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The Methodological Approach of Action Research in the Field of English Language Teaching

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Qualitative research has been dominant paradigm in social research including English Language Teaching (ELT) for many years. However, there has been a paradigm shift towards qualitative research that has occurred in much recent social research. In addition, there has been a shift towards a new paradigm, often referred as 'Action Research (AR)' in which teachers as researchers study situations in effort to improve some aspect of professional practice. In this paper, we will take AR as a much broader approach within the qualitative research stance to see what is happening in educational and ELT research, so that teacher research can enhance the practice of teachers. With this new methodological movement, we have three purposes in this paper: 1) to explore two different methodological approaches within a theoretical perspective; 2) to criticize an example of sustained cross-school AR in order to better illustrate how action research can proceed; and 3) to investigate the application of AR in order to explore its potential for developing collaborative classroom-based AR. We believe that if further AR is to be sustainable by English teachers as researchers, it will be a promising area needing further research in educational and ELT research in Korea.

[research methodology/qualitative research/action research/teachers as researchers]

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I. INTRODUCTION

Research as "the systematic gathering, presenting and analyzing of data" (Bartlett et al. 2001, p. 39) is one of several ways of collecting information and finding answers to questions, and its increasing use as a basis for knowledge about education requires teachers as researchers to possess research skills. There are many different approaches to conducting research projects and each methodological approach is situated within a theoretical perspective, the positivist or the interpretive perspective with a corresponding quantitative or qualitative research approach, often referred to as 'paradigm'. It is generally believed that there are two main research paradigms as the basis of research in the social sciences. Typically, within the dominant tradition, a polarity is established between the two approaches in which quantitative research is 'hard', 'fixed', 'objective', 'value-free', 'survey', 'hypothesis-testing', and 'abstract' while qualitative research is 'soft', 'flexible', 'subjective', 'value-laden', 'case study', 'speculative', and 'grounded' (Silverman, 1997 p. 24). There has been a debate about whether data collection and analysis should be quantitative or qualitative or a combination of both. The advocates of the two opposing sides have developed their own values, methods and techniques to understand social phenomena. An important issue, however, may be one that illustrates the influence of one paradigm on another. It might be risky to assume that quantitative and qualitative research are necessarily polar opposites. As Ackroyd and Hughes (1992, p. 30) argue, "Neither one is markedly superior to the other in all respects", both approaches have their place in research with their strengths and weaknesses. Patton (1982) suggests that researchers should be able to shift back and forth between these approaches.

II. PARADIGMS OF RESEARCH

It is a widely held view that there are four significant and influential traditions of knowledge: positivism, interpretivism, critical inquiry and post modernism. However we concern that two predominant paradigms ('positivism' and 'interpretivism') in theoretical perspectives are more directly related to action research. Therefore we will focus on the two paradigms in this paper.

1. Positivism

The term 'positivism' originated from the French philosopher, Auguste Comte and positivistic researchers are likely to concentrate upon the collection of large amounts of data in order to establish patterns and regularities (Zalta, 2013). This approach is likely to

be inherently quantitative in orientation, emphasizing measurement of behavior and prediction of future measurements (Anderson, 1998) because quantitative researchers use mathematical models, statistical tables, and graphs, etc. and their main concern is to quantify social behavior in order to explain the regularities of such phenomena. As a consequence, the positivist approach generally involves testing a hypothesis, using an experimental group and control group. In this way, the research is viewed as measurable and objective.

No research methodology, however, can be perfect and there have been criticisms of the positivist approach. A major criticism of the positivist approach concerns human behavior. Quantitative researchers tend to regard the empirical materials produced by interpretive methods as unreliable, impressionistic, and not objective. In addition, a positivist approach argues that the properties of the world can be measured through empirical scientific observation and as human behavior is predictable, it can be observed and measured as well. Researchers in this traditional positivist paradigm see themselves as "standing apart from the phenomena which they observe and investigate" (Edge & Richards, 1998, p. 336).

Some critics, however, argue that quantitative researchers are seldom able to capture their subjects' perspectives because they have to rely on more remote, inferential empirical methods and materials. Therefore, social scientists need to deal with many variables simultaneously and work under conditions that are much less precise because "No matter how exact measurement may be, it can never give us an experience of life, for life cannot be weighed and measured on a physical scale" (Nesfield-Cookson, 1987, in Cohen et al., 2000, p. 17). Moreover, the positivistic approach asserts that inquiry can be essentially value free. Conversely, other people argue that such value freedom in social science is either undesirable or impossible.

