Regular Article

Engagement with research: A qualitative study of English department teachers' experiences and insights

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A B S T R A C T

This study delves into the engagement with research among university-level English department teachers. It examines their reading habits, literature preferences, and the influence of these activities on their professional practices. Through in-depth interviews with teachers from four reputable universities, this research offers insights into the frequency, format, and resources of engagement with research, as well as the challenges and reasons behind their varying levels of engagement. The findings drawn from this study contribute to the current body of research on teachers' engagement with research. They offer insights that may help improve educational programs or policies aimed at enhancing engagement with research in the academic community. The study, while offering valuable insights, acknowledges its limitations and suggests future research to broaden the scope and understanding of research engagement across different academic fields and settings.

1. Introduction

Engagement with research, as described by Borg (2010), involves reading and using research. This is founded on the notion that teachers who are well-prepared with knowledge and skills are better positioned to enhance their students' learning. However, engagement with research in language teaching has sparked controversy. Some scholars such as Maley (2016) and Medgyes (2017) believe that researchers' advice is of minimal value to language teachers and argue that teachers should instead rely on their experiences and intuition. In contrast, others (e.g., Kostoulas, 2018; Paran, 2017) state that this reliance on experience could result in the profession's stagnation. These scholars believe that research has revealed insights missed by teachers' intuition, contributing to improved language learning and teaching.

In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition that the direct relevance of research to teaching practice may not always be immediately evident. Borg (2010) suggested that research's contribution to teacher practice is "at best facilitative rather than determinative" (p. 421). Engagement with research, therefore, is pivotal since teachers should utilize insights offered by research reports and critically assess research information themselves (Kostoulas, 2018; McMillan & Wergin, 2010). As emphasized by Borg (2010), teachers must be critical

consumers of educational research to inform their instructional decisions.

Yet, studies explicitly focusing on engagement with research remain rare in many contexts and are neither a priority nor feasible (Borg, 2010). There has been limited effort to understand language teachers' practices concerning engagement with research, specifically in regard to what they read, why they read, and how their engagement can be facilitated (Borg, 2010).

In response, the present paper aims to examine English-language teachers' reading and usage of published research for professional development. While studies in various countries (e.g. Borg, 2010; Hemsley-Brown & Sharp, 2003), including a study in Dhaka, Bangladesh by Anwaruddin and Pervin (2015) and another one in Indonesia by Wulyani et al. (2021) have explored this topic, a closer examination of the Indonesian context, with its distinctive international significance, rich tradition in English as a foreign language teaching, and extensive university network, promises deeper insights.

Furthermore, there is an emerging call in the field of ELT for moving away from 'one-size-fits-all' methodologies towards an understanding of locally appropriate practices and the particularities of specific contexts. Recognizing the need for context-specific, localized studies such as suggested by Borg (2009) and Borg and Liu (2013), this study

emphasizes the research engagement of university teachers and full-time faculty members, whose careers are intrinsically linked to research productivity.

This study is situated within English Departments of universities in Surabaya, Indonesia, and aims to explore the extent to which university-level teachers read research, and if not, the justifications they provide. Additionally, it investigates the barriers to reading research and how these teachers incorporate research findings into their professional practice. The focus on these particular universities is grounded in their status as the oldest institutions with English departments in Surabaya, providing a unique opportunity to investigate research engagement practices in a setting with a long-standing tradition of ELT.

The findings are intended to be specific to this context, not generalizable, but may offer value to those promoting teachers' engagement with research. The empirical evidence will highlight the impact of reading research on teachers' professional activities and contribute to initiatives aimed at fostering research engagement at the university level. This study's uniqueness also lies in its Indonesian context, adding a distinct voice to the literature and offering a perspective potentially divergent from previous studies. Furthermore, it aligns with the urgent need for professional development within the Southeast Asia or ASEAN community.

Reflecting Borg's (2013) framework for teachers' engagement with research, this study delves into teachers' reading habits, the obstacles they face in engaging with research, and the influence of reading on their professional practice. It aims to serve as a starting point for a more comprehensive evaluation of teachers' engagement with research, adding a unique Indonesian perspective to the literature and addressing the need for professional development within the region.

2. Method

In this study, ten individual in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face with English teachers from four English departments of four reputable universities in Surabaya, Indonesia. Surabaya, known as Indonesia's second-largest city and a key educational centre in the east, offers a unique and relevant setting for this research. The selection of these institutions, which includes one state/public university and three private universities, is based on their long-standing history in the academic field including ELT. All four are accredited by the Indonesian government, reflecting their high standards in education: three of these universities are rated with an Excellence grade and one with a B grade. Similarly, their English departments, also accredited and established for over 20 years, follow the same pattern of distinction — three with Excellence grades and one with a B grade. The choice of these institutions is deliberate, intending to explore the research engagement practices in settings that have been well-established. This approach is to capture a broad spectrum of research engagement practices within the city's academic landscape.

