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EFL TEACHERS' LEVEL OF TEACHER ACTION RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

Teachers doing action research has been recommended as a powerful and transformative model for teacher professional development, but remains trivial among the population of teachers worldwide, including those who teach English as a foreign language (EFL). The present study investigates EFL teachers' level of engagement with and in Teacher Action Research (TAR), as well as their motives for the engagement. Employing quantitative approach with a survey as the design, a questionnaire was distributed to EFL teachers teaching at secondary school to collect data. Descriptive statistics was run to analyze the data. The results showed that EFL teachers' engagement with TAR was high, while their engagement in TAR was moderate. Thus, encouraging EFL Teachers to conduct TAR will consequently get them used to continuously make reflections on what they did in their classroom in which better teaching learning quality can be achieved. Besides, the policy makers should be provide some fundamental supports to encourage the teachers making the research engagement.

Keywords: *Teacher Action Research, EFL Teachers, Research Engagement, Teacher Professional Development*

Introduction

As knowledge and society are dynamic and teaching is a social-bound profession, teachers need more than college knowledge to establish teaching practices that can add value on students' learning outcome. A number of studies currently note that learning to teach takes a life time process involving cognitive, emotional, capacity, as well as willingness to examine the performance of appropriate alternatives for improvement and change (Avalos, 2011; Crandall, 2000). Accordingly, teacher education has been shifting into four major trends encompassing a constructivist approach, a linkage of theories and classroom practice, a recognition of the potentials of teachers' prior learning for effective learning, and a concern of teachers' role in developing theories and directing the teachers' professional development (Crandall, 2000). This shift defines Teacher Professional Development (TPD) as a learning process taking place along one's career path (Stan et al., 2013). Mahmoudi & Özkan (2015) noted that TPD offers new instructional techniques, new roles, and self-improvement both as educators and individuals.

Consequently, teachers are urged to participate in on-going professional development following their formal education.

The recognition that teachers are active participants rather than passive recipients in meaning construction have altered approaches and methods of TPD, such as; team teaching, mentoring, peer-coaching, in-service teacher training, and teacher research. However, to establish a meaningful teacher learning, TPD should not be far from teachers' daily life in which changes and solutions for practical matters can scientifically and systematically obtained. Among all the options of TPD, teacher research has been documented as an evocative transformative tool for teachers' classroom practice as well as professional development. This inquiry-based professional development is grounding from teachers' dual roles, i.e. a practitioner and a researcher. In other words, teachers are the practitioners who conduct a research, individually or collaboratively, in their own classroom, aiming at understanding their practice and gaining enhancement of students' learning outcomes (Phuong & Quyen, 2017). The dual roles begin when the teachers doing their teaching at the same time question their own classroom practice, continue with collecting related information/data, then using them to reflect and answer their questions. These roles are, in fact, enable them to develop their capacity as a professional teacher and create fruitful impact locally, into their classroom practice, and globally for the insight they share. Teacher research enables the teachers to self-analyze their classroom practice, work and share their insight with the other teachers (Medgyes, 2017).

Teacher research believed as a meaningful TPD tool has invited scholars to investigate its effect on those who have done it as an alternative to conventional professional development programs. Promising and appealing contributions have found benefited the teachers and their teaching learning practice (Borg & Sanchez, 2015; Borg & Liu, 2013; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2016) Simon Borg (2010) stated that teachers involving in research open chances for improvement of the quality of teaching practice and their sense of professionalism. Conducting research, teachers become more sensitive and increase self-awareness of what works for what purpose, and what works in what situation for the betterment of the students learning. Iliško et al. (2010) mentioned that as soon as teachers began to incorporate research elements in their classroom practice, their understanding of what happen in the classroom is better. In fact, Moutafidou et al. (2012) revealed that employing a case study (48.4%), an action research (25.8%), and a focus group discussion (22.5%), the teachers obtained a more active role, including curriculum developer, self-evaluator, and knowledge disseminator.

