Teachers' Perceptions of Action Research as a Tool for Professional Development: The Role of the 'Research for Professional Development' (RPD) Course for In-Service Omani Teachers

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Abstract:

When talking about the educational field in Oman, teachers' professional development is a considerable concern. A variety of professional development strategies have been introduced to teachers of English and have been put into practice. Action research is one of these strategies. It is introduced to teachers through a voluntary course, Research for Professional Development (RPD), which is a sixteen-session course and lasts for one semester. This course aims to raise teachers' knowledge and skills of action research in order to support them, as research practitioners, to enhance the quality of their work and to show initiatives in their schools. However, as it is relatively new in this context, this study attempted to explore teachers' beliefs on the values of this course with regard to their professional development and the extent to which these teachers adopted this strategy for their ongoing professional development after the course. The study was conducted in the Dakhiliya region of Oman and the data was collected from eight teachers through a semi-structured interview. The findings indicate a conception of the RPD course as a means to enrich Omani teachers' knowledge and skills of AR. The practical side of the course also raises participants' awareness of the possibilities of improving their work and gives them insights to solving their students' problems through systematic inquiries. This study also reveals that, although participants master this tool, very few of them conduct action research after the course and this is due to the lack of time, heavy responsibilities and lack of support. Therefore, this study raises the issue that although providing teachers with knowledge and skills of PD strategies is essential, enabling them to apply these strategies relies heavily on paying attention to their needs.

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**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
ACTION RESEARCH AS A TOOL FOR
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
THE ROLE OF THE 'RESEARCH FOR
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT'
(RPD) COURSE FOR IN-SERVICE**

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MEd

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MARKER'S COMMENTS:

This is a very interesting topic will clearly have some impact on understanding the role of action research in teachers' professional development. You have done well to conduct an innovative study and you have come up with some worthwhile findings, which will make some contribution to the field.

In Chapter 1, you have clearly provided an introduction to the topic you have chosen and justified it with very well. Starting from a personalised justification of why the chosen topic is of interest, you have identified the purpose, aims and organisation of the study in a clear manner. The background / contextual information in Chapter 2 equally provides a comprehensive base to understand the rationale and objectives of the study. Your literature review has covered key concepts of your dissertation. Given professional development is a huge area, you have done well to provide a clear and coherent review of the literature that informed your study. You have shown competence in drawing different sources, including empirical studies but your study could have benefited more if you were more critical about the literature.

Your overall approach to the study is appropriate and the methodology is well explained, justified and supported by the literature. It is evident that you understand the nature of qualitative study – the data collection methods and procedure are sound. Research issues are appropriately addressed, for example ethical issues, transferability and trustworthiness, and limitations. The study could have benefited from a clear description of sampling strategy and procedure, and data analysis, although a data analysis trail was attached.

The presentation of the data is handled very well by organising it around four themes, teachers' expectations, the extent to which participants' expectations were achieved, their views on challenges and the connection between the RPD and professional development. The most significant findings are highlighted and discussed in the light of the literature. But perhaps, you could have linked your results more closely to the literature to provide more in-depth discussion. Having said this, I think overall it is a well-designed and organised study and you have achieved what you set out to do.

Signature of 1st Marker: Date: 20/10/2011

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68

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(Student ID: 600052632)

MEd in TESOL

**Teachers' Perceptions of Action Research as a Tool for Professional Development:
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Service Omani Teachers**

Graduate School of Education

University of Exeter, 2011

Dedication

I shall dedicate this thesis to my mother, who taught me that even the largest task can be accomplished if it is done one step at a time and whose prayers for my success in my life have always given me power and enlightened my way.

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Abstract

When talking about the educational field in Oman, teachers' professional development is a considerable concern. A variety of professional development strategies have been introduced to teachers of English and have been put into practice. Action research is one of these strategies. It is introduced to teachers through a voluntary course, Research for Professional Development (RPD), which is a sixteen-session course and lasts for one semester.

This course aims to raise teachers' knowledge and skills of action research in order to support them, as research practitioners, to enhance the quality of their work and to show initiatives in their schools. However, as it is relatively new in this context, this study attempted to explore teachers' beliefs on the values of this course with regard to their professional development and the extent to which these teachers adopted this strategy for their ongoing professional development after the course. The study was conducted in the Dakhiliya region of Oman and the data was collected from eight teachers through a semi-structured interview.

The findings indicate a conception of the RPD course as a means to enrich Omani teachers' knowledge and skills of AR. The practical side of the course also raises participants' awareness of the possibilities of improving their work and gives them insights to solving their students' problems through systematic inquiries. This study also reveals that, although participants master this tool, very few of them conduct action research after the course and this is due to the lack of time, heavy responsibilities and lack of support. Therefore, this study raises the issue that although providing teachers with knowledge and skills of PD strategies is essential, enabling them to apply these strategies relies heavily on paying attention to their needs.

List of Abbreviations

1.	PD	Professional Development
2.	AR	Action Research
3.	RPD	Research For Professional Development
4.	SQU	Sultan Qaboos University
5.	BE	Basic Education
6.	C1	Cycle One
7.	C2	Cycle Two
8.	PB	Post Basic

Chapter One: *Introduction*

1.1. Introduction to the study

Professional development (PD) is undisputedly a crucial element in all careers in order to sustain and enhance the productivity of work. In addition to the values gained through them, enrolling in PD activities represents the commitment of individuals to raising their awareness of their work, looking deeper into it, and identifying opportunities and possibilities to improve it. Focusing on the teaching profession, as is obviously known, teachers do not only teach but also have a responsibility to learn, so it is considered a dynamic and demanding job. According to Underhill (1999:17), for teachers, PD is “the process of becoming the best teacher one is able to be, a process that can be started but never finished”.

One of the paths for effective PD is the adoption of action research (AR). AR is one of many strategies for PD, but one of the most demanding and, at the same time, one of the most powerful. It is demanding because teachers go through different procedures. This requires knowledge and skills in research. However, considering AR as a powerful tool for teachers' PD, it is worth adopting in that it leads to investigation of one's own work and aims for better understanding and acting accordingly to enhance classroom practice. AR has been proved to be a very effective method in teachers' PD, which is “associated with work-based learning” (McNiff, 2010:41).

PD for teachers is gaining growing attention in Oman. A lot has been done to support teachers and raise their awareness of different aspects in their profession. At the very beginning of the last decade, *The Teachers' Professional Development Program* was initiated and, since then, has been implemented in all schools. This focuses on PD of

teaching staff in general and which takes the forms of presentations and workshops done by teachers themselves in their schools. Other PD activities such as courses, workshops and meetings are conducted by trainers and supervisors in training centers, in all regions in Oman. For English language teachers, these activities usually focus on issues of concerns within EFL classrooms, aim at developing those teachers' knowledge and skills and encourage reflective teaching.

As one of the PD strategies that are expected to have a favorable impact on the teaching profession, AR has recently emerged in the context of Omani English language teachers. It has been introduced to teachers through a course, *Research for Professional Development* (RPD), which aims to widen their knowledge of this strategy and promote their skills in applying it. However, as it is relatively new, there are still some doubts about its value and effectiveness in this context. Thus, there is a need to investigate its success in achieving the aims it is designed for.

1.2. Rational

This study is inspired by my experience as a teacher trainer in charge of planning and delivering workshops and courses and the fact that teachers' feedback informs training programs. Considering the RPD course, this issue has raised a number of issues in my mind, such as: how those teachers in the Dakhiliya region of Oman benefit from the course; the level of implementation of AR after one or two years of taking it; how they perceive the role of AR in promoting them professionally; and the reasons behind their engagement in research or their reluctance to conduct it.

Investigating this, I believe, will give a clear vision of the current situation, not only about the course, but more importantly about the Omani teacher researchers' views and demands in order to adopt such a strategy on a regular basis. Thus, this study aims to

investigate the perceptions of the Omani English language teachers in the Dakhilya region of the connection between the RPD course and their PD.

1.3. Aims of the study

The present study has the following aims:

- To investigate teachers' opinions about the role of the RPD course in enhancing their knowledge and skills of AR
- To investigate teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards AR as a strategy for PD
- To analyze the beliefs and views identified in order to suggest possible actions for the future.

1.4. Organization of the study

This study consists of six chapters. Following the introduction, the second chapter will focus on the background and the context of the study. Then, chapter three will be a review of the literature. Chapter four will focus on research methodology and the procedures followed in this study. In chapter five, the major findings and the discussion will be presented. Chapter six presents a summary of the findings and recommendations for future practice.

Chapter Two: *Background*

2.1. Introduction

In this section, the discussion focuses on the background of the study, where initial teacher education for EFL Omani teachers is highlighted in relation to teachers' PD. Then, the situation of in-service teacher PD is discussed. After that, the RPD course is presented with a focus on its aims, methods, participants and content. The last section under this topic is a brief summary of participants' evaluation of the course.

2.2. EFL Teacher's Initial Education and PD

In order to be an English teacher in Oman nowadays, student teachers must complete a four-year BA degree. Even those who were appointed in the past with a diploma were recently enrolled in a BA program run by Leeds University in Oman. Focusing on Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), which is one of the main sources of English Teachers in Oman, the EFL teacher education program mainly concentrates on building teachers knowledge of linguistics, pedagogy and methods of teaching; this is expected to provide students with the basic elements to do their teaching job in the future. PD is included to a certain extent but still it is not necessarily effective enough, as those who have not yet been in the field are not aware of what they need to improve.

