

# Overcoming Challenges in Action Research: Lessons from Key Studies in School Settings

Azlin Moktar and Bity Salwana Alias

**Abstract** – Action research is crucial approach in education, fostering continuous improvement and professional development among educators. However, implementing it in schools presents several challenges. This review explores these challenges, synthesizing findings from five key studies. Using the Reporting Standards for Systematic Evidence Syntheses (ROSES) protocol, this review ensured thorough and transparent reporting. The research questions were framed using the PICO framework, focusing on school educators (Population), challenges in implementing action research (Interest), and educational settings within schools (Context). The quality of articles was appraised using Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles (SANRA) criteria. The methodology involved a systematic search and selection process, focusing on articles published between 2020 and 2024. Articles were screened based on predefined criteria, resulting in studies specifically addressing the obstacles in implementing action research in schools. Key findings identified five recurring challenges: time constraints, lack of resources, resistance to change, technical difficulties in data collection and analysis, and the need for mentoring and support. Time constraints were a significant barrier due to conflicts between professional development schedules and school commitments. The lack of resources, including financial constraints and limited access to materials, hindered effective action research. Resistance to change was prevalent due to a lack of confidence and comfort with existing practices. Technical challenges in formulating research questions and analyzing data were prominent, compounded by inadequate training and tools. Mentoring and continuous professional development were essential for providing guidance and support. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including strategic plans, specific budgets, fostering collaboration, comprehensive training, and structured mentoring programs. These strategies can enhance the effectiveness of action research, leading to more successful and impactful outcomes in educational settings.

**Keywords** – Action Research, Educational Challenges, School Settings, Teacher Development, Implementation Barriers.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Action research is vital in education, promoting continuous improvement and professional growth among educators. However, implementing action research in school settings presents numerous challenges, which need to be thoroughly understood to empower educators and inspire meaningful change in educational practices (Saeband Nejadansari, 2022; Abrenica and Cascolan, 2022).

This review aims to explore and synthesize findings related to these challenges, drawing insights from five key

studies. By identifying common obstacles and discussing strategies to overcome them, this review provides valuable perspectives on enhancing the effectiveness of action research in educational settings. Understanding these challenges and their implications can lead to more informed and supportive practices, ultimately benefiting both educators and students. The research questions guiding this review are:

RQ1: What are the key challenges faced by educators in implementing action research in school settings?

RQ2: What strategies can be employed to effectively overcome these obstacles to enhance the overall impact of action research on educational practices?

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

While action research offers great potential for fostering continuous improvement and professional development among educators, its implementation in school settings is riddled with significant challenges. One of the main issues is time constraints, as teachers often juggle multiple responsibilities that hinder their ability to engage in action research effectively. Many educators report feeling overwhelmed by their teaching loads, which include grading and administrative tasks, making it difficult to allocate sufficient time for research activities (Hui and Mathew, 2024; Caabas et al., 2024). Additionally, there is a notable lack of resources available to support action research initiatives. Teachers frequently indicate that they do not have access to necessary materials or support from school administration, significantly impeding their efforts to conduct meaningful research (Nagibova, 2019). Resistance to change is a significant barrier, as educators may be reluctant to adopt new practices or methodologies due to entrenched habits or skepticism about the value of action research (Esparza et al., 2022).

Furthermore, technical difficulties in data collection and analysis can complicate the process, especially for those who lack proficiency in these areas (Hui and Mathew, 2024; Caabas et al., 2024). Lastly, the need for mentoring and support is critical. Many teachers express a desire for guidance from more experienced colleagues but often find that such support is lacking within their institutions (Nagibova, 2019). Understanding and addressing these challenges is crucial for empowering educators and enabling meaningful, impactful changes in school settings. This article aims to explore these barriers and provide strategies to overcome them, ultimately helping educators to implement action research more effectively and achieve better outcomes for their students.

