ASSESSING THE POSSESSION OF ACTION RESEARCH SKILLS BY ADMINISTRATORS AND SUPERVISORS IN OMANI SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the administrators and supervisors' skills in action research in Omani schools from their point of view and identify statistically significant in the participants' responses attributed to some variables. Sample of the study was consisted of (461) principals, assistant principals, supervisors and other administrators' in (5) governorate in Oman. The researchers developed a questionnaire consisted of (51) items that were divided into (6) domains. Validity and reliability of the questionnaire were computed. The results show that the means of all domains were 3.37 to 3.85 while five of them were in high level except the fifth domain which is in medium level. There were no statistically significant differences in the responses of research participants that were attributed to gender, whereas there were statistically significant differences that were attributed to governorate and experience. The researchers recommended that it is necessary to develop the administrators and supervisors' skills in data collection, analyzing results and discussion.

Keywords: Assessing, action research, skills, administrators, supervisors, Omani schools

INTRODUCTİON

Action Research is an area of inquiry that began in the United States and has a long and varied history (McKernan, 1996). Kurt Lewin used the term "action research" in the 1940s to describe the application of methods of social science research to improve practice in schools by solving practical problems and contributing to education theory and knowledge (Dixon-Kraus, 2003). Lewin described action research as a form of experimental method that cycled through "analysis, fact-finding, conceptualization, planning, implementation and evaluation of action" (McKernan, 1996, p. 9). As a research area, action research has strong origins in the scientific method and positivist tradition (McKernan, 1996) in that it is focused on and supervised by established research methods and involves different phases of data processing and analysis (Tripp, 2003).

Action research can be theorized as a reaction to both extremes that influenced the direction of educational practice at the same time or later. Some researchers saw action research as offering starting points to overcome suspected or actual deficiencies in traditional hermeneutical education. Others presented it as an attack on two fronts: on impractical hermeneutics caught up in old-fashioned ideologies, and on a new wave of social technologists propagating seemingly more modern concepts, which, after closer examination, turned out to repeat the ideologies of dependence and oppression in a slicker outfit (Altrichter and Gstettner, 1993).

According to Tripp (2003), action research is one form of action inquiry, which is a general term for the intended use of some kind of plan, act, describe, and review process for the

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inquiry of action throughout the field of practice. Reflective work, analytical practice, action learning, action research and researched action are all kinds of action inquiries.

Action research can even be described as an overview term that refers to the "family of approaches and practices" (Bradbury & Reason, 2003; Boog, 2003). There are various forms of action research, not all of which reinforce or value scientific rigor in the conventional positivist context (Brydon-Miller, 2001; Masters, 2000). Although Lewin's theory has developed four basic principles or concepts that direct or define all action research, researchers vary about how these principles are applied. The four basic guiding principles for action research are that action research empowers participants, involves collaboration through participation, results in knowledge acquisition and aims at social change (Masters, 2000).

Action research, as historically defined, is distinctive in that it concentrates on the issue of practice; is undertaken by practitioners in their own organizational settings; and seeks to develop, execute and analyze an action plan to resolve the problem. While there are forms of action research that are restricted to evaluating and strengthening individual activities, at the organizational level, action research is generally a collective endeavor, including as part of the research team, individuals with a direct interest and dedication to solving the topic under investigation.

Action Research presented a methodological framework for reflective study and teacher-led research (Dixon-Kraus, 2003). In fact, the great majority of action research studies have been conducted by individual or group teachers in the classroom (Best & Kahn, 1998; Dixon-Kraus, 2003; Miller, 2000; Riehl et al., 2000). Since the late 1990s, school administrators have also been implementing action research projects, primarily in the form of doctoral dissertations or academic presentations (Anderson & Jones, 2000; Riehl et al., 2000).

Action Research rehabilitates practice and reinforces the possibility that active involvement with everyday work life, rather than prior contemplation, may result in sound theoretical conclusions (Papastephanou, 2006). Action research is a research strategy that, according to some, is eminently suited to the preparation of educational leaders and the development of effective leadership skills (Anderson, 2002; Andrews & Grogan, 2005; Furman, 2011; Grogan, Donaldson, & Simmons, 2007; Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Furman (2011, 2012) presents a rather stronger argument for action research in the context of educational leadership, describing how the concepts and processes inherent in action research (focus on practical issues, equity, partnership, data-based decision-making, and reflective analysis) are closely associated with the concepts of effective leadership and, more precisely, leadership for social justice. Participating in action research therefore not only encourages educational change, but also leads to the creation of essential leadership skills and encourages social justice.

