Can Tho University Journal of Science

website: sj.ctu.edu.vn

Factors inhibiting teachers from research engagement: A review

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Article info.	ABSTRACT
  Keywords 	*Teachers' research capacity has long been considered an important component that contributes to their own professional development as well as teaching practice. Specifically, teaching effectiveness will be improved significantly when teaching is integrated with research activities (Healey, 2005). However, various factors have prevented teachers from involving in as well as conducting research activities. Based on existing literature, the current study reviewed five common factors that prevent language teachers from research engagement. These factors include non-collaborative school culture; limitations in teachers' awareness, beliefs, skills and knowledge; limited resources; demotivators and economic factors.*

1 INTRODUCTION

Various benefits have been recorded when teachers conduct research or at least read and use others' research. Some of them include facilitating teachers' critical thoughts, boosting teachers' self-esteem, and increasing their awareness of students' needs (Atay, 2006). Moreover, it is claimed that when teachers engage *with* research (through reading research papers) and *in* research (by doing research themselves) as well as make pedagogical decisions basing on sound research evidence, they will bring a beneficial effect on both teaching and learning (Hargreaves, 2001). More remarkably, it is argued that being research-engaged provides benefits for teachers' professional development (Kincheloe, 2003; Lyle, 2003; Lankshear and Knobel, 2004; Kirkwood and Christie, 2006) and for their status as professionals (Gurney, 1989). Therefore, in recent years it is understandable to see a drive to engage teachers more fully both with and in educational research in educational policy in several internal contexts such as Australia, the USA and the UK (Borg, 2009). Despite these benefits of research

engagement, not many teachers are willing to engage with and in research for different reasons. This review is aimed at providing a detailed analysis of factors that inhibit language teachers from research engagement. The term research engagement in this paper refers to teachers' engagement in doing research as well as in any kinds of research activities such as reading and using research. It is to review the existing literature on language teachers' research engagement all over the world and does not limit itself to a specific context, region or types of research that language teachers have been involving. Five most typical inhibiting factors of teachers' research engagement, namely non-collaborative school culture; limitations in teachers' awareness, beliefs, skills and knowledge; limited resources; demotivators and economic factors will be reviewed in detail in the coming parts of this paper.

2 NON-COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

One of the factors that inhibits teachers' research engagement is their non-collaborative school cul-

ture. More specifically, lacking support or collaboration from colleagues and students and factions of research-engaged and non-research-engaged staff have discouraged teachers from involving in research activities. An example of such lack of support is cited by Atay (2006) when she claimed that the teachers in her in-service training on how to do research were very eager to carry out their study at first but then could not continue because their school administration did not give them any time off for doing research and this took place in every institution in Turkey, the study context. Additionally, she herself could not help her trainees either because she had her own workload. In the same vein, Borg (2009) discovered from his study with 505 teachers in 13 countries three inhibiting reasons for teachers' research engagement that result from the lack of support or collaboration from colleagues and students. These reasons include (1) other teachers would not cooperate if I asked for their help, claimed by more than 30 teachers; (2) the learners would not cooperate if I did research in class, claimed by more than 20 teachers; and (3) I need someone to advise me but no one is available, claimed by more than 60 teachers.

Besides the lack of support from colleagues and students, there exist factions of research-engaged and non-research-engaged staff. In other words, teachers who do research and those who don't find "a keener sense of isolation and lack of connection with the work and ideas of others" (Allison and Carey, 2007, p.63). Similarly, Worrall (2004) discovered that teachers in his study felt that research was "something that's done to them by people outside" (p. 140). In the same vein, Borg's (2009) study figured out that quite a number of teachers asserted that their job is "to teach not to do research" when being asked for why they don't do research. In the field of language teaching research, Allison and Carey (2007) claimed that regarding the relationship between teachers and linguists, most published commentary "appears to accept that academic applied linguists, including teacher educators, occupy a different role from that of second-language teachers and that some imbalance in the profession or between the related professions is a fact of organized institutional life" (p. 63). These factions between research-engaged and non-research-engaged staff; however, are not good for both teaching and researching. Allison and Carey (2007) commented that there should be a partnership between research and language teaching practices since that is "the only way to answer some of the key questions about classroom language-learning and teaching" (p. 63).

