Action research consists of the same elements as regular research, that is, questions, data, and interpretation. What makes it unique is that it is carried out by classroom practitioners investigating some aspect of their own practice. In other words, it is carried out principally by those who are best placed to change, and hopefully as a result, improve what goes on in the classroom. This is not to say that research carried out by non classroom-based researchers is not intended to lead to change, nor that researchers and teachers might not collaborate in the research process. However, non-practitioner driven research is more often motivated by a desire to identify relationships between variables that can be generalized beyond the specific sites where the data were collected. The primary motivation for action research is the more immediate one of bringing about change and hopefully to improve teaching and learning processes in the classrooms where the research takes



place. As it is also indicated by Cooper-Twamley (2009) unlike many other types of research, the purpose of action research, as its name indicates, is for action to result from the research. It is also important to note that, unlike other types of research that look to generalize the research results to a larger population, “action research is concerned with improvement within the context of the study” (Tomal, 2003, p. 5). Because of this fact, action research is uniquely suited to being conducted in the workplace by the people who will be most directly impacted because “the inquiry process necessitates teachers questioning their own practice, systematically studying their own practice, and ultimately changing their own practice” (Dana, Gimbert, & Yendol-Silva, 2001, p. 57). As a result of its practical nature and focus on immediate concerns, it holds particular appeal for classroom teachers and promising direction for the building of theories related to teaching and learning (Burns, 1999).

Bailey (1999:13) contrasts action research with both experimental and naturalistic research in the following quote:

While experimental research is often directed at hypothesis testing and theory building, and naturalistic inquiry aims to understand and describe phenomena under investigation, action research has a more immediate and practical focus. Its results may contribute to emerging theory, and to the understanding of phenomena, but it does not necessarily have to be theory-driven. To say that action research has a practical focus does not demean its value, however. As van Lier (1994) observes, “We must never forget that it is ... important to do research on practical activities and for practical purposes, such as the improvement of aspects of language teaching and learning” (in Nunan, t.y.)

Focusing on what action research is not, Ferrance (2000) summarizes what has been said so far: “Action research is not what usually comes to mind when we hear the word “research.” Action research is not a library project where we learn more about a topic that interests us. It is not problem-solving in the sense of trying to find out what is wrong, but rather a quest for knowledge about how to improve. Action research is not about doing research on or about people, or finding all available information on a topic looking for the correct answers. It involves people working to improve their skills, techniques, and strategies. Action research is not about learning

why we do certain things, but rather how we can do things better. It is about how we can change our instruction to impact students.”

As the research focus is on the classroom and on immediate practical concerns in teaching, action research also holds promise as a site for building theories about language teaching which are potentially of value and interest to other teachers (e.g., Freeman, 1998).

Through conducting action research, teachers develop a deeper understanding of many issues in teaching and learning as well as acquire useful classroom investigation skills. Action research has the following characteristics:

- Its primary goal is to improve teaching and learning in schools and classrooms and it is conducted during the process of regular classroom teaching.
- It is usually small-scale and is intended to help resolve problems rather than simply be research for its own sake.
- It can be carried out by an individual teacher or in collaboration with other teachers. (Richards and Farrel, 2005)

Regarding what has been said so far, Burns (1999) summarises the characteristics of action research as follows:

- Action research is contextual, small-scale and localised - it identifies and investigates problems within a specific situation.
- It is evaluative and reflective as it aims to bring about change and improvement in practice.
- It is participatory as it provides for collaborative investigation by teams of colleagues, practitioners and researchers.
- Changes in practice are based on the collection of information or data which provides the impetus for change.

In educational settings, there are a variety of action research methods available to use, depending on the number of participants and the objectives that are identified. It can involve a single teacher investigating an issue in his or her classroom, a group of teachers working on a common problem, team of teachers working with others focusing on a school, or an even larger group working on a

district-wide issue. Ferrance (2000) classifies these different types of action research as follows:

Individual teacher research usually focuses on a single issue in the classroom. The teacher may be seeking solutions to problems of classroom management, instructional strategies, use of materials, or student learning. The problem is one that the teacher believes is evident in his or her classroom and that can be addressed on an individual basis. The research may be such that the teacher collects data or might look at student participation. One of the drawbacks of individual research is that it may not be shared with others unless the teacher chooses to present his or her findings at a faculty meeting, a presentation at a conference, or by submitting written material to a journal. It is possible for several teachers to be working concurrently on the same problem with no knowledge of each other's work. The focus of this study is individual action research.

Collaborative action research may include as few as two teachers or a group of several teachers, along with others interested in addressing a classroom, a department, or a school-wide issue. This issue may involve one classroom or a common problem shared by many classes. Teachers may have support from individuals outside of the school, such as a university or a community partner.

School-wide research focuses on issues common to everyone in the school. For example, a school may have a concern about the lack of parental involvement in activities and is looking for a way to reach more parents to involve them in meaningful ways. Or, the school may want to address its organizational and decision-making process. Teams, from the school staff, work together to narrow the question, gather and analyze the data, and decide on a plan of action. An example of action research for a school might be to examine its state test scores to identify areas that need improvement and to determine a plan of action to enhance student performance. Teamwork and individual contributions to the goal are very important in this form of action research. Problems can easily arise as the team tries to develop a process and make commitments to each other. Though challenging, there is a sense of ownership and accomplishment in the results that come from a school-wide effort.

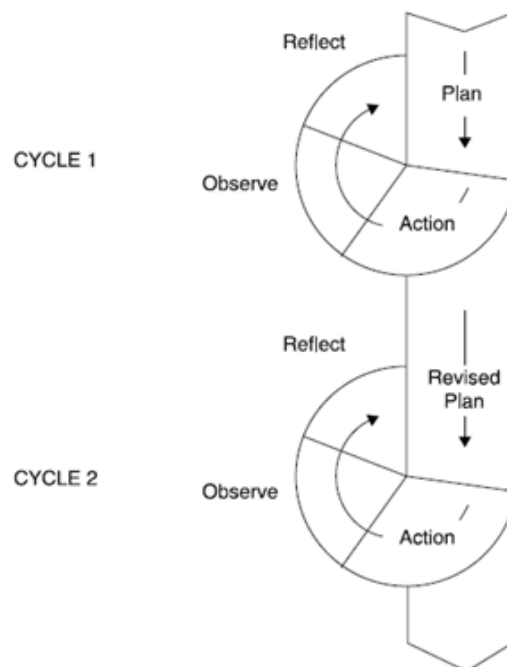
District-wide research is more complex, utilizes more resources, and is shared by more people. Issues can be organizational, community-based, performance-based, or

focused on decision-making processes. A district may choose to address a problem common to several schools or to examine a problem of organizational management. Potential disadvantages are the amount of documentation and communication required to keep everyone in the loop and the work involved to keep the process in motion. Collecting data from all participants requires a commitment from the staff to do their fair share responsibilities and to meet agreed-upon deadlines for assignments. An advantage is school reform and change built upon common understanding and inquiry. The involvement of multiple groups can provide fuel for the process and create an environment of interested and motivated members as well.

### 2.3.3 Steps in Action Research

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) action research typically involves four broad phases in a cycle of research which are planning, action, observation and reflection. This model of action research can be illustrated through the diagram in Figure 1

**Figure 1. Kemmis and Mc Taggart's Cyclical Action Research Model**



**Reference: Burns, 2010: 9**

To explain this figure, “You start with a problem you encounter. Faced with the problem, the action researcher will go through a series of phases (reflect, plan, action, observe) called the Action Research Cycle to systematically tackle the problem. Usually you discover ways to improve your action plan in light of your experience and feedback from students. One cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, therefore usually leads to another, in which you incorporate improvements suggested by the initial cycle. Projects often do not fit neatly into a cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection. It is perfectly legitimate to follow a somewhat disjointed process if circumstances dictate.” (Center for Enhanced Learning and Teaching, 2009).

The steps of action research can be explained in detail as follows:

- 1.Planning—a problem or issue is identified and a plan of action is developed in order to bring about improvements in specific areas of the research context;
- 2.Action—the plan is put into action over an agreed period of time;
- 3.Observation—the effects of the action are observed and data are collected;
- 4.Reflection—the effects of the action are evaluated and become the basis for further cycles of research. (Burns & Rochsantiningsih, 2006).

More clearly, educational researchers use the first step to identify a need, a concern, or a problem in the teaching-learning environment to address it. The research question(s) to be dealt with, people to be involved, possible solutions of the problem, data collection instruments are all prepared at this stage. Richards and Lockhart (1994, p.28) states that the most important outcome of the planning phase is a detailed plan of the action you intend to take or the change you intend to make.

The researchers implement the second step to take action and experiment with ways that may lead to solutions. The third step, observing, is important for data collection. It is during this step that the researchers record specific elements for a series of lessons. That is, the effects of action taken and the contexts that these effects occur in are documented. The fourth step, reflecting, is used to reflect on the plan, action, and observations. It allows teachers to evaluate their teaching and the situation. After this guided reflection, the educational researchers re-plan and revise

the original plan according to the data, and then continue through the spiral of acting, observing and reflecting.

There are several other models of action research like Sagor's Model, Calhoun's model, Elliot's model, Ebutt's model. Although these models have different words while defining the stages of action research, each of them uses data to act or react to a determined problem or area of concern. They also define action research as a spiraling process that facilitates planning, acting, collecting, observing, reflecting, analyzing, reacting, and evaluating.

#### **2.3.4. Limitations of Action Research**

Although action research can be viewed as a process that guides teachers towards personal and professional development, it does have its limitations. One of them is lack of time. As Cochran - Smith and Lytle (1996: 100) pointed out, "Unlike other professions which are organized to support research activities, teaching is a profession in which it is extraordinarily difficult to find enough time to collect data and it is almost impossible to find time to reflect, reread or share with colleagues.....". That action research produces results which are not generalisable causes criticisms against it. Another limitation is that action research is lack of scientific rigor in that its objective is situational and its findings don't contribute directly to general educational situations (Cohen & Manion, 1990). In the same way, Keating discusses a belief that exists about teachers not being qualified to design objective studies with the clear direction that is needed (Keating et al., 1998). Lack of distance from the research situation is another problem to be faced. As Belleli (1993, p.73) pointed out that language teachers reflect 'in' and 'on' action related to specific practices in the language classroom rather than actions related to conceptualisation of broad issues of teaching and learning which can result in detracting them from other central points of instruction and curriculum.

#### **2.4. The Relationship between Professional Development and Action Research**

Educators themselves frequently regard professional development as having little impact on their day-to-day responsibilities. Some even consider it a waste of

their professional time. They participate in professional development primarily because of contractual obligations but often see it as something they must "get out of the way" so that they can get back to the important work of educating students (Guskey, 2000, p.4).

How can it be that something universally recognized as so important also can be regarded as so ineffective? A number of explanations might be offered for this seeming anomaly (Guskey, 1997). We know, for example, that many of the professional development experiences in which educators engage are meaningless and wasteful. Many are not well planned or supported and they don't align with teacher needs. Still others present ideas that may be valuable but are impractical to implement in educational settings. They don't need traditional approaches in that they have often felt they were not allowed to admit to having problems or difficulties in the classroom. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2008) say that "Rather than sweeping the problems under the carpet and pretending they don't exist, teachers want to welcome problems by deliberately naming them, making them public, examining them, and making a commitment to do something about them" (p. 11).

