

# English Language Teachers' Conceptions of Research

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SIMON BORG

School of Education, University of Leeds, UK

This article examines the conceptions of research held by 505 teachers of English from 13 countries around the world. Questionnaire responses supplemented by follow-up written and interview data were analyzed to understand teachers' views on what research is and how often they read and do it (and why or why not in each case). An understanding of these issues is central to the development of informed policies for promoting teacher research engagement, but relevant systematic evidence is lacking in the field of English language teaching (ELT). The study shows that the teachers held conceptions of research aligned with conventional scientific notions of inquiry. The teachers also reported moderate to low levels of reading and doing research, with a lack of time, knowledge, and access to material emerging as key factors which teachers felt limited their ability to be research-engaged. Teachers engaged in research reported being driven largely by practical and professional concerns rather than external drivers such as employers or promotion. Overall, the findings of this study point to a number of attitudinal, conceptual, procedural, and institutional barriers to teacher research engagement. Understanding these, it is argued here, is an essential part of the broader process of trying to address them and hence to make teacher research engagement a more feasible activity in ELT.

## TEACHER RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT

A drive to engage teachers more fully both with and in educational research has in recent years been a prominent feature of educational policy in several international contexts (Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000; Shavelson and Towne 2002; Thomas and Pring 2004 in Australia, the USA and the UK, respectively). One fundamental argument underpinning this drive is that when teachers engage with (through reading) and in (by doing) research and make pedagogical decisions informed by sound research evidence, this will have a beneficial effect on both teaching and learning (Hargreaves 2001). The recommendation that teachers be research-engaged has also been based on broader arguments about the benefits this can have for teachers' professional development (see, for example, Kincheloe 2003; Lyle 2003; Lankshear and Knobel 2004; Kirkwood and Christie 2006) and, from a more critical perspective, for their status as professionals:

teachers need to be encouraged to move out of their submissive position and to take a much more innovatory, as opposed to

plementary, role in curriculum development. One way to do this is to adopt the perspective of the researcher. (Gurney 1989: 15)

Stimulated by this interest in encouraging teachers to be research-engaged, one strand of inquiry to emerge has focused on examining what teachers actually think about research (Shkedi 1998; Everton *et al.* 2000; Everton *et al.* 2002; McNamara 2002b; Ratcliffe *et al.* 2004). The rationale for such work has been that initiatives to promote teacher research engagement are more likely to succeed if they are based on an understanding of teachers' conceptions of research and of the role research plays in their work. A further related strand of inquiry, particularly in the UK, has focused on the notion of research-engaged teachers and schools (Ebbutt 2001; Handscomb and Macbeath 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Sharp 2003; Barker 2005; Sharp *et al.* 2005; Sharp 2007). One collective finding to emerge from this work is that organizational and institutional factors, and not just teachers' individual attitudes, can also exert a powerful influence on the extent to which teachers can be research-engaged.

An interest in teacher research engagement is also evident in the literature on English language teaching (ELT), though in this field only a limited number of empirical studies of teachers' conceptions of research exist (in contrast to a much wider body of work which advises teachers on how to do research—e.g. Allwright and Bailey 1991; Nunan 1992; Freeman 1998; Burns 1999; Brown and Rodgers 2002). McDonough and McDonough (1990) surveyed the views of research of 34 teachers of English as a foreign language, while Brown *et al.* (1992) report a survey of 607 members of an international association for ELT professionals (although it is not clear what proportion of this sample were teachers, as opposed to academic researchers and university lecturers). These studies, echoing those outside ELT, reported notions of research closely tied to quantitative and statistical methods and a general ambivalence (and in some cases cynicism) about the role of educational research in teachers' professional lives. In the field of foreign language teaching more generally, Macaro (2003) examined the views about research of 80 heads of modern foreign language departments in the UK. Reflecting findings in McNamara (2002b) and Shkedi (1998), respondents in this study identified the physical and conceptual inaccessibility of published language teaching research as a key barrier to their engagement with it.

More recent work by Allison and Carey (2007) reflects increasing empirical interest in English language teachers' engagement in research. The views about research of 22 members of staff teaching at a university language centre in Canada were studied through questionnaires and interviews; key findings were that these individuals felt constrained in their ability to engage in research by the limited time left available to them after they had fulfilled their teaching duties; lack of encouragement and motivation to do research were also cited as common challenges, particularly where a requirement to do research was not part of teachers' job descriptions. One teacher was quoted as

saying they were explicitly discouraged by 'high ranking members of the university' from 'acting like professors and publishing research' (p. 70). This points to issues surrounding professional status and identity which debates about teachers as researchers bring to the fore.

To extend our empirical understandings of English language teachers' conceptions of research, in 2005 I initiated a program of research which is examining these issues in a range of international contexts [see Borg (2007a) and Borg (2007b) for early papers from this work]. Here, I draw on this program of research to examine the conceptions of research of over 500 English language teachers from 13 countries. In doing so, my aim is not to argue that teachers *should* be research-engaged; my point, rather, is that decisions about what is desirable and feasible in relation to teacher research engagement in ELT need to be based on the kinds of empirical insights we currently lack and which I present in this article. Such research can elucidate practitioners' perspectives on what research is, the extent to which they feel they are research-engaged, and the factors which they feel enable or hinder them in being so; informed recommendations about teacher research engagement in ELT cannot, I would argue, be made without an understanding of such issues.

## METHOD

The design of this study reflects what Creswell (2003) calls a sequential explanatory multi-method strategy. This is a design which 'is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data' (p. 215). Specifically, the study reported here adopted a survey approach in which largely quantitative data were first collected through a questionnaire. A sub-sample of the teachers who completed the questionnaire then participated in a second phase of data collection through which their questionnaire responses were explored and illustrated in more depth qualitatively [see Bryman (2006a) for a detailed analysis of rationales for multi-method research]. I discuss the different forms of data below.

### Research questions

The aim of this study was to understand the conceptions of research held by ELT teachers working in a range of countries (without, however, conducting cross-country comparisons).<sup>1</sup> The following questions were addressed:

1. What are the characteristics of 'research' according to ELT teachers?
2. To what extent do teachers say they read published research?
  - a. Where teachers do not read research, what reasons do they cite?
3. To what extent do teachers say they do research?
  - a. What are their reasons for engaging in research?
  - b. Where teachers do not do research, what reasons do they cite?

4. What are teachers' perceptions of their institutional culture in relation to research?
5. How do these perceptions relate to teachers' reported levels of research engagement?
6. To what extent are teachers' reported levels of research engagement associated with specific background variables: qualifications, experience, and type of institution (university versus non-university)?

Due to limitations of space here, this article focuses on questions 1–3 and 6.

## Data collection and analysis

### Questionnaire

In the form of a questionnaire, the cross-sectional survey allows large amounts of data to be collected efficiently, economically, and in a standardized manner [see, for example, Aldridge and Levine (2001)]. The questionnaire used in this study (Appendix 1) had six sections, focusing on respondents' conceptions of what counts as research, views about the characteristics of good quality research, perceptions of their institutional culture in relation to research, engagement in reading research, engagement in doing research, and background information. The range of themes covered in the instrument was informed by issues raised in the literature reviewed earlier. The instrument was piloted with a group of 21 English language teachers and its length, wording and organization revised in line with their feedback.

