

Chapter 13

Research Engagement as Professional Development for English Educators

Siti Mariam

(Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang)

sitimariam@walisongo.ac.id

1. RATIONALE

Research engagement is a critical aspect of professional development for English educators in the twenty-first century. As the field of English language teaching (ELT) continues to change in response to globalization, technological innovation, multilingualism and changing learner needs, teachers are under increasing pressure to not only implement pedagogical knowledge but also generate, interpret and apply research findings to improve their professional practice. Research engagement is the active involvement of teachers in research and reading the scholarly literature, for participating in research communities and applying research-informed evidence to improve teaching and learning. Such involvement closes the gap between theory, practice, fosters reflective, evidence-based and context-sensitive teaching.

Current research suggests that professional development for teachers is most effective when it is ongoing, collaborative, inquiry-based and directly linked to classroom practice, rather than relying solely on one-off workshops or training sessions. Through participation in research, teachers have opportunities to critically examine their pedagogical decisions, investigate classroom issues, and develop new instructional strategies based

on empirical evidence. Activities such as action research, exploratory practice, practitioner inquiry, and engagement in professional learning communities enable English educators to be active knowledge producers rather than passive recipients of externally generated knowledge. Also, engaging in research is contributing to teacher agency, professional identity and lifelong learning. Teachers who are engaged in research tend to have more confidence in curriculum innovation, more reflective capacity, and higher adaptability to educational reforms (Cross, R., & Hong, 2022; Ma'mun, N., et al., 2025; Yuan, R., & Burns, 2020).

Research also suggests that supportive institutional cultures, collaborative networks and mentoring opportunities can maintain teachers' motivation to engage with research and to translate research outcomes into classroom practice. However, for many English educators, barriers such as limited time, lack of research training, heavy teaching loads and lack of institutional support still constrain research participation. In the context of the modern ELT landscape, therefore, engaging with research should be approached not only as an academic obligation but also as a transformative avenue of professional development which empowers English language educators to become reflective practitioners, informed decision-makers and contributors to educational knowledge. Integrating research in professional learning can help English teachers become more effective and more adept at negotiating the complexities of contemporary language education.

2. IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter supports the growing consensus that research engagement is a powerful and life-altering form of professional development for English educators. Current research is increasingly defining teacher learning as a continuous process of inquiry, reflection, collaboration, and knowledge construction, rather than a series of externally organized workshops or training sessions. By reflecting on their practices, generating context

sensitive knowledge and making informed pedagogical decisions, research engagement enables English teachers to be active agents of educational change. This view aligns with current notions of teacher professionalism, highlighting autonomy, agency and lifelong learning. Research engagement is important in reflective practice.

2.1 Teacher Professional Learning

Teachers undertake systematic inquiry such as action research, exploratory practice and practitioner inquiry to investigate issues in their classrooms and to solve them on the basis of evidence, not just gut feeling. The use of research methodologies makes reflection more rigorous and provides educators with the means to evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction and to adjust their practices to the needs of diverse learners. Recent research indicates that teachers who participate in research have a more in-depth understanding of the processes of teaching and learning, which affects their pedagogical decisions and enhances classroom outcomes (Hasbi, 2025). Therefore, reflection through research is not only a personal activity, but also a professional practice that directly contributes to teacher development. It also demonstrates the connection between research engagement and teacher agency (Jia, Q., et al, 2025; Liu, D., & Xu, 2021; Wang, T., & Zhang, 2021).

It is the capacity of teachers to make purposeful choices and influence educational practices within their professional contexts. Research-active teachers are more likely to see themselves as change-makers because they have evidence to back up their pedagogical innovations. Through research teachers become less dependent on externally imposed solutions and more confident in developing contextually relevant approaches. Recent literature shows that engaging in research strengthens professional agency as it prompts teachers to identify problems, formulate research questions, analyse data and apply evidence-based interventions. Therefore, teachers are changed from the consumers of

knowledge to the producers of knowledge, which enhances their professional confidence and leadership ability. Another important finding refers to the role of research engagement in the development of professional identity. It is dynamic and changes as a result of contacts, experiences, and involvement in professional societies. Teachers are able to reframe their professional roles outside of the classroom by doing and sharing research. Teachers who conduct research frequently start to regard themselves as academics, creators, and adders to the body of knowledge in education. Studies in ELT environments suggest that engagement in research activities fosters the formation of more nuanced and powerful professional identities. Teachers' dedication to professional learning is further strengthened when they become more conscious of their skills and receive recognition from institutions and peers. In this topic, the function of action research merits special consideration.

