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TEACHER EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

The impact of research practice on professional teaching practice: Exploring EFL teachers' perception

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Abstract: Although there has been surge of interest in teacher research practice in English language teaching (ELT) context, few research studies seem to have shown the attitudes and perceptions of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching practice. Adopting a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, the present study explored the current status of EFL teachers' research practice and the impact of research practice on the professional teaching practice of EFL teachers who were actively engaged with (i.e. through reading) and in (i.e. through doing) research. To this end, 150 EFL teachers filled out English Language Teacher Research Practice questionnaire in order to check their current status in research practice in the ELT setting. The participants' responses to the questionnaire indicated that they were engaged both with and in research to some extent. Based on the responses to the questionnaire, 31 EFL teachers who were actively engaged with and in research were selected to explore their attitudes and perceptions towards the impact of their research practice on their professional teaching practice through a semi-structured interview.



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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The present study shows the current status of English language teachers' research practice in their own educational context. The study indicates that English language teachers who are actively engaged in reading and doing research can dramatically increase their knowledge in English language teaching and learning, think reflectively and critically about the teaching and learning issues in the classroom, and find better ways to teach more effectively and confidently and enhance their students' proficiency level. Moreover, the study reveals that English language teacher-researchers collaborate more with other English language teachers and researchers and become a well-known figure in the English language teaching community through reading and doing research. The findings call for educational policymakers and teacher educators to support, train, and encourage English language teachers in reading and doing research in order to become researchers in their own educational context.

Thematic analysis, used to analyse the qualitative data, uncovered nine themes that addressed the positive attitudes and perceptions of EFL teachers towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching practice. In line with the findings, implications for developing EFL teachers' research practice in their own professional ELT context are suggested.

Subjects: Development Theory; Language and Linguistics; Language Teaching and Learning

Keywords: research practice; professional teaching practice; ELT; EFL teachers; mixed-methods approach

1. Introduction

Over several decades, there has been increasing interest in teachers' research practice (e.g. Altrichter, Feldman, Posch, & Somekh, 2008; Barkhuizen, 2009; Borg, 2007, 2009; Brown & Flood, 2018; Hemsley-Brown & Sharp, 2003; Wentworth, Mazzeo, & Connolly, 2017). A large body of educational studies show that engaging both with and in research contribute to teachers' professional development (Cordingley, 2015; Hammersley, 2004; Holmqvist, Bergentoft, & Selin, 2018; Kincheloe, 2003; Kirkwood & Christie, 2006; Lyle, 2003). It is believed that research engagement influences teachers' quality of teaching by "the creation of a problem-solving mindset, the improvement of teachers' instructional decision-making processes, the increase of teachers' professional status, and the empowerment of teachers in bringing about changes at classroom, district, state and national levels" (Olson, 1990, p. 17–18). As yet, though, there has been limited research studies in English language teaching (ELT) context exploring the impact of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' research practice on their professional teaching performance (Borg, 2009). In response to this research lacuna, the present study, first, examines EFL teachers' research practice through a survey (i.e. quantitatively) to investigate the teachers' current status of research engagement on the one hand, and to find those teachers who are research active on the other hand. Second, this study explores the attitudes and perceptions of EFL teachers, who are actively engaged with and in research in ELT context, towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching practice by conducting an interview (i.e. qualitatively). The findings can provide EFL teachers with valuable insights into the impact of reading and doing research in ELT context on professional teaching practice.

