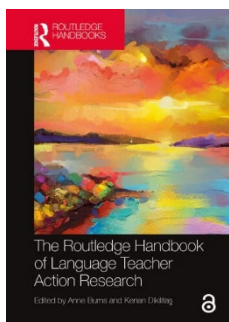


BOOK REVIEW




The Routledge Handbook of Language Teacher Action Research

Edited by Anne Burns and Kenan Dikilitaş
Routledge 2025, 436 pages.
DOI: 10.4324/9781003367352
ISBN: 9781032434421
ISBN: 9781003367352 (ebook)

Reviewed by **Valentyna Guseva**

Karlsruhe University of Education, Germany

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2107-5621>

The Routledge Handbook of Language Teacher Action Research edited by Anne Burns and Kenan Dikilitaş is a valuable guide for readers who are new to action research (AR) or who want to strengthen their understanding of its principles and practice. Written in a clear and accessible style, the book combines theoretical and practical insights with real-life examples that help prepare researchers for the challenges and unexpected situations they may encounter in the field. The volume brings together contributions from forty-four researchers representing diverse global regions, including Scandinavia, Central and South America, the Pacific Rim, and Europe. Collectively, these authors have made a substantial contribution to the advancement and wider dissemination of AR.

The volume opens with the leading chapter by the editors (Chapter 1). In the concisely written introduction, Burns and Dikilitaş point out the increased recognition of the impact of AR and define the aim of the volume – to “confront misconceptions that previously existed and may still exist” (p. 2). The structure of the book, also explained here, attests to the expansion of AR’s role in teachers’ professional development (TPD). The 34 chapters comprising the *Handbook* are sorted into 5 divisions (Parts) corresponding to domains where AR can affect TPD: professional, pedagogical, personal, and educational aspects, and, finally, learnings from teacher-researchers’ own projects, to which other language teachers can easily relate. Each chapter, consequently, represents a specific aspect of AR’s impact on TPD. The volume thus serves as an encyclopaedic reference book detailing and systematising the far-reaching effects of AR. As such, it stands out among a collection of more general and / or more practical compilations of AR (e.g., Rowell et al., 2017; Stringer, 2014) as “the first extensive *Handbook* on AR and its related approaches in the field of language education” (p. 4).

Part I, titled “Professional impact”, contains seven chapters. Siegel (Chapter 2) highlights the significance of research knowledge and skills for TPD, while Hadley (Chapter 3) explores Critical Action Research and its differences from AR. Carrying on, Banegas and Villacañas de Castro (Chapter 4) employ a triptych composed of creativity on, for, and through AR, to illustrate that AR is a creative process. Both chapters 3 and 4 merit attention as they note the potential within AR to become a transformative tool beyond language learning and teaching. Such adherence to the Freirean vision of education is notable in the introductory chapter too, where reflective and transformative praxis (i.e., from practice to theory and back to practice)

are named as the roots of AR (p. 1). In a similar vein, Hanks (Chapter 5) explores the impact of learner-led research on teachers and teaching. This chapter also provides a clear distinction between types of practitioner research and notes the lacunae in AR regarding learners' inclusion. Cárdenas (Chapter 6) then discusses the importance of publishing research findings and the challenges along the way, whereas Barnard (Chapter 7) emphasises ethical norms when conducting AR.

While teachers are encouraged to carry out AR, publishing their results in academic journals remains challenging, especially for novice teachers, due to journal expectations (Xerri, 2022) and the lack of focus on academic writing skills in teacher preparation programmes (Banegas et al., 2020). This is why I was especially interested in Chapter 6, in which Cárdenas, the editor of the *Profile* journal, presents her ethnographic case study to explore teacher-researchers' publishing experiences, addressing the challenges and the impact of disseminating AR. She emphasises that it is a crucial stage of research, as it allows teachers to share context-based insights, connect theory with classroom practice, and enrich educational knowledge. However, publishing their work entails a variety of challenges for teachers, such as meeting the standards of an academic publication, the complex process of revision that a written piece must go through before publication, and a lack of confidence on the authors' part whose first language is not English. An important solution that Cárdenas offers is that of a mentoring role for editors, who could guide and support novice writers – an approach adopted by some open access teacher-research oriented journals such as *Profile* [<http://dx.doi.org/10.15446/profile>] and *ELTCRJ* [<https://eltrj.com>]. Nevertheless, to ensure the dissemination of teacher-research, commitment of all the involved parties is required: not just that of the editors and reviewers, but also the teacher-researchers and their audience.

