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University Teachers' Knowledge of- and about- Action Research: The Case of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Two Ethiopian Public Universities

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Abstract:

This study aimed at investigating English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' knowledge of and about action research. Analysis of the data collected from EFL teachers and students at two Ethiopian Universities through questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interviews has shown that the teachers had relatively more of the theoretical knowledge than practical skills, both of which positively correlated. Equally, the teachers had minimal tacit-knowing-in-action in comparison with reflection-in action and reflection-on-action, which might have made them to take time and more information before deviating from the normal lesson plan whenever the classroom circumstances require. This necessitates the need for empowering the teachers and boosting their commitment to possess nimble hands, mind and heart for learning how to transform their practices through learning and practicing action research with the desire to teach the right things right. This can be done when the teachers enhance their practical skills mainly through learning how to do their day-to-day practices in new ways, by putting themselves in enlightening practice-based debates related to their specific professional environments and being responsive to individual differences within their classrooms.

Keywords: University, action research, teachers, knowledge, English, foreign language

1. Conceptual and Theoretical Background of the Study

With the purpose to investigate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' knowledge of and about action research at two Ethiopian public universities, the study had two assumptions. First, the teachers' knowledge and perceptions serve as a surface symptom for their actual practices. Second, in today's dynamic environments, EFL teachers are expected to: a) do the right things right- to be alive in changing EFL classroom practices for better quality; b) continually reexamine taken for granted assumptions against evidences and interpretations related to teaching rather than longing for one approach as an *attainable ideal*; c) de-absolutize accustomed traditions and rituals; and d) take a fallibilist view of truth. By implication, EFL teachers need to possess adequate Knowledge about- and-of Action Research. Knowledge about action research deals with theoretical knowledge (knowing that) and the information, theoretical reasoning, and understanding about action research, which EFL teachers think they possessed implicitly /tacitly or explicitly. Knowledge of action research, on the other hand has two connotative meanings. In the first place, it refers to practical, procedural (know how) knowledge, competence and skills that EFL teachers claimed that they possessed for conducting action research. Second, it also stands as a generic phrase for the sake of simplicity, where there is no need to differently indicate EFL teachers' theoretical and the practical knowledge of action research, mainly in the current dynamic world.

The dynamism implies a pragmatic and critical reflection of the teachers upon their practices and contexts guided by some explicit and implicit aspects of teaching as a profession. The explicit aspect refers to the teachers' professional actions in line with their profiles embedded in their training and career specifications. The implicit dimension, on the other hand, implies the teachers' 'tacit knowing' which contains their values inherent in their professional lives and practices. It implies qualities, and dispositions of the teachers not objectified, but are simply inherent in the already embedded ones- informing their practices and entailing the independence of the world of objective mind (Habermas, 1986; McNiff, 2002).

The case demands empowerment, which in turn entails moral, epistemological, ontological, and methodical positions of the teachers to invest much effort and many talents for the betterment of their classroom practices. These positions demand professional autonomy to think and act rationally and consensually as opposed to a forced or manipulated one- entailing the close relationship between rationality and knowledge (Kemmis, 1995; Habermas, 1986). This line of thought: a) qualifies EFL teachers as logical, sensible and capable professionals to make prudent decisions and take wise actions to bring change based on intelligent thinking and understanding rather than on emotion or on established norms and rituals; and b) challenges the notion that 'teachers teach as they were taught' using a taken-for-granted approach. This is because, life and environmental situations change from day-to-day making teaching a complex

craft, one class never being quite the same as another and today's method may not work for tomorrow's situation (Allwright & Bailey, 1991).

Analogously, whereas it is possible for medical workers to prescribe the same/similar medicines as others in the profession, it is unfair for teachers to replicate an approach of teaching that they have not experienced in their actual work environments. This is because teachers, unlike artists, deal with human beings having different physical, physiological, intellectual, emotional, and moral makeup. By implication, settings as well as learners are unique- demanding language teachers to be mindful of the dynamism in their day-to-day activities rather than taking one approach, for instance Communicative language teaching (CLT), for granted. In the dynamism, CLT may not be as effective as it claims to be. Arguably, there is no systematic proof that typical CLT techniques work well or works at all under all conditions and with all learners (Lindsay & Knight, 2006; O'Neill, 2000). In O'Neill's views, pluralist methodologies are more likely to be successful than any single orthodoxy.

