Professional Development Journey Through Action Research: A Case of A Primary School Teacher In An EFL Context

(Eylem Araştırması ile Bir İngilizce Öğretmeninin Mesleki Gelişimi: Durum Çalışması)

Saadet KORUCU KIS [1]

Abstract

Although action research enables teachers to take responsibility of their own professional development, teachers ascribe the role of researcher only to experts outside the classroom. Drawing on qualitative analysis of a teacher of English's reflection journal and interviews as well as quantitative analysis of examinations taken by students, this study examines how action research can affect the teacher in terms of content knowledge, teaching practices, and beliefs and attitudes. The results suggest the popularization of action research among teachers by teacher training and development units showing the positive changes in the teacher's performance leading to improved student learning.

Keywords: Action research, professional development, teacher of English

Özet

Eylem araştırması, öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişimlerinin sorumluluğunu üstlenmelerini sağlayan modellerden biri olmasına rağmen, öğretmenler araştırmacı rolünü yalnızca uzmanlara atfetmektedirler. Bu çalışma, bir İngilizce öğretmeninin günlüklerinin ve kendisi ile yapılmış röportajların niteliksel analizine ve aynı zamanda süreç boyunca öğrencilere yapılmış olan sınavların niceliksel analizine dayalı olarak, eylem araştırmasının bir öğretmenin alan bilgisini, öğretim uygulamalarını, inanç ve tutumlarını nasıl etkileyebileceğini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Sonuçlar, öğretmenin performansında meydana gelen değişikliklerin öğrenmeyi olumlu yönde etkilediğini göstererek, öğretmen eğitimi ve gelişiminden sorumlu kurumlar tarafından eylem araştırmasının kullanımının öğretmenler arasında yaygınlaştırılması gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eylem araştırması, profesyonel gelişim, İngilizce öğretmeni.

---

[1] Necmettin Erbakan University, The School of Foreign Languages, 42090, Meram, Konya, Turkey. saadetkorucu@yahoo.com

Introduction

Language teachers all around the world often desire to be effective and to develop professionally (Guskey, 2002; Burns, 2010). Nevertheless, professional development requires constant questioning of one's practices and this can be attained by carrying out action research. Even so, many teachers do not see research as part of their role as it invokes the concept of hypothesis testing or of being specialists. However, unlike other types of research which raises concerns about the universality of their findings, action research is concerned with the immediate learning and teaching environment. Focusing within the context of the study, action research encourages teachers to collect data about their teaching, to examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and their teaching practices, and to use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about their teaching (Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p.1). In a similar vein, Pinder and Turnbull (2003) stated that professional development initiates changes in teachers' content knowledge, teaching practices and beliefs and attitudes leading to improved student learning. Thus, the present study aims to show how action research as a professional development strategy influences teachers' content knowledge, teaching practices, and beliefs and attitudes. In addition, it can help teachers to see how they can use action research as a practical classroom tool for professional learning and teaching.

Theoretical Background

Professional development is a key tool to help teachers to update their knowledge, skills and practices. With this aim in view, teachers often engage in professional development activities such as in-service courses, workshops, lectures and conferences. However, many conventional forms of professional development are seen as ineffective by a number of researchers in terms of their impact on practice (Kennedy, 1998; Yoon, Park & Hong, 1999; Guskey, 2000; Özer, 2004; Uysal, 2012). Fullan and Miles (1992) suggested that by having pragmatic incentives, what teachers hope to gain through professional development activities are specific, concrete and practical ideas that relate directly to the day-to-day operation of their classrooms (as cited in Guskey, 2002, p.382). Therefore, teachers need more practical tools such as action research that can help with resolving problems or issues that are of concern to them by being actively involved in problems in their own classrooms. (Freeman, 1998; Ferrance, 2000; Mills, 2007; Richards & Farrel, 2005; Burns, 2010). Action research enables teachers to act as researchers, develop personal goals, values and beliefs about practice (Burns, 2000). Nevertheless, teachers do not generally adopt the role of researcher. Teachers assign this role to outside experts with the notion that they themselves can become subjects to a researcher, but they can not produce research work of their own (Stenhouse, 1975 in Burns, 1999; Polemeni, 1976; Hancock, 1997) because the word 'research' often conjures up images of theory building or producing universal findings. However, action research as a model of professional development differs from regular research forms by its contextualized nature. In this respect, "Teacher research is, at one level, a means of countering the hegemony of academic research which teachers are often distanced by" (Rudduck, 1987, p.5).