2. Literature review

Teacher research is conceptualised as an enquiry, qualitative and/or quantitative, that is systematically carried out by teachers in their own professional setting in order to be engaged in professional development activities, such as reading professional research articles and doing classroom-based research, and improve their teaching performance (Borg, 2010). Borg (2010) maintains that teachers conduct classroom-based research individually or with other teachers or researchers not only to contribute to their own classroom, but also to make institutional improvement. It is argued that teachers who are engaged with and in research create stronger links between theory and practice in their teaching profession (Crookes, 1993), which can subsequently result in better pedagogical decisions and students' learning outcome (Walker, 2017). Therefore, teachers should be "encouraged to move out of their submissive position and to take a much more innovatory, as opposed to implementary, role in curriculum development by adopting the perspective of the researcher" (Gurney, 1989, p. 15). Teachers engaging with and in research think critically and reflectively about their classroom issues (Allwright & Hanks, 2009), discover relevant knowledge for themselves accordingly (Cain, 2015; Smith, 2014), and become more self-efficacious in their professional teaching practice (Cabaroglu, 2014; Henson, 2001).

A number of research studies have addressed teachers' research engagement in educational context in general. Borg and Alshumaimeri (2012), for instance, investigated the university teacher educators' engagement both with and in research across a range of disciplinary and pedagogical

courses at a leading university in Saudi Arabia through a survey. The findings indicated that more academically senior, highly qualified, and experienced teacher educators read and do more research in comparison with those who are less senior, less qualified, and less experienced. The teacher educators stated that the main reasons for doing research are to enhance their professional development, get promotion, and contribute to their knowledge generally. The findings further indicated that the main reason for not reading and doing research is the lack of time. Moreover, the conceptions of teacher educators towards the main characteristics of good quality research are experimental design, large sample size, questionnaire, and statistical analysis.

More specifically, some studies have addressed teachers' research engagement in the ELT context. For example, Borg (2009) exploring English language teachers' conceptions of research through a questionnaire and follow-up written and interview questions from different countries around the world, found that second/foreign language (L2) teachers conceptualise statistics, objectivity, hypotheses, large samples, and variables as the main features of a good research study. In addition, teachers' lack of research engagement is due to lack of time and knowledge, and lack of access to the required materials. Moreover, teachers' motivation for research engagement is to develop their practical and professional knowledge. Similarly, Xu (2014) explored university EFL teachers' research practice through narrative frame and in-depth interview questions in China. The results showed that the teachers' research practice is limited by some constraints such as "teaching overload, a shortage of resources, and a lack of support from mentors, as well as self-efficacy beliefs" (p. 248). The results further indicated that the university EFL teachers are more engaged with reading research in comparison with their engagement in doing research. Moreover, the teachers' motivation towards reading and doing research is more extrinsic (i.e. for promotion) than intrinsic (i.e. for teaching improvement).

However, Allison and Carey (2007) point out that in some contexts academics (i.e. MA and PhD students and university professors), studying or teaching Applied Linguistics in higher education, develop research agenda for L2 teachers, teaching in non-academic institutions, where teachers cannot engage with and in research due to some setbacks for their research activities. Allison and Carey further claim that such inequality of power and status is due to the academics' positions of power in conducting research. So, as there is a disparity between researchers (i.e. academics in higher education) and classroom practitioners, researchers might not be able to directly address the real issues of most teachers and learners in the classroom (Rose, 2002). For this reason, the knowledge base keeps growing through research in higher education context without the awareness of most teachers in non-academic institutions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Procter, 2015). As Bolitho (1987) put it:

As long as applied linguists remain in universities and express themselves in terms which teachers find difficult to understand, but somehow feel they ought to understand, as long as the rules for professional advancement are devised by academics so that training takes place on their territory and on their terms, teachers will continue to feel inferior. As long as teaching continues to be regarded as a lower-order activity, involving high stress, large numbers of contact hours and low pay, and as long as those involved in theory have visibly less of the first two and considerably more of the last-mentioned commodity, there will be imbalance in the profession (p. 30).