Part II, focusing on “Pedagogical impact”, also contains seven chapters. Two of them deal with methodological issues: Reed and Chappell (Chapter 8) provide a critical review on using AR for improving grammar teaching, whereas Dikilitaş (Chapter 9) demonstrates how participation in AR projects enhances students' engagement and thus fosters language learning. Giraldo and Murcia (Chapter 14), in turn, focus on assessment and demonstrate how AR can be incorporated to enhance specific aspects of learners' language skills. The rest of the chapters in this section all explore the integration of AR and technology, currently an inseparable element of language teaching and learning. Sert and Jonsson (Chapter 10) provide an excellent example of how data-led reflections of classroom interactions serve TPD. Crucially, their example goes to show how a piece of Collaborative Action Research between scholars and teachers, based on data-driven reflections, can bridge the gap between research and practice – one of the main issues that the practitioner research field is concerned with (Wyatt et al., 2016). Hockly (Chapter 11) takes this step further and reflects on a case study of designing and using mobile-based tasks, while Liontas (Chapter 12) analyses the advantages and limitations of hybrid learning presenting AR as a tool to help teachers understand and improve their practices. In the penultimate Chapter (13), Farr provides an overview of corpus-based studies with recommendations for teachers who are engaged in such research.

Among the chapters in Part II, I particularly enjoyed Giraldo and Murcia's (Chapter 14) approach to merging AR and assessment. The authors specify that language assessment is mostly based on the core questions of why, what, and how to assess, emphasising the shift from traditional to alternative approaches of assessment, such as self- and peer-assessment, portfolio assessment, and teacher conferences among others. Furthermore, they state that the incorporation of AR into language assessment prioritises process over product, which contributes to an assessment-for-learning culture, thus fostering language development rather

than measuring it. These are important points, because the synergy of AR and language assessment can empower learners to take an active role in their learning (Xu & Brown, 2016).

Under the heading “Personal impact”, Part III, which is comprised of 9 chapters, dives into complex themes related to teachers’ inner-growth. Building on AR as a framework for teacher development, Bahrami and Gao (Chapter 15) show how AR fosters reflective practice and teacher agency. Gregersen (Chapter 16) explores how teachers can use AR to improve their own wellbeing through individual self-care practices, while Webb and Mumford (Chapter 17) emphasise learner autonomy and suggest practical ways to develop it through AR. Sampson and Pinner (Chapter 18) highlight AR’s suitability for studying motivation and involving participants ethically. Le (Chapter 19) reconceptualizes AR as part of a complex learning system, emphasizing self-reflection and teacher development, while Barkhuizen (Chapter 20) explores the link between teacher identity and AR. King and Gkonou (Chapter 21) examine emotion regulation that teachers can develop and sustain through engaging in AR, offering practical implications. Wyatt (Chapter 22) shows the importance of supporting teachers’ self-efficacy for effective engagement in AR, and finally, Feryok (Chapter 23) examines the relationship between language teacher cognition and AR.

In this section, I was particularly drawn to Chapter 16 in which Gregersen highlights the central role of self-care in teacher wellbeing. She emphasises its impact on teaching effectiveness, student outcomes, and institutional climate, and focuses on what she calls N-of-one AR, a method that allows an individual teacher to investigate themselves and their self-care practices in order to identify what works most effectively for their wellbeing.

The majority of the 6 chapters comprising Part IV, titled “Educational impact”, deal with the implementation of AR into pre- and in-service teacher training programmes. Teacher training in general is a core theme, rightfully permeating through the *Handbook*, as authors note the need to incorporate exploratory practice principles (Chapter 5) and academic writing skills (Chapter 6) into teacher training. The topic is also related to teacher agency (Chapter 17) and identity building (Chapter 20), to name but a few examples. In Part IV, however, it is addressed directly through a variety of practical considerations. While Barahona and Darwin (Chapter 24) examine the limits of AR in pre-service teacher education, questioning its universal effectiveness across different contexts and teaching environments, Burns (Chapter 25) explains why AR is an important form of professional development and analyses its impact on in-service English language teachers. Edwards and Ellis (Chapter 26) state that the potential for institutional development is still not being realised in many contexts, and illustrate how it can be initiated and sustained through AR. Yuan, Wang, and Zhang (Chapter 27) provide insights into AR facilitators’ experiences, challenges, and coping strategies, offering guidance for aspiring facilitators. Lastly, the remaining two chapters turn to the effects of AR on education in general: Padwad (Chapter 28) notes the suitability of AR to research difficult circumstances – a complex and context-specific phenomenon, while Porto (Chapter 29) presents an AR intervention aimed at advancing social justice in education in practical terms.