2.3. In-service Teachers' PD

Newly qualified teachers, whether those who graduate from SQU, other universities in Oman or abroad, are appointed in different schools. There are schools for Basic Education (BE) Cycle one (C1), in which teachers deal with grades 1-4. Others are for (BE) cycle two (C2) in which teachers deal with students of grades 5-10. Those for

students of grade 11-12 are called Post Basic (PB) schools and some of the novice teachers are also appointed in these.

The training department in the Ministry of Education has the responsibility of preparing these teachers and familiarizing them with the schools' situations and types of syllabuses in addition to other important issues related to teaching and learning that are seen to be of concern for novice teachers. There are courses for those who are newly appointed in C1, C2 and PB. Attention to PD goes beyond focusing only on novice teachers, to give courses for senior teachers and courses in language development. Although these courses are seen as developmental courses, they all share a top-down compulsory nature. This means that they are imposed on teachers. Teachers are nominated by their supervisors to attend the courses and by the end they get certificates of attendance and reports of participation. These courses are obviously considered post-degree training. Most of these courses last for one semester - 15 weeks - and teachers are trained on a day release basis; one day a week targeted teachers are released from schools to attend the course.

Despite the top-down nature, training plays a significant role in teachers' development. All courses, programs and workshops are based on teachers' expected needs and focus on the grades they teach and curriculum and materials they use. In addition to enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills, training also develops teachers' reflective teaching through preparing them to adopt PD tools such as peer observation and team teaching and by providing opportunities to discuss situations in their classrooms and relating new knowledge to their work.

2.4. RPD Course

The RPD course, unlike other courses, is voluntary. It introduces teachers to the notion of AR and supports them in investigating their practice by implementing it in their classrooms. It was first run in the academic year 2006-2007 for teacher trainers and supervisors from different regions. Thereafter, this course has been offered to teachers in all regions of Oman annually.

2.4.1. Aims of the course

This course aims, as in the course description, at developing teachers' ability to conduct effective and meaningful action research in their classrooms. Participants have the opportunity to conduct an AR project, write up their findings in a 3000 word report and hold a presentation to share the findings and implications with other colleagues. (For the RPD course objectives see appendix 1)

2.4.2. Training Methods

The course is delivered through seminars, group tasks, workshops, presentations, one to one tutorials and library study. Participants are also given articles to read in advance as a kind of preparation for the following session discussion or as a further reading of what is discussed during the day's session. In addition to the tutorials, participants have constant support via email throughout the course.

2.4.3. Participants

As mentioned earlier, this course is voluntary. All teachers, 281 male and 574 female English language teachers in the Dakhiliya region in the year 2010-2011, have the right to apply for it. However, only twelve participants are enrolled in the course every year. A circular goes to all schools in the region with a description of the course and with an

application form to fill in which helps trainers later to decide on who to enroll in the course (see appendix 2). Priorities are usually given to those who have a good language standard so they will face no obstacles in regards to reading literature and writing their projects. It is worth mentioning that every year participants enrolled in this course have different teaching expertise. This makes the discussion tasks rich.

2.4.4. Duration and content

The course starts with a six-day intensive block. It then continues on a day release basis for ten weeks (for the course outline and summary see appendix 3). Each session lasts for five hours in which the last half -hour is spent on individual library study in addition to one-to-one tutorial.

The course initially focuses on theoretical issues and provides the opportunity for participants to apply these to practical AR projects in their classrooms. It also allows collaboration between participants, as they support and give one another feedback, and develops their reflective skills.

2.4.5. RPD Course Evaluation

By the end of the course participants are requested to fill in a course evaluation form. (For RPD course evaluation form see appendix 4)

Revising previous end of RPD course evaluation reports, there are certain issues that participants raised. In general, they had positive views about the course in the sense that it provided them with a good introduction to teachers' classroom AR and found the opportunity to conduct an AR project very valuable. At the time of the evaluation, most of them felt confident about conducting AR and had already decided on their next

research areas. However, course participants expressed their concerns about different aspects related to the course, such as timing of the course and handout distribution.

Although this gives a very general view about participants' perceptions on the course and their future intentions to become involved in AR, their views and attitudes need to be further investigated for three reasons. First, some of the participants' concerns are not clear enough to build on and need to be discussed to see what exactly they mean and what they suggest. Second, as the course aims to equip teachers with AR tools for their continuous PD, it is necessary to find out how successful their plans are in implementing AR in their classrooms and the extent to which they use what they learned in their ongoing profession. Third, a study like this will give participants opportunities to elaborate on their visions of AR as a tool for their PD.

The RPD course has emerged from the awareness of the significance of PD to teachers that can be derived from reflective teaching. Thus, as an effective tool that can have a remarkable impact on the teaching profession, AR's position within the Omani EFL context should be seen from teachers' perceptions and practices. In this section, I have discussed the situation of teachers' PD for both pre-service and in-service teachers. AR as a tool for PD for in-service teachers has also been discussed, raising the matter of the significance of accessing participants' views in order to see its effectiveness in their situations. All these issues will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: *Literature Review*

3.1. Introduction

The chapter focuses on three areas. First, the issue of PD and its significance in teaching is highlighted. Second, AR as a PD tool and its procedures and challenges are discussed. Third, the focus will be on teachers' beliefs and their role in shaping teachers' attitudes towards their actions and more specifically towards engaging in PD methods like AR.

3.2. Professional Development

PD means “all types of professional learning undertaken by teachers beyond the point of initial training” (Craft, 2000:9). Kirk (1988:15-16) claims that no initial training is good enough to equip teachers with all they need in their “full teaching career” however “thorough and systematic” it is. This means there is a need to consider continuous PD for in-service teachers which Craft (2000:9) refers to as “moving teachers forward in knowledge or skills”.

PD for teachers differs in types and aims. Craft (2000:3) draws attention to the differences between in-service PD that fulfills school policies or “national priorities” and that which focuses on individual needs. This raises the issue of the 'Top-down' PD which is imposed on teachers and the 'Bottom-up' PD in which individuals themselves seek to implement voluntarily. Edwards (2010b:58) strongly recommends the bottom-up strategy if indeed PD is expected to be successful. In my opinion, although the aims, to a certain extent, may coincide in both types, many differences can occur regarding teachers' motivation, commitment and, therefore, outcomes.

For this reason, individuals themselves should be committed to enhancing their knowledge and skills. Komba & Nkumbi (2008:71) affirm that the value gained from “intrinsic drive” of individuals towards PD cannot be gained through any external pressure; those who are intrinsically motivated to develop professionally are more likely to “attain new knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and dispositions”.

3.2.1. Significance of PD

The value of PD is represented in the desire to change, especially when facing challenges or when seeking possibilities for improving the quality of work. Change can be sought in awareness, knowledge, attitudes and skills (Freeman, 1989:36). Richards and Farrell (2005:9-10) mention many reasons for PD to be undertaken by individuals, such as to be updated with theories and practice and to enhance teaching skills. They argue that adopting PD activities can also raise understanding of oneself, learners, curriculum and materials. It “... helps us to remain fresh, alert, up-to-date, and confident in ourselves and in the topic we teach” (Underhill, 1999:17). I believe this leads to having deep understanding of the profession.

Moreover, Komba & Nkumbi (2008:70) contend that PD enables teachers to “explore new roles, develop new instructional techniques, refine their practice and broaden themselves both as educators and as individuals”. Therefore, enrolling in PD activities enhances teachers' role and demonstrates their commitments to their own development as argued by Edward (2010a:64).

Furthermore, Bailey et al. (2001:7) state that “knowledge is power” and working on PD can lead to both “empowerment and inspiration”. This means that the knowledge teachers gain through PD activities enables them to show initiatives in their schools. Underhill (1999:17) makes the assertion that PD allows teachers to have an active role

in developing their schools as “learning organizations” and their own profession as a “learning profession”.

3.2.2. Reflective practice

As far as Richards and Lockhart (1994:2) are concerned, reflective teaching is an essential element in PD. They emphasize the need for teachers to have curiosity in exploring their practice through developing the concept of questioning their actions. This leads to promotion of self-reflection as an initial step for decision making.

When involved in reflection, teachers go through different levels of the cognitive process. Brumfit and Rossner (cited in Belleli, 1993:65-66) point out that reflection involves two levels: first, the stage where teachers reach an understanding of the ‘implicit’ theories leading their practice, which they refer to as “analysis of understanding”; and second, “monitoring performance” which includes revising and reformulating hypotheses through practice and amendment. Thus, reflection raises understanding of what is really happening and informs future practice.

Wallace (1991:15) demonstrates how “received knowledge” and “experiential knowledge” are integrated with practice through reflective teaching. This integration promotes professional competence within teachers. I believe this all leads to re-conceptualizing theories and feeling more certain about what to do: “we do not learn by experience, but by reflecting on experience” (Taylor, 2006:11).

3.2.3. PD Tools

There are several PD activities which teachers can adopt in order to enhance particular aspects of their profession. Bailey et al. (2001:11) classify these activities into three categories, namely activities that are carried out individually, activities that can be

carried out either individually or collaboratively and activities that are done collaboratively. This highlights the options that teachers have and considers teachers needs and their preferences. For example, individual teachers can adopt tools such as teaching journals, reflective teaching, and teaching portfolios. Teachers can be involved in action research, reading, or writing case studies, either individually or collaboratively. Activities such as peer observation, mentoring and team teaching are other forms of collaborative PD activities.

Richards and Farrell (2005:14) list more PD activities that the teacher can adopt (see appendix 5). Craft (2000:11) claims that “being professional means taking responsibility for identifying and attempting to meet the professional development needs of oneself”.