This study involved ten teachers from various English departments across four reputable universities in Surabaya, Indonesia, confidentially referred to as T1 to T10 in this manuscript. The selection of these teachers was made with a focus on diversity in teaching experience and academic qualifications. Ranging in age from 30 to 60 years, the participants comprised 6 female and 4 male English teachers. Their teaching experience varied from 6 to 35 years, with the most experienced teacher being a full professor with 35 years of experience. Among the participants, two teachers held doctoral degrees, while the others had achieved master's degrees in either ELT or English literature. They are teaching a variety of subjects, such as sociolinguistics, English language teaching methodology, film studies, creative copywriting, or English language skills. In terms of academic ranks, which in Indonesia are classified as lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor, the teachers held positions ranging from assistant to full professor. The varied demographic profile ensured a comprehensive exploration of the research questions, drawing from a wide range of individual experiences and insights.

The selection and recruitment of the participants in this study were facilitated through snowball sampling, a technique where initial participants recommend others relevant to the research questions, thus creating a chain of recommendations (Clark et al., 2021). The decision to employ snowball sampling was influenced by its appropriateness for in-depth data collection from a focused sample, allowing for a deeper, more nuanced understanding (Clark et al., 2021). This approach is particularly effective in qualitative studies where the richness of the data is prioritized over the quantity of participants. Unlike the study by Wulyani et al. (2021), which covered a broader scope with 20 interviewees coming some high schools and universities from around Indonesia, this study's narrower focus on university-level English teachers allowed for a more detailed exploration of individual experiences within this specific academic context.

In selecting only ten participants, this study aimed to achieve a balance between diversity and depth. Given the qualitative nature of the research, a smaller sample size is often more manageable and allows for comprehensive, in-depth data collection and analysis. This approach ensures that each participant's detailed insights and experiences are thoroughly explored, contributing to the richness and depth of the data. This size is sufficient to reach data saturation in qualitative research, where no new themes or insights emerge from additional interviews. Additionally, the selected participants represent a diverse range of experiences, qualifications, and perspectives within the field, thus ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the topic.

The data collection process in this study was conducted through semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen to delve into the participants' lived experiences and the meanings they derived from these experiences, as outlined by Seidman (2006). The semi-structured format of the interviews was inspired by and aligned with the approaches recommended by Borg (2010), Anwaruddin and Pervin (2015), and Wulyani et al. (2021). These authors advocate for an interview structure that offers flexibility in exploring specific research themes while also giving participants the opportunity to expand on topics they find important.

The interviews were conducted offline, ensuring a more personal and engaging interaction, which is conducive to exploring perspectives and experiences. All interviews were held in locations convenient for the teachers between August and November 2022, with each session averaging 45 minutes.

Recognizing the bilingual proficiency of the participants, interviews were conducted in the language each interviewee was most comfortable with, be it Indonesian, English, or a mix of both. This approach was intended to ensure that participants could express themselves freely, thereby enhancing the quality and authenticity of the data collected.

In line with ethical research guidelines, permission was sought from each participant prior to conducting the interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded to prevent miscommunication and ensure accuracy. To maintain confidentiality, teachers' names were not used in the transcripts or subsequent analysis; instead, symbols (T for teacher) followed by numbers 1–10 were employed. This method ensured the privacy of the participants throughout the research process.

In the analysis of the transcribed interviews, the first step involved identifying the themes using a combination of Ailyze (https://ailyze.streamlit.app/) and manual thematic analysis. Ailyze was employed to quickly sift through the data, using its algorithmic capabilities to identify initial themes. However, recognizing the limitations of purely automated analysis, this initial identification by Ailyze was refined through manual thematic analysis. This manual process allowed for a deeper exploration and verification of the themes, ensuring they accurately represented the complexities and nuances of the participants' experiences.

Once the themes were established through this combined approach, Taguette (https://www.taguette.org/) was utilized in the next phase of the analysis. This tool's functionality for highlighting and tagging was

instrumental in organizing the data. With the themes already identified, Taguette was used to systematically go through the transcripts and highlight specific text segments that corresponded to each theme.

This methodical process, beginning with theme identification through Ailyze and manual analysis, followed by the detailed organization of data using Taguette, provided a comprehensive and accurate thematic exploration. It ensured that the study's analysis was not only systematic but also deeply aligned with the identified themes, capturing the depth and richness of the participants' experiences and insights as per the guidelines proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

3. Findings

This study reveals key insights into the engagement with research among university-level English teachers in Indonesia. The findings revolve around three main themes: Reading Habits, Barriers to Research Engagement, and the Impact of Reading on Professional Practice. Each theme interlinks to present a comprehensive picture of the current state of university-level teachers' engagement with research.

3.1. Reading habits

This study highlights varied reading habits among teachers, reflecting their commitment to staying updated with research while also considering the practical and theoretical needs. Their reading frequency was largely occasional, driven by specific needs such as preparing for their research or for teaching. Teachers had different preferences for reading formats, with some favoring digital formats for their accessibility and others preferring print for its concentration and retention benefits. Furthermore, they accessed a wide range of resources, including academic journals, teaching magazines, books, and online websites, indicating a comprehensive approach to selecting reading materials that cater to both practical application and theoretical knowledge. The following subsections provide a detailed examination of these habits.

3.1.1. Reading frequency

In the context of this study, a common expectation is that teachers remain up-to-date with developments in their field through engagement with research articles. However, the findings revealed a different reality among the participating teachers. Regular reading of research, such as on a daily or weekly basis, was not a common practice. Instead, teachers in this study reported irregular interactions with research literature, primarily driven by their immediate academic or teaching needs.

