

**IN-SERVICE HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE
ROLE OF RESEARCH IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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ÖZET

**LİSE İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETİMİNDE
ARAŞTIRMANIN ROLÜNE İLİŞKİN GÖRÜŞLERİ**

Bu çalışmada, liselerde görev yapmakta olan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin bilimsel araştırmalar ve bu araştırmaların sonuçlarının İngilizce öğretimi süreci açısından yer ve önemlerine ilişkin düşüncelerinin saptanması amaçlanmıştır. Çalışmada, ayrıca, lise İngilizce öğretmenlerinin bu düşüncelerinin farklı değişkenler açısından incelenmesi de hedeflenmiştir.

Yapılan anketlerin analizleri sonucunda, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin, araştırma ve sonuçlarını İngilizce öğretimi açısından önemli buldukları, yapılan araştırmaları nispeten takip etmeye, bulgularını sınıf ortamına taşımaya ve kısmen de araştırma yapmaya çalıştıkları, ancak imkanlarının bunları gerçekleştirmeye elverişli olmadığı yönünde görüşlere sahip oldukları belirlenmiştir.

Diğer taraftan, bu görüşler arasında öğretmenler arasındaki cinsiyet, yaş, tecrübe, mezun olunan bölüm, sahip olunan akademik derece ve çalışılmakta olan okul gibi değişkenler açısından kayda değer bir farkın olmadığı görülmüştür.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Araştırma, İngilizce Öğretimi, Öğretmen Görüşleri, Eylem Araştırması, Sınıf Ortamı*

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ABSTRACT

This study is intended to find out the views of high school English teachers on the role of scientific research and the use of research results in the process of teaching English. In the study, it was also intended to analyze the views of these teachers according to different variables.

When the results of the questionnaire were analyzed, it was determined that English teachers consider research and its results important, they partially follow the research publications, try to carry the findings of research into their classrooms, and to conduct research. However, they state that their facilities and other conditions are not appropriate to realize above mentioned activities.

On the other hand, it was seen that there was no significant difference between their views according to various variables such as gender, age, experience in professional life, department of graduation, academic degrees earned, and type of school they work at.

Keywords: *Research, Teaching English, Teacher Views, Action Research, Classroom Setting.*

1. Introduction

Research is an issue the importance of which is constantly felt more and more. With the developments in every sphere of life and naturally in educational arenas, both theoretical and practical, dealing with research to overcome the complexities and problems, and to keep pace with the changes and innovations due to these developments have become a need.

In accordance with this need the place of research in education is uncontroversial. Among others who emphasize the role of research in their studies. Cresswell (2005) states that research is essential for educators and practitioners of education. It contributes to our present knowledge. It lets us to develop results which would be helpful in answering questions as we accumulate these results in gaining a deeper understanding of problems. Research adds to our knowledge in several ways some of which are addressing gaps in knowledge, replicating knowledge, expanding

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knowledge, broadening our perspectives, and informing practice (p. 4). Another reason for the importance of research stated by Cresswell (2005) is its role in suggesting improvements for practice. It offers new ideas to educators to consider while they are performing their jobs. It also provides educators with the opportunity to evaluate their approaches in the classroom. From a broader perspective, research helps teacher researchers interact with other researchers who are concerned with similar endeavors (Cresswell 2005, p.6), through which educators can accomplish Allwright's (2003) premise "think globally, act locally".

There are several reasons leading educators to utilize research in the education process. It is vital to appeal to scientific research during making decisions; and, forming and changing educational policies. Teachers, in a more comprehensive term, educators, are also expected to do research or use the findings of research in the process of curriculum development, instruction, counseling, assessment and other educational practices (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Similarly, research provides opportunity to policy-makers of education to debate on the educational issues when research results are well reported in concise forms. And finally, research plays a great role in enhancing certain individual skills, such as conceptual thinking, analyzing the relationships among complex ideas, and synthesizing disparate ideas. In addition, research develops individuals' organizational and conversational skills as well.