Questionnaire data were collected from a non-probability sample of 505 teachers of English in 13 countries. My goal was to obtain a broad perspective on the issues under study and with this goal in mind I approached contacts in a number of ELT contexts around the world who were in a position to invite *practising* teachers (that was my only criterion for teacher participation) of English to complete the questionnaire. These contacts played a vital facilitative role in this study by providing access to respondents as well as by advising on which mode of administering the questionnaire—hard copy, web-based, or e-mail attachment—would work best in their particular contexts [all three modes of administration were used in the study—see Couper (2005) for a discussion of the use of technology in survey research]. The closed questionnaire data were analyzed statistically using SPSS 12.

Of course, the many advantages of questionnaires are countered by certain limitations [Dörnyei (2003) lists a number], particularly when respondents are being asked to report their beliefs [see Borg (2006c) for a discussion of methodological issues involved in using self-report instruments to study teachers' beliefs]. Questionnaires, also, often generate superficial answers and do not allow in-depth exploration of particular issues. In response to these concerns, direct questionnaire items of the type 'what are your beliefs/views about

research?' or 'what is research?' were avoided; additionally, the questionnaires were supplemented with qualitative data, which I now describe.

### Written follow-up

Teachers completing the questionnaire were asked if they would like to participate in a second phase of the study where their questionnaire responses would be explored in more detail. A total of 259 (just over 50 per cent) volunteered. In two contexts (accounting for 50 of these 259 volunteers), I was able to interview teachers (see below). In one further context, accounting for 20 volunteers, e-mail addresses were not supplied (and I was thus not able to contact the volunteers). From the remaining 189 volunteers, a proportional random sample of one-third (rounded to the closest integer) of the volunteers in each of the 10 contexts represented were sent follow-up questions by e-mail<sup>2</sup> (these questions were not included in the original questionnaire to prevent its length becoming excessive). In total 61 teachers were sent questions and 22 (36 per cent) from eight countries replied to these. Each follow-up was personalized according to the answers teachers had given in their questionnaire (see Appendix 2 for an example of questions and answers). The qualitative data generated by this written follow-up were analyzed with attention to three issues in particular to augment the analysis of the questionnaire data: (i) teachers' reasons for feeling an activity was or was not research; (ii) teachers' reasons for feeling that a particular characteristic was or was not important in making research 'good'; and (iii) the meanings that adverbs such as 'often' had for teachers when they described the frequency with which they did or read research.

### Interviews

As noted above, I was additionally able to conduct follow-up interviews in two of the contexts represented in this study. In these contexts, 31 and 19 teachers, respectively, volunteered a follow-up contribution; once again, one-third in each case was randomly chosen (10 and 7, respectively) and invited to do an interview, and in total 12 teachers (5 and 7, respectively) were actually interviewed. During the face-to-face interviews (which lasted on average some 35 minutes and were audio recorded), teachers were asked to expand on their questionnaire responses; in particular they were asked to explain why they felt certain scenarios were or were not research and to comment on their understandings of the criteria (such as 'objectivity') they had said in the questionnaire were important in making research 'good'. Interviewees were also asked about the frequency of their engagement in research. The interviews were structured in the sense that in each case topics were covered in the order that they appeared in the questionnaire; within this structure, though, there was also scope for more flexible interaction through which teachers were able to elaborate on any matters relevant to their views and experiences of research

and I was able to probe further relevant emergent issues as required. The interviews were transcribed in full. The analysis of these transcriptions (supported by Nvivo 7) initially involved mapping teachers' interview comments onto the section of the questionnaire they related to (these sections provided the broad categories for analysis—e.g. characteristics of good quality research). The transcripts were then coded in relation to these broad categories (e.g. all comments about the importance of 'objectivity' were coded as a sub-category of 'characteristics of good quality research'). Finally, the resulting categories and sub-categories were used to elaborate on (e.g. using examples and explanations teachers provided) the quantitative analysis of each questionnaire section (and thus by combining quantitative and qualitative data I was, for example, able to comment both on how many teachers felt 'objectivity' was an important characteristic of research as well as how teachers defined this characteristic and why they felt it was important).

Collectively, then, the questionnaires, written follow-up, and interviews allowed the research questions outlined above to be examined in detail.

## RESULTS

### Background information

Questionnaires were completed by 505 teachers in 13 countries covering Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Australia (Table 1). A total of 182 questionnaires were completed in hard copy, 236 via the web-based survey,

*Table 1: Respondents by country*

Country	<i>N</i> (%)
Australia	27 (5.3)
Mainland China	57 (11.3)
France	17 (3.4)
Hong Kong	23 (4.6)
Japan	33 (6.5)
Nigeria	26 (5.1)
Oman	64 (12.7)
Poland	39 (7.7)
Slovenia	31 (6.1)
Spain	63 (12.5)
Switzerland	44 (8.7)
Turkey	67 (13.3)
UAE	14 (2.8)
Total	505 (100)

and 87 by e-mail attachment. In 6 of the 13 ELT contexts involved here the teachers consisted of a mixture of local and expatriate staff, while in the remaining seven countries the teachers were all local.

Tables 2 and 3 present the sample according to experience in ELT and qualifications relevant to ELT, respectively.

Table 2 reflects the range of ELT experience this sample of teachers had, though the majority had less than 15 years. Table 3 indicates that just over 31 per cent had postgraduate qualifications. The responses to the questionnaire also showed that (i) 62.6 per cent of the respondents ( $N=494$ ) worked in the state sector, (ii) 64.3 per cent ( $N=485$ ) worked in institutions that were not attached to a university (e.g. secondary schools, private language schools, and adult education colleges), (iii) the most common age group taught by the sample was 13–19 years old (46.2 per cent,  $N=496$ ), and (iv) 79.4 per cent ( $N=456$ ) were full-time English language teachers working for one institution. Some of these background variables will be referred to below to examine

*Table 2: Respondents by years of ELT experience*

Years	<i>N</i> (%)
0–4	116 (23.4)
5–9	88 (17.7)
10–14	110 (22.2)
15–19	87 (17.5)
20–24	56 (11.3)
25+	39 (7.9)
Total	496 <sup>a</sup> (100)

<sup>a</sup>Throughout the article, where totals in tables do not add up to 505, this is due to missing data.

*Table 3: Respondents by highest ELT qualification*

Qualification	<i>N</i> (%)
Certificate	48 (9.7)
Diploma	69 (13.9)
Bachelor's	204 (41.1)
Master's	140 (28.2)
Doctorate	17 (3.4)
Other	18 (3.6)
Total	496 (100)

whether they are associated with the extent to which teachers reported being research-engaged.