Action Research

Action research is a professional development model which involves teachers inquiring into their own practice, studying and reflecting on their own practice, and correspondingly changing their own practice. Richards and Farrell (2005) stated that in the combination of action and research, "the word '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', on the other hand, refers to taking practical action to resolve classroom problems" (p. 171).

Like many other types of research, action research consists of a question, data and interpretation (Nunan, 1992, p.3). However, it differs from other types of research in its small scale and localized nature (Burns, 1999, p.30). The primary motivation for action research is the more immediate one of bringing about change and improving teaching and learning processes in the classrooms in which the research takes place (Nunan, n.d.). It enables teachers to seek for knowledge to improve their skills, techniques and strategies in order to change their instruction methods to impact on students.

Through conducting action research, teacher researchers gather information about how they teach, and how well their students learn. It helps teachers to gain insight, develop reflective practice and create positive changes both in their professional learning and in their classrooms (Mills, 2007, p.4). In the process of action research, a teacher becomes an 'explorer' of his or her personal teaching context, while at the same time being one of the participants in it (Burns, 2010, p.2).

Stages of Action Research

Action research involves planning, acting, observing and reflecting more carefully, more systematically, and more rigorously than one usually does in everyday life (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992 p.10). Action research consists of these four stages: planning, action, observation and reflection. Burns and Rochsantiningsih (2006) explained these four steps as follows:

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;

Action– the plan is put into action over an agreed period of time;

Observation– the effects of the action are observed and data are collected;

Reflection– the effects of the action are evaluated and become the basis for further cycles of research. (p.22)

According to Elliott (1991), the process of reflection is representative of the action research process. It lies at the core of action research (Somekh, 1995, p.347). It enables teachers to 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). Through self-inquiry and reflection, "teachers move from a level where they may be largely guided by impulse, intuition, or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking" (Boud, Keogh & Walker 1985, as cited in Richards, 1998, p.144). Reflection brings about changes in the way teachers perceive their teaching and their role in the process of teaching (Richards, 1991) as it makes teachers more aware of their teaching. Being a form of self-reflective inquiry, reflective practices involve teachers as active participants in their own educational process (McNiff, 1997, p.1). It is this reflection process that provides the momentum for increased professional competence (Wallace, 1998, p.12).

In brief, although action research is not necessarily a condition for reflection, reflection is at the heart of action research. Farrell (2004) suggested that "the use of reflective practices 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" (p.1) because reflection as part of action research empowers teachers to improve their knowledge and their teaching practices as well as to reshape their attitudes, beliefs and assumptions.

The Interplay Between Teacher's Content Knowledge, Teaching Practices and Beliefs and Attitudes

Action research requires awareness and reflectivity, thus paving the way for changes in teachers' professional lives. In support of this, many research studies have shown that participating in action research leads to positive changes regarding teachers' content knowledge, teaching practices, and beliefs and attitudes. (Ferrance, 2000; Sax & Fisher, 2001; Benton & Wasko, 2000; Ponte, Ax, Beijaard & Wubbels, 2004; O'Connor, Green &Anderson, 2006; Young, Rapp, Murphy, 2010). As a key feature, change is an initiator for development. It embraces learning something new and using it in practice. If teachers learn something new and practise it in their classrooms and if they receive positive results from changed practice, they get a reason to change their previously held knowledge and beliefs (Goodson, 1992). Similarly, Richards (1998) suggested that "the primary source of teachers' classroom practices is belief systems that teachers build up over time and bring with them to the classroom" (p.66). Standen (2002) and Zembylas (2005) also emphasised that in order to understand teacher practices thoroughly, teacher knowledge is needed as well as teacher beliefs. Mansour (2008) suggested that beliefs and knowledge are so intertwined that each controls the gaining of the other and Pajares (1992) supported this idea by stating the difficulty of distinguishing where knowledge ends and belief begins. Consequently, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and attitudes, knowledge and teaching practices is dialectic. Change in one of them influences the others thus sparking the need for professional development.

