Secondary- level EFL Teachers' Perceptions toward Doing Research and their Challenges in Research Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Research engagement seems to be an important means for teachers to develop their professional competence and status in different aspects; thereby, the present study employs a mixed-methods design to examine English language teachers' engagement with and in research in the context of the secondary level EFL teachers in Iran. Using a Likert scale questionnaire followed by in-depth interviews, the researcher gathered empirical information from 100 English language teachers who teach at various lower-secondary and upper-secondary public high schools mostly located in the city of Sabzevar in Khorasan Razavi province. The objectives of the study were to investigate the extent of Iranian EFL teachers' engagement with/in research, the relationship between some related factors including EFL teachers' years of teaching experience, their qualifications, and genders on the extent of research engagement (RE), and also to explore the teachers' perceptions about the important reasons for being research engaged and the dominant challenges and barriers EFL teachers deal with in the context of the study. The findings indicated that the EFL teachers' engagement in/with research in the research context was not a frequent activity and most of them were engaged with/in research in a less than a moderate level; therefore, RE was a minority activity. EFL teachers also highlighted mostly external reasons for research engagement. The impeding factors were firstly related to lack of financial supports and economic matters and secondly to the barriers related to non-collaborative school culture in the context of the study. The study has some implications and also some suggestions for further studies.

1. Introduction

Teachers are one of the most important contributors to educational system, and their responsibility in schools extends beyond carrying out and delivering the curriculum. They also need to know how to recognize and solve problems that may occur within the classroom when they deliver the curriculum (Davies, 1995). It is a broad and important aspect of development not only for the teacher-researchers themselves but also for the colleagues with whom they share results in writing or at conferences or meetings and they can do research at all levels of education. Teacher research may mean different things to different educators. To some it may be engagement with research that pertains to reading and using research while for others it may be doing research and publishing the results (Borg, 2010; Kyaw, 2021). Typically, research is conducted because teachers want to have some questions answered--hence the development of the teachers' goals for the research. These questions "often develop gradually as teachers try to figure out why certain things are happening in their classrooms" (Hubbard & Power, 1993, p. 20).

Moreover, a qualified teacher should be aware of, and be able to respond to the direction of new development in teaching (Lewis & Munn, 1997). In other words, in modern world, effective teaching needs teachers engage in educational research in order to improve the standards of their teaching. At the present time, and especially in the developing countries, teachers are expected to follow educational research findings in order to enhance the quality of their teaching, and to solve problems that may come up in their classes (Everton et al., 2002). Moreover, research engagement has been increasingly seen as an important means for English language teachers to improve their professional competence in many contexts (Ahmed & Pervin, 2013; Atay, 2008; Borg, 2009). Consequently, English teachers in these contexts have been called on to play "a central and critical role in generating knowledge of practice by making their classrooms and schools sites for enquiry" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1999, p. 273).

Although teacher research engagement is not an old phenomenon in English language teaching (ELT), there are only a limited number of empirical studies related to high school teachers' understanding of research in comparison to university contexts (Bai & Millwater, 2011; Sippel & Sato, 2022) and relative to levels of research engagement (Mehrani & Behzadnia, 2013; Mehrani, 2015; Mehranirad & Behzadpoor, 2022), and research which suggested teachers how to promote teachers' research engagement (Allwright & Baily, 1991; Li & Xu, 2024; Nunan 1992; Freeman, 1998; Mehrani, 2015; Mehranirad, 2023). Furthermore, research engagement is often a challenging task for English teachers, especially for teachers, who are relatively underpaid and whose professional contributions receive little recognition in comparison with those of their counterparts in other educational settings (Allwright 1997). Mehranirad and Behzadpoor (2022) found that the barriers on their way of engagement in and with research are relevance of research findings to their needs, restrictive educational policies, lack of teacher-research collaboration, and insufficient technological facilities and resources. With this in mind, this study aims to uncover Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about the reasons for research engagement, measure the extent of their engagement in research and identify barriers that prevent them to be engaged in research.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants and Setting