The teachers highlighted the absence of dedicated time for reading research in their routine schedules. Research reading was often relegated to a task undertaken only when it was directly relevant to their immediate work. For example, T7 noted, "While there is an intent to read more consistently, the challenge is finding the time. Currently, my engagement with research articles is occasional, driven by the need to find information for my research." Similarly, T4 commented, "I do not engage in regular reading. The subjects I teach don't change frequently, so the need for constant updates through research isn't felt strongly."

This pattern of occasional and need-based reading of research articles contrasts with the anticipated regular engagement with scholarly literature. Teachers in this study tended to read research only when it was required for developing their own research papers or when searching for materials related to their teaching subjects, rather than as a routine practice to stay informed about ongoing developments in their field.

3.1.2. Reading format

Despite the widespread availability of digital devices and Internet access, a notable preference for print over online formats was observed among some teachers. These teachers found that reading in print format increased their ability to focus and understand the material more effectively. T10 emphasized this point, "There is an ability to focus and assimilate information more proficiently when reading from a printed page, as it facilitates the marking or annotation of printed materials."

Conversely, several teachers expressed a preference for digital formats due to their accessibility and ease of use. T3 highlighted the benefits of digital resources being available "around the clock" and accessible "from diverse devices with internet connectivity." Similarly, T6 mentioned the preference for online reading because it "facilitates more straightforward searching," especially with subscriptions to online databases and access to materials either freely or at a reduced cost.

The findings of this study indicate a significant difference in reading format preferences among teachers involved in this study. While some display a preference for print due to its focus-enhancing qualities, others lean towards digital formats for their accessibility and search ease.

3.1.3. Reading resources

Teachers in this study utilized a variety of reading materials, encompassing books, journals, conference proceedings, teaching magazines, web-based resources, and non-ELT sources. While there was a variety of materials used, a common thread was the use of resources that provided insights into educational practices and trends. The teachers' choices, encompassing a wide range of material types, demonstrate an effort to balance practical teaching needs with theoretical knowledge.

3.1.3.1. Journals. In this study, teachers frequently referenced academic journals as their primary resource. T1 described journals as "reliable … high quality and relevant for those seeking information on specific topics." T8 emphasized their role in keeping up-to-date, noting that "reading journals can aid teachers in staying current on the latest research and best practices in ELT."

The criteria for selecting journals were also discussed. T10 focused on the importance of impact factors, saying, "Journals with high impact factors are generally perceived as higher quality." T5 highlighted the role of editorial boards, stating, "A robust editorial board … plays an essential role in the quality and credibility of a journal." T7 mentioned the relevance of focus and scope, asserting, "It is crucial to consider the focus and scope of the journal."

The emphasis on academic journals by the teachers, coupled with their considerations of impact factors, editorial boards, and journal focus, reflects their commitment to accessing high-quality and relevant research in their field.

3.1.3.2. Teaching magazines. In this study, several teachers expressed a preference for articles in teaching magazines offering practical teaching ideas. These magazines, like Forum, Modern English Teacher, and Humanising Language Teaching, focus on classroom application rather than empirical research. T3 mentioned, "Teaching magazines focus on presenting ideas and materials for classroom use," and T9 added, "They include articles, lesson plans, and other resources directly relevant to teachers' work."

When considering what magazines to read, teachers emphasized the importance of the publication's reputation. T4 commented, "By considering the reputation of the magazine, teachers can help ensure that they are accessing materials of high quality." Additionally, T1 said, "I would scrutinize the publisher," and T5 remarked, "I would check whether the magazine presents articles written by top scholars in our field." T10 also emphasized the importance of overall quality, stating, "Does the magazine include articles that are directly relevant to the work of teachers? Are the articles well-written and easy to understand?"

The teachers' preference for practical, application-focused magazines reflects their preference for resources that directly support their classroom practices, highlighting the importance of resource relevance and quality in their reading choices.

3.1.3.3. Books. Several teachers in this study identified books as a key

reading resource. T4 highlighted their advantage, stating, "Books … afford a more expansive overview … for a comprehensive understanding." T8 added that books are often "more accessible and comprehensible than academic articles," offering clear explanations of complex concepts.

When selecting books, teachers focused on subject matter and author reputation. T2 emphasized the importance of relevance: "It is essential to select a book that is relevant to my needs." T7 also noted the significance of author reputation and reviews in determining a book's quality and relevance, mentioning that books by experts are "more likely to be well-crafted and dependable."

Teachers' preferences for using books as a primary resource reflect their desire for in-depth and accessible information. The careful selection of relevant subject matter and reputable authors demonstrates a thoughtful approach to choosing resources that are informative and useful for professional needs.

3.1.3.4. Conference proceedings. Teachers in the study found value in conference proceedings for staying current with research. T1 mentioned, "Conference proceedings are valuable … to remain current on the latest research." T9 highlighted their practicality: "Many papers offer practical ideas and are penned by field experts."

When choosing conference proceedings, teachers considered their relevance and the reputation of the conference. This was noted by T2 and T8, who emphasized the importance of these factors in ensuring the usefulness and credibility of the information.

