Formadores de Profesores de Inglés y sus Actitudes hacia la Investigación Educativa

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English Teacher Educators' Engagement with and Attitudes towards Educational Research

Formadores de Profesores de Inglés y sus Actitudes hacia la Investigación Educativa

Formadores de professores de inglês e suas atitudes em relação à pesquisa educacional

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Abstract

Today, the development of research skills in teacher education programs is highly valued. In line with this, this mixed-method case study aimed to examine teachers' engagement with and attitudes towards educational research in an EFL teacher education program in Mexico. A sample of the population of educators answered the Teacher Attitude Scale towards Educational Research (Ilhan et al.), whereas qualitative data emanated from interviews with 6 teachers. Findings suggest that teacher educators perceive the value of educational research; however, its necessity and applicability cannot be ascertained. Barriers that impede teacher educators' engagement with research, resulting in a lack of research culture in this context, were also identified.

Keywords: **Attitudes, higher education, EFL teaching, teacher education, research training**

Resumen

Hoy en día, el desarrollo de habilidades investigativas en programas de formación docente es considerado de gran valor. Por ello, este estudio mixto tuvo como objetivo examinar las actitudes de docentes de un programa de formación de profesores de inglés en México hacia la investigación educativa y su participación en la misma. Una muestra de la población docente respondió la escala TASTER (Ilhan et al.), y los datos cualitativos emanaron de entrevistas a 6 profesores. Los hallazgos sugieren que los participantes reconocen el valor de la investigación educativa, no así claramente su necesidad o aplicabilidad. Asimismo, se identificaron barreras que les impiden involucrase de lleno en la investigación, resultando en una falta de cultura de investigación en este contexto.

Palabras clave: **Actitudes, educación superior, enseñanza del inglés, formación de investigadores, formación de profesores**

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Resumo

Hoje, o desenvolvimento de habilidades investigativas em programas de formação de professores é considerado de grande valor. Portanto, este estudo misto teve como objetivo examinar as atitudes de professores de um programa de formação de professores de inglês no México em relação à pesquisa educacional e sua participação nela. Uma amostra da população docente respondeu à escala TASTER (Ilhan et al.), e os dados qualitativos vieram de entrevistas com 6 professores. Os achados sugerem que os participantes reconhecem o valor da pesquisa educacional, mas não claramente sua necessidade ou aplicabilidade. Da mesma forma, foram identificadas barreiras que os impedem de se envolverem plenamente na pesquisa, resultando em uma falta de cultura de pesquisa nesse contexto.

Palavras-chave: **Atitudes, ensino superior, ensino de inglês, formação de pesquisadores, formação de professores**

Introduction

Today, given the accelerated knowledge changes, competent university students are required not only to adopt a reflective and critical attitude regarding their present and future educational reality but also to possess the necessary competencies to investigate this reality and to transform it creatively. Research promotes the development of inquiry, observation, and reflection skills that can lead to students' development of logical-formal, analytical, and critical thinking skills that will have as main purpose the generation of knowledge. Furthermore, in education and higher education, doing research is one of the most important duties that need to be fulfilled to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Luu et al.).

Undoubtedly, the development of research skills among university students seems to be the key to responding to the complex and changing reality of today's global environment (Rodríguez Fiallos et al.). It is therefore pertinent to train professionals who carry out the permanent task of studying reality, to ask themselves about the everyday and the obvious, professionals who provide answers to the problems that exist in the educational arena. This is undoubtedly the case of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education programs since pre-service teachers will have to integrate research skills as part of their everyday job.

However, for this aim to be reached, teacher educators, in charge of forming future English teachers, need to be engaged with research and have an encouraging attitude towards the role of research in pre-service teachers' education. Even though English language learning has resorted to the implementation of research, the gap between theory and practice in the profession is still a matter to be solved (Kutlay). Because there seems to be a paucity of studies conducted to explore English teachers' research engagement in EFL contexts, we aim to unveil EFL teacher educators' attitudes and engagement with educational research in a public university.

Review of the literature

Teacher research

In the last decades, research has focused on how research training can help in the acquisition of a second language (Kutlay). However, research integration in teaching-learning practice is still considered a challenge in higher education environments. Prosser and Trigwell agree that teacher educators should practice research in their

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undergraduate teaching, as it seems to be an approachable way for students to benefit their learning process. The relationship between teachers and undergraduate researchers is an important component of the learner research experience (Craney et al.), and for those that have an opportunity to collaborate with a faculty member, it can be "a life-changing experience" (Kuh et al.). Nevertheless, teacher educators often struggle to integrate research and teaching; as a result, students do not see the relation between research and the teaching-learning process (Myers et al.).

