Second language teachers' reasons for doing/not doing action research in their classrooms

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the extent to which Iranian teachers do research, and their reasons for doing so in the English as a foreign language context, with a special emphasis on action research (AR). The present study used a mixed methods design, i.e. questionnaire and interview, to gain a richer understanding of the teachers' reasons for doing AR. The participants were 65 English teachers from 5 private English language teaching institutions. Despite the fact that many teachers in the present study considered AR useful in solving their immediate teaching problems and improving their teaching practices, the analysis of the teachers' reasons showed that there are serious barriers in the way of conducting AR which are in nature practical (lack of time), logistic (not having enough knowledge and support), and attitudinal (teachers believe that their job is only to teach).

Key Words: teacher research engagement, teachers' reasons, action research, mixed methods design, questionnaire, interview

Razones de los profesores de segundo idioma para hacer/no hacer investigación-acción en sus aulas

Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar en qué medida los maestros iraníes realizan investigación y sus razones para hacerlo en el contexto del inglés como idioma extranjero con un énfasis especial en la Investigación-Acción (IA). El presente estudio utilizó un diseño de métodos mixtos, es decir, cuestionario y entrevista, para obtener una mejor comprensión de las razones de los maestros para hacer IA. Los participantes fueron 65 profesores de inglés de 5 instituciones privadas de enseñanza de inglés. A pesar del hecho de que muchos maestros, en el presente estudio, consideraron que la IA es útil para resolver sus problemas de enseñanza inmediatos y mejorar sus prácticas de enseñanza, el análisis de las razones de los profesores mostró que existen serias barreras en la forma de conducir la IA que son de naturaleza práctica (falta de tiempo), logísticas (no tienen suficiente conocimiento y apoyo) y actitudinales (los docentes creen que su trabajo es solo enseñar).

Palabras clave: compromiso de investigación docente, razones de los profesores, investigación-acción, diseño de métodos mixtos, cuestionario, entrevista.

Introduction

One central argument supporting a drive to make teachers more engaged in educational research is that when teachers do research and make pedagogical decisions based on their own research findings, they can make more informed and evidence-based decisions (Borg 2007, 2009, 2010). Consequently, these decisions will beneficially affect both teaching and learning (Hargreaves 2001). Another main reason underlying this drive has been that engaging teachers in research is considered essential for teachers' professional development (Borg 2010; McDonough 2006). In other words, doing research can empower teachers to better understand their work, encourage them to reflect on what they do, lead them to explore different avenues regarding new thoughts, and end up being more autonomous (e.g., Kirkwood & Christie 2006; Tinker Sachs 2000). On a personal level, conducting research has been found to have the capacity to fulfill an academic's curiosity and creativity (e.g., Akerlind 2008; Chen et al. 2006). On a professional level, it can raise professional status (e.g., Akerlind 2008; Borg 2003).

Stimulated by this interest in encouraging teachers to be research-engaged, an emergent strand of research has concentrated on looking at what reasons underlie and drive teacher research or vice versa discourage it (e.g., Allison & Carey 2007; Barkhuizen 2009; Borg 2007, 2008, 2009). The rationale for such work has been that activities to advance teacher research engagement will more probably succeed if they are based on an awareness of teachers' reasons for doing research. This success will in turn bridge the gap between the stakeholders in the field of second/foreign language (L2) education. Considering the importance of such an issue, Borg and Liu (2013, p. 296) state that,

It is essential that initiatives to promote teacher research engagement be informed by insights into such matters [teachers' current understandings of and attitudes towards research engagement]. This will, for example, allow discrepancies between institutional and teacher perspectives on research engagement to be identified and addressed.

Looking at the issue from a general perspective, this is of most extreme significance in light of the fact that "understanding what teachers do, how they do it, and *why they do it* is central to any effort at reshaping education policy around teacher education, teacher professional development, and school reform" (O'Connell Rust 2009, p. 1882; *emphasis added*).

In line with this general attitude toward investigating teachers' research engagement, this study aims to explore the extent to which Iranian teachers do research and their reasons for doing so in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context with a special emphasis on action research (AR). AR is specifically noteworthy as teachers are increasingly being encouraged to carry out small-scale research studies in their own classrooms, and to assume the role of a teacher-researcher (Atay 2006, 2008; Burns 2005b, 2010; Edwards & Burns 2016; McDonough 2006; Wyatt 2011).