Although there are numerous advantages and uses of research, teachers, frequently, cannot make use of the findings of research in their classroom performances. Many problems inhibiting their utilization of research can be expressed. One of these problems is that the results of some studies are unclear and inconsistent with each other. A second problem with research is the questionable data provided by it. The participants of some research from whom the data are gathered may not be convenient, or their number may not be adequate enough to represent the universe of the problem. Also, the methods and techniques followed and the instruments used in the collection and analyses of the data may be inappropriate for the study. Another problem which should be emphasized related

to the issue of research is that practitioners have difficulties in understanding and interpreting the implications due to unclear and complex statements of both the aim and results of the studies (Cresswell, 2005, p.7).

Crookes & Chandler (1999) expresses that there are problems with research which can be related to foreign language teacher education programs in that they do not prepare teachers as practitioners who engage in the process of life-long learning which is invaluable in our modern world. They also do not contribute teachers to use disseminated research; and the problem-solving orientation to their own teaching is not encouraged.

Teachers' perceptions of research and their states in research activity are also effective factors bringing about problems with research. Berne (1998) sees the place of teachers in research at the bottom of a top-down process. She also claims that teachers are unable to provide adequate input into research operations. Likewise, teachers see research as an activity that should be carried out by academicians.

Besides the teachers who are happy teaching in their own conventional ways and caring other things more than pursuing changes and personal and professional development, there are also a great many teachers who are questioning their ways of practicing their profession and aiming to make their teaching more effective by reflecting on their work. following scientific publications and events, trying to incorporate the research findings into their classes, and, sometimes, doing classroom research by themselves, in particular, action research (Green, 1996). For DiPardo et al. (2006) expert English language teachers tend to utilize the results of the research which are convenient with efforts to facilitate student learning. They also indicate that expert teachers adapt research findings when they consider them appropriate to their situations, beliefs, curricula, and local contexts.

Depending on the increase in the focus on research in education, there became a shift of orientation in the profession of teaching in the last decades. Learning to teach is not only limited to the pre-service preparation period and it

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continues over the professional life span (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). In other words, life-long learning is given more importance than ever before.

This shift brought about a change in the definition of 'language teacher.' S/he is not seen as a transmitter of knowledge any more. For instance, Green (1996) conveys the definition of Schön (1983) for modern languages teacher, as "reflective practitioner". According to Green, this definition implies an assumption of a constant personal and professional development, and a reflection process which necessitates thinking and evaluating the activities carried out in the classroom.

The role of teacher as a reflective practitioner is increasingly replacing the conventional teacher in the field of teacher education (Gimenez, 1999). This role can be achieved by doing research in the classroom. The research conducted by teachers serves as a means of gaining an understanding of what goes on in the classroom, which is seen crucial by reflective teaching.

Cochran-Smith & Lytle, (1999) expresses that this type of research has become prominent in the areas of teacher education, professional development, and school reform. One of the major kinds of research which can be performed by teachers is action research. This type of research is defined by Kemmis & McTaggart (1989) as "a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out" (p.2). Kurt Lewin (1946), initiated action research in 1940s in order to solve social problems, proposed four steps to conduct an action research: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. For Nunan (1992), action research has three major characteristics. It is done by the practitioners (i.e., classroom teachers), it is collaborative, and the aim of this type of research is changing things. Burns (1999), points out that (eited in McKay, 2006 p.30) action research is contextual; hence it has a localized and small-scale nature as it deals with issues concerning a certain situation. It is not only evaluative but also reflective since the aim is to change things and improve practice.

In western countries, to inform teachers on research, particularly types of teacher research, and to encourage them to carry out classroom research, teachers have been supported by journals which publish teacher research, parts of research handbooks, and national or international conferences devoted to teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

Unlike these countries, Turkey does not commonly carry out such activities related to research. There is a need to encourage teachers to follow research, and perform classroom research. To meet this need, activities similar to those in the western world might be promoted.

This study, as an initial step, aims to grasp an understanding of high school English language teachers' views on research and its role in ELT. By determining their views on research, the study will provide some suggestions about what can be done to enhance the use and conduct of research.

2. METHODOLOGY

The data of this study was collected from the high school English teachers who were asked to state their agreement with 21 statements about the place of research and research result in language teaching process given in the form of a 6-point Likert scale questionnaire.