The use of conference proceedings by teachers underscores their commitment to staying informed about the latest developments in their field, with a focus on practical application and credibility of sources.

3.1.3.5. Websites. Teachers recognized websites as significant resources for teaching and educational materials. T2 noted their value for practical ideas, stating, "Websites focusing on teaching and education can be a good source of ideas and strategies." T5 elaborated on specific sites like the British Council Teaching English website and the TESOL International Association website, mentioning their wide range of resources, including "lesson plans, activities, and articles on current issues."

In choosing websites, teachers emphasized the importance of the publisher's reputation, the author's credentials, and the user-friendliness of the site. T7 pointed out the need to check "the credentials of the author," T9 discussed "the publisher of the website and its affiliation," and T3 highlighted the importance of "websites that are easy to use and navigate."

The use of websites as a resource demonstrates teachers' understanding of the convenience, applicability, and availability of online content. It also highlights the importance of credibility and user-friendliness in their selection criteria or process.

3.1.3.6. Non-ELT sources. Some teachers in the study explored non-ELT fields to enhance their content knowledge, recognizing the value of cross-disciplinary reading. T1 described using resources outside the ELT domain, especially for topics like cross-cultural communication. T1 shared, "I read any articles relevant to improving my subject understanding. For cross-cultural communication, I found examples in a business communication journal, not in ELT publications."

The integration of non-ELT sources by some teachers highlights their pursuit of a broader, more diverse knowledge base. This demonstrates openness to different disciplines that enrich their teaching and enhance their understanding of the subject matter.

3.1.4. Reasons for reading

Throughout the interviews, it became evident that the teachers had a range of motivations for engaging with research. These primary reasons included a desire to gather ideas for their research projects, seek assistance in academic writing, enhance their content knowledge, improve teaching practices, and develop critical thinking skills.

3.1.4.1. To get ideas for research. The study revealed that a primary reason for teachers engaging with research was to gather ideas for their own projects. T2 expressed this motivation, stating, "I have an interest in the role of technology in language learning … I was inspired to undertake my research project on this subject." Similarly, T10 emphasized the value of research in identifying areas for new projects: "A teacher … should peruse multiple research articles … to recognize the necessity for additional research."

Teachers' engagement with research literature is an important aspect of a teacher's professional growth and development. It helps to inspire and inform their own research endeavours, showing their dedication to continuously improving their skills and knowledge in their respective fields.

3.1.4.2. To improve academic writing skills. Teachers interviewed in this study expressed that reading research was key to enhancing their academic writing skills. T1 noted the learning benefits: "I discern the typical structure of a research article by studying others' works … I become acquainted with the necessary academic phrases." T8 discussed how reading aids in understanding writing conventions: "Reading acquaints me with writing styles and conventions … It assists me in structuring my arguments." Similarly, T4 highlighted the insights gained into research designs: "Through reading articles that utilize observational designs, teachers can comprehend the types of research questions addressable with this design."

Engagement with research publications is a valuable resource for teachers to enhance their academic writing skills. It enables them to gain insights into various aspects of scholarly writing, such as style, research design, and methodology.

3.1.4.3. To improve content knowledge. The participants of the study highlighted the role of research engagement in enhancing content knowledge. T6 reflected on the benefits of reading research articles: "High-quality research articles … enable us to remain current on the latest developments. For instance, in sociolinguistics, recent studies on novel language practices are intriguing." T2 discussed how reading helps keep up with technological advancements: "I need to regularly refresh my understanding … Articles on the evolution of chatbots and virtual assistants have provided insights into how these can complement traditional teaching methods."

Engaging with research literature is crucial for teachers to enhance their content knowledge and stay updated on the latest developments and innovative practices in their teaching fields.

3.1.4.4. To improve teaching practices. Teachers in this study identified engagement with research as key to enhancing their teaching practices. T5 mentioned the practical impact of research on teaching methods: "From the creative writing book I read, I learned that creative writing classes are mostly done in workshop format." T9 shared how research influenced their perspective on assessments: "I came across a research article … on alternative forms of assessment … I am eager to explore how these can be used in my teaching."

Reading research publications can provide teachers with valuable ideas and insights that can enhance their teaching practices. This highlights the importance of practical application of research in real-world educational settings.

3.1.4.5. To improve critical thinking. Teachers acknowledged that reading research enhances their critical thinking abilities. T3 shared the impact of research on teaching methods: "Reading articles on project-based learning versus lecturing made me reflect on my current methods and consider alternatives." T7 spoke about the influence of research on understanding student-teacher relationships: "An article on

student learning factors made me realize the need to connect more with my students."

Engagement with research plays a crucial role in developing teachers' critical thinking skills. It allows them to analyze and evaluate various educational methods and reflect on their own teaching strategies.

3.2. Barriers to research engagement

Considering the significance of teachers' engagement with research, particularly reading research, an essential question emerges: why do teachers appear to be engaging in infrequent or non-extensive reading? This query leads to an examination of the barriers that may hinder teachers from actively participating in reading scholarly works.

There are four major reasons why some teachers who participated in this study did not read research regularly. These include the availability of time, access to materials, motivation to read, and the practical relevance and language used in the articles.