Recent studies seem to indicate that when educators engage with research, either by reading research or by doing research themselves, great benefits to both educators' teaching and students' learning happen. Moreover, reading and doing research involves lecturers changing their roles from passive actors within educational systems to innovative roles in curriculum development. In addition, taking educators to do research is a feasible way to help them to become less dependent on external challenges and to facilitate their teaching challenge encounters (Luu et al.). Simon Borg summarizes several advantages if teacher educators use research knowledge for educational practice: Research can make deeper sense of their work, detect ideas to experiment within their classroom, extend their discourse for discussing teaching, authenticate with a theoretical rationale what they already do, or examine their planning and decision-making processes (Language).

Verburgh and Elen mention that integrating research into teaching seems to be one of the most important factors in promoting student learning and student beliefs about research. "However, not many in quantity, some research has been conducted in the field of English language teaching which aimed to enquire the research perceptions of teachers" (Kutlay 190). Because there seems to be a paucity of studies conducted to explore English teachers' research engagement in this field of study, this study aims precisely to examine teachers' engagement with and attitudes towards educational research in a public university in Mexico.

Teacher research is more commonly associated with qualitative forms of inquiry and investigative strategies, which are accessible to teachers, though, in theory, there are no limitations on the strategies that teacher-researchers can deploy. Simon Borg defines teacher research as systematic, qualitative, and/or quantitative, conducted by teachers in their professional contexts, individually or collaboratively (Language). Teacher Research aims to improve teachers' understanding of some aspects of their work. In addition, teacher research may

contribute to increasing the quality of the teaching-learning process in classrooms and enhance institutional improvement and educational policy more generally.

Teachers were usually viewed as the implementers of the findings produced by researchers; however, this view has been changing in recent years as teachers are now more commonly regarded as practitioners of educational research (Kutlay). Simon Borg suggests that we should be mindful of the potential of research to transform teacher research into an exercise driven by mainly instrumental goals (Language). Teachers ought to practice research in their classrooms in order to produce and transfer functional knowledge (Vereijken et al.). As they succinctly put it:

Teachers should explicitly express research in their undergraduate teaching in a way that is visible and approachable for students in order for student learning to benefit research integration, since student perceptions of teaching play an important role in fostering student learning outcomes (Vereijken et al. 425).

Haberfellner and Fenzl assert that research should produce propriety functional knowledge and that teachers should be able to find, understand, and transfer this knowledge into their teaching practice. According to Simon Borg, teacher research as part of a university degree requires more supervision than practicing teachers doing teacher research would not normally receive (Language). This is one advantage of the academic model of teacher research and highlights the central role that expert mentors can play in enabling teachers to sustain their engagement in teacher research. Developing teacher research can also improve teachers' critical thinking, creativity, and research competence (Luu et al.). Many faculty members could benefit from strategies that enable them to generate new research ideas, create time for research, effectively mentor undergraduates, garner external funding, establish successful collaborations, and maintain their level of expertise (Laursen et al.).

Allison and Carey reported lack of time, lack of encouragement, lack of expertise, and confusion about the concept of "real" research as the main factors that hindered teachers from doing research. Similarly, Nesrin Kutlay found that teachers do not like to do research, they do not know how to do it, and there is confusion about "the real" concept of research, while teachers who have more experience tend to do more research.

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Teachers' beliefs about research

Teachers and administrators believe, based on their experiences, that undergraduate research results in high-quality student learning, but they do not know that with confidence because a cautious assessment has not been done (Laursen et al.). They reported that insufficiencies in campus infrastructure to support dynamic and productive research programs are also prevalent.

Beycioglu (qtd. in Kutlay) carried out a study, which revealed that 68% of the teachers reported that they have considered educational research in their practices since they started teaching. Academic journals were the most frequent means of accessing research (28.2%) followed by books (18.8%). Busseniers and others performed a study in a Mexican BA degree in English, which aimed to make teachers aware of the benefits of research in the academic area; they found out that professors believe doing research improves their teaching and helps them to solve problems in the classroom, but they perceive themselves as teachers, not as researchers.