Confusion may arise as in education the term *action research* is often used almost interchangeably with another term, i.e., *teacher research*. It should be noted that, however, there are important differences between these two terms. Teacher research refers to all kinds of school- and classroom-based research conducted by practitioners, and is an "inquiry that is intentional, systematic, public, voluntary, ethical, and contextual" (Mohr et al. 2004, p. 23). As a general term, teacher research includes many different methodologies

and contexts. In contrast, action research in its strict sense refers to research activities that use "cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection that problematise (in a positive sense) issues, dilemmas or gaps that concern us" (Burns 2010, p. 19) and attempts to make change in an organization, for example, a school.

AR has been theoretically studied and practically used by many different traditions, such as social movements, public health, psychology, management, and education. These different disciplines have looked at AR from their own perspective and have emphasised the learning and transformation power of AR. They have also praised the role of AR in the increase of quality in various settings. Despite such benefits, however, "what most approaches have in common is the idea that creating knowledge for change is essentially a *social and political process*, and that how this process is facilitated will shape the outcomes" (Pettit 2010, p. 821; *emphasis added*). In other words, despite their differences, most of these approaches and disciplines are still faithful to Kurt Lewin´s principal tenet which is about the relationship between AR and the larger panorama of society and its problems.

Considering the importance of AR in the field of L2 education, it is now an established belief that the process of AR, if conducted systematically and extensively, enables the construction of teacher-generated knowledge, thus empowering teachers as the creators and not just the holders of such knowledge (Avgitidou 2010; Edge 2001). Moreover, AR has been regarded favourably because it can help teachers develop in-depth perspectives about the process of teaching and learning (Lacorte & Krastel 2002). In addition, AR can help L2 teachers recognise the importance of learning how to seek answers to their questions (Tedick & Walker 1995), address and find solutions to particular problems in a specific teaching or learning situation (Hadley 2003), develop personal theories about L2 learning (Crookes, 1997), become autonomous (Tinker Sachs 2000), reduce gaps between academic research findings and practical classroom applications (Sayer 2005), and become familiar with research skills and enhance their knowledge of conducting research (Crookes & Chandler 2001). It is often considered as a potential way to encourage teachers' engagement in research and subsequently to bridge the gap between researchers and practitioners (Burns 2005b).

Saying this, it is not aimed to argue that teachers should be research-engaged; rather the point is that the decisions to be made about what is feasible and attainable in relation to language teachers' research engagement need to be based on empirical studies that we currently lack. Such studies can clarify teachers' viewpoints on the degree to which they are research-engaged, and the reasons behind being so (Borg 2007, 2008, 2009); needless to say that without a perception of such issues, thoughtful proposals about teacher research engagement in second language education cannot be made.

The present study thus aims to collect data relevant to the following questions:

1) To what extent do Iranian EFL teachers say they do AR?
2) Where teachers do AR, what are their reasons for engaging in this type of research?
3) Where teachers do not do AR, what reasons do they cite?

Literature review

Researchers have recently paid a special attention to the reasons which drive teacher research or vice versa impede it. Watkins (2006), for example, examined the factors which may prompt teachers to end up in conducting research. Her article aimed to present some first-hand observations from teachers in special education who had all been involved in teacher research projects. She highlighted a number of concepts including motivation, support, and professional learning based on her personal experiences that were then examined in relation to teachers' willingness and ability to engage in research. Teachers' views were obtained through semi-structured interviews with nine practicing teacher-researchers. Her study revealed that professional development was the teachers' primary motivation for getting involved in research. The other reasons included obtaining an outsider perspective toward the practice of teaching, finding out what other people are doing, seeing the practical relevance of research to classroom setting, developing research skills, and enjoying a research-type approach to teaching. Yet, some other teachers related their engagement in research to their involvement in higher education courses.