3.2.1. Lack of time

In the study, teachers frequently cited the lack of time as a major barrier to engaging with research. T1 described the challenge: "I simply do not have enough time … I teach 20 hours per week and need to prepare for those classes in addition to other duties." Similarly, T8 mentioned the difficulty in balancing multiple roles: "My current duties include teaching, academic advising, and working on accreditation … It is hard to find balance." The issue of time scarcity was not limited to professional responsibilities. T9 and T5 pointed out additional challenges such as working extra hours and managing family responsibilities, further compounding the difficulty in finding time for reading research.

The issue of time constraints poses a significant challenge in academia. Teachers, despite their interest and need to stay updated with research, often find themselves prioritizing immediate responsibilities over research engagement. This can have an impact on their professional development and the overall academic pursuit of knowledge.

3.2.2. Lack of access to research publications

Lack of access to research publications was identified as a significant barrier by the teachers. T2 highlighted limited availability in their university's database, with only a few ELT journals accessible. Similarly, other teachers pointed out restricted access to research platforms like ERIC, JSTOR, or EBSCO, and a scarcity of reputable ELT books or journals. T10 spoke about the financial constraints: "Some papers I wanted to read were online, but I had to pay more than USD 30 to download them." This reflects broader financial limitations faced by teachers, especially in universities where funding for resources is limited.

The findings underscore the challenge that limited access to research publications presents in the academic world. This barrier hampers teachers' efforts to stay informed and engage meaningfully with current research, impacting their professional development and, in a broader sense, the advancement of educational practice.

3.2.3. Lack of (practical) relevance

The teachers interviewed expressed frustration regarding the lack of practical relevance in ELT research. T3 shared their disappointment with the applicability of research ideas: "Before teaching, I tried to use corpora for teaching grammar, but the outcomes weren't as good as expected." T6 also noted the challenge of applying research in their context: "The ideas and conclusions in research are often detached from our local contexts." T1 further highlighted the confusion caused by contradictory research findings: "Some research findings contradict others, leading to confusion." These sentiments underscore a gap between theoretical research and its practical application in the classroom.

This gap between theoretical research and its practical application in

ELT indicates a challenge within the field. The experiences of the teachers in this study highlight a distinct divide, underscoring the importance of engaging with research that not only enhances theoretical understanding but also aligns with the practical aspects of teaching.

3.2.4. Highly use of the academic language

The study revealed that while teachers prefer reading research in English, they face challenges with complex academic language. T1 shared their difficulty in understanding complex concepts in research articles: "I find some ideas in research articles hard to understand, especially when it involves complex academic language." Similarly, T4 noted the challenge of reading dense academic papers: "Reading long and dense research papers is tiresome. I lose interest and concentration, and it becomes really challenging to comprehend the issues presented." These experiences highlight the barrier that complex language and academic jargon pose to effective research engagement.

Complex academic language and dense research presentations emerged as notable barriers in the study. These challenges highlight the difficulty teachers face in engaging effectively with research.

3.3. Impact of Reading on Professional Practice

In the dynamic and ever-evolving field of education, teachers' engagement with research literature plays a pivotal role in shaping their professional development and teaching methodologies. This study delves into the profound impact that reading scholarly works has on educators, exploring how it influences their creative thinking, enhances their research skills, deepens their subject knowledge, and enriches their teaching practices.

T7 shared how reading research helped in identifying gaps and generating new ideas: "I've been able to identify gaps in the existing literature and generate new ideas for my own projects." This illustrates the role of reading in fostering creativity and critical thinking.

T4 emphasized the acquisition of research skills through reading: "I have gained knowledge about various research methods … I have applied this knowledge in my subsequent work." Meanwhile, T1 described the deepening of subject understanding: "Reading has … enabled me to gain deeper insights into key concepts and stimulating ideas pertinent to my field of study."

T2 highlighted how exposure to different perspectives through reading enriches teaching practices: "Thanks to reading, I have learned from experts and fellow teachers in my field, exposing me to novel ideas." Finally, T8 reflected on the influence of reading on teaching methods: "Reading has introduced me to fresh ideas … prompting me to reassess my current teaching practices and knowledge base."

These accounts from the teachers demonstrate the multifaceted impact of reading on their professional development, ranging from enhancing creativity to improving teaching practices and expanding content knowledge. Such active engagement with scholarly literature is essential for teachers to stay innovative and responsive in the dynamic field of education.

4. Discussion

This discussion examines English language teachers' engagement with research, focusing on their research habits, the barriers to research engagement, and the impact on their professional practice. The discussion aims to offer insights into the interplay between theoretical knowledge and practical application in the realm of ELT.

4.1. Reading habits

This study provides valuable insights into the reading habits of teachers, uncovering a distinct pattern of engagement that diverges from the expected norm. In line with findings from Borg's study (2009), this research finds that teachers tend to interact with research literature

irregularly. Their engagement is primarily motivated by immediate academic or teaching needs, rather than being part of a regular and proactive routine.

Borg (2009) noted a strikingly low percentage – only 15.6% – of teachers in his study regularly engaged with research, a trend that echoes the findings here, where teachers' engagement with research literature is often sporadic and closely tied to specific tasks such as preparing for research or developing teaching materials.