The current trend, in Ethiopian universities, has also opened new opportunities for EFL teachers to reflect on and assess the level of effectiveness of CLT approaches with a purpose to make adaptations to their classroom environments rather than taking it, which may have different environmental implications for granted. Such opportunities have necessitated provision of action research to teacher educators through Higher Diploma Program (HDP), and as a course at the level of pre-service undergraduate program, and as part of research course and work in MA programs. HDP is a practice-based training program for teacher educators at higher education institutions in Ethiopia. Though some universities modified, HDP generally has one year duration whereby teachers attend 2 hours discussion classes for 2 days per week, supplemented with additional classroom observations and secondary school visits for a week or two. To graduate, the participants are expected to conduct action research.

Action Research in this study is conceived as a systematic, flexible, context-based, eclectic and pluralistic form of research whereby EFL teachers (individually or in group/collectively) diagnose, monitor, and analyze their classroom practices for learning, problem resolution and quality improvement instead of relying on CLT alone (Firdissa, 2016).

Consequently, all level schoolteachers are expected to possess knowledge about/ of action research and do action research as one of the many requirements for career development, and students also get acquaintance to action research practices through different mechanisms one of which is practicum placement at secondary schools.

As there is no single method or approach that can work for all teachers or for all students at all times, places and in all contexts; EFL teachers are expected to recognize the fact that current and new understandings about their practices are always open to revision, disproof, and criticism in the light of as yet undiscovered knowledge or understandings and a view that truth must always be justified discursively through evidence-based argument. The quality of the argument, and the ways people participate in it is what gives life to being *critical* (Hoy & McCarthy, 1994; Noffke & Somekh, 2009; McNiff, 2002; Selinger & Shohamy, 2007).

By implication, EFL teachers' knowledge is 'never static and complete' as the topics, themes, and circumstances of their communicative action will forever be changing, leaving all their professional competencies incomplete and partial- halting steps and limiting achievements on a path towards an unattainable complete agreement, complete understanding, and perfect consensus about what to do (McNiff, 2002; Kemmis, 2007a, b).

CLT, to be relevant in today's dynamism, needs to be responsive to the theory-driven research (extant literature) and data-driven research (the research situation and the people in it), and to the dual commitment of action research- action (change and improvement) and - research (learning and understanding). By implication, EFL teachers are expected to include research into their range of skills and are conceptualized as language researchers and practitioners. There are basic assumptions for this. The assumptions are grounded in the perspectives of *reflective rationality* (as opposed to *technical rationality*) as synthesized from different sources and distinctively presented in Table 1 below.

Contrasting Points	Reflective Rationality	Technical Rationality
Complex practical problems	Demand specific solutions	Demand general solutions.
These solutions can be developed	Only inside the context in which the problem arises and in which the practitioner is a crucial and determining agent	Outside practical situations (in research or administrative centers)
The solutions	Cannot be successfully generalized to other contexts but they can be made accessible to other practitioners as hypotheses to be tested or read	Can be translated into teachers' actions by means of publications, training, administrative orders, etc.
Views about knowledge	Knowledge is something, which people generate for themselves as they work out their dilemmas and issues	Knowledge is a 'given', something to be acquired; it exists external to the knower
The purpose of action research	Finding ways of influencing social change through the production of descriptions and explanations by individuals themselves to account for their educational practices (I-theories)	Observing and describing the behavior and actions of people in order to understand how they behave (E-theories)

Table 1: Reflective Rationality versus Technical Rationality [does not exist]

Source: Firdissa (2010: 70-71)

It can be depicted from Table 1 that the features of *reflective rationality* align with that of action research whereby teachers are empowered to make appropriate decisions. This is because teaching as a profession involves complex decisions (at planning, interaction, evaluation, and follow-up) and social interactions implying that there is always opportunity for improvement and change.

Change in the context of action research is an inevitable and important part of being a professional. Specifically in the context of curriculum development for effective teaching-learning, teachers are expected to explore the implications of the changes for their own educational values, and find out how to make any necessary alterations to the routines of their teaching practices. Understanding such a change, nonetheless, is not an easy task. It demands an adequate description of the complex professional actions of the teachers in a spirit of reflective practice individually or collectively. Reflective practice which characterizes these efforts is a form of practical theorizing which can lead to the evolution of good social orders in general and improved professional action in particular.

Virtually, practice can be enhanced when we reflect on what we are doing and decide to improve it. In this sense, we raise our deep tacit knowledge which contains our values base to an explicit surface level where we try to live our values in our practice. By so doing, we come to understand how our I-knowledge is embodied within and informs our practices in the world.