Change in content knowledge involves developing a background of theoretical concepts and keeping abreast with new methods and techniques in ELT (Finocchiaro, 1988). According to the US Department of Education (2009), "Change in teaching practices encompasses 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" (as cited in Twamley-Cooper, 2009, p.10). "Change in teacher beliefs and attitudes influences knowledge acquisition and interpretation, task selection, and interpretation of course content" (Pajares, 1992, p.328). Although it has been implied that beliefs are difficult to change (Rokeach, 1968; Pajares, 1992; Woods, 1996), Somekh (1993) claimed that action research is a powerful tool for bringing about change and development in our teaching as it questions and affects our perceptions, beliefs and values about our own teaching.

Now that action research is a professional development strategy and professional development can be described as the process of changing knowledge, teaching practices and beliefs and attitudes (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990; Underhill, 1995; Turnbull & Pinder, 2003; Marcelo, 2005), this study investigates how action research can contribute to the professional development of a language teacher in respect of the following research questions:

- What changes does action research bring about in a teacher's content knowledge?

- What changes does action research bring about in a teacher's teaching practices?

- What changes does action research bring about in a teacher's beliefs and attitudes?

METHODOLOGY

This study comprises two stages. In the first stage, a teacher of English conducted an action research to address her students' low-level retention of vocabulary. In the second stage, the researcher investigated what changes the process of action research produced in the teacher's content knowledge, teaching practices, and beliefs and attitudes. The study was designed as a case study because the smaller scale of a case study makes it more possible for action research on it to be carried out (Wallace, 1998).

Participants

The participants were a teacher of English and thirty 4th grade students at a public primary school in Konya, Turkey. The teacher was a graduate of an English Language and Literature Department. After she had received her pedagogical formation education, she had started to teach at a public high school. Her next appointment was to a primary school. She had been working at her current school for two years and she had been teaching fourth graders since then. Having previously worked with teenagers, the teacher lacked the necessary background information, skills and techniques to teach young learners. She had been struggling with these challenges for two years. When she was asked to take part in this action research project, she was extremely keen to participate in the study because she had a desire to understand and teach young learners better. Throughout the research process, the teacher collaborated with the researcher who acted as a facilitator. The teacher exchanged ideas with the researcher regarding the problem area, the literature review, planning the action research, the design of the lessons and the overall research process. The ages of students were changing from nine to ten. It was their first year of learning English.

Data Collection

The data for the study came from multiple sources. First, the teacher was asked to keep a reflection journal to record any thoughts and experiences she had while implementing action research in her classroom. She also reflected on her action research experience regarding the changes it brought about in her content knowledge, teaching practices, and beliefs and attitudes.

Second, the researcher conducted three interviews with the teacher: a pre-action research process interview, a while-action research process interview, a post-action research process interview. These were semi-structured interviews. The aim of the pre-action research process interview was to investigate the teacher's professional development activities and what she had in mind about action research before implementation of the process. The while-action research process interview was conducted in order to gather data regarding both the status of the teacher's research project and her beliefs and attitudes about the action research process. The post-action research process interview gave the teacher the opportunity to share her thoughts and reflect on the entire process of her action research experience. These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

Third, six quizzes and two exams were taken by the students during the research process. The first three quizzes and the first exam were taken before the implementation of the action research project. The last three quizzes and the second exam were taken during the implementation of the action research study. The quizzes and the exams were conducted to enable a comparison between students' scores before and after the implementation of the action research, thus enabling us to infer whether the action research led to positive changes in the teacher's performance.

The Action Research Process

The research process lasted for eleven weeks. The problem area was determined by the teacher as the low-level vocabulary retention of the students. In order to compare the students' level of vocabulary retention before and after the action research project, sixty target words were determined. They were prepared by the teacher in accordance with the students' course-book and the syllabus. The target words were related to food and drinks, animals, and adjectives of personality and physical appearance. There were twenty words to be acquired under each topic on average. With the aim of creating a balance between word types, the first ten words in each category were taught in the teacher's traditional way - giving the direct equivalent of the target words, repetition drills and blank-filling exercises- and the second ten words in each category were taught by means of edutainment activities involving songs, games and creative drama. These activities were adopted by the teacher as a result of her detailed research into characteristics of young learners and vocabulary teaching strategies for enhancing retention in young learners.