The sample of the study comprises of 100 EFL teachers with an age range between 25-50 years, including male and female EFL teachers (60 female, 40 male) teaching in public junior or senior high schools and/or private language institutions. They held BA (70%) or MA (30%) degrees in TEFL, translation, and English literature. Teachers participated in the present work were selected through non-probability convenience or opportunity sampling procedure because of some practical aspects such as geographical proximity, availability and their voluntary willingness to participate in the study. Most of the teachers were working in junior high schools, senior high schools and/pre-universities and some of them from private language institutions in Sabzevar and some other cities in Khorasan Razavi province such as Shirvan and Neyshaboor and also from Tehran.

2.2 Instrumentation

To obtain the needed data for the present study, the researcher utilized the following instruments.

English Language Teachers' Conceptions of Research Questionnaire

As a means of data collection, a questionnaire can let large amount of data be collected efficiently, economically, and in a standardized manner (Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010). In addition, considering the accessibility to some geographically dispersed participants, a questionnaire can be easily administered through the internet access. Hence survey studies aim at describing the characteristics of a population the use of questionnaires is the main data collection procedure in surveys (Dornyei, 2007).

The questionnaire used here was adapted from Borg's (2009) study of English language teachers' conceptions of research. To make the questionnaire relevant to the context of the current study, the researchers modified the original one based on feedback from a panel of experts in applied linguistics. Borg's questionnaire includes six sections focusing on different themes of his study. Regarding some sections and also some questions and sub-questions of the original version unnecessary to the objectives of the present study, the researchers revised the questionnaire and deleted unrelated sections or items according to the experts' recommendations. For pilot-testing, it was distributed among a group of 20 EFL teachers who were similar to the study sample to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire that yielded an acceptable Cronbach's alpha of 0.7.

The other important modification was the constructing of two Likert scale questionnaires based on the reasons of being research engaged and barriers of RE which had been identified in Borg's (2009) study. In addition, each of these two Likert scale questionnaires were divided into some subtitles according to the benefits and barriers of RE which were indicated in the literature (e.g., Atay, 2008; Allison & Carey 2007; Burton & Mickan 1993; McKernan 1993; Borg 2003, 2009; Worrall, 2004; McKay 2009) and were classified by Borg (2009).

In this way, the final version of the questionnaire is composed of four sections. In section one there are five items to provide some demographic information necessary to the study, the second section of this instrument includes four close ended questions to measure the extent engagement in research, the third section of the questionnaire is a Likert scale questionnaire consisting of 16 items under two subtitles to infer the most salient and frequent reasons for doing or reading research, and finally the fourth section four is also a Likert scale consisting 24 items under five subcategories to classify and infer the dominant barriers to RE in the context of the study.

The subtitles of the third section included 16 items on reasons for the effectiveness of RE on teaching which are determined with 7 items (3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12) and reasons of RE for professional development in 9 items (1, 2, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16). The fourth section of the questionnaire composed of five sub sections to determine the obstacles to RE related to non-collaborative school culture which is measured by 4 items (40, 33, 34, 11), limitations in teachers awareness, beliefs, skills and knowledge to be inferred by 4 items (19, 2, 16, 12), limited resources with 5 items (13, 22, 23, 14, 17), demotivators with 7 items (32, 37, 39, 24, 29, 25, 9) and finally economic matters with 4 items (38, 36, 27, 28).

Semi-Structured Interviews

In spite of the popularity of the questionnaire in applied linguistics to collect qualitative data, this is not to overlook the drawbacks of the questionnaires in both their conventional and electronic formats, for example they are vulnerable to design flaws (Borg, 2013) and according to Bryman (2007), in comparison to interviews, questionnaires do not provide   in-depth exploration of particular issues and they are more subject to respondents' fatigue. Therefore, to have a more in-depth exploration of issues and gather some reasons and barriers probably not being covered in the Likert scale questionnaire, the researcher conducted an interview stage through which 10 people of the respondents who completed the questionnaire were selected purposefully to participate in the interview.