In the process of transforming tacit into explicit knowledge, three key ideas (generations of professional knowledge and improvement of practice) are interwoven, namely: *Tacit knowing-in-action (Tkia)*, *Reflection-in-action (Ria)*, and *Reflection-on-action (Roa)*.

Tacit knowing-in-action is a (research) process that follows a very different route from that anticipated in traditional research. This is because, knowing- in- action is about the professional knowledge that we use in our daily practice (Ghaye&Ghaye, 1998). It exists in two forms: reflection and utilization of knowledge. In the first place, reflection on what we actually do, on our own teaching and experience: a) causes improvement of our teaching and our development as teachers; and b) generates rich and detailed knowledge base derived from practice. Second, this knowledge is used by us in our teaching. It then becomes knowledge or 'knowing-in-action'. Our knowing as teachers is, therefore, reflected in what we teach, how we teach and how we encourage children to learn. *Reflection-in-action on the other hand*: a) is a reflection on the adequacy of our 'knowing-in-action'; b) occurs in the midst of action; c) is based upon a rapid interpretation of the situation where rapid decisions are required; and d) guides further action (Ghaye&Ghaye, 1998). It is called forth whenever new and complex situations have to be dealt with or disturbances and problems disrupt the smooth flow of routine action; and when a surprise, which causes one to question, appears in the process of accomplishing the task. *Reflection-on-action*: a) consists of reflection after the event; b) is deliberate, conscious and public activity principally designed to improve future action; c) is a research process as the *reflective practitioner is a researcher*; d) is akin to *practical* action research which is designed to promote teachers' professionalism by drawing on their informed judgment; and e) is generated through reflection on the characteristics and processes of one's own practice, in all its aspects and dimensions: design, development and assessment (Ghaye&Ghaye, 1998; Noffke&Somekh, 2009; Grundy, 1987, in Cohen, Manion& Morrison, 2000).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The landscape of knowledge production, preservation, dissemination, extension, and application is changing, demanding teachers to possess nimble hands, minds and hearts for learning how to transform their practices through action research with the desire to teach the right things right. As teachers are accountable both to others and to truth, they need to be responsive to their practices, in their practices and at their practices. Failure to do so has inexorable repercussions for students' world of life, work and destiny in today's volatile, global environment. Waiting an ideal moment to do action research is waiting forever, and yet, knowledge of epistemological, ontological, methodological, and quality implications of the field is essential.

Action research brings together *research* and *action*, the *researcher* and the *actor* with the purpose of enhancing the quality EFL teaching and learning through empowered, informed, motivated, and committed teachers.

There is, however, a doubt whether English as Foreign Language (EFL) Teachers in Ethiopian public universities have profound knowledge of and about action research. More specifically, as a Tutor and Leader of Higher Diploma Program (HDP) at Addis Ababa University, I used to observe classrooms of instructors of different disciplines and different backgrounds. I also had made a short assessment by collecting data from 25 language instructors who were attending the HDP to gauge their level of understanding of and about action research, and the state of the affairs of their overall reflections on their practices, settings and contexts. The findings have shown that even though the teachers had awareness about action research, they were not actually doing it due to different reasons, among others negligible action research practical knowledge and their limited understanding of its role for creating and sustaining the quality of language teaching and learning.

Moreover, as a guest trainer at Haramaya University on Action research for Instructors, I tried to gauge the instructors' level of understanding of action research through brainstorming. Consequently, I have come to learn that there were ambiguities in differentiating action research from the conventional research approach and consequently, students who were given action research practicum assignments were being evaluated by the conventional research criteria.

Whereas instructors of other subjects were also observed facing similar challenges, this study focuses on EFL teachers' knowledge of and about action research. This is because the English language is the medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels in the country; and it is also decisive for the learners' successes in academic, economic, and

social life in the world. Failing to pragmatically reflect on their own classroom practices, the instructors, in most cases, used to resort to blaming students' secondary school English language background.

The implications of all thus far mentioned potential and observed shortfalls are low quality EFL teaching in particular and the education system in general. This in turn might have resulted in students' low proficiency in English, low academic achievement and consequently low performance at the world of work and life, symbolizing a sort of vicious circle.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The study intended to investigate the extent to which EFL teachers have knowledge of and about action research to bring improvement and change in their specific work environments. Whereas the issue might have been treated piecemeal previously, attempts have been made in this study to examine it anew in the light of the current developments about action research and EFL worldwide and in our universities. Implied in the attempts are learning and enhancement of effective implementation of EFL teaching by adapting CLT approach to specific classrooms of Ethiopian universities.