The teaching of the first ten words in each category lasted for 80 to 120 minutes using the traditional method. For the second ten words in each category, the teacher prepared three lesson plans as part of the action research project and put them into action. The teaching duration changed to between 120 and 160 minutes.

Both before and during the implementation of the action research, the students took one quiz a week after the introduction of each ten words. A week after the third quizzes, an examination was conducted to test the students on their retention of the total thirty words. The pupils were not informed about the quizzes and the examination beforehand. The scores in the pre-action research quizzes and exam were compared with those in the while-action research quizzes and exam. The reason for holding examinations a week after the presentation of the lessons was to compare the level of vocabulary retention before and during the action research process.

Data Analysis

After the action research process had ended, the transcriptions of the interviews and the reflection journal of the teacher were analysed using coding method devised by Miles & Huberman (1994). Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive elements of inferential information during a study. Bearing the research questions in mind, first, a single summarizing notation was applied to each research area:

Teacher's Content Knowledge**: TCK**

Teacher's Teaching Practices: **TTP**

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

Then, these codes were written on the related statements in the reflection journal and in the interview transcriptions. This provided a systematic method of retrieving the data. After that, statements that were directly related with the research areas were picked out and placed under the appropriate theme- teacher's content knowledge, teacher's teaching practices or teacher's beliefs and attitudes.

Both before and during the action research, a quiz was prepared for each group of ten words. In order to increase the objectivity, the quizzes involved matching and true/false exercises. Each quiz consisted of twenty questions and each question was 5 points. The exams consisted of twenty questions involving matching, true/false and multiple-choice exercises. Each question was 5 points. The results gathered from the six quizzes and two exams taken by the students were analysed by paired t- test.

Having a highly local nature, action research does not aim to establish relationships between variables or to make generalizations to larger populations which are inherently in opposition to its purpose (Burns, 1999, p.161). Given its nature, although the notion of validity seems problematic in action research at first, this study employed three techniques to increase the validity of the research findings: member check, peer examination and triangulation. The researcher took the transcribed text back to the teacher for her to check and ensure the accuracy of the transcription. The researcher worked with the teacher and a second coder, who had taken her M.A. in English language teaching, to place the data gathered from the journal entries and interviews under the appropriate coded categories. A teacher's success can be measured by his/her students' success. In coming to an understanding of the effects of action research on the teacher, qualitative data (the reflections obtained from the journal and the interviews) were supported by quantitative data (the quiz and exam results).

FINDINGS

This section summarizes the teacher's overall reflections about action research. In addition, the quiz and exam results are explained in detail. Below are sentences quoted from the teacher's reflection journal and interview responses regarding content knowledge, teaching practices, and beliefs and attitudes that show the effects of action research on her performance.

The changes action research brought about in the teacher's content knowledge

When the quoted data below are examined in terms of the teacher's content knowledge, it can be clearly seen that action research brought changes and improvement into the content knowledge of the teacher. Through reviewing the literature on young learners and techniques for enhancing vocabulary retention, the teacher developed deeper background knowledge about the learning characteristics of young learners and effective ways of teaching vocabulary. In addition, she learnt more about action research, how to conduct an action research project and the use of the t-test method in order to compare the test results of students.

- *"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 practise 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."*

- *"The 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-."*

- *We generally focus on meaning while teaching vocabulary and ignore spelling and pronounciation. My second project will be about improving student's spelling while learning vocabulary.*

- *"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: planning, acting, observing and reflecting and what to do in each stage."*

- *"I am really curious about the results of the 'acting' stage."*

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

- *"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 a t-test."*

- *"Yes, it [t-test] can be a great tool to use to see my students improvement."*

- *"Learning new things makes me really happy."*

The changes action research brought about in the teacher's teaching practices

The teacher's reflections about the action research process also point out the changes and improvement she experienced with respect to her teaching practices. After the literature review about the problem area, the teacher used edutainment activities (songs, game and creative drama) to increase her students' vocabulary retention. She added a production element to her lesson plans from which her students got great joy and received positive reinforcement. In addition, organizing student groups and the classroom in different ways and her elaborate use of pictures and flashcards contributed to improvement in her teaching practices. Reflection time was also given for her pupils to receive feedback and for her to plan the next course in accordance with their needs. Furthermore, the systematic form of action research enabled the teacher to become more structured and to evaluate herself in a self-reflective manner. She exercised discipline over her everyday learning and teaching by keeping a journal, preparing more elaborate lesson plans, acting in accordance with due times and notting down her impressions about the process.