In this study, teachers such as T7 and T4 reported that their engagement with research literature is primarily occasional and arises out of a need to find information for their specific research projects or to find materials related to their teaching subjects. This pattern highlights a significant barrier to professional development – the absence of dedicated time for reading research within teachers' routine schedules.

This sporadic nature of engagement with academic literature is not unique to the field of education. Broemmel et al. (2019) and Rudland and Kemp (2004) have similarly noted that, compared to other professionals like engineers, lawyers, and physicians, teachers tend to devote less time to reading for professional advancement. Despite the availability of a plethora of publications specifically tailored for teachers since the early 20th century, their engagement appears to be largely driven by immediate needs rather than a consistent habit of scholarly reading. This reliance on intuition and experience over research-based knowledge raises questions about the integration of contemporary pedagogical developments into teaching practice.

This study provides valuable insights into the evolving preferences of teachers regarding reading formats. It uncovers a complex landscape of how teachers use both print and digital resources. Despite the increasing popularity and accessibility of digital resources in education, teachers still have different preferences when it comes to reading formats.

On one hand, a significant portion of teachers demonstrate a preference for print materials, as emphasized by T10 and echoed by Solak (2014). This preference for print is not merely a matter of habit but stems from the tangible, interactive experience it offers, which many teachers find conducive to deeper engagement and comprehension. The nature of print materials facilitates annotation and note-taking, crucial aspects of academic research and reflection. This is consistent with studies conducted by Piramanayagam and Seal (2020, p. 3921) and Raths (2015) which emphasize that even though digital texts are widely available, many teachers still prefer printed materials for a more engaging reading experience.

On the other hand, the present study shows that teachers have a clear preference for using electronic resources, as supported by Aggarwal and Bhalla (2012) and Son (2013). Digital formats are favored for their convenience, accessibility, and the ability to quickly search and access a wide array of materials. Teachers like T3 and T6 value digital resources for their adaptability to busy schedules and the ease of reading. The practicality of digital formats, especially in an increasingly connected world, makes them a popular choice among teachers who require up-to-date information or access to specific academic articles. The study's findings further suggest that the choice between print and digital materials is not binary but is influenced by various factors, including teachers' specific requirements, teaching contexts, and personal preferences.

This study also shows that teachers' choices in reading materials reflect a blend of practical teaching needs and theoretical knowledge, indicating a holistic view of professional development. This trend aligns with findings from researchers like Borg (2009), Borg and Alshumaimeri (2012), and Farsani and Babaii (2019).

Teachers frequently turn to a diverse array of resources, including academic journals, teaching magazines, books, conference proceedings, and web-based materials, demonstrating an effort to balance their immediate classroom applications with broader theoretical insights. This eclectic approach, as corroborated by studies from Brooks (2007), Rudland and Kemp (2004), and Williams and Coles (2007), underlines teachers' desire to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical teaching strategies. Academic journals, as observed by T1 and T8, are particularly valued for their reliability and relevance in staying current with the latest research and practices, especially in fields like ELT.

The study also reveals teachers' openness to interdisciplinary approaches, as evidenced by their integration of non-ELT sources, a tendency that enriches both their teaching methodologies and content understanding. This aligns with Pryke's (1987) definition of professional literature and Kostoulas's (2018) observations on the varying quality and reliability of these sources. Teachers' preference for professional literature encapsulates their need for materials that are informative and directly applicable to contemporary educational practices and philosophies, emphasizing the importance of critical discernment in resource selection.

Ur's (2019) emphasis on the importance of both theoretical and practical resources in teacher development further corroborates the study's findings. The preference for a wide range of material types demonstrates teachers' recognition of the multifaceted nature of teaching, which requires a strong theoretical foundation as well as the practical ability to apply this knowledge in classroom contexts.

The preference of university-level English department instructors for a mix of academic journals, practice-focused journals, and other professional literature, as identified in this study, reflects a balanced approach to staying updated on theoretical advancements and practical applications in the field of education. This comprehensive approach to professional learning and development reflects the expectations of the educational landscape, where teachers are required to have a broad knowledge base and adaptability, incorporating insights from various sources into their teaching practices.

The study also points out the various reasons behind teachers' engagement with research. This range of motivations, from inspiring new research ideas to enhancing academic writing skills, deepening content knowledge, improving teaching practices, and developing critical thinking skills, highlights the complex role research plays in the realm of education.

A primary reason teachers engage with research is to gather ideas for their own projects. This is evidenced in the experiences of teachers like T2 and T10, who utilize research literature to find out new ideas and initiatives within their fields, a finding that resonates with Borg's (2009) observations on the influence of research engagement on professional growth. Moreover, teachers like T1 and T8 emphasize the importance of reading research in enhancing their academic writing skills. Engaging with diverse scholarly articles aids them in understanding the nuances of academic writing, from structure to style, an essential skill for effective communication within academic circles, as highlighted by Hyland (2012).

Furthermore, the study finds that reading research significantly contributes to teachers' content knowledge. Teachers like T6 illustrate how staying abreast of the latest developments through high-quality research articles ensures that their practices remain relevant and informed. Bednarek & Cybulska-Gomez de Celis (2022) support this view, noting the necessity for teachers to continuously update their knowledge in a rapidly evolving educational environment. Equally important is the impact of research reading on teaching practices. Teachers, such as T5 and T9, report that insights gained from research directly influence their teaching, aligning with Bednarek & Cybulska-Gomez de Celis' (2022) emphasis on the importance of research-informed teaching approaches.