To achieve the above purpose, the study tried to answer the following basic questions:

- Do EFL teachers at Jimma and Hawassa Universities have the knowledge of and about action research?
- Is there correlation between the teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research?
- With which does the observed level of EFL teachers' knowledge align: *Technical rationality*? *Reflective rationality*? Or both?
- To what extent do the Action Types characterize EFL Teachers' Classroom Practices?

These questions on EFL teachers' knowledge align with the *interpretivist's* line of thought which advances the notion that human behavior is affected by the knowledge of the social world. It is my belief that EFL teachers' action research knowledge (theoretical as well as practical) can influence their practice of action research for (re)constructing knowledge rather than recording and assigning it.

The level of EFL teachers' action research knowledge and skills serves as a surface symptom to surmise their level of practicing it purposefully. Inherent in this line of thought is the fact that the teachers' knowledge involves their 'whole-body practice' beyond cognitive activity. Considering the teachers' claim to knowledge, therefore, does not mean to study their brain, rather considering what they claim they can do to inform their practices (McNiff, 2002).

2. Research Design and Methodology

This study employed a case study design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The subjects of the study were instructors, and students at Jimma and Hawassa Universities. Whereas systematic sampling technique was employed in selecting the two Universities, purposive and availability sampling techniques were employed in selecting the research participants.

The selection of the Universities was preceded by registering all the nine public universities in the country functioning prior 2004/05 in a descending order of their years in offering English as a field of study. Whereas the first three from the order (Addis Ababa, Haramaya, and Bahirdar Universities) had been taken for another related large-scale research, Jimma and Hawassa Universities have been selected for the current study. From the two Universities, 43 instructors (25 at Jimma and 18 at Hawassa Universities) and 150 second- and third-year undergraduate students (90 at Jimma and 60 at Hawassa Universities) were selected as participants of the study using purposive and availability sampling techniques respectively for the teachers and the students. The selection of the instructors was purposive because those who served for a minimum of two years at higher education institutions and who were said to have conducted action research were included. On the other hand, all the available and accessible second- and third-year undergraduate students were included as data sources. With the purpose to supplement and triangulate the data from instructors and students, interviews were also conducted with three officials at the Ministry of Education.

3. Data Collection Tools

Three data collection tools were utilized in the course of the research work: two kinds of close-and open-ended questionnaires (one for teachers and the other for students); a semi structured interview schedule (for three people at the Ministry of Education), and a focused group discussion guide (for six teachers at the two universities). The data generated through these different tools were used to back up or cast new light, each onto the other.

The questionnaire for teachers was given (for comment and inputs) to three measurement specialists with a rank of assistant professorship (two from AAU and the other from Hawassa University). One of them (from AAU) has given me nothing except a statement: 'Go ahead, it has no problem'. Even though this had given me confidence about the questionnaire, I did not hesitate to push the rest two to give me critical comments. Consequently, both have given me valuable inputs by critically commenting the formats and the contents of the questionnaire.

Whereas the one from Hawassa University has emailed me, the one from AAU has personally brought to my office and discussed with me. Finalizing the teachers' questionnaire by incorporating the inputs from both professionals, I have adapted it to that of the students.

Whereas the teachers' questionnaire and the FGD questions directly addressed EFL teachers' knowledge of and/or about action research; both the interview questions and the students' questionnaire were used just to complement that of the teachers' questionnaire and to serve for triangulation purpose.

Attempts were made to validate the findings by generating data from five members of a *validation group* through close-ended and open-ended questions. The results of validation analysis have shown that the research procedures and the tentative findings were valid. Whereas the quantitative data have shown (strong) agreement of the group members to the statements that supported the validity of the research procedures and the tentative outcomes from the set criteria; the data generated through the open-ended questions have brought a number of valuable ideas in conformity to the claim I, as a researcher, have made.

4. Methods of Data Analyses

A blend of both qualitative and quantitative methods has been used following descriptive- and interpretive- approaches in analyzing the data collected for the study. These are believed to generate relevant meanings from the data. The descriptive approach dealt with explorations of extant literatures that have been addressed in the Conceptual and *Theoretical Background of the Study* section, and examining the EFL teachers' knowledge of and about action research based on the data generated.