A number of studies have documented research done by teachers a means of TPD which comes in some designs includes action research (Banegas et al. 2013; Burns & Rochsantiningih, 2006; Burns & Westmacott, 2018; Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Halim et al., 2017), exploratory practice (Allwright, 2007), lesson study (Malmberg et al., 2010), and reflective practice (Armutcu & Yaman, 2010; Jones, 2015; Pop, 2015). Among the forms

mentioned, the present study focuses on teacher action research since the design encourages the teachers to make -reflection on a daily basis so that they can comprehend their daily practice which eventually enhance the quality of their students' learning. Besides, the teachers' knowledge about their classroom is a practical knowledge which is accessible to be codified only through reflection (Gutiérrez, 2012). In fact, this allows the teachers to be more scientifically reflective, thus provides opportunities for on-going learning by questioning their pedagogical choices and how their choice can improve their instructional practices (O'Connor & Anderson, 2006; Bae et al., 2016). It is an action research which is believed as the research that is closest to the teachers' ever day practice, and is in which information about practical problems are analyzed scientifically and used to direct more effective practice to achieve a desired end (Stringer, 2007).

Studies aforementioned argue the benefits if the teachers do the action research and the use the action research as the design employed, yet some hurdles of teacher research remain exist. Simon Borg (2010) noted that 500 English teachers in 13 countries faced time constraint, limited access to materials, unsupportive institutional condition, and limited knowledge and research skills as reasons for not engaging with research. Besides, he mentioned a clear tension between the potentials of teacher research for teachers as active researchers and to what extent they are engaged with research as the chosen means of their on-going professional development. The tension is that teachers doing research remain scarce, even though they know the potentials of it for their professional practice. Similar tension was conversed by Gao & Chow (2012), Shen (2017), Xu (2014), Hishan et al. (2020), and Rahimi & Weisi (2018). Gao & Chow (2012) and Xu (2014) notably pointed a raise of teachers' level of engagement, although the teachers' attitudes toward research are vary due to with various context of external drives for conducting research. Lack of opportunities, low motivation, minor research skills, misconception of research, ineffective management system, and insufficient materials and supplies for doing the research are some challenges found when teachers do their research (Shen, 2017).

In different setting, Rahimi et al. (2019) discussed the postgraduate students' and the university professors' optimistic perceptions about the effect of research activities toward TPD. They revealed some barriers for not engaging with and in research activities, such as; competitive burdens in doing and disseminating their research for career development, and issues of publication (Rahimi & Weisi, 2018). Those are barriers faced by the students and the professors in sustaining their professional development. Hishan et al. (2020) also noted that foreign language teachers viewed research as a resource providing solutions to educational challenges, though their research ability were at a modest degree.

EFL teachers in Indonesia were identified with issues alike, although doing research is a required condition for their career development in the country (DEPDIKNAS, 2005). Some issues

found in Indonesia were categorized into general problems, research problems, and individual problems (Burns & Rochsantiningsih, 2006). The general problem covers time management, funds, and overload teaching hours. The research problems includes incapability of formulating research problems, defining the focus of the research, making plans for the cycles of action research, and composing a research report which was found as the most struggling issues. The personal problem faced were low confidence and motivation to finish the research, criticism from colleagues, conflict with school priorities, and family commitments. Some other studies reveal that the action research done EFL teachers are mostly happen due to external drive. Wulandari et al. (2019) revealed that teacher research was chosen as TPD as it is a mandatory for their career. In line with that, only fifteen out of 145 teachers reveals that they take research as a means of their TPD (Utami, 2019).

Teachers' engagement in the present study comprises engagement with and in research. The engagement with research is identified when an indirect interaction between the teachers and the research present. The interactions present when the teachers are able to take advantage of the research findings for their classroom practice improvement, usually when reading research findings. Teachers can be considered making an engagement in research when the teachers conduct an action research. The engagement can be done for some reasons, such as; enhancing quality of their classrooms or developing their competences as professional teacher. I strongly believe that the two channels of engagement are interconnected. When teachers are engaged with a research, it is expected that they can make themselves more informed, thus make their decision and judgment be scientifically objective since it is driven from a rigorous data collection and analysis. Teachers' engagement with and in research positively contribute teachers' autonomous professional judgment. The two channels of research engagement make the teachers be more critical, reflective, and analytical on what they do in their classroom.