Similar results were found by Sato and Loewen, who reported that teachers believe research helped them to deal with classroom problems, but the participants also reported that in higher education L2 teachers only conduct and publish research to retain their jobs, and consequently they may only do it because they feel pressured to do so. Sato and Loewen appraised teachers because they provided useful information to increase research engagement among faculty members: cooperate with other teachers, interpret results into applicable pedagogical tools, and conduct classroom research integrating research procedures into existing curricula.

On the other hand, Olwen McNamara reported that the most negative perception of teachers about research was the quantitative and statistical nature of research; they did not rely on statistics, as they are open to manipulation. They also believe that facts produced in research are not applicable in classrooms. Allison and Carey examined the perceptions of 22 language teachers in Canada, regarding the relationship between professional development and research, and they reported some factors that hindered teachers from doing research. Lack of time, lack of encouragement, lack of expertise, and confusion about the concept of "real" research were the most common reasons. Some teachers find it difficult to become involved in undergraduate research because it is time-consuming. They think that undergraduate students need more training and supervision than graduate students do, so involving undergraduate students in undergraduate research requires planning and preparation. However, some teachers believe

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that their students receive significant educational benefits from the research experience (Webber et al.).

Darío Luis Banegas investigated L2 teachers' notions in Argentina. He found that they conceptualize research as an academic activity, which is organized systematically, objectively, with a variety of data collection tools (e.g., questionnaires or surveys), analysis, and socialization of findings that are expected to be generalizable, and with classroom application. For teachers, good research should include hypotheses and tests. A remarkable observation was that they perceived other professionals, not teachers, in charge of carrying out research. Among the factors hindering their research engagement, the participants mentioned that research is not supported by institutions and as a result, they do not collaborate with other universities. Second, teachers assessed lack of knowledge of research and lack of time as obstacles. Teachers need to invest part of their personal time, and if they have part-time jobs, it is even more difficult to conduct research. Also, EFL teachers mentioned a lack of access and a lack of practical advice. It was concluded that even though research is important, it is difficult to see its benefits.

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As there seems to be a lack of studies conducted to explore English teacher educators' research engagement and attitudes towards research in EFL contexts, the present study sought to explore this in a teacher education program at a public university in Southeast Mexico. The results of the study might be useful not only for the academic community of the educational program in question, but also for those who work in similar teacher education programs and even for postgraduate ones in the area of teaching English, as this information might make them reflect on their perspectives towards research. Similarly, the results can serve as input for future evaluations and modifications to teacher education programs since teachers' experiences with research may be taken into consideration to include research educational experiences in the syllabus.

Methodology

This mixed-method case study pursues to shed light upon the EFL teacher educators' attitudes to and engagement with educational research. The case study design aims to understand a specific phenomenon or situation by describing how the individuals involved experience any given problem or situation (Autor et al.). In a case study approach, the researcher studies a specific case or cases which belong to a specific group by using data collection techniques that allow for in-depth and detailed data to be collected and which include various

sources of information such as observations, interviews, documents, reports and audiovisual material (Wellington).

This case study followed an Explanatory Sequential Two-Phase Design, as quantitative data was first collected and analyzed, and then results were used for follow-up collecting and analyzing qualitative data (Creswell and Creswell). For the quantitative part, a modified version of the Teachers Attitude Scale towards Educational Research (TASTER) developed by İlhan and others was used to collect data from 12 teachers, including those in charge of the research courses. TASTER is a five-point Likert-type scale consisting of 20 items with answers including, 'I Strongly Disagree' (1), 'I Disagree' (2), 'Neutral' (3), 'I Agree' (4), and 'I Strongly Agree' (5). In the study conducted by Ilhan et al. (2013), the TASTER reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) was 0.87. TASTER has three sub-dimensions, which are 'Necessity of Educational Research' (Items 1,3,7,10,14,17,20), 'Value of Educational Research' (Items 2,6,9,11,12,16), and 'Applicability of Educational Research' (Items 4,5,8,13,15,18,19). Negative items (4, 5, 8, 13, 15, 18, 19) are first converted into positive statements and then analyzed. Quantitative data was evaluated through descriptive statistical techniques. The data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel ©. An independent groups t-test was performed to investigate whether there was a statistical difference in mean scores among the different groups of teachers in the study. A correlation analysis was performed to determine the significance and strength of the relationship between the variables.