In spite of such kinds of criticisms, the positivist approach has brought with it a useful legacy of sound experimental design and an insistence upon quantifiable, empirical enquiry (Taylor et al., 2006). In a sense, the choice of approach should depend upon the aim of the inquiry and use of the findings.

2. Interpretivism

Qualitative researchers operate predominantly in the interpretive paradigm (Rossman & Rallis, 1998), and they also deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices in order to get a better understanding of the subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As this perspective exists alongside a qualitative approach, researchers are concerned to understand a subject's perception of the world. The interpretive traditions of qualitative research commit the researcher to a critique of the positivist or post-positivist project as well. In the light of a major anti-positivist stance, an interpretive approach argues that the

world is interpreted through the researcher's set of beliefs and attitudes about the world. Within this paradigm, researchers acknowledge that there is no single objective reality and that different versions of events are inevitable. Reichart (1979, in Fetterman, 1988) suggests that a researcher's paradigmatic viewpoint should be flexible and adaptive. In addition, some researchers, adopting an interpretative or qualitative approach, insist on the importance of discovering the meanings and interpretation of events and actions.

However, there is a risk in the interpretive or qualitative approach that it can be criticized for narrowly micro-perspectives. The relationship between qualitative researchers' observations of everyday life and analyzes of it is complex, involving a variety of interpretive concerns and processes. Rossman and Rallis (1998, p. 36) define it as follow: "Data do not speak for themselves; they are interpreted through complex cognitive processes", but data are usually filtered through the researcher's ways of seeing the world.

In terms of the scientifically based research movement, Ryan and Hood's (2004, p. 80) "rigorous, systematic, and objective methodology to obtain reliable and valid knowledge", the work of qualitative researchers is criticized as unscientific, or exploratory, or subjective. In other words, although there are meaningful questions that cannot be answered through the use of scientific procedures, it is assumed that a piece of qualitative research is heavily influenced by the researcher's personal perspectives. Moreover, as society is made up of the feelings of human beings (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 200), their interpretations of the world must be valued in the research process. Thus, values and perspectives should be regarded as important considerations in the search for knowledge.

In particular, applied to educational contexts this qualitative or interpretive research recognizes that what goes on in the classrooms and schools is made up of complex layers of meanings, interpretations, and values, etc. Given this interpretive nature of qualitative research, techniques used in quantitative research are not the only way of establishing the validity of findings from qualitative or interpretive research. The measurement and analysis of the variables about which information is obtained in a research study are dependent upon the purpose of the study (Kumar, 2005).

III. ACTION RESEARCH FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We consider action research as a form of teacher professional development in this paper; hence we will explore and discuss the nature of action research as well as educational research with key features of an action research project.

1. The Nature of Educational Research

As research and scientific knowledge have been considered significant in other fields, educators have also expected similar effects if educational research increases and the results can be widely disseminated. As a result, the teacher as researcher movement emerged during the 1960s in the field of education. According to Ary et al. (1985, p. 22), educational research is the way in which "one acquires dependable and useful information about the educative process" or it is "scientific and disciplined inquiry using quantitative and qualitative approaches" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989, p. 1).

In general, educational research has had strong links with the research traditions of social science. This has meant that education research has at the same time absorbed two competing views of the social sciences; the traditional, positivistic view as well as a more recent interpretive view (Cohen et al., 2000). This worldview sees human beings as co-creating their reality through participation, experience, and action. Educational research is described as making contributions to knowledge about education and educational practices as well. Clearly, research is supposed to generate knowledge and teachers are supposed to implement it. However, a considerable number of teachers and administrators tend to know little about educational research and assume that research cannot be useful in program planning and development. In addition one of the problems with educational research is that the complexity of education demands different research techniques and methods. One of these stands out for consideration: action research. As a result, there is an expanding literature on the use of action research within a professional setting, particularly within education.

2. Action Research in a Research Paradigm

Action research was originally developed by Lewin (1946, in Cohen et al., 2000), often cited as the originator of action research for his work with people affected by post-war social problems. In the field of education, the term 'action research' was used to articulate an alternative paradigm of educational inquiry and action research as "a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level" is defined in Cohen et al. (2000, p. 226). When viewed in this way, the action researcher is actively involved in the research process as an "agent of change" (Gray, 2004, p. 374) and action researchers are professional practitioners who use action research methodology as a means of researching into and changing their own professional practice.