To ask the respondents for interview, while completing the questionnaire teachers were asked if they would like to participate in a follow up interview to discuss the related issues, they would provide their name and contact details. After receiving respondents' completed questionnaires, a series of follow up questions were conducted to explore more detail or to exemplify some of the general issues. The questions of interview were structured according to the topics constructed in the questionnaire but the scope was more flexible to elaborate any matter more effectively. The interviews lasted an average of 30 minutes and according to the previous appointment they were administered face. The main interview questions were as follows:

1. Are you engaged in research?
2. If not, what prevents you from doing research?
3. What's the main reason for this problem? Personal, institutional, or any other?

2.3 Design of the Study

In the present study the researcher employs a mixed method deign. A mixed method study involves the mixing of quantitative and qualitative research methods or paradigm characteristics (Johnson and

Christensen, 2004),Therefore the design of the study adopted what Creswell(2003)calls a 'sequential explanatory strategy, which is a mixed methods design characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data, the priority typically given to the quantitative data and the two methods are integrated during the interpretation phase of the study '(p. 215). The quantitative data needed for the present study was generated via a Likert scale questionnaire and then the follow up interviews were conducted to collect the supporting qualitative data to achieve a fuller understanding of the target phenomenon.

2.4 Research Procedure

As mentioned above this study adopted a mixed methods strategy in data collection to enhance the quality of research. In this study by the use of both questionnaire and interview the researcher aims to 'examine the evidence from different sources to build a coherent justification for themes'(Creswell, 2003, p.196). To follow this method, the participants were asked either directly by the researcher or indirectly through the heads of English teachers' communities or other colleagues to fill up the questionnaire. Some relevant information about the purpose of the study was provided for the teachers before the distribution of the scales. In addition, confidentially assurance and in-advance acknowledgement for their cooperation in the study were given in an introduction at the first page of the questionnaire.

Some of the questionnaires were directly distributed to the participants. In some cases, the researcher attended schools or institutions to distribute the questionnaires. In one case the researcher attended the national conference of challenges on EFL teaching and learning holding in Hakim Sabzevari University and distributed some of the questionnaire to EFL teachers who participated in the conference. For those of the respondents who were geographically dispersed, soft copies of the questionnaires were sent to them via email.

After the submission of questionnaires, the researcher contacted with the respondents who accepted to interview, and make appointment to do face to face or via telephone interview. The researcher preferred face to face interview. The interview set up in the study is a semi- structured interview (Dornyei, 2007) in which "although there is a set of pre-prepared guiding questions and prompts the format is open-ended and the interviewee is encouraged to elaborate on the issues raised in an explanatory manner'(p. 136). Qualitative data were collected through interviews set up for 10 EFL teachers who announced their tendency to participate in the interview. Before starting the interview, the researcher briefly discussed the purpose of the interview and the use of audio recorder. In addition to record the interview via a voice recorder, the researcher takes note during the interviews.

3. Data Analysis

The present study intended to investigate the extent of IEFL teachers' research engagement and the relationship between EFL teachers' RE and their years of experience, their academic degrees and their gender. Moreover, an attempt was made to determine challenges teachers had in their research engagement. Therefore, in this section, the related descriptive and inferential results as well as the interview findings are presented and discussed.

The Extent of Research Engagement

The first objective of the study was to determine the frequency of doing research by the teachers. It is clear from Table 1 that 47% indicated that they do research sometimes, 36% rarely, 10% often, 2% always and 5% never. Therefore, it can be claimed that doing research is not a frequent activity among IEFL teachers and about 83% are engaged in doing research sometimes or rarely.