3 LIMITATIONS IN TEACHERS' AWARENESS, BELIEFS, SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Along with the challenges from non-collaborative school culture, the barriers to teachers' engagement with research may stem from internal factors, or from teachers themselves. In other words, these factors include the limitations in teachers' awareness, beliefs, skills and knowledge. As Allison and Carey (2007) implied, the limitations of teachers' awareness of research importance in their professional development are revealed as challenges to teachers' efforts to engage in research. To support this idea, the study by Borg (2009) revealed teacher participants' less positive attitudes toward research, or "having a low level of interest in reading about research" (p. 370) which is emphasised as another reason hindering teachers' research engagement. The study results further clarified one reason related to the limitations of teachers' awareness of research since teachers realize there are no connections between their teaching practice and conducting research. This view is also in line with what Macaro (2003) revealed when working with the heads of modern foreign language departments in the UK. Macaro's study figured out the participants' negative attitudes toward research is one of the reasons for not to doing research. Thus, negative attitude toward research is another significant limitation of teachers' research engagement.

In addition to the internal barriers from teachers' awareness, previous studies have also highlighted inhibiting factors from teachers' beliefs. This means that teachers are suspicious of and lack trust in their published research projects (Shkedi, 1998). Sharing the same concern, Worral's (2004) study pointed out that although teaching staff were encouraged in cultivating educational research, some of them felt reluctant to engage in research due to their misconception that research was conducted *on* teachers rather than *by* teachers with a specific explanation: "research was something that's done to them by people outside" (p.145). The participants in this study also felt embarrassed to state they have enough abilities to do research because it seems very "grand" to them. The findings were in accordance with the participants' view in Pham's (2006) study in the tertiary context of South East Asian that "the idea of undertaking a research project seems to be reserved for those considered experts or professional researchers" (p. 2). Such the research reluctance was also addressed by Hancock's (1997, p. 93) study on seeking the reasons why class teachers are unwilling to become researchers. Of four listed areas of difficulty, Han-

cock (1997) identified a barrier from "the lack of expectation that teachers should research and write about their professional practice" (p.93) which is closely connected to lacking teachers' beliefs as a discouraging factor to teachers' research engagement. However, although the participants in Burn's (1999) study had positive attitudes toward doing research, they also shared the same concern that they did not believe they have adequate skills, training or knowledge to carry out research according to empirical requirements. Another example of this concern is shared by Borg (2009) that teachers showed their lack of engagement with research since they thought that it has no practical value in their classes.

Furthermore, the limitations in teachers' skills and knowledge, which are closely related to the points of view on internal factors discussed earlier, are considered as another significant discouraging factor to teachers' research engagement (Burn, 1999; Borg, 2003, 2006; Allison and Carey, 2007; Borg, 2009). Specifically, by exploring how language teaching colleagues in a Canadian university view the relationship between research and teaching, Allison and Carey (2007) indicated lack of expertise as a hindering factor to teachers striking out on doing research and then reduce their confidence to conduct research alone even masters' graduates in this context. The specific limitations included deficiencies in research design, statistical analysis, and in negotiating the process of publication. Along with this concern, Borg (2003) mentioned lack of technical knowledge of research in relation to lack of expertise in research design or in data analysis. These teachers' challenges were considered as another reason preventing teachers' research participation. Related to this view, Borg's (2009) study then revealed that along with nine identified reasons for not doing research, lacking knowledge on research methods is the third most cited reason by the participants. This contributes to an understanding of research engagement being an irrelevant and unfeasible activity among teachers. In other words, the limitations of research knowledge lead to limited confidence in teachers' research capacities (Henson, 1996).