However, studies on teachers' research engagement with a particular context-specific researcher, as like EFL teachers, and specific design, i.e. action research are scant (S Borg & Liu, 2013). Besides, the tensions (Borg, 2010) and the hindrances identified (Burns & Rochsantiningsih, 2006; S Borg & Sanchez, 2015; Simon Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Al Jabri et al., 2018) lead to inconclusive findings about the practice of teacher research in diverse context. Therefore, investigating to the extent of which EFL teachers' engagement with and in action research as their TPD as well as the motives of the engagement would bring valuable insight in identifying realistic information about the practice of teacher doing research particularly action research in the setting where it serves as one of requirements for their professional career development. Overtly mention, the present study aims at answering the following question;

1. What level of TAR engagement do EFL teachers have as their TPD?
2. What motivation do the EFL teachers have for their TAR engagement?

Research Methods

Employing quantitative approach with survey as the design the present study distributed an online questionnaire utilizing Google Form to EFL teachers teaching in secondary schools in Jombang. Simple random sampling was assigned when the questionnaire was sent to the participants through MGMP WhatsApp group. The Google Form recorded 33 out of 110 of the EFL teachers gave complete responses to the questionnaire sent. Thus, they served as the participants in the present study. Their demographic background were varied in terms of gender, educational background, and years of teaching experience as can be seen in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Participants by Educational Background

	Number	%
Under graduate (S1)	27	81
Master (S2)	6	18
Doctorate (S3)	0	0
Others	0	0

Table 2 Participants by Years of Teaching Experience

Years of Experience	Number	%
0-5	0	0
6-10	5	16
11-15	8	26
16-20	10	33
>20	10	33

An online questionnaire was utilized to answer both research questions. The questionnaire consists of three sections; individual information, TAR engagement, and motives for making or not making the engagement. As section one was used to obtain demography of the participants, the questions addressed working institution, educational background, and years of teaching experiences. Section two consisted questions about the EFL teachers' engagement with

and in action research, and section three covered questions about the motives. The questions for both sections, section two and three were developed by adapting Kutlay's (2013) questionnaire

Some adjustments were made so that they can properly address the problematizing issue of present study. The first adjustment is done in terms of the design of the research. Kutlay (2013) did not mention specific designed of research in the questionnaire, while the present study specified its design, i.e. action research. Accordingly, the statement 'reasons of doing research' in (Kutlay, 2013) were changed into 'reasons for doing action research'. They were also developed by giving additional statements based on finding emerged in related literature (Anne Burns, 2005; Torre et al., 2018; Koshy, 2005; Cohen et al., 2007; Ary et al., 2010). The last adaptation was done in terms of language. While Kutlay's (2013) was in English, the questionnaire in the present study was written in Bahasa Indonesia. This translation was done to avoid misunderstanding the questions since the participants' first language was Bahasa Indonesia.

The data obtained was analyzed by running descriptive statistics. The conclusion was drawn from the result of descriptive analysis statistics, in the form of description of frequency and mean to reveal the level of EFL teachers' engagement with and in TAR. The frequency of the channels of engagement were categorized into low, moderate, and high. The more frequent the engagements were made the higher the level was, see Table 3. The motives of the two channels of engagement were also concluded by making categorization based on similar shared statements with high frequency.

Table 3. The Categorization Level of EFL Teachers Research Engagement

EFL Engagement with Action Research		EFL Engagement in Action Research	
Frequency	Level	Frequency (in One Academic Year)	Level
Never - rarely	low	0	low
Sometimes	moderate	1x - 2x	moderate
Often	high	3x - 4x	high

Results and Discussion

Answering the research questions, the results of the present study begins with the presentation of the level of EFL teachers' engagement with and in TAR. The following is the results of data analysis answering the second research question, i.e. the motives of engaging with and in action research.

The Engagement with TAR

The data analysis revealed that the EFL teachers had made interaction with action research by reading published findings of the research. Table 1 describes 52% EFL teachers had sometimes engaged with TAR, 15% of the participants reported that they often read findings of action research. None of them reported never read the findings of action research. The present study pointed out that the EFL teachers' engagement with action research was moderate.