3.3. Action Research

3.3.1. Definition

One of the PD tools that depend on reflection is AR. Richards and Lockhart (1994:12) define AR as a classroom investigation carried out by teachers themselves in order to raise their understandings of classroom practice, teaching and learning, which results in developing their practice to the better. Wallace (1998:15) summarizes the meaning of AR as “the process of answering questions by using various kinds of evidence in some kind of reasoned way”. Richards and Farrell (2005:171), meanwhile, separate the two words and see the word 'research' as conducting investigation systematically and gathering data in order to find explanations to issues in the classroom, whereas the word 'action' means the intervention for solving classroom practice problems. I can define AR as teachers' systematic investigations into their practice for the purpose of improvement that is done through their own intervention and change. In fact AR is not only about

problem-solving but it is also, as argued by Bailey et.al. (2001:139), to satisfy teachers' curiosity and find answers to questions arising during practice.

3.3.2. AR Characteristics

Just like other research, AR “leads to knowledge”, “provides evidence to support this knowledge”, “makes explicit the process of inquiry through which knowledge emerges”, and creates “links between new knowledge and existing knowledge” (McNiff et al., 1996:14).

On the other hand, McNiff (2010:27-30) notes the differences between AR and other kinds of research in four major areas - what, who, how and why - which highlights the unique features of AR (see appendix 6). AR's characteristics are related to the fact that it is carried out by practitioners who are “best placed” to raise their understanding about their work and to solve problems in order to improve practice (Bailey et al., 2001:135), and the requirement of an 'intervention', defined by McNiff et al. (1996:14) as an “integral part” of the process.

Schmuck (2006:29) describes AR as “tentative”, in the sense that it supports teachers with possible solutions but not right or wrong answers, and it is “cyclical” (Bassey, 1995:47), which means procedures can be repeated to reach better outcomes. The validity of teacher researchers' claims can be tested by critical feedback from others and this makes it also "collaborative" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:21).

3.3.3. Benefits

The idea of including AR in teachers' work does not seem to be very welcomed by many at first. Llewellyn and Zee (2010:10) concur with Richards and Farrell (2005:172) that there is a misunderstanding of seeing teachers as researchers in the way that

research is seen as another burden added to their workload. This may have resulted from the use of the word 'research' and the implications that it frequently has of some systematic process. Therefore, AR should not be too formalized and teachers should realize its potential as more of a normal part of their work. I believe understanding the benefits of AR can encourage dedicated teachers to adopt it as a PD strategy.

McNiff and Whitehead (2005:1) see AR as tool that assists teachers in evaluating their own work. Through evaluating their practice and trying new techniques, teachers come to an understanding of how things work best. AR promotes teachers' knowledge and skills and is thus described as “empowering” by Schmuck (2006:29), in the sense that it equips teachers with tools from which to benefit for their future practices. This understanding of practice “strengthens the discipline and rigour in what we are already doing” (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005:vii).

In addition to promoting teachers' knowledge and skills, involvement in AR re-determines their position in the educational field. An interesting claim is raised by Richards and Farrell (2005:172) that teachers' involvement in AR “redefines” their role. It goes beyond just testing one's own theories to wider horizons where teachers come to establish new theories. McNiff and Whitehead (2005:3) and McNiff (2010:136) agree with Stenhouse (cited in Bailey et al., 2001:135) that AR enables teachers to contribute to the building of theory suitable to the classroom. I believe, becoming engaged in AR, the teacher becomes a theory builder and more of a productive agent rather than receiving educational innovations from outside which may or may not suit his or her context.

Besides, Richards and Farrell (2005:171) claim that teacher researchers go through different steps and procedures, “planning and carrying out action”, that enlighten their

understanding, not only of teaching and learning but also research skills. In addition to developing these skills and procedures, it raises teachers' ability in reflection, which is the backbone of all PD activities that teachers can adopt.

Furthermore, for some teachers the process of conducting AR could be interesting and enjoyable in addition to being rewarding. "... teachers who have been involved in AR are overwhelmingly in favour of it" (Nunan, 1993:46).

However, although AR can be very beneficial, it requires "democratic involvement to those whom it impinges" (Bassey, 1995:47) and needs "commitment to educational improvement" from the teacher researcher side (McNiff et al. 1996:16). I believe this is true for all PD strategies. Considering AR procedures and the challenges that might face teachers when deciding to engage in researching their classrooms (see below), their commitment should be high enough to pursue adopting the strategy. For this reason, teachers should not only be encouraged but also supported to adopt AR in their practice.

3.3.4. Procedures of AR

AR strategy requires going through procedures that involve different activities which are carefully planned and systematically executed and which can be repeated until the teacher researcher reaches satisfactory results. Thorne (2006:80) argues that it is not a linear process and that teachers "should be prepared for a process of continual review and adjustment". The following diagram represents the cycle of activities involved in AR:

Figure 3.3.4.1 Action Research Cycle, (Craft, 2000, 29)

In the initial step of data collection, the focus could be on something that emerges from the daily observations and that raises curiosity to find out about an issue that is interesting or appears to be problematic. This requires “systematic monitoring to generate valid data” (McNiff et al. 1996:16) using such methods as field-notes, logs, journals, dairies, personal accounts, and verbal reports (Wallace, 1998:46), based on regular observation and reflection, as well as interviews and questionnaires.

The following step is diagnosing and identifying problems through carefully analyzing the data to find out the problematic aspects and to reach a clearer picture of the investigated issue the teacher formulates hypotheses. The next step is implementing hypotheses. Here, the teachers implement, observe and evaluate the progress. In order to reach to a valid result, I believe it is necessary that a reasonable time is spent on the implementation stage.

Wallace (1998:17) describes this cycle of AR as “a loop process” in which this process can be repeated till the teacher reaches satisfactory results. Nunan (1993:42) adds two

more stages to the cycle: these are “outcomes”, in which the teacher identifies the outcomes of the project and the benefits, and the final stage of “reporting” it to the public.

Publishing is helpful in that other teachers can benefit from AR projects (Bassey, 1995:3), they can inspire others to become involved in AR (Hadley, 2003:v), and in order to “subject them to critical evaluation” (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005:2). It is to “improve the reputation of the profession” (Altrichter et al., 1993:179). In my view, it also rewards teachers and gives them a sense of pride.

3.3.5. Challenges

AR is not without challenges: Nunan (1993:44) mentions time and Bailey et al. (2001:141) add lack of “recognition” of teachers' effort and time, which can lead to “demoralization”. Teachers may also have difficulties in conducting AR due to the lack of researching skills and experience, (Nunan, 1993:44). This involves “technical skills and knowledge to conceptualize and put into operation the research that interests them” (Bailey et al., 2001:142). I believe lack of research skills can prevent teachers from carrying out AR rather than encourage them to seek consultations.

Teachers also need support from experts in AR, 'critical friends' and even the school administration to facilitate their work and sometime to help in the procedures. Therefore, “lack of ongoing support”, as stated by Nunan (1993:44), could be a challenge that requires attention.

There are a number of solutions that may help in overcoming these challenges (Nunan, 1993:44). First, teachers should have a sense of ownership of the project, which means, it is work that is related to their practice and belongs to them. Second, experts in AR

should be available to provide constant support to teachers. Third, teachers should be trained in research skills and in presenting the outcomes of their projects.

3.4. Teachers' Beliefs

Teachers' beliefs are “individual's judgment of the truth or falsity of a proposition, a judgment that can only be inferred from a collective understanding of what human beings say, intend, and do” (Pajares, 1992:316). It is, therefore, the way teachers judge issues, either consciously or unconsciously, that can be based on their prior knowledge, experience and the context they are working in.

There is no doubt that teachers' perceptions on different aspects of their profession determine the way they act. “It is obvious that what teachers do is directed in no small measure by what they think...” (National institute of Education cited in Borg, 2006:7). In this sense, considering teachers' beliefs about a certain aspect of their practice is of great benefit in recognizing reasons for the way they act and helping to promote their practice accordingly.

Teachers' beliefs not only affect their daily teaching practice but influence their decision making for their PD. Frode et al. (2006:32) claim that teachers' perceptions of their roles and the way they respond to their work both “intellectually and emotionally” have great influences not only on their teaching routine but also in making decisions about their continuous PD.

3.5. Previous studies

There are several studies that focus on the role of AR in professional development. Thorne and Qiang (1996) investigated the impact of an AR course done for the trainee teachers at the University of Beijing in the last year of initial teacher education.

The AR project resulted in raising participants' awareness of teaching and learning processes and their ability to consciously reflect on their own practice. Participants could see the theories and their applications and their students' needs in addition to considering AR as a tool to solve their problems.

Another study by Rainey (2000) surveyed the practice of AR within the EFL context to find out what the EFL teachers know about AR and the extent to which they apply this strategy. The researcher surveyed 240 teachers in 10 countries and did four follow up interviews. Her study revealed that only one quarter of those surveyed had heard about AR. Although the majority of these do not practice AR, they value it and can see its usefulness to them as classroom teachers. The study also identified reasons for teachers' reluctance in involving themselves in AR, such as not feeling confident enough, having negative experiences and receiving no support from authorities.

McDonough (2006) also investigated the effectiveness of an elective AR course on graduate teaching assistants' PD at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The researcher gathered the data from 7 participants through professional journals, reflective essays, the AR project, course feedback and field notes. Participants reported an increase in their awareness about pedagogical practices and found the opportunity to conduct the AR project valuable. Time constraints and administrative demands were the main obstacles participants had according to this study.

Papasotiriou and Hannan (2006) used semi-structured interviews to investigate 14 Greek primary school teachers' perceptions of the impact of research on their profession and their practice. This revealed that although teachers seemed to be interested to read research reports, their practice did not seem to be largely influenced by research

findings. The researchers concluded that in order to raise the impact of research in teaching, teachers should be actively involved in it.