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III. METHOD

The need for narrative review

Considering the complexity and varied contexts in which action research is implemented, a narrative review enables a nuanced synthesis of insights from diverse studies. This approach highlight the unique challenges faced by educators, providing a comprehensive understanding that rigid systematic reviews might overlook (Hall, 2024; Chaney, 2021). Additionally, a narrative review offers the flexibility to integrate theoretical perspectives and practical experiences, enriching the discussion on overcoming obstacles in action research within school settings.

Review Protocol - ROSES

This review adhered to the ROSES (Reporting Standards for Systematic Evidence Syntheses) protocol (Haddaway et al., 2018), which offers a comprehensive framework for reporting systematic reviews. The process started by developing research questions using the PICo framework, where ‘P’ stands for Population (school educators). ‘I’ for Interest (challenges in implementing action research), and ‘Co’ for Context (educational settings within schools). The systematic search strategy was executed in three phases: identification, refining keywords, and search terms; screening, which included selecting articles based on established inclusion and exclusion criteria; and eligibility, re-evaluating selected articles for alignment with study objectives. The quality of eligible articles was evaluated using the Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles (SANRA) criteria as proposed by Baethge et al. (2019). Data were then systematically extracted, and methodology adjustments were made based on insights from prior reviews to align with the study’s objectives and scope.

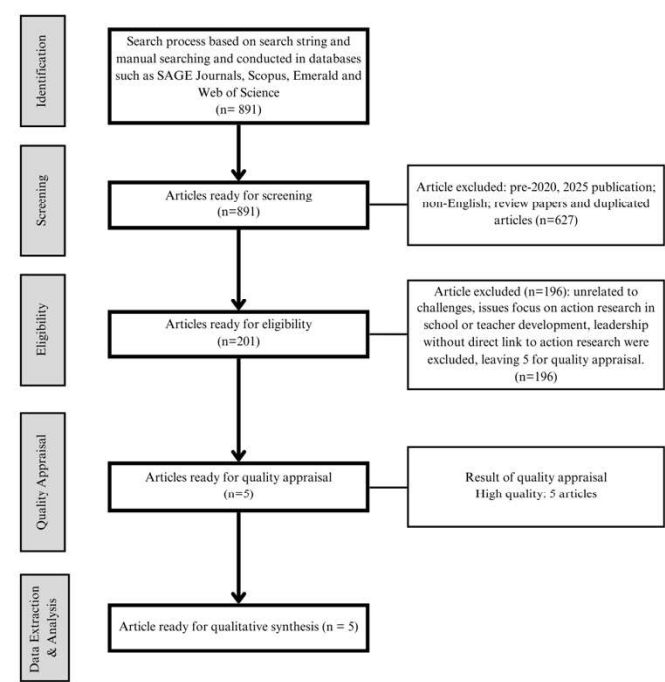
Systematic search strategies

The systematic search strategy in this review followed a structured approach to ensure comprehensive and transparent article selection. It involved three main steps: identification, screening, and eligibility (Figure 1). This method allowed for a thorough search of studies focusing on the challenges of carrying out action research within educational institutions. By using this approach, the review rigorously selected studies, ensuring a well-organized synthesis of findings.

Identification

From the research questions, the primary keywords identified were “challenges in action research in school.” These keywords were merged using advanced search techniques, including field codes, phrase searching, wildcards, truncation, and Boolean operators in the primary databases, Scopus and Web of Science, as detailed in Table I. Additionally, manual searches were conducted in databases Emerald and SAGE Journals. As a result of these combined efforts, a total of 891 potential articles were

identified.



Source: Adapted from Haddaway et al. (2018).  
Data extracted: 28 January 2025.