In marked contrast to the existing setbacks for teachers' research engagement, there has been considerable sustainability in some teachers' research practice in some educational contexts (e.g. Edwards & Burns, 2016; Smith, 2014; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2015). For instance, Edwards and Burns (2016) explored English language teachers' research practice in an annual nine-month action research programme in Australia. The teachers, teaching intensive courses to overseas students, were brought together regularly to present and discuss their classroom actions in order to conduct follow-up action research in their own classrooms, supported by other colleagues and an expert. After conducting the action research, the teachers presented the results in

a conference and wrote up the reports for publication in a journal. The teachers were then asked to take part in an online survey and follow-up interviews in order to check the influence of the programme on their professional development. The results showed that the action research programme enhances English language teachers' research activities and its impact continues for a long time. Edwards and Burns further indicated that after the programme the teachers are more self-assured for their teaching performance, have a deep understanding of their students, engage with and in research to a great extent, and are recognised more by other teachers and researchers in the community. Moreover, they argued that to ensure the sustainability of the teachers' research engagement, institutional support and teachers' own motivation are essential. In much the same vein, Atay (2008) explored Turkish EFL teachers' research practice through an in-service education and training programme in which the teachers were engaged in the practice of reading and doing research. The teachers were encouraged to connect the concepts and principles in the literature to their own classroom setting. To this aim, the teachers read the relevant literature, selected based on their own suggestions, in order to criticise their own teaching beliefs, better understand the teaching and learning issues in the classroom, and conduct action research accordingly to improve their teaching performance. Atay revealed that teachers involving in action research become more knowledgeable in ELT, develop awareness and reflectivity, and collaborate more with their colleagues.

3. The aim of the study

While a substantial body of educational research has focused on promoting a knowledge base about teaching, just a few studies have explored the teachers' role in generating this knowledge base (e.g. Cordingley, 2015; Holmqvist et al., 2018; Kirkwood & Christie, 2006). On the other hand, a few research studies seem to have been done so far exploring the perceptions held by teachers towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching performance, especially in ELT context. The present study attempts to fill this lacuna by exploring the attitudes and perceptions of EFL teachers towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching practice. Drawing upon the aim of the study, therefore, the following research questions are raised:

- (1) What is the current status of EFL teachers' research practice?
- (2) What are EFL teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching practice?

4. Method

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003; Riazi & Candlin, 2014; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003) to both data collection and analysis was adopted to address the research questions. To this end, the qualitative findings were used to explain and refine the quantitative findings.

4.1. Participants and context

One-hundred and fifty EFL teachers who were teaching general English courses to adults at different private language institutes from different countries (e.g. Iran, Indonesia, Japan, and Thailand) participated in the study; they were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. As the goal of the study was to obtain a broad perspective on the impact of EFL teacher research practice on their teaching performance, data were collected from teachers who were engaged with and in research in a number of EFL contexts around the world. The participants' age ranged between 26 and 37 years, and their teaching experience varied from 2 to 20 years. Based on the standards of the language institutes, the participants followed a communicatively oriented approach to their teaching to develop the learners' proficiency in the four English language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The next factor which was controlled in this study was that the teachers taught general English courses to adult learners, however, the teachers taught different proficiency levels (ranging from elementary to advanced), so that it was possible to add a wider perspective on the issue under study.

Before embarking on their career as an EFL teacher, the participants attended BA and/or MA courses in Applied Linguistics at university. In EFL contexts, Applied Linguistic programmes cover such EFL teaching courses as Teaching Methodologies, Teaching Language Skills, Practicum, and Language Testing, as determined by the curriculum plans of the universities. Moreover, all the teachers attended teacher training courses prior to their teaching profession.

This study was carried out by the first author (i.e. the researcher). As an experienced teacher/researcher, he had taught EFL courses for many years in different universities and language institutes and had carried out many research studies in ELT context.