For the qualitative phase, interviews were chosen as they might allow for a deeper understanding of teacher educators' engagement with research as it intermingles with various social, contextual, and intrapersonal factors. The use of interviews allows the researcher to have "better control over the types of information received because the interviewer can ask specific questions to elicit this information" (Creswell 218). Thus, six English teacher educators were interviewed following a semi-structured interview guide that allowed the interviewer to have guiding open-ended questions to lead the participant's responses while maintaining the flexibility to pursue interesting developments or to further explore certain issues (Gillham). The interviews were recorded using an application on the researcher's smartphone to ensure more accurate documenting of the interviews and to facilitate the transcription process. The questions focused on teachers' understanding of research, their definition of 'EFL research', their impressions of research/researchers, and research accessibility. Other questions aimed at obtaining teachers' use of research, the usefulness of research, actual use of research, obstacles to using research, and ad-

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vice to researchers. The interview responses were analyzed according to the sub-dimensions from the TASER instrument.

The case study included 12 teachers (8 female and 4 male) from one of the major public universities in southeast Mexico. Their age range was from 28 to 65 years old and they shared several key learning/teaching backgrounds. Their average teaching experience was 18.7 years, thus most were experienced EFL teachers. Four teachers had experience in teacher training courses for pre-service English teachers, which was considered a factor that could have influenced their perceptions of research. They all spoke English as an L2, and 11 were Spanish L1 speakers. Except for one teacher, all had formal training as English teachers. There were 2 teachers holding bachelor's degrees, and 10 teachers with master's degrees in TESOL or similar areas; 2 of the MA holders were undertaking PhDs studies. In terms of research experience, none of the MA holders reported conducting empirical research for their theses. Only one participant had conducted research individually; however, another reported having taken courses related to action research. The names of all teachers were changed when reporting the findings so as to protect their identities.

Findings

Results from the survey were interpreted following the procedure suggested by Ilhan et al. (2013). A score interval between 1 and 2.59 indicates negative attitudes, a score interval between 2.60 and 3.40 means moderate attitudes, and a score interval from 3.40 to 5 represents positive attitudes. The general mean score (M) was 3.28, which means teachers' responses to educational research are moderate to positive as most of them think this sort of research is beneficial for their professional development, to improve the curriculum at schools, and because research outcomes are meaningful for students' success. The following table shows the results for each of the TASTER's items.

Table 1. Teachers' Attitudes to Educational Research

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	Educational research provides beneficial information that I can use in class.	12	6	0	0	0

2.	Scientific publications regarding education (dissertations, articles, books etc.) contribute to an increase in the quality of education.	8	8	2	0	0
3.	I am happy to teach a lesson in the class according to the findings of educational research.	5	9	4	0	0
4.	Educational research conducted by academicians is undertaken only to enhance their own careers.	0	1	4	10	3
5.	If I teach lessons according to the data obtained from educational research, the syllabus cannot be completed.	0	2	4	11	1
6.	Teachers should benefit from the findings of educational research.	8	10	0	0	0
7.	I like attending seminars on educational research.	7	9	2	0	0
8.	I believe that the scientific publications regarding education (dissertations, articles, books, etc.) are superficial.	0	1	7	5	5
9.	Following educational research is part of the process of being a teacher.	7	8	2	1	0
10.	Educational research contributes to the development and renewal of curricula.	5	12	1	0	0
11.	It is necessary to conduct scientific research regarding education.	8	9	1	0	0
12.	It is important to be informed about educational research.	7	11	0	0	0
13.	It is a waste of time to teach lessons according to the results of the educational research.	0	0	1	8	5

14.	Educational research generates solutions for the problems I encounter in teaching.	1	10	2	0	1
15.	I do not think that educational research is applicable.	1	0	0	7	6
16.	Educational research contributes to the development of the teaching profession.	2	11	0	1	0
17.	The findings of educational research that are recounted in seminars are beneficial.	2	8	2	1	0
18.	Educational research is not applicable in a school environment.	0	0	1	7	6
19.	Teaching lessons according to the findings of educational research reduces the success of students.	0	2	1	8	4
20.	The findings of educational research are important for me in the selection of a teaching model, method and technique according to the topic in the teaching process.	1	9	3	0	1

Source: Statements from TASTER (Ilhan et al.)