There are several phases or stages within the context of the action research that, although defined differently in the literature, allow researchers to gain a better understanding of a problem and use that knowledge and new awareness to construct a viable plan of action. The research process continues with a concentrated emphasis on the issue, as team members execute the planned change and regularly analyze their activities and the results of their activities. These crucial results form the basis for refining the action agenda and improving it (Argyris, 1993; Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Stringer, 2007).

Action research presumes that through shared experience and critical thinking, people may formulate hypotheses and assumptions, and build awareness. These can be tested under new conditions and updated in the light of potential experience and practice (Weber, 2011).

Action research is Critical (and self-critical) collaborative enquiry by, Reflective professionals being, Accountable and making public the findings of their enquiry, self-evaluating their activity and participating in, Participative problem-solving and continuing professional progress (Zuber-Skerritt, 2000).

However, action research – one of the key factors – is not just about examining yourself or even your own practices, but also about empowering those with whom you share the experiences that are being thoroughly investigated. For example, in dance education, this means giving importance to the students' experiences in the classroom and not only looking at the teacher's perspectives on the pedagogy or instructional practices. One of the main reasons for intervention research is empowerment of the community members in which the research is being conducted (Giguere, 2014).

Glassman and Erdem (2014) go as far to conclude that participatory action research is a way to motivate those oppressed within their own social history. Action research is an evolving investigative methodology that combines theory and practice to incorporate scientific knowledge with current organizational knowledge, and action research methods offers a comprehensive description of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and procedures for performing action research in a variety of educational settings. Sagor (2000) identified seven steps that for the inquiring teacher become an endless cycle, namely: selecting a focus, clarifying theories, identifying research questions, collecting data, analyzing data, reporting results, and taking informed actions.

Attitudes towards action research within academia can also be complicated by a lack of conceptual clarification about action research as an educational study tool. Since there is common consensus that action research is problem-oriented, there are varying meanings of what this means. Some authors, drawing on Kurt Lewin 's foundational work, describe action research as problem-solving interventions, based on research, systematically developed, implemented, and evaluated. Some offer a wider view that underlines inquiry to educate practice and provide guidance for progress that may or may not require a conscious attempt to improve (Osterman, Furman, & Sernak, 2013).

In Oman vision 2040, the development of the educational system at all levels and improving its outcomes have become a top priority. The major role of educational institutions is to build Omanis' confidence in their identity and commitment to their social values. This is attainable through increasing the quality of basic and higher education and developing scientific and educational curricula. According to Oman vision 2040, educational system improvement entails the development of educational institutions, faculty and staff; the use of modern teaching and learning techniques; and the dissemination thereof as national culture. In addition to that, it entails maximizing national capabilities through a national system established to nurture talent, creativity and entrepreneurial potential (Oman vision Document, 2019).

PROBLEM OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Action research is a continuous process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Creswell, 2009). A survey of the related literature in Oman indicated paucity of research that addressed the administrators and supervisors' skills in action research in Omani schools from their point of view, and to determine statistically significant in the participants' responses attributed to some variables.

Question One: How do the administrators and supervisors' in Omani schools perceive their skills in action research?

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Question Two: Does the perception of skills in action research differ based on the administrators and supervisors at Omani schools' gender, governorate, and experience.

METHODOLOGY

This study was a quantitative descriptive method conducting through utilizing how do the administrators and supervisors' in Omani schools perceive their skills in action.

The target population for the study included all administrators and supervisors from different governorate of Oman. The sample consisted of 461 administrators and supervisors from different governorate of Oman as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Study sample distribution

Variable		*Frequency*	*Percent*
Gender	male	261	56.6
	female	200	43.4
	Total	461	100.0
Gov	Muscat	94	20.4
	Dakhilia	101	21.9
	Batina Janoob	117	25.4
	Batina Shamal	96	20.8
	Sharqia Shamal	53	11.5
	Total	461	100.0
Experience	new experience	107	23.2
	medium experience	209	45.3
	long experience	145	31.5
	Total	461	100.0

For the instrumentation of this study, after review of the literature, the researchers developed a questionnaire as a data collection tool. The questionnaire consisted of fifty-one items that were divided into (6) domains. The response options for the respondents were the Likert scale of 5 options type. Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UN), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree SD).