Borg (2007, 2008, 2009) also conducted a series of studies on teachers' perceptions of research in the field of L2 education. His more comprehensive study (Borg 2009) examined the conceptions of research held by 505 teachers of English from 13 countries around the world. His methodology consisted of questionnaire responses accompanied by follow-up interview data which aimed to reveal what teachers' views on research were. By and large, in explaining why they do research, teachers referred to intentions which were primarily personal, pedagogical, and professional, with much less emphasis on external drivers such as promotion and employer pressure. He found that the three main reasons for doing research were to find better ways of teaching, to solve problems in their teaching, and to enhance their professional development. In contrast, more instrumental motives such as employer expectations and promotion were less significant in teachers' responses. The main factor for not doing research was a lack of time; the next most common reason teachers mentioned for not doing research was that most of their colleagues were also not interested in doing research. A lack of knowledge about research was also considered an important factor in preventing teachers from conducting research. Moreover, some of the teachers contended that such activity was not part of their responsibility while some others stated that they were not intrigued by research.

Allison and Carey (2007) also investigated the views of teachers about research at a university language centre in Canada. A questionnaire was distributed to 22 teachers and 17 of them participated in the follow-up interviews. In line with the Borg's (2007, 2008, 2009) studies, the respondents of the study mentioned lack of time and time-consuming demands of teaching as an obstruction to conducting research. They also believed that immediate classroom needs had priority over any other activity such as research. However, in contrast to other studies (Borg 2007, 2008, 2009), teachers mentioned that they needed outside motivation to initiate and conduct research since research was not an obligatory activity for them. Collecting data through a narrative frame during a professional development programme in China which aimed to introduce teachers to qualitative research methods, Barkhuizen (2009) examined the research experiences of 83 teachers of English in Chinese

universities. In line with the previous studies (e.g., Allison & Carey 2007; Borg 2007, 2008, 2009), he found that time was a major factor preventing teachers from carrying out research. A second key constraint concerned teachers' impression of their ability to conduct research. Moreover, surprisingly, a number of the teachers in his study assumed that their students would not take an interest in participating in their research. However, his findings also reflected the dominance of practical and professional concerns as factors which motivated teachers to go through the task of doing research (e.g., motivating their students, improving teaching materials, and encouraging students to speak in class).

Gao et al. (2011) conducted a mixed methods study to find out about the research engagement of a group of primary English language school teachers in China. The researchers particularly focused on the teachers' conceptions of research and the contextual factors driving them to do research. They first administered a survey among the 33 teachers who had agreed to participate in their study and then, drawing on a preliminary analysis of the survey data, they invited participants to take part in the following focus-group interviews. The study revealed that the majority of teachers preferred the type of research involving experimental use of particular teaching methods in their classrooms with the goal of improving their own teaching and their students' learning. While it is an integral part of academic research to share research findings through publication, the teachers of this particular study did not consider writing for publication essential, although they mentioned other forms of research dissemination. Carrying out a study on Sudanese teachers' professionalization, Bashir (2011) tried to deal with the complexities of engaging in AR by providing explanations in different areas, one of them was teachers' beliefs of AR. In order to explore the principles and practices of AR, a workshop consisting of 25 teachers and 7 representatives from universities was held. The data obtained from the workshop discussions were analyzed and the results revealed that since AR was not part of the Sudanese teachers' institutional culture, they did not have any idea about AR. In addition, it was found that the teachers were mostly unwilling to do AR due to the absence of knowledge which was viewed as a basic element. Some other reasons for the scarcity of AR were also recognized, such as lack of time, work overload, and uncertainty about the adequacy of doing AR.

Methodology

Design and data types

In order to gain a rich understanding of the teachers' reasons for doing AR, the present study used a mixed methods design. Mixed methods designs incorporate both qualitative and quantitative elements in the design, data collection, and analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009). Quantitative and qualitative approaches are currently viewed as complementary rather than fundamentally incompatible in the fields of applied linguistics and second language acquisition, and, hence, more mixed methods research is recommended (Dornyei 2007; Hashemi 2012; Hashemi & Babaii 2013). Although integration has been described as difficult to achieve (Bryman 2007), the main attraction of mixed methods research lies in the fact that by using both quantitative and qualitative approaches researchers can bring out the best of both paradigms. This integration is further enhanced by the potential that the

strengths of one method can overcome the weaknesses of the other method used in the study (Dornyei 2007; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004). This overlap in turn leads to a better understanding of problems than either approach alone (Creswell & Garrett 2008).