After analyzing the data, no item was recognized to have negative attitudes towards educational research. Items 1 to 12 (M= 3.6) represent positive attitudes towards educational research. This suggests that teachers perceive educational research as beneficial for the teaching practice (1) and a factor contributing to education quality (2), and thus a necessary element in the education process (11). They seem to be aware of the importance of being informed about educational research findings (12) and like attending to seminars where they disseminate them (7). They also seem to be eager to take these findings into account to plan lessons (3) and do believe it is possible to take advantage of them (6), as it is all part of the teaching process (9). They even seem to acknowledge education research importance for curricula development and renewal (10), and disagree with claims sustaining that it is superficial (8), only conducted to enhance academicians' careers (4), and a hindering factor for the successful completion of syllabi (5).

Items 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, and 20 (M= 2.8), 17 (M= 2.6) and 19 (M= 3) show moderate attitudes. This implies that teachers seem to only partially agree that educational research findings actually contribute to solving teaching problems (14), foster professional development (16), and should be used to select their teaching model, methods and techniques (20). This explains to some extent why their positive perception of regarding education as beneficial (1) is also expressed only in terms of a moderately positive one (17). Teachers' answers also show that they do not really agree with considering educational research as a waste of time (13), nor with their findings not being applicable to education (15 and 18) or the idea that they hinder students' success (19), which in this case supports their moderately positive attitude towards educational research. It is important to highlight results showed no negative attitude in any of the items. Therefore, in general, and in line with some previous studies, teachers seem to welcome the idea of educational research having a positive influence on their teaching practice (Busseniers et al.; Sato and Loewen; Webber et al.).

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The next step in this study was to analyze the qualitative data obtained from the interviews interpreting results by explaining the quantitative data (Creswell and Creswell), in this case obtained from the sub-dimensions of the TASER. The interviews also sought to better understand the teachers' attitudes towards research in terms of what they understand it involves and what hinders their engagement in it. Therefore, the following sections present the findings considering first the TASER sub-dimensions (The necessity of Educational Research, The Applicability of Educational Research, and The Value of Education Research), and then the teacher participants' perceptions of what research involves (Characteristics of Research), and to what extent they engage in it and why (Research Engagement, Factors Hindering Research Engagement, and Research Process Development).

The necessity of Educational Research

When analyzing the results specifically obtained from the 'The Necessity of Educational Research' sub-dimension (Table 2), these provide a mean score of 2.82. That is, participants have moderate attitudes towards educational research, closer to a negative attitude, in the sense that they do not see the need to carry out studies conducted to improve teaching practices, which matches both Busseniers and others and Darío Luis Banegas' participants' perceptions of themselves as teachers and not researchers. This seemingly contradicts the general more positive attitude towards educational research shown in Table 1

results, which in turn seems to indicate that there is a need to develop a sense of a research culture at the site of investigation so that teachers become more involved in research.

Table 2. The Necessity of Educational Research

	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Educational research provides beneficial information that I can use in class.	3.6	5.37
3. I am happy to teach a lesson in the class according to the findings of educational research.	3.6	3.78
7. I like attending seminars on educational research.	3.6	4.16
10. Educational research contributes to the development and renewal of curricula.	3.6	5.13
14. Educational research generates solutions for the problems I encounter in teaching.	2.8	4.09
17. The findings of educational research that are recounted in seminars are beneficial.	2.6	3.13
20. The findings of educational research are important for me in the selection of a teaching model, method and technique according to the topic in the teaching process.	2.8	3.63
Mean score	2.82	

Source: Statements from TASTER (Ilhan et al.)

When interviewing the participants, they agreed that educational research is a formal process that is necessary to improve teaching, as well as find solutions to teaching/learning problems. They described it as a process in which both teachers and students must be involved to find answers regarding learning situations. Those few

who were more engaged in research would see how it actually influenced what happens in the language classroom. For instance, professor Bernadette said, "I would say it is important and meaningful because no matter how small or how simple things you think you are researching, those are important and because of small details bigger things can come up[1]". This might lead us to state that the teachers interviewed consider educational research meaningful and important for the teaching-learning process as it provides new ideas and knowledge to share with students, especially for those who actually conduct research, who, as Haberfellner and Fenzl suggest, are likely to be able to transfer the knowledge constructed from this research into their teaching practice.

Nonetheless, they also stated that educational research implies hard work because of their workload. Research is time-consuming as it involves working with people, so you need to find the time to do it. To achieve significant results participants suggested doing teamwork, which can be achieved by forming research groups in which teachers and students work together. They also mentioned it is important to establish times and schedules so research aims can be achieved.