- *"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"*

- *"I had thought that the way we were taught can work on my students, which resulted in dull and boring lessons. 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 do but others did not. However, each individual of my classroom is ready to do what they are required to do now. Even though some do not understand what to do at first, they eventually manage it by observing other pupils."*

- *"Meaning is not the only side of teaching vocabulary. Through edutainment activities, more importance is attached to pronunciation and spelling."*

- *"As I regarded games or songs as time-consuming, I hardly ever employed them in my classes. But I can see that lessons should be based on fun."*

- *"I was pleased to see that their performance was quite high while revising the vocabulary items through the song. I will try to find a song for each unit. If I can't, I will make up one."*

- *"I was pleased to see that they were very willing to perform body movements while singing the song."*

- *"I act as a motivator, organizer even as a singer or an actress rather than just an instructing teacher."*

- *"Thanks to action researh, I have one more role. I am a teacher researcher now."*

- *"I am able to keep their focus for a long time by engaging activities."*

- *"We all enjoyed ourselves while playing the chair games."*

- *"Arranging chairs in different ways changes the atmosphere of the classroom."*

- *"I realize that cooperation between students enhance their motivation."*

- *"They have a new vocabulary notebook now. They are finding related pictures and writing the words under them. I also want to reduce the use of the mother tongue in this way."*

- *"The students were looking forward to the 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."*

- *"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 that it [action research] helps me to differentiate and individualize my instruction. "*

- *"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 now."*

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

- *"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."*

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

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

- *"Examining the quiz and test results, I compared my former and new strategies for teaching vocabulary and increasing retention. It is for sure that this process has contributed to my instructional practices a great deal."*

- *"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."*

The changes action research brought about in the teacher's beliefs and attitudes

Considering the quoted data below, the teacher's expressions such as "*I can see that", "I have realized that", "I am learning", "I wasn't aware", "I used to think", "I used to believe"* suggest changes in her beliefs and attitudes. Although she had negative feelings about some of the techniques she used during the process beforehand, she started to regard them as effective ways of teaching. For instance, while she used to regard games as time-consuming activities beforehand, during the research process, she stated that she would use games in her teaching practices as they were engaging and even time-saving activities if planned carefully. She was also hesitant to use songs and drama activities. She had thought that she would not be able to 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. Moreover, the reflection stage of action research enabled the teacher to become more aware of what was going around the classroom and the way she performed during the classes. It facilitated meaningful thought in the teacher. As Qing (2006) pointed out "reflection 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" (p.36).

- *"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 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."*

- *"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."*

- *"I am learning not to be a biased person. My views about edutainment activities have changed. At first, I had an assumption that I wouldn't be able to put these activities into practice and that the process wouldn't be that effective because going down from the adults' world to the 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 reactions from my pupils, all my beliefs disintegrated. I am feeling more energetic now."*

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

- *"I can see that I am completely mistaken. If lessons are 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 it a try."*

- *"Having them 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 it, and I saw that this was the long-awaited atmosphere in my classroom. The more I behaved like them, the more fun we had together."*

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

- *"I am learning not to make prejudgments. 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 in itself... But it helps me to work professionally together with my colleague."*

- *"Colloboration with you made me aware that I had that question and it need to be handled."*

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

- *"I am glad to see how willing my students are to take part in activities. Seeing them all active in the lessons makes me feel proud."*

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

- *"I realize that cooperation between students enhance their motivation."*

- *"I am more than a simple teacher now."*

- *"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 I didn't want not to be able to keep up with the curriculum. But, I can see now that if you have 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 get out of the circle of traditional methods and materials."*

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

- *"Reflection supported changes in my beliefs, attitudes, teaching practices and knowledge in different ways: planning, focusing and assesing."*

- *"Reflecting made me aware of myself as a teacher."*

- *"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."*

- *"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 my part as it required from me to act in a more elaborate way and this sometimes caused me to feel I might fall behind the curriculum."*

- *"However I deeply believe that it contributed to my professional development a lot. I can easily see the change in my teaching."*

- *"The quiz and exam results showed that I am on the right track to improved student learning."*

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

A significant difference can be seen when the results of the quizzes and exams carried out before and during the action research process are examined in Table 1. As it can be seen, the significance value for all the quizzes and exams is .00 which means that there is a significant difference between pre-action research and while-action research process as the significance value is less than .05. This indicates that edutainment activities enhanced the students' retention of vocabulary indicating the teacher's improved practices.

