



## **Perceptions of high school administrators, teachers, and staff on their educational action research skills**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Educational action research is becoming more essential and widespread in teacher education programs, with the ability to improve and address administrators' and teachers' professional needs and teaching practices. As a result, educational action research skills are regarded as one of the most essential aspects of doing educational action research. The main objective of the present study is to investigate perceptions of high school administrators, teachers, and staff on their educational action research skills. The study used the 12-item questionnaire to survey 252 respondents (14 administrators and 238 teachers and staff) from high schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The descriptive analysis was used to assess perceptions of high school administrators, teachers, and staff on their educational action research skills. The results show that administrators, teachers, and staff assess their educational action research skills at a good level. Some of the necessary abilities for doing action research were already presented by high school administrators, teachers, and other staff members, while others needed to be developed further. The present findings provide more information on the current state of educational action research among administrators, teachers and staff in Ho Chi Minh City. It is highly suggested that educational action research training programs, workshops, and educational policies be implemented to reinforce and promote educational action research skills.

**Keywords:** educational action research, high school, administrators, teachers, staff

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has changed dramatically many aspects of society including the education system. In this context, applying research to teaching and learning has been an important factor that should be considered. In the field of education, research plays a crucial role in improving teaching and learning methods as well as enhancing knowledge advancement across different fields of study. As a result, applying research to the education system has been a major function of administrators and teachers in the twenty-first century. Applying research to the educational system is called action research. In education, action research has also referred to as educational action research, teacher research, and classroom action research.

According to Ferrance (2000), action research is a process that participants systematically and carefully studied their own educational practices. Besides, action research is a systematic, reflective, and collaborative approach for planning, implementing, and evaluating changes in the classroom and school issues. Teachers are guided and trained to examine the policies and events that impact their teaching so that they can make instructional decisions (Mills, 2000). Action research is a model of professional development in which teachers and teacher educators investigate student learning in relation to their teaching (Rawlinson & Little, 2004). Educators learn about their own teaching methods and monitor the improved student learning. Hardy, Rönnerman, and Edwards-Groves (2018) defined educational action research as a way for teachers to improve their teaching and learning practices in collaboration with one another and a facilitator. Hairon (2017) described that action research can be an appropriate method or tool in improving teacher's competency in crafting appropriate instruction and school curriculum.

The role of educational action research in administrators and teachers has been thoroughly studied and well documented for a long time. Teachers could improve their flexible thinking, open-mindedness to new ideas, problem-solving skills, sense of efficacy, professional standpoint, teaching throughout the educational action research, their teaching practices, and their professional knowledge in research work (Levin & Rock, 2003; Strickland, 1988; Vogrinc & Zuljan, 2009). Furthermore, school administrators and teachers could gain a complete

understanding of their instructional practices and problem situations, analyze their capabilities, evaluate the classroom issues, and contribute to teachers' professional development through educational action research (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005; Yee & Teoh, 2015). According to Burns (2009), teachers not only analyzed, evaluated, and solved problems in their classrooms, but also developed, changed, and reformed the teaching practices at the institutional and national levels. Previous findings from education action research have shown that teachers could improve, enhance their professional development, and reflect on their teaching and learning processes. Moreover, the educational outcomes of students could improve, including academic performance, behavior, and values (Burns, 2011; Dick, 2006; Medina & Taylor, 2013). As a result, educational action research is critical for future teachers who want to improve their evidence-based teaching practices. The research starts by reviewing the literature on educational action research in high school administrators and teachers. A research methodology is presented in the second section. In the following sections, the research results and discussion are introduced. The concluding section of the paper focuses on some of the study's key perspectives and implications.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A framework of action research is reported that action research process involves seven steps: identifying a question, reviewing the literature, planning a research strategy, collecting data, analyzing data, performing based on findings, and sharing the study findings Mettetal (2002). Johnson (2008) stated that teachers should follow these five steps in action research process including (i) refining the area of research, (ii) selecting the data collection method, (iii) collecting and analyzing the data, (iv) determining the findings can be used and applied, (v) sharing the study findings and developing an action plan with others. Sagor (2011) reported that there are four-stage processes with teachers involving: clarifying vision and targets, clearly expressing theory, implementing the action, and collecting data, and reflecting the data and taking informed action. According to Hairon (2017) showed that some essential and specific tasks that teachers need to acquire to conduct action research including establishing the research problem; searching and reading relevant literature about the problem; establishing the purpose of the study; crafting the research question; framing the design of the study (research design or approach, collecting data, analyzing data); organizing the findings; summarizing the conclusion of the study; exploring the implications of the study; writing the report of the study; and sharing the study findings. Among a sample of 60 Philippine teachers reported that data collection, presentation and publication of results were the most difficult skills among those teachers (Tindowen, Guzman, & Macanang, 2019).