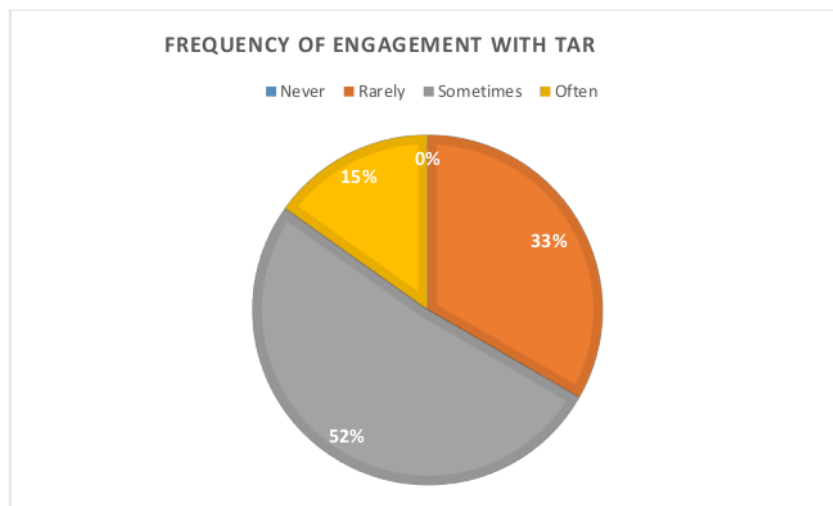


Figure 1. EFL Teachers' Engagement with TAR

Engagement in TAR

The level of the EFL teachers' engagement in TAR was revealed vary. The data showed that 12% of all the participant conduct TAR twice in one academic year, 6% reported doing the research three times a year, and only 3% of the EFL teachers mentioned doing research four times in a year. Overall, 76% of the EFL teachers participated in the present study confirmed that they conducted TAR at least once in one academic year, and 24% reported that they have never conducted TAR. It can be concluded the frequency of engagement in action research showed a moderate level of engagement. The description of the engagement can be seen in Figure 4.

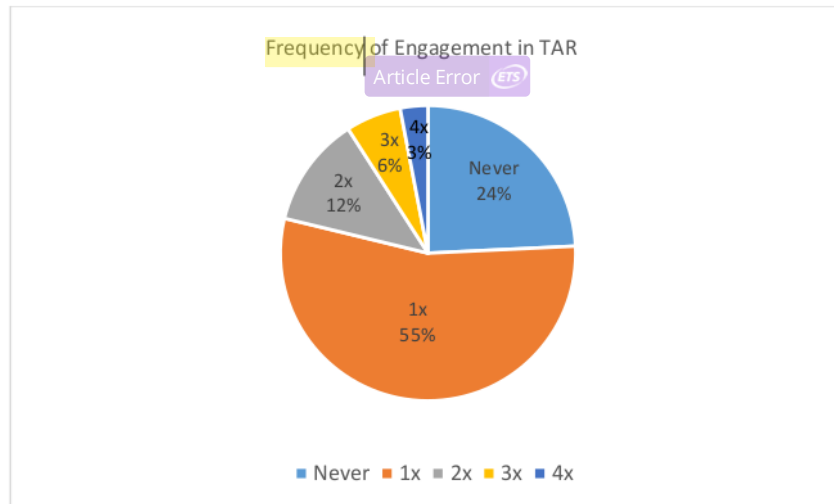


Figure 2. EFL Teachers' Engagement in TAR

The Motives of EFL Teachers' Engagement with TAR

The data from the questionnaire showed that most of the participants (91%) made their engagement with TAR since they had access to read published research findings (books/articles) from web-based sources. This finding was interesting since previous studies (Kutlay, 2013; Mahmoudi & Özkan, 2015; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2016) did not conversed about the motives of the teachers' engagement with research. The present study, in fact, revealed that technology presumably play an important role in the engagement made by the EFL teachers of the TPD. Other motives of the EFL teachers' engagement with action research were that reading the findings of action research enable them to pursue current practical knowledge about teaching strategies and solutions of their classroom problems. Overall, the motives of the EFL teachers' engagement with TAR were due to their concern in enhancing their teaching practice, also the student learning, as can be seen in Figure 3.