The overwhelming majority of teachers are thoughtful, inquiring individuals who are inclined to solve problems and search for answers to pressing questions. The action research model of professional development provides them with opportunities to do just that. The Eisenhower National Clearinghouse (ENC) (1998) notes that, "Direct teacher involvement with research will increase the likelihood that they will use research results" (p. 19). A higher likelihood for systemic change exists if teachers are critically examining what they do in the classroom instead of being mandated to implement a new initiative. Castle and Aichele (1994) also emphasized the need for autonomy and personal decision-making for the classroom teacher. Castle and Aichele (1994) stress that, "when teachers are told what to do, they do not think: they just respond. Since the activity was not of their choice, they do not find it personally meaningful" (p. 5). This concept is not new. John Dewey, who espoused the importance of a democratic system of education, felt that "the three dispositions of curiosity, open-mindedness, and active and reflective inquiry are important to the constant creation of a democracy" (Meadows, 2006, p. 6). This idea is the overriding purpose of the inquiry form of professional development like action research that

enables teachers to investigate and evaluate their work. They ask, 'What am I doing? What do I need to improve? How do I improve it?' Their accounts of practice show how they are trying to improve their own learning, and influence the learning of others (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006, p.7). Noffke and Zeichner (1987) make several claims for action research with teachers, namely that it

- brings about changes in their definitions of their professional skills and roles
- increases their feelings of self-worth and confidence increases their awareness of classroom issues
- broadens their views on teaching, schooling and society.
- changes their values and beliefs
- improves the congruence between practical theories and practices
- improves their dispositions toward reflection

Reflection is considered as a process or activity that is central to developing practices as Qing (2009:36) pointed out "Reflective teaching is undoubtedly a valid means towards effective teaching practices. Authors like Richards, Dewey ( in MacKinnon and Erickson, 1992) defines reflective thinking as a number of phases in thinking, i.e. a state of doubt, hesitation or mental difficulty in which thinking originates, followed by an act of searching or inquiring to find material that will resolve the doubt. Through reflection, teachers are able to examine their teaching experiences as a basis for self-evaluation and self-criticism asking the questions how and why the things are the way they are, thus bringing about changes in their professional lives. It enables teachers to be more aware what alternatives may be available or what the limitations of doing things one way as opposed to another. Teachers who are conscious of their teaching practices are better prepared to evaluate their professional growth and see what aspects of their teaching need changes. When critical reflection becomes a part of teaching, it helps teachers be more confident in trying different options and assessing what effects they have on their teaching. Önel (1998) states that being reflective as a teacher embodies both inquiring and taking action. Wilson, Shulman, & Richert (in Lowery, 2003) defines reflection as a stage in which teachers look back on the teaching and learning that has occurred as a means of making sense of their actions and learning from their experiences (Wilson,



Shulman, & Richert, 1987). When teachers sense that there are some aspects of their teaching and/or some situations in the teaching learning environment that need to be analyzed and improved, they start looking for ways to change the current situation or to find possible solutions (Önel, 1998). Both action research and reflective practice aim for change and improvement. Although action research is not a condition for reflection, reflection is at the heart of action research because a teacher who conducts an action research thinks critically and becomes analytic through reflection. Teachers question their teaching and classrooms and investigate their teaching practices through action research. Teachers start reflecting on their teaching as a result of becoming an inquiring person. As stated by Özdemir (2004) “ Reflection throughout an action research process helps teachers to observe and understand the changes they go.

Action research has become increasingly popular around the world as a form of professional development. Results of action research studies show that teachers believe that engaging in action research enhances their personal and professional growth (Neapolitan, 2000). Additionally, participation in action research can enhance teachers' confidence and improve their teaching practices. Receiving positive results from changed practice patterns affects teachers' knowledge; only when teachers see improvement in their classes as a result of changed practice, they get a reason to change previously held knowledge and beliefs (Goodson I, 1992). Change in one of them influences the others thus leads teachers to professional development. Teachers who engage in action research report increased confidence in changing and adjusting their instruction due to their methodical and structured testing of new strategies and scientific study of the results (Neapolitan, 2000). Therefore, teachers gain more confidence by redesigning their classroom instruction. Empowered teachers are able to bring their talents, experiences, and creative ideas into the classroom and implement programs and strategies that best meet the needs of their students (Johnson, 2002). In addition to an empowered approach to change in classroom instruction, teachers gain other skills through action research. They report more autonomy, a higher level of problem-solving skills and an increased ability to use classroom data more effectively (Neapolitan, 2000). As action research calls for the teacher-researchers to be reflective and selfdetermine the direction of their

improvements, teachers have ownership of their goals. It is this reflection on professional action which provides the momentum for increased professional competence.(Wallace, 1998) . Action research allows, and almost demands, that only teachers of the classrooms can set goals for development. When teachers have ownership in creating and processing goals, they are more likely to accomplish the intended goals (Kraft & Wheeler, 1997). Therefore, because action research calls for individual teachers to be the authors of the research (Johnson, 2002), action research, more than any other forms of teacher development, facilitates ownership and accomplishment of goals. The benefits of action research as a model for professional development are many and varied. They range from subtle impacts on individual teachers' views of their teaching to continuing efforts to engage in action research and report findings (Salzman & Snodgrass, 2003).

The related literature provides examples of studies that show how teachers benefitted from action research regarding their professional development .

In 1997, Aylin Atikler carried out an action research project for her master thesis named “The Role of Action Research in the Self-Development of an ELT Teacher” in which she discussed the role of action research in the self-development of an ELT teacher. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether through action research an ELT teacher may accumulate knowledge, develop skills and raise awareness of new teaching perspectives through continuous reflection on actual classroom experience.

The study was conducted at the Department of Basic English (DBE), Middle East Technical University. The subject of the study was an English instructor working at the department. Qualitative data were collected through action research meetings, the subject's journal entries and interviews conducted by the researcher during and at the end of the action research project. Quantitative data were collected through students' first and last essays and compared by T-test analysis. The findings of the study indicated that the subject experienced development in terms of knowledge, skills and awareness of teaching practice. In addition, the findings revealed that the subject gained familiarity with the process of action research and she experienced the most benefit in terms of awareness, realizing both her students' and her own weak and strong points in teaching/ learning experience.

In conclusion, it was made clear by the study that action research can contribute to the development of an English language teacher in terms of accumulating knowledge of language teaching, developing teaching skills and enhancing awareness of personal and professional aspects of teaching situations.

Another study, focusing on the effectiveness of action research as a teacher development tool was conducted by Özdemir at the English School of Başkent University in 2001. The study investigated what improvements and changes action research brings into teachers' teaching practices and their ideas, beliefs, perceptions and emotions. The researcher carried out an action research study in her class of upper-intermediate students. Qualitative data were collected from different data sources through the action research journal, which was kept by the researcher, the observation checklist filled in by an observer and the action research reports written by eight teachers who also conducted action research in their classes at ELSBU.

The results of the study show that the action research brought change and improvement to teachers' teaching and it also brought inner change to teachers' ideas, beliefs, perceptions and emotions thus contributed to the professional self-development of teachers.

Önel's (1998) doctoral dissertation is another study that focused on becoming reflective in teaching through action research as teacher development model. It is titled as "The Effect of Action Research as a Teacher Development Model on Becoming Reflective in Teaching." This study was conducted at English Language School of Başkent University (ELSBU). The purpose of the study was to investigate whether or not, doing action research in classes helped teachers become reflective in their teaching. The study also aimed to see whether conducting action research influenced teachers' attitude toward professional development and the level of their openness to student feedback when reflecting on their teaching.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in the study. The quantitative data consisted of inventories and tests employed at different times of the study to teachers who participated in the study and questionnaires given to the students. The qualitative data were collected through teachers' journals, observation notes of the researcher and interviews both with students and teachers. The results of the study showed that teachers benefited from being engaged in action research.

Their awareness of classroom-related issues was increased and they became more systematic in considering student feedback when planning their lessons. The teachers' attitudes towards being collaborative and professional development also changed in a positive way.

Christine Bennett (1994) conducted a study to evaluate teachers' perceptions of action research. She found that teachers who conducted action research viewed themselves as being more open to change, more reflective about their teaching practices and decision making, and more effective teachers with fresher attitudes toward the educational process.

Nunan (1994) reported three action research projects carried out in a variety of EFL and ESL settings. The study proposed that despite the anticipated benefits of classroom research for improved instruction, there were identifiable factors that can interfere with its effectiveness. First, the steps in the classroom research process are outlined. Then for each case, the evolution of the project is described, problems are noted, and attempts to remedy them are examined. The cases involved professional development projects for secondary and postsecondary language teachers. It was concluded that in each instance, some of these things happened to prevent change: (1) teachers were not given recognition or time off for doing research; (2) the agenda was controlled by the administration; (3) the agenda was subverted from within by teachers who wanted to bolster their own position within the political context in which they worked; (4) teachers lacked the technical skill and knowledge to conceptualize and operationalize their research interests; and (5) doing research got in the way of teaching; (6) there was a secondary agenda concerning curriculum development; and (7) teachers feared that involvement in classroom research would be used against them. The study showed that despite the difficulties experienced, teachers did get to the point of formulating a research question, collecting baseline data, finding an innovation, and documenting the effects of implementing that innovation. In all of these instances, teachers reported the project had changed their classrooms, and, further, that it had changed them as teachers. Moreover, it was stated that action research could be an effective instrument for bringing about professional renewal and curriculum change.

Benton & Wasko (2000) conducted an action research study to understand what teachers think about the influences of action research on their teaching practices and student achievement. Eight elementary, middle, and high schools connected with each other and a local university to conduct the study during the 1997-1998 school year. The teachers were asked if their involvement with the action research projects had affected their teaching practices and what the effects were if they occurred. Of the 87 teachers who completed the survey, 70 responded that their teaching practices had been changed through involvement. Of the teachers who responded affirmatively to this question, many said that the research project helped them develop new strengths in teaching and add to their existing repertoire of instructional methods. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected, analyzed, and reported in all eight action research projects regarding student achievement. The findings from all eight studies indicated varying degrees of gains in specified areas of student achievement. At the end of the study, some teachers discussed personal and professional growth that resulted from their involvement as researchers in the projects and it was pointed out that action research gave teachers the opportunity to examine the achievement of their students through specific data, and also to examine teaching practices and strategies that affect that achievement.

### **2.5. Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners (The Action Research Process)**

As mentioned earlier, the ARP conducted an action research project in her own class, which provides most of the data for this study. The age of students in her classroom changes between nine to ten which means they have different motivation and characteristics from older learners that the teachers must be aware of. As stated in elementary school curriculum, teaching English consists of four language skills, they are: listening, speaking, reading, and writing and vocabulary is one of the language aspects supporting these skills. The students in ARP's class have problems with retaining the vocabulary items. Therefore the ARP conducted an action research project in order to investigate the problem in depth and enhance vocabulary retention. As reviewing the related literature is one of the steps of action research process, the ARP did a detailed research about the issue to be investigated in order to

select the right activities, considering the characteristics of her young learners, for her action plan. This section presents information about the related literature of the problem area.

### **2.5.1. General Characteristics of Young Learners**

Children at elementary schools are categorized as young learners and they have different features from adult learners. Brumfit (in Şimşek, 2007: 59) mentions that children are; at the beginning of their schooling, different in many ways from the adult and secondary learners as they are closer to their home culture, usually keen and enthusiastic learners, without the inhibitions which older children sometimes bring to their schooling. Aydın (2009) focused on young learners' attitudes towards learning English in his study quoted about the characteristics of young learners from the following authors as follows:

- Brewster et al. (2003:27) stresses that young children are different from older learners because the former:
  - have a lot of physical energy and often need to be physically active
  - are emotionally excitable
  - are still developing literacy in their first language
  - learn more slowly and forget things quickly
  - get bored easily
  - can concentrate for a surprisingly long time if they are interested
  - can be easily distracted but also very enthusiastic...'