The particular mixed methods design used in the present study is called "sequential explanatory strategy" by Creswell (2009). In his words, this is a design which "is characterised by the collection and analysis of quantitative data in a first phase of research followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in a second phase that builds on the results of the initial quantitative results" (p. 211). The questionnaire is the first part of this strategy which allows an extensive analysis of data but also acts as a kind of filter through which a smaller sample of participants will be identified for the subsequent interview phase of the study. The rationale behind this type of mixed methods research is that in spite of the fact that the questionnaire survey is an adaptable technique that helps to gather a large amount of data efficiently and quickly, it also suffers from the shallow respondents' engagement. In other words, it is difficult for the researcher to investigate complex meanings directly by using this technique alone (Dornyei 2007). It is believed that adding a subsequent interview component to the study can help the researcher to deal with this weakness. Each data type is described in detail in the following sections.

Questionnaire

The format of questionnaire used in this study is generally based on the questionnaire developed by Borg (2009). Borg's questionnaire has originally six sections which one of its sections (section 5) is used in this particular study due to its relevance (see Appendix). However, regarding the present study questionnaire, one point is worth noting. All of the words "research" in section 5 in the original questionnaire were changed to "action research" to reflect the aims of the present study. As Borg (2007) makes it clear, the lists of factors presented in section 5 in relation to why teachers do and do not do research "were informed by the discussion of these issues both in the ELT literature and outside" (p. 734). The questionnaire aimed to reveal the teachers' dedication to doing AR with the reasons behind.

Interview

A subgroup of teachers (n=22) were randomly chosen and invited to a semi structured interview to elaborate on their responses to the quantitative data. In total 17 teachers were actually interviewed, as the other five teachers declined to participate in the interview due to the lack of time. The aim of the interview was to get a better insight of the reasons for doing or not doing AR in the questionnaire. In this way, during the face-to-face interviews, teachers were requested to elaborate on their questionnaire responses; in particular they were asked about the reasons for their engagement/non-engagement in AR. Although there was a set of pre-prepared guiding questions and prompts, the interviewees were encouraged to elaborate on their views and experiences of AR in an exploratory manner. Interviews lasted on average between 25 to 30 minutes and were audio recorded. Farsi (the teachers' native language) was used to help the participants feel more relaxed and speak more freely. All of the interviews were translated from Farsi into English and fully transcribed.

Participants

The participants were 83 Iranian teachers from 5 private English Language Teaching (ELT) institutions. They were all of the available and active English teaching staff in these institutions which had been recruited with the mission of teaching general English skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing). The institutions were located in a middle class part of the city of Mashhad, north-eastern Iran. The questionnaires in hard copy were given personally to the teachers in each institute from which 65 completed questionnaires (38 female and 27 male) were returned, representing a response rate of 78%. The respondents were homogeneous in several respects including their mother tongue (Farsi), second language education experience (EFL context), type of institution (private), the age of their learners (they were teaching mostly teenagers), years of teaching experience (the majority of teachers had less than 15 years of teaching experience) and relevant ELT qualification (most of them had bachelor's degree). Before administering the survey, consent was sought from the chair of each of the five institutions and all participants received information about the voluntary nature of the study with anonymity assured.

Tables 1 and 2 present the sample according to experience in ELT and qualifications relevant to ELT, respectively. As Table 1 shows, the majority of this sample of teachers (83%, n=54) had less than 15 years of ELT experience. Table 2 indicates that just over 18 per cent had postgraduate qualifications.

Table 1: Respondents by years of ELT experience

Years	N (%)
0-4	11 (16.9)
5-9	25 (38.5)
10-14	18 (27.7)
15-19	8 (12.3)
20+	3 (4.6)
Total	65 (100)

Table 2: Respondents by highest ELT qualification

Qualification	N (%)
Certificate	7 (10.8)
Bachelor's	46 (70.8)
Master's	12 (18.4)
Total	65 (100)

Findings

The survey focused on teachers' engagement in AR. Teachers were asked how often they did AR, if so, why, and if not, what the reasons for this were. 32% (the percentages are rounded to the nearest number) of the respondents said they did AR sometimes, while only 8% of them often did research. 45% of individuals reported never doing research and 15% rarely.