## Conceptions of research

Respondents' conceptions of research were elicited in two ways (Appendix 1, Sections 1 and 2). They were first asked to assess a series of scenarios, then to comment on the characteristics of 'good' research.

### Evaluating scenarios

The questionnaire presented 10 scenarios, all describing some form of inquiry, and teachers were asked to indicate to what extent they felt the inquiry in each case was research. There were no right or wrong answers here and the purpose of the item was to gain insight into respondents' views of what counted as research. The findings for this question are summarized in Table 4, which gives the percentage of teachers selecting each of the four possible ratings for each scenario.

Defining research is in itself not a straightforward issue. However, it is necessary here for me to state briefly my own position as this informs some of the comments I make below in analyzing the data. It is possible to extract from the research methodology literature (Wiersma 1991; Robson 2002; Babbie 2003; Cohen *et al.* 2007) a number of commonly cited minimal elements in definitions of research—a problem or question, data, analysis, and interpretation. Regularly mentioned too are characteristics of the research process such as systematicity and rigour. Additionally, it has been argued

*Table 4: Teachers' assessment of 10 scenarios (Appendix 1)*

Scenario	N	Definitely not research (%)	Probably not research (%)	Probably research (%)	Definitely research (%)
1	505	25.0	23.4	35.6	16.0
2	504	3.2	7.9	34.5	54.4
3	502	18.5	22.3	29.7	29.5
4	503	2.0	8.2	25.6	64.2
5	502	4.4	14.9	36.9	43.8
6	502	4.0	8.6	30.9	56.6
7	502	19.7	27.3	29.3	23.7
8	504	31.2	36.5	17.9	14.5
9	504	19.0	30.0	29.2	21.8
10	505	12.9	20.4	37.4	29.3



that to qualify as research, inquiry needs to be made public; Stenhouse (1981), for example, states that 'private research for our purpose does not count as research' (p. 111) and Crookes (1993: 137, drawing on Stern 1983) says that 'research is not research unless communicated'. My own views of research resonate with the above-mentioned characteristics. I do not subscribe to the view, however, that research should be defined according to its methodological orientation; I am thus supportive of views of research which promote epistemological pluralism [i.e. which acknowledge different research traditions—see Ernest (1994) for a discussion] and which resist attempts to sustain 'paradigm wars' (Bryman 2006b) by claiming that particular traditions and investigative methods are necessarily superior to others.

As Table 4 shows, the three scenarios most highly rated as research by the teachers were numbers 4, 2, and 6. Scenarios 8, 9, and 1 were the three least rated as research. While the statistical analysis of these scenarios provides an overall picture of teachers' conceptions of research, the questionnaire data alone do not provide any insight into teachers' reasons for their assessments. For this we must turn to the follow-up data obtained, as discussed earlier, in writing and through interviews. I do not have the space to provide an exhaustive qualitative analysis of teachers' comments on every scenario, but will draw on the written and spoken data to highlight common factors which shaped teachers' assessments of the individual scenarios most highly and least highly rated.

Scenario 4 was the one that was most highly rated as research. Teachers who provided follow-up data and who said this was definitely research were asked to explain their choice. A number of common influences on their assessments are highlighted in the following comments:

This is classic quantitative research: large sample, statistical data analysis, and a very public report. (Japan)

Because the large number of teachers were taking part in the research and because of the feedback that was published. (Slovenia)

Using statistics also suggests that the approach was objective. I also assume, rightly or wrongly, that an academic journal would only publish results that were worthwhile. (Switzerland)

The sample—500 people. Statistics were used, writing an article in an academic journal—what more could you want! (Turkey)

A large sample for me would seem to be indicative of more meaningful and generalizable results. (Spain)

References to large samples, statistics, and academic outputs recurred in the views on Scenario 4 articulated in the written and interview data; these ideas were central to teachers' conceptions of the kind of activity that research involves. Scenario 8 was the one that was least highly rated as research. Teachers' critiques of this scenario centred around the small number of

participants and the limited representativeness of their views, as illustrated in these comments:

The number of the completed questionnaires studied by the teacher is too low. (Slovenia)

The information he collects is not an overall reflection of the students' ideas. (China)

The data collection process is flawed (you cannot draw reliable conclusions from such a small sample). (France)

This is definitely not research. Data collection is invalid since they're just five out of thirty. (UAE)

As it stands, it doesn't seem very representative. (Spain)

Teachers' comments on this scenario thus reflect conceptions of research in which the number of participants and the representativeness of the sample are key elements; critiques of this scenario also referred to the local (i.e. not generalizable) focus of the exercise (in the words of a teacher from Switzerland, it 'was only intended to gear the course to suit a particular group of students') and to the fact that collecting feedback from students was a normal teaching activity rather than research: 'Getting feedback from students seems like normal "teaching" work to me' (Switzerland). This latter point also emerged quite strongly in comments on Scenario 1; one teacher wrote that 'it is part of the teaching workload and something we do all the time without even thinking of it as something extra' (Switzerland); while another said 'this is what a teacher does almost everyday, isn't it? It may be a starting point of research but I would call it reflective teaching' (Japan). Research, then, is here being contrasted with the more regular and routine thinking about their work which teachers engage in. Although some examples of teacher research in the scenarios were highly rated, overall, the assessments of these scenarios as shown through the questionnaire, written, and interview data suggest that teachers' conceptions of research were aligned with conventional scientific ideas. This has implications for the extent to which teachers may feel research is an activity they can feasibly engage in, as I discuss later.

### Characteristics of good quality research

Section 2 of the questionnaire focused further on teachers' conceptions of research by asking them to rate the importance to good quality research of a list of characteristics. Table 5 summarizes the responses to this question. For the purposes of this table, 'Less important' includes 'unimportant' and 'moderately important' ratings for each characteristic, while 'More important' constitutes 'important' and 'very important' responses. The responses are listed in descending order according to the percentage of teachers who indicated that a characteristic was 'more important'.

*Table 5: Teachers' views on the importance of 11 research characteristics (N = 505)*

Teachers' views	More important (%)	Less important (%)	Unsure (%)
The researcher is objective	84.8	5.7	9.6
Hypotheses are tested	80.1	11.0	8.9
The results give teachers ideas they can use	78.5	14.3	7.2
Variables are controlled	68.1	11.9	20.0
A large number of people are studied	67.3	26.5	6.2
Information is analyzed statistically	66.3	22.9	10.8
A large volume of information is collected	60.2	27.4	12.4
Experiments are used	58.8	28.0	13.3
The results are made public	51.3	33.6	15.1
Questionnaires are used	48.0	36.2	15.9
The results apply to many ELT contexts	45.2	33.3	21.6

As Table 5 shows, the characteristic most highly rated was 'the researcher is objective', followed by 'hypotheses are tested'. Together these responses provide further support for the view that teachers' conceptions of research are aligned with more scientific notions of enquiry;<sup>3</sup> having said that, the third most highly rated characteristic was 'the results give teachers results they can use', which reflects more pragmatic concerns. Other points worth noting here are that 'the results apply to many ELT contexts' was the characteristic which generated the largest number of 'unsure' answers, while just over half the teachers here felt that making results public was important.