A vast majority of the eight to ten year olds will have some sort of language awareness and readiness which they bring with them into the foreign language classroom. Harmer (2007 p.83) points out that this age group of young learners are different from older children, adolescents, and adults in the following ways:

- They respond to meaning even if they do not understand individual words.
- They often learn indirectly rather than directly; that is they take in information from all sides, learning from everything around them rather than only focusing on the precise topic they are being taught
- Their understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see and hear and, crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with.

- They find abstract concepts such as grammar rules difficult to grasp.
- They generally display an enthusiasm for learning and a curiosity about the world around them.
- They have a need for individuals attention and approval from the teacher.
- They are keen to talk about themselves and respond well to learning that uses themselves and their own lives as main topics in the classroom.
- They have a limited attention span; unless activities are extremely engaging, they can get easily bored, losing interest after ten minutes or so.

In addition, Slatterly&Willis (2001) suggest that children as language learners need:

- to hear clear pronunciation and intonation,
- to feel successful when using English,
- plenty of opportunities to communicate,
- to enjoy their efforts at speaking in English,
- to know they have achieved something worthwhile.

Besides, Halliwell (1992) suggests that young children do not come to the language classroom empty-handed. They bring with them an already well-established set of instincts, skills and characteristics helping them learn another language. For example, children:

- are already very good at interpreting meaning without necessarily understanding the individual words;
- already have great skill in using limited language creatively;
- frequently learn indirectly rather than directly;
- take great pleasure in finding and creating fun in what they do;
- have a ready imagination;
- above all take great delight in talking! (p.3).

The above mentioned needs and characteristics of young learners as language learners influence language instruction, classroom atmosphere and preparation of the materials. By providing a wide range of opportunities for hearing, using the language, and playing action - based games as an active part of the teaching, young

learners work more actively and eagerly on language topics. In the learning process, games play an important role, and much of the time may be spent for such activities that are considered as play. The activities that look like as a play are most interesting to children as the element of fun is a part of their world.

### **2.5.2. Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners**

Vocabulary learning is considered as an integral part of language teaching as “words are the basic building blocks of language, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and whole texts are formed” (Read,2000:1).

English is taught at elementary school to give students simple skills in understanding written and oral statements in English. Basically, there are four skills in English consisting of listening, speaking, reading and writing and vocabulary is the basic component to learn the four language skills. It is central to language and without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, one cannot communicate or express his/her ideas both in oral and written forms. Since it is an essential means in providing communication, vocabulary is very important to be mastered first. So, the focus should be on the vocabulary in the elementary school.

English teachers teaching these ages need more knowledge about young learners since they have certain characteristics that differ from adult learners, namely: children can not learn abstract things, their interest is restricted to themselves and their surroundings, etc. To clarify, as elementary school is the place for students to learn English for the first time, the students just learn the basic vocabulary with emphasis on topics related to their environment.

In this respect, the materials for the fourth grades, most topics are about center of interest that they often face in their life. The topics include things inside a class, inside a house, things around a school, body parts, clothes, animals, food and drinks, family members etc. These topics are so familiar with students that they may see it around themselves everyday in their daily lives. So, it is easier for them to grasp the words given which are about things they are familiar with. As can be concluded from



general statements the language used to talk to young children is in accordance with the “here and now” principle.

Knowing these characteristics, teachers can make considerations in determining the right methods and materials while teaching vocabulary.

Teaching children is very different from teaching adults as they always seek for fun and want to play. Consequently, the teacher should pay attention to techniques for teaching vocabulary and decide which the best is for their students. But, teachers usually use traditional ways in teaching vocabulary such as using dictionaries. When students meet unknown words they have to look up the dictionaries for the meaning. It takes a long time for students to find the meaning of the word that makes them get bored and tired. Young learners can not be expected to spend all their time sitting still in rows and listening to the instructing teacher. Scot and Ytreberg ( 1990: 5) state that : “Words are not enough. Most activities for the young learner should include movement and involve the sense. Similarly, they must be as playful as possible-visual, hands-on and participatory. The activities that look like as a play are most interesting to children

To make effective techniques in teaching vocabulary, the teacher should be very active and should create various teaching techniques to increase the motivation of young learners.

#### The role of English Teachers While Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners

A language teacher is expected to be someone who can combine his/her knowledge with the needs and interests of young children in his/her classroom. More importantly, such a teacher must get the picture of what the needs of children are and respond to them as well as mastering knowledge, skills, methods and techniques. He/she should also love teaching and find it motivating and challenging, being aware of the fact that he/she is a major influence in helping young learners to gain self-confidence in their ability to learn a new language. However, as most authors in this field agree, it is really hard to define the ideal teacher and find one as there are those who try to be ideal and those who do not make any effort at all.

Vale and Feunteun (1995) suggest that teachers should establish a good working relationship with children and encourage them to do the same with their classmates. The teacher has the role of a parent, teacher, friend, motivator,

coordinator and organizer. Vale and Feunteun further explain that the skills for these roles have more to do with understanding the children in terms of their development, needs and interests – than with EFL methodology alone. They also stress the point that it is necessary for language teachers to have an opportunity to reflect on what happens in the classroom during different activities based on various approaches and decide how such approaches relate to their method of teaching children (in Inan, 2006).

Williams (1999) points out that teachers of young learners need to have a communicative ability in order to interact naturally with their pupils. Without this ability, teaching English to young learners would be a more challenging task for the language teacher.

Scott and Ytreberg (1990) suggest that it helps a lot if a teacher of young children has a sense of humour, and if he/she is open-minded, adaptable and patient. However, even reserved and silent language teachers can work on their attitudes and abilities. For example, they can respect their pupils and be realistic about what they can manage at an individual level. English teachers must become learners of their own profession and of the ways in which they can improve their effectiveness.

Nunan (1989) criticises about the big gap between theory and practice in language research; and attaches great importance to the teacher-initiated research, which has numerous advantages both for learners and language instruction. One of the most important advantages is that it provides teachers with more concrete information than they already have about what is actually happening in the classroom and why. Finally, recent research shows that teachers who take part in structure processes are more effective in producing cognitive and affective gains.

### **2.5.3. Vocabulary Teaching Techniques For Young Learners**

Vocabulary knowledge is only one component of language skills such as reading and speaking. Thus, it might be said that one should take time in teaching vocabulary. As Nation (1993) claims, “Vocabulary knowledge enables language use, language use enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of the world enables the increase of vocabulary knowledge and language use and so on”.

Although vocabulary learning is of such importance, it has generally been thought as memorizing a list of new words with meanings in learner's native language without any real context practice. Words are thought separately and memorized without understanding. Using this traditional method makes the learner bored and stressful as it is hard to memorize long lists of vocabulary. Especially, if the subjects are children, this way seems ineffective because of the fact that children can not sit still for long hours to learn something unlike adults, they easily get bored . As they have got a short attention span, they can learn small amount of new concepts at a time, however this method forces them to memorize large amount of decontextualized new vocabulary which causes them to forget after a short time.. While Nunan (1991) divides learners in general into four types; concrete, analytical, communicative and authority-oriented, he calls children as “concrete learners”, who tend to like games, pictures, films, videos, and etc. Similarly, Phillips (1994) suggests that the kinds of activities that work well with children are games and songs with actions, total physical response activities, tasks that involve colouring, cutting, and sticking, simple, repetitive stories that have an obvious communicative value. According to Phillips, an enjoyable activity will be quite useful for motivation and long-term retention of learned things. They should learn in a form of entertainment that is designed to be educational as the term edutainment indicates. The term edutainment started being used as an acceptable term in the 1990s and made its way into language teaching research as a powerful teaching tool shortly afterwards It is a word coined by combining the two words ‘education’ and ‘entertainment’, which play indispensable roles in the life of a young learner (Radick, in Inan, 2006). According to Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou (2003) why edutainment has become so popular recently is summarized as follows:“The recognition that children have special needs has led to the development of effective teaching methodologies that take into account children’s creativity and their love of play, songs, rhymes, activity and role play. These methodologies also recognize children’s limitations in terms of their short attention span, their cognitive development, and their specific areas of interest” (in Inan, 2006: 35).

According to Çakır (2004:11) , teaching young learners is quite a hard task for foreign language teachers unless they are equipped with the knowledge appropriate

for the subject group. To be able to present the required subject in the classroom adequately, teachers should be able to keep in mind many aspects concerning young learners, such as age, material, interest, level, intelligence, time, and physical conditions in the classroom and he divides teaching languages to young learners into four main categories; teaching through visuals, teaching in context, teaching through activities and teaching through fun and games.

#### Teaching through visuals

Most of the learners are keen on learning visually and spatially and language teachers feel the need to support lessons through visuals such as big colourful pictures, posters, drawings or flashcards, puppets, toys and real objects or by dramatising the meanings through mime, facial expressions, gestures etc. as young learners learn best by seeing and doing which means, they have a predominantly visual and kinesthetic learning style. Visual aids enable learners to guess meanings from contexts and makes learning memorable and fun- especially if the pictures are large, colourful and amusing, and the miming is exaggerated and funny. As Sprenger (1999) stresses that the best things about visuals appears that they are able to make the learning more permanent.

#### Teaching in context

All language learners appreciates learning through contexts as contextualized activities facilitate learning any topic since it enables learners to work out the meanings of unknown language from a situation or a context. Such activities make the unknown language more meaningful. Additionally, if the language to be introduced in the classroom is accompanied with visuals along with the contexts, retention would be longer.

#### Teaching through activities

Using different activities while teaching a foreign language improves the atmosphere in language classrooms. Especially, young learners get great joy by means of activities that encourage, stimulate and motivate them while taking part in them. Such activities as project works, drawings, colouring, cutting out, making things, solving problems, recording information etc. can be interesting for them. The

reasons behind these activities are that young learners live in a colorful world and they learn by doing and being active since they can use their imagination and creativity taking part in these activities.

#### Teaching through fun and games

Enhanced motivation is of high importance in language classrooms as it is the key principle while teaching children. In this regard, Argondizzo (1992:6) suggests that “most children who start foreign language instruction do not have autonomous motivation to learn a foreign language and Thornton (2001:12)states “...one thing teachers are sure of, however, is that fun and games are a must in the English language classroom because they are intrinsically motivating for children and again, because they are part of a child’s natural world: the “here and now” of a child’s life.” Similarly, Phillips (2001:79) points out “games in foreign language teaching help students to see learning English enjoyable and rewarding. Playing games in the classroom develops the ability to co-operate, to compete without being aggressive, and to be a good loser”. Thus, games and fun must be a part of a language teacher’s lesson plan as they keep learners motivated for a long time.

There are various forms of edutainment such as films, theatre, drama, games, music, storytelling, software. Considering the target vocabulary, language teachers teach their learners a lot of innovative and exciting activities in the classroom. Because of time limitation, the ARP used songs, games and drama activities considering the type of target vocabulary in her classroom while conducting the action research project.

#### Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners Through Games

Teaching a foreign language to young learners is more difficult than teaching teenagers or adults because young learners get easily bored. In acquiring the English skills the basic thing that students have to learn and understand is vocabulary as it is the key to open the door of mastering a foreign language. Using games while teaching vocabulary can be an efficient tool for a language teacher because it can

make the students get joy in learning vocabulary and it will be easy for them to acquire the lessons.