Reasons for doing action research

The 26 teachers who reported doing AR often or sometimes were asked to choose from a list of 9 reasons provided for doing so by selecting items from and suggesting other reasons if required. The findings are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Teachers' reasons for doing action research

Reasons for Doing Action Research	Frequency (%)
1) As part of a course I am studying on	2 (7.6)
2) Because I enjoy it	12 (46.1)
3) Because it is good for my professional development	5 (19.2)
4) Because it will help me get a promotion	9 (34.6)
5) Because my employer expects me to	1 (3.8)
6) Because other teachers can learn from the findings of my work	17 (65.3)
7) To contribute to the improvement of the institute generally	8 (30.7)
8) To find better ways of teaching	21 (80.7)
9) To solve problems in my teaching	23 (88.4)

As Table 3 shows, the most commonly cited reasons were "to solve problems in my teaching" (88%) and "to find better ways of teaching" (81%). 65% of teachers also said they do AR because other teachers can learn from the findings of their work. Another interesting finding is that 46% of teachers said they do AR because they enjoy it. Getting a promotion and improvement of the institute emerged here as minor factors motivating teachers to do AR. Additionally, only 19% of the teachers said that they do AR because it is good for their professional development. The least favourable reasons were "because my employer expects me to" (item 5) and "as part of a course I am studying on" (item 1) which only 4% and 8% of teachers chose them, respectively.

Item 9 (solving the problems of teaching) was the most popular reason for doing AR among teachers in this particular study. Teachers' main views about this reason are provided in the following:

The name talks for itself. I mean we do research to understand whether our action is right or wrong. What is more important than this? If it does not help me to make my teaching better, why action research at all?

I think that the most noticeable difference between this type of research [action research] and other types of research is this characteristic. If the kind of research we do is not compatible with helping teachers in solving their problems, it is anything but action research.

I am a teacher and the first aim in my teaching is improving my classroom context. Action research is an important technique for reaching to this aim. It helps me solve the problems I have in my teaching.

Item 8 (to find better ways of teaching) was the second most popular reason for doing AR among teachers. Teachers' opinions about this reason are stated below:

I've always been interested in finding new ways in my teaching… I think that this helps me break the routine and make teaching more enjoyable for both teachers and students. The best way to analyze the result is through action research because of its cyclical nature and you can always check whether the new method is good or not.

It is my belief that action research can help teachers test different methods of teaching to discover the best one that is suitable for their own context. It is true that all of the teachers are equipped with different methods of teaching from their teacher training programmes, but not all of them are applicable to their specific teaching context.

It is the responsibility of every teacher to make himself familiar with various forms of teaching as all of the classes are not the same. I think action research can help teachers more than any other type of research, as it is more applicable to classroom context.

The teachers' comments concerning their strong motivation to do research reveal that their research engagement is determined with the aim of improving their teaching practices, and particularly by the need to solve their pedagogical problems. It seems that teachers associate their research engagement with the difficulties they might encounter in their teaching process, as AR is primarily targeted to improve teaching and learning.

Reasons for not doing action research

The 39 teachers who reported doing AR rarely or never were similarly asked to indicate reasons for this. Their responses are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Teachers' reasons for not doing action research

Reasons for Not Doing Action Research	Frequency (%)
1) I do not know enough about action research methods	32 (82.0)
2) My job is to teach not to do action research	17 (43.5)
3) I do not have time to do action research	34 (87.1)
4) My employer discourages it	2 (5.1)
5) I am not interested in doing action research	8 (20.5)
6) I need someone to advise me but no one is available	26 (66.6)
7) Most of my colleagues do not do action research	23 (58.9)
8) I do not have access to the books and journals I need	13 (33.3)
9) The learners would not co-operate if I did action research in class	9 (23.0)
10) Other teachers would not co-operate if I asked for their help	2 (5.1)

A lack of time was the factor most often cited (87%). The next most common reason teachers cited for not doing AR was that they did not have enough knowledge about AR methods (82%). Items 6 and 7 which stated "I need someone to advise me but no one is available" and "most of my colleagues do not do action research" were the next factors in this list with the percentages of 67% and 59%, respectively. Yet 43% of teachers believed that their job was to teach not to do research, and 33% blamed the lack of access to the books and journals they needed as an important reason for not doing AR. The last four least mentioned reasons are the lack of co-operation of the students (23%), the lack of interest (20%), the lack of cooperation of other teachers (5%), and employer's discouragement (5%).

Teachers in this study have justified their main reason for not doing AR because of the lack of time. Some of their comments on this issue are provided here:

I teach in two other institutes except this one. With such a compact schedule it is very difficult to find free time for doing extra work such as action research.