In the interviews and written follow-up, teachers were asked to articulate why they felt particular characteristics were or were not important in defining the quality of research. For reasons of space I will limit my focus here to teachers' comments on the characteristic most highly rated: objectivity. Here are some comments explaining why teachers rated objectivity so highly, and which provide insight into the meanings teachers assigned to this term:

Well you don't want to make your research and results fit your hypothesis just to make it look as though you have an excellent result and it is a neat and tidy piece of research. (Australia)

The research he is doing must reflect the situation and the problems existing in present teaching practice. The research shouldn't put any assumption or personal preference in it. (China)

You have to convince others that what you have done has some merits. To convince others, you cannot use your 'belief'. You have

to give some evidence to convince others. The results should be supported by some scientific measures. (Japan)

You may start with your own idea and then you just go and read the people who are on the same wavelength as you are and you just ignore the others and you say that you have reached the truth, which is not the truth at all, who are you trying to fool? Some people do it that way. (Turkey)

I think, any researcher who wants true and valid results needs to be objective. They may have an idea of what they think the results might be, for me the purpose of research is to test and analyse to see if that's true, not to say, I want to prove this, let's see if I can do it, let's do what I can do to prove it . . . they may have an idea what they think but they can't say this is it and let's work backwards from that point to prove it. (Spain)

Overall, objectivity emerged in this study as a central characteristic in the way teachers define the quality of research; teachers' comments, as indicated above, highlighted a range of meanings associated with this concept:

- research should not be influenced by the researcher's personal preferences, opinions, emotions, or assumptions;
- opinions both supportive of and in opposition to the researcher's position should be acknowledged;
- conclusions should not be pre-determined (i.e. the research should allow for the possibility that the researcher's hypothesis will be disproved); and
- conclusions should be based on 'scientific' evidence, not the researcher's beliefs.

One teacher also wrote that objectivity is when 'the researcher is distant and detached, but this is quite impossible even in empirical study' (UAE). This was the only comment which reflected critically on the feasibility of 'scientific' objectivity in social science research.

## Reading research

Section 4 of the questionnaire asked respondents about the extent to which they read research, and if not, about their reasons for not doing so.

### Frequency of reading

A total of 495 teachers reported how often they read published language teaching research; 3.8 per cent said they never did so, 28.7 per cent said they did it rarely, 51.9 per cent sometimes, and 15.6 per cent often (see below for a comment on the meaning of these frequency words). These reported levels of reading were analyzed (using Spearman's correlation) for associations with both teachers' qualifications and years of experience. In both cases, significant though weak associations<sup>4</sup> were found (for qualifications,

$N=489$ ,  $\rho=0.107$ ,  $p=0.009$ , one-tailed; for experience,  $N=489$ ,  $\rho=0.184$ ,  $p<0.001$ , one-tailed). More experienced and more qualified teachers, then, reported reading research more frequently than those with fewer qualifications and less experience. Comparisons between university-based and non-university-based teachers showed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the former reported reading research significantly more often [mean of university teachers = 2.99, mean of non-university teachers = 2.69,  $t(477) = 4.262$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , two-tailed].

### Reasons for not reading research

Teachers who reported reading research rarely or never ( $N=161$ ) were asked to identify reasons for their low engagement with research. The reasons identified by the teachers are listed in Table 6. A lack of time is the predominant reason cited here (by almost 66 per cent of teachers answering this question). A perceived lack of practical relevance was also a common hindrance, as was the inaccessibility, both physical and conceptual, of published research.<sup>5</sup>

Among the 'other' reasons for not reading research mentioned by teachers, a recurrent view was that research had little to offer them; in addition to being viewed as too theoretical and of limited practical use ('I'm only interested in practical ways I can improve my teaching and have a low level of interest in reading about research'—Spain), it was also described as 'dry', 'dense', and of dubious quality due to small samples and limited generalizability; in the words of one teacher, 'Research into ESL is not often done with a big enough sample or in stringent enough conditions to provide convincing results' (Australia).

More experienced teachers in particular were likely to question what published research could offer them; one explained they did not read research because 'I'm a very experienced teacher. I feel I've been there and done that ...' (France), while another did not because 'sometimes it's "faddy" and often I either disagree with findings or I already know that' (Spain). In such cases, the barriers to research engagement would appear to be attitudinal rather than the result of external constraints.

*Table 6: Reported reasons for not reading research*

Reasons	Frequency
I do not have time	106
I do not have access to books and journals	67
Published research does not give me practical advice for the classroom	57
I find published research hard to understand	34
I am not interested in research	27

## Doing research

Section 5 of the survey focused on teachers' engagement in research. Teachers were asked how often they did research, if so, why, and if not, what the reasons for this were.

### Frequency of doing research

A total of 493 teachers reported how frequently they did research. Of them, 8.1 per cent said they never did it, 37.3 per cent said they did it rarely, 41 per cent sometimes, and 13.6 per cent often. Almost 55 per cent of the teachers, then, said they did research at least sometimes (but this needs to be interpreted cautiously—see below).

Comparisons between university-based and non-university-based teachers showed, again, that the former reported doing research significantly more often [mean of university teachers=2.87, mean of non-university teachers=2.47,  $t(474)=5.238$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , two-tailed]. There was also a weak but significant relationship between how often teachers reported doing research and both their experience and qualifications (experience,  $N=488$ ,  $\rho=0.207$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ , one-tailed; qualifications,  $N=485$ ,  $\rho=0.185$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ , one-tailed). Figure 1 illustrates the almost linear increase with years of experience of teachers' reported engagement in doing research (only in the 25+ group is this increase not sustained).

One methodological point here relates to the different ways in which frequency words such as 'often' and 'sometimes' are interpreted by respondents when they are asked to specify how often they engage in an activity. To explore this issue, in the written follow-up and in the interviews I asked teachers to explain their interpretation of such terms. Here are some examples of how teachers explained what they meant in saying that they did research 'sometimes':

It means once or twice a year. But I am often thinking about doing research and have done some casual try-outs of new ideas or activities with an intention of developing them into research. (Japan)

No time now—in the past at University. (Switzerland)

Not often. (Australia)

Sometimes when I am away from teaching I have the time to reflect upon what I have practised routinely. (China)

I did research in my last year in my Bachelor Degree . . . Before that, I did preliminary research before starting this one. So, I might consider this as sometimes. (UAE)

Which I meant, you know, sometimes when I have the time. (Turkey)