Figure 1: ROSES Flow Diagram

TABLE I: SEARCH STRING USED IN THE SELECTED DATABASE

Database	The search string
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "challenges" OR "issues" OR "problems" OR "obstacles" OR "barriers" in AND action AND research AND in AND school ) AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "SOCI" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( EXACTKEYWORD , "Action Research" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( EXACTKEYWORD , "Participatory Action Research" ) ) )
Web of Science	challenges in action research in school (All Fields) and Review Article (Document Types) and 2020 or 2021 or 2022 or 2023 or 2024 (Publication Years) and Review Article (Document Types) and Education Educational Research (Web of Science Categories) and English (Languages)

Source: Adapted from Tran et al. (2022)

Screening

In the second step of the process, articles were screened based on specific criteria using database tools or manual review by the authors (Table II). Following Kraus et al. (2020), and the concept of ‘research field maturity,’ the screening process focused on articles published between 2020 and 2024 to ensure a representative sample. Only journal articles providing primary data and higher quality were considered, and only English-language articles were included for consistency. Articles were further filtered for relevance to educational settings per the research question (Moktar et al, 2025). This process resulted in the exclusion

of 627 articles, leaving 201 articles to advance to eligibility stage.

TABLE II. THE SELECTION CRITERION

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Time frame	2020-2024	2019 and earlier, 2025
Document type	Journal (Article)	Book Chapter, Review Article, Early Access, Proceeding Paper, Editorial Material, Note
Subject area	Social Sciences	Medical, public health, other non-social science studies

Source: Adapted from Zakaria (2023)

Eligibility

Eligibility was the third process in this review, where the relevance of each selected article was assessed by reviewing the title, abstract, and, when necessary, the full content. Articles were excluded if they did not focus on action research in schools or failed to address implementation challenges. Additionally, articles on teacher development, leadership, or educational reforms without a direct link to action research challenges, as well as studies on higher education, social work, healthcare, or community-based, were deemed irrelevant. Articles focusing on the impact or benefits of action research rather than its implementation challenges were also excluded. Consequently, 196 articles were removed, leaving 5 articles suitable for the quality assessment phase.

Quality assessment

The five selected articles were subjected to a stringent quality assessment process to minimize bias and ensure the integrity (Shaffril et al. 2021; Haddaway et al. 2018). Employing Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles (SANRA) developed by Baethge et al. (2019), all authors independently reviewed each article, starting with a thorough reading and engaging in discussions to determine quality. SANRA assists editors in assessing the quality of narrative reviews based on formal criteria that visible to the reader, without addressing aspects like originality or conflicts of interest. It includes evaluations of the review’s significance, objectives, literature search, citation and presentation of evidence, quality of evidence, and relevant endpoint data (Table III). The scale uses three scoring options—0, 1, and 2—for a swift and pragmatic sum score, suitable for everyday use. SANRA was selected to assess this narrative review due to its structured approach, providing a clear and concise quality measure. Ultimately, all five articles fully satisfied the criteria (Table IV).

TABLE III: THE CRITERIA EVALUATED BASED ON SCALE FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF NARRATIVE REVIEW ARTICLES

Aspect	Question	Scale
1. Justification of the article’s importance for the readership.	The importance is not justified.	0
	The importance is alluded to, but not explicitly justified.	1
	The importance is explicitly justified.	2

2. Statement of concrete aims or formulation of questions.	No aims or questions are formulated.	0
	Aims are formulated generally but not concretely or in terms of clear questions.	1
	One or more concrete aims or questions are formulated.	2
3. Description of the literature search.	The search strategy is not presented.	0
	The literature search is described briefly.	1
	The literature search is described in detail, including search terms and inclusion criteria.	2
4. Referencing.	Key statements are not supported by references.	0
	The referencing of key statements is inconsistent.	1
	Key statements are supported by references.	2
5. Scientific reasoning.	The article’s point is not based on appropriate arguments.	0
	Appropriate evidence is introduced selectively.	1
	Appropriate evidence is generally present.	2
6. Appropriate presentation of data.	Data are presented inadequately.	0
	Data are often not presented on the most appropriate way.	1
	Relevant outcome data are generally presented appropriately.	2

Source : Baethge et al. (2019)