I wish I had enough time to do action research. Sometimes I really feel that I need to do something about some of the problems I have in my classroom. However, it is really difficult to devote some time to such an activity.

Teaching is a kind of burdensome job. You are always living in the extra time. I mean you are always far behind the schedule. How could you sacrifice some of your time to doing research when you are living in such a situation?

As the quotations clearly show, the teachers accuse the lack of time as the main constraint for not doing AR. It seems that the teachers' heavy teaching workload prevents them from dealing with the time-consuming work required by the research activity.

Discussion

It seems that teachers' main reasons for doing AR in the present study (i.e., to solve problems and to find better ways of teaching) fall within Rock and Levin's (2002, p. 7) definition of teacher AR "with the goal of improving their [teachers] teaching practices". Learning to solve problems through the study of practice is of particular importance in the context of second language teaching. This context needs teachers to come to the job equipped not just with a broad knowledge of how learners learn a second language, but also with knowledge of how to apply diverse second language teaching methods to different learners and continually changing situations that are the remarkable signs of current second language education. As Richards and Farrell (2005) truly state, "teachers have different needs at different times during their careers…the pressure for teachers to update their knowledge in areas such as curriculum trends, second language acquisition research, composition theory and practice, technology or assessment is intense" (p. 2). Learning how to problematise and manage the intricate difficulties of their occupation is in this way fundamental to the work of teachers in the field of second language education. AR can help to address these issues. In other words, the process of solving problems with evidence gathered through AR can make teachers become more critical (Price 2001), connect general theory with their specific practice (Burns 2005b), and take appropriate action to make change if necessary (Somekh & Zeichner 2009).

In line with this perspective, many teachers in the present study have also expressed strong beliefs in support of AR to solve their teaching problems. Their responses demonstrate that several teachers believe that doing AR is both personally and professionally of significant value in helping them to examine issues related to their own teaching. As one of the teachers states, "although I hardly find any extra time to do action research, it is my firm conviction that if I am going to solve MY classroom problems, there is no way but to do it MYSELF through some sort of research" (emphasis in original). This finding is in accordance with the previous research. For example, Campbell and Jacques (2004, p. 80) state that all teachers in their study had "expectations of practical outcomes from doing research, which would affect their teaching and preparation and planning for teaching". Mehrani (2014) also found that the teachers participating in his study were disappointed with academic research studies as they neglect questions that are applicable to their teaching prac-

tice. The teachers believed that "they [academic research studies] deal with questions that are too insignificant and non-practical. Such research questions are basically not rooted in real classroom problems and often originate from theoretical discussions which do not serve teachers' interests" (p. 31).

Another interesting finding was that one of the least rated reasons for doing AR was professional development. Although in both general education (e.g., Ado 2013; Cain & Milovic 2010; Descamps-Bednarz 2007; McNiff 2002; Vogrinc & Zuljan 2009; Zeichne, 2003) and second language education (e.g., Atay 2006, 2008; Bailey et al. 2001; Campbell & Tovar 2006; Chou 2011; McDonough 2006; Richards & Farrell 2005) AR has been seen as a key factor in providing opportunities for professional growth and development, teachers in the present study do not express the same thought. This is due to several reasons mentioned by the teachers who participated in the interviews such as lack of motivation, lack of deep knowledge about AR and its trivial effects on their professional lives. Two-thirds of the teachers in the Campbell and Jacques' (2004) study also did not identify a resulting engagement in professional development. However, Campbell and Jacques (2004, p. 80) provide a different explanation and believe that "perhaps research into practice is not recognised as proper professional development…teachers' perceptions of professional development indicated a tendency for teachers to subscribe to a narrow, traditional model of professional development as characterised by workshop and course attendance". There is also evidence from general education that although teachers usually value AR as a means of professional development, it doesn't necessarily lead to changes in their practice. Haggarty and Postlethwaite (2003), for example, have reported that "[action research] led to understanding of new perspectives for some teachers but limited understanding for others" (p. 435).

Shifting the focus to the reasons for not doing AR, time limitation has always been considered a major problem in conducting AR in the field of second language education. In spite of the fact that time is more of a structural factor, which alone will not ensure that high levels of professional development will be achieved, there has not been provision made for time within the workload of teachers to suit the necessary ingredients for carrying out AR. Dealing with the prominent dimensions of research communities, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) consider time to be one of the most important dimensions when teachers come together as researchers because they "need sufficient chunks of time in which to work and sufficient longevity as a group over time" (p. 294). In the same line, Firkins and Wong (2005), recognising research as a sign of professionalism of teachers, also assert that "educational authorities need to allocate resources to schools by way of time and funds" (p. 69).