4 LIMITED RESOURCES

Besides non-collaborative school culture and limitations in teachers' awareness, beliefs, skills and knowledge, a number of further obstacles to teachers' research are limitations in resources including the shortage of time, limited references, and lack of expert supports as well (Borg, 2006). These barriers make many teachers reluctant to do research although they have been made aware of the poten-

tial benefits of engagement in research. Among these unexpected barriers, lack of the time is one of the predominate reasons causing the teachers' low engagement with research (Borg, 2006, 2009). Crookes and Arakaki (1999) claimed that most of the teachers do not engage in doing research since they are occupied in overload work at teaching and other duties involved in preparing for lesson plans, and joining teachers' union at school. In relation with this view, Allison and Carey (2007) found out that most teachers admitted that the time-consuming demands of teaching left them a little space or energy for catching up on research as well as carrying a project to completion and publication. In other words, most teachers have not been able to devote sufficient time to systematic research on the English as a second language/ English for academic purposes (ESL/EAP) issues. In fact, the pressure of time consuming in teaching is generally considered the most commonly cited reason which explains teachers' low engagement in teacher research. This view has been highlighted in discussions of the previous study conducted by Allison and Carey (2007) and in the survey of Hancock (2001).

In consideration with the influential factors to engagement in research, the limitations in accessing the previous research publications are listed as another barrier to teacher research engagement. In reality, this barrier has directly influenced some teachers since working with literature is a big challenge for any researchers. Finding appropriate literature to their research questions takes more time unless there are external supporters including librarians, other researchers and their supervisors (O'Leary, 2004). Therefore, if there is no expert support, teachers would face numerous difficulties which prevent them from carrying their research (O'Leary, 2004; Borg, 2006). It is apparently matching with the findings in Allison and Carey's study (2007) in which the teachers lose their confidence on research methodology without mentoring and supervising from an expert. In other words, the teachers doing research need to be guided to figure out what to do from formulating research questions, discussing relevant themes, and searching appropriate literature from previous studies. Generally, new researchers face a great number of barriers to engagement in research; therefore, they need a tremendous amount of expert guidance in negotiating the whole process (O'Leary, 2004).

5 DEMOTIVATORS

From a number of studies about the engagement of language teachers in research (Borg, 2006, 2008; National Teacher Research Panel, 2011; Kutlay,

2013; Mehrani, 2015), it is obvious that the majority of teachers interviewed never did research or rarely engaged in research. Many factors demotivate teachers from research engagement.

The factor that is most mentioned as the barrier for teachers to conduct research is time. The amount of workload that language teachers need to take over keeps them busy with their teaching. Therefore, they do not have more time for conducting research. As cited in the survey report of the National Teacher Research Panel (2011, p.25), a teacher shared that "different workload patterns would need to be created if teachers were to find the time to research. They could do primary research in the classroom, but the constraints of the curriculum and contact time mean people don't want to take risks." With tight teaching schedule and heavy workload, they cannot have more time for research, finding resources or reading academic papers though some of them are still interested in doing research (Hancock, 1997; Kutlay, 2013; Mehrani, 2013).

In addition to that, a number of language teachers do not find reasons to engage in research. In many cases, they see themselves as teachers rather than researchers. Therefore, they believe their job is not carrying out research (Oliver, 2005; Borg, 2009). With that reason, although many teachers can recognize the importance of doing research, they are not eager to conduct their own studies as 'it is not part of their job' (Borg, 2009, Kutlay, 2013). In other cases, since teachers are not interested in doing research, they find no reasons for research engagement (Borg, 2009; Kutlay, 2013; Mehrani, 2015).

The reason why many teachers do not have interest in doing research also comes from the support and encouragement of schools' leaders and colleagues. As mentioned in the survey of National Teacher Research Panel in 2011, the lack of support from school leadership is one of the barriers to teachers' engagement in research. Obviously, when they do not have the support from their leaders, particularly their rectors or school principals, doing research is not a choice for them especially for those who even do not recognize the significance of doing research in their professional development (Halim and Meerah, 2002) as they have to handle with many obstacles in doing research. A significant number of responses from previous studies about reasons for doing or not doing research also show that teachers are not motivated to do research when their studies are not acknowledged by their leaders and their colleagues (Allison and Carey, 2007; Borg, 2010; Mehrani, 2013). In his study, Borg (2006) also found similar responses from the respondents of his study about the conditions for teacher research. Many teacher researchers require their effort to be recognized when they conduct studies.