Borg (2009) investigated the perception of research among 505 teachers from 13 countries including Oman. His findings revealed that participants were only aware of the scientific notion of research. Lack of time, lack of knowledge of research skills and lack of access to resources prevented teachers from engaging in research. However, the study showed that those who do research are self-motivated to develop themselves professionally rather than encouraged by rewards from their institutions.

Cain and Milovic (2010) examined the value of an AR program to 18 senior advisors from different regions in Croatia who were trained by a foreign expert. Results showed that the concept of AR was thoroughly understood by participants and that they could use this tool to communicate with the teachers and principals. This program provided an opportunity to participants to share their experience with others. However, one significant issue was raised in this study: advisors were seen as authoritative and so involving other teachers in their AR projects could be seen as a top-down procedure.

3.6. Conclusion

The review reveals the significance of PD focusing on AR as a strategy that is sought by teachers themselves in order to enhance the quality of their work and present them as active dedicated members of the educational field. In addition to this, the review gives emphasis to the role of teachers' beliefs in shaping teachers' practice and their decisions for future involvement in PD activities.

Previous studies showed the effectiveness of AR as a PD channel. They proved the strong and immediate impact on teachers' and trainee teachers' performance and

supported them with a skill for their continuous PD. However, some of the studies revealed the lack of knowledge of and engagement in AR from the teachers' side (see for example Borg, 2009). Interestingly, the challenges in conducting AR vary according to the context. Where some agree on time as a challenge, others emphasized the lack of knowledge and support that teachers' receive.

However, there has been very little research done, if any, to follow up teachers' practice of using AR as a strategy for PD after completing a course in AR. I believe this is a crucial aspect of the process, as continuing evaluation is essential to its success. Therefore, in addition to investigating teachers' views about the AR course they completed, this study intends to explore eight Omani English teachers' perceptions of AR as a necessary cyclic tool for their PD and the extent to which they find themselves actively engaged in it iteratively after the course.

Chapter Four: *Methodology*

4.1. Introduction

This section discusses, first, the aims and the methodology used in this study. Then it provides details about the participants. After that, the research method and procedures are stated. Next, research issues are presented. Finally, limitations of the study are highlighted.

4.2. Aims and methodology of the study

4.2.1. Aims

This study aimed to explore in-service Omani English language teachers' views regarding the role of the AR course on their PD. The study focused on the teachers who enrolled in the RPD course in the previous two academic years (2008-2009 and 2009-2010), in the Dakhiliya region.

The study aimed to address the following questions:

1. What expectations did the teachers have of the AR course?
2. To what extent were they achieved in regards to: Knowledge of AR? Skills development?
3. What challenges did they face as participants in the course? What do they suggest to overcome these challenges?
4. What relationship did teachers see between the AR course and their PD?

By conducting this study, I hoped that it would yield sufficient information that would assist, first of all, me as a teacher trainer and the training department in finding out about the benefits and obstacles that teachers face in conducting classroom AR, either during or after the course. The other aim was to identify teachers' support needs in and outside their schools when adopting this strategy.

4.2.2. Research methodology

This study intended to construct teachers' beliefs concerning the role of the AR course in their PD and to reach an understanding of this issue by accessing the meanings participants assigned to it. It is an exploratory research that is carried out via semi-structured interviews and follows the interpretive paradigm. One of the factors that support this paradigm, as argued by Carr and Kemmis (1986:86), is that "... reality can only be understood by understanding the subjective meanings of individuals". The interpretive paradigm focuses on actions which can be thought of as "behaviour-with-meaning... intentional behaviour and as such, future oriented" (Cohen et al., 2007:21). Carr and Kemmis (1986:88) also state that in order to identify the motives and the intentions that people have for their actions, which is the point of this study, it is important to "grasp the 'subjective meaning' " which is significant to these people.

4.3. Participants

The data was collected from eight Omani English language teachers who had taken the RPD course in the previous two years in the Dakhiliya Region. All of them (four men and four women) had experience of teaching, ranging from four to seventeen years. They taught in different school types (C1, C2 and PB) and had considerable professional and pedagogical knowledge prior to enrolling in the course. However, they

had limited research experience before enrolling in the course. The following table shows information about the study participants.

Table 4.3.1.: Information about the participants

Teacher	BA Degree	School	Experience (year)	Remarks
Ali	Leeds	C2	17	Senior teacher
Huda	SQU	C2	4	Teacher
Ibtisam	SQU	C1	7	Teacher
Khalid	SQU	PB	5	Teacher
Muneer	SQU	PB	8	Senior teacher
Noora	SQU	C1	11	Senior teacher
Salim	Leeds	PB	18	Teacher
Samia	SQU	PB	7	Teacher

4.4. Research method and procedures

I used semi-structured interviews to collect data. Cohen et al. (2007:349) state that interviews allow the researcher to press for "responses about complex and deep issues". This kind of interview is, as argued by Dornyei (2007:136), suitable when the researcher has "enough overview of the phenomenon" so the interviewer is able to design broad questions in advance. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:102) sets out seven stages of an interview inquiry, namely thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting. These are precisely followed in this study.

4.4.1. Interview design

First, the goals of the study were translated to more detailed and specific objectives. Then, these were put into questions that form the main body of the interview schedule (see appendix 7). The formation of these questions was with guidance from the previous studies on the same topic. The interview was divided into four areas: knowledge of AR before the course, enrolment in the course, involvement in AR after the course and beliefs on effects of AR on PD. Each area is supported with prompts (pick-up clues) that enabled deeper investigation of each.

4.4.2. Piloting

There is no doubt that piloting research methods is necessary, especially when dealing with semi-structured interviews; "a few trial runs can ensure that the questions elicit sufficiently rich data and do not dominate the flow of the conversation" (Dornyei, 2007:137). I piloted the interview twice: both were recorded. The adjustment after piloting was mainly in procedure rather than content. I discovered that I needed to be patient with participants and not interrupt them before they completed what they wanted to say. Bryman (2008:438) claims that such interviews depend largely on the way participants respond and new questions may arise accordingly. In addition, I needed to give more time for participants to understand the questions. More probes also were needed to investigate each topic more deeply. Bernard and Ryan (2010:29) mention that using probes will enhance the depth of the data.

4.4.3. Informing & interviewing participants

Participants were informed by e-mail about the study, the area of questions and the process (including audio recording). Teachers were ensured about the confidentiality of

their contributions and anonymity. They had the choice of time and place of the interviews. Some of the interviews took place in teachers' schools, whereas others were in informal places (i.e. their houses). At the beginning of each, I briefly introduced the purpose of the study and thanked them for participating. During the interviews, I made sure that no harm or embarrassment was caused by "handling the situation sensitively and professionally" (Cohen et al., 2007:363).

4.4.4. Transcribing and analyzing

The whole of the interviews were transcribed except for the insignificant material (e.g. fillers), which was left out. This allowed me to have rich data and go through it several times before the analysis stage. During the analysis, the themes were based on the interview topics, but the categories were formed inductively from the respondents' utterances (see appendix 8).

4.5. Research issues

4.5.1. Ethical issues

Following the ethics in research, participants were given pseudonyms and informed about the confidentiality of their participation. Another issue that I should raise here is that some of these participants were tutored by me in the RPD course (3 of them) and this could put them in a sensitive situation. However, having volunteered to participate in the study, as well as being reassured that their honest participation would help to improve the situation, it can be confirmed that this affected neither the process of the interview nor their honest contribution.

4.5.2. Transferability and trustworthiness

In such a qualitative study the validity and reliability can be ensured, as mentioned by Ary et al. (2006:504), through several factors such as transferability, and trustworthiness.

Ary et al. (2006:507) define transferability as the extent to which the finding can be generalized to other contexts. The description of the context and the participants gives a clear idea of the situation of my study. It focuses on the Dakhiliya region, and can be applied not only to other regions in Oman, for teachers who take the same course and are in the same conditions as my participants, but also to other similar EFL and ESL contexts. Having similar responsibilities, EFL teachers may have the same concerns about adopting AR as a tool for their PD, which this study provided insights into.

Involving eight participants in this study, in addition to recording and transcribing the whole interviews and showing that the responses, to a great extent, were consistent, raise the trustworthiness of the data collected and the study. This makes the method used "reproducible and consistent" Ary et al. (2006:509).

4.6. Limitation

The following are the three main limitations of the study:

- Using only one method to collect data could be considered a limitation. Starting with a questionnaire and building on the responses, a follow up interview would study the situation in more depth. Nevertheless, this could give a clear picture about the situation, could be used as guidance for future studies on similar topics and could help to build data collection methods for the same purpose.

- My position as a teacher trainer, responsible for delivering the RPD course, could be considered a limitation to this study. This raises issue of imbalances of power. However, only three participants were tutored by me in this course and comparing their responses to others' ensured that these were not affected.
- This is considered a small scale study, with a sample of eight participants. However, the findings are likely to interest trainers in other regions and could be relevant to other EFL contexts.

The following chapter presents the finding and the discussion of the collected data.

Chapter Five: *Finding and Discussion*

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study and the discussion in an attempt to answer the research questions. Each section focuses on one research question, where the findings of the sub-themes are highlighted, and this is then followed by a discussion of the whole theme.

5.2. Teachers' expectations of the RPD course

Three major areas arose through the interviews that could help in measuring teachers' expectations of the course: their previous knowledge of AR, their previous experience of AR and their aims in enrolling in the course.