TABLE IV: QUALITY ASSESSMENT RESULT

SANRA Criteria	Prabandri et al. 2024	Rabgay & Kidman, 2023	Nehéz, 2020	Enerio, 2020	Godfrey, 2020	Number of criteria fulfilled	Inclusion in the review
Importance of the review.	2	2	2	2	2	6/6	Yes
Aims of the review.	2	2	2	2	2	6/6	Yes
Literature search.	2	2	2	2	2	6/6	Yes
Referencing.	2	2	2	2	2	6/6	Yes
Evidence level.	2	2	2	2	2	6/6	Yes
Relevant endpoint data.	2	2	2	2	2	6/6	Yes

Source : Adapted from Baethge et al. (2019)

Data synthesis

The results of the selected studies were analyzed thematically to classify common ideas into themes for the presentation and discussion (Page et al., 2022). Common themes and unique insights related to the challenges in action research were identified and discussed. Themes were meticulously reviewed to ensure alignment with the data, and clear definitions were created to accurately reflect participants’ experiences (Rodríguez-Feria, 2024; Buchan et al, 2022).

IV. FINDINGS

Background of selected articles

The selected articles span various years and countries, meeting the inclusion criteria of focusing on action research in school settings and addressing challenges, issues, obstacles, problems, or barriers. Prabandari et al. (2024) conducted research in Indonesia, Rabgay and Kidman (2023) in Bhutan, Nehez (2020) in Sweeden, Enrio (2020) in the Philippines, and Godfrey (2020) in England. Each study examines the challenges faced by educators in implementing action research within their respective educational contexts.

The developed themes

Several recurring themes emerged from the analysis of challenges in implementing action research in school settings. These themes include time constraints, lack of resources, resistance to change, technical and practical challenges in data collection, and the need for mentoring and support as outlined in Table V. Understanding these themes helps in developing strategies to overcome these obstacles and enhance the effectiveness of action research.

TABLE V: THE DEVELOPED THEMES

Countr y	Study	Time Cons train ts	Lac k of Reso urce s	Resist ance to chang e	Techn ical, Practi cal Challe nges and Data Collec tion	Mento ring and Suppo rt
Indone sia	Prabandri et al. 2024	/	/	/	/	/
Bhutan	Rabgay & Kidman, 2023	/	/	/	/	/
Sweden	Nehez, 2020	/	/	/	/	/
Philipp ines	Enrio, 2020	/	/	/	/	/
Englan d	Godfrey, 2020	/	/	/	/	/

Source : Adapted from Shaffril et al. (2024)

Time Constraints.

Teachers consistently reported significant time constraints as a major challenge in implementing action research. In Prabandari et al. (2024), teachers struggled to manage their schedules due to conflicts between the Teacher Professional Education (TPE) program and their school commitments. Rabgay and Kidman, 2023 highlighted the difficulty of balancing teachers’ responsibilities with the demands of action research, particularly the iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Nehez, 2020 noted that practitioners had limited time for research activities, affecting their ability to engage full. Enrio, 2020 found that Master Teachers had a little time for action research due to their busy schedules, despite recognizing its

importance. Similarly, Godfrey, 2020 indicated that teachers and school leaders faced significant time pressure, making it difficult to dedicate sufficient time to action research.

Lack of Resources.

A common barrier identified was the lack of resources necessary for effective action research. Prabandari et al. (2024) highlighted teachers’ concerns about insufficient materials and tools. Rabgay and Kidman, 2023 identified a shortage of educational resources and professional development opportunities. Nehez, 2020 also pointed out insufficient resources to support action research initiatives. Enrio, 2020 suggested limited access to necessary resources as a contributing factor to the challenges faced by teachers. Godfrey, 2020 emphasized the scarcity of financial resources, training materials, data analysis tools, and professional development opportunities as significant obstacles.

Resistance to Change.