Even though action research sits within the qualitative, interpretive research paradigm, "... it is different from 'positivist' research ... not trying to identify large scale causal laws ... it is different from other qualitative research ... not seeking to contribute to large scale

explanations of events" (Griffiths and Davies, 1993, p. 45, in Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Therefore, it will be worthwhile to consider some other style of research briefly in order to obtain a contextual picture of the field of research as a whole.

Action research turns teachers into 'co-researchers', creating communities of inquiry by engaging them in the questioning of the research, their own values and attitudes, and their own actions and behaviors. Essentially, action research is practical, cyclical and problem-solving in nature and it is seen as a fundamental way through which to effect change. Action research is deliberately concerned with "the processes of development, improvement and continuous learning" (Dewar & Sharp, 2006, p. 221). As the principle features of an action research approach are change or collaboration, action researchers are concerned to improve a situation through active intervention (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995).

Moreover, action research would not only benefit professional development but also have implications for future use in all areas. As action research might be relatively powerless in the face of mandated changes in education, it should be more concerned with intervening in existing practice to ensure that mandated change is addressed efficiently and effectively. It is important to locate action research as a strategy of educational research in the 'teacher-as-researcher' movement.

3. The Fundamental Characteristics of Action Research

1) Spiraling Cycles

A widely adopted view of action research is as "a spiral, or cyclical process" (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998, p. 21), originally developed by Lewin (1946) and further developed by Schon (1983) and Carr and Kemmis (1986) involving stages of action and research followed by action. In other words, the action research process itself is a cyclical one as a series of steps which include planning, observing and evaluating the effects of the action, or "a process for collecting, analyzing and interpreting information to answer questions" (Kumar, 2005, p. 6). In an action research project, information will be gathered during the action research circle.

In this way, the action research cycle is completed and may be started again with a view to refining and repeating the action research process. It seems that an important feature of action research is that the task is not finished when the project ends. Brown and McIntyre (1981) also emphasize the on-going nature of action research. For many researchers, the image of a serial of cycles of self-reflection has become the dominant feature of action research as an approach (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005), but, in order to qualify as research, it should be "controlled, rigorous, systematic, valid and verifiable, empirical and critical" (Kumar, 2005, p. 7). For example, if researchers ask their colleagues to offer critical and

constructive feedback throughout their research, their critical claim can be strong evidence in the cyclical action research process. By doing this, researchers are able to achieve good professional practice and development.

2) Reflective Practice

It is generally believed that learners do not learn by experience, but by reflecting on experience. Action research is based on the principle of developing learning through reflection on experience, and the idea of reflection has become the sine qua non of the action research movement. Elliott (1991) points out that reflection initiates action and action initiates reflection. Reflection on practice can be managed in many different ways. For instance, as research reflects the values, beliefs, and perspectives of the researcher, all activities can be seen and understood from different perspectives.

The concept of 'reflective practice' within the workplace was explored by Schon (1983; 1987) with a teacher's role being seen as a reflective practitioner in order to improve his or her own professional practice. There is more than one way into the reflective cycle. The research process itself is an invaluable tool for the development of reflective practice. For teacher-researchers, the processes concentrate on understanding what is going on in classroom teaching and learning, and the knowledge established reflects that understanding.

Moreover, many definitions of action research emphasize the self-reflective aspect involving both thinking about what researchers are doing and becoming critical about what they are doing (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005), but it is not always clear how to best facilitate this. Although the essential ingredient of action research is that it combines action with theorizing, then it is questionable to know how self-reflection in the research process can lead to the development of new theories. As there is no separation between the design and delivery of teaching and the process of research, according to McNiff and Whitehead (2005), action research in particular plays a central part in enabling teachers to be involved in the generation of theory. For example, if practitioners read or write a reflective journal, it may take a significant place in the light of later action and reflection because theory can be gradually built up inductively from what is critically reflected upon and systematically recorded. This is a crucial and considerable issue in educational research about the relationships of practice and theory.