5.2.1. Pervious knowledge of AR

Six of the eight participants had a general idea of research, having studied a course about it as a part of their BA program, but reported having no knowledge of AR. Five of them mentioned this, even though they were not satisfied with the knowledge of research they had gained. Noora and Samia, for example, described it as "*very limited*", while Muneer thought it was "*vague*" and "*only theoretical*". However, Huda thought that she had prior knowledge about research in general and held a positive view of it.

On the other hand, two out of the eight participants reported that they had had knowledge of AR prior to enrolling in the course. These were the ones who did their BA through the Leeds program. For example, Ali said "*we studied how to do AR*". Both

mentioned that they had a course discussing types of research which were suitable for teachers, and these included AR. Both reported that their knowledge of AR was good.

5.2.2. Previous Experience of AR

During BA program

Except for these two respondents who had studied at Leeds and had had the chance to conduct AR, the other participants had conducted no research in the educational field. Most of these interviewees did theoretical research that focused on social issues. Two of them did not recall conducting any field research; for example, Noora said *"I don't remember I did a field research. They were only assignments and we depended on books as the main resource"*.

As in-service teachers

None of the participants conducted AR in their classrooms after they graduated. The majority of the participants reported not feeling confident enough to conduct research. One reported conducting some collaborative exploratory research in Arabic where they used questionnaires, but this was not about teaching English. Those who had knowledge and experience of AR did not feel encouraged to do it afterwards. For example, Salim said *"nobody encouraged us to do AR"*.

5.2.3. Participants Aims in Enrolling in the course

All participants claimed that their aim was to improve themselves. Five expressed this more by indicating that their aims were to develop research skills, learn new strategies and change for the better. For example, Samia said *"I was looking forward to learning about AR to improve my practice and I applied for the course twice before I got accepted"*. Two participants mentioned that this course was expected to refresh their

memories of what they learned earlier and give them a chance to conduct more AR in their classrooms. For example, Ali said *"I liked this area in the BA and I thought it would be a good chance also to conduct another AR project in my classroom"*. Individuals also reported *"change the working atmosphere"* and *"to be supported in conducting research"* as their aims.

5.2.4. Discussion

The results indicate that teachers' background in AR differs according to their previous academic studies. Only teachers who did their BA program in Leeds, which represent a very small percentage of English teachers in Oman, had an idea about AR and experienced conducting it. This is possibly because they had already had several years of teaching experience and were studying and teaching at the same time, which made it a reasonable idea for this group to be introduced to AR. However, other teachers did not seem to have much knowledge about AR and had not conducted AR before. These findings are in congruence with Burns (2010:1) who mentioned that language teachers have "only a hazy idea of what it actually is and what doing it involves".

This resulted in differences in their expectations of the course outcomes. Where the former group felt this would give an opportunity for revision and a guided AR project, the latter expected more from the course, such as learning a new strategy for their PD, developing research skills and finding more ways for change. This matches the opinion of Bailey et al. (2001:7) that learning new skills and the desire for change are reasons for engaging in PD activities. Therefore, the teachers showed their expectation that AR could be "a very valuable way to extend our teaching skills and gain more understanding of ourselves as teachers, our classrooms and our students" (Burns, 2010:1).

In general, the results demonstrate that all participants had the desire to develop the area of AR and to experience it in their classrooms, through attending the RPD course. Bordia et al. (2006:04.2) claim that expectations of the process and outcomes of a certain program if fulfilled can have a great impact on motivation and learning. Since fulfilling these expectations is a significant issue, it is necessary to see the extent to which these have been met.

5.3. The extent to which participants' expectations were achieved

In order to construct a clear idea about participants' views on this, their responses were categorized into four sub-themes: raising knowledge of AR, enhancing research skills, the course process and conducting an AR project.

5.3.1. Raising Knowledge of AR

All the participants agreed that the course had raised their knowledge of methods of data collection and that they had been thoroughly discussed during the course. The AR cycle (procedure) was introduced for the first time during the course to five of the participants. Two of these reported that before the course their concept of research had been connected with the scientific research. For example, Samia said *"when we thought about research in the past, we only thought about the scientific research"*. Two participants mentioned that it enhanced their knowledge of the purpose of teacher research. Ali felt that this course had developed the concept of AR. He said *"... but in the RPD course I noticed that it is not necessary to have a problem to do an action research ... it is something you want to improve"*. Individuals raised other aspects learned such as *"ethics in research"* and *"benefits of transcribing data"*.

5.3.2. Enhancing research skills

Skills learned and enhanced varied according to participants' prior experience of research. All of the participants emphasized data collection methods and analysis of data as the skills that they learned and developed. Two of these highlighted the benefits of discussing and designing questionnaires. Four of the teachers felt that they developed the skills of stating research questions and three reported on enhancing their reflective skills, for example Muneer said *"I learned how to look at things from different angles"* Khalid also said *"I improved my reflective skills and giving feedback to others"*. Individuals also expressed skills improved in other aspects, such as *"presenting my work"* and *"interpreting data"*.

5.3.3. The course process

Teachers commented on the benefits of the course process and found the idea of day-release helpful in the sense that they spent the whole working day with other course participants. All participants reported that the course was a chance for them to share ideas and cooperate with others, which helped them to digest new concepts and made them better appreciate others' opinions. For example, for Ibtisam *"it was a good chance to share ideas and to get feedback from colleagues"*. Six participants raised the issue of the benefits of the tutorials they received. They felt that this raised their awareness and some found it helpful in conducting their research project. Three of them appreciated the idea of having the course in English and felt that they improved their language skills. Three of them mentioned the increase in their motivation; while one found it motivating to be a teacher researcher, the other two felt motivated to do a Master degree afterwards.

5.3.4. AR project

A strong belief was expressed by all teachers in the importance of having a practical side to the course by conducting an AR project. For example, Samia said *"if we only learn theories without practice I think will be useless"*. They also emphasized the necessity of choosing a research topic of interest and relevance to one's own workplace.

On one hand, the teachers reflected on their satisfaction with their experience in conducting AR, the process they went through and the sense of achievement they felt in their practices and their students' performance. For example, Muneer said *"now, as a senior teacher, when I enter those classes to visit a teacher who teaches those students, I feel my teaching at that time have an impact on their learning"*. They reported that having done AR had brought about a change in their attitudes to learning and their teaching practice. For example, Ibtisam said *"it opened my eyes to see my teaching differently and encourage me to learn more about it"*.

On the other hand, two participants felt that the time allocated to conducting their research projects was very limited. They felt it was not enough and this made Salim, who had had previous experience in conducting research for a whole academic year, raise the comment, *"this makes it very challenging... all of the teachers who were with me ... all our researches were only on the surface - we can't go deeply because we can't have the time"*, and Huda said that she did not have enough time to implement the action: *"My topic was using electronic games to promote grade 8 spelling, but because I needed to use computers, so I needed for example two days a week to use it so there was no enough time"*.

5.3.5. Discussion

Teachers responded positively to the course outcomes and showed general satisfaction in the areas of learning and improvement in regards to AR. It seems that participants raised their knowledge of AR, its purposes and procedures. Even those who had prior knowledge seem to have further developed the concept they had of AR. This is possibly because AR had been introduced to them as a problem solving technique.

Research skills, such as methods of collecting data and data analysis seemed to be discussed thoroughly and participants felt that this was a strength in the course. They highlighted the significance of gaining research skills such as reflection, which is noted in section 3.3.3. The participants seemed to develop both types of reflexivity, mentioned by Edge (2011:38), prospective and retrospective; these are, respectively, participants' effects on their work and the effect of understanding their work on them. Bailey et al. (2001:154) mention that this enables teachers to "build on strengths and identify weaknesses" and see teaching from multiple perspectives. These seemed to be gained not only from discussion and the course process, which they mentioned to be of a great benefit, but also from the practical side of the course, which they highlighted as vital.

The duration of the research project seemed to be limited in two cases. This is possibly because, in the first case, the teacher had had experience of conducting an AR project in a full academic year before the RPD course and this may have affected his view. In the second case, the choice of the topic to investigate in the short duration of the course seems to have been unfortunate. Investigating the role of electronic games in raising spelling requires the ability to access the computers labs consistently, which was not possible in the teacher's school. This raises the issue of the need to support teachers in choosing suitable topics with which they can experience AR for the first time. The role

of teacher educators is to "assist teachers to use their practice and their intuitions about it as a starting point for more systematic and in-depth investigation which calls upon more formal research techniques" (Brindley, 1992:104). Burns (2010:22-23) claims that choosing a topic for AR is not an easy one and teachers need to think about many issues including "resources and materials" they will need to carry out their project.

Identifying the extent to which the teachers' expectations were fulfilled, it is also necessary to look at the challenges they faced during the course.

5.4. Participants' views on challenges faced in the course and their suggestions for improvement

5.4.1. Challenges

All of the respondents mentioned workload and time as factors which largely affected their ability to carry out their research plans. They commented on their teaching commitments at schools and the heavy responsibilities they had. For example Ali said that in addition to teachers' work, teaching, marking duty ... etc, *"as a senior teacher I have to visit classes and write reports and do other administrative responsibilities ..."*.

Six of the respondents remarked on problems with the extra workload. Although they appreciated the idea of day release, they felt that its implementation made the situation worse. Explaining this, Khalid said *"I was teaching twenty two lessons in five days and when I enrolled in the course I had the same twenty two periods in four days"*.

Five of the participants added that the course itself was demanding and mentioned reading articles and going through the steps of the research. Although they expected this, they still felt this was not considered by school administrations. For example,

Ibtisam said *"we had to attend substitution lessons; we are responsible for school activities just like other teachers"*.

Two of the teachers commented on the timing of the course. Having it in the second semester was difficult for them. For example, Muneer said *"at the end of the second semester, most of the teachers are busy preparing students for committees of evaluation and busy with other school activities and this also made some participants miss a day or two in the course"*. Two commented on the duration of the research project (see section 5.3.4).