As someone who has worked on including AR in pre-service teacher education, I found Barahona and Darwin’s chapter particularly interesting. The AR programs they introduced in the final-stage practicum for pre-service English teachers in Chile highlighted three conditions for effective AR: a collaborative framework, space for understanding, and sufficient time. I concur with scholars such as Schön (1992), Kemmis et al. (2014), McNiff (2013), and Burns (2010) that AR is closely linked to Reflective Practice, transforming critical reflection

and AR into a systematic, evidence-informed process. Rather than limiting it to the final practicum, introducing it progressively throughout the pre-service program could make it more meaningful, theoretically grounded, and pedagogically informed.

Finally, Part V, listing 5 chapters, is dedicated to “Teacher voices”. In four of the chapters, language teacher-researchers from different backgrounds share reflections on their engagement in AR projects. Brereton (Chapter 30) describes AR as a structured and empowering approach that revitalized his professional development by enabling systematic experimentation, critical reflection, and greater autonomy. In a similar vein, Herrera (Chapter 31) recounts how AR helped him find ways of working with minority learners in various contexts, an element that was completely lacking in his teacher training. Chagua (Chapter 32) recounts the uplifting story of how AR helped her overcome challenges as a first-time teacher at a public school in Peru. Similarly to several authors in Part I, Chagua draws on Paulo Freire’s ideas in her reflections, once again emphasising the deeply transformative nature of AR. Lastly, Malecka (Chapter 33) shows how AR can turn a local classroom problem into a broader inquiry. To conclude the volume, these personal accounts are followed by the closing chapter written by the editors (Chapter 34). Drawing on the immense input collected in all the chapters of the *Handbook*, Burns and Dikilitaş reflect on future directions for AR lamenting the lack of its inclusion into teacher education and calling for sustainable local, national, and international initiatives which would enable teacher-research.

In a broad sense, one of the great benefits of the *Handbook* is that it offers a comprehensive overview of research directions and discussion questions, as well as conveniently suggests further reading and lists of references at the end of each chapter. These features strengthen the practicality of the volume for the use by practitioners, seeking to try out a particular path of AR’s impact. Although the inclusion of a chapter on qualitative and quantitative data analysis would have further strengthened the volume, the book is undoubtedly set to become a key reference for those interested in AR. Overall, this seminal and thought-provoking volume marks an important milestone in the inclusion of AR into language education, encouraging greater recognition of the value of teacher-led inquiry and providing a foundation for future studies exploring both the complexities and the benefits of such initiatives.

References

- Banegas, D. L., Loutayf, M. S., Company, S., Alemán, M. J., & Roberts, G. (2020). Learning to write book reviews for publication: A collaborative action research study on student-teachers’ perceptions, motivation, and self-efficacy. *System*, 95, 102371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102371>
- Burns, A. (2010). *Doing action research in English language teaching*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203863466>
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2014). *The action research planner: Doing critical participatory action research*. Springer Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4560-67-2>
- McNiff, J. (2013). *Action research: Principles and practice* (3rd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203112755>
- Rowell, L. L., Bruce, C. D., Shosh, J. M., & Riel, M. M. (Eds.). (2017). *The international handbook of action research*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-40523-4>

- Schön, D. A. (1992). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315237473>
- Stringer, E. T. 2014. *Action research: A handbook for practitioners* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Wyatt, M., Burns, A., & Hanks, J. (2016). Teacher/practitioner research: Reflections on an online discussion. *TESL-EJ*, 20(1), 1– 22.
<https://tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume20/ej77/ej77int/>
- Xerri, D. 2022. *How can teachers best be encouraged to engage with research – Published and their own practitioner inquiry?* London: British Council.
https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/2022-07/SUPPORTING_TEACHERS_TO_ENGAGE_WITH_RESEARCH.pdf
- Xu, Y., & Brown, G. T. L. (2016). Teacher assessment literacy in practice: A reconceptualization. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 58, 149–162.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.05.010>

Reviewer

Valentyna Guseva is a teacher-educator with 28 years of experience at the In-Service Teachers' Training Academy in Vinnytsia (Ukraine), where she taught English for Specific Purposes courses. After relocating to Germany in February 2022, she worked as a Visiting Professor at the Karlsruhe University of Education (2022-2025). Since 2021 she has also been mentoring English language teachers. Her academic interests include teacher education, EFL methodology, de/coloniality in ELT, mentoring teacher-research and curriculum development. Email: valentina.guseva23@gmail.com