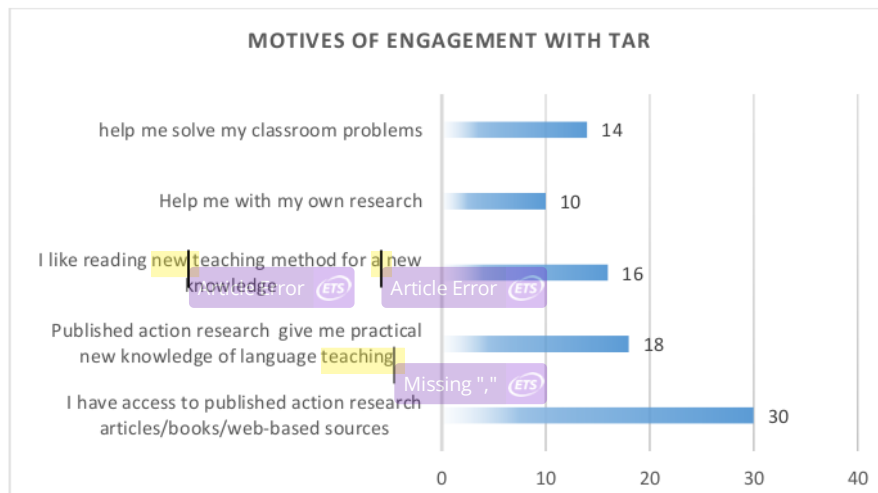


Figure 3. EFL Teachers' Motivation for Engagement with TAR

Elaborating the previous investigation on motives of making engagement with research, the present study included kinds of resources of their engagement, such as printed books, magazines, theses, and other web-based resources. The present study revealed that 23 of 33 participants choose journal articles among other options. 14 of the participants found books and web-based sources as resources to read the findings of TAR in making the engagement with TAR. Among the resources mentioned, journal articles, books, and web-based sources were the top chosen resources by the EFL teachers.



Figure 4. Kinds of Reading Text

Motives of doing TAR

Following the data revealed about the EFL teachers' engagement in TAR, the present study also uncovered their motives of doing the research. The present study revealed that career development and classroom practice were mostly mentioned as the motives of the teachers doing action research. 42% of the participants mentioned that they did TAR since the teaching career regulation required the teachers to conduct TAR. It is due to the professional development need that endorsed them to conduct action research. Another commonly shared motive included classroom practice. It was reported as the motives of 42% EFL teachers in the present study to engage in the research. They did action research since they perceived that action research can solve their classroom problems and they find better way to teach the students.