5.4.2. Suggestions for improvement

Agreeing on most of the challenges, the participants suggested some solutions which they believed would improve the process of the course and make life easier for future course participants.

For the training center

All the respondents agreed that the choice of participants should be earlier, before the first semester starts. This also includes informing the school administration of the kind of work these participants are supposed to do. For example, Ibtisam said *"Choose the participants at the end of the year, so the following academic year school administration will take this in account when deciding on teachers' timetable and responsibilities"*. Khalid also suggested that the *"school administration should be informed what exactly participants are doing and how much work this needs"*.

Four teachers mentioned that the course should start earlier. Two said that starting the course in the first semester would be a good idea. Two suggested increasing the

duration of the AR project. For example, Huda said that it would be better to start it in the first semester and submit the report by the middle of the second semester.

Three suggested that the outline of the course and the handouts should be distributed earlier at the beginning of the course, so teachers could use their free time to go through them and have an idea of the process beforehand. Muneer, for instance, said *"at the beginning of the course teachers can be given the outline and the handouts of the course"*. He also suggested that it was not necessary to meet every week as long as the participants had access to the tutor when they needed him or her.

For schools

All of them agreed that the school responsibilities given to participants should be reduced. Informing school administrations earlier can help set the timetable so it will place no pressure on the teacher later while having day-release. Reducing responsibilities includes, as suggested by six participants, excluding participants from some school activities and substitution lessons. This included four participants' recommendation of having no more than fifteen lessons a week for each participant. For example, Salim said *"teachers who are going to attend this course should make sure they have no more than fifteen lessons a week"*.

5.4.3. Discussion

The respondents seemed to have faced challenges and expressed their strong demands through their suggestions to overcome these challenges for future course participants. The results indicated that time constraints and the workload teachers had in their schools, in addition to the demands of the course itself, made it challenging for those

participants. Burns (2010:19) mentioned that time for those teachers is "the major practical hurdle".

Having direct experience of the course, the participants were able to raise some suggestions for improving it. Their demands to the training center to send the names of participants earlier and inform school administrations about the kind of work they are required to do are reasonable and may give school administrations a chance to cooperate on it more effectively. Informing schools about this could possibly be seen as a request from the training center rather than from the teachers themselves.

Starting the RPD course earlier, as suggested, is seen as a chance to finish the course before the end of the second semester, which is the busiest time of the year for everyone. This may also provide another solution to the problem of time and workload. The participants' idea of distributing the course outline and the handouts could be considered another way to help teachers be prepared and make use of their free time.

Although participants faced challenges during the course, in general, they see that cooperation from and between both schools and the training center could help solve the problem. This may result in enhancing the effectiveness of the course procedures, which would be of great help to the participants.

5.5. *The connection between the RPD course and teachers' PD*

Many issues were raised by participants in regards to the topic. These are categorized as: general views of AR as a tool for teachers' PD, challenges faced in adopting it and their suggested solutions.

5.5.1. General View of AR as tool for PD

AR is seen by all participants to be an effective tool for their PD. This is because it helps to “*evaluate current practice*”, “*solve problems*”, “*improve teaching and learning and use new techniques*”, “*enhance the effectiveness of teaching materials used*”, “*enhance reflective skills*”, “*force teachers to read*” and “*promote cooperation between teachers*”.

Ali stated “*it makes you alive as a teacher... because you are doing something besides teaching*”. Noora said “*I find it useful, because I noticed a big difference between what I did before and after*”. Other teachers also mentioned that knowing about AR is useful for further studies.

However, only three of the participants conducted AR after the course. Two of them mentioned that their research projects were part of a course requirement. Only one participant conducted it voluntarily and highlighted the support she received from the school administration in doing so.

Other participants mentioned that they still follow the cycle of AR to improve their practice but see no purpose in documenting it or writing the research report. For example Samia said “*it would be nice if I write it, it would be a research, but I didn't, because there is no encouragement for doing this thing, for example, who do I write the research to if I write it? It is not going to be published*”. Therefore, they mentioned that they shared their findings only with their colleagues at schools by conducting workshops or presentations.

Seven participants said they intended to conduct AR in the near future and all had their topics and plans to do so. However, for some of them this all depends on their work

situation. For example, Khalid said *“I want to conduct an action research on how I can improve my students writing skill but I don’t want to start and then stop because of other school responsibilities”*.

5.5.2. Challenges faced in adopting it as a tool for PD

Being asked about the feasibility of conducting AR in schools by all English teachers, they agreed that the lack of knowledge will be a challenge to those who have not attended a course on AR.

In addition, all participants agreed that a heavy workload and lack of time are the main challenges they faced. Six saw lack of stimulus from the Ministry of Education and school as a challenge. For example, Khalid said *“there is no encouragement to do this research ... yes there is benefit for me and my students but me as a teacher: I need some encouragement ... free time”*. Therefore, Salim said *“if there is no change in teachers' work, it will be difficult for the Omani teachers to use AR ... they are asked to do a lot of things in a very limited time”*. Thus, these teachers expressed their demands, if adopting AR as a tool for their ongoing PD is an option.

5.5.3. Participants suggestions

For schools

All teachers agreed that school administrations should encourage teachers to do AR. They suggested reducing the responsibilities these teachers have, such as number of lessons, school activities, the number of substitution lessons and administrative work. For example, Ali said *“reducing the amount of work given for teachers everyday will be a big help”*.

In addition to this, four of the participants mentioned that schools should facilitate the research process; they mentioned arranging school visits and cooperation. For example, Huda said *“they should help for example in arranging visits”*.

For the training center

Six participants suggested that all teachers should have knowledge of AR. These suggested either *“the RPD course should be repeated to all teachers in the region”*, as Ali said, or *“a one week course just to raise their awareness about what is it ... what its benefits ... how to conduct it because they really don’t know this and leave the choice to them to conduct or not”*, as Ibtisam said.

Although they mentioned they felt confident conducting AR, four participants mentioned that there is still a need for constant support from trainers when they are undergoing the process. Khalid said *“I will need support from the trainer”* and this is *“to make sure that I am following the right procedures and get advice to improve it”*. Three participants said they would need support from colleagues who had conducted AR on similar topics to those with which they were concerned.

Ali suggested a *“regular meeting for senior teachers”* in the training center to discuss issues about AR and spread knowledge about findings.

For the Ministry of Education

All participants agreed that research projects conducted in the Omani context would be more beneficial for teachers and expressed their strong demand for the ministry to publish them. Two suggested English departments should be responsible for these and should distribute them to schools. Participants mentioned that this will motivate teachers to become involved in AR. For example, Salim said *“this will encourage more*

teachers to do more work if they are published". Samia added that *"you can get feedback from others to enhance your work"*.

Four participants suggested that the curriculum department should also consider this work. For example, Noora said *"the strategies that come from teachers' AR and which they see suitable should be included in the teacher's book so everyone can benefit from them"*.

5.5.4. Discussion

The teachers' perceptions of AR as a tool for their PD seem to show it gaining a healthy respect. Teachers could see how this tool was related to their practice and how effective it was in improving it. This view may result from their experience of conducting their projects.

Talking about challenges, respondents' views on the lack of knowledge of AR for teachers could possibly result from their previous experience of the insufficient initial education they received in this area. It seems that their understanding of its significance has made participants suggest that all teachers should attend a course in AR. Teachers seem to face challenges of time, a heavy workload and lack of support. This could also emerge from teachers' awareness of the kinds of procedures and work demands when conducting AR.

The teachers, therefore, do not seem to adopt this strategy on a regular basis. Only one participant conducted AR voluntarily, which could be because she received support from the school administration, which she mentioned. This raises a significant issue, which is that although preparing teachers with knowledge and skills of AR is important, in order to allow them adopt it as a strategy for PD, the necessary assistance should not

be ignored. "Teachers clearly can conduct research successfully if they are given the necessary support and the resources to carry it out" (Brindley, 1992:103).

In addition, the respondents' views on the need for constant support from trainers and teachers who had conducted AR in their areas of interest raises the issue of collaboration and receiving feedback from others noted in 3.3.2. Publishing teachers' AR projects also seems to be of considerable concern to the respondents. Their views reflect what Altrichter et al. (1993:176-179) mention the importance of disseminating teachers' work, such as increasing the quality of work and enhancing their professional self-confidence.

Chapter Six: *Summary and Recommendations*

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the results of the study and the recommendations. It also includes suggestions for further research on the area.

6.2. The summary of the findings

The findings and the discussion of this study highlight the following:

- ◆ Omani English language teachers have a limited background in AR.
- ◆ The RPD course plays a significant role in raising teachers' awareness of AR and in raising their researching skills. It also provides them with a valuable opportunity to conduct AR projects in their classrooms.
- ◆ Teachers believe that there is a strong relation between AR and their PD.
- ◆ Time constraints, heavy school responsibilities and a lack of encouragement and support are seen to be the most challenging obstacles that teachers' face, during and after the course, in adopting AR as a PD tool.
- ◆ Not publishing teachers' research is seen by teachers as de-motivating and not promising for their future practice.
- ◆ Enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills of AR is undisputedly critical if teachers are expected to use it as a tool for their PD. However, considering teachers' needs in order to go through the process of conducting AR is also essential and if these needs are not fulfilled, teachers will find it difficult to pursue the strategy. Therefore, teachers believe that the chance to adopt AR as a

tool for their PD depends greatly on the authorities' view of its significance, which determines the kind of support they can offer.

- ◆ Teachers tend to use the research skills gained from the RPD course to improve their practice, but very few conduct AR projects.