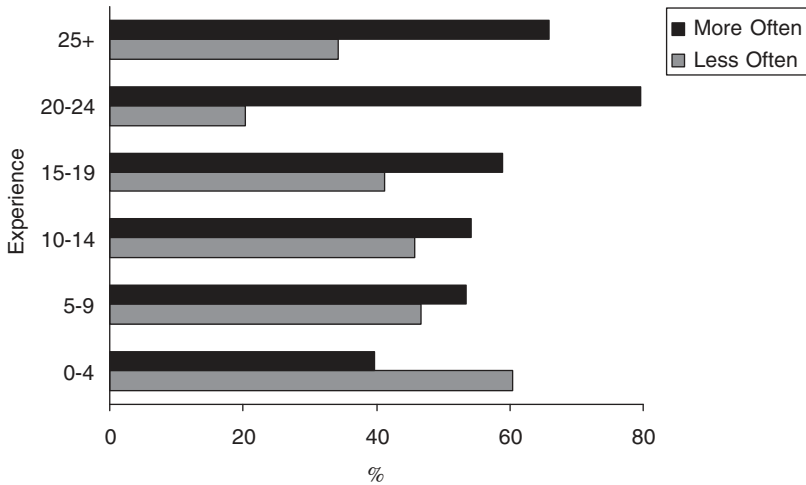


Figure 1: Reported levels of doing research by years of experience

Maybe once a year. (Spain)

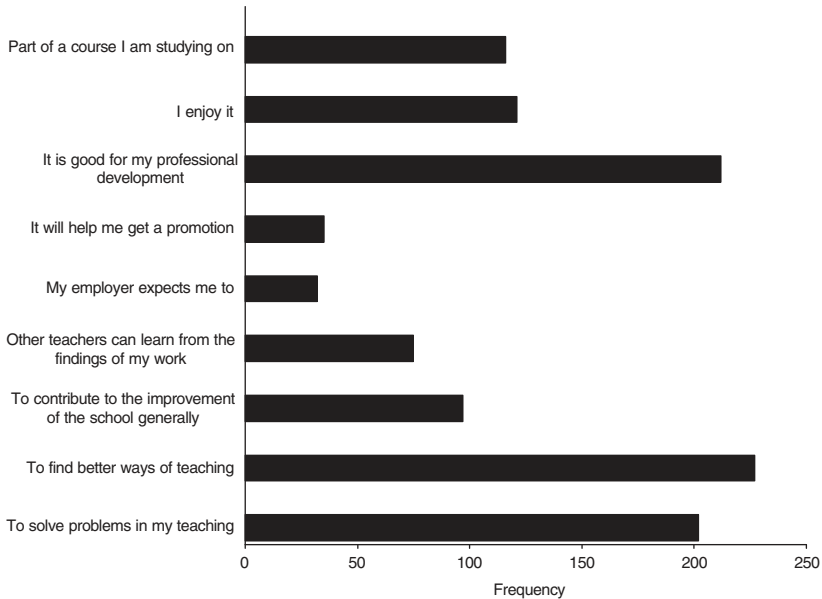
Sometimes means I don't do it regularly. (Spain)

The various interpretations of 'sometimes' highlighted here suggest that alternative ways of asking teachers to report the frequency with which they do research should be considered (e.g. a more concrete scale might range from 'less than once every two years' to 'once a month' with intermediate options). In any case, on the basis of these insights, figures of 41 per cent for teachers who say they do research sometimes and 51.9 per cent who say they read research sometimes should be interpreted cautiously; they may actually reflect infrequent and incidental levels of engagement in these activities.

### Reasons for doing research

Teachers who reported doing research often or sometimes ( $N=269$ ) were asked to indicate their reasons for doing so by selecting items from a list provided and suggesting others if required. The findings are summarized in Figure 2.

The three main reasons for doing research cited here were to find better ways of teaching (227 mentions), to solve problems in my teaching (213), and because it is good for my professional development (202). These reasons clearly have a strong personal, pedagogical, and professional focus; in contrast, more instrumental motives such as employer expectations (32) and promotion (35) were less prominent in teachers' responses here. At the same time, over 43 per cent of the teachers who said they did research at least sometimes also said they were doing so as part of a course they were studying on; this motive is at least partly instrumental (i.e. research is being done to obtain a



*Figure 2: Reasons for doing research*

qualification) and this kind of external pressure can be, as I discuss later, a facilitative condition in enabling teachers to do research.

### Reasons for not doing research

The 224 teachers who reported doing research rarely or never were similarly asked to indicate reasons for this. Their responses are summarized in Figure 3.

The overwhelming factor (cited by 81.7 per cent of this sub-group) was a lack of time; the next most common reason teachers cited for not doing research was that most of their colleagues do not do it either (this points to the impact peers can have on teachers' engagement in research). A lack of knowledge about research was the next factor in this list (teachers thus seem less likely to engage in research if they lack self-efficacy in relation to this activity). Over 28 per cent of the teachers who said they do research rarely or never said that such activity was not part of their job—they were teachers not researchers—while over 16 per cent said they were not interested in research.

## DISCUSSION

I will organize the discussion of this study around two issues: (i) teachers' conceptions of research; and (ii) their levels of reported research engagement.



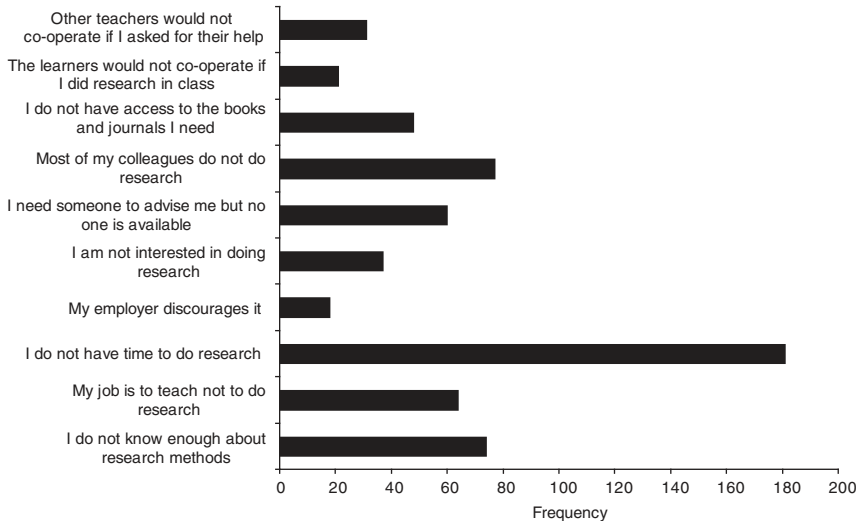


Figure 3: Reasons for not doing research

### Teachers' conceptions of research

Overall, the responses from the heterogeneous sample of 505 teachers of English studied here indicated that their conceptions of research are aligned with conventional scientific notions of enquiry. Key ideas which resonated with teachers' notions of research were statistics, objectivity, hypotheses, large samples, and variables. Teachers, though, also rated highly the need for research to provide results they could use, signaling a concern with the practical application of research findings. As McIntyre (2005) argues, teaching is a fundamentally practical activity and in evaluating research evidence teachers will naturally look for ideas that enhance pedagogy and not just propositional knowledge. However, while reading research for ideas that can stimulate teachers to reflect on and experiment with their own practices is desirable, consulting research to seek out direct solutions to localized pedagogical problems is likely to be less productive; the latter stance overestimates the potential of received knowledge to have an immediate influence on instructional practices [see Johnson (1996) for a similar view] and over-simplifies the complex processes through which research knowledge acquired externally becomes incorporated into teachers' daily practices.