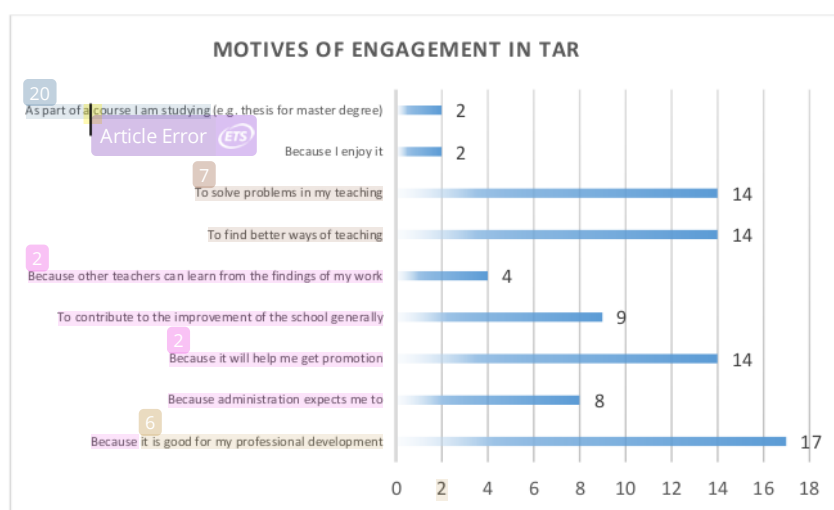


Figure 5. EFL Teachers' Engagement in TAR

Investigating EFL teachers' research engagement as a means of TPD, the study presents two channels of interactions, i.e. the engagement with TAR which included teachers reading the findings of action research and the engagement in TAR referring to teachers doing action research. The findings of the present study revealed that the EFL teachers' level of engagement was diverse. In regard to EFL teachers' engagement with TAR, the findings of the present study contradicted Kutlay's (2013) which reported that most of the EFL teachers rarely read research publications. The majority of the EFL teachers in the present study, in fact, reported that they read the research findings and none of them reported never read the findings of action research. In fact, they who claimed that they sometimes read the research findings reported that Internet websites were the place to find journal articles, books, and reports of action research they were interested in. Different settings between Kutlay's (2013) study and the present study was

assumed to explain the findings' discrepancies. The gap of time was putatively to be the cause. The study by Kutlay (2013) was eight years prior to the present study. It was when language learning ecosystem consisted of combination of traditional and technology artifacts, while the present study was conducted in which more teachers were evidenced to use technology as part of their daily practice (Altasan, 2017). Gadgets, applications, software, and academic websites were mushrooms and easy to reach, thus enabled the teachers to have greater access to vast information. Technology was continuously contributes proficient advancement to every part of teachers' lives and TPD was an unexceptional.

However, the findings of the present study were consistent with some more recent studies. First, they were in line with Alhassan & Ali (2020) mentioning that most of their participants reported their engagement by reading and use the findings of action research. Secondly, it supported a study by Gao & Chow (2012) revealing that 26 of 33 EFL teachers in China read published research and 30 talked about research. The present study evidenced that reading findings of action research allowed the EFL teachers to be well informed with the current insight of EFL teaching and learning. Besides, making interaction with action research also helps increasing their awareness about their classroom practice. Accordingly, Alhassan & Ali (2020) noted that engaging with action research was the key to level up a research-informed pedagogy. Besides, although Kutlay's (2013) contradicted in the case of teachers reading habit, he asserted that reading research findings kept the teachers following the current knowledge. The engagement with the reports of action research fruitfully contributed to the EFL teachers' classroom practice. Research interaction as such somehow can be a positive hint of a more intense engagement with TAR.

Findings on another channel of the engagement, i.e. teacher doing action research showed that there were still several teachers did not have the engagement, although some of them reported doing their action research at least once a year. The findings supported Gao & Chow (2012) and Alhassan & Ali (2020) revealing that some teachers reported the engagement in research by conducting a modest action research, although by numbers they were not outreach those who made the engagement with action research by reading it. The demography data of the present study showed that the frequency of doing action research tended to get higher with teachers holding higher educational background. This relevant with Borg (2010) and Wang & Zhang (2014) whose statistical analysis showed a significant positive association between the frequencies of doing research and their education degrees, as large as 40% of research engaged teacher said that they did research for their master or doctoral theses.. As Simon Borg & Alshumaimeri (2012) mentioned one motive that teachers had was the academic program they took. The same patterns were found in (Simon Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012). The moderate level of engagement in TAR found in the present study confirmed their findings and was an interesting evidence. When it was of numbers of how often teachers do research, the present study found

that research does not seem to be a primary option of professional life for most of EFL teachers in Indonesia.

In regard to what motivates the EFL teachers' engagement with and in TAR, the present study reveals various motives. Understanding their TAR engagement requires eliciting possible rationales of the engagement. The Level of research engagement was commonly associated with frequency of making interaction with and doing the research. The present study found that their awareness to provide better teaching learning practice are found as one of major motives for them to keep themselves be research engaged. The findings revealed that the EFL teachers who said they occasionally or frequently conducting action research believed that doing action research would improve the quality of their teaching practices. Wiggins et al. (2017) also reported that it was due to the teachers' effort for fulfilling immediate need of their students which served as rational for the teachers to conduct a systematic inquiry. Another element in their study that was comparable to the current study was the requirement for external motivators. The teachers taking part in the current study also shown a desire for external motivations such as sharing knowledge with the other EFL teachers experiencing action research.