4.2. Instruments

English Language Teacher Research Practice questionnaire (see Appendix A) adapted from Borg (2009) was used to investigate the teachers' research practice. The questionnaire comprises 20 items on a 5-point Likert scale, which consists of 5 options of "not at all", "very little", "to some extent", "quite a lot", and "a great deal". The questionnaire items check EFL teachers' engagement with and in research, their abilities in conducting research, the impact of their research practice on their teaching performance and students' learning, and the support provided by the ELT context for teachers' research practice. To check the validity, the English Language Teacher Research Practice questionnaire was pilot tested with 150 EFL teachers. The results indicated that the questionnaire enjoyed KMO index of .82, which was adequate. Bartlett's test of Sphericity was also significant $p = .00$ which showed significant and positive correlation among the items. Moreover, the reliability index of the questionnaire, as revealed through Cronbach's Alpha consistency index, was .87 which was adequate.

Furthermore, a semi-structured interview (see Appendix B), the questions of which were developed by the researcher, was conducted to explore the perceptions of EFL teachers towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching practice. The questions were developed through a thorough analysis of the existing literature in the ELT context and interview with some participants. To ensure the validity, the questions were piloted with some participants and consulted with some experts in the field of Applied Linguistics.

4.3. Procedures

English Language Teacher Research Practice questionnaire was designed in Google Form by the researcher and circulated online, using social networking websites like LinkedIn and ResearchGate, to a large number of EFL teachers in order to find those EFL teachers who were actively engaged in reading and doing research. The questions and the procedures for answering the questionnaire were already clarified for the participants in the instruction section. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, applying to check the normality of the collected data, showed that the data were normal.

The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with 31 focal participants (which were found to be actively engaged with and in research in ELT context based on their responses to the questionnaire) to explore their perceptions towards the impact of research practice on their professional teaching performance. The interviews were conducted in English and each one took approximately 20 minutes. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. A member checking technique (Creswell, 2007; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002) was conducted to check the credibility of the transcribed interviews. To this aim, the transcribed interviews were returned to the participants to check for their authenticity and make any alterations and/or modifications, if needed.

4.4. Data analysis

First, the frequency of the participants' responses to the questionnaire was investigated to find about their current status of research practice. Then, the average mark for each participant's questionnaire was calculated to select the participants with high average mark. Assigning these participants as EFL teachers who were actively engaged with and in research, the researcher

explored their perceptions towards the impact of research practice on their teaching practice through an in-depth individual semi-structured interview.

To analyse the interview data, thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) was used in order to uncover the important themes regarding the attitudes and perceptions of EFL teachers towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching performance. Thematic analysis is rooted in grounded theory (Charmaz, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Stern, 1994) and consists of “systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). To this aim, following a reiterative, bottom-up approach, the transcribed interviews were coded to identify the important core variables, and the interrelationships among these core variables were examined to generate some themes about the EFL teachers’ attitudes and perceptions towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching practice. Afterwards, the uncovered themes were rank-ordered based on their number of mentioning.

5. Results

This section presents the results of the EFL teachers’ current status of research practice and their attitudes and perceptions towards the impact of the research practice on professional teaching practice by analysing the quantitative (i.e. the survey) and qualitative (i.e. the interview) data through a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach.

5.1. The quantitative analysis

The first section of the questionnaire addressed the EFL teachers’ engagement with research and the impact it had on their professional teaching practice. Table 1 presents the participants’ responses to this section of the questionnaire.

The results in Table 1 indicate that most of the EFL teachers were engaged with research and thought that research practice influenced their professional teaching practice. As is evident, none of the participants selected “not at all” option for both items. On the other hand, most of the participants chose “to some extent” and “quite a lot” options which indicated that the EFL teachers were engaged in reading research to some extent.

The second section of the questionnaire investigated the teachers’ engagement in research and their abilities in doing appropriate research in ELT context. Table 2 demonstrates the participants’ responses in this regard.