Table 1

Reported Frequency of Doing Research by EFL Teachers

Frequency	Number of Respondents	Percent of the Respondents
Always	2	2%
Often	10	10%
Sometimes	47	47%
Rarely	36	36%
Never	5	5%

Regarding the extent to which the respondents utilized the published studies and resources associated with TEFL, Table 2 shows that 56% of respondents said they sometimes read the published researches, 22% rarely, 15% often, 5% always, and 2% never studied. Therefore, it can be said that while a majority of respondents have a limited level of engagement with published research.

Table 2

Reported Frequency of Reading and Using Published Research

Frequency	Number of respondents	Percent of the respondents
Always	5	5%
Often	15	5%
Sometimes	56	56%
Rarely	22	22%
Never	2	2%

To determine whether there was a relationship between the years of the teaching experience and the extent of RE, it was found that there wasn't any significant difference between the respondents in this regard as displayed in table 3. In this part, the respondents were divided into three groups according to the years of teaching experience: the first group 0-9 years, the second one 10-19 years, and the last group at least 20 years.

Table 3

The Relationship between Years of Experience and the Extent of RE

Test Statistics[a,b]	
	n6
Chi-Square	3.687
Df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.158
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: group	

In order to investigate the effect of teachers' academic degrees on their research engagement, Mann- Whitney U test was run and the results (as shown in Table 4) revealed that there was a significant difference between the respondents' research engagement regarding their academic degrees.

Table 4

The Relationship between   Teacher's Qualification and the Extent of RE

Test Statistics[a]	
	n6
Mann-Whitney U	502.500
Wilcoxon W	1.282E3
Z	-5.917
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
a. Grouping Variable: n2	

To explore the relationship between gender and the extent of RE, another Man – Whitney U test was run. The findings revealed that female EFL teachers had higher extent of RE in comparison to the male EFL teachers (Table 5).

Table 5

The Relationship between Gender and RE

Test Statistics[a]	
	n6
Mann-Whitney U	830.000
Wilcoxon W	1.650E3
Z	-3.173
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
a. Grouping Variable: gender	

The Reasons for Doing Research

In studies conducted in different contexts (Borg & Liu 2013; Everton et.al 2002; Gao & Chow 2011; McNamara 2002; Worrall 2004) different reasons for doing research were explored and listed. In addition, some important benefits for teacher research (TR) were elaborated in the literature. The present study aimed to explore the most frequent reasons for being research engaged by IEFL teachers. The reasons were grouped into two categories: The reasons which dominantly express the influence of RE on teaching procedures and the reasons for EFL teachers' professional status.

A fundamental argument is that when teachers engaged with and in research and make pedagogical decisions informed by sound research evidence this will have a beneficial effect of both teaching and learning, additionally the evidence-based practice has been extensively described and debated in the literature (e.g., Davies, 1999; Elliot, 2002). According to Table 4.8 one of the significant reasons for teachers to be research engaged can be the beneficial impact that it has on the quality of teaching, in this regard the first part of the third section in the questionnaire aimed to measure the level of participants coincidence on some influencing factors of RE on teaching. As it is showed in Table 4.8 one of the fundamental reasons as indicated by the respondents was that RE "allows teachers to become more reflective, critical and analytical about their teaching behaviors in the classroom" (with 94% agreement). Two other salient reasons for RE with the same level of agreement (89%) were "doing research to find better ways of teaching" and "to contribute to renew and update information about language teaching". The reason of "improving teaching procedure" gained 82% agreement. The other reasons in this part received on average of 73% accordance on the part of respondents.