Despite such propositions, many previous studies have shown that teachers justify their lack of engagement in research because of the lack of time. For example, Crookes and Arakaki (1999) highlighted some factors which hinder teachers' research engagement; one of them was lack of time. Borg (2007, 2008, 2009) also in his serial studies on teachers' research engagement showed that a lack of time was by far the factor most often cited for not doing research. It is not thus surprising to see that 87% of teachers in this study have also attributed their lack of engagement in AR to the lack of time. AR involvement demands time and the present study showed that teachers generally do not feel this time is available within their current schedule. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) pointed out, "unlike other

professions which are organised to support research activities, teaching is a profession in which it is extraordinarily difficult to find enough time to collect data…reflect, reread, or share with colleagues" (p. 91). As one of the teachers of the present study clarifies in his interview, "I do not find any logic in doing AR when I see that I even do not have enough time to cover my regular teaching programmes". A corollary of this situation is that AR turns into an activity which teachers do not feel it is important to engage in. The results here thus suggest that time may be a more prominent factor than others in impacting the degree to which teachers actually take part in AR.

A further noteworthy finding for not doing AR concerns teachers' lack of specialised knowledge of research (i.e., "I do not know enough about AR methods" and "I need someone to advise me but no one is available"). In the same line, the teachers in Mehrani's (2014, p. 29) study also argued that "teachers do not read research simply because they cannot; they are not educated how to find, read, evaluate, and use research papers". Definitely, this issue is largely related to our deficient pre-service teacher education programmes, where prospective teachers are not given sufficient knowledge and skills to engage with research (Atay 2008; Gore & Gitlin 2004; Zeuli 1994), leave alone in research. Examining the current teacher education programmes reveals that research methodology courses are basically theoretical rather than practical in involving teachers in reading and doing research. Prospective teachers are rarely educated where to find, how to read, and analyse research studies; however, they are unreasonably expected to carry out research projects all alone, and furthermore to use research findings in their own practice. Gore and Gitlin (2004, pp. 51-2) liken this "to inviting someone to a meeting at which they have access to the agenda but none of the background, the nuances, the politics of the committee and so on. At such meetings, where we do not have an adequate grasp of the terrain, we are effectively silenced". Thus, if practitioners are not equipped with enough knowledge and skills to critically read research materials and engage in practical research, they are basically ruled out of the research community.

Another finding that is worth considering is the rather high number of teachers who assumed that their job "is to teach not to do AR". Mehrani (2014) found that one factor that disheartens teachers from doing research especially in Iran is the way the Ministry of Education evaluates teachers. In his words, "teachers are not rewarded for engaging in research, participating in conferences, and keeping up with current theoretical issues in language education… teachers [thus] see their job as teaching and not researching" (pp. 27-28). In order to deal with this issue, the teachers in his study then suggested that the educational system can offer a set of incentives to motivate teachers to do research activities, a small part of teachers' working hours could be determined for research, teachers could be rewarded for carrying out small-scale research studies, the educational authorities can set research priorities and provide grants for practicing teachers to conduct such projects, and, last but not least, teachers can be encouraged to share their experience and knowledge to other teachers and colleagues.

Implications for L2 teachers

In spite of the fact that AR is a primary "vehicle for practitioners' personal and professional development" (Burns 2005a, p. 70), many researchers in the field of L2 education have considered lack of time as a major problem in preventing teachers from engaging in research (e.g., Allison & Carey 2007; Atay 2006; Barkhuizen 2009; Borg 2009).

Likewise, as the results show, many teachers in the present study have also blamed lack of time as the main reason for not doing AR. As one of the teachers states, "lack of time is a big problem [in conducting action research]. I'm sure that if time is integrated into teachers' workload, most of them would be eager to do action research". This comment suggests that the educational institutions do not provide teachers with required time to encourage them to do AR. So, one might speculate that if teachers have more time, it is more likely to carry out AR in their classes. In the same way, Borg (2007, p. 744) believes that "sustained and productive research engagement is not feasible unless the time it requires is acknowledged and built into institutional systems". In order to overcome the lack of time obstacle to research engagement, it is suggested that a comprehensive framework that allows teachers the flexibility to plan and incorporate research activities into their current teaching schedule be set up by administrative authorities.