2.2 Classroom-Based Research

Since action research directly tackles classroom problems and produces workable answers, it has long been seen as one of the most accessible types of teacher research. Action research is integrated into teachers' regular professional activities, in contrast to typical academic research. Recent studies indicate that action research encourages self-directed professional development by motivating teachers to identify local difficulties, implement interventions, and assess outcomes systematically. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that participation in action research enhances teachers' sense of control over their professional development and helps them form positive professional identities. These results imply that action research is still a very useful paradigm for teacher professional development, especially in situations where teachers do not have easy access to formal research training (Burns, A., & Lawrie, 2020; Cross, R., & Hong, 2022; Dikilitaş, K., & Sağlam, 2023).

They highlight the value of cooperative research communities in maintaining teacher interest in research. Professional learning does not occur in isolation rather, it is enhanced by interaction with colleagues, mentors, and professional networks. Research communities give chances for instructors to communicate ideas, receive criticism, and explore collective solutions to educational difficulties. In ELT contexts, engagement in blended and online professional communities has been demonstrated to help both professional growth and identity development. Collaborative settings foster chances for ongoing learning and assist educators in overcoming emotions of loneliness. These communities also promote access to research materials and encourage teachers to communicate their discoveries, so creating a culture of inquiry within educational institutions.

2.3 Research Literacy

The relationship between research participation and the development of academic literacy is a significant consequence arising from the findings. To participate effectively in research, teachers must have competencies in reading scholarly literature, critically analysing evidence, academic writing, and distributing findings. Engagement with these activities promotes teachers' academic literacy and expands their capacity to access and contribute to professional knowledge. Recent studies demonstrate that academic literacy development not only increases research skills but also develops professional identity by establishing instructors as members of broader scholarly communities. For English teachers, whose work frequently involves language, literacy, and communication, research participation provides beneficial chances to improve teaching efficacy and hone these skills (Hasbi et al., 2025a). They also show that the degree to which teachers participate in research is significantly influenced by institutional support. While human motivation is crucial, organizational circumstances frequently

limit or promote research engagement. Institutions that give research funding, mentoring, professional development opportunities, lower teaching loads, and access to scholarly resources are more likely to generate research-active instructors. On the other hand, instructors are often deterred from engaging in research activities by heavy workloads, a lack of research training, and inadequate institutional support. Empirical evidence reveals that institutional support greatly influences research self-efficacy and engagement levels among EFL teachers. Thus, encouraging teacher research necessitates systemic initiatives to establish encouraging work conditions in addition to individual dedication (Hayes, D., et al, 2024; Miller, E. R., & Gkonou, 2021; Smith, B., & Wyness, 2024).

Research self-efficacy revealed as another significant element impacting teacher engagement with research. Teachers who believe in their competence to do research are more likely to participate in research-related activities and persist despite hurdles. Self-efficacy is often built through successful research experiences, mentoring relationships, and participation in joint initiatives. When instructors build confidence in their research skills, they become more likely to pursue challenging investigations and distribute their findings. This association between self-efficacy and engagement underscores the necessity of offering opportunities for beginner researchers to gain competence progressively through guided practice and professional support. Despite its benefits, the data reveal that several impediments continue to hinder teachers' engagement with research. Time limits remain one of the most often stated issues.