6.3. Implications and Recommendations

In the light of these results, AR is seen by teachers as a significant tool for their PD. However, in order to overcome the challenges stated by teachers there is a need to consider their situation while introducing them to the strategy and when they decide to use it later in their ongoing practice.

Therefore, certain issues should be considered before the course starts. Training centers should inform school administrations about the participants before the beginning of the first semester, so they will be taken into consideration and supported in their schools. It is also important that teachers' AR project schedules should be included in their school timetables, so this will ensure specific time allocated to AR with no distraction caused by other responsibilities.

In addition, other issues can be dealt with during the course to improve the situation. In the first session, the outline and the handouts of the RPD course should be distributed to the participants and thoroughly discussed with them. Participants should also be guided to narrow the scope of their studies and choose reasonable topics to investigate according to the time limit of the course. Since publishing teachers' work is considered a significant issue, a session on publishing AR projects should be added to the course in order to raise teachers' awareness of publishing their work through educational journals.

Moreover, after the course, teachers should receive enough support to conduct AR. Therefore, trainers should offer constant help to these teachers. This should also be announced to all teachers in all schools. From the side of the Ministry of Education, teachers should be encouraged through publishing their projects and providing them with channels to communicate their findings with others.

6.4. Suggestions for future research

Although this study presents a clear picture of the situation of AR in the Omani context, further investigations in the area that employ mixed methods of data collection and cover a wide range of participants are needed. Studies that aim to explore the views of the ministry and school administrations of teacher researchers and the support they can provide them with are also of equal importance in order to understand the future practice of AR. This study has raised issues that will surely improve the situation of AR for teachers' PD if they are taken into account. As a teacher trainer, I believe working on these issues can improve both the benefits of the course and teachers' practice of AR.

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Appendix (1)
RPD Course Objectives

1. To develop an understanding of the need and value of teacher action research
2. To develop the participants' understanding of the theory and practice of conducting teacher action research into practice.
3. To enable participants to conduct meaningful and appropriate action research into their own practice as a form of professional development
4. To support participants through the process of conducting their own action research project
5. To develop language skills through reading academic texts, writing reports, taking part in seminar discussions and presentations
6. To develop presentation and workshop skills

For participants to go on to become a research 'resource' in their schools to support other teachers in their research ideas

Appendix (2)
RPD Course Application Form

Application to study on the
Research for Professional Development Course

Name:	File number:
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School: [name and type]	Contact numbers: school- e-mail- gsm-
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Degree(s): [University, title and classification]
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English certificates and levels: [e.g. IELTS 5.5; PET 3.4]

1. Why would you like to participate on the Research for Professional Development course?
2. What experience have you had in conducting classroom research? Briefly outline any research project you have undertaken in the past.
3. Why do you think it is important for teachers to investigate their own practice?
4. Is there any aspect of your teaching, your classroom or your learners you think you may want to investigate? Why?

Appendix (3)

RPD Course Outline

Session	Focus	Aims
Session one	Exploring understandings about research and introducing action research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To explore participants' own beliefs about research ▪ To understand the purpose of teacher action research ▪ To begin to identify criteria for effective and appropriate teacher action research
Session two	Types of research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To identify characteristics of effective teacher action research ▪ To explore differences between quantitative and qualitative research ▪ To understand the links between teacher development and teacher action research
Session three	Action research and developing research questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To explore the formulation of effective research questions ▪ To understand the difference between first and second order data ▪ To identify the basic principles and procedure of action research
Session four	Research methods, triangulation and researching children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To explore a variety of observational and non-observational research methods ▪ To consider the important factors of researching children ▪ To understand the importance of triangulation
Session five	Research ethics and developing a focus for the inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To develop a clear understanding of ethical research issues ▪ To explore a focus for the inquiry ▪ To understand how to write a research proposal
Session six	Developing a research proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To identify and develop your research questions ▪ To develop your proposal document for your research ▪ To think about the purpose and process of keeping a research journal ▪ To further explore the purpose and structure of action research
Session seven	Case study research and sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To further explore the purpose and structure of action research ▪ To explore the purposes and procedure of conducting case study research ▪ To consider the decisions required in selecting the sample for the research

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To continue to develop your own research questions and proposals
Session	Focus	Aims
Session eight	Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To explore the purpose and procedure of conducting observation research ▪ To consider the importance of piloting action research instruments ▪ To review and develop reading and note taking skills ▪ To continue to develop your own proposals
Session nine	Writing questionnaires and conducting interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To explore the use of questionnaires and interviews in research ▪ To review and develop reading and note taking skills ▪ To identify and record appropriate information from research literature ▪ To review referencing norms ▪ To continue to develop your own research proposals
Session ten	Progress reports and writing the action research report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To present progress reports ▪ To discuss common themes and problems ▪ To identify some of the different ways of organising and structuring a research report ▪ To review issues of reliability and validity
Session eleven	Progress reports and an introduction to qualitative data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To present and share progress on individual studies ▪ To explore common themes and problems ▪ To learn how to analyse qualitative data. ▪ To clarify the difference between grounded data analysis and a priori data analysis. ▪ To review reading and find more references
Session twelve	Analysing qualitative interview data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To present and share progress on individual studies ▪ To explore common themes and problems ▪ To learn how to analyse qualitative interview data ▪ To learn some ways of presenting this data ▪ To review reading and to find more references
Session	Focus	Aims

Session thirteen	Analysing interaction transcripts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To learn how to analyse qualitative interaction data ▪ To explore an example of published research
Session fourteen	Sharing research through presentations and reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To learn how to give effective presentations ▪ To learn about the content and structure of introductions and conclusions ▪ To review referencing issues ▪ To learn how to present quantitative data in reports (using Excel)
Session fifteen	Analysing and presenting quantitative data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To present and share progress and findings of individual studies ▪ To explore the 'limitations' of research and how to include them in the action research report ▪ To identify the requirements for submitting the report ▪ To review progress on finishing the action research project
Session sixteen	Designing workshops and evaluating the course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To learn how to design effective workshops ▪ To reflect on understanding of action research ▪ To evaluate the course

The first six sessions of the course aim to explore participants' understanding of research and introduce them to classroom AR. Participants here build a focus for their AR projects and are assisted to develop their research questions. In addition, other issues like triangulation, researching children and research ethics are explored. By the end of the sixth session, participants work on their AR proposal and continue developing it throughout the following sessions. The purpose and structure of AR are revisited in different sessions and participants are provided with examples of real classroom AR studies to analyze aspects according to the focus of the particular session. At different stages of the course, issues related to AR such as type of data, methods of collecting data, data analysis and writing AR project are discussed. Participants are encouraged to do two presentations reporting progress in their projects; the first one is in session seven and the second one is towards the end of the course. They get feedback on both by the course tutor and the other participants.

Appendix (4)

RPD Course Evaluation Form

1. Do you think this course has provided you with a good introduction to the idea of teacher research?
2. What aspects of the course did you find most interesting?
The following aspects were the most interesting according to the participants:
3. What would you like to change about the course?
4. How confident do you now feel in your ability to conduct a meaningful, systematic and ethical research into your own practice?
5. How motivated do you now feel to go on to do more research? What ideas have you got for your next research project?
6. What did you learn about your practice from undertaking your own research project on this course?
7. What did you learn about research from undertaking your own research project on this course?

8. How useful did you find the reading on this course?
9. As a result of all the reading, writing, discussions and presentations you have taken part in this semester for the RPD course, do you feel your English language has been refreshed or even developed? In what way?
10. How do you feel about your research report?
11. What did you find the most useful thing you learned on this course?
12. Any further comments?

Appendix (5)

Professional Development tools

Individual	One-to-one	Group-based	Institutional
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-monitoring• Journal writing• Critical incidents• Teaching portfolios• Action research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peer coaching• Peer observation• Critical friendships• Action research• Critical incidents• Team teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case studies• Action research• Journal writing• Teacher support groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workshops• Action research• Teacher support groups

(Richards and Farrell, 2005:14)

Appendix (6)

The differences between AR and traditional research

What traditional researchers and action researchers tend to think about their different kinds of research

What traditional researchers tend to think	What action researchers tend to think
Only academic practitioners can do research and generate knowledge.	All practitioners can do research and generate knowledge.
Practitioners have to be told what to do and think about their practice.	Practitioners can think for themselves and make their own decisions about practice.
Knowledge is a thing that exists in someone's head (usually an academic's).	Knowledge is a creative process that all people engage in, intellectually and physically.
There is an answer to everything, and it can be discovered somewhere.	There is no final answer to anything. Knowledge can be created as well as discovered.
All research will lead to an end point.	There are no end points in life or human enquiry, only continual process of new beginnings.

Who studies what

What traditional researcher tend to study	What action researcher tend to study
Traditional researcher study the world 'out there', from an outsider perspective. They ask, 'What is going on over there?'	Action researcher study the world 'in here', from an insider perspective. They ask, 'What is going on in here?'
They study other people, seeing those people as separate from themselves.	They study themselves, seeing themselves as connected with everyone and everything else. The 'I' studies the 'I' in company with other people.
They offer explanation for what other people are doing, but remain separate from the people they are studying.	They offer descriptions and explanations for what they are doing in company with other people.

How they study it

How traditional researchers tend to study	How action researcher tend to study
Traditional researcher tend to carry out experiments on things and people, using traditional scientific methodology, including quantitative data gathering and statistical analysis.	Action researcher investigate their own practices together with the people they are with, starting from where they are. They offer explanations for how they think and act, and how they are trying to improve things. They often use qualitative forms of data gathering and analysis, though they frequently use quantitative forms too.
They often use control and experimental groups.	They produce their written and visual narrative to show their work in action.
They tend to say, 'If I do this, that will happen', aiming to show a cause-and-effect relationship between what they do and what other people do.	They do not say, 'I caused this to happen .' Instead they say, 'I had an influence somewhere.'