Applicability of Educational Research

Regarding the 'Applicability of Educational Research', the mean score in the TASER survey was 3.17 (Table 3), which indicates that teachers also have moderate attitudes, but closer to a positive attitude, in this dimension. The fact that teacher participants perceive only moderate applicability of educational research in their teaching practice partially explains why they do not engage in research processes. As there is only some research applicability, why bother doing it themselves when it has been commonly reported as a time-consuming and stressful activity (Allison and Carey; Busseniers et al.; Banegas; Sato and Loewen).

1. The original language of all participants' interview excerpts is Spanish, as the interviews were conducted in their native language. Translation into English was made for publication purposes.

Table 3. Applicability of Educational Research

	Mean	Standard deviation
4. Educational research conducted by academicians is undertaken only to enhance their own careers.	3.6	3.91
5. If I teach lessons according to the data obtained from educational research, the syllabus cannot be completed.	3.6	4.39
8. I believe that the scientific publications regarding education (dissertations, articles, books, etc.) are superficial.	3.6	2.97
13. It is a waste of time to teach lessons according to the results of the educational research.	2.8	3.56
15. I do not think that educational research is applicable.	2.8	3.42
18. Educational research is not applicable in a school environment.	2.8	3.42
19. Teaching lessons according to the findings of educational research reduces the success of students.	3	3.16
Mean score 3.17		

Source: Statements from TASTER (Ilhan et al.)

There were no data obtained from the teacher participants regarding the 'Applicability of Educational Research' in the interviews. However, some of them did refer to research outcomes as beneficial in that they help them solve teaching problems, thus contributing to their students' learning process. The teacher participants seemed more likely to be willing to engage in research only in order to move forward in their teaching careers, since they felt that their working conditions left them with very little time for doing research for any other purposes.

Value of Educational Research

The mean score for 'Value of Educational Research' in the survey was 3.4 (Table 4), and according to this mean score, participants appear to have positive attitudes towards this sub-dimension. This result indicates that even though teacher participants do not engage in doing research themselves, they do acknowledge the impact that research may have on education and their teaching practices, and thus that research

is important. Nevertheless, as was previously mentioned, teachers do not go further; they do not carry out studies, which in the end hinders their engagement with educational research and its possible benefits in their everyday classrooms.

Table 4. Value of Educational Research

	Mean	Standard deviation
2. Scientific publications regarding education (dissertations, articles, books etc.) contribute to an increase in the quality of education.	3.6	4.10
6. Teachers should benefit from the findings of educational research.	3.6	4.98
9. Following educational research is part of the process of being a teacher.	3.6	3.65
11. It is necessary to conduct scientific research regarding education.	3.6	4.51
12. It is important to be informed about educational research.	3.6	5.13
16. Educational research contributes to the development of the teaching profession.	2.8	4.66
Mean score	3.40	

Source: Statements from TASTER (Ilhan et al.)

Data from the interviews supports these positive attitudes towards the value of research, as professors agreed that doing research lets them find solutions to problems they encounter and helps them to improve their teaching practices, as has commonly been the case in previous similar studies (Rahimi and Weisi). Participant Amy succinctly puts it,

It is meaningful because if you want to improve your teaching practice, I think it is necessary to do it [research]. There is a problem, [and] then you have to find a solution, and a good way to do it is through researching.

However, professor Sheldon admitted that even though doing research is important, he just does it for personal purposes; "I research what I think I need, what I enjoy reading. Because nobody asks me to, I don't do it for those purposes, but I do it for me." This particular view seems to indicate that although research brings new knowledge, different perspectives, and new outcomes that you can apply in your academic life, there is still a lack of interest in contributing to this field and limited experience regarding research.

Therefore, with regard to the TASER survey sub-dimensions of necessity, applicability and value of research, it can be concluded that teachers have moderately positive attitudes towards educational research. They perceive research as valuable, but they appear not to see the necessity to carry it out, nor seem to really apply research outcomes to their teaching practice. Yet, professors agreed that doing research increases the quality of education as well as the development of the teaching profession. Similar results were obtained from the study conducted by Busseniers and others in the same research context many years ago, which indicates that teachers continue to perceive themselves as teachers but not as researchers, considering research, in general terms, as beneficial for teaching and learning, but not actually engaging in it, or only engaging in it to move forward in their teaching profession.