2.4 Teacher Identity

There is little time for research activities for many English teachers due to their demanding teaching loads, administrative duties, and assessment commitments. Furthermore, some educators believe that research is excessively theoretical,

complicated, or unrelated to the realities of the classroom. Limited access to research training and scholarly materials can further diminish teachers' confidence and motivation to engage in inquiry. In developing educational contexts, where institutional research cultures may still be forming, these obstacles are especially noticeable. Strategic initiatives at the institutional and policy levels are needed to address these issues and more successfully incorporate research into teachers' professional duties. The results are especially pertinent to teaching English in Indonesia and other expanding-circle English environments.

English teachers in these settings generally operate within multilingual and multicultural situations characterized by various student demands and fast changing educational practices. Instead of depending solely on instructional models created elsewhere, research engagement allows teachers to look into context-specific challenges. Local knowledge can be produced through teacher-led inquiry to address issues with intercultural communication, multilingualism, global Englishes, and culturally sensitive education (Hasbi et al., 2025b). The current calls for more context-sensitive types of ELT that acknowledge the diversity of English language learning situations globally are in line with this localized approach to professional development. Another significant finding is that research engagement promotes to sustainable professional development. Conventional professional development programs frequently result in temporary gains that fade after outside assistance stops.

2.5 Reflective Practice

In contrast, research involvement builds habits of inquiry that may be maintained throughout a teacher's career. Teachers who actively engage with research gain the skills to detect emerging difficulties, evaluate innovations, and adjust their approaches continuously. This self-sustaining cycle of inquiry and reflection encourages long-term professional growth and resilience. Consequently, research participation should be

considered not as an additional professional responsibility but as an intrinsic component of continuing professional learning. (Jia, Q., et al, 2025; Ma'mun, N., et al, 2025; Stringer, 2024). Overall, they show that research participation fulfils numerous professional purposes simultaneously. Academic literacy is improved, professional identity development is supported, teacher agency is strengthened, reflective practice is strengthened, and sustained professional progress is facilitated. However, achieving these advantages necessitates mentoring opportunities, sufficient resources, supportive institutional cultures, and acknowledgment of teacher research as a worthwhile professional endeavour. Fostering research engagement among English educators is a promising strategy for producing knowledgeable, reflective, and creative professionals capable of effectively responding to changing educational demands as educational systems continue to face complex challenges in the twenty-first century.

3. REFLECTION

Based on the findings and discussion, numerous solutions can be given to promote research engagement as a sustainable form of professional development for English educators. First, educational institutions should build supportive research cultures that encourage instructors to participate in inquiry-based professional learning. Universities, schools, and teacher education institutes should give research funds, access to academic databases, mentoring programs, and dedicated time for research activities. Teachers' willingness and ability to conduct research has been repeatedly found to be significantly influenced by institutional support (Hasbi et al., 2025a). When teachers are provided with enough resources and organizational encouragement, they are more likely to do classroom-based research and apply evidence-informed methods in their teaching (Ni, 2024; Smith, B., & Wyness, 2024).

Second, teacher learning efforts should incorporate research training into professional development programs. Workshops and seminars should move beyond traditional knowledge transmission methods and instead focus on strengthening teachers' competencies in action research, practitioner inquiry, data analysis, academic writing, and research dissemination. Such training can boost teachers' research self-efficacy and minimize anxiety related with research activities. Developing these competences is particularly critical for rookie researchers who may lack past research experience (Dikilitaş, K., & Sağlam, 2023; Stringer, 2024). Third, legislators and educational leaders should support collaborative research communities and professional learning networks. Teachers can share research experiences, discuss ideas, and get helpful criticism from mentors and peers by taking part in communities of practice. Online and in-person networks can lessen professional isolation and promote ongoing professional growth. Research has demonstrated that teacher agency, professional identity, and long-term engagement with research are all strengthened in collaborative situations (Başar, S., & Çomoğlu, 2024; Hayes, D., et al, 2024; Ramdani, J. M., et al, 2023).

Finally, future study should explore research participation across multiple educational contexts, including rural schools, multilingual classrooms, and higher education institutions. In particular, longitudinal studies are required to investigate the long-term effects of continuous research engagement on student learning outcomes, professional identity development, and teaching effectiveness. Such investigations will contribute to a deeper knowledge of how research involvement can be effectively entrenched into English teacher professional development programs and educational policies (Alridya, 2025; Hayes, D., Jang, K., & Lee, 2024; Ni, 2024).