Besides, the current study evident that it was professional development drives motivating the EFL teachers' TAR engagement. The current study found that teachers' desires for competence, autonomy, and immediate relevance to their everyday practice influenced their willingness to do action research. Teachers are drawn to research activity when they believe it will contribute to their professional development, their improved ability to perform academic tasks and enhanced relationships with their colleagues. Their engagement in research is sustained or discontinued in the same way. Banegas et al. (2013) and Consoli & Dikilitaş (2021) noted that the importance of transformation was the core of action research, but only if the process and outcomes of the action research were published or shared within the community practice where the action research was conducted. Contextual constraints, however, may diminish the significance of the desirable type of motivation and create the needs for a less desirable one (Edwards & Burns, 2016(Edwards & Burns, 2016). Specifically, in the presence of too many difficulties, a teacher's genuine interest in doing research does not always suffice to maintain his/her engagement in a research project. The risk, otherwise, is that some of us may continue to encourage teachers to see the benefits of doing research but without much recognition which, in turn, may lead to frustration (Anne Burns et al., 2015; Edwards, 2010; Edwards & Burns, 2016). Therefore, we must work together to foster a research culture that values the social element of language education research.

¹⁴ In the light of professional development, Teacher Action Research stresses the importance of collaboration. Bergmark (2020) and Hishan et al. (2020) advocated the need for external motivators in conducting Teacher Action Research. For this cultural environment of language education inquiry to flourish, both the teaching and academic societies must work

together. In other words, collaboration between academic community and the teacher-researchers are the only way to have substantial influence that benefits everyone (Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021). National-wide policy makers should also make efforts enabling teachers' research experience as positive as reasonably possible and maximize the chance that teachers can develop their competence, autonomy, and social belonging from doing research (such as, reducing teaching loads, encouraging team of teacher researchers with universities researchers). Besides, external pressures were still found in both initiating and sustaining a teacher's research journey (Burns & Rochsantiningsih, 2006; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Xu, 2014). The findings of the present study, nevertheless, pointed out that there were an increase of numbers of EFL teachers making engagement by reading and conducting action research. Teachers' willingness and commitment to their professionalism were evident as the motives of making the research engagement. Besides, the external pressures which did not give any option for the teachers implied that EFL teachers' research engagement was context-bound. This exerted that EFL teachers' TAR engagement and motives of the engagement were somehow suggested that both pedagogical and professional drives were evident in the EFL teachers' TAR engagement.

Conclusion

This study revealed that EFL teachers showed a high engagement with TAR and moderate engagement in TAR. Engaging with and in TAR allowed them to make scientific and rigorous reflection of what they had achieved and what they failed which contributed to the betterment of the student learning as well as their own learning. In the light of findings of previous studies, the present was not in line with (Kutlay, 2013), but supports a more recent studies (Alhassan & Ali, 2020; Gao & Chow (2012), that pointed out a higher level of engagement as well as the motives of the research engagement. Besides, the present study evidenced that TAR was context-bound in the light that it is from the teachers and for the teachers. Therefore, as a strong transformative approach for teacher professional development, the present study advocated EFL teacher to employ the research and emerged the practice as their continuous professional development.

However, limitations were inevitable for any study, not to mention the current study. The obvious limitation of the current study was the methodological constraints. The present study only recoded 33 out of 110 participants sent the Google Form Questionnaire and no inferential statistics were run, thus generalization of the findings to other wider context was futile. The findings potentially apply only to setting where similar characteristics were shared and exist. Furthermore, studies concerning TAR, notably the literature about teachers' research engagement in the light of TPD, to some extent were inadequately discussed the principles of engagement of particular professional endeavor since similar studies were scant. Therefore, recommendation for future researcher is to consider multidimensional of engagement in the

light of TPD. In addition, future researchers can employ inferential statistics to reveal the multidimensional variables of the engagement and the practice of TAR.

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