



BOOK REVIEW

Global Stories on School Improvement: A Comparative Review of Action Research Projects

Action research for schools: Global stories of school improvement.
British Council. (2024).

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Various international organizations and agencies have played a crucial role for decades in the field of classroom research for the professional development of teachers' pedagogical practices, thereby leading to school transformation (Calhoun, 2002; ProFuturo, 2025). Among these, the British Council (BC) has gained global recognition for its exceptional work in supporting education through its Partner Schools network. The BC's focus has been on three pillars of modern education: leadership at all levels, effective continuing professional development (CPD), and the integration of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) into English Language Teaching (ELT) and other school subjects.

The two volumes on school improvement through Action Research, which I review here, are the direct result of the Partner Schools initiative, during which, over a three-year period, teacher researchers accomplished their projects related to the three main themes mentioned above. Academic leads Sirin Soyoz and Kathleen O'Hare guided the researchers and were responsible for helping to choose appropriate methodologies and frameworks. Judging by the outcomes, their persistent support and feedback probably provided crucial help to the participants throughout the research and editing process.

The two volumes hold great significance, as they provide experiential data from teachers confronting real challenges in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) contexts. The majority of partner schools use English as the medium of instruction to deliver UK qualifications. The volumes do not only offer clear, evidence-based reports on subject-specific difficulties, which often coincide with language barriers, but also propose strategies for teachers to overcome these challenges. For example, in my context, I have found that a student in Nepal struggling with science may, in fact, be struggling with the language used in science rather than the subject matter itself.

Through the reports presented in the slim volumes, it is evident that English is no longer confined to the classroom but is now being used to address whole-school problems and to access various sectors, from mastering complex subjects to participating in the digital economy worldwide. In an analysis of Bangladeshi pre-adolescents, Neeti Tripathi in the first volume

(2024) underscores the integration of English along with generative AI into EFL instruction to enhance not only linguistic skills but also cognitive and digital proficiencies. Also, in the same volume, Lina Hoyos presents a cross-disciplinary approach in Colombia where AI is used in language teaching to help students master complex topics in other subjects as well.

In the second volume (2025), Sara Ahmer demonstrates that the synergy between English instruction and generative AI helps students to access differentiated learning by providing them with the tools required to navigate global knowledge systems. While Ahmer's research focuses on AI-driven learning to forge connections in diverse classrooms, Alexander Owens emphasizes active learning by using English as a dynamic tool for expression rather than merely as a subject that improves academic attainment through interdisciplinary linguistic support.

These reports suggest that the introduction of AI and digital tools into traditional lesson planning can replace the outdated teaching methods that are no longer relatable to the tech-savvy lifestyles of today's students. The initiative, which began with the integration of basic digital tools is now focussing on something much deeper and more complex, such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and the impact of generative AI.

The two volumes clearly show that the limitations of ELT can be organically surpassed. While they reveal that English is presently used as a medium of communication and a tool for accessing global knowledge, they also create a solid foundation for the international Partner Schools network. The use of English as a lingua franca in the projects promotes a seamless exchange of ideas and findings of the researchers, despite having different native languages, and ensures that local classroom understanding meets global standards. This structure recognizes the achievements of local scholars and connects their work with the global scientific research community. It ensures that their ideas are not confined by geographical borders anymore. They can be heard and cited across the globe. The combination of action research with digital tools and awareness offers a comprehensive picture of English teaching in modern times.

One of the major contributions of the volumes is their focus on action research methodology, which is becoming increasingly popular in ELT contexts as a means of continuing professional development (Edwards & Burns, 2016). The claim about the centrality of action research as a practitioner-led methodology in ELT is strongly supported across both volumes, particularly through evidence-based accounts and concrete actions for change, inspiring novice researchers to undertake this approach. Action research is evidenced to be the bridge between teaching, language, and subject content through the grouping of individual teacher stories into bigger themes.

In the first volume (2024), several chapters demonstrate this process in practice. For example, Cesar Morales, in the chapter titled "Developing leadership skills in Peruvian high school students", uses focus groups, interviews, and reflective journals to identify students' perceptions and then iteratively designs and implements a leadership program based on the findings. Similarly, Neeti Tripathi in "Leveraging Chat GPT to enhance EFL reading skills for 10–12-year-old students" applies action research to test digital interventions in English learning, adapting instruction based on observed outcomes. These chapters clearly show teachers diagnosing issues, testing strategies, and refining practices of the recursive action research cycle. In the second volume (2025), chapters such as "Impact of gender stereotyping on performance in English" by Tendai Mendaza and "All the school's a stage: Improving

attainment through drama as pedagogy" by Alexander Owens illustrate how teachers investigate specific ELT issues (gender bias, the use of drama-based pedagogy), implement interventions, and evaluate their impact within their own contexts.

Both volumes include several special chapters with real applicability to our classroom practice. I found the chapters on student engagement to be particularly impactful, especially the use of drama as an interactive tool. Since these strategies align with my belief in the communicative approach, I look forward to implementing these tasks to help my students learn and use English more naturally.

To me, teacher collaboration is another relevant issue. Peer mentoring and professional learning communities demonstrate how group collaboration and reflection enhance pedagogical quality (Lynch et al., 2024). I believe such collaboration, peer mentoring, and collective reflection support ELT practitioners in the effective dissemination of language teaching strategies, the shared use of materials, and the implementation of up-to-date assessment practices (Song, 2019).

The chapters' focus on ongoing interactions among teachers for their professional development as a social and continuing process is highly commendable. This marks a shift from teachers following traditional training, where they are told how to teach, to taking ownership of their classroom solutions and actively researching and improving them as they go. The academic leads Soyoz and O'Hare highlight this shift by recognizing how teachers can take on the role of researchers and solve problems through constant reflection. The volumes also show the importance of peer monitoring through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which the British Council deems a shared path for professional growth.

Technology integration in teaching is another relevant aspect in both volumes. The use of multimedia resources, such as smartboards and online feedback platforms as digital tools, is an innovative way to support language teaching and assessment in my context, too. The examples presented show their relevance to combining digital technology with language teaching. It is a great hands-on demonstration of the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) model (Koehler & Mishra, 2009) that proves that digital tools are a fundamental part of teaching today.

Despite their strengths, it is worth noting that the volumes lack a balanced geographical representation since the primary focus is on specific parts of Asia, Africa and South America. While these contexts are vital, the under-representation of other regions limits the potential for comparisons across different institutions and cultures. A clearer picture of the diverse environments of school reform could be achieved by broadening the regional scope.

The volumes offer valuable insights, yet the lack of longitudinal data makes it difficult to discern the sustainability of these projects in the long run. Although they cover a wide range of topics, the addition of a clearer summary of the findings could have provided the ideal finishing touch. For me, a final discussion on what links the themes to school policy would have been more insightful. That being said, these gaps do not take away from the strengths of the publications but rather highlight opportunities for the program to evolve.

In conclusion, the volumes demonstrate the British Council's catalytic role in school transformation by not limiting its role to the traditional focus on ELT. The Partner Schools project focuses on three main pillars for sustainable change, namely, AI integration into

teaching, leadership development and commitment to continuing professional development programs for teachers stepping forward as researchers. This approach ensures a modern and holistic vision for education systems all over the world. The volumes stand out in terms of using action research to create solutions that work in local contexts. The studies reveal that EMI serves as a thread connecting language learning and subject knowledge for ELT professionals. Collaboration, reflective practice, and technology integration are additional relevant aspects of the volumes. Overall, the global stories of school improvement present a compelling, practical framework for transforming schools through research-informed, globally connected practice.

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Conflict of Interest

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