According to Gestwicki (1999) all over the world, children play. They play on their own, with other children or with adults. They play with different objects or toys specially made for them. They play in ways adults and other children have taught them to play and they sometimes play in ways that show they have been watching the adults in their world. What is even more interesting is that children start playing joyfully when they are just babies and go on playing even when they are supposed to be concentrating on schoolwork. Therefore, children's play is considered to be an indispensable part of childhood. (In İnan, 2006: 43)

In her article, Uberman (1998) stated that learning vocabulary was perceived as a tedious and laborious process and language games for vocabulary could be successful as she noticed how enthusiastic students were about practising language by means of games. Results of her research showed that groups of students who practised vocabulary activity with games felt more motivated and interested in what they were doing. The marks students received suggested that the fun and relaxed atmosphere accompanying the activities facilitated students' learning and an overwhelming majority of pupils find games relaxing and motivating. Thus, she suggested that games should be an integral part of a lesson, providing the possibility of intensive practise while at the same time immensely enjoyable for both students and teachers.

Teachers help their students practice and internalize vocabulary through well-planned games. Games enhance the motivation of the students as well as reducing the stress in the classroom. When children play games, their attention is on the message, not on the language. That is, they acquire language unconsciously since their whole attention is engaged by the activity which provides them to retain new words for a long time. Therefore, it is necessary to use games effectively while teaching vocabulary to young learners.

#### Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners Through Drama

Drama activities are of high use while teaching English to young learners since it has numerous advantages regarding motivation, the use of the language in a

context etc. There are several studies that support the benefits of drama in foreign language learning, such as Maley and Duff (2001), Brumfit (1991) and Phillips (2003), to mention just a few. They suggest that drama activities can promote interesting ways of motivating language learners and teachers as they provide exciting opportunities for language learners to use the language in concrete situations. While learning vocabulary, drama activities help students with their pronunciation, fluency and meaning of vocabulary items. They also foster meaningful learning as it allows learners to use language with a clear purpose and in a specific context, thus being more relevant for learners. Maley and Duff (1982:6) pointed out that drama activities give the student an opportunity to use his or her own personality in creating the material on which *part* of the language class is based. Drama provides an enjoyable and useful way of learning vocabulary as it places the learners into the center.

Young learners are quick to learn vocabulary, slower to learn structures because words have tangible, immediate meanings whereas structures are less obviously useful. Children should meet and use words in relevant contexts in order to fix them in their mind. This helps establish their relationship to other words so that a vocabulary network is built up. (Demircioğlu, 2008)

Several studies indicate that using creative drama activities to teach target vocabulary words can be an effective and motivating instructional practice for all students, especially for young learners.

#### Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners Through Songs

Most children love to sing songs. Therefore, using songs becomes a great breakthrough in learning English. Songs provide opportunities in learning pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Dealing with the characteristics of young learners, Murphey (1992) stated that teachers can use songs to teach vocabulary to students. He suggested that “an additional thing we might do with song and music in teaching is teach vocabulary”. He further explained that “the advantage of musical materials is that they are so readily available to the teacher and so immediately motivational to most students”.

Phillips (1993:94) elaborates that “music and rhythm are an essential part of language learning for young learners. Children really enjoy learning and singing songs, and older learners find working with current or well-known pop songs highly motivating”. Most children enjoy singing, and songs should be part of classroom activities while learning language.

According to Thornbury, words are organised in the human mind in what is called the mental lexicon, which means that the vocabulary is stored in "highly organised and interconnected fashion“ (2002:16). He further suggested that “In lyrics, words usually appear in context, the sound of new words is easily remembered along with the melody of the song and by listening to the song, students are exposed to the new words many times.”The words used in the lyrics remain in the active store and facilitates the retention of vocabulary items for language learners. In this respect,.

In conclusion, songs can be considered as effective tools for teaching vocabulary as learners easily pick up words through songs since they stick up their mind. A variety of new vocabulary can be introduced to students through songs. They are great sources for internalizing the lexical items by providing an excellent means of repeating and reinforcing vocabulary as well as providing a meaningful context.

#### 2.5.5. Conclusion

It is important to state that action research is believed to bring changes into content knowledge and instructional practices of a teacher thus leading to changes in the teacher beliefs and attitudes. Changes in these components directly influence student learning. The teacher can observe such changes easily through reflection and by gaining awareness, thus, they develop themselves professionally.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

In educational practices, we are not able to make use of emerging trends efficiently because, as Caine & Caine (1994) stated “process can be neither understood nor measured with the rational or experimental research model. Therefore, they specified, “We urgently need more qualitative measures in education (p.22). Qualitative research is a form of inquiry that explores phenomena in their natural settings and uses multi-methods to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning to them. ...A fundamental assumption of the qualitative research paradigm is that a profound understanding of the world can be gained through conversation and observation in natural settings rather than through experimental manipulation under artificial conditions. (Anderson, 1998). Denzin & Norman (1994) defined that “Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts— that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. Yin (1989) viewed case study as a qualitative methodology whose focus on a contemporary phenomena within a real life context and the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed. Mason (2002) also points out that what, why and how question are probably the most important in forming the kind of qualitative questions used in action research as they allow us to ask about puzzles and seek explanations.

Some researchers view action research as using primarily qualitative methods, and there are strong similarities between qualitative and action research. In both qualitative and action research, researchers continually examine their own assumptions and biases because they are active participants in the setting that they study. (Marguerite G. Lodico, Dean T. Spaulding, Katherine H. Voegtler, 2010).

This study is a case study. By case study, the systematic investigation of an individual “case” whether that refers to one teacher, one learner, one group one class or whatever is meant. It provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles. The potentially smaller scale of a case study means that it might be more possible for action research on it to be done on an individual rather than collaborative basis (Wallace,1998). Action research is not meant to be complicated, elaborate, lengthy, or quantitative in nature (Johnson, 2002). Due to these characteristics, action research is user-friendly. In line with what has been said so far, the study was conducted with a single subject, an English teacher who teaches elementary levels. This study mainly employed qualitative research methods such as the journal of the action research practitioner, and interviews conducted by the researcher with the ARP. Quantitative data were collected from students’ pre-action research process, while-action research process and post-action research process tests.

### **3.1. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

This study was designed to investigate whether the use of action research is effective on the professional development of an English teacher. The researcher who initiated the research process, conducted an action research project with an English teacher (the action research practitioner: ARP). The researcher acted as a facilitator throughout the project. The ARP is a graduate of English Language and Literature Department. After she received her pedagogical formation education, she started to teach at a state high school. Her next appointment was to a primary school. She has been working at her current school for two years and she has been teaching fourth and fifth grades since then. Having worked with teenagers before, ARP was lack of necessary background information, skills and techniques to teach young learners. She has been responding to these challenges for two years as teaching young learners is different from teaching older ones. She is highly motivated to stay informed regarding best practices in young learners education. She had never heard of action research prior to this study. But, she was highly keen on participating in the

project by a desire to understand young children better in order to improve her practice and teach them considering their learning needs.

The research lasted for eleven weeks. It started the third week of October and was completed the third week in January. For four weeks, The ARP taught vocabulary in her usual way in order to conduct a pre-test before action research project. Information sessions were also held at ARP's home within this month. The researcher informed the action research practitioner with information on implementing the action research process and provided materials and literature about action research. She was also provided with resources about teaching English to young learners and teaching vocabulary. The action research process started the first week in December and was completed the third week in January.

The ARP was the main source of data of this study, as she carried out the action research project in her own class and kept a journal in which she reflected on the whole action research process.

### 3.2. The problem statement

As stated earlier, this study was designed to investigate whether action research is effective on teacher professional development and whether it brings changes into their overall professional performance. Thus, research questions of this study as follows:

1. How effective is action research as a model on the Professional development of an English Teacher?
2. When teachers conduct action research :
  - a) What changes does it bring about in teacher attitudes and beliefs?
  - b) What changes does it bring about in teacher content knowledge?
  - c) What changes does it bring about in teacher instructional practices?

### 3.3. Data collection

#### 3.3.1. Instruments

Two qualitative data collection techniques were used in this study: journal, and interview. ARP kept a teaching journal and the researcher conducted interviews with the ARP. The interviews were conducted as : pre-action research process interview,

while-action research process interview and post-action research process interview. Quantitative data were collected from students' quiz and examination results.

### 3.3.2. Procedures

The journal kept by the ARP, interviews conducted by the researcher with the ARP and students' quiz and examination results make up the data collection process.

#### Action research practitioner's teaching journal

Teachers are not often aware of the kind of teaching they do or how they deal with many of the moment-to-moment decisions that arise. Through keeping a reflective journal, they are able to think about the issues they confront during their day-to-day classroom teaching, and develop reflective and critical thinking skills.

A journal is an ongoing written account of observations, reflections, and other thoughts about teaching. They are used for recording incidents, problems, and insights that occurred during lessons. Writing a teaching journal provides an "opportunity for teachers to use the process of writing to describe and explore their own teaching practices" (Ho & Richards, 1993, p. 8). Hitchcock and Hughes (1994:134) provides a neat description for diary or journal writing: "The journal or diary allows the researcher to let off steam, to complain, or to moan. They enable some of the pressures which are inevitably placed upon the researcher in such work to be taken off. But the significance of keeping a journal or diary is not only the emotional security it may afford but also for the researcher to reflect on the research, step back and look again at the scenes in order to generate new ideas and theoretical directions. The fieldwork journal or diary is the place where the researcher in conversations with herself, can record hopes, fears, confusion and enlightenment. It is the place where the personal side of the fieldwork equation can be recorded.

The ARP was asked to keep a journal to record any thoughts and experiences she had while implementing action research in her classroom. She was asked to describe her feelings toward the experience and any benefits or drawbacks she attributed to action. She was also asked to reflect on her action research experience regarding the changes it brought about in her content knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and instructional practices thus leading to student achievement.

### 3.3.2.1. Interviews

Interviews are communications that aim at getting to know points of view, interpretations and meanings in order to gain greater understanding of a situation. Interviewing is a way to collect qualitative data which enables one to discuss their perception and interpretation with regard to a given situation from their point of view. According to Patton (2002) “We interview people to find out from them those things we can not observe. We can not observe feelings, thoughts and intentions...We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into other person’s perspective. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind...”

Throughout this study, three interviews were held (see Appendix A): pre-action research process interview, while-action research process interview, post-action research process interview. They were semi-structured interviews. The aim of the pre-action research process interview was to investigate ARP’s professional development activities and what she had in mind about action research before implementation process. While-action research process interview was conducted to gather data regarding both the status of ARP’s research project and her beliefs and attitudes about action research process. The post-action research process interview gave ARP the opportunity to share and reflect on the entire process of her action research experience.

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study. To clarify, the researcher worked through a list of preplanned questions to provide the underlying focus for the interview, allowing for the emergence of themes and topics which may not have been anticipated when the investigation began (Burns, 1999). The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for later data analysis. According to Seidman (2006) “By preserving the words of the participants, researchers have their original data. If something is not clear in a transcript, the researchers can return to the source and check for accuracy. Later, if they are accused of mishandling their interview material, they can go back to their original sources to demonstrate their accountability to the data.”