2.1. Limitations of the Study

It is essential to cite some limitations of the study. First of all, the sample of the study consists of 59 teachers and this number may be regarded low in terms of the power of generalization of the results reached. In addition, the sample consisted of only high school English language teachers from a single location. The location and school levels can be varied in further research.

The data collection method of this study can also be considered as a limitation. This study was designed as a survey study; and, only quantitative data were collected. Qualitative or mixed type of designs can be used in further research to collect more in-depth data.

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Despite the mentioned limitations, it is assumed that the results of this study may contribute to the understanding of English teachers' views on scientific research on second language teaching.

2.2. Participants

The participants of this study consist of 59 (F= 36; M= 23) English language teachers working at different types of high schools such as High School (F= 5; M= 6), Anatolian High School (F= 11 M= 8), Anatolian Teachers High School (F= 2; M= 3), Vocational High School (F= 8; M= 2), and some other types of high school (F= 10; M= 4) in the city centers of Çankırı and Erzurum. In the questionnaire given to the participants, they were also asked to give information about their ages, experience in English language teaching, departments they graduated from, and degrees they earned.

According to their responses, it was seen that most of the teachers participating in the study were aged between 25 and 35 (71%) and the percentages of the younger (5.1%) and older (23.8%) participants were much lower. From these rates, it can be stated that the participants were mostly young English teachers. Their years of the teaching experience were parallel to their ages. A great rate of the participants had experience of teaching from 1 to 15 years (86.4%), and only 8 had an experience of 15 years and more. Among the participants, 36 (64.4%) teachers reported that they had graduated from English Language Teaching departments, 15 (25.4%) from English Language and Literature departments, and only 6 (10.2) of them from the departments different from these.

As for the degrees they earned, the great majority, 49 (83.1%) of them had a BA degree, 3 were MA degree candidates, 4 had a MA degree, and 3 were PhD candidates.

The variables given above were analyzed in terms of their effects on the views of in-service high school English teachers' on the role of research in English language teaching. The findings obtained from this analysis are given in the data analysis section of the study below.

2.3. Instrument

In this study, a questionnaire of 21 items was used to collect the data. This instrument was designed by the analyses of the scales used in Funk et al. (1991). It consisted of the items adapted from that study and those formed by the researchers of the study.

The items in the questionnaire can be grouped in three parts. The first group items were designed to measure participants' views on the importance of scientific research in English language teaching (ELT) process. The items of the second group were designed to find out the views of the participants on the conditions, opportunities, facilities, and other factors that would inhibit or enhance the practice of research and their utilization in classroom settings. The rest, 3 questions were aiming to determine the participants' personal involvement in research and use of research results in their language teaching settings.

Before the main analysis of the results of the survey in accordance with the aim of the study, to determine the general opinions of English language teachers on the role of research and research findings in language teaching process and the variances in these opinions according to some variables, reliability analysis of the questionnaire was made.

The reliability of the questionnaire was measured by using the Cronbach Alpha test. In this test, when the Cronbach Alpha value is found over 0.7, the factor or test used is considered to be reliable (Saruhan & Özdemirci, 2005). The Cronbach Alpha value for the reliability test of the questionnaire of the study was found to be 0.73; and, assuming that the results to be obtained from the survey would be reliable, the main analyses of the study began.

3. The Analysis of the Data

The analyses of the results of the study were carried out in four steps. Firstly, the frequency tables for each item were formed through SPSS 16.00. Reviewing them, the questions with highest and lowest scores were identified. They were analyzed according to whether they differ as regards the variables among the

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participants. Secondly, the overall means of the items in the questionnaire were found. Thirdly, the mean scores for the three dimensions of the questionnaire were measured. And, finally, the analysis of the overall and sub-dimensional means in terms of the variables was carried out.

The item which was given the highest score by the participants was the 4th item "The language teachers are unwilling to change and try new ideas." The mean for this item was 4.06, and 83% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Another statement with a high rate of agreement by the participants was the 8th item "Research information is best understood when it is applied in a class." 71% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The other statement with high rate of agreement by the participants was the 1st item in the questionnaire "In my opinion, the results of research are of little help in solving real life problems in ELT." The agreement level with this statement was 74.6%. No significant difference was found between the agreement levels of male and female participants.