With data collected from senior high school teachers in the Philippines, Salcedo-Salcedo-Relucio (2019) found that conducting action research could improve their knowledge and research skills, strategies, social skills, and teaching-learning problems. A sample of Indonesian teachers reported that they could enhance awareness, feel self-improvement, gain new knowledge, and empower professionally after participating in a six-month action research project (Burns & Rochsantiningasih, 2006). Besides, teachers reported that conducting action research at school could improve their knowledge and skills. Teachers reported that they have no knowledge and skills about conducting action research because they have not attended any related seminars and training programs. Abelardo, Lomboy, Lopez, Balaria, and Subia (2019) surveyed 52 teachers in National High School and found that teachers cannot conduct research and report study findings due to a lack of related research training.

In Vietnam, several studies on educational action research in administrators and teachers have been conducted so far such as (Anh, 2017; Hien, 2009; Van, 2020). A study by Anh (2017) on 30 teachers in central Vietnam showed that 74% of teachers felt confident to conduct action research, and 90% of those developed the knowledge after participating in an action research course.

The demands of the educational system have changed rapidly that lead administrators and teachers to invest in school curriculum development and innovation, as well as improving teaching processes and developing suitable curricula. Many factors should be considered by education institutions to meet these demands of a rapidly changing world. One of these factors is conducting action research as a primary function of administrators and teachers in the twenty-first century. The knowledge and skills-related educational action research are a significant challenge for administrators and teachers that have been found in previous studies. However, to the best of our knowledge, there has been little scientific research on educational action research and required educational action research skills in Vietnam, especially regarding high school administrators, teachers, and staff in Ho Chi Minh City. To bridge this gap, our research investigates perceptions of high school administrators, teachers, and staff on their educational action research skills.

## METHODS

### Participants

Participants were recruited from high schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. All participants provided informed consent after receiving an explanation of the purpose of the research. A survey instrument was distributed to 252 respondents, all of which were returned. The sample consisted of 14 administrators and 238 teachers and staff. Table 1 shows that 92.0% of participants were teachers, 5.6% administrators, and 2.4% staff. With 66.2% of

participants did not attend training in educational action research and 33.8% reporting that they attended. With 61.2% of respondents reported that they conducted educational action research and 38.8% of respondents did not.

