

Main articles

Improving accounting education through the use of action research

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Abstract

Action research is a systematic investigative research method that educators can use to improve aspects of their educational practice. Originally adopted in school situations, action research is becoming increasingly used within higher education. First, the paper explains the action research process. Second, the action research process is applied to a small-scale project undertaken by the authors in order to assist in the development of students' research skills by encouraging them to read primary documents for themselves. Finally, the paper discusses the use and appropriateness of action research within accounting education. Some possible implications for accounting academe are also identified. It is argued that action research, with its emphasis on continuous improvement and the promotion of scholarly activity, is consistent with the accreditation standards issued by The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB).

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1. Introduction

Action research is a systematic investigative research method that can help improve aspects of educational practice (Hand, Sanderson, & O’Neil, 1996). Continuous improvement and the promotion of scholarly activity among accounting faculty have recently been emphasised by The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) (AACSB, 2004). The AACSB stresses that accreditation seeks to improve accounting education and that the accreditation process “intends to promote the development of accounting education programs of high quality and to encourage innovation and continual improvement” (AACSB, 2004, p. 3). With its focus on the improvement of educational practice, action research can be viewed as consistent with how the AACSB would like its member schools to approach continuous improvement.

Action research typically incorporates five stages, as elaborated by Bassey (1998) and Hand (2001). These stages are depicted in Fig. 1.

First, the enquiry must be defined by identifying the ‘problem’ to be addressed and a research question should be framed. Problem identification is dependent upon the beliefs of the teachers involved. What is perceived as a problem to one teacher may not be so perceived by another. It is therefore important for users of action research to briefly outline the educational beliefs that inspired their projects. Second, the current educational situation should be described. This

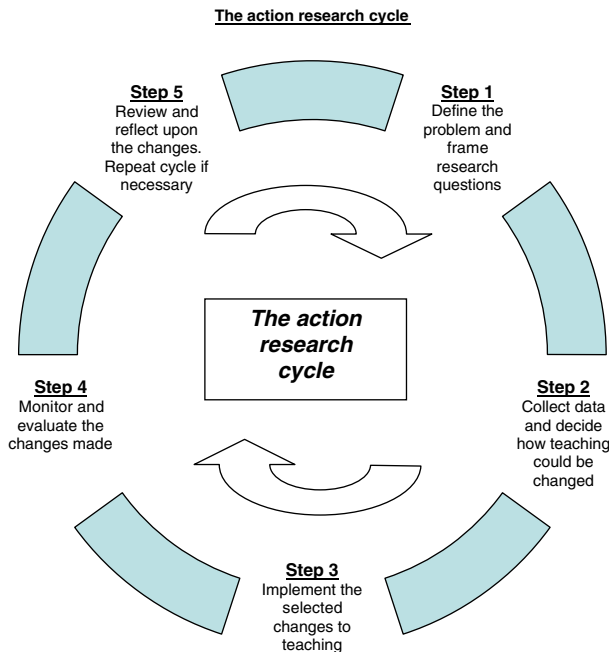


Fig. 1. The action research cycle.

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