The lowest scores were respectively the 16th, 20th, and 21st statements in the questionnaires "There is sufficient time to implement new ideas in the classroom"; "Teachers are not encouraged to do and read research"; and "As teachers we do not have enough time to follow ELT journals." The percentages of the agreement of the participants with these statements were 25.4, 23.7, and 27.1. It was seen that there were no significant differences or relationships between the responses of the participants in terms of any of the variables when the ANOVA and Bi-variate Pearson Correlation analyses were made for these lowest scores.

Table 1: Items scored highest and lowest by the participants

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Item 4	59	4.0678	.98023
Item 8	59	3.9492	1.02425
Item 1	59	3.7627	.75061
Item 21	59	2.6271	1.17295
Item 20	59	2.5593	1.20732
Item 16	59	2.4237	1.14776

In Table 1, the items with three highest and three lowest scores were given in the order from the highest to the lowest one. The highest scores are all related to the statements about the importance of the research in language teaching whereas the lowest scored ones belong to the statements about the conditions that enhance or hinder the access to or use of research. Therefore, it can be claimed that teachers find research and research findings very useful and important in terms of teaching languages, but they do not have opportunities to follow and utilize research in language teaching due to some reasons such as time constraints and non-encouraging working environments.

In the second phase of the data analysis, the overall means of the items in the questionnaire were measured. Then a single mean for the whole questionnaire was found. The mean for all the scores obtained was calculated to be 3.24. It can be inferred from this mean that the participants, to some extent, have positive views on the role of research in language teaching process.

As explained under the heading *instruments*, the questionnaire can be evaluated in three parts. Of the 21 items, nine (1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15 and 19) include the statements especially related to teachers thoughts on the importance of research, nine (3, 8, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 20 and 21) include the statements related to the opportunities and conditions enhancing or inhibiting the access to or utilization of research, and other three (4, 6, 12) were particularly related to teachers' self involvement in research. The mean for the first dimension was coded as 'IMPMEAN', the second as 'BARMEAN', the third as 'SELFMEAN', and the mean for the whole questionnaire as 'OVERALLMEAN' in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean scores for the three sub-dimensions of the questionnaire.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
BARMEAN	59	2.8983	.43343
IMPMEAN	59	3.5348	.56824
SELFMEAN	59	3.4011	.65735
OVERALLMEAN	59	3.2429	.41913

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In Table 2, it can be seen that the mean of the scores for the items aiming to measure teachers' views on the importance and value of research and research findings in English teaching is highest among the three dimensions. It was found to be 3.53. According to this mean, it can be considered that high school English teachers, to a significant extent, find research important and valuable to be used in English teaching practice.

The mean of the scores for the items designed to measure the teachers' views related to their self-involvement in research and their incorporation of research into classroom settings is the second highest mean. However, among the three items in this dimension the one "I myself do scientific research related to English teaching" is one of the lowest scored items. Only 35.6% of the participants agreed with the statement that they do scientific research. The mean for the dimension aiming to find out the thoughts on the appropriateness of different conditions facilitating or weakening the state of following research results and using them in the classroom may be explanatory for the reasons why teachers do not do research. When analyzing the general mean of the scores for this dimension, and the means for each items (3, 8, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 20, and 21) it is seen that teachers think that there are barriers preventing them from following and utilizing research.

A great deal of participants' scores for this dimension indicate that teachers cannot find time to follow ELT journals (N= 33; 55.8%), to implement them in the classroom (N= 33; 55.9%); they are not encouraged to read and do research (N= 31; 52.5); they find the facilities of their school inadequate (N= 28; 47.4%); they find themselves isolated from knowledgeable colleagues on research (N= 27; 45.8%); and that they regard research findings not clear enough (N= 27; 45.8%). These and some other similar reasons can be considered as the factors obstructing the use of research in language teaching.