As the values in Table 2 suggest, most of the EFL teachers were engaged in research and they had enough abilities in conducting research in ELT context. There were the highest percentage of the participants selecting “a great deal” option for the ability to produce coherent reports of research item, and the highest percentage of the participants choosing “quite a lot” option for the developing a focused literature review item. It could thus be suggested that the EFL teachers might be more capable to produce coherent reports and

Table 1. EFL teachers’ engagement with research and its impact on their professional teaching practice

Items	Not at all (%)	Very little (%)	To some extent (%)	Quite a lot (%)	A great deal (%)
To what extent do you read published ELT research?	0	12	29.3	32	26.7
To what extent does the research you read influence your teaching?	0	4.7	39.3	37.3	18.7

Table 2. EFL teachers' engagement in research and their abilities in doing appropriate research in ELT context

Items	Not at all (%)	Very little (%)	To some extent (%)	Quite a lot (%)	A great deal (%)
To what extent can you identify an issue that needs researching?	0	11.3	35.3	37.3	16
To what extent can you develop specific research questions?	0.7	12	36.7	35.3	15.3
To what extent can you develop a focused literature review?	0.7	7.3	28.7	46	17.3
To what extent can you identify appropriate research methods?	0	7.3	29.3	40.7	22.7
To what extent can you justify using the research methods you have chosen, considering their strengths and weaknesses?	0	10.7	25.3	44.7	19.3
To what extent can you design appropriate research instruments?	1.3	10.7	34.7	30.7	22.7
To what extent are you skilful in collecting data?	0	8	29.3	40.7	22
To what extent are you skilful in analysing data?	0.7	15.3	40	28.7	15.3
To what extent can you conduct research in an ethical way?	0	12	28.7	44	15.3
To what extent are you able to produce research that contributes to knowledge, with implications for practice?	0	8.7	43.3	30	18
To what extent are you able to adopt a critical stance, constantly questioning your own biases?	0	12	32	36	20
To what extent are you able to produce coherent reports of your research, both in oral and written form?	0	8	28.7	32.7	30.7

develop focused literature reviews of their research studies. With regard to designing instrument and analysing data, there were the highest percentage of the participants choosing “not at all” and “very little” options, respectively which might propose that the participants find instrument design and data analysis as relatively the most difficult parts of doing research.

The last section of the questionnaire examined the impact of research practice on EFL teachers' professional teaching practice and students' learning, and the support provided by the working context for teachers' research practice. Table 3 summarises the participants' responses to this section of the questionnaire.

The results presented in Table 3 reveal that most of the EFL teachers thought their research practice had a positive impact on both their professional teaching practice and students' learning. A closer look at the values indicates that the highest percentage of the teachers chose “a great deal” and “quite a lot” options for the second item (i.e. The impact of research practice on self-confidence and sense of autonomy in teaching) and the fourth item (i.e. The impact of research practice on teachers' understanding of learners) respectively. It could be argued that the EFL teachers who read and do research think they are more confident and autonomous in their teaching performance, and that they claim they understand their students better when they are engaged with and in research. Regarding the support of the

Table 3. The impact of EFL teachers’ research practice on their teaching practice and students’ learning

Items	Not at all (%)	Very little (%)	To some extent (%)	Quite a lot (%)	A great deal (%)
To what extent has your research practice affected your teaching?	1.3	3.3	36.7	38	20.7
To what extent has your research practice impacted your self-confidence in any way or your sense of autonomy in teaching?	2	4.7	27.3	38	28
To what extent has your research practice affected the way you work with colleagues?	1.3	4.7	35.3	37.3	21.3
To what extent has your research practice affected your understanding of your learners?	0.7	3.3	35.3	42	18.7
To what extent have your learners benefited from your research?	1.3	5.3	38.7	34.7	20
To what extent does your working context support your research activity?	2.7	16.7	24.7	34.7	21.3

working context for teachers’ research activity, there were the highest percentage of the teachers selecting both “not at all” and “very little” options. This may indicate that lack of support of the working context for research activities is the most important setback for teachers’ research practice in ELT context.