Table 6

The Reasons for Doing Research to Influence Teaching Quality

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't know (%)	Agree (%)
allows teachers to became more reflective, critical…….	0	3	3	94
creates a problem-solving mindset that help teachers when….	1	3	15	81
develops teachers' capacity for autonomous professional judgments	2	2	25	71
Helps to find better ways of teaching	1	5	5	89
allows me to collaborate with colleagues	1	10	22	67
causes to improve my teaching procedure	1	3	14	82
contributes to update my information about language teaching	1	5	5	89

Research engagement has been increasingly seen as an important means for English language teachers to improve their professional competence in many contexts (Atay 2008; Borg 2009). Besides, teacher research has been advanced as an important means for in- service teachers to improve their professional competence (Gu and Wang 2006; You 2007), thereby a number of EFL teachers are engaged in research to develop their professional status. The concern of the second part in the third section of the questionnaire is to examine and measure the majority and minority of such reasons from the EFL teachers' points of view. Nine reasons for professional development were presented to the teachers in this part in the form of Likert scale. Among these nine statements (reasons) a considerable number of respondents (about 81%) agreed that "doing research reduces the feeling of frustration of their jobs", 80% of them agreed that RE "allows teachers to move out of a submissive position and be a curriculum inventor". The other salient reasons for being research engaged were "helping to solve professional problems" 80% and "improving teachers' instructional decision – making process" 75%. Other reasons in this part received at least the average of 57% agreement among respondents. Table 7 shows the results in more details.

Table 7

The Reasons for Doing Research   for Professional Development

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't know (%)	Agree (%)
reduces teachers feeling of frustration and isolation	5	6	9	80
allows teachers to move out of a submissive position and be curriculum innovators	1	7	12	80
improves teachers instructional decision-making process	0	6	19	75
increases the professional status of teachers	4	15	26	55
helps empower teachers to influence their own profession ……	5	11	28	56
contributes to improvement of my department	7	19	27	47
it is good for my professional development	7	10	18	65
I feel that doing research is an important part of my job	2	12	24	62
helps me to solve my professional problems	0	5	15	80

The Barriers to Research Engagement

Quantitative Results

In comparison to the volume of empirical work which has been conducted in to teachers' research engagement in education, generally little research has been conducted in the field of English language teaching (Borg, 2003), Crooks and Arakaki (1999), McDonough & McDonough (1990) refer to some factors and barriers which hinder teachers research engagement. Additionally, the reasons for not doing research have been recognized in the related literature and also categorized in different subtitles (Borg & Liu, 2013).

Although some obstacles are of the same sorts in different context, one purpose of the present study was to recognize which of such barriers are the most common among the respondents of the Iranian context. Thus, the first part of the section four in the questionnaire consisted of four barriers under the title of "non- collaborative school culture". In general, 77% of the participants chose "agree" and "strongly agree" for the first item that said "the employers do not support them in doing research". The second noteworthy barrier for the respondents was "the lack of cooperation of the principals or department head for teachers to be research engaged" which 35% were agreed. The other two non-collaborative school culture obstacles seemed not to be very dominant for the respondents as displayed in Table 8.

Table 8

Barriers Related to Non-Collaborative School Culture

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't know (%)	Agree (%)
My employer does not support me	1	3	19	77
Other teachers would not cooperate if I asked for their help	1	36	43	20
Learners would not cooperate if I did research in class	10	55	18	17
Principal or department head dose not cooperate me to do research	12	20	33	35

Considering the barriers related to the "limitations in teachers' awareness, beliefs, skills and knowledge" the most notorious obstacle was "the teacher's perception of research as an academic, large scale, statistical and technically difficult activity on which 63% of the respondents reported agreement. Another important obstacle with less than 50% agreement were: having not access to needed books and journals (43%), thinking that research publications are irrelevant to their teaching contexts (41%), having not enough knowledge about research method (40%), and finally a less dominant preventive factor in this part was having difficulty in understanding research reports with 19% agreement as shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Limitations in Teachers' Awareness, Beliefs, Skills and Knowledge

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't know (%)	Agree (%)
I do not know enough about research methods	14	35	11	40
I face difficulty in understanding research reports	18	41	22	19
I think of research as an academic, large scale, statistical and technically difficult activity	2	22	13	64
Most research publication are not relevant to my teaching context	6	38	15	41

"Limited resources" was the other important category of barriers with six influencing factors under it as shown in Table 10. Referring to the obtained results of "having not enough knowledge about how to access to digital libraries and web-based resources of research", 83% agreement on this item revealed its importance as one of the prominent barriers. Lack of ability to think of note-worthy topics for research received 50% agreement. The other important but not very dominant ones were "having no access to English resources such as books and journals' (37%), and "not allocating a particular time to do research as a part of teachers' yearly workload" (36%).