### 3.3.2.2. Audio Recording

Audio recording is a technique for capturing in detail naturalistic interactions and verbatim utterances. It is thus, a very valuable source of accurate information on patterns of interactional behavior. Recordings are invaluable in furnishing researchers with objective first-hand data for analysis. One way of handling data collected through audio is to transcribe it. Of itself, the process of transcribing produces revealing insights into the data as the researcher becomes closely engaged. Transcription has the effect of concentrating the mind considerably beyond simply listening or watching and provides a basis for more in-depth analyses, while any length of time spent transcribing also means that the data become very familiar. Having interviewed with the ARP, the researcher transcribed the recorded data to determine the categories and place the related data under appropriate code-headings.

### 3.3.2.3. Students' Quiz and Examination Results

Students took six quizzes and two exams throughout the research process. First exam was called as pre-action research process exam and the second one was called as post-action research exam. Both quizzes and exams were conducted to compare students' scores before and after the implementation. Students were expected to master 60 words during research process. These target words were prepared by the ARP in accordance with students' own course books and in parallel to their syllabi. The quizzes and exams were administered to observe changes in teacher's instructional practices and students' performance.

### 3.3.3. The Research Process

For the action research study which provided most of the data, quantitative data were gathered from the quizzes and exams students took throughout the research process. The students were thirty elementary level students in the ARP's classroom. As vocabulary is of concern for beginners, the teacher focused on effective vocabulary teaching techniques in order to increase students' retention of vocabulary items. Sixty target words were determined to be mastered by the students. They were prepared by the ARP in accordance with students' own course books and in parallel to their syllabi. The target words were related with food and drinks, animals and

adjectives. There were twenty words to be acquired under each topic. For the first month, it was decided that the ARP have her lessons in her usual way to observe the changes, if any, in students learning and teacher instructional practices comparing the pre- and post- action research process. In connection with this and with the aim of creating a balance between word types, first ten words from each subject were taught by teacher's traditional way and the others were taught by edutainment activities involving, songs, games and creative drama. The target words and how they would be taught are illustrated as follows:

**Table 1. Target Words to Be Learnt by the Students**

FOOD&DRINKS		ANIMALS		ADJECTIVES	
Traditional Way	Edutainment Activities	Traditional Way	Edutainment Activities	Traditional Way	Edutainment Activities
Bread	Meat	Cat	Dog	Tall	Happy
Butter	Fish	Elephant	Horse	Short	Angry
Cheese	Steak	Snake	Bird	Fat	Sad
Olive	Egg	Donkey	Sheep	Thin	Surprised
Jam	Chicken	Rabbit	Pig	Big	Confused
Coffee	Tea	Goat	Hen	Small	Bored
Lemonade	Cola	Chicken	Cow	Weak	Excited
Orange-juice	Hot-chocolate	Giraffe	Dolphin	Strong	Shy
Milkshake	Water	Tiger	Lion	Young	Pleased
Soda	Milk	Shark	Monkey	Old	Scared

### *3.3.1. Pre-Action Research Process*

The teacher taught the first ten words of each category (bread, butter, cheese, olive, jam, coffee, lemonade, orange-juice, milkshake, soda; cat elephant, snake, donkey, rabbit, goat, chicken, giraffe, tiger, shark; tall, short, fat, thin, big small, weak, strong, young, old) that makes totally thirty by means of her traditional techniques in the first month. What is meant by 'traditional techniques' is the techniques used in methods like grammar translation and direct method (Larsen-Freeman 1986). These techniques mainly include giving the direct equivalent of the target word; repetitions drills, and fill in the blanks exercises.

Ten new vocabulary items were introduced to students in each module that lasted three to four regular lessons, that is, 120-160 minutes. The way the teacher taught vocabulary items to children before action research process is as follows:

The teacher wrote the English forms of the target words on the board. Turkish equivalents of the same words were written on the board as a demonstration technique and repetition drills were used to practice the new words. Students were asked to write down the new vocabulary. They were given half an hour to memorize them all. First, volunteers were asked to tell the Turkish meanings of the target words and vice versa. When students mispronounced the word, the teacher corrected and have them to repeat mispronounced words for several times. Lastly, the students were asked to write down these words for five times in their notebooks as a homework. There was no fun during the courses. There were no winners or losers; therefore the lesson was quite boring both for the students and the teacher. No particular materials were prepared; the traditional chalkboard was used as the main material of the lesson.

A week after each implementation, students took one quiz totally three quizzes. The reason for this was to test the long-term potentiation of the items. A week after the third quiz, an examination was administered to test the total thirty words. The pupils were not informed about the quizzes and the examination beforehand

### *3.3.3.2. While-Action Research Process*

The research cycle of this study repeated for three times.



1st cycle: In accordance with the target words, ARP prepared a lesson plan based on using a song and a game (Plan1). When she told her students that they would listen to a song, she saw that they all got excited and had a big grin on their faces. She stated that they were getting great joy while singing and performing it. The game time was full of merriment. The students didn't even want to take their break. At the end of the lesson, she received cheers from her students that they wanted to have such joyful lessons (Act & Observe 1). She reflected in her journal that both she and her students enjoyed themselves very much but she had a real difficulty in managing the time. (Reflect 1)

2nd cycle: ARP was more careful about time allocation for each activity this time. She prepared a lesson plan based on using game and drama activities (Plan 2). In the break time, she observed that her students were calling each other by the names of animals which they pretended to be and making the sounds of these animals. They were having great fun. She was really glad to see it, but, she also observed that they were generally pronouncing the words wrong. (Act & Observe 2) Comparing it with the previous lesson, she reflected that songs could be of great use for pronunciation. For the next lesson, she would definitely use songs. She also added that allocating time for each activity beforehand enabled her to act more time-efficiently. (Reflect 2)

3rd cycle: ARP prepared a lesson plan based on a song, a game and drama activities (Plan 3). She observed that the game they played was a total pleasure for her students. Thanks to the game and the song they learnt, most of the students were able to pronounce the words correctly. In the production part, that almost all of the students made a puppet of a happy face encouraged her more to include such types of activities in her other classes, as well (Act and Observe 3). Now, she was aware of the fact that they were actually not learners but children and fun must be central to her lesson plans (Reflect 3).

Examining the quiz and exam results also gave ARP the opportunity to evaluate and reflect whether the vocabulary retention level of her students enhanced. Below how lessons were given during the conduction process can be seen.

The teacher taught the second ten words of each category (meat, fish, steak, egg, chicken, tea, cola, hot-chocolate water, milk; dog, horse, bird, sheep, pig, hen, cow, dolphin, lion, monkey; happy, angry, sad, surprised, confused, bored, excited, shy, pleased, scared) that makes totally thirty by means of edutainment activities in the second month. What is meant by ‘edutainment activities’, as mentioned earlier, is learning in a form of entertainment that is designed to be educational.

Three lesson plans were prepared by the teacher in order to teach new vocabulary items through music, games and drama activities. Here the teacher will be called “the action research practitioner (ARP).” They were prepared after an in-depth research of related literature which is the part of the action research process.

First ten words (meat, fish, steak, egg, chicken, tea, cola, hot-chocolate water, milk) were taught pupils by games, songs and drama activities.

### **Lesson Plan 1**

**Level:** 4th grade

**Target words:** meat, fish, steak, egg, chicken, tea, cola, hot-chocolate, water, milk

**Number of students:** 30

**Techniques used:** Songs, games and drama activities

**Materials needed:** flashcards, of colourful paper, string, cards, crayons, scissors and glue

**Duration:** 40’ + 40’ + 40’

The teacher stuck the flashcards of target words on the board. She said she was so hungry and thirsty that she wanted to imagine she was eating and drinking all. In order to imagine better, she said they needed a song and she played the recorder.

The song is as follows:

*Are you hungry? (Shrug your shoulders and then rub your tummy.)*

*Are you hungry?*

*Yes, I am. (Thumbs up gesturing “yes” and/or nod your head “yes”.)*

*Yes, I am.*

*Here is some chicken(salami)* (Gesture holding the chicken leg and then eating it)

*Here is some chicken(salami)*

*Yum,yum, yum.*

*Yum,yum, yum.*

*Are you thirsty?*

*Are you thirsty?*

*Yes, I am.*

*Yes, I am.*

*Here is some cola( ice tea).* (Gesture holding a can of cola and then drinking it)

*Here is some cola(ice tea).*

*Slurp, slurp, slurp.*

*Slurp, slurp, slurp.*

Although the song had different food and drink vocabulary items, since it was an enjoyable song with sounds and body movements, the teacher preferred this song and called out the target words over the voice on the CD.

Having listened to it for three times, students began to murmur the song. After singing it altogether, students came to the board and perform the song with their partners as illustrated below.

Student A: Are you thirsty? Are you thirsty?

Student B: Yes, I am. Yes, I am

Student A: Here is some water. Here is some water (Gives the water flashcard to student B)

Student B: Slurp, slurp, slurp

In the practice part, the ARP placed six chairs in an empty area of the classroom and pointed out six students to perform the activity. She put a picture of food or drink under each chair and asked students to walk or dance round the chairs as the song plays and sit when the song stops. She played the tape recorder and stopped it somewhere in the middle of the song and asked the sitting students to take the pictures under their chairs and say their name. The students who could not answer correctly were disqualified. The game went on by eliminating the chairs of

the losers. In each game, teacher placed different flashcards under the chair. The one who sat on the last chair and answered correctly was announced as the winner.

In the production part, the teacher distributed pieces of colourful paper, string, cards, crayons, scissors and glue. Students were asked to make a plate and draw what they wanted to eat and drink for lunch and they were stuck on the English board with pins.

A week later, the students took their first quiz.

### **Lesson Plan 2**

**Level:** 4th grade

**Target words:** dog, horse, bird, sheep, pig, hen, cow, dolphin, lion, snake

**Number of the students :** 30

**Techniques used:** Games and drama activities

**Material needed :** pictures, a clown and animal puppets, animal game cards, animal flashcards, a piece of paper, colourful paper, cards, strings, crayons, scissors and glues

**Duration :** 40 + 40+ 40 + 40 minutes

As a warm up activity, the ARP helped students to arrange their seats in U-shape. She drew three circles on the floor with a chalk and wrote the words sea, farm and forest in each of circle. Then she placed the pictures of each word in the circles. She said by pointing the sea some animals live in sea and showed the picture of dolphin, some live in farm and showed the pictures of pig, cow, hen, horse, sheep, bird, dog and some live in forest and showed the pictures of monkey and lion. She placed the pictures of animals in circles. She stood in each circle, showing the pictures of animals, she pronounced each word. She asked students to make the sounds of called animals by the teacher. Then she started a game. She would say the names of an animal in English. Whenever they heard an animal, they would jump into the environment where that animal lives. For example, if it were a monkey, pupils would jump into the 'forest' part. After finding the right environment, the pupils would pretend to be that animal.

In the presentation part, the teacher prepared stick puppets of target words beforehand. First, she wore a sad face mask and started telling the story.

“Hello. I am Ms. Lonely. I haven’t got any friends. I want to play games with my friends. Look at these children. (The teacher sticks on the board the picture of happy children who are playing basketball.) They’re very happy. They’re playing basketball. I want to play with them, but I can’t. I’m very lonely. (At that moment, the teacher picks up the ‘bird’ puppet.)

**A bird :** Hello. I am a bird. My name’s Tweety. What’s your name?

**Ms. Lonely:** I’m Lonely. I can’t believe it! You are speaking to me!

**Tweety:** Yes. I can speak. Why are you so sad?

**Freak :** I’ve got no friends. I want to play games.

**Tweety:** Don’t worry. Come with me. I’ve got horse friends.

( The teacher shows the puppet of horse.)