Following the interpretive approach, on the other hand, attempts have been made to clarify and justify what has been said in the literatures and the data-based results on subjectively, objectively, and dialectically constructed realities. In the analysis, the order in which the items in the data gathering instruments were followed. It followed a sequence of EFL teachers' action research knowledge sources and theoretical and practical skills; correlation between EFL teachers' theoretical knowledge and skills of action research; EFL teachers' familiarity with the EFL classroom implications of action research; and the extent to which some action types characterize EFL teachers' classroom practices.

The data collected by all the close-ended questions of the questionnaires were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program and quantitatively analyzed. Accordingly, assessment of the internal consistency (reliability) of the items was made to see whether the items tend to be measuring much the same thing using Cronbach's Alpha Reliability. Finally, the data generated by the generally stated questions of all the tools including that of the interview guides have been merged, analyzed and interpreted qualitatively, basically to complement the quantitative results.

4.1. Presentations and Analyses of the Data

A total of 43 and 150 copies of teachers' and students' questionnaires, respectively, were dispatched by hand delivery. The overall rate of return was 33 (77 %) and 104 (69%) from teachers and students respectively. FGDs and interviews were also conducted respectively with six EFL teachers, and three people at the Ministry of Education. The next sub-sections, therefore, present the characteristics (bio-data) of the respondents of the questionnaires, and presentation and analyses of the theme-based data.

4.2. Characteristics of the Respondents

Sex	Frequency		Valid Percent	
	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students
Male	20	76	83	85
Female	4	13	17	15
Total	24	89	100	100
Missing system	9 (27%)	15 (14%)		
Total	33	104		

Table 2: Sex of the Respondents

As can be seen from Table 2, of the 24 teachers and 89 students who properly answered the specific question about their sex, there were only 4 (17%) and 13 (15%) female teachers and students respectively. Male dominance was, therefore, manifested in both cases. The case could be due to the long-lived gender gap among employees, particularly in posts that require high-level qualification including teaching at HEIs. As the document produced by the Office of the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs (OAVPAA) (2007) presents, there were 1286 (93%) and 104 (7%) male and female full-time Ethiopian teaching staffs respectively in the year 2006/07 at Addis Ababa University. Similarly in the academic year 2008/09, the number of female academic staff in the university was very low as it comprised only 11 % (231), out of the total 2078 academic staff in the University, in contrast to an 89% (1847) of male staff population (OAVPAA, 2009: 4).

Teaching Load	Frequency	Valid Percent
Under 6	1	3
6-12	18	58
13-19	10	32
Above 19	2	7
Total	31	100
No response	2 (6%)	
Total	33	

Table 3: Staff Teaching Load in Hours Per Week

As can be seen from Table 3, only one respondent had below six hours teaching load per week. Of the 31 (2 were missing) staff respondents, 58%, 32%, and 7% had teaching loads of 6-12, 13-19, and above 19 credit hours per week respectively. This shows that 39% of the teachers were overloaded beyond the maximum limit, which is 12 lecture equivalent hours per week for academic staff in the academic (teaching) departments (AAU, 2007: 177).

Those who had fewer than 6 and 6-12 teaching load per week were engaged in different routines and administrative activities. Whereas one teacher indicated that he was serving as an associate dean, two indicated that they were heads at their respective departments. Other six teachers also pointed out that they were engaged in teaching and other activities and routines including coordination of different sections in their respective universities.

Above all, the discussants underscored the fact that the majority of the teaching staffs were involved in advising graduating students, teaching in the extension and part time programs and engaged in other non- teaching activities in and outside their institutions to supplement their incomes. The trend, in general, shows that the staff members did not have time to advance their action research knowledge and skills due to much teaching load and other routines.

Experience	Frequency	Valid Percent
Under 5	11	39
5-10	11	39
11-16	4	14
Above 16	2	7
Total	28	100
No response	5 (15%)	
Total	33	

Table 4: Experience in Teaching English at HEIs

As can be seen from Table 4, of the 28 total respondents to the specific question, 39% had fewer than five, and five to ten years of services, followed by 14% and 7% having 11-16 and above 16 years of services respectively in teaching English at HEIs. This indicates that the majority of the respondents (78%) had 10 and under 10 years of services in teaching EFL at HEIs. This is an indication that academic staffs with relatively low teaching experiences staffed the departments of teaching English as a Foreign Language at both Universities entailing low level of action research knowledge and skills.