The development of critical thinking skills is another crucial aspect of teachers' engagement with research. As T3 and T7's experiences suggest, reading research encourages teachers to critically analyze and evaluate various educational approaches, fostering a reflective and informed teaching practice. This is in line with Brookfield's (2012) suggestion for the development of critical thinking in educational settings. It can be seen that the diverse motivations for reading research among teachers reflect a profound engagement with their own professional development.

In conclusion, this study highlights that teachers' reading habits are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including time constraints, format preferences, resource availability, and personal motivations. These diverse elements collectively influence how teachers engage with scholarly literature, highlighting the importance nature of reading practices in the professional development of teachers.

4.2. Barriers to research engagement

The study highlights several key barriers hindering teachers' engagement with research. These barriers include time constraints, limited access to research materials, the perceived lack of practical relevance in research findings, and challenges with the complexity of academic language, each impacting teachers' ability to engage with scholarly reading.

The findings from this study highlight time scarcity as the predominant barrier impeding teachers' engagement with research. This issue, as underlined in the works of Borg (2007, 2008, 2009), Borg and Alshumaimeri (2012), and Borg and Liu (2013), reveals a widespread challenge in the educational profession where the demands of teaching, administrative duties, and personal commitments heavily constrain teachers' availability to engage in scholarly pursuits.

Participants like T1 and T8 in this study mention the struggle to balance multiple roles, a sentiment echoed by Anwaruddin and Pervin (2015), Banegas (2018), Sadeghi and Abutorabi (2017), and Sato and Loewen (2019). The additional responsibilities of research reading, when added to an already extensive workload, intensify the challenge, resonating with Watts and Castle's (1993) discussion on the complex time-management struggles faced by teachers. This constant juggling of responsibilities often results in the relegation of research reading to a lower priority.

The challenge of limited access to research publications, as highlighted in this study, also emerges as a significant systemic issue within the educational field. Teachers like T2 and T10, as well as findings from studies by Borg (2008, 2009), Borg and Alshumaimeri (2012), and Borg and Liu (2013), underscore this barrier that significantly inhibits teachers' ability to stay current with the latest research and implement evidence-based practices in their teaching.

The experiences shared by T2 and T10 align with broader trends identified in the literature regarding disparities in access to academic materials. Studies by Begede (2015) and Borg (2009) and Sibanda have revealed significant disparities in the availability of resources among different educational settings. These differences underscore a systemic gap in academic resources, where the availability of scholarly materials can vary greatly depending on the capabilities and financial limitations of different institutions.

Further emphasizing this point, the discussions by Anwaruddin and Pervin (2015), Borg and Alshumaimeri (2012), Banegas (2018), Sadeghi and Abutorabi (2017), and Sato and Loewen (2019) pointed out on how financial and institutional limitations restrict teachers' access to scholarly materials. These constraints manifest in various forms, such as limited institutional subscriptions to academic journals, inadequately resourced libraries, and the costs associated with accessing individual research articles. Such barriers pose a challenge for teachers who want to enhance their professional knowledge and teaching methods. Additionally, they contribute to an unfair academic environment where only some teachers have the opportunity to engage with scholarly literature.

The issue of the lack of practical relevance in educational research, as highlighted by teachers like T3, T6, and T1, resonates with findings from several studies and presents a critical challenge within the field of education. This concern, echoed in research by Alhassan and Ali (2020), Anwaruddin and Pervin (2015), Borg (2009), Farrell (2013), Hemsley-Brown and Sharp (2003), Le Fevre (2014), and Reynold (2018) centers on the disconnect between academic research and its direct application in classroom settings.

Teachers often seek immediate, pragmatic solutions for their classrooms, a need that is not always met by academic research. The experiences shared by T3, T6, and T1, alongside observations by T8, underscore the challenge teachers face in translating research findings into effective classroom practices. This gap between theoretical insights and practical applicability can lead to reluctance among teachers to engage with research.

Supporting this perspective, studies indicate that the lack of immediate applicability of research findings may discourage teachers from engaging with academic literature. Teachers, as T8 notes, prefer strategies that can be directly implemented in their classrooms, underscoring a preference for research that offers clear, contextually relevant solutions. This preference is further complicated by the fact that some teachers may resist change due to satisfaction with their current practices or find it challenging to absorb and implement new information that conflicts with their established beliefs.

The challenge of applying research findings in diverse teaching contexts is multifaceted. As Alhassan and Ali (2020) state, teachers may struggle to adapt research due to differences in cultural or linguistic contexts, variations in student populations, or the curriculum being taught. Additionally, the lack of clarity or specificity in research findings can further hinder their practical application in educational settings.

The struggle with complex academic language in research literature, as experienced by teachers such as T1 and T4, also emerges as a significant barrier for teachers' engagement with scholarly works. This challenge, highlighted in the study and supported by research from Anwaruddin and Pervin (2015), Em (2023), Hemsley-Brown and Sharp (2003), Sadeghi and Abutorabi (2017), and Teater (2017) underscores a critical issue in academic accessibility and comprehension.