**Tweety:** Hello, horse! How are you?

**The horse:** We’re fine. Who is this?

**Tweety:** She’s my friend, Lonely. She hasn’t got a friend and she’s sad.

**Horse:** Hello, Lonely! Nice to meet you. I am horse. How are you?

**Lonely:** Nice to meet you, too! I’m sad.

**Twin Mice :** O.K. Don’t worry. Come with us. I have got a sheep friend.

(The teacher sticks the ‘bird’ puppet on the board and picks up the ‘sheep’ puppet)...

The dialogue is repeated for each animal.

In the practice part, the teacher played a flashcard game, the teacher brought the flashcards of the above animals. She made small holes on a piece of paper which she put on the flashcards. Then, she asked the students to look through and guess which animal it was.

In the production part, the teacher distributed pieces of colourful paper, string, cards, crayons, scissors and glue. Students made their own puppets and write the names of animals on their puppets and they were stuck on the English board with pins.

A week later, students took their second quiz.

### **Lesson Plan 3**

**Level:** 4th grade

**Target words:** happy, angry, sad, surprised, confused, bored, excited, shy, pleased, scared

**Number of the students:** 30

**Techniques used:** Games, song and drama activities

**Materials needed:** Flashcards, vocabulary cards, a paper bag, scissors and crayons.

**Duration :** 40 + 40+ 40 + 40 minutes

When the teacher came in, she tried to mime the target words and wanted students to guess them in English. When the teacher made the facial expression, the students looked up the dictionary and the one who found it more quickly wrote it on the board as a warm-up activity. Then, she stuck some flashcards on the board and asked students to match them with the flashcards. Next, she wrote the keywords under the flashcards and students noted down the target words on their notebooks.

In order that students would grasp the pronunciation of the target words easily, she sang the song she composed and after a few repetitions they all began to sing it. While they were singing, they were also trying to do the facial expressions by the help of their teacher.

*Happy, excited, confused,*

*Shy, bored, surprised.*

*These are the words we use to describe.*

*These are the words we use to describe.*

*Angry, confused, pleased,*

*Scared, happy, bored,*

*These are the words we use to describe.*

*These are the words we use to describe, hey!*

In the practice part, they played a game called “freeze”. Students formed a circle and sat down on their seats. The ARP chose two volunteers and they came to middle of the circle. She whispered a keyword to their ears and they tried to mime it at the same time. They took up their position and “froze”. Other students tried to guess what the scene represented. This game continued until all the target words were mimed.

After that, the class was divided into four groups. She gave out some worksheets to each group and students tried to find the target words according to the pictures on the worksheet. Lastly, students called out the answers altogether.

In the production part, the ARP asked students to prepare a puppet with a paper bag. She gave out 30 paper bags to the students. They drew the picture of an adjective on it and put their hand in the paper bag. Then, they tried to mime their puppets by using body language.

After a week, they took their third quiz. As in the pre-action research process, a week after their third quiz, they took the second examination which covered the total thirty words.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were used. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) “the words are based on observation, interviews or documents (or as Wolcott [1992] puts it “watching, asking or examining”). These data collection activities are typically carried out in close proximity to a local setting for a sustained period of time. Such data are not usually immediately accessible for analysis, but require some *processing*. Raw fieldnotes need to be corrected, edited, typed up; tape recordings need to be transcribed and corrected. “ Qualitative data gathered from the ARP’s research journal and

interviews conducted by the researcher with the ARP were transcribed and analyzed by coding the data on the basis of the research questions.

The first step in analysis is the data reduction which refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear in written-up fieldnotes or transcriptions... It is a form of analysis that shortens, sorts, focuses, discards and organizes data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified. (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As Tesch (1990) points out it also can be seen as “data condensation.” Coding is another part of analysis. It is a process of attempting to reduce the large amount of data that may be collected to more manageable categories of concepts, themes or types.(Burns, 1999). According to Miles & Huberman (1994) “Coding is analysis. To review “ a set of field notes, transcribed and synthesized and to dissect them meaningfully while keeping the relations between the parts intact is the stuff of analysis... Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive of inferential information during a study.” The vast array of words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages have to be reduced to what is of most significance and interest (McCracken, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Wolcott, 1990; cited in Seidman.)

The ARP’s journal entries and interview responses were coded with regard to research questions. As mentioned in chapter three, there were three kinds of interviews conducted in this study. They were pre-action research interview, while-action research interview and post-action research interview. The purpose of the pre-action research interview was to enable the ARP to reflect on her professional life and what her objectives were by conducting this action research project. While-action research interview was conducted to gather data regarding the status of ARP’s research project, her beliefs and attitudes about action research process and changes she experienced till that time. The post-action research interview gave ARP the opportunity to share and reflect on the entire process of her action research experience. To code journal entries and interview responses of ARP, first, statements that were directly related with research questions were picked out and three main code categories were formed abbreviating the first letters of research area, as follows:



**TCK:** Teacher's Content Knowledge

**TIP:** Teacher's Instructional Practices

**TBA:** Teacher's Beliefs and Attitudes

While analyzing the entries and responses, four additional themes that were directly related with action research process also emerged. These themes were: reflectivity, structured approach, time restraint and future conduction of action research. Abbreviating the first letters of them, four additional code categories were created as follows:

**REF:** Reflectivity

**SA:** Structured Approach

**TR:** Time-Restraint

**FCAR:** Future Conduction of Action Research

The coded data were then placed under appropriate code categories.

### **3.4.1. Qualitative Data Analysis**

#### **3.4.1.1. Journal and Interview Analysis**

The first category is Teacher's Content Knowledge (TCK). It includes the statements from journal entries and interview responses of ARP related with the changes she experienced in terms of content knowledge.

**Table.2 Code Category 1 (Teacher Content Knowledge)**

<b>Code Category</b>	<b>Journal and Interview Analysis</b>
<b>TCK</b>	

- I am still reading books about the general characteristics of young language learners.

- While I was reviewing the related literature I realized that there were a lot of things to learn in our profession.

- There are various vocabulary teaching techniques that emphasize the “fun” element while teaching to young learners and increase retention.

- I see that I teach my young learners as if they were older. I must practice concrete strategies in my class rather than abstract techniques.

- I learn that I need to make use of their physical energy.

- “Fun” must be the main principle of my lessons.

- Literature review made me aware of the effectiveness of the edutainment activities in teaching vocabulary.

- When I was teaching vocabulary items, I used to focus on meaning and pronunciation. I am now aware that it has got another side –spelling--.

- Understanding of young learners comes from being physically active.

- I didn’t know that there was a professional development model called action research which enhances improvement in teaching and learning. But I am learning...

- Today, I learnt the cycles of action research: planing, acting, observing and reflecting and what to do in each stage

- I am really curious about the results of “act” stage.

- Combining body movements and songs will be very useful for my students.

- While comparing the test results of my students, I learnt that we would use T-test.

- Yes, it [T-Test] can be a great tool to use to see my students improvement.

The ARP gained theoretical knowledge about general characteristics about young language learners, vocabulary teaching techniques, edutainment activities, action research process and T-test analysis before conducting her action research

process. As mentioned earlier, in the first stage of action research, related literature must be mastered in order to act effectively.

**Table 3. Code Category 2 (Teacher's Instructional Practices)**

Code	Journal and Interview Analysis
Category	
TTP	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I'd like to improve my teaching skills ultimately. I want to gather data and go through the whole process ...to see whether or not I can improve my teaching</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I generally taught vocabulary to my young learners by vocabulary memorization lists, that is, they listed new words in one column and the translation in another column and tried to memorize them all. Some did what they were asked to but others did not. However, each individual of my classroom is ready to what they are required to do. Even though some don't understand what to do at first, they eventually manage it observing other pupils.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I think that it [ action research] helps me to differentiate and individualize my instruction.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•As I regarded games or songs as time-consuming, I hardly any employed them in my classes. But I can see that lessons should be based on fun.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I was pleased to see their performance was quite high while revising the vocabulary items through the song. I will try to find a song for each unit. If not, I will make up .</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I act as a motivator, organizer even as a singer or an actress ☺ rather than an just instructing teacher.</li> </ul>

- I am able to keep their focus for a long time by engaging activities.
  - Even arranging chairs in different ways changes the atmosphere of the classroom.
  - We all enjoyed ourselves while playing the chair games.
  - I was pleased to see they were too willing to perform body movements while singing the song.
  - Meaning is not the only side of teaching vocabulary. Through edutainment activities, more importance is attached to pronunciation and spelling.
  - They have a new vocabulary notebook now. They are finding related pictures, writing the words under them. I also want to reduce the use of mother tongue in this way.
  - Students were looking forward to production part. Practising what they learnt and receiving positive reinforcements for their products were a real enthusiasm for them.
  - I began to keep the last three minutes of my lessons for students' reflection. I am glad to see their smiling faces while evaluating what we have done.
  - Examining the quiz and test results, I compared my former and new strategies in teaching vocabulary and increasing retention. It is for sure that this process has contributed to my instructional practices a great deal.
- 

The ARP changed her instructional practices as a result of what she learned about student learning while engaging in action research. She regularly aligned her instructional practices to how her students learnt better. This alignment was a direct result of what was learned about young learners and effective ways to teach vocabulary to them. Considering the statements of the ARP, it can clearly be seen that she has gone through changes in terms of her instructional practices. Using different techniques while teaching vocabulary, classroom management strategies, student reflection time can all be shown as changes in her teaching practices.

**Table 4. Code Category 3 (Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes)**

Code	Journal and Interview Analysis
Category	
TBA	

- At first, I had an assumption that I wouldn't be able to put these activities into practice and the process wouldn't be that effective because going down from adults' world to children's seemed difficult at first. I couldn't think of myself singing or jumping or running back and forth or imitating. But when I tried and got very positive reflections from my pupils, all my beliefs broke into pieces. I am feeling more energetic now. ☺

- The literature review helped me to understand I treat my young learners as if they were adults.

- I can see that I am completely mistaken. If planned carefully and elaborately, you get full joy and even save time.

- I wasn't aware of the fact that teachers can make efficient use of teaching techniques to involve their students in the lesson, I regarded them as unrealistic. Now, I can see that exploiting edutainment activities isn't that difficult.

- I should have trusted in myself and given a try.

- Having them to memorize the words in the way we used to do was really unpleasant for me, too. Although I took part in some seminars and read articles about teaching young learners, I didn't believe in myself to put them into practice. I couldn't think of me playing games, imitating or singing after teaching the older ones for a long time. But, I tried and I saw that this was the long-awaited atmosphere in my classroom. The more I behaved like them, the more fun we got together.

- I am learning not to make prejudgements. Action research can really be a useful tool for all teachers. We are making some assumptions that are not always true.

- It is all about making changes to maximize the results at your next implementation. So I believe that it has helped me to be more logical and structured in my process.

- I think that teaching can be isolating on itself...But it helps me professionally work together with my colleague.

- I used to think games were time consuming and regarded them as a reward. I hardly any used games in my lessons. But now, I can see that they should be part of lessons. I am learning not to be biased.

- Sharing feelings, thoughts etc. with colleagues are of great use.

- I am glad to see how willing my students in taking part in activities. Seeing them all active in the lessons make me feel proud.

- Through action research, I have realized my weaknesses in teaching young learners as well as vocabulary teaching techniques and had a chance to improve my practice.

- I am more than a simple teacher now.

- Although the activities were challenging, they were worth doing. Seeing them learn better by different techniques encourages me to do my best.

- Preparing lesson plans made me more structured and organized.

