5th Global Conference on Innovations in Education
12 - 14 November 2026
Nottingham, UK

Participatory Action Learning And Action Research As A Theory Of Community-Based Learning

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Abstract

Community-based learning (CBL) is widely invoked in education, development, and climate adaptation scholarship. Yet, CBL is rarely theorised in its own right. More often, CBL is perceived as a descriptive label for informal, collective learning that happens in communities. By contrast, Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) is more often positioned as a research design and method rather than as a theory of learning. This theoretical paper argues that PALAR should be understood as a theory of community-based learning, not merely a method for studying it. This theoretical paper draws on theory-building literature integrating action learning, participatory action research, and experiential learning in climate adaptation scholarship to generate and advance five theoretical propositions that, a) learning is socially co-produced, b) the iterative cycles of inquiry, action, and reflection embedded in PALAR constitutes a generative mechanism of learning, c) experience functions as the epistemic raw material of learning, d) community-based learning legitimises Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and experiential knowledge and e) leadership and agency are emergent, recursive products of learning cycles. This theoretical paper concludes by distinguishing PALAR-as-theory from PALAR-as-method and outlining implications for research, practice, and policy in climate adaptation.

Keywords: Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR), Community-Based Learning (CBL), experiential learning.