3) Teachers as Practitioners

In traditional quantitative research, the researcher stands outside the research and observes what other people are doing. In action research, the researcher is at the center of the research, and the focus is on self-improvement. The ownership of knowledge and

control over research are important questions for action researchers. Teachers as practitioners learn to puzzle and speculate about what lies outside the realm of the known (Schon, 1983). To be a practitioner, teachers learn to talk about what they do, about the techniques and materials they use, about how students learn, and about local, educational policies, and so on.

Action research is primarily an approach relating to individual or small group professional development, but it is recommended that action research should be a collaborative or team-based project (Elliott, 1991; Oja & Smulyan, 1989; Wallace, 1998). Collaboration between researchers and those who are the focus of the research, and participation in the process, are typically seen as central to action research, the terms 'participatory research' (Park, 1993) or 'participatory action research' (Selener, 1997). When teachers have the opportunity to collaborate, they can share interest and experiences and build on each other's strengths for the benefit of their students. For example, practitioners are able to raise their issues or problems among colleagues who are working in similar situations or who are facing similar challenges. As a consequence, it will be beneficial that researchers try to seek links with what other researchers have done previously.

Inquiry is a state of being engaged in what is going on in the classroom that drives one to better understand what is happening there (Freeman, 1998, p. 14). It is assumed that through collaboration action research can personalize public debates in education and begin to relate more directly to concrete situations. As professionals, practitioners are valued for their abilities to inquire and to apply the known to the new, novel, or unknown.

IV. AN EXAMPLE OF AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

In this part, one article will be introduced as an example of a joint action research project for improvement in teaching and learning. In terms of research methods, three constraints will be tackled namely ethical issues, political issues and research design issues, though the outcomes of the selected article was positive and successful.

1. A Brief Overview of an Article

In the collaborative action research of the article, as in Oja and Smulyan's (1989) definition, the teachers engaged in all aspects of the research process with their students, classrooms and schools. The joint action research project in this article was carried out over a 12-month period in Portfield Combined School, Bradwell Village Middle school

and Castlethorpe First School. Especially, the research adopted a collaborative classroom-focused action research project, exploring the limitations and possibilities of teachers' and children' learning through self-evaluation. Three primary school teachers involved in this study and Day as a 'critical friend' reflected on the whole research process.

Data collection occurred in 2 phases. Phase 1 focused on assessing pupils' responses to writing as evidence for the development of the new teaching/learning strategies, via questionnaires, interviews and observations. Phase 2 focused on evaluating the effectiveness of the new strategies from the children's views and was concerned to represent the voice of children in this research. In an additional dimension of this research, moreover, it enabled practitioners to improve the educational process in order to share instances of good practice.

2. Summative Evaluation

1) Ethical Issues

There is a need for a good grasp of the ethical and moral considerations in action research. In particular, ethical issues in educational research have a high profile. As action research projects involve more than conducting research with human participants, the ethical principles of action research set out by Robson (2002) need to be considered (access also the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association at http://www.bera.ac.uk). In other words, rules for protection of human subjects should be heeded in all research projects, not only in action research.

In particular, researchers should think carefully before involving students, since issues of professional ethics are involved. In the article, the practitioners had to obtain permission from subjects' parents because they were working with young children who were under supervision. In other words, they had to ask whether it was possible to involve such young children in some of the data collection in an ethical way in advance. It might be important but not sufficient for targeted children and involved teachers in receiving drafts of how they were presented, quoted, or interpreted, etc.

With much qualitative work, the collaborative action research in the article also shared children's views and voices of concern through research methods, such as questionnaires, interviews and observations, and so on. Therefore, the children's lives and expressions might have risked exposure. Even if they had permission from the children's parents to use collected data, some of the children might not wish to be personally identified in any talk or article. Clearly, issues of observation and reportage had to be discussed as well. The article had little to say on what the practitioners did something in relation to this issue.

Moreover, the article should have explained how the practitioners could design their project in an ethical way, since the practitioners established the research project within their institutions. For example, the article needed to describe how the practitioners administered their questionnaire and how they were sent out, and needed to explain what was going on during the research process, not only give the results of the project.

In some cases, ethical difficulties are encountered in action research projects when abuses of power are encountered. It may be difficult to justify forcing the collaboration of colleagues who have little interest in research. Sometimes, in Elliott's (1991) opinion, sharing data with teachers from other schools could be more conducive to a reflective conversation than sharing it with colleagues. If the practitioners invite the co-operation of others in the article, it is only right that they should know what they intend to do with the data collected. Therefore, the ethical principles of the researcher should offer the explanatory framework for why they are doing what they are doing.