Resistance to adopting new research practices was a notable challenge. Prabandari et al. (2024) reported reluctance among some teachers to adopt new methods due to a lack of confidence in their CAR (classroom action research) competencies. Rabgay and Kidman, 2023 found that teachers were apprehensive about changing their established practices. Nehez, 2020 highlighted resistance from participants, particularly teachers, due to fear of the unknown, lack of trust in the research process, and concerns about additional workload. While not explicitly detailed in Enrio (2020), the study suggested that teachers comfort with existing methodologies and skepticism about new approaches could contribute to resistance. Godfrey, 2020 discussed a culture of resistance within schools, where educators were hesitant to adopt new practices due to perceived risks and challenges.

Technical, Practical Challenges and Data Collection.

Technical and practical challenges, particularly in data collection and analysis, were significant obstacles. Prabandari et al. (2024) reported difficulties in formulating research questions, selecting methods, and analyzing data. Rabgay and Kidman, 2023 noted issues with data collection and analysis, affecting research outcomes. Nehez, 2020 highlighted the complexity of collecting and analyzing qualitative data, presenting difficulties for both external researchers and participants. Enrio, 2020 indicated that Master Teacher struggled with the writing and analytical components of action research. Godfrey, 2020 emphasized educators’s lack of skills or confidence in data analysis, crucial for drawing meaningful conclusions from action research projects.

Mentoring and Support.

The need for mentoring and support was underscored across multiple studies. Prabandari et al. (2024) highlighted gaps in guidance during the CAR process. Rabgay and

Kidman, 2023 noted the lack of adequate mentoring from experienced colleagues. Nehez, 2020 emphasized the necessity of effective mentoring to prevent misunderstandings and ineffective implementation. Enrio, 2020 found that Master Teachers required structured guidance and ongoing support. Godfrey, 2020 indicated that inadequate mentoring led to feelings of isolation and limited collaborative learning opportunities.

## V. DISCUSSION

Addressing the common challenges of action research requires a multifaceted approach. Time constraints are a significant obstacle for teachers, often due to conflicts between professional development schedules and existing school commitments (Saro and Taray, 2024; Abrenica and Cascolan, 2022, Cortes and Reyes, 2021). Mitigating this issue involves incorporating action research activities into professional development schedules, providing flexible timing options, and allocating designated time slots for research (Dhungana et al. 2021). Additionally, the lack of resources and insufficient support can be addressed by allocating specific budgets for action research, exploring partnerships with external organizations, and ensuring access to professional development opportunities (Fauzan et al. 2021; Balilemwa, 2024; Knight and Skrtic, 2020).

Resistance to change is another challenge that can be managed through creating a continuous learning environment, recognizing subcultures, and rewarding early adopters (Sharma et al., 2024). Transformational leadership, as opposed to transactional approaches, is recommended to navigate change effectively (Danquah, 2021). Providing comprehensive training and ongoing support can help educators feel more confident in adopting new practices (Gonzalez, 2021). Technical and practical challenges, especially in data collection and analysis, can be mitigated by offering targeted training sessions and providing access to data analysis tools and software (Breeze, 2023; Scully et al., 2021). Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications can also support teachers in planning, implementation, and assessment of their teaching (Celik et al., 2022).

Finally, enhancing mentoring and support is crucial. Establishing structured mentoring programs where experienced researchers guide teachers through the action research process can be highly beneficial (Figuerola et al., 2022; Henthorn et al., 2022). Continuous professional development and peer support networks can foster a collaborative learning environment, reducing feelings of isolation and promoting shared learning experiences (Amaliyah and Nurpratiwi, 2023; Bekes, 2020). By implementing these strategies, educators and school leaders can effectively address the challenges of action research, leading to more successful and impactful outcomes in educational settings.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this review identified common challenges in implementing action research in school settings, such as time constraints, lack of resources, resistance to change, and difficulties in data collection and analysis. Key insights from the studies emphasize the importance of mentoring, collaboration, and recognizing the iterative nature of action

research. Strategies to overcome these challenges include developing strategic plans for time management, providing ongoing mentoring and professional development, fostering meaningful collaboration, and enhancing technical competencies. While these strategies offer practical solutions, future research should further explore these areas to develop more comprehensive approaches and address any limitations, ultimately empowering educators, and inspiring meaningful change in educational practices.

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