Using the SSPS 16.00 and conducting the tests of ANOVA and Bivariate Pearson Correlation Analysis, the overall score for the whole questionnaire and the means of sub-dimensions were analyzed in order to determine whether these means vary according to the variables such as gender, age, experience in English language

teaching, the departments graduated from, academic degrees the participants had, and types of school they worked at; and the correlations between the scores and variables were looked for. The significance values obtained from both correlation and variance analysis were higher than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). Namely, neither significant variances nor significant correlations were found.

Considering these analyses and reviewing the analyses of the general average score, and the means for all three dimensions, it is possible to conclude that the participants, irrespective of their gender, age, experience in English language teaching, the departments they graduated from, what academic degrees they have, and which types of school they work at, generally have positive views on the role of research in English teaching; they find research important; they try to do and to utilize research in the classroom; but, they think some factors inhibit their reading and using research.

4. Results and Implications

To summarize the results and findings obtained in this study, it can be stated that high school English language teachers, to a certain extent, have positive opinions on the role and importance of the scientific research on second language teaching in the whole process from planning to evaluation; and desires to implement research results in the classroom. However, besides these positive thoughts, the factors which prevent them from reaching and reading research, implementing research results in the teaching settings, and doing research were also presented. Inadequacy of time and school facilities, absence of an encouraging atmosphere, the difficulty in understanding and adapting research results to classroom setting can be given as the most emphasized ones of these factors.

It should also be emphasized that teachers' views do not vary significantly according to different variables. Depending on this result, it can be inferred that these are general views of teachers, irrespective of the variables between them.

According to the results, it can be assumed that teachers want to read, utilize, and carry out research, but there are some obstacles. Therefore, there should

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be some attempts to remove these obstacles. As it is very well known in recent decades, there have been great developments and innovations in second language teaching as well as in all professions, disciplines, and every sphere of life. To keep pace with all these developments, science and scientific knowledge should be introduced to every level of all professions. Some attempts are needed in order to remove the obstacles inhibiting the access, use, and conduct of scientific research via different types of activities, such as introduction of research to teachers by conferences, panels, seminars, in-service teacher education etc., providing them with access to scientific journals in schools, designing and organizing classrooms in a way that would let the implementation of research into classroom, encouraging them to read and utilize research in their teaching process, rewarding scientific studies which would contribute to improvement of teaching, and many others that cannot be counted here. By this way, teachers' reflections on their own teaching, classroom problems, learning, planning, evaluation processes; and their conduct of, classroom researches, in particular, action research can be encouraged. This would improve English language teaching.

By this study, it was aimed to find out general opinions of teachers on research. In further studies, more in-depth and multi-faceted research with much greater number of participants from different levels of schools in different locations in Turkey can be carried out to analyze the current state of research in schools and to search ways to develop its use and administration in schools. Especially the studies that would analyze reflective practices and action research practices by English language teachers are expected to be useful and contributory to both the area of research in second language teaching and teaching of English as a foreign language in Turkey.

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APPENDIX

HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS' VIEWS ON RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

1.	In my opinion, research results are helpful in solving real life problems in ELT.
2	Research, in general, deals with issues which are not very important for ELT classrooms.
3	Teachers know how to use (utilize) research results in language teaching contexts.
4	Language teachers are willing to change and try new ideas.
5	Language teachers do see the value of research for practice.
6	I myself do scientific research related to English teaching.
7	Research results should be used as the main criteria in determining and assessing teaching/learning alternatives.
8	Research information is best understood when it is applied in classroom settings.
9	Research information should be used to determine the potential success of a teaching/learning.
10	We have access to scientific journals of ELT.
11	Research implications for practice are not clear enough.
12	I incorporate research information into my teaching/learning.
13	Language teachers feel research results are not generalizable to their own settings.
14	I think language teaching/learning should be guided by research and theory.
15	Language teachers see great benefit in research for self.
16	There is sufficient time to implement new ideas in the classroom.
17	Language teachers are isolated from knowledgeable colleagues with whom to discuss the research.
18	Facilities of schools are adequate for the implementation of research results in classrooms.
19	In my opinion, every teacher should follow research.
20	Teachers are not encouraged to do and read research.
21	As teachers we do not have enough time to follow ELT journals.