- I used to believe that it would take time to use songs or games or drama activities in the classroom and didn't want not to be able to keep up with the curriculum. But, I can see now that if prepared thoroughly, you manage the time as you wish and provide meaningful learning for your students.

- The more I read, the more excited I get. I want to enrich my teaching techniques and go out of the circle of traditional methods and materials.

- Being reflective makes me more aware of what is going around me.

- Although putting them into practice can sometimes be challenging, the thought of seeing more pleased faces motivates me more and more.

- The action research process was really challenging and required hard work on the part of me, however I deeply believe that it contributed to my professional development a lot. I can easily see the change in my teaching.

- Quiz and exam results showed that I am on the right way to improved student learning.

- I believe that I have changed as a teacher since my beliefs have changed regarding my teaching.

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The ARP's statements show that, she has gone through changes in her beliefs and attitudes. She understands that teaching young learners is different from teaching older ones. Although her beliefs and attitudes about different techniques were negative in the beginning, they changed positively by the conduction of action research.

**Table 5. Code Category 4 (Reflectivity)**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Journal and Interview Analysis</b>
<b>Category</b>	
<b>REF</b>	

- I am of the opinion that although in-service workshops increase your knowledge, you can not do anything in practice as the real classroom atmosphere is really different from how they imagine it.

- I am aware of the fact that teaching young children really differs from teaching teenagers. I need to be more attentive about their characteristics and how their learning style is affected by them.

- I think that I reflected on the success of past lessons but in an informal way. You know, just thinking.

- Vocabulary is of utmost importance in elementary level curriculum but I can not say that I am such effective in teaching vocabulary because my

students forget them quickly. I need different techniques that I can apply in the classroom.

- I used to think that I generally reflected on the success of lessons but now, I can see it was just a verbal reflection, nothing more.

- Action research is a structured process that enables one to discover what is going on in your mind and how to put it into action.

- Keeping a journal makes me aware of what I am doing and what I am going to do.

- Keeping the records of what is happening during the process makes me conscious of what is going on about my teaching.

- I am reflecting on what I have done thanks to action research.

- I am learning not to be a biased person. My views about edutainment activities have changed.

- I am more serious with my teaching now. I am now aware of the fact that I should do in-depth research about the things that I haven't got thorough knowledge rather than relying on my beliefs.

- I am preparing more elaborate lesson plans regarding the activities to be performed in my class.

- I am more attentive and focused on my teaching and students.

- I can say that improvement in my knowledge led to changes in my teaching practices, improvement in my teaching practices led to changes in my beliefs and attitudes and vice versa.

- I feel that I am improving as a teacher during this process. My students performance makes me feel like that.

- Reflecting on what I am doing show my strengths and weaknesses with my teaching.

- I realize now that I need to have concrete reflection rather than abstract reflection and keeping a journal provides me with this.

- I am more aware of my students' needs now.

- Action research is really user-friendly. It enabled me to deal with what I'm concerned about and wanted to change in that area.



- I had thought that the way we were taught can work on my students, as well which resulted in dull and boring lessons.
  - It forced me to think with wh- questions.
  - I would have a question in my mind, but since the question was just in my brain, it would fade away soon.
  - Collaboration with you made me aware that I had that question and it need to be handled.
  - I realize that cooperation between students enhance their motivation.
  - I can say that sharing my thoughts clarified my brain about what to do.
  - Reflection supported changes in my beliefs, attitudes, teaching practices and knowledge in different ways: planning, focusing and assessing.
  - Reflecting made me aware of myself as a teacher.
- 

One of the inducted themes from the interview responses was reflectivity. The ARP stated that she was being reflective and more conscious of her professional life and she recognized the elements of reflective teaching in her practice as a result of participation in this action research study. It can clearly be understood from the entries of ARP that the reflection process made her more aware of her beliefs, attitudes and teaching practices. As Richards (1996) pointed out that reflective teaching is one in which teachers and student-teachers collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching. Qing (2006) also stated that reflective teaching asks EFL teachers to stop, to slow down in order to notice, analyze, and inquire on what they are doing. It tells them to relate theory and practice, to evaluate both old and new teaching experiences, and to make interpretations on the situations encountered.

**Table 6. Code Category 5 (Structured Approach)**

Code	Journal and Interview Analysis
Category	
SA	

- I can not say that I used to have a systematic way of reviewing my teaching.

- This is truly the first time I have experienced such a structured process in my profession.

- I think I used to reflect on my teaching, but you know, it was in an informal manner: just thinking for a while and then forgetting.

- But now, I regularly write down what I think and note down new things that I begin to learn instead of just reading.

- I believed that my long experience with teaching made me know how to use time efficiently in the classroom. But, I can see that I am mistaken. It wasn't an efficient way of using time. Preparing lesson plans and having due times for the activities enabled me to use time more effectively .

- It really has a systematic nature and I am more systematic by preparing a research plan, reviewing information, planning, observing, recording, reflecting, collecting data, analyzing...

- Having due dates led me to more planned actions

- It keeps me on track.

- I am thinking about my teaching practices more regularly and more closely now.

- I am more attentive and it supports me by giving a focus so that I am acting more concerted rather than just having abstract ideas on my mind.

- I feel really organized and planned by recording what I observe.

- This whole process is different than what I have ever done before. I never recorded or wrote down my impressions before.

- With action research, I have one more role. I am a teacher researcher now.

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Action research is a systematic form of inquiry which enables teachers to evaluate themselves in a self-reflective manner. It serves as a tool for teachers to take a look at their teaching in a structured manner. As it can be understood from ARP's statements, she put a discipline in her everyday learning and teaching by keeping a journal, preparing more elaborate lesson plans, acting in accordance with due times and noting down her impressions about the process.

**Table 7. Code Category 6 (Time-Restraint)**

Code	Journal and Interview Analysis
Category	
TR	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although it makes you act in a planned and organized way, it requires a considerable time .</li> <li>• You can know, after a tiring day, it is sometimes difficult to get prepared according to research plan. ☹</li> <li>• Finding enough time to prepare is a real challenge.</li> <li>• Finding time to plan, research, review, observe, collect data, reflect, can be difficult at times.</li> <li>• As it requires to act in a more elaborate way, I sometimes feel I may fall behind the curriculum.</li> </ul>

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Most teachers already have busy classroom lives and work in the hurly-burly of their own practice. They are usually busy and they might not have time to explore action research more fully in their teaching practice. Doing research in the classroom requires extra time. As it can be understood from ARP's statement that time is a real challenge while conducting action research. It requires serious devotion of time and effort.

**Table. 8 Code Category 7 (Future Conduction of Action Research)**

Code	Journal and Interview Analysis
erCategory	
FCAR	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning new things makes me really happy.</li> <li>• I always want to see smiling faces in my classroom.</li> <li>• Improved student learning is my ultimate aim.</li> <li>• Their excitement for the lesson encourages me to go on carrying out action research in other classrooms, as well.</li> <li>• One can learn best by his/her mistakes. Action research helped me improve myself.</li> <li>• It supports one to improve her practices. It is really user-friendly.</li> <li>• We generally focus on meaning while teaching vocabulary and ignore spelling and pronunciation. My second project will be about improving student's spelling while learning vocabulary.</li> <li>• Though time is a real challenge, I will include action research as part of my professional life.</li> </ul>

### 3.4.2. Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were gathered from the six quizzes and two exams taken by the students in order to compare the results before and after the action research process. The results of the three quizzes and the first exam administered to students before the action research process were compared with the results of the three quizzes and the second exam by T-test analysis.

A t-test was used in comparing the results of pre and post action research process quizzes and exams using a programme called SPSS. There are normally three different types of T-test. However, a paired t-test is used in this study to measure whether means from a within-subjects test group vary over 2 test conditions. The

paired t-test is commonly used to compare a sample group's scores before and after an intervention. Sig. column (significance value) is the most important part in the t-test. If the significance value is less than .05, there is a significant difference. If the significance value is greater than .05, there is no significant difference between the applications.

Below are the tables of pre- and post-action research process quizzes and exams.

**Table.9 Results of the First Quizzes Before and After the Action Research Project Conduction**

	Quizzes	N	x	sd	t	p
Pair1	PreARQuiz1	30	54,67	20,63	-9,42	0,00
	PostARQuiz1	30	65,00	23,82		

**Table. 10 Results of the Second Quizzes Before and After the Action Research Project Conduction**

	Quizzes	N	x	sd	t	p
Pair2	PreARQuiz2	30	59,00	23,75	-11,00	0,00
	PostARQuiz2	30	73,67	20,88		

**Table.11 Results of the Third Quizzes Before and After the Action Research Project Conduction**

	Quizzes	N	x	sd	t	p
Pair3	PreARQuiz3	30	48,17	25,10	-9,654	0,00
	PostARQuiz3	30	68,83	22,42		

**Table.12 Results of the Exams Before and After the Action Research Project Conduction**

	Exams	N	x	sd	t	p
Pair4	PreARExam	30	49,67	26,06	-10,36	0,00
	PostARExam	30	67,83	22,84		

When the tables are examined, the results of the quizzes and exams before and after the action research project conduction can be seen. The PreARQuiz1 mean score of students is 54,67 and the PostARQuiz1 mean scores of students are 65,00; the PreARQuiz2 mean score of students is 59,00 and the PostARQuiz2 mean score of students is 73,67; the PreARQuiz3 mean score of students is 48,17 and the PostARQuiz3 mean score of students is 68,83; the PreARExam mean score of students is 49,67 and the PostARExam mean score of students is 67,83 and the significance value for all the quizzes and exams is .00 which means that there is a significant difference between pre-action research and post- action research process as the significance value is less than .05. In other words, ARP's students did better in their post-action research quizzes and exam than those of pre-action research

process which shows that ARP's action research project enhanced students' vocabulary retention.

### **3.5. Trustworthiness of the Findings**

The term trustworthiness is used in qualitative research to account for credibility and dependability. Three different processes were used in this study to increase the validity of the research findings: triangulation, member check and peer examination.

Action research, whose aim is not to establish relationships between variables or to isolate causes and their effects, describes and explains events and activities in a specific context. It is interested in specific participants and phenomena since it has got a small-scale and highly local nature. Selecting subject samples from which generalisations can be made to larger populations is inherently in opposition to the purpose and aim of action research (Burns, 1999).

Given its nature, the notion of validity seems to be problematic in action research at first. However, new concepts of validity have emerged as qualitative approaches have gradually become more common in educational research. Triangulation technique is one of them. It is a procedure for organizing different types of evidence into a more coherent frame of reference or relationship so that they can be compared and contrasted (McKernan, 1996). According to Silverman, triangulation is comparing different kinds of data (e.g. quantitative and qualitative) and different methods (e.g. observation and interviews) to see whether they corroborate one another... This form of comparison, called triangulation, derives from navigation, where different bearings give the correct position of an object (in Burns, 1999).

Triangulation is broadly defined by Denzin (1978: 291) as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon." Triangulation may be used not only to examine the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives but also to enrich our understanding by allowing for new or deeper dimensions to emerge. Action researchers use multiple methods and the perspectives of different participants in order to gain a richer and less subjective picture than they obtain by relying on a

single data gathering technique. In this sense, this study used three different methods to compare the data with respect to research questions.

In addition to triangulation, member check technique was used in the study. This technique enabled the researcher to take the transcribed item back to the ARP to ensure the accuracy or validity of the transcription.