**Table 1: An overview of survey participants (n = 252)**

School	Training in educational action research		Conducting educational action research		Administrators	Teachers	Staff
	Yes	No	Yes	No			
Trung Vuong High School	77.8%	22.2%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Bui Thi Xuan High School	25.0%	75.0%	34.6%	65.4%	3.8%	84.6%	11.5%
Ernst Thalmann High School	50.0%	50.0%	52.9%	47.1%	5.9%	94.1%	0.0%
Hung Vuong High School	22.2%	77.8%	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Thuc Hanh High School – Ho Chi Minh City University of Education	30.0%	70.0%	80.0%	20.0%	10.0%	90.0%	0.0%
Tran Huu Trang High School	0.0%	100.0%	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Mac Dinh Chi High School	30.4%	69.6%	59.1%	40.9%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Binh Phu High School	6.7%	93.3%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Nguyen Tat Thanh High School	66.7%	33.3%	60.0%	40.0%	6.3%	81.3%	12.5%
Luong Van Can High School	33.3%	66.7%	72.7%	27.3%	4.5%	95.5%	0.0%
Suong Nguyet Anh High School	40.0%	60.0%	10.0%	90.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Nguyen Du High School	66.7%	33.3%	11.1%	88.9%	0.0%	88.9%	11.1%
Nguyen An Ninh High School	20.0%	80.0%	60.0%	40.0%	30.0%	70.0%	0.0%
Tran Van Giau High School	63.6%	36.4%	54.5%	45.5%	27.3%	72.7%	0.0%
Quang Trung High School	10.0%	90.0%	22.2%	77.8%	10.0%	90.0%	0.0%
Long Thoi High School	30.0%	70.0%	60.0%	40.0%	10.0%	90.0%	0.0%
Cu Chi High School	44.4%	55.6%	88.9%	11.1%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Trung Phu High School	0.0%	100.0%	88.9%	11.1%	11.1%	88.9%	0.0%
Binh Khanh High School	11.1%	88.9%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>33.8%</b>	<b>66.2%</b>	<b>61.2%</b>	<b>38.8%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>92.0%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>

### Measurement

The questionnaire was designed to survey high schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The questionnaire has 12-item and those are equal to 12 educational action research skills. In our sample, Cronbach's alpha was 0.94, indicating that the scale is significant and reliable. The questionnaire is based on a 5-point Likert scale, which was used for all items, ranging from one to five (1 = Very Poor; 2 = Poor; 3 = Fair; 4 = Good; 5 = Very good). Guidance for participants was provided at the top of the form. The present study focused on analyzing three-level (fair to excellent level) administrators' and teachers' perceptions of their educational action research skills. Accordingly, two levels (good-very good) were grouped to good and very good. The intermediate level (fair) was still unchanged.

### RESULTS

Perceptions of administrators, teachers and staff on their educational action research skills are shown in Table 2. The mean score of the sample on perceptions of administrators, teachers, and staff on their educational action research skills (M = 3.98, SD = 0.57).

**Table 2: Perceptions of high school administrators, teachers, and staff on their educational action research skills**

Skills	Total Sample				
	3 (Fair)	4-5 (Good-Very good)	M	SD	Order
Identifying and determining the limitations of the current situation in teaching and educating	13.9%	85.2%	4.16	0.68	1
Identifying the causes of the limitations of teaching and educating	13.2%	86.4%	4.16	0.65	1
Identifying a research problem	24.8%	72.7%	3.91	0.74	9
Proposing solutions to overcome the limitations	19.8%	78.9%	4.00	0.69	4

Defining a research problem and research title	21.2%	78.0%	4.10	0.75	3
Choosing a study design	28.6%	70.6%	3.91	0.72	9
Measuring and collecting the data	24.7%	73.3%	3.91	0.73	9
Analyzing the data	19.6%	77.1%	3.93	0.72	8
Reporting research results	18.0%	78.0%	4.00	0.78	4
Applying study findings to teaching practices	18.6%	77.7%	3.99	0.77	6
Sharing and guiding colleagues to apply their study findings to teaching practices	18.8%	77.1%	3.97	0.77	7
Presenting at seminars and conferences	25.0%	66.0%	3.75	0.87	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>20.5%</b>	<b>76.8%</b>	<b>3.98</b>	<b>0.57</b>	