To examine the validity of the instrument (face validity evidence) was presented to post-secondary education experts. They were asked to check whether the statements in the instrument are clear and linked appropriately with the areas that were classified to them in advance. Regarding the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach Alpha was used; a pilot study had been conducted. Fifteen administrators and supervisors participated in the pilot study. Reliability coefficients for the instrument in each case were 0.760, 0.891, 0.885, 0.906, 0.886, and 0.917, for the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth domains, respectively as shown in Table 2. The table 2 shows the values of Alpha Cronbach for the six domains and the questionnaire as a whole and they are obviously very high. That means the questionnaire is consistent.

Table 2. Reliability coefficients (Alpha Cronbach) for the six domains instrument

No	*Domains*	*Alpha Cronbach's*
1	Action research Knowledge	.760
2	Focusing the research problem	.891
3	Research questions and hypothesis formulism	.885
4	Designing research planning and it's procedure	.906
5	Defining data collection tools	.886
6	Organizing, analyzing and explanation the data	.917
Total		.874

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data collected from the surveys. Descriptive statistics providing means and standard deviations were calculated for the first question. t-test was employed to answer the second question. In order to understand the results of this study, it was important to set specific cut points to interpret the participants total scores related to their perception of their perception of skills in their action research. Regarding the cut points, it should be noted that the researcher used the response scale of each item that ranged from 1 to 5 to determine these cut points according to the following manner: 1-2.33 = low, from 2.34 to 3.67 = moderate, and 3.68-5.00 = high levels.

RESULTS AND DİSCUSSİON

Question One: How do the administrators and supervisors' in Omani schools perceive their skills in action research?

In order to answer the first question, the means and standard deviations were calculated. As table 3 shows, the Action Research Knowledge dimension scored the highest with the mean of (3.85) along with the Designing research plan and its procedures dimension which scored (3.6), whereas the dimension Identifying data collecting tools scored the lowest with the mean of (3.37).

Table 3. Means and standard deviation for the all dimensions as perceived by administrators and supervisors

No	*Domains*	*N*	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*
1	Action research Knowledge	461	3.85	.79
2	Designing research plan and its procedures	461	3.62	.78
3	Identifying the research problem	461	3.55	.84
4	Organizing, analyzing and explaining data	461	3.54	.86
5	Making Questions and hypothesis	461	3.53	.747
6	Identifying data collecting tools	461	3.37	.86
7	Total	461	3.79	.78

Question Two: Does the perception of skills in action research differ based on the administrators and supervisors at Omani schools' gender, governorate, and experience.

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Gender

t-test was conducted to determine whether there are significant mean differences in the perception of skills in action research differ based on the administrators and supervisors' gender at Omani schools. Table 4 presents t-test results, shows that there were no statistically significant differences in the responses of research participants about gender. This means that males and females both have similar knowledge about action research and how to implement it.

Table 4. t-test, Means and standard deviation for perceived the skills of action research by administrators and supervisors based on their gender

Domains	*Gender*	*N*	*SD*	*Mean*	*t*	*df*	*Sig.*
1	male	261	.82	3.84	.43	459	.67
	female	200	.75	3.87			
2	male	261	.85	3.53	.44	459	.66
	female	200	.83	3.57			
3	male	261	.81	3.52	.38	459	.71
	female	200	.66	3.55			
4	male	261	.86	3.62	.15	459	.89
	female	200	.67	3.63			
5	male	261	.88	3.35	.50	459	.62
	female	200	.83	3.39			
6	male	261	.89	3.56	.57	459	.59
	female	200	.81	3.52			
Total	male	261	.85	3.76	.87	459	.38
	female	200	.68	3.82			

Governorate

Five-Way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there are significant mean differences in the perception of skills in action research differ based on the administrators and supervisors' governorate at Omani schools. Table 5 shows that there are significant differences in the responses of research participants about governorate between Batina Janoob and other governorates for other governorates, which means that participants from Batina Janoob have less knowledge of action research compared to other governorates in the Sultanate.

Table 5. One-Way ANOVA tests the administrators and supervisors perceived the skills of action research by administrators and supervisors based on their governorate

Domains		*Sum of Squares*	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
1	Between Groups	13.159	4	3.29	5.44	.000
	Within Groups	275.603	456	.60		
	Total	288.762	460			
2	Between Groups	7.009	4	1.75	2.51	.042
	Within Groups	318.941	456	.67		
	Total	325.950	460			

	Between Groups	7.374	4	1.84	3.37	.010
3	Within Groups	249.138	456	.55		
	Total	256.512	460			
	Between Groups	4.203	4	1.05	1.74	.140
4	Within Groups	275.494	456	.60		
	Total	279.697	460			
	Between Groups	1.436	4	.36	.48	.748
5	Within Groups	339.013	456	.74		
	Total	340.449	460			
	Between Groups	4.556	4	1.14	1.55	.187
6	Within Groups	335.283	456	.74		
	Total	339.838	460			
	Between Groups	10.266	4	2.57	4.34	.002
Total	Within Groups	269.437	456	.597		
	Total	279.704	460			

Experience:

One-Way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there are significant mean differences in the perception of skills in action research differ based on the administrators and supervisors experience at Omani schools. Table 6 shows that there are significant differences in the responses of research participants with regard to experience between long experience and new experience for new experience, which means that participants with new experience have more knowledge of action research compared to other participants with long experience.