Table 10

Barriers Related to Limited Resources

Statements	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't know (%)	Agree (%)
I do not have enough time to read research	8	38	17	37
I do not have access to the books and journals I need	7	31	9	43
I cannot think of any topics that are worth researching	3	35	12	50
Teachers are not given time to do research as part of their weekly workload	7	42	15	36
I do not know enough how to access to digital libraries and web-based sources of research	4	1	12	83
I have not access to English books or journals I need	6	32	25	37

According to Crookes and Arakaki (1999), lack of time is one of the factors that hinders teacher research Engagement (TRE). Nevertheless, in the present study, lack of time is one of the barriers but not as dominant as the above-mentioned ones and it received 37% agreement. The fourth group of TRE challenges were categorized as demotivators under which the majority or minority of seven related barriers were examined Among these hindering factors, the most dominant one was the statement that "there is not tangible benefit or reward for teachers to be research engaged " with 82% agreement (Table 11). The other considerable demotivative factors were "the lack of doing research by the other colleagues" 76%. "Not necessity of being research engaged for keeping the job and getting promotion" (57%). "The lack of institutions encouragement" (66%), and "the findings of researches are not important for EFL teachers to modify their probably less beneficial teaching procedures" took the fifth place among these demotivators with 55% agreement. Two other less dominant demotivators were "my job is to teach not to research" received (17%) and finally the lack of teachers' interest in doing research gained the least amount of agreement (6%).

Table 11

Demotivators for Doing Research

Statements	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't know (%)	Agree (%)
Most of my colleagues do not do research	3	5	16	76
I am not interested in doing research	32	47	15	6
There is no tangible benefit or reward for being research engaged	1	9	8	82
Reading research is not necessary for keeping my job and getting promotion	2	27	14	57
The finding of researches is not important for EFL teachers	4	17	24	55
My institution dose not encourage me to read research	3	12	19	66
My job is to teach, not to do research	5	43	35	17

The last topic to be examined in this section was the economic preventing matters for RE which consisted of three items. These three financial and economic factors obtained a high degree of concord among respondents. The item" teachers are paid only for teaching time" 77%," There is no financial support to do research" 86%, and "there is no financial support from the educational system to do research" 76% (Table 12).

Table 12

The Economic Preventing Matters

Statements	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Don't know (%)	Agree (%)
Teachers are paid only for teaching time	4	10	9	77
There is no financial support to do research	1	2	11	86
There is no financial support from educational system to do research	13	1	10	76

Qualitative Results

The results of the interviews were in line with the finding of the questionnaires findings. In addition, the interviewees pointed to some more challenges and barriers related to TRE such as lack of time in EFL teachers' weekly timetable to teach their textbooks, considering research as a voluntary activity without any assignment for EFL teachers to be research engaged, lack of time allocation for RE in teachers' yearly workload and low status of research in educational system.

As to lack of time in EFL teachers' weekly timetable to teach their textbooks, one of the teachers stated:

I'm usually overloaded with weekly 24 hours of full-time teaching and 15 hours as part-time job at private institutes. Therefore, no time is left for doing research.

The other similar barriers reported by most teachers were the optional choice of doing research without any obligation to integrate research into the teaching job and unimportance of doing research at schools as a part of the teachers' tasks or duties. For example, one of the teachers reported:

In our educational system, research is not as important as teaching. Policy makers expect us to teach whatever is presented in textbooks with a fixed centralized methodology.