HDP Attendance	Frequency	Valid Percent
Attended	17	55
Did not attend	12	39
Attending	2	6
Total	31	100.0
No response	2(6%)	
Total	33	

Table 5: The Respondents' Attendance of Higher Diploma Program (HDP)

It can be seen from Table 5 that 55% of the respondents did attend and 6% were attending HDP during the time of data collection. On the other hand, just 39% did not attend. The data show that the majority of the staff respondents attended HDP. This in turn implies that the majority of them had some awareness about action research, which is one of the main interactive Modules of HDP Portfolio. This finding has also been supported by the data from the FGDs and interviews. Particularly the discussants indicated that the majority of the staff had attended HDP conducted action research and as a requirement for certification.

4.3. EFL Teachers' Action Research Knowledge

In order to investigate the level of EFL teachers' knowledge of and about action research, twenty questions were prepared and dispatched to the teachers. Whereas one question was open-ended, 19 were closed.

	Theoretical Knowledge		Practical Skills to do Action Research	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Low	2	6	5	15
Medium	19	58	16	49
High	12	36	12	36
Total	33	100	33	100

Table 6: The Respondents' Theoretical Knowledge and Practical Skills of Action Research

Table 6 shows that 58% and 49% of the respondents, respectively, rated their theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research as medium. Thirty- six percent of them also rated both theoretical knowledge and practical skills as 'high'. A further look at the Table shows that 6% and 15% rated low for theoretical knowledge and

practical skills respectively. Relatively, the respondents had more of theoretical knowledge than practical skills to do action research.

Furthermore, it has been learnt from a descriptive analysis of the same data that the teachers' action research theoretical knowledge and practical skills are $\bar{X} = 2.30$ (SD = 0.59), and $\bar{X} = 2.21$ (SD = 0.70) respectively. Since the questions that generated the data were rated on a scale of 1-3, where 3 = high, 2 = medium, and 1 = low; both theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research of the respondents fall above the middle rater.

Comparatively, however, the results of both frequency and descriptive analyses show that the respondents rated their theoretical knowledge to be higher than that of their practical skills on action research.

A correlation analysis has also been done for the theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research. The result has been presented in Table 7 below.

Correlation between	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
EFL teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research	33	.61(**)	.000

Table 7: Correlation between EFL Teachers' Theoretical Knowledge and Skills of Action Research

** Correlation Is Significant at the 0.01 Level (2-Tailed)

Table 7 shows that there is a positive association between EFL teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research. The association is significant ($r = 0.61$, $DF = 31$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that EFL teachers with more theoretical knowledge have also more practical skills to do action research. Equally, as the p value is small, getting the correlation coefficient by chance is unlikely.

Furthermore, requested to rate how familiar they were with EFL classroom implications of action research, the majority (63% of the respondents) indicated that they were familiar (see Table 8 below).

Level of Familiarity	Frequency	Valid Percent
Very Unfamiliar	2	6
Unfamiliar	4	13
Heard the term	2	6
Familiar	20	63
Very familiar	4	13
Total	32	100
Missing System	1 (3%)	
Total	33	

Table 8: Familiarity of the EFL Teachers with the EFL Classroom Implications of Action Research

A further look at Table 8 shows that whereas 13% of the respondents rated the case as 'unfamiliar', equal percentage also rated that they were 'very familiar'. It can, therefore, be judged that the respondents were familiar with the EFL classroom implications of action research as the majority reflected the case positively.

The teachers' observed level of familiarity might have resulted from the trainings they had. Requested to tell whether or not they had any training to do action research, 63% indicated that they had. Those who claimed to have training on action research further mentioned the main types of the trainings and their durations. Their responses, nonetheless, were mixed. The majority indicated their first exposures to action research were through attending specific sessions on action research in HDP at their respective universities. Other 6% of the respondents indicated that they got opportunity to participate action research sessions of the HDP moderation workshops centrally ran by MoE and VSOs. This finding aligns with the result in Table 5 that the majority of the respondents attended HDP.

Furthermore, other 20% to 25% of the respondents indicated that they had got opportunities to attend different workshops, seminars, and training programs related to action research organized by different bodies at different levels through distance and face-to-face modes for the duration of 1 day to 2 months. The issues cited as the topics of the said trainings, among others, include: the need to conduct action research; the effects of action research findings; procedures to conduct action research; action research in classroom; and upgrading the teaching performance of teachers through CPD whereby action research is a central theme.