Table 1.

Comparison of Students' Quiz and Exam Results Before and During the Action Research Process

	Quiz 1	**Quiz 2**	**Quiz 3**	**Examination**	
	Mean Score	*Mean Score*	*Mean Score*	*Mean Score*	*Significance*
Pre- Action Research	54.67	59.00	48.17	49.67	
					.00
While-Action Research	65.00	73.67	68.63	67.83	

Discussion and Conclusion

The results suggest that action research can be an effective tool for bringing about improvements in a teacher's content knowledge, teaching practices and beliefs and attitudes. The teacher's statements show that she had useful experiences while conducting action research. This study is contributory to the literature of teacher research, which is essentially a new game not necessarily bound by the constraints of traditional research paradigms (Bissex & Bullock, in Lytle & Cochran Smith, 1989)

The teacher's research into her students' low-level retention of vocabulary enabled her to gain profound knowledge about the general characteristics of young language learners, vocabulary teaching techniques, edutainment activities, the action research process and t-test analysis. Having acquired such knowledge, the teacher changed her teaching practices. She started to use edutainment activities, changed her classroom management strategies and added a production element and reflection time for the students after each class. Gaining new knowledge and receiving positive feedback changed her negative beliefs about different techniques and she understood that teaching young learners was rather different from teaching teenagers. This dialectical relationship is in line with previous studies indicating uncertainty about whether knowledge directs beliefs or beliefs lead to knowledge (Zembylas, 2005; Mansour, 2008) thus leading to changing teaching practices (Pajares, 1992; Standen, 2002; Snider & Roehl, 2007; Bingimlas & Hanrahan, 2010). Moreover, this interplay is an important part of teacher development as it influences the acceptance and uptake of new approaches, techniques and activities (Donaghue 2003). Consistent with recent research advocating that action research leads to positive changes regarding teachers' content knowledge, teaching practices and beliefs and attitudes (Ferrance, 2000; Sax & Fisher, 2001; Benton & Wasko, 2000; Ponte, Ax, Beijaard & Wubbels, 2004;

O'Connor, Green &Anderson, 2006; Young, Rapp, Murphy, 2010; Chou, 2010), our findings discussed above indicate that action research leads to professional development by making teachers think about what they do, how they do it and why they do it.

Although action research produces results which are not generalisable and lacks scientific rigour in that its objective is situational (Cohen & Manion, 1990), generalisability and reliability should not be issues of concern in action research. Because action research produces results which focus on immediate practical concerns within a specific context, its reliability and validity should be measured in terms of its usefulness in providing solutions to classroom problems. By conducting action research, teachers become the investigator of their own classrooms rather than being the tool of an outside researcher. Stenhouse (in Burns, 1999) states that it is not enough that teachers' work should be studied, they need to study it themselves.

In summary, the findings of this study show that action research can be an effective tool that enables teachers to develop professionally. It prompts teachers to reshape their knowledge, examine their teaching practices and question their previously held beliefs and attitudes. According to Borg (1965, as cited in Ferrance, 2000, p.8), 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. Therefore, simply informing teachers about research is unlikely to bring about change (Mills, 2007, p.13). By starting with a training requirement, teacher training and development units can provide teachers with opportunities to learn about and to conduct action research.

REFERENCES

Benton, J., & Wasko, J. (2000). *Anything worthwhile takes time: Eight schools discuss impacts and impressions of doing action research.* Retrieved October 10, 2010 from *h*ttp://www.oise.utoronto.ca/~ctd/networks/journal/Vol%203(1).2000april/Article3.html.

Bingimlas, K. & Hanrahan, M. (2010). The relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practice: How the literature can inform science education reformers and researchers. In M. F. Taşar & G. Çakmakcı (Eds.). *Contemporary Science Education Research: International Perspectives* (pp.415-422). Ankara: Pegem Akademi.