There was less certainty among these teachers about need for results to be generalizable or for them to be made public. The former is not an essential characteristic of educational research, especially in the sense of statistical generalizability, and an awareness of the value of rigorous but context-specific inquiries would seem desirable in enabling teachers to think about research in more inclusive ways and hence to have more realistic goals about the scope of

the research they do. Making research public, as I argued earlier, is a defining characteristic of research. The obstacle for teachers is often that they interpret 'making public' to mean formal written publication in a journal; 'public', though, means more broadly that an enquiry has been shared and made available for scrutiny in oral or written form, whether less formally at a local level (e.g. to colleagues at school) or on a larger, more formal stage. This, then, is another dimension of research which teachers can benefit from being more aware of.

Another point to emerge from the analysis of what research means to teachers is the distinction between research and routine teaching. This distinction was cited a number of times to explain why particular scenarios in the questionnaire were not felt to be research. In particular, research was contrasted with reflective practice; a similar distinction is made by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), who argue that teacher research goes beyond the kind of thoughtful teaching that reflective practice involves. McIntyre (2005), in distinguishing between different types of knowledge related to teaching, also posits reflective thinking and research as distinct types of knowledge. I do acknowledge reflection as a powerful strategy for professional development and there is an extensive literature on the subject which supports this view [for a recent treatment in language teaching, see Farrell (2007)]. Private reflective practice and language teaching research, though, are not synonymous.

The conceptions of research highlighted here contribute to an understanding of why research for many teachers can seem to be an irrelevant and unfeasible activity. That is, if teachers feel that research needs to involve large samples and statistics, be objective and lead to a formal written publication, then it will necessarily not represent an activity they can feasibly aspire to engage in [this challenge relates to what Allwright (1997) refers to as the problem of sustainability in teacher research—the fact that teachers often abandon research they start doing because of the challenges it is seen to present]. To increase the scope for teacher engagement in research, then, one condition which is needed is a broader awareness among teachers of the forms research can take, with particular emphasis on those approaches to research which are feasible and conducive to inquiry having a professional or pedagogical orientation, and on the various forms through which such work can be meaningfully communicated to fellow professionals. This does not imply that quality should be compromised, and key characteristics of research highlighted earlier are equally important for the research teachers do [as Nunan (1997: 377) says, 'the key distinction should be not whether an activity is practitioner research or regular research but whether it is good research or poor research'].

### **Levels of reported research engagement**

At best, the results here point to moderate levels of engagement, both in terms of reading (with over 67 per cent of the teachers saying they did this at least sometimes) and doing research (the equivalent figure here being over

54 per cent). As I discussed earlier, though, these figures must be interpreted cautiously given the varying ways in which 'often' and 'sometimes' were interpreted by teachers ('sometimes', in particular, seemed to be a euphemism for 'rarely'). Also, more insight is required into the kinds of activities teachers engage in when they say they are reading and doing research. In terms of reading, teachers cited a range of sources they consulted from academic journals to practical newsletters; it is likely (and there is some limited evidence in the interviews of this) that material considered to be research in some of these outlets is not (i.e. articles which suggest practical teaching ideas but which are not the outcome of empirical activity). In terms of doing research, I asked teachers in the written follow-up about this and the examples provided suggested a varied range of activities from giving a presentation at an international conference on 'How to teach C.S. Lewis as literature in Higher Education' to investigations of language learning using tests and questionnaires and employing statistical analyses. One teacher who said she did research 'sometimes' and who I asked for an example said 'I haven't done "real" research as it involves an incredible amount of work and presentation at the end'; what she had done was to contribute to research by providing data 'for someone's thesis'. Interestingly, then, while teachers would benefit from more inclusive understandings of what research can entail, at the same time a greater awareness of key characteristics of research would enable teachers to avoid overly broad views of what research involves by distinguishing between professional development activities generally and that sub-group of such activities which can legitimately be called research.

In explaining why they do research teachers cited motives which were primarily personal, pedagogical, and professional, with much less emphasis on external drivers such as promotion and employer pressure. At the same time, though, over 40 per cent of the teachers doing research said it was part of a course they were studying on. This raises questions about the role which external pressures, such as course requirements, can play, in promoting research engagement more widely among teachers. If teachers commonly report that they do not do research because time and support are lacking, then a formal course of study may provide a way forward here, by providing a supportive and structured route for teachers to do research. Support for this view is seen in Borg (2006a), which is based on the dissertations conducted on an in-service BA TESOL program in Oman, and Phipps (2006), which reports papers based on MA projects done in Turkey. In both cases, without the formal requirements driving the teachers, the research would not have been completed and published [Watkins (2006) also found that formal study was for many teachers an important starting point for doing research]. Thus, although the notion of teachers autonomously designing, conducting, and sharing research projects is appealing, the lack of structure, support, and external pressure that such a situation may involve can at the same time hinder the completion of a good-quality piece of research.

This study has also identified a number of reasons why teachers said they do not read and do research. A lack of knowledge was an important factor; Atay (2008) refers to teachers' concerns about their lack of knowledge about research at the start of a research-oriented in-service course, while Henson (1996) suggests that teachers' perceived lack of knowledge about research means they have limited confidence in their ability to do research. Foster (1999: 395), in his analysis of teacher research projects funded by the Teacher Training Agency in the UK, also concludes that, due at least partly to limitations in knowledge about doing research, 'even teachers who are highly motivated find it difficult to produce high quality research'. It was, though, a lack of time which emerged as the major reason for teachers' limited research engagement (it was cited by almost 82 per cent of those teachers who said they do not do research).

## CONCLUSION

The literature is replete with persuasive arguments in favor of the benefits to teachers of being research-engaged; the reality remains though that teacher research—systematic, rigorous enquiry by teachers into their own professional contexts, and which is made public—is a minority activity in ELT. This is not a criticism of teachers, as there are clearly powerful interacting factors at play in shaping the current situation. These factors have typically been described largely with reference to teachers' unfavorable working conditions. However, this study shows that barriers also exist which are attitudinal, conceptual, and procedural in nature. Thus, one common issue to emerge from the international sample in this study is that teachers' understandings of what research is are not aligned with the forms of systematic inquiry which they can feasibly and productively engage in. Teachers may thus have inappropriate or unrealistic notions of the kind of inquiry teacher research involves. This has obvious implications for the need for awareness-raising work with teachers and through which their perspectives on research can be reviewed. Additionally, teachers may lack both the knowledge and practical skills which must underpin good quality research. These limitations in teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills (particularly when combined with unsupportive institutional conditions) shed light on why for so many teachers reading and (to a greater degree) doing research are not seen to be feasible or even desirable activities. Productive teacher research engagement, then, is unlikely to occur without the organizational, collegial, emotional, intellectual, and practical support structures which are needed not only to initiate it but also more importantly to sustain it and enhance its quality.