Finally, very few of the respondents claimed to have practiced action research in their formal trainings for MA in TEFL, postgraduate certificate programs, and during ELIP training that had been coordinated by the Ministry of Education at different levels. The data generated by the interviews have also supplemented this finding. Two of the interviewees at MoE indicated that teachers in HEIs in general and English language teachers in particular had opportunities to participate different English language proficiency trainings at different times through different modes.

Factual Statements for Rating	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
1. Action research is learning by doing	32	3.00	0.00
2. Action research is responsive to specific EFL classroom situation	32	2.09	0.47
3. Action research deals more with the immediate application rather than the development of theory	27	2.78	0.58
4. EFL classroom practical problems demand specific solutions	32	2.97	0.18
5. EFL classroom practical problems demand general solutions	31	2.13	0.62
The solutions to EFL classroom practical problems can be developed:			
6. only inside the context in which the problem arises	32	2.50	0.62
7. outside the practical situations (in research or administrative offices)	29	2.21	0.68
The choice of the methods for action research work should be:			
8. guided by scientific considerations in a restricted sense	32	2.41	0.71
9. a choice about the empowerment of participants/teacher researchers	27	2.67	0.678

Table 9: EFL Teachers' Action Research Knowledge

The descriptive statistics in Table 9, have been generated from questions rated on a scale of 1-3, where 3 = agree, 2 = somewhat agree, and 1 = disagree. It can, therefore, be seen from the Table that the respondents have shown agreement to almost all the factual statements that were meant to assess their theoretical knowledge about action research. Particularly, the mean for the statements about: the conceptions of action research (learning by doing); the specificity of the solutions for EFL classroom practical problems; the immediacy nature of action research application; the *empowerment* of participants/teacher researchers for choices of the methods for action research work; and the whereof the solutions to EFL classroom problems were rated as 3.00; 2.97; 2.78; 2.67; and 2.5 respectively.

This finding is an indication that the respondents were in favor of the *reflective rationality* as opposed to the *technical rationality* (See Table 1 under *Theoretical and Contextual Background of the Study* section). This is, specifically, because the respondents highly rated statements about reflection rationality that favored classroom and teacher empowerment and commitment. More specifically, the responses were in favor of the notion that *EFL classroom practical problems demand specific solutions* and *the solutions to EFL classroom problems can be developed only inside the context in which the problem arises*, all of which are the features of *reflective rationality*.

On the other hand, the mean averages for the three incorrect statements aligning with the arguments of the supporters of 'technical rationality' are above two which is the middle rater. That means, the mean for the three statements: about the *choice of the methods for action research work is to be guided by scientific considerations in a restricted sense*, the development of the solutions to EFL classroom practical problems outside the practical situations (in research or administrative offices), and EFL classroom practical problems' demanding general solutions were 2.41, 2.21, and 2.13 respectively. This could be due to mixing or confusing the context-responsiveness nature of action research to the terms '...restricted sense', '...general solutions', and '...outside of the practical situations'. At an extreme case, the factual statement: '[a]ction research is responsive to specific EFL classroom situation' has a mean of $\bar{X} = 2.09$ (SD = 0.47). My assumption was that the teachers ought to rate higher than this figure as an indication of their theoretical knowledge of action research. This specific rating and the moderately high rating on the incorrect statements espousing for the 'technical rationality' are indications for the need to further investigate the case.

Six questions dealing with the extent to which some action types characterize EFL teachers' classroom practices were presented to the respondents for rating on a scale of 1-5, where 5 = very high, 4 = high, 3 = medium, 2 = low, and 1 = very low. The expected minimum and maximum scores generated for each of the action types are 2 and 10 respectively.

Action types	N	No of items	Minimum	Maximum	$\bar{X}$	SD
Tacit knowing in action (Tkia)	32	2	2	10	2.85	.97
Reflection-in-action (Ria)	32	2	4	10	4.00	.88
Reflection-on-action (Roa)	30	2	6	10	3.97	.63

Table 10: The Extent to Which Some Action Types Characterize EFL Teachers' Classroom Practices

Table 10 shows that the mean average of the responses for *Reflection-in-action (Ria)*, *Reflection-on-action (Roa)*, and *Tacit knowing-in-action (Tkia)* are 4.00 (SD = .88), 3.97 (SD = .63), and 2.85 (SD = .97) respectively. This means, the respondents' engagements in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action were very high whereas *tacit knowing* is medium. Reflection-in-action is called forth whenever strange situations disrupt the smooth flow of 'routinised action'. Roa also occurs when formulation of explicit knowledge and reflections are required in the form of synthesis and judgment (see Table 1 under *Theoretical and Contextual Background of the Study* section).