\*Note: %: Percentage; M: Mean; SD: Standard deviation

Table 2 reveals the 12-item regarding to perceptions of administrators, teachers and staff on their educational action research skills, indicators with mean score ranging from the highest to the lowest as below: Identifying and determining the limitations of the current situation in teaching and educating (M = 4.16, SD = 0.68); Identifying the causes of the limitations of teaching and educating (M = 4.16, SD = 0.65); Defining a research problem and research title (M = 4.10, SD = 0.75); Proposing solutions to overcome the limitations (M = 4.00, SD = 0.69); Reporting research results (M = 4.00, SD = 0.78); Applying study findings to teaching practices (M = 3.99, SD = 0.77); Sharing and guiding colleagues to apply their study findings to teaching practices (M = 3.97, SD = 0.77); Analyzing the data (M = 3.93, SD = 0.72); Identifying a research problem (M = 3.91, SD = 0.74); Choosing a study design (M = 3.91, SD = 0.72); Measuring and collecting the data (M = 3.91, SD = 0.73); Presenting at seminars and conferences (M = 3.75, SD = 0.87) with the lowest mean score.

The overall mean score and mean scores of each educational action research skill were both above 3.40, indicating a good level of perceptions of administrators, teachers and staff on their educational action research skills. However, analyzing percentages showed that more than 20% of administrators, teachers and staff choose a fair level. Based on these findings, training courses for administrators, teachers and staff should be designed and developed. Specifically, the four worst educational action research skills must be improved: identifying a research problem; choosing a study design; measuring and collecting the data; and presenting at seminars and conferences.

## DISCUSSION

The objective of this research was to examine perceptions of administrators, teachers and staff on their educational action research skills. According to the findings, many administrators, teachers, and staff rated their educational action research skills at a good level.

The overall mean score and mean scores of each educational action research skill were both above 3.40, indicating perceptions of administrators, teachers and staff on their educational action research skills at a good level. This finding showed that high school administrators, teachers and staff have already been equipped with essential skills in conducting educational action research. Meanwhile, some educational action skills including identifying a research problem; choosing a study design; measuring and collecting the data; and presenting at seminars and conferences with the lowest mean score need to be considered and improved. The findings are directly in line with the previous finding that collecting the data and presentation at seminars must be enhanced and improved in teachers (Tindowen et al., 2019). Schools or educational organizations should develop seminars and conferences related to educational action research that administrators, teachers and staff could present their study findings.

Our results found that a substantial number of participants conducted educational action research but did not receive any training in educational action research. These findings need to draw attention to improve the quality of research and avoid research based on personal experiences in administrators, teachers, and staff. In a prior study, the effectiveness of educational action research training in doing educational action research was discovered that participating in an action research project and the course could help teachers improve their knowledge, research skills; and gain new knowledge (Anh, 2017; Burns & Rochsantiningsih, 2006). Another conclusion was reached by Abelardo et al. (2019) showed that lack of related research training program led to teachers that cannot conduct research and report study findings.

This study has several limitations. The first is the sampling process, the sample was selected randomly in Ho Chi Minh City which limits the generalizability for the other administrators and teachers. Therefore, the greater number of administrators and teachers should be expanded to other areas in Vietnam for potential study in the future.

## CONCLUSION

Educational action research is a process that teachers and teacher educators systematically and carefully examine their educational practices, investigate student learning to their teaching, and improve their teaching and learning practices. This research makes a substantial contribution on the issue, as follows: (i) it shows that some educational action research skills that administrators, teachers and staff need to improve; (ii) it provides implications to Ho

Chi Minh' educational practice on educational action research skills among administrators, teachers and staff. School administrators, teachers and staff must be encouraged and supported to conduct educational action research by developing an educational action research policy for them. Rewards and remunerations must be included in the policy to encourage teachers in doing action research. Some required skills in conducting action research were possessed by high school administrators, teachers, and staff, but others needed to be improved. As a result, it is highly recommended that training programs, workshops on educational action research, and educational policies be developed to strengthen and enhance educational action research skills.

Future research should consider the potential effects of educational action research training programs and conducting educational action research on administrators' and teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching practices. Additionally, further investigation is needed to evaluate the educational action skills that teachers need to enhance.

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