Clearly, many issues raised here suggest further areas of enquiry. Larger scale but localized studies of research engagement can deepen understandings of how research is perceived in particular contexts and help promote more informed consideration of feasible forms of teacher research engagement in those contexts (and I am very aware that in some contexts such engagement

will be neither a priority nor feasible). At a more specific level, of interest too is examining not just how often teachers do and read research but what the research they do is, how they read research (Zeuli 1994; Bartels 2003), what impact it has on practice [see Rankin and Becker (2006) for a recent study of the impact of reading research in a foreign language teaching context], and how teachers reconcile and meld [to use terms from Thomas (2004)] research knowledge with their own practical knowledge.

Overall, the insights provided here can fulfill an important awareness-raising function among individuals involved in initiatives promoting teacher research engagement. Such initiatives are more likely to succeed when they are based on—and take as their starting point—an understanding of the conceptions of research teachers hold and of the contextual influences which shape the extent to which teacher research engagement is feasible. Such understanding remains limited in the field of ELT, but empirical interest in these issues is growing and this article has pointed to many lines of inquiry which can be productively and more specifically explored in local ELT contexts around the world. The investigative strategies highlighted here can also be adapted and applied in such contexts to support continuing work of the kind reported here.

## APPENDIX 1. QUESTIONNAIRE

### English language teachers' views of research

What does 'research' mean to you and what role does it play in your life as a professional English language teacher? These are important questions in our field—especially at a time when in many countries teachers are being encouraged to do research as a form of professional development. This International Survey of English Language Teachers asks you for your views on these issues and will take 15–20 minutes to complete. Participation in this study is voluntary. Thank you for your interest in contributing.

#### SECTION 1: SCENARIOS

The purpose of this section is to elicit your views on the kinds of activities which can be called research. There are no right or wrong answers. Read each description below and choose one answer to say to what extent you feel the activity described is an example of research.

1. A teacher noticed that an activity she used in class did not work well. She thought about this after the lesson and made some notes in her diary. She tried something different in her next lesson. This time the activity was more successful.

<i>Definitely not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Definitely research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
---	---	---	---

2. A teacher read about a new approach to teaching writing and decided to try it out in his class over a period of two weeks. He video recorded some of his lessons and collected samples of learners' written work. He analyzed this information then presented the results to his colleagues at a staff meeting.

<i>Definitely not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Definitely research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
---	---	---	---

3. A teacher was doing an MA course. She read several books and articles about grammar teaching then wrote an essay of 6000 words in which she discussed the main points in those readings.

<i>Definitely not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Definitely research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
---	---	---	---

4. A university lecturer gave a questionnaire about the use of computers in language teaching to 500 teachers. Statistics were used to analyze the questionnaires. The lecturer wrote an article about the work in an academic journal.

<i>Definitely not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Definitely research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
---	---	---	---

5. Two teachers were both interested in discipline. They observed each other's lessons once a week for three months and made notes about how they controlled their classes. They discussed their notes and wrote a short article about what they learned for the newsletter of the national language teachers' association.

<i>Definitely not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Definitely research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
---	---	---	---

6. To find out which of two methods for teaching vocabulary was more effective, a teacher first tested two classes. Then for four weeks she taught vocabulary to each class using a different method. After that she tested both groups again and compared the results to the first test. She decided to use the method which worked best in her own teaching.

<i>Definitely not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Definitely research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
---	---	---	---

7. A headmaster met every teacher individually and asked them about their working conditions. The head made notes about the teachers' answers. He used his notes to write a report which he submitted to the Ministry of Education.

<i>Definitely not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Definitely research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
---	---	---	---

8. Mid-way through a course, a teacher gave a class of 30 students a feedback form. The next day, five students handed in their completed forms. The teacher read these and used the information to decide what to do in the second part of the course.

<i>Definitely not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Definitely research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
---	---	---	---

9. A teacher trainer asked his trainees to write an essay about ways of motivating teenage learners of English. After reading the assignments the trainer decided to write an article on the trainees' ideas about motivation. He submitted his article to a professional journal.

<i>Definitely not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Definitely research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
---	---	---	---

10. The Head of the English department wanted to know what teachers thought of the new course book. She gave all teachers a questionnaire to complete, studied their responses, then presented the results at a staff meeting.

<i>Definitely not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably not research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Probably research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Definitely research</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
---	---	---	---

## SECTION 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD QUALITY RESEARCH

1. Here is a list of characteristics that research may have. Tick **ONE** box for each to give your opinion about how important it is in making a piece of research 'good'.

	<i>Unimportant</i>	<i>Moderately important</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Very important</i>
<i>a. A large number of people are studied</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>b. A large volume of information is collected</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>c. Experiments are used</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>d. Hypotheses are tested</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>e. Information is analysed statistically</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>f. Questionnaires are used</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>g. The researcher is objective</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>h. The results apply to many ELT contexts</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>i. The results are made public</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>j. The results give teachers ideas they can use</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>k. Variables are controlled</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. If there are any other characteristics which in your opinion a study must have for it to be called 'good' research, please list them here.

### SECTION 3: RESEARCH CULTURE

Tick ONE box for each statement below to give your opinion about the general attitude to research in your school.

	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Don't Know	Agree	Agree strongly
<i>Teachers do research themselves</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>The management encourages teachers to do research</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Teachers feel that doing research is an important part of their job</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Teachers have access to research books and journals</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Teachers have opportunities to learn about current research</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Teachers talk about research</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Teachers are given support to attend ELT conferences</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Time for doing research is built into teachers' workloads</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Teachers read published research</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### SECTION 4: READING RESEARCH

1. How frequently do you read published language teaching research? (Tick ONE)

Never <input type="checkbox"/>	Rarely <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Often <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------	---------------------------------	------------------------------------	--------------------------------

**If you chose Rarely or Never go straight to Question 4 in this section.**

2. You said that you read published language teaching research *often* or *sometimes*. Which of the following do you read? (Tick all that apply)

- Books*
- Academic journals (e.g. TESOL Quarterly)*
- Professional Journals (e.g. ELT Journal)*
- Professional Magazines (e.g. ET Professional)*
- Newsletters (e.g. IATEFL SIG Newsletters)*
- Web-based sources of research*
- Other (please specify)*



3. To what extent does the research you read influence your teaching?  
Choose **ONE**.

- It has no influence on what I do in the classroom*
- It has a slight influence on what I do in the classroom*
- It has a moderate influence on what I do in the classroom*
- It has a fairly strong influence on what I do in the classroom*
- It has a strong influence on what I do in the classroom*

**Now go to Section 5**

4. In Question 1 of this section you said that you read published research *rarely* or *never*. Here are some possible reasons for this. Tick those that are **true for you**.