Finally, the respondents enumerated qualitatively some additional information regarding EFL teachers' action research knowledge (theoretical as well as practical skills). It has been learnt from the qualitative data that action research is very young in Ethiopian schools. Consequently, teachers' knowledge of action research is not as such developed. Even though the quantitative data has shown that the respondents had high theoretical and medium practical

skills of action research, the qualitative data revealed that it is not deep-rooted and inbuilt in the teachers' professional culture.

5. Summary and Conclusions

The study was sought to investigate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' knowledge of and about action research. Data were generated through questionnaires respectively from 33 EFL teachers and 104 students at Jimma and Hawassa Universities; and by conducting focused group discussions and interviews respectively with six EFL teachers at the two Universities and three MoE officials. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data were made, giving more space to the former approach.

6. Summary of the Major Findings

The analyses of the data generated from the subjects have given the following major findings.

- EFL teachers had relatively higher theoretical knowledge (56%) than practical skills (50%) on action research. There, however, is a positively significant association between the teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical skills of action research ($r = 0.61$, $DF = 31$, $p < 0.01$). Their observed knowledge and skills in action research were resulted from participating in Higher Diploma Program and different workshops, seminars, and training programs organized by different bodies; and scanty engaging in the research itself.
- Even though the quantitative results have shown that the respondents had higher theoretical knowledge and medium practical skills of action research, the qualitative data revealed that it is not deep-rooted and inbuilt in the teachers' professional culture, and consequently the teachers' knowledge of the field is not as such developed and grounded as it ought to be. This could be due to the fact that action research is very young in Ethiopian schools. This is in addition to the minimal enabling environments that motivate the teachers to advance their knowledge as the basis for their actual practices.
- The respondents' knowledge aligns more with the features of reflective rationality, which is the basis for action research (as opposed to the technical rationality).
- Whereas the respondents' engagement in reflection-in- action and reflection-on- action were very high and high respectively, their tacit knowing-in-action was rated medium to low. This implies that the teachers' actions were not situated on accumulated practical knowledge in which routines could run skilfully without intentionally planning ahead. In other words, at the absence or low level of tacit knowing-in-action, their professional practices could hardly flow smoothly and did not appear simple to onlooker.

7. Conclusions and Implications

The findings of the study shed lights on the level of EFL teachers' knowledge of and about action research serving as a surface symptom to gauge their actual practices. On the basis of the findings, therefore, the following conclusions have been drawn.

- The fact that the teachers had relatively more of the theoretical knowledge than practical skills, both of which positively correlate, casts a doubt on their readiness in skills and disposition to inform their classroom decisions and actions by action research findings. This in turn might have limited the level of their action research practices. Equally, the fact that the qualitative (beyond the quantitative) results revealed that action research is not deep-rooted and inbuilt in the teachers' professional culture implies a need for arranging different professional development programs on the knowledge of and about action research as the basis for practicing it for professional and personal improvement backed with empowerment, and commitment of the teachers themselves to de-absolutize accustomed ways of doing things and taking a fallibilist view of truth. This is because the observed sources for theoretical and practical action research knowledge of the teachers (participation in HDP and training programs, and scanty engagements in the research itself) have not resulted in the required level of knowledge and skill that the time and professional duties demand.
- Though the alignment of the teachers' with reflective rationality could be an encouraging result, their tacit knowing-in-action is the lowest in the continuum. The teachers were less clear about their tacit knowledge since the mean average for this action type is the lowest within the category. By implication, the teachers could rarely act on their 'I-theories' (McNiff, 2002). This is because the results entail that the teachers' actions were not situated on personal knowledge in which routines run smoothly and skillfully without necessarily planning before happenstances. The teachers, consequently, might not be efficient in the unexpected happenstances and *run-of-the mill* situations of everyday professional practices which the time and the profession demand of them in handling classroom complexities.
- By implication, teachers are accountable to truth and others. All concerned parties including the teachers themselves, therefore, should promote the view that today's understandings about professional practices are always open to revision, disapproval, and criticism in the light of as yet undiscovered knowledge or understandings and a view that truth must always be justified discursively through evidence-based argument. This calls for fine-tuning the sources and magnitude of and about action research to enhance actual practices of the practitioners.

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