2) Political Issues

There is always a political dimension to do research, because researchers have different ideas about what counts as knowledge. In traditional types of research, researchers usually carry out what is required by someone else, such as policy-makers or school governors. Practitioners in action research make their own decisions about what is important and what they should do. It is seen as a powerful form of organization and institutional reform.

> We have met regularly, visited each other's schools, spent days together in a library, reading and writing, we have designed and conducted an inquiry project which has changed the way we and some of our colleagues think about the roles and responsibilities of pupils and teachers in the classroom (Elliott, 1991, p. 84).

However, the extent to which the participants were able to change the power dynamics within the project or indeed change the organizational culture was limited in the article. As Elliott et al. (1979, in Elliott, 1991) points out, head teachers might to be anxious about levels of teacher expertise when conducting action research in problem areas within their schools. This assumes that the organizational culture or ethos of an institution will not be supportive of such activity. Some of the dilemmas teachers as researchers confront while doing research in schools lie in this area.

> Whether a school is regarded as either successful or unsuccessful, it is often the head teacher who is seen as the responsible party. However, we believe this is to be too narrow a view of school leadership (Elliott, 1991, p. 83).

The development of classroom practice cannot operate effectively under a separate control system from that of institutional development (Elliott, 1991) or without a stronger commitment from management to this project. There were organizational and cultural barriers which did not make change easy. Therefore, administrators and department chairs need to acknowledge that this kind of work may be time-consuming, and teachers as researchers need to be given time for working on problems considered 'real' by the community and rewards for doing so.

> None of this has been without cost. Whilst membership of a networked learning community and being in receipt of a Best Practice Research Scholarship has enabled us to have time to develop our work, we have also spent considerable personal time on our project (Elliott, 1991, p. 85).

3) Research Design Issues

Research methods often sit within a spectrum, ranging from the quantitative to the qualitative. Although research methods may involve a range of tools such as interview, observation, video recording, or documentary analysis, etc. The key principle in choosing tools is that they must be 'fit for purpose'. A variety of methods of enquiry were used during the project in the article. The methods included:

1. Regular meetings to discuss, read, critique and plan
2. Observations of teachers, class groups, pairs and individual children
3. Questionnaires with teachers and children
4. Interviews with teachers and children
5. The selection of different groups/year groups/individuals
6. Classroom observation
7. Prompt cards

Even though this range of methods helped the practitioners to see the multi-layered nature of the project, there are many factors that may influence the choice of research methods including political or ethical considerations. This part will mainly focus on the interviews and observation research method. In case of Castlethrope First School, staff from other schools interviewed with the school children.

> We felt that because these staff were unknown to the children, the pupils might be more inclined to be open in their responses to questions (Elliott, 1991, p. 78).

However, in problematic cases where, for example, the external staff had no information about the children, how could they manage the interview with the children? The situation

was already strange for the children as the external staff were new to their school. Additionally, in the same way as with questionnaire, children might be required to answer the right kind of question in interview, but it was not mentioned whether or not the children had previously been involved in any research work. In the case of Portfields school, staff from other schools also conducted interviews to investigate the partner work of the small-scale study in the school.

> We hoped the following our work, we would see a growth in children's personal confidence in writing and that their ability to evaluate a range of features within their own writing would improve as a result of their collaboration (Elliott, 1991, p. 79).

The practitioner of the school was interested in the quality of a text, but the question is how did the staff ascertain that the use of pairs for planning writing was successful, since they were only dealing with produced texts by the children? It is doubtful that the external staff could be aware of the internal learning process of the children. Even though the staff spent time at the school, it is not believed that they could be fully in residence as they were external visitors. In terms of the school context, similar classes did not exist in the school. Another argument is about the observation process. The staff also observed and the collected data was later analyzed and interpreted.

> We have gained experience in classroom observation and in interviewing pupils. …. We learned that open questions produced a wealth of information which we could then analyze, while closed questions sometimes generated responses which were too limited to be of any value (Elliott, 1991, p. 83).

V. APPLICABILITY FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH KOREA

We will discuss two additional considerations of action research when action research is undertaken in a Korean ELT context. There are clearly a wide range of possibilities (Ahn, 2010; Chang & Song, 2001; Yang, 2009), but we will focus on keeping a reflective journal for research training and networking for sharing findings that are directly related to action research.