"If management does not value attempts by teachers to research their own practices, or actually obstructs their research … then research by teachers is less likely to occur". (p.26)

The recognition for their engagement in research can be expressed by giving benefits for teacher - researchers such as rewards and promotion. Without rewards, they are reluctant in carrying out studies (Merah *et al.*, 2002; Borg, 2010) as 'there is no reason to do it [research] because it is not going to bring anything to us at all - there will be no reward whatsoever - probably no recognition' (Allison and Carey, 2007, p.69). Along with that, teachers are also impacted by their colleagues. They feel it is not necessary to do research while their colleagues and people around them do not do research (Borg, 2006, 2009). Furthermore, they also cannot overcome their fear of doing research unless they receive support and guidance from senior colleagues or experts with the knowledge of research (Hancock, 1997; Borg, 2006; National Teacher Research Panel, 2011).

It can be seen that a variety of obstacles and barriers demotivate teachers in doing research. They can derive from external reasons such as no time for doing research, no support and acknowledgement from school and colleagues, but they can also come from the awareness of each teacher about the research engagement in their professional development, and their interest in carrying out those studies. Therefore, if we want to motivate and encourage language teachers to involve in research, we need to minimize the influence of the elements mentioned above.

6 ECONOMIC FACTORS

Besides numerous unexpected constraints to teachers' research engagement discussed above, school teachers also have to face economic matters (Elliot, 1991). The fact is that the most commercial schools maximize teachers' workload to make school more profitable. Obviously, school teachers have no more payment for their extra time doing research; in other words, most schools require their teachers to complete a large number of annual teaching hours, which is a strict requirement to each of the teaching staff to ensure the profit of a school. Therefore, teachers have to make their great efforts to obtain their teaching hours per year unless they would be transferred to another position of an officer at school. The high pressure of workload is

considered one of the main reasons that demotivate teachers in taking part in doing research since it might not bring them any financial benefits. There is also a similar result in the survey of constraints on doing research conducted by McKernan (1993). It is clearly stated that most teachers have faced some professional factors including union policy and contract. The fact is that some teachers have signed part-time working contract; as a result, they do not have any financial support from their school for conducting a research as it is likely part of their teaching duties. Nevertheless, funding has been almost a high obstacle which directly influences the teachers' decision in engagement in research, the barrier which results in the online investigation in teachers' attitudes towards educational research conducted by the National Teacher Research Panel (2011).

In addition, many teachers claim that they have to finish a great amount of workload in classroom teaching without any further special support from the school for extra time of doing research. On the other hand, school teachers expect that they could have received advice on where and how to gain funding. Similarly, as part of barriers to teachers in engagement in research stated in this online survey, most teachers feel that they have a lack of knowledge of funding resources. They complain that they do not have enough access to specialist support. Apart from organizational challenges, teachers may feel that attempting to investigate changes in practice through action research is not worth the effort since it might not bring them personal financial benefits (Oberg and McCutcheon, 1987). Another aspect of money matter is that there are a number of teachers working part-time to make more money to support their own living expenses since their monthly income from their work at school might not bring them a sufficient life for their family. Although school teachers are struggling to maintain a work/life balance, most of them feel that engaging in research is not relevant due to the pressure of accountability and focus on attainment targets in school, instead, they would choose the second option as their best way to ensure their stable income monthly for their living (Barkhuizen, 2009).

7 CONCLUSIONS

So far, various factors that inhibit teachers' research engagement have been reviewed. These factors can derive both from the teachers themselves such as their awareness, beliefs, skill and knowledge and from external factors such as their non-collaborative school culture, limited resources, economic matters and other demotivators. There-

fore, in order to enhance teachers' research engagement, these limiting factors should be addressed properly. The solutions, however, are not in the hand of the teachers only. On the contrary, actions should be taken from many other stakeholders including education institutions, school leaders as well as the government. In the context of Vietnam, few studies have been conducted regarding the factors inhibiting Vietnamese teachers from doing research. The current paper, thus, can be used to build the theoretical framework for an in-depth study on what has prevented Vietnamese teachers from research engagement. This will be especially useful in the context that the Ministry of Education and Training regulates that lecturers have to spend at least one third of their annual working hours for research (Circular 47/2014/TT-BGDDT).

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