As the findings show, a large number of teachers in the present study have also attributed their lack of engagement in AR to their lack of specialised knowledge about AR. The previous literature has made it clear that this problem is largely rooted in our inefficient teacher education programmes, where prospective teachers are not provided with enough knowledge and skills to help them feel confident in engaging with research (Atay 2008; Gore & Gitlin 2004; Zeuli 1994). As Mehrani (2014, p. 34) asserts "basically, research methodology courses offered in our teacher education programmes include too much *theoretical discussions about* research rather than *practical involvement in* reading and doing research" (emphasis in original). As one of the teachers plainly declared "we [teachers] were never taught how to do research in practice. It is true that we had research methodology course at the university but we never had any idea what research is in the real world, leave alone action research". In the same way, Gore and Gitlin (2004) argue that currently teachers are only given some basic knowledge and skills about research in teacher education programmes which is not at all enough for them to engage with it. They even go further and believe that presenting research "in all its messy, fragmented, manipulated reality may simply further undermine its credibility and give teachers even less reason to use it" (p. 51).

In order to deal with this problem, it is suggested that educational institutions provide opportunities for researchers and practitioners to meet regularly to share their knowledge and experience. In other words, if we truly hope to fill the gap in our teachers' knowledge about how to do AR, one good strategy is to help practitioners have access to researchers easily. This can be even beneficial for any possible collaborative and cooperative projects in the future. It is hoped that forming such professional communities provide teachers with opportunities to develop their research knowledge generally, and AR specifically.

Conclusion

The literature of second language teacher education is replete with powerful and influential arguments in favor of the benefits of being engaged in research. However, as Borg (2009, p. 377) asserts, "the reality remains though that teacher research … is a minority activity in ELT". Despite the fact that many teachers in the present study considered AR useful in solving their immediate teaching problems and improving their teaching practices, the analysis of the teachers' reasons showed that there are serious barriers in the way of conducting AR which are in nature practical (lack of time), logistic (not having enough knowledge and support), and attitudinal (teachers believe that their job is only to teach). These limitations shed light on why for such a large number of teachers carrying out AR is seen as not only undoable but also undesirable. This situation has obvious implications for the need for organisational, practical and intellectual support to encourage teachers to be research engaged.

The insights provided here can also fulfill an important awareness-raising function among those interested in promoting AR engagement. The notion of AR is definitely not new in the field of second language education; however, what is new is the organised and systematised study of the teachers who do AR and their personal reasons which impact their research engagement. In other words, research engagement efforts are more likely to succeed if they take into account the empirical evidence of the teachers' reasons for doing AR. Such understanding is currently restricted in the field, but as Borg (2007, p. 745) contends if a field wants "to promote and support research engagement by teachers more widely it is necessary for it to begin to generate the empirical evidence which is required to inform initiatives of this kind".

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Appendix: Reasons for (Not) Doing Action Research

a)   How frequently do you do action research yourself? (Tick ONE)

Never ☐	Rarely ☐	Sometimes ☐	Often ☐

If you chose *Never* or *Rarely* go straight to part c.

b)   You said you do action research *sometimes* or *often*. Below are a number of possible reasons for doing action research. Tick those which are true for you.
    I do action research...

 1) As part of a course I am studying on
 2) Because I enjoy it
 3) Because it is good for my professional development
 4) Because it will help me get a promotion
 5) Because my employer expects me to
 6) Because other teachers can learn from the findings of my work
 7) To contribute to the improvement of the institute generally
 8) To find better ways of teaching
 9) To solve problems in my teaching
10) Other reasons (please specify):

c)   You said that you do action research *never* or *rarely*. Below are a number of possible reasons for not doing action research. Tick those which are true for you.

I don't do action research because...

 1) I do not know enough about research methods
 2) My job is to teach not to do research
 3) I do not have time to do research
 4) My employer discourages it
 5) I am not interested in doing research
 6) I need someone to advise me but no one is available
 7) Most of my colleagues do not do research
 8) I do not have access to the books and journals I need
 9) The learners would not co-operate if I did research in class
10) Other teachers would not co-operate if I asked for their help
11) Other reasons (please specify):