Another technique used to increase the internal validity in the research was peer examination. Peer examinations (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995) are similar to member checks, except that peers may not have been present in the research setting. Peer examinations involve cooperation with a colleague or a teacher etc. who knows the research situation well to comment on the data. Having coded the journal entries and interviews, the researcher worked with ARP and a second coder, who had done her MA in English language teaching. The second coder and ARP agreed with the researcher on categories and coding in most cases. Although they generally agreed to place the data under the appropriate category, there were times when they disagreed because it was sometimes difficult to determine under which category to put the data. Having reviewed and discussed the data for several times, they reached an agreement, though. These techniques enabled the researcher be more confident of the validity of findings.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in this study. Qualitative data were collected through the ARP's journal and interviews conducted before, during and after the action research process. The data gained were first transcribed, second reduced to of interest and finally were coded in alignment with research questions. Seven code categories were defined analyzing ARP's journal entries and interview responses , three of which were main code categories that were created in accordance with research questions and four of which were additional categories that were directly related with research process. All of these data were analyzed to investigate whether action research can bring about changes in an English teacher's professional development.

Improved student learning was observed through quantitative data. Quantitative data were gathered from the six quizzes and two exams taken by the



students in order to compare the results before and after the action research process. The results of the three quizzes and the first exam administered to students before the action research process were compared with the results of the three quizzes and the second exam by T-test analysis.

The results of data analysis will be discussed in detail in Chapter V according to the research questions of the study.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **4.1. Results and Implications**

This case study investigated whether action research can bring about changes in an English teacher's attitudes and beliefs, content knowledge and instructional practices thus leading to professional development. The researcher initiated an action research project with an English teacher (action research practitioner: ARP) who has been teaching elementary levels for two years. She implemented the stages of action research which are plan, act, observe, reflect in cooperation with the researcher. The students' retention of vocabulary items were determined as the problem area by ARP and plans were made, they were put into practice, observed and reflected on. The cycle repeated for three times.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected during the process. ARP's research journal and interviews conducted by the researcher with ARP provided the qualitative data for the study. Both journal entries and interviews were analyzed by coding in alignment with research questions. Quantitative data were gathered from the quizzes and exams taken by students before and after the process. The pre- and post-action research results were compared and analyzed by sample paired t-test.

#### **4.2. Summary of the General Results**

The results of the study will be presented in line with research questions.

The first research question of the study was whether action research brings about changes in ARP's content knowledge. When the analyzed data in terms of content knowledge were examined, it can be clearly seen that action research brought changes and improvement into the content knowledge of the action research practitioner. Through revising literature on young learners, and effective ways of increasing vocabulary retention of the students at that level, ARP developed background knowledge about effective ways of teaching vocabulary to young learners. She also stated that she gained knowledge about action research and how an action research project could be developed and conducted. She managed to bridge

the gap between theory and practice through applying appropriate techniques and strategies while teaching vocabulary. Besides, she broadened her knowledge about statistics. Although she had knowledge about median and standart deviation before, it was the first time for her to use T-test analysis to compare students' results. Gaining knowledge about these areas enriched her teaching repertoire. As regards, change in the content knowledge of ARP can be mainly seen in terms of teaching young children, teaching vocabulary, action research and statistics.

The second research question of the study was whether action research brought about changes in the teaching practices of ARP. When the analyzed data regarding teaching practices were examined, it can be clearly seen that action research brought changes and improvement into the teaching practices of the action research practitioner. For example, she generally taught vocabulary items by traditional way, that is vocabulary memorization lists before the research process. Having identified the problem and revised the related literature, she used edutainment activites while teaching vocabulary to increase students' vocabulary retention. She used to regard games as time-consuming and reward-like activities. However, during the research process she said that she would use games as part of her teaching practices as they were engaging even time-saving activities if planned carefully. They also made students learn unconsciously and retain vocabulary items for a long time. She was also hesitant to use songs and drama activities. She had thought that she wouldn't be able sing or perform drama activities because of her lack of self confidence. However, when she saw how surprised and enthusiastic her students were, she thought that she was doing the right thing. Organizing student groups and classroom in different ways were also contributory to improvement in her teaching practices. She also began to make use of pictures and flashcards to enhance retention. Besides, she had added production part to her lesson plans in which students got great joy and received positive reinforcements. Reflection time was given for her pupils to get feedback and plan the next course in accordance with their needs. As Qing (2009) stated the judgmental practices can impact positively in understanding what is going on in language teachers' classrooms and in producing changes in methodology, assessment, and instruction. Language teachers cannot see themselves as passive agents in the field. Rather, teachers should be involved deeply in the process, and the

only way to do this is taking time to think and reflect on their practices to foster more effective learning in their students.

ARP became more structured and organized as well as being more aware of what was going around her. When the lesson plans of the ARP were examined, it can be seen that she was able to make her lessons more student-centered. She also learned a formal method for evaluating and comparing her students test results by t-test analysis. Test results also show the improvement and change in the teaching practices of the ARP. When pre- and post- quiz and exams are examined, a meaningful difference can be seen in results.

The third research question of the study was whether action research brought about changes in ARP's beliefs and attitudes. When the analyzed data in terms of beliefs and attitudes were examined, such expressions like "I can see that", "I realize that", "I am learning", "I understand that", "I am aware that", "I observe that", "I used to think", "I used to believe" and her becoming more reflective show the changes in her attitudes and beliefs. Although she had negative feelings for some of the techniques she used during the process before, she is now regarding them as effective ways of teaching. She is learning not to be biased and to give a try at least. Through reflection, action research facilitates meaningful thought in teachers. From Carson's (1990) statement that action research enables researchers to have the belief that they may develop their understandings while at the same time bringing about change in concrete situations, it can be concluded all the defined constructs of professional development are tightly interrelated. Qing's (2009) statement that through reflection EFL professionals can react, examine and evaluate their teaching to make decisions on necessary changes to improve attitudes, beliefs and teaching practices also support this.

Change in one of the constituents of teacher professional development in this study influences the others directly. The teacher who has a more extensive knowledge and deeper awareness about the different components and dimensions of teaching is better prepared to make appropriate judgements and decisions in teaching. For example, when the ARP's role was influenced through the structured planning, this enabled her to be more reflective of her teaching practices thus leading her to seek for more information and do detailed research.

This study also provided evidence showing that reflection is a key element of teacher professional development. Reflection brings about changes in the way teachers perceive their teaching and role in the process of teaching as it enables them to be more aware of their teaching and through conducting action research, teachers move from a level where they are largely guided by intuition to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and self-inquiry.

According to Black (2001), “Being a reflective language teacher demands teaching, thinking back, describing, investigating reasons, discovering new understandings, deciding what to do next.” Through it, teachers can improve their perception of teaching and the quality of their own teaching by reflecting critically on their teaching practices. Action research calls teachers for an appraisal of their own teaching, a willingness to change, an open mind to accept suggestions, and a serious attention to reflective practice. The answers to all language teachers’ problems will not arise right away, it will take time, patience, responsibility, endurance, commitment, encouragement. Teachers must reflect, analyze, and adjust or change their practice whenever it is necessary. To move from the older teaching model to the newer one, language teachers need to think about what they do and how and why they do it (Qing, 2009).

In this study, action research encouraged the ARP to try new things in her classroom, investigate, be more confident and speak out by being reflective of her own practice. She had the opportunity to gain a better understanding of her teaching situation through the stages of action research, thus increased her knowledge and improved her practice. Action research helped her to promote self-directed learning and to expand her methods of teaching and learning as a result of research on the related literature. It also made ARP more aware of her students and of the effects of her practices on her students. The relationship between her and her students have improved, and the students have responded with being more motivated, active and willing. Their improved grades and understanding prove this clearly.

Action research enriched the quality of language teaching in her classroom by increasing her content knowledge, bringing about changes in her beliefs and attitudes and producing improvements in her teaching practices.

Teachers can use action research to both improve their own teaching and student learning which results in significant contributions to the development of the teaching profession.

#### **4.3. Implications For Further Research**

A follow-up study can focus on the role of reflection on teaching or time factor or the direct or indirect effects of action research on students while doing research as this study didn't focus on these aspects much although they were of high importance to the study. The challenge that the ARP faced while conducting the project was time factor as it needed a serious devotion of time. For this reason, a study about restructuring time for professional development activities can be carried out.

The direct and indirect effects of action research on students can be another research focus as students are the ones who are influenced by the attitudes or teaching practices of the teachers directly and benefit from the improvements experienced by their teachers.

Another study can be about the role of reflection on the professional development of teachers as it enables teachers to grow from previous experiences. When reflective practices become a part of their teaching, teachers are encouraged to adopt a self-reflective role which leads to more quality education.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview Questions

#### Pre-Action Research Interview Questions

(Adapted from Wallace. M, 1997)

1. What are the strategies, formal or informal that you either as a matter of policy perhaps almost unconsciously use for your professional development? How helpful/ useful do you find these strategies?
2. What are the areas of your professional competence that you feel are strength of yours?
3. What are the areas in which you think you could be more effective in your teaching?
4. What are the problem areas in your professional life that might be tackled through collecting or analysing data in a systematic way?
5. Do you ever reflect on your teaching? If yes, when do you actually do this?
6. Do you share your thoughts, feelings with anyone else?
7. Do you have any systematic way of reviewing your lessons?
8. Have you ever heard of action research?
9. Why are you engaging in this action research project?
10. What area are you going to investigate?
11. What is the total amount of time in hours that you think you can afford to spend on your action research project?
12. What is the precise question you are going to ask yourself within that area?
13. Can you guess what the likely outcome of this research is as you intend it?

**While-action research Interview Questions**

1. What do you foresee to gain from conducting this research project?
2. What have you learnt about action research having one a research about the related literature?
3. At what stage are you in the action research process ?
4. What have you learned from engaging in the beginning steps of the action research process?
5. Did you face any challenges while conducting action research project? If yes, what are they?
6. Can you compare your previous and present reflective practice?
7. In what ways, you think that the process you are going through enable you to reflect differently from your previous reflection attitudes?
8. What are the changes you observe in your current practices?
9. Do you think that action research is making changes in your practices ?
10. Does collaboration with a colleague (the researcher) help you in any way?
11. Are you thinking of conducting action research projects in different classes?

### **Post-Action Research Interview Questions**

1. What did you set out to teach?
2. Were you able to accomplish your goals?
3. What teaching materials did you use? How effective were they?
4. What techniques did you use?
5. What grouping arrangements did you use?
6. Was your lesson teacher dominated?
7. What kind of teacher-student interaction occurred?
8. Did anything amusing or unusual occur?
9. Did you have any problems with the lesson?
10. What kinds of decision making did you employ?
11. Did you depart from your lesson plan? If so, why? Did the change make things better or worse?
12. Which parts of the lesson were most successful?
13. Which parts of the lesson were least successful?
14. Would you teach the lesson differently if you taught it again?
15. Was your philosophy of teaching reflected in the lesson? (Richards & Lockhart, 1996, p.16)
- 16)What differences do you see about your teaching?
- 17.Do you think that the reflection process you experienced had meaningful effect on your teaching practices? If yes, how?
- 18.Are there any changes do you feel regarding your beliefs and attitudes to your teaching?
- 19.Do you think that participating in a formal action research project different than the regular practices of yours?
- 20.What were the challenges you faced while conducting the action research project?
22. Do you feel that the challenges or difficulties encountered were worth the benefits?
- 23.Did you find the role of the researcher helpful during the research process?

24 .Will action research continue to be part of your practice? Why or why not?

25.Is there any other question, you think, I should have asked about the process?





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