Characteristics of Research

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Teachers were asked to define research to have a general perception of how they perceive the process. Most participants mentioned that some of the characteristics of research have to do with the knowledge the researcher provides to the potential readers and the field. They also think research is interesting, important in the professional field, and widens people's curiosity, which is an innate characteristic.

Regarding this last point, Professor Sheldon stated that "research is basically an action that is innate in the human being since we are born…we start investigating in order to adapt and to develop within the environment in which we live". This seems to be in line with the perception of research that teachers had many years ago in this same context, that is, research as an innate activity to the human being out of curiosity (Busseniers et al.). However, like some of the participants back then, the participants of the present study also mentioned that for undertaking educational research, it is necessary to organize your time, to be willing to follow sequences and procedures, to be disciplined and organized, as Darío Luis Banegas' participants in Argentina also perceive it, as well as being emotionally intelligent to interact with others, thus perceiving research as a systematic and rigorous process rather than only reading in search of answers.

Concerning the role of research among students, it is important to mention that professors think doing research causes distress in students because they probably do not know how to do it. This may imply that even though, as Webber and others assert, teachers regard research as important and beneficial to students, they all must take into consideration the aspects of timing, discipline, and good rapport with others among other characteristics to undertake it.

Research Engagement

Regarding teacher's research practice, most participants said they read and did research when they studied their major and their master's degree. At the time of the investigation, only one of the consulted professors was researching for personal interests while the rest were involved in research as part of their PhD studies and as advisors for different projects. That is, despite the great weight that Higher Education institutions place on their professors doing research, these teacher educators' research experience and their engagement with research are still mainly degree-oriented (Busseniers et al.).

Regarding the product of research or the academic production resulting from research processes, participant Sheldon said he does not research for publishing whereas participant Leonard mentions he publishes once a year. According to professor Sheldon's opinion, doing research is a matter of having a full-time job. He stated, "I don't do research for papers that will be published because I don't hold a full-time job." In contrast, professor Leonard, who holds a full-time job, said he has published several times, in national and international journals; also, he participated in the national program for university teachers called 'Perfil PRODEP' for six years. But currently, he does not publish. He stated, "I wanted to do it on my own. That is what I have done. But also, because I want to help my students."

This might imply that teachers recognize the value of doing research, whether they publish research papers or not, and not only because they feel pressured by their universities to do it, as was the case in Sato and Loewen's study, and as it is the case for university teachers worldwide (Burns and Westmacott). Teacher participants also see the applicability of the results. Thus, it is not a matter of holding a full-time job; it is a matter of engaging in research because it helps them in their teaching practice (Borg, Language; Luu et al.; Sato and Loewen).

Factors Hindering Research Engagement

The participants specified what factors foster or hinder their engagement in research. Similarly to Allison and Carey's and Darío Luis Banegas' studies, among the most common factors are lack of time, again as was reported years ago by Busseniers and others, but they also reported a lack of energy. Professors commented that you have to find the time to do research. This is closely linked to teachers' type of hiring condition, whether they are full-time or hourly-paid teachers. As also reported by Darío Luis Banegas, some educators hold two or

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three jobs, and as a result, it is difficult for them to find the time to investigate.

This factor also has to do with the lack of energy, the ones who have long working hours, do not feel energetic enough to carry out research. Moreover, they consider they cannot work along the research process as a single area. It is essential to be in contact with other fields, as Leonard stated, "We also need to be in touch with other areas, such as administration, statistics, maybe other sciences in general." This may imply that teachers also perceive some sort of lack of expertise (Allison and Carey; Banegas; Borg, Language).

All the participants agreed that the University ought to contribute more to the research process. They expressed that first, it is important to provide educators with resources that enable them to do more research. These resources might include financial support, extra incomes to encourage professors to carry out investigations; offering full-time jobs, so they have the time to do more studies, organizing conferences to call teachers' attention and interest in research. In this regard, Professor Penny stated, "Teachers do not see the importance of doing research until they have a benefit. That would be a really good initiative", in contrast to Darío Luis Banegas' results, where research was regarded as important despite its benefits being difficult to perceive.