Heineke and Neugebauer (2018) discuss the difficulties teachers encounter when faced with dense academic jargon, a common characteristic of scholarly articles. Anwaruddin and Pervin (2015) and Hemsley-Brown and Sharp (2003) also observe that the specialized terminology and complex structures prevalent in academic writing can be intimidating and overwhelming for teachers. This complexity not only poses a challenge in understanding the content but also potentially reduces teachers' engagement with scholarly reading.

Moreover, the intimidating nature of research language, along with the unique structure and format of scholarly articles, can be a significant hurdle. Teachers, in their efforts to engage with research, often find themselves grappling with these linguistic and structural challenges, which can lead to a decrease in their engagement with research literature.

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant barriers that hinder teachers' engagement with research, including time constraints, limited access to research materials, the lack of practical relevance in research findings, and the complexity of academic language. These factors collectively shape teachers' interactions with scholarly literature, presenting a clear picture of the challenges faced in integrating research into their professional practice.

4.3. Impact of Reading on Professional Practice

The study's exploration into the impact of reading research literature on teachers' professional development reaffirms the critical role that scholarly engagement plays in the field of education. This engagement not only fosters creativity and critical thinking but also bolsters research skills, deepens subject knowledge, and enriches teaching practices, echoing findings from educational research.

T7's experience with identifying gaps and generating new ideas through reading highlights the role of scholarly engagement in fostering teachers' creativity and critical thinking. This observation aligns with the work of Gorshunova et al. (2014) who emphasizes the importance of creative thinking in problem-solving and innovation within educational settings. The ability to critically analyze existing literature and identify unexplored areas is fundamental to the advancement of educational practices.

The acquisition of research skills through reading, as shared by T4, is a significant aspect of teacher professional development. This aligns with the observation by Frager (2010), who notes that teachers' engagement with research enhances their ability to conduct meaningful inquiries and contribute to the academic discourse in education.

Furthermore, T1's deepening of subject knowledge through reading scholarly works resonates with the work of Shulman (1986), who highlights the necessity of strong content knowledge for effective teaching. The ability to delve deeper into subject matter enriches teachers' understanding, allowing them to offer more comprehensive learning experiences to students.

Exposure to diverse perspectives, as experienced by T2, is essential for enriching teaching practices. This idea is supported by Baker et al. (2019), who emphasize the value of multicultural education and the exposure to diverse perspectives in enhancing pedagogical approaches. Engaging with a variety of ideas and strategies ensures that teachers remain adaptable and responsive to the evolving needs of the educational field.

Lastly, the influence of reading on teaching methodologies, as reflected by T8, indicates the transformative potential of engaging with research literature. As stated by Gorshunova et al. (2014), exposure to research can encourage teachers to critically evaluate their teaching approaches, resulting in better classroom practices.

In summary, the study's findings, supported by seminal works in the field of education, underscore the multifaceted impact of reading research literature on teachers' professional activities. From fostering creativity to enhancing research skills, deepening subject knowledge, and enriching teaching practices, engagement with research is very important for teachers aiming to stay innovative, well-informed, and effective in their teaching roles.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative study delved into the research engagement of university-level English department teachers, exploring their reading habits, literature preferences, and the influence of these practices on their professional practices. Through in-depth interviews with teachers from four reputable universities, key insights were uncovered regarding the frequency, format, and resources of their research engagement, as well as the challenges and motivations behind their engagement with research.

The study's findings contribute to the existing literature on research engagement among teachers. It reveals that teachers' engagement with research is influenced by various factors, including time constraints, format preferences, and access to resources. Notably, while there is a strong preference towards staying updated with current research, practical constraints such as time limitations and resource availability often hinder consistent engagement. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of the practical applicability of research findings in teachers' professional contexts.

Addressing the need for professional development, as outlined at the outset of this study, the findings offer implications for the enhancement of professional development programs within the region. Specifically, they underscore the necessity for institutional support mechanisms that lessen time and resource constraints faced by teachers. Developing targeted professional development programs that facilitate easier access to research, cater to diverse format preferences, and emphasize the practical application of research findings can significantly bolster teachers' ability to integrate scholarly insights into their teaching practices.

This study is not without limitations. The focus on English department teachers from only four universities may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study, while offering in-depth insights, may not capture the breadth of experiences across a wider educational landscape.

For future research, it would be beneficial to expand the study to include teachers from a broader range of disciplines and institutions.

This would help in understanding whether the patterns observed in this study are consistent across different academic fields. Moreover, a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data, could provide a more comprehensive view of the factors influencing research engagement among university-level teachers.

In conclusion, this study not only offers valuable insights into the engagement with research among university-level English department teachers but also serves as a foundational step towards enhancing professional development practices in the region. By shedding light on the complexities of integrating scholarly research into teaching practices, it calls for a concerted effort to develop institutional strategies and professional development programs that support teachers' continuous engagement with research, thereby enriching the quality of education provided to students.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Flora Debora Floris: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Utami Widiati:** Validation, Supervision. **Willy Ardian Renandya:** Validation, Supervision. **Yazid Basthomi:** Validation, Supervision.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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