- a. *I am not interested in research*
- b. *I do not have time*
- c. *I do not have access to books and journals*
- d. *I find published research hard to understand*
- e. *Published research does not give me practical advice for the classroom*
- f. *Other reasons (please specify)*

### SECTION 5: DOING RESEARCH

1. How frequently do you do research yourself? (Tick ONE)

Never <input type="checkbox"/>	Rarely <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Often <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------	---------------------------------	------------------------------------	--------------------------------

**If you chose Rarely or Never go straight to Question 3 in this section.**

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

I do research ...

- a. *As part of a course I am studying on*
- b. *Because I enjoy it*
- c. *Because it is good for my professional development*
- d. *Because it will help me get a promotion*
- e. *Because my employer expects me to*
- f. *Because other teachers can learn from the findings of my work*
- g. *To contribute to the improvement of the school generally*
- h. *To find better ways of teaching*
- i. *To solve problems in my teaching*
- j. *Other reasons (please specify)*

**Now go to Section 6**

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

I don't do research because ...

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| a. I do not know enough about research methods                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. My job is to teach not to do research                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. I do not have time to do research                             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. My employer discourages it                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. I am not interested in doing research                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. I need someone to advise me but no one is available           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. Most of my colleagues do not do research                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h. I do not have access to the books and journals I need         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i. The learners would not co-operate if I did research in class  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| j. Other teachers would not co-operate if I asked for their help | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| k. Other reasons (please specify)                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## SECTION 6: ABOUT YOURSELF

1. Country where you work: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Years of experience as an English language teacher (Tick ONE)

0-4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5-9 <input type="checkbox"/>	10-14 <input type="checkbox"/>	15-19 <input type="checkbox"/>	20-24 <input type="checkbox"/>	25+ <input type="checkbox"/>
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3. Highest relevant qualification to ELT (Tick ONE)

Certificate <input type="checkbox"/>	Diploma <input type="checkbox"/>	Bachelor's <input type="checkbox"/>	Master's <input type="checkbox"/>	Doctorate <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>
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4. Type of institution you teach English in most often (Tick ONE)

Private <input type="checkbox"/>	State <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>
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5. Is your language school or centre part of a University? (Tick ONE)

Yes  No

6. The age of the learners you teach most often (Tick ONE)

12 or younger <input type="checkbox"/>	13-19 <input type="checkbox"/>	20-25 <input type="checkbox"/>	26+ <input type="checkbox"/>
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7. How would you describe your work as an English language teacher? (Tick ONE)

I teach English full-time

I teach English part-time

This completes the questionnaire. Thank you for taking the time to respond.  
Dr Simon Borg, School of Education, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK

## APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Scenarios**

*In Section 1 of the survey you were asked to say to what extent you felt each activity described was research (on a scale of definitely not research, probably not research, probably research, and definitely research). Here I ask you to explain some of your answers.*

**Q1. You rated the scenario below as **definitely research**:**

To find out which of two methods for teaching vocabulary was more effective, a teacher first tested two classes. Then for four weeks she taught vocabulary to each class using a different method. After that she tested both groups again and compared the results to the first test. She decided to use the method which worked best in her own teaching.

Why did you feel this scenario was definitely research?

*Because it was trialling and analyzing different strategies to see which was the best strategy to use to improve teaching—so she was researching the best way to do something.*

**Q2. You rated the scenario below as **definitely not research**:**

A teacher trainer asked his trainees to write an essay about ways of motivating teenage learners of English. After reading the assignments the trainer decided to write an article on the trainees' ideas about motivation. He submitted his article to a professional journal.

Why did you feel this scenario was definitely not research?

*Not research because the trainer had simply collated ideas. He had not trialled them to see how students reacted. Whether they were as good as the trainees suggested and whether they really did motivate the students and why they did. No analysis.*

**Q3. You rated the scenario below as **probably not research**:**

A university lecturer gave a questionnaire about the use of computers in language teaching to 500 teachers. Statistics were used to analyse the questionnaires. The lecturer wrote an article about the work in an academic journal.

Why did you feel this scenario was probably not research?

*If the questions were asking opinions and who uses what and is it successful etc. I would say not research. To me research needs to be looking at reactions. This seems to be just giving how many do this and that and like this and that. It does not come up with a tried and tested information that can be used to produce change in some form.*

## Characteristics of Good Research

*In Section 2 of the survey you were asked to give your opinion about how important a list of characteristics were in making a piece of research 'good'. Here I ask you to explain some of your answers.*

Q4. You said that 'hypotheses are tested' was **very important**. Please explain why you feel this is a very important characteristic of good research.

*Because surely research is based on a hypothesis and you need to test this to produce an outcome of the research.*

Q5. You said that 'the researcher is objective' was **very important**.  
(a) Please explain what 'objective' means for you in relation to research.

*Well you don't want to make your research and results fit your hypothesis just to make it look as though you have an excellent result and it is a neat and tidy piece of research.*

(b) Why do you feel an objective researcher is a very important characteristic of good research?

*Because the research then should be unbiased.*

## Doing Research

*In Section 5 of the survey you were asked how often you did research.*

Q6. You said that you do research 'sometimes'.  
(a) What does 'sometimes' mean for you—i.e. how often?

*Not often. I like to try out different ways of presenting materials or I have been putting simple stories to music for our illiterate Sudanese to help them memorise text. So we sing it. It is a kind of research, very simple I wouldn't say though that I am doing research into helping the Sudanese learn more effectively because I guess I haven't formalised it.*

(b) Can you briefly describe an example of research you have done?

*I haven't done 'real' research as it involves an incredible amount of work and presentation at the end etc. Often the research we are asked to do with time allowance—never enough is not relevant or I feel there is often a hidden agenda or the final results we never hear about. Or it is for someone's thesis! Yes I am a bit cynical about this.*

## NOTES

- 1 Cross-country comparisons were avoided as generalizations about particular countries based on the non-probability and small sub-groups involved here would not be meaningful. I acknowledge, though, that the groups studied here worked in diverse educational settings and that the distinct contextual features of these settings are inevitably not given close attention in survey-based analyses of this kind.
- 2 For example, if there were 30 volunteers from a country, one-third of these (10) were selected randomly and followed up; if there were 15 volunteers from another country, five were selected.
- 3 Colleagues with experience of research have pointed out to me that the items in Section 2 of the questionnaire reflect scientific forms of research and that this may have constrained teachers' responses; I agree that a number of the characteristics presented derive from conventional notions of enquiry, but teachers did have the option of indicating that these were less important in defining good quality research if that is what they felt; the option to identify other indicators of good quality research was also provided. Having said that, in future versions of this item I will consider ways of varying the range of characteristics offered here.
- 4 Following Salkind (2004: 88), here I treat correlations of less than 0.4 as weak and those between 0.4 and 0.6 as moderate.
- 5 A reviewer noted that by publishing this article in *Applied Linguistics*, I am contributing to the problems of accessibility highlighted here in that this is an academic journal that most teachers will not read. My audience here, though, are academic readers who may be in a position to use the insights from this study to support research engagement among the teachers they work with. I have also written widely on teacher research engagement in professional outlets (Borg 2003, 2006b, 2007c, 2008).

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