Burns, A. (1999). *Collaborative action research for English language teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burns, A. (2000). *Action Research and Applied Research: What are the relationships*. Retrieved December 23, 2010, from http://language.hyper.chubu.actionresearch.jp/jalt/pub/tlt/00/jul/burns.html

Burns, A. (2010). *Doing action research for English language teachers. A guide for practitioners.* New York: Routledge.

Burns, A., & Rochsantiningsih, D. (2006). Conducting Action Research in Indonesia: Illustrations and Implications. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching*, *2(1),* 21-35.

Cohen, L. & Manion, L. (1990). *Research Methods in Education* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Chou, C. (2010). Investigating the effects of incorporating collaborative action research into an in-service teacher training program. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 2(2), 2728–2734. Retrieved from http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042810004441

Donaghue, H. (2003). An instrument to elicit teachers' beliefs and assumptions. *ELT Journal*, *57(4),* 344-351.

Elliott, J. (1991). *Action research for educational change.* Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Farrell, T. S. C. (2004). *Reflective practice in action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Ferrance, E. (2000). *Themes in Education: Action Research. Retrieved September 23, 2009 from* www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/themes_ed/act_research.pdf. Accessed on 2009/09/23

Finocchiaro, M. (1988). A Teacher Development: "Continuing Process*". English Teaching Forum , 26 (3)*, 2-5.

Freeman, D. (1998). *Doing Teacher Research: From Inquiry to Understanding*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle

Goodson, I. F. (1992). *Studying teachers' lives*. London: Routledge.

Guskey, Thomas. R. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Guskey, T. R (2002). Does It Make a Difference? Evaluating Professional Development. *Educational Leadership*, *59(6),* 45-51.

Hancock, R. (1997). Why are class teachers reluctant to become researchers? *British Journal of In-service Education*, *23(1),* 85–99.

Pinder, H. & Turnbull, M. (2003, September) Teacher professional development: a portfolio approach. Paper presented at the *British Educational Research Association Annual Conference*, Heriot Watt Universtiy, Edinburgh.

Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (1992). *The action research planner (3rd ed.).* Victoria:

Deakin University Press.

Kennedy, M. (1998). *Form and substance in inservice teacher education* (Research Monograph No. 13). Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison, National Institute of Science Education. Retrieved November 18, 2011, from http://tinyurl.com/6qujdf

Lytle, S., & Cochran-Smith, Marilyn. (April 1989). Teacher researcher: Toward classifying the concept. Retrieved December 20, 2012 from

http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/download/nwp_file/11019/Teacher_Research.pdf?x-r=pcfile_d

Mansour, N. (2008). Science teachers' beliefs and practices: Issues, implications and research agenda. *International Journal of Environmental & Science Education, 4(1),* 25-48.Retrieved from http://www.ijese.com/IJESE_v4n1_Mansour.pdf

Marcelo, C. (2009). Professional Development of Teachers: past and future. *Sísifo. Educational Sciences Journal,* 8, 5-20 Retrieved from http://sisifo.fpce.ul.pt/pdfs/S8_ENG_CarlosMarcelo%20(1).pdf

McNiff, J. (1997). *Action research: Principles and practice*. Chatham, Kent: MacKays of Chatham.

Miles, M. B. & Huberman, M. A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis (*2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mills, G. (2007). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher (3rd ed.).* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Nunan, D. (n.d.) Empowering Teachers Through Classroom Research. Retrieved January 3, 2013 from http://www.culi.chula.ac.th/e-Journal/bod/David%20Nunan.pdf

Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge University Press.

Nunan, D. (2006). Action Research and Professional Growth. Paper presented at the The 1st JALT Joint Tokyo Conference: Action Research – Influencing Classroom Practice. Tokyo, Japan. Retrieved From: http://moodle.stoa.usp.br/file.php/1292/NUNAN_actionResearchAndProfessionalGrowth_ShantouNov06.pdf

O'Connor, K. A., Greene, H. C. & Anderson, P. J. (2006, April). *Action Research: A Tool for Improving Teacher Quality and Classroom Practice*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), San Francisco.

Özer, B. (2004). In-service training of teachers in Turkey at the beginning of the 2000s. *Journal of In-service Education*, *30*, 89-100.