In sum, the qualitative results revealed that the teachers attributed the challenges and barriers to both personal and institutional factors highlighting the fact that research engagement requires and inner drive partly motivated by job requirements.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The persuasive arguments in favor of the advantage of being research engaged by the teacher replete the literature but the reality remains that teacher research is a minority activity in ELT (Borg, 2009). A significant rationale for teacher research is its contribution to the teachers' professional development and practical value of educational research (Anvarudin & Pervin, 2013). Hargreavs and Fullan (1992) suggest a model of teachers' development which consists of three approaches to teacher development (TD).

The first approach argues that those teachers who equipped themselves with appropriate knowledge and skills have more ability to provide better learning opportunities for their learners, the second approach of TD deals with self-understanding and the third approach in this model suggest that "the process and success of teacher development depends very much on the context in which it takes place"(1992, p.13). Both quantitative and qualitative results in the present study also confirm the important role of personal and institutional factors in research engagement.

Among these three approaches, the importance of knowledge in teachers' professional development was highlighted in the first one. Other scholars for example Shulman (1987) also emphasizes that teachers need to have not only content knowledge but also they need to possess pedagogical knowledge. From this perspective of teacher development, in order to inform and improve their practice, teachers are expected to utilize research- based practice. Other researchers (see Mansilla & Gardner, 1997) also emphasize the centrality of research knowledge.

Another profound rationale for being research engaged teacher is that teaching is a dynamic, progressing process and the teachers' initial/pre-service education is not enough for them to have a progressive and effective career in teaching. In other words, "the ongoing development of this knowledge relies on the continuous in-service education and teacher professional learning"(Santora et al. 2013, p.123). Reviewing such significant issues on teacher professional development maintaining teacher research as a basic and efficient means to obtain such needed development, and drawing on our findings, there are some places of argument in the context of the study.

As a place of concern, we can recall one of the findings of this study where the average of frequently research engagement by IEFL teachers is 16% and it confirms the Borg's (2003) citation that teacher research remains a minority activity. The second concerning issue is that most of the participants agree on the beneficial impact of the RE on their teaching careers or professional development and based on the finding the lack of interest to TRE was very little (6%) but this internal factor was not able to overcome some external demotivators for teachers. As another substantial place of concern, we would argue strongly that since a majority of respondents emphasized to be research engaged for getting a promotion or increasing their precedence to develop their status among their colleagues, this will make TR a non-collaborative activity with purposes other than teachers' knowledge and skills development.

The final remarkable part of the study was about the preventive factors or obstacles for teachers to be research engaged. From the five subtitles under which various obstacles were investigated economic matters obtain the highest mean (4.6) and the second important group of the barriers were non-collaborative school culture ones with the mean of (3.6).Consequently in line with the findings of the third part of the study (the reasons for being researched engaged),here it can be concluded that the most considerable barriers for teachers are external factors such as financial matters or non- collaborative school cultures.

The present study finding pertaining to Iranian EFL teachers' low level of engagement is in line with results reported by Mehrani and Behzadnia (2013). Economic constraints and lack of institutional support as dominant barriers are also consistent with Mehranirad and Behzadpoor (2022). However, the results reported by Li and Xu (2024) in a university context show higher engagement because of institutional support and role expectations.

Based on both quantitative and qualitative results, it can be concluded that limited research engagement among school-level EFL teachers is a global pattern caused by personal factors and

institutional barriers reinforced by economic and cultural constraints. In order to address these issues, systemic changes in the educational system are required and more longitudinal studies should be conducted on how to motivate teachers for more engagement in research. Teachers should be encouraged to use more resources in addition to books and to continue their education for more training on how to do research. The present study can have some implications for teachers, institutional administrators, and policy makers to seek professional development, foster collaborative culture among teachers through supporting research communities, and reduce teaching load to allocate time for research.