Why they study it and what they do with their findings

Why traditional researcher study and what they do with their findings	Why action researcher study and what they do with their findings
Traditional researcher want to find out facts and measurements about the external world.	Action researcher want to find out how they can improve the world, starting with themselves.
They do this so that they can make recommendations about how events can be predicted and managed.	They take responsibility for what they are doing, and encourage others to do the same.
They publish their work in scientific books and papers, usually as printed texts. Their findings tend to take the form of abstract theories which they expect other people to apply to their own practices.	They publish their living theories of practice in books and papers, often as visual texts, to influence the development of new open forms of thinking and practices that carry hope for the future.

From (McNiff, 2010:27-30)

Appendix (7)

Interview

<p>Interview schedule:</p> <p>Name of Teacher:_____</p> <p>Years of Experience:_____</p> <p>Name of School:_____</p> <p>Date of Interview:_____</p>	<p>A. Experience of AR before the RPD Course</p> <hr/> <p>1. What research experience did you have before the course?</p> <p>Pick up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How sufficient • Example
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<p>B. Enrolling in the Course</p>	
<p>2. What were your aims of enrolling in the RPD course?</p> <p>3. To what extent were they achieved?</p> <p>Pick up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and skills before and after • Opinion on the procedures, tutorials • Challenges faced during the course • Suggestions to overcome challenges 	<p>4. How would you describe your experience of conducting AR in your classroom?</p> <p>Pick up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits • Challenges • Suggestions

<p>Involvement in AR after the course</p>	<p>C. Beliefs on wider effects of AR</p>
<p>5. How viable is conducting AR in your school by English teachers?</p> <p>6. Have you conducted or been involved in AR process after the course? why? why not?</p> <p>Pick up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges • Suggestions 	<p>7. What effects do u think AR has on:</p> <p>A. Teachers' PD (teaching and learning, further studies)</p> <p>B. Educational field</p> <p>8. How could AR be valued and encouraged in schools?</p>

Appendix (8)

A Sample of the Interviews' Analysis

Appendix (9)

A Sample of the Interviews' Analysis

Before the course	During the course	After the course
Expectations (EX)	RPD Course (R)	Action Research (AR)
EX1= previous knowledge	R1 = Benefits R1a= knowledge R1b= Skills	AR1= connection to PD AR1a= teaching and learning AR1b= Further studies
EX2= Previous experience	R2= AR Project R2a= benefits R2b= Challenges R2c= suggestions	AR2= Experience after the course AR2a= Projects conducted AR2b= intentions for future practice AR2c= Support needed
EX3 = Aims/reasons for applying to the course	R3= Course process R3a= Positive issues R3b= Challenges R3c= Suggestions	AR3= Challenges AR3a= Knowledge and skills AR3b= time and workload AR3c= Motivation
		AR4= Suggestions AR4a= For training Center AR4b= for schools AR4c= For The Ministry

Saif: knowing that you had a good experience of researching ... what were your aims for applying for the RPD course?

Ali: my aims were...as I told u that ... i mean I like doing research because it seems that there is a purpose and the purpose is from the teacher himself i mean it is not, the teachers is not asked from the admin or DG to do an AR, it is his own desire to do something to serve himself and also for the sake of our learners... so i liked this area in the BA course ... when err I meet this chance to apply for the RPD course it is also ..I mean here I find myself it is just this is I was searching for... so it was a nice thing so I applied for it in order to improve the things that I

EX3 (Feelings about :[10]Comment
research)

EX3 (desire for :[20]Comment
improving practice)

wasn't I mean able to improve during the BA course because during the BA course there were so many modules there ... but RPD course it is about only one module so it will be focused.

EX3 (improving :[30]Comment
research skills)

EX (expectations) :[40]Comment

Saif: what do u think about conducting a research during the course?

Samia: if we only learn theories without practice I think will be useless... because theories r easy to forget ,, but practice always u keep it in your mind.. especially in that course teachers have opportunities to present on how he conducted it what are the methods and why ... which makes things more clear for other teachers and get feedback from them ..

R2a (significance of the :[50]Comment
practical side of the course)

R3a (presenting their :[60]Comment
R)

R2a :[70]Comment

Saif: what's the problem with the practical side

Huda: time... not enough time to do it. we haven't time to apply the research the because my topic was about using electronic games to raise spelling to promote grade 8 spelling ok ,, but because I used computers so I need for example two days a week to use it so there is no time and the results will not be so honest .. realistic..

R2b (Problem of time :[80]Comment
in conducting R project)

R2b (Choice of topic) :[90]Comment

Saif: what are these skills?

Muneer: maybe we have learned some of these as i told you at the university but we haven't applied them so they vanished .. they vanished and we haven't used them, but now because we are in the real practice of teaching ... that course added a lot and it was a good chance to think about a real experience that we are doing in our classroom ,, learning things and practicing learning things and practicing and it wasn't the case like we did in university which was only for the credit hours, but here we learned things and we apply it ,, so it was meaningful for us

EX2 (didn't practice :[100]Comment
the research skills)

R1 (benefits -while :[110]Comment
being an in-service teacher)

R2a (The practical :[120]Comment
side makes it meaningful)

Saif: do you see any relation between AR and PD?

Noora: they are very related we cannot separate them because if the teacher continues teaching without researching and thinking about

pupils' problems and without thinking about an action which should be there I don't think that the teacher will be a successful as the teacher who is always involved in research...

AR1 (makes :[130]Comment
successful teachers)

S: Regarding your future practice of research... would u like to have support by anybody for conducting research in the future?

Muneer: actually I feel I am confident with it but i may be need help of someone who recently have conducted a research which i mean has a relation with what I am doing especially if we r doing with the same theme for example he may help me with some instructions with some methodologies he has used and if he has encountered any problem he may guide me.

R1 (benefits of the :[140]Comment
course)

AR2 (kind of support :[150]Comment
needed)

Certificate of ethical research approval

Your student no: 600052632

Title of your project: Teachers' Perceptions on Action Research as a Tool for Their Professional Development: The Role of "Research for Professional Development" Course for In-service Omani Teachers

Brief description of your research project:

"Research for Professional development" course is one of the in-service teacher training programmes offered by the ministry of education in Oman and which is delivered in all training centres all over Oman. It aims to raise teachers' awareness about teacher research in general and the application of Action research in their classrooms in particular. In this course participants are trained to investigate their own practice by conducting meaningful small-scale research into their own professional context.

My research project aims to investigate teachers' perceptions on "Research for Professional Development" course in promoting their knowledge and skills about research and the extent to which they find themselves engaged in research afterwards. The focus of my research will be on one of the regions in Oman where I work, Nizwa in the interior region. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with eight teachers who attended the course, four from last year, 2009-2010, and the other four from the year before, 2008-2009.

Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

Participants will be in-service teachers whose experience ranged from four to fifteen years by the time they enrolled in the course. These teachers were working in different schools, Cycle One, Cycle Two and Post Basic.

Give details regarding the ethical issues of informed anonymity and confidentiality.

Ethical issues are to be considered in all steps during and after the study. This includes informing participants about the study, the method of data collection and procedures.

Participants will be informed about the protection of their anonymity in the research, confidentiality of their personal details and workplace in addition to their contributions to this study. They have the right to withdrew from the study at any point.

Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

Certain procedures will be followed to ensure that there is no harm caused through data collection and analysis. First I will personally contact them through emails to inform them about the study and procedures to be followed to gather information. Then, I will work with those interested to participate in the study. The schedule of the interviews are to be negotiated with participants and will be set according to the time that suits each of them. They also have the choice where they prefer the interview to be, either in their schools or in the training centre. I will make sure of the privacy of the place during the interview. They have the right to choose not to be recorded, in which I will depend on note taking.

Participants will be given a copy of the recorded interview so each one of them can listen to the interview and check if what s/he says is what s/he believes is true. They have the right to contact me to clarify any issue raised during the interview or to add any information they feel necessary to include. During analysis, in case of ambiguity when listening to the recorded interviews or of difficulty in understanding what exactly participants means I will refer back to them to ensure that what I understand is what they mean.

Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):

All recordings will be kept in a secure place and used only for the case of research. Each of the participants have his or her copy of his or her interview. Transcripts will not include their real names or any personal details.

Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

Four of the participants were tutored by me. This could be an issue to be considered. Therefore, the contributions of the other four participants have an additional value which is to make sure that my position does not have an effect on my tutees' contributions.

This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's **Research Support Office** for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: March until: August 2017

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature): J. Cadoath date: 21/3/11

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

GSE unique approval reference: M/10/11/54

Signed: B. Moncrieff date: 25/3/11
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

This form is available from <http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/>

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Teachers' Perceptions of Action Research as a Tool for Professional Development: the Role of the 'Research for Professional Development' (RPD) Course for In-Service Omani Teachers by Saif Alabri

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Chapter One: Introduction 1.1. Introduction to the study Professional development (PD) is undisputedly a crucial element in all careers in order to sustain and enhance the productivity of work. In addition to the values gained through them, enrolling in PD activities represents the commitment of individuals to raising their awareness of their work, looking deeper into it, and identifying opportunities and possibilities to improve it. Focusing on the teaching profession, as is obviously known, teachers do not only teach but also have a responsibility to learn, so it is considered a dynamic and demanding job. According to Underhill (1999:17), for teachers, PD

1is "the process of becoming the best teacher one is able to be, a process that can be started but never finished".