Pajares, F. (1992). Teachers Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning Up a Messy Construct. *Review of Educational Research*, *62(3)*, 307-33.

Polemeni, A. J. (1976). Research and teacher power. *Educational Leadership*, *33(7)*, 493-497.

Ponte, P., Ax, J., Beijaard, D., & Wubbels, T. (2004). Teachers' development of professional knowledge through action research and the facilitation of this by teachers educators. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. *20(6),*571-588.

Qing, X. (2009) Reflective Teaching- An Effective Path for EFL Teacher's Professional Development. *Canadian Social Science*, *5(2).* 35-40

Richards, J. (1991). Towards reflective teaching. *The teacher Trainer: A Practical Journal for those who Train, Mentor, and Educate TESOL teachers, 5 (3),* 4-8. Retrieved from

http://www.tttjournal.co.uk/uploads/File/back_articles/Towards_Reflective_Teaching.pdf.

Richards, J. C. & Lockhart, C. (1994). *Reflective teaching in Second Language Classrooms.* New York: Cambridge University Press

Richards, J. C. (1998). *Beyond training: Perspectives on language teacher education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J. C., & Farrell, T. S. C. (2005). *Professional development for language teachers: strategies for teacher learning.* New york: Cambridge University Press.

Rokeach, Milton. (1968). *Beliefs, attitudes, and values: A theory of organization and change.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Rudduck, J. (1987) Teacher Research, Action Research, Teacher Inquiry: What's in a Name. In J. Rudduck., D. Hopkins, J. Sanger, & P. Lincoln,   *Collaborative Inquiry and Information Skills.* British Library Research Paper 16, Boston Spa, British Library.

Sax, C. & Fisher, D. (2001). Using qualitative action research to effect change: Implications for professional education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *28 (2),* 71-80.

Snider, V. E. & Roehl, R. (2007). Teachers' beliefs about pedagogy and related issues. *Psychology in the Schools*, *44(8),* 873-885

Somekh, B. (1993). Quality in education research - the contribution of classroom teachers. In Edge, J. & Richards, K. (Eds.), *Teachers Develop Teachers Research: Papers on Classroom Research and Teacher Development (pp.26-38).* Oxford: Heinemann.

Somekh, B. (1995). The Contribution of Action Research to Development in Social Endeavours: a position paper on action research methodology. *British Educational Research Journal,* 21(3), 339-355.

Sparks, D. & LoucksHorsley, S. (1990). Models of Staff Development. In R. W. Houston, M. Haberman, J. P. Sikula & Association of Teacher Educators (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education.* (pp. 234-251). New York: McMillan Pub.

Standen, R. P. (2002). *The interplay between teachers' beliefs and practices in a multi-age primary school.* (Doctoral dissertation, Griffith University, Australia. Retrieved from http://www4.gu.edu.au:8080/adt-root/uploads/approved/adt-QGU20030730.102127/public/02Whole.pdf

Twamley-Cooper, S. M. (2009). *Action Research and Its Effects on Teacher Efficacy: A Mixed Methods Case Study* (Doctoral dissertation, Baylor University, Texas.

Underhill, A. (1995). *Self and Peer Assessment.* London: Heinemann.

Uysal, H. H. (2012). Evaluation of an In-service Training Program for Primary-school Language Teachers in Turkey, *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 37(7)*, 14-29.

Wallace, M. (1998). *Action research for language teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, S., Shulman M., Lee. S. & Richert, A. E. (1987). "150 different ways" of knowing: Representations of knowledge in teaching. In James Calderhead (Ed.), *Exploring teachers' thinking.* (pp. 104–124) London: Cassell.

Woods, D. 1996. *Teacher Cognition in Language Learning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yoon, K., Park, Y., & Hong, S. Y. (April, 1999). Elementary teachers' perceptions of action research in Korea. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, Toronto, Canada.

Young, M. R., Rapp, E., & Murphy, J. W. (2010). Action research: Enhancing classroom practice and fulfilling educational responsibilities. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies*, *3(1),* 1-10.

Zembylas, M. (2005). Beyond teacher cognition and teacher beliefs: The value of the ethnography of emotions in teaching. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *18(4),* 465-487.