We acknowledge that although this study provided a considerable volume of quantitative and qualitative data from EFL teachers, our respondents represent a small nonrandom sample, and we cannot make any claim about the statistical generalizability of our findings. More studies can be conducted to consider other variables such as specific contexts (urban vs. rural and public vs. private schools), and the role of technology in overcoming research engagement barriers and challenges.

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Appendix: English Questionnaire

➢ About Yourself:

Name : ………………   Gender: ………………

1. Where do you teach English in most often (Tick ONE)
   a) Primary School
   b) High School
   c) Higher Secondary School
   d) Private language institutions

2. Your highest academic/professional degree:
Degree (e.g., BA or PhD): …………………
Concentration/Major (e.g., ELT or literature) ………………………………

3. Years of experience as an English teacher: ………………

4. Type of institution where you teach:
a) Private   b) Public

➢ About Reading and Using Research Publication/s:

5. Have you ever done publishable research related to EFL teaching or learning?

a) Yes   b) No

6. How frequently do you read published language teaching research? (Tick ONE)
    a)   Always   b) Often   c) Sometimes   d) Rarely   e) Never

7. Which of the following do you read?
a) Books
b) Academic journals (print)
c) Academic journals (electronic)
d) Professional Magazines/Newsletters (Tick all that apply)

8. How frequently do you do research yourself? (Tick ONE)
a) Always   b) Often   c) Sometimes   d) Rarely   e) Never

Reasons for being research engaged and the challenges toward TRE

Answer the following questionnaire (Tick one of the items: Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know, agree, strongly agree)

	Reasons for research engagement	Strongly disagree	disagree	I don't know	agree	Strongly agree
		1	2	3	4	5
1	reduces teachers' feelings of frustration and isolation					
2	creates a problem-solving mindset that helps teachers when they consider other classroom dilemmas					
3	allows teachers to become more reflective, critical, and analytical about their teaching behaviors in the					
4	to find better ways of teaching					
5	Because it allows me to collaborate with colleagues					
6	It causes to improve my teaching procedures					
7	helps empower teachers to influence their own profession at classroom, district, state and national levels					
8	allows teachers to move out of a submissive position and be curriculum innovators					
9	improves teachers' instructional decision-making processes					
10	Contributes to update my information about language teaching					
11	increases my professional status in teaching					
12	It helps me to solve my professional problems easily					
13	develops teachers' capacity for autonomous professional judgments					
14	To contribute to the improvement of my department/ institution					
15	Because it is good for my professional development					
16	I feel that doing research is an important part of my job					

	For research engagement Challenges and barriers	Strongly disagree	disagree	I don't know	agree	Strongly agree
		1	2	3	4	5
1	I face difficulty in understanding research reports/articles					
2	I do not know how to access to digital libraries and web-based sources of research					
3	I do not have access to the books and journals I need					
4	My institution (e.g., principal or department head) does not encourage me to read research					
5	Reading research is not necessary for keeping my job and getting promotion					
6	There is no financial support from educational system to do research					
7	I cannot think of any topics that are worth researching.					
8	My job is to teach, not to do research					
9	teachers are not given time to do research as part of their workload					
10	I have not access to English Language teaching books and journals					
11	I am not interested in doing research or using the research finding to improve my teaching					
12	Other teachers would not cooperate if I asked for their help					
13	Learners would not cooperate if I did research in class					
14	principal or department head) does not cooperate me to do research					
15	There is no financial support to do research					
16	There is no tangible benefit or reward for being research-engaged					
17	Teachers are paid only for teaching time.					
18	The findings of research are not important for EFL teachers					
19	I do not know enough about research methods					
20	Most of my colleagues do not do research					
21	My employer does not support					
22	. I do not have enough time to read research					
23	I think of research as an academic, large scale, statistical and technically difficult activity.					
24	Most research publications are not relevant to my teaching context					

Thank you for taking the time to respond to these questions. I appreciate your contribution to my research.