5.2. The qualitative analysis

To explore the attitudes and perceptions of EFL teachers towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching performance qualitatively, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the EFL teachers who were actively engaged with and in research. By analysing the data through thematic analysis, some themes were emerged which addressed the EFL teacher-researchers’ perceptions towards the impact of their research practice on their professional teaching practice. The results are summarised in Table 4.

As is evident from Table 4, nine themes were uncovered addressing the EFL teacher-researchers’ attitudes and perceptions towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching practice. The dominant theme was “Developing my professional knowledge in ELT” (21%), followed

Table 4. Themes of the EFL teacher-researchers’ perceptions towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching practice

Themes	Mentions (%)
Developing my professional knowledge in ELT	21
Thinking more reflectively	15
Thinking more critically	14
Addressing issues in my professional teaching practice	13
Finding better ways to teach	11
Contributing to the improvement of my students	10
Collaborating with colleagues	6
Becoming more self-confident	5
Becoming a known figure in the community	3

by “Thinking more reflectively” (15%), “Thinking more critically” (14%), “Addressing issues in my professional teaching practice” (13%), “Finding better ways to teach” (11%), “Contributing to the improvement of my students” (10%), “Collaborating with colleagues” (6%), “Becoming more self-confident” (5%), and “Becoming a known figure in the community” (3%).

On the whole, the results indicate that the EFL teachers had positive perceptions towards the impact of their research practice on their professional teaching practice. The teacher-researchers thought that their engagement both with and in research contribute to their professional knowledge in ELT. For instance, one of the participants said:

Through reading and doing research I know what is going on in the world, and this can expand my knowledge in ELT.

The teachers’ research practice was believed to make them reflect on, in, and for their actions in the classroom. The teachers thought that through doing research, they reflect more about their actions in the class, and this can develop their professional teaching practice. For example, a participant reported that:

Conducting research to address an issue makes me reflect more about my actions in the classroom. Due to the research that I conduct, I think more about what I am going to teach and how I should teach before the class time, I focus more on my actions while I am teaching, and even after the class time I reflect more on what and how I taught.

The teachers reported that being engaged in research makes them think critically about different issues in their teaching process. They reported that while they are doing a research study to deal with an issue in their teaching and/or students’ learning, they think more critically about different ways, so that they could come to the best conclusions. A teacher reported that:

Doing and reading research make me think critically about my teaching practice. I always compare and analyse different ways to teach more effectively.

The participants believed that conducting research must be for the sake of addressing an issue in their professional teaching and/or students’ learning not for the sake of publication. They reported that through conducting research, they could address issues that they encounter in the class and, as a result, develop their professional teaching performance. One of the teachers said:

When I teach and I come across a teaching or learning issue, a question comes to my mind that makes me conduct research to address it. By solving the problems in my class, I develop my teaching practice gradually.

The participants reported that their research practice develops their professional teaching practice and contributes to other teachers’ professional teaching in the community. For instance, one of the teachers reported:

By reading research in the field, I can find about different ways of teaching. I can also find about the gaps in the literature and conduct research in this regard, which can subsequently contribute to my teaching performance.

The teachers also claimed that their research practice develops their students’ English language proficiency. They claimed that the main goal of their teaching is to improve students’ English language learning, and that they could deal with and address the issues related to the students’ learning through their research practice. As one of the teachers reported:

Through my research practice, I mostly try to find a better way to develop the students' language learning.

They reported that their research activities make them collaborate more with other teachers. They claimed that while conducting research, they come across questions which behave them to collaborate more with their colleagues to conduct research in a better way in order to come to reliable findings. One of the participants said:

Due to my research activities, I am always in contact with other teachers who are more capable in that field.

The teachers also reported that they feel more confident about their teaching practice, since they think their teaching practice is based on the published research studies that they read and research that they do. One of the teachers said:

I am confident about my actions in the class, since I think they are based on research.