Author



Dr. Siti Mariam, M.Pd., is a lecturer, researcher, and trainer in education, in the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia. Her research interests include Language Testing and Assessment, TESOL Methodology, Curriculum and Material Development.

References

- Alridya, B. P. (2025). A systematic review of language teachers' professional development in Western Indonesia: Current practices and challenges. *Applied Linguistics & Language Teaching*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.37253/iallteach.v7i2.11542>
- Başar, S., & Çomoğlu, İ. (2024). A review of critical pedagogy-informed collaborative professional development practices in English language teaching. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 26(2), 163–179. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v26n2.110341>
- Burns, A., & Lawrie, J. (2020). Teacher agency in action research. *ELT Journal*, 74(3), 298–307. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccaa017>
- Cross, R., & Hong, J. (2022). Teacher identity and agency in professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 112, 10366. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103660>
- Dikilitaş, K., & Sağlam, A. (2023). Exploring the practical impacts of research engagement on English language teaching: Insights from an online community of practice. *Journal on Efficiency and Responsibility in Education and Science*, 16(1), 46–54. <https://doi.org/10.7160/eriesj.2023.160105>

- Hasbi, M., Wahyuningsih, S., Fata, I. A., Islamiah, N., Arjulayana. (2025). *Teaching, Research, and Community Service: A Tridharma Guide for English Educators*. Rizquna.
- Hasbi, M., Nor, H., Madkur, A., Sulistyo, T., Mulyani, Y. S. (2025). *Local-Based English Language Teaching Across Indonesia*. Rizquna.
- Hasbi, M. (2025). Navigating teaching, research, and community service: Tridharma practices for English lecturers. In *Teaching, Research, and Community Service: A Tridharma Guide for English Educators* (pp. 1-15). Rizquna.
- Hayes, D., Jang, K., & Lee, J. (2024). Revisiting INSET for new directions in English teachers' continuing professional development. *Journal of Korea English Education Society*, 23(3), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.18649/jkees.2024.23.3.1>
- Jia, Q., Wang, D., & Ding, J. (2025). Evolutionary Review of Teacher Agency Research over the past 22 Years (2003-2024): A Bibliometric Analysis. *SAGE Open*, 15(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440251342633>
- Liu, D., & Xu, Y. (2021). Teacher agency in curriculum innovation. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 51(3), 312–330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2020.1834425>
- Ma'mun, N., Riyono, A., Mariam, S. (2025). Negotiating Teacher Professional Identity and Agency in the Era of AI; Evidence from Faith-based Educational Institutions through a Delphi Inquiry. *JETLI: Journal of English Teaching and Learning Issues*, 8(2), 2685–4473. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21043/jetli.v8i2.34005>
- Miller, E. R., & Gkonou, C. (2021). Teacher emotions and agency in ELT. *Modern Language Journal*, 20(3), 437–456. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-020-09568-1>
- Ni, H. (2024). "I am strong in will but weak in action": College English teachers' research engagement in a Chinese regional university. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, 1397786. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2024.1397786>
- Ramdani, J. M., Baker, S., & Gao, X. (2023). Exploratory practice as

a professional development strategy for English-language teachers in Indonesia. *RELC Journal*, 54(2), 385–401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882231152944>

Smith, B., & Wyness, L. (2024). What makes professional teacher development in universities effective? Lessons from an international systematised review. *Professional Development in Education*, 50(8), 1550–1572. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2024.2386666>

Stringer, T. (2024). Synthesisability and optimising exploratory action research for continuing professional development. *Educational Action Research*, 32(4), 677–694. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2024.2362706>

Wang, T., & Zhang, L. J. (2021). Teacher agency in English language education. *System*, 98, 102457. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102457>

Yuan, R., & Burns, A. (2020). Teacher identity and agency in language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 54(1), 129–149. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.535>