Research Process Development

Professors' notions about the significance that the university seats on the research process have changed with the implementation of the curriculum currently used. Professor Sheldon mentioned,

Students look at things differently, it is different. Supposedly learning is autonomous, so because it's autonomous it engages people into doing research." Positive changes have been implemented, as participant Leonard said, "…I thought at that moment that students needed to know how to write essays in English first. Teachers were talking about triangulation, but students did not know what was that, not at this level… teachers learn this in the MA and they want students to learn it in the BA. We have to be more realistic.

As the participants said, some changes have been implemented. However, there is still misinformation regarding the significance the University should give to the research process in order to improve the research engagement in the EFL context. The teacher participants in this study provided different suggestions such as motivating students by taking them to real experiences that can enhance their interest in doing research, bringing them to investigate meaningful

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things since the beginning of the degree, as well as organizing more conferences.

Within this aspect, the participants also mentioned that they would reduce the level of difficulty that some teachers impose when doing research. Also, they suggest providing teachers with research opportunities like keeping in contact with other universities and offering full-time jobs, so they have a set schedule in which they have time to carry out research projects. Therefore, teachers do perceive mentoring undergraduates in research and collaboration in research projects (Laursen et al.; Rahimi and Weisi) as beneficial research processes for their teaching practice.

Conclusions

There are indeed plenty of studies conducted to evaluate the benefits for teachers in doing research; however, research conducted in ELT contexts showing the attitudes and perceptions of teachers towards research and its impact on their teaching practice is still scarce (Rahimi and Weisi). This study aimed to answer the question: What are teachers' perceptions of research in an English as a Foreign Language setting? To answer this question, it was necessary to analyze how teachers conceptualize research, and to examine their engagement and experiences with research.

The findings obtained in this small-scale study may lead us to conclude that lack of a research culture at the institution may be affecting teachers' engagement with educational research. Participants still have moderate experiences in both reading and doing research. Even though they recognize the value of research for their careers and the improvement of teaching processes, their involvement has only happened as part of their education; in other words, they have limited experience with research. Therefore, they may lack both the understanding and concrete skills that must support good quality research (Borg, Resarch).

Despite the increasing pressure for university teachers to become research active (Burns and Westmacott), the institutional hiring conditions are limiting teachers' research-oriented activities; professors do not have enough time to research because of their schedules, especially when some of them hold more than one job. These limitations, and teachers' attitudes towards research, result in scarce productivity, which can also hinder students' engagement with research. This in turn affects their work. Being involved in research processes can make them reflect on the importance and benefits research can have (Luu et al.; Laursen et al.; Vereijken et al.).

To improve research engagement, teachers must discuss and set the kind of research they are interested in doing. What is recommended for the University is to contribute more to this process. That is, preparing conferences, seminars, and workshops, so teachers and students see the significance that doing research may have on their professional development. There should be research advisors, who have more experience in doing research, open to guiding and offering reunions with other teachers (Luu et al.). If these suggestions were implemented by the university, teachers' views and engagement with research could change positively.

The limited number of participants in this research may cause the results to be considered cautiously, but it is important to share them, so teachers see the impact it has on this field. As a result, more extensive studies should be done. Another limitation to consider for the study is the validity of the data provided by the participants. The participants were advised to provide honest answers during the data collection process, but it was quite difficult to be certain that the participants spoke with honesty. For this reason, the data collected was taken at face value but repeated interviews and strategies for achieving trustworthiness were used to help ensure its consistency. Similarly, the time that the participants were able to invest in the study is considered another limitation. Since the data was collected during the last month of the term, participants were involved with school activities, homework, and academic workload. To counteract this limitation, every effort was made to keep a flexible schedule for the interviews to accommodate the needs of the participants.

Lastly, even when the study was completed in a short period, the multiple interviews that were conducted provided sufficient data, and although the qualitative sample size was considerably small, which does not allow for generalizations, results may be transferable to other cases depending on how similar they are to the case being studied in this project. Also, the findings from this study could provide a different point of view of the problem at hand which could signify an opportunity for further research on this topic that could encompass a larger sample as well as a different research methodology, such as a quantitative design, to contribute with further data regarding this problem, making it possible for results to be generalizable. In addition, a longitudinal study could be considered to obtain a deeper understanding of the problem at hand, as well as an exploratory study of the topics commonly addressed by teachers conducting educational research and their applicability in actual teaching practices. Establishing a relationship, if any, between these variables may enable ed-

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ucational researchers to conduct studies that will have a more visible impact on their teaching practice, fostering the research culture in higher education institutions. ■

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