Moreover, they reported that being engaged with and in research make them a well-known figure in the community. They maintained that not only they develop their professional teaching and students' learning through their research activities, but also they publish their research in a high-qualified journal in the field and become more famous. They further claimed that they are more noticed by other teachers, and that they are enquired about the effective ways to teach. For instance, one of the participants stated that:

My research practice has distinguished me from the other teachers, because the other teachers think I am an expert in this field. They usually ask me about different issues related to their teaching practice and students' issues in English language learning.

From what the EFL teachers reported regarding the impact of their research practice on their professional teaching practice, it might be suggested that EFL teachers' engagement with and in research in ELT context develop their professional teaching performance and contribute to their students' English language learning.

6. Discussion

In this study, the researcher explored the status of EFL teachers' research practice and the perceptions of EFL teacher-researchers towards the impact of their research practice on their professional teaching practice. The results indicated that the EFL teachers were engaged with and in research to some extent. However, there were some setbacks for EFL teachers' research engagement. For instance, the working context did not support their research activities and they had difficulties in conducting some parts of research. The aforementioned setbacks and difficulties might be the greatest impediments to some EFL teachers' research practice. The findings in this regard are consistent with Allison and Carey's (2007) findings in which the stakeholders of research in higher education develop research agenda for teachers in non-academic contexts, so that the teachers may read and apply the findings in the classroom.

The results further highlighted the positive attitudes and perceptions of EFL teachers towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching practice. For example, the teachers claimed that doing and reading research develop their professional knowledge in ELT. The findings of the study echo with those of Borg (2015) who suggested that teachers who are engaged with and in research are knowledge generators. These teacher-researchers would mostly focus on topics of immediate concern in their teaching context (Smith, 2014), and develop their knowledge in this regard (Cain, 2015). Similar to the findings of the study,

Borg (2009), Borg and Alshumaimeri (2012), and Holmqvist et al. (2018) claimed that teachers' research engagement contributes to their professional development.

The teachers in the present study also claimed that their research practice makes them think more reflectively and critically about the classroom issues. When the teachers encounter a teaching or learning issue in the class, they reflect on/in/for (for reflective practice, see Farrell, 2016) the teaching/learning issues and/or think critically (for critical thinking, see Ebadi & Rahimi, 2018) about various aspects of the teaching/learning issues that can subsequently behave them to become more engaged with and in research. The findings in this regard echo with those of Allwright and Hanks (2009) who argued that teachers who are involved in research activities engage critically, reflectively, and collaboratively in their teaching practice to address the teaching and learning issues in their classroom. Similarly, the findings are in line with those of Atay (2008) who proposed that teachers involving in research activities reflect more in their teaching practice.

The teachers in this study reported that being involved in research helps them to collaborate more with their colleagues. They thought that reading and doing research behave them to share the teaching and learning issues, occurred in the classroom, with other teachers in order to find a better way to deal with the issues through research. They would also meet up with other external teachers and researchers to conduct their research studies better. The findings are consistent with those of Borg (2009) and Atay (2008) who indicated more collaboration between teachers, engaging with and in research, and their colleagues.

The teachers also thought that they could deal with their classroom issues and find better ways to teach. After addressing the teaching and/or learning issues in the classroom through reading and doing research, the teachers thought that their teaching performance improves to a great extent. The findings of the study echo with those of Borg (2009) and Borg and Alshumaimeri (2012) who proposed that teachers who are engaged with and in research solve the classroom teaching and learning problems and teach more effectively.

The participating teachers in this study further claimed that their research practice makes them become more self-confident in their teaching practice. As they read and do research studies, they have logical justifications for their teaching practice in the classroom which makes them more confident. The findings of the present study are consistent with Henson's (2001) findings in which teachers' research practice makes them more self-efficacious at dealing with their teaching issues in the classroom. In addition, Edwards and Burns (2016) proposed that teachers' research practice makes them more confident in their teaching performance.