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA tests the administrators and supervisors perceived the skills of action research by administrators and supervisors based on their experience

Domains		*Sum of Squares*	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
	Between Groups	1.827	2	.913	1.46	.23
1	Within Groups	286.936	458	.626		
	Total	288.762	460			
	Between Groups	1.088	2	.544	.77	.46
2	Within Groups	324.862	458	.709		
	Total	325.950	460			
	Between Groups	3.441	2	1.720	3.11	.05
3	Within Groups	253.071	458	.553		
	Total	256.512	460			
	Between Groups	1.627	2	.813	1.34	.263
4	Within Groups	278.071	458	.607		
	Total	279.697	460			
	Between Groups	.986	2	.493	.66	.515
5	Within Groups	339.463	458	.741		
	Total	340.449	460			
	Between Groups	2.185	2	1.092	1.48	.228
6	Within Groups	337.654	458	.737		
	Total	339.838	460			
	Between Groups	2.014	2	1.007	1.66	.191
Total	Within Groups	277.690	458	.606		
	Total	279.704	460			

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DİSCUSSİON AND RECOMMENDATİONS

This study sought to examine the administrators and supervisors' skills in action research in Omani schools from their point of view and identify statistically significant in the participants' responses attributed to some variables. The results of the survey indicated that all the action research skills of the study sample fall in the medium range, as the highest was the action research knowledge dimension (M=3.85) whereas the dimension Identifying data collecting tools scored the lowest with the mean of (3.37). These results indicate that there is a need to develop the skills of action research through training programs and professional development in most of the required skills

This result is consistent with the results of some previous studies and reports which showed that the knowledge domains of action research obtaining a high response may be due to the research sample receiving some training courses in identifying the objectives of the action research, its steps, methodology, and the spatial boundaries in which it is conducted.

The research plan design domain and its procedures ranked second due to employing the study sample their experiences in planning their work in schools and workplaces when they developed the action research plan. As the study sample is from school principals, their assistants, and educational supervisors, and all these groups practice planning in their daily and monthly work, and even they make annual plans.

The focus of defining the study problem came in the third place due to some practices by the study sample in writing research papers as a form of on-the-job training or as a requirement to request promotions or to apply for other jobs or may be to address some of the problems they face in the field. Also, having studied the educational research course at the university, they developed the skill of writing the research problem.

The reason for obtaining a transformer in the focus of data collection, organization, analysis and interpretation in a late rank is due to the difficulty of mastering this skill due to its need for much training and practice, which the study sample individuals did not obtain sufficiently.

In the last place came the focus of identifying data collection tools, and this is due to the weakness of training to practice these skills in training programs, or the reason may be the difficulty in acquiring these skills easily, or the reason may be the lack of training on them in the first place and reliance on ready-made tools when doing with research.

With regard to the differences in the responses of research participants that were attributed to demographic variables, study results indicate there were no statistically significant differences in the responses of research participants that were attributed to gender, whereas there were statistically significant differences that were attributed to governorate and experience. The reason that males and females receive equal training and experience, and there is no differentiation between them in that. The training centers in the governorates provide training programs for everyone without discrimination, and the supervisory experiences they receive are close in terms of conducting research. The reason is that Al Batinah South received a weak response because of the lack of training needed to conduct research, or the lack of practice of the study sample for procedural research. The reason for the sample with short experience obtaining the highest response may be due to the fact that they have studied courses in scientific research due to the introduction of these courses by universities and colleges in recent years, while in the past there were no compulsory courses for all students, but rather they were optional.

In reference to the implications of this study, it recommends that Educational Policymakers in Oman should design training programs to develop procedural research skills for administrators and supervisors in the educational field, in a way that helps them develop them among the teachers who supervise them, and in a way that contributes to a solution Problems in the school and classroom field, and it promotes the improvement of learning pulp in the Sultanate of Oman.

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