1. Reflective Journal for Being an Action Researcher

It is assumed that the researcher is the 'outsider' and the teacher's views are not necessarily being taken into account. A teacher as researcher, however, can access the detailed and complex classroom, and they have the knowledge and skills necessary to make valid decisions about what to do and how to do it. Unlike unskilled teachers, professionals must plan for themselves. Therefore, Loughran (2003) insists that encouragement of teacher research may offer opportunities for improving teachers' professional practice and development.

In action research teachers can play a major role in the project, providing ideas, keeping journals and writing project reports, and so on. The reflective journal is a resource for recording a teacher's professional growth. In addition to improving teachers' practice, the process of reflective journal writing also helps them as an action researcher. "A research journal can be a useful record of observation, key points in the research process, significant events" (Taylor et al., 2006, p. 35). This means that the reflective journal writing becomes a powerful tool for teachers' professional and personal development.

Reflective journal writing enables teachers to go through a change in their classrooms and schools. This kind of personal reflective journal allows them to record their feelings and questions about them (see Clarke and Erickson, 2003, chapter 12). It gives a way for teachers to look at their own practices alongside their day-to-day work. In a sense, keeping using reflective journals can help teachers avoid feeling stagnant, because they think about how they can do things differently.

Especially, if teachers are engaged in a collaborative project with one or more other people, they may decide to triangulate their journal entries. Triangulation can be a helpful technique in the assessment of complex and multi-faceted concepts offering a more balanced, holistic picture rather than one individual method alone. Then, what can teacher-researchers do with their findings? Teachers need to be encouraged to report what is happening in their own classrooms. In order to share findings with other teachers in their schools or outside, the teachers as researchers disseminate the findings to various local groups encouraging similar work to take place.

2. The Research Conference for Networking

In Lortie's (1975) criticism, school are like 'egg crates' in which individual teachers work largely in isolation, like eggs in the separate sections of their carton. Under this structural isolation, it is assumed that an inter-disciplinary community of teaching will not arise. Apart from personal and morale considerations, this kind of isolation may be a barrier to professional development.

Action research is a form of personal enquiry, but it is always done collaboratively because it involves individuals working together to achieve commonly agreed goals. Thus, a whole-team approach for the benefit of children has the potential to exert a positive and lasting impact upon teaching and learning in a wide variety of education settings (Taylor at el., 2006). Research conferences can be a helpful means to break down professional isolation. It is also perceived as a means for teachers' professional development and professionalism. It is becoming quite common for ELT professionals to improve their qualifications through further studies.

Networking of individual research projects is not, however, without problems. Because teachers focus on their classroom issues, the ability to generalize to other situation becomes problematic. In addition, for teachers, a wider communication of their findings might be difficult to achieve or it could be risky to leave their comfort zone and explore practices whose outcomes are unknown (Mitchell, 2003). Clearly, not all teachers at a school seek collaboration and some may wish to work alone.

In addition, it is not easy for teachers to receive any training in its application or purpose. Therefore, they should be given the necessary research training that allows them to collect data in their own environments and be then encouraged to report it to a wider audience. During the professional training, teachers will be given the opportunities to deal with the scientific findings as well as the opportunity to update this knowledge regularly. Ultimately, this allows a broader picture to be built up. The research conference is in support of such a view. They can grow along with the project.

VI. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to explain the theoretical foundations of action research in educational research, and to tackle several issues which arose in the selected article. As a research approach, action research clearly sits with qualitative or interpretative research designs. However, the choice between different research methods depends upon what researcher is trying to find out. No matter what paradigm and/or research methodology the researcher works within, therefore, it is clear that the action research movement, with its emphasis upon practice, collaboration, reflection, and interpretation, has its place in the research process. In this paper, some issues – quantitative versus qualitative, positivism versus interpretivism, the nature of educational research, the action research process with its key characteristics – were dealt with, and strengths and limitations to successful action research endeavours were the main focus for discussion. Teachers in a Korean ELT context should also try to find ways to improve their educational practice by engaging in the processes of planning, acting and reflecting. What researchers should keep in mind is,

"Research and its products should facilitates refection, criticism and a more informed view of the educational process which will, in turn, help to improve professional practice" (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p. 17). A more open-minded exploration of the most suitable strategy and best methods for the task should also be considered for Korean language learners.

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