The teachers further proposed that research practice helps them develop their students' English language learning to a great extent. Reading and doing research were claimed to provide teachers with many alternative ways to deal with different students' learning styles. The findings echoed Edwards and Burns's (2016) findings in which they suggested that teachers engaging in research are claimed to have excellent rapport with their students which might subsequently contribute to their learning outcomes.

Moreover, the participating teachers stated that the research activities make them a well-known figure in the community. They could share their published research studies with other colleagues and researchers in the community online or present their work in a conference. The findings are consistent with those of Edwards and Burns (2016) who proposed that teachers involving in research activities are more recognised by other colleagues and managers in the teaching community.

7. Conclusion

The findings of the present study, thus, suggest that educational policymakers should invoke research practice in EFL teachers by providing them a supporting context in which they conduct research about their professional teaching practice and students' learning. It also behoves teacher educators to train EFL teachers to read and conduct research appropriately to better deal with their classroom issues. EFL teachers should gradually adjust their teaching approach to their local context (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and become their own researchers, since as Allwright (2003) argues teachers should engage with and in research in their own educational context to better understand and deal with the teaching and learning issues in the classroom. So, with this end in view, EFL teachers can develop their knowledge in ELT, think reflectively and critically about their classroom issues, collaborate more with colleagues to find better ways to address the teaching and learning issues in order to teach more effectively and confidently and develop the students' proficiency level in this regard, and become a prominent figure in the ELT community. Hence, EFL teachers are strongly recommended to become engaged with and in research in their own educational setting.

Future researchers might replicate this study in other educational contexts in order to examine the teachers' current status of research engagement and to see if the same themes are uncovered when they explore the teacher-researchers' perceptions towards the impact of research practice on professional teaching practice. Future researchers are also recommended to qualitatively explore the requirements for EFL teachers' research engagement in their own educational context.

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Appendices

Appendix A. English language teachers' research practice

This questionnaire is devised with the aim of looking into your research practice as an EFL teacher. To this end, your careful completion of the questionnaire will definitely contribute to obtaining more reliable data.

The information will be kept confidential and will be used just for research purposes.

1: Not at all, 2: Very little, 3: To some extent, 4: quite a lot, 5: a great deal.

Items	1	2	3	4	5
1. To what extent do you read published ELT research?					
2. To what extent does the research you read influence your teaching?					
3. To what extent can you identify an issue that needs researching?					
4. To what extent can you develop specific research questions?					
5. To what extent can you develop a focused literature review?					
6. To what extent can you identify appropriate research methods?					
7. To what extent can you justify using the research methods you have chosen, considering their strengths and weaknesses?					
8. To what extent can you design appropriate research instruments?					
9. To what extent are you skilful in collecting data?					
10. To what extent are you skilful in analysing data?					
11. To what extent can you conduct research in an ethical way?					
12. To what extent are you able to produce research that contributes to knowledge, with implications for practice?					
13. To what extent are you able to adopt a critical stance, constantly questioning your own biases?					
14. To what extent are you able to produce coherent reports of your research, both in oral and written form?					
15. To what extent has your research practice affected your teaching?					
16. To what extent has your research practice impacted your self-confidence in any way or your sense of autonomy in teaching?					
17. To what extent has your research practice affected the way you work with colleagues?					
18. To what extent has your research practice affected your understanding of your learners?					
19. To what extent have your learners benefited from your research?					
20. To what extent does your working context support your research activity?					

Appendix B. Interview questions, investigating the contribution of EFL teachers' research practice to their professional teaching practice

- (1) Do you read published ELT research? Why or why not?
- (2) Do you do ELT research? Why or why not?
- (3) Does your research engagement (both doing and reading research) impact your teaching practice? Why or why not?
- (4) Does your research practice impact your self-confidence or autonomy in teaching? Why or why not?
- (5) Does your research practice impact your understanding of your students? Why or why not?
- (6) How do you think your research practice impact your students' English language learning?
- (7) Does your research practice impact the way you work with your colleagues? Why or why not?
- (8) Does your working context support your research activity? Why or why not?



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