

Research practice and professional development for university teaching of English: A qualitative study

Masoud Rahimi, Nouroddin Yousofi and Shahab Moradkhani

Razji University, Iran

As part of a large-scale study, the present study explored the impact of research practice on professional development for English language teaching (ELT) in higher education. To this end, 10 masters students, 10 doctoral students and 10 university professors in ELT in different high-ranking state universities in Iran participated in the study. A narrative frame was first used to collect data about the participants' research practice in higher education. Subsequently, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the participants individually to triangulate the results of the narratives and yield more profound insights into the participants' research impact in ELT higher education. Grounded theory, used to analyse the data, uncovered a number of themes and categories addressing the impact of research on professional development in higher education for masters and doctoral students and university professors. A number of themes were uncovered for the following generated categories: growth of knowledge and skills in ELT, positive impact on professional teaching practice and qualifications. Implications and recommendations are provided for research practice in higher education.

Introduction

Masters and doctoral students, as postgraduates and university professors in higher education are engaged both with (i.e. through reading) and in (i.e. through doing) research (Borg & Liu, 2013; Daniel, Kumar & Omar, 2018; Mantai, 2017; Rahimi, Yousofi & Moradkhani, 2019a, 2019b; Xu, 2014). The researchers' research engagement (interchangeably referred to as research practice) assists their own professional development and research skills and knowledge base growth more broadly (Gibbs et al., 2017; Hajdarpasic, Brew & Popenici, 2014; Wald & Harland, 2017).

In English language teaching (ELT), in higher education in particular, a number of studies have addressed the impact of research on professional development (Borg & Liu, 2013; Xu, 2014). However, the impact of research practice of masters and doctoral students and university professors, as the three stakeholders of research in ELT higher education context, has not been explored and compared. Exploring and disentangling the influence of masters and doctoral students' and university professors' research practice in ELT higher education yield insights into how research practice contributes to professional development.

In response to this research lacuna, the current study set out to explore the impact of masters' and doctoral students' and professors' research practice on their professional development for ELT higher education. The findings might benefit the ELT researchers' research activities in higher education. Following the viewpoints of masters and doctoral students and university professors, policymakers and officers in higher education might

help improve the dominant research practice in ELT higher education. The findings could also benefit other researchers, policymakers and officers in broader higher education disciplines, since clarifying the research impact of masters and doctoral students and university professors in this manner is a common goal in many higher education settings.

Review of the literature

Following Borg (2010), research engagement/research practice in higher education refers to masters and doctoral students' and university professors' engagement both with research (i.e. reading published research articles and books) and in research (i.e. doing qualitative and/or quantitative research individually or collaboratively). Researchers engaged both with and in research are believed to enhance their professional development. Professional development refers to a comprehensive, sustained and intensive approach to developing researchers' knowledge base and effectiveness in teaching and research practice (van den Bergh, Ros & Beijaard, 2014). Professional development entails such activities in higher education as attending workshops, writing descriptions of effective teaching and research practices, following experts' opinions or peer consultation and involvement in course development processes. In this study, masters and doctoral students' and university professors' direct involvement with and in research can contribute to their professional development. Nevertheless, not being engaged with and in research activities, competitive pressures in doing and publishing research for promotion, problems of the published research articles and the deterrent effect of the immediate context, can hamper masters and doctoral students' and university professors' professional development.

A number of studies have addressed academics' research engagement (Allison & Carey, 2007; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012; Borg & Liu, 2013; Xu, 2014). Some academics claim a positive association between their research engagement and professional teaching practice (Brew, 2010; Hammersley, 2004; Jenkins, 2000; Neumann, 1993; Rahimi & Weisi, 2018a, 2018b; Rahimi, Yousofi & Moradkhani, 2018; Robertson & Bond, 2001). For example, Rahimi et al. (2018) quantitatively explored the contribution of research engagement to professional development in ELT higher education, finding that postgraduates and instructors hold positive perceptions towards the impact of research activities on professional development. For instance, they indicated that research activities influence ELT knowledge positively by connecting the research findings to the researchers' own classroom context. Hargreaves (2001) and Lankshear and Knobel (2004) also claimed that being engaged with and in research positively influenced teachers' professional teaching practice. It is argued that teachers engaging in research discover relevant knowledge for their professional teaching development (Smith, 2014).

Moreover, it has been suggested that in order to take a more "innovatory, as opposed to implementary, role in curriculum development", teachers should adopt the perspective of researchers (Gurney, 1989, pp. 15). Therefore, teachers' research engagement brings about "the creation of a problem-solving mindset, the improvement of teachers' instructional decision-making processes, the increase of teachers' professional status and the empowerment of teachers in bringing about changes at classroom, district, state and

national levels” (Olson, 1990, p. 17-18). In a similar vein, Edwards and Burns (2016) argued that action research has a durable impact on English language teachers’ teaching practice. They proposed that teachers involved in action research are more confident, have an excellent rapport with their students, are more research-engaged and well-known by other teachers in the field. They maintained that institutional support and teachers’ own motivation are necessary to ensure the sustainability of the teachers’ research engagement. It is claimed that English language teachers involved in action research are more knowledgeable in their professional teaching, develop awareness and reflectivity, collaborate more with their colleagues (Atay, 2008), think critically and reflectively about their classroom problems (Allwright & Hanks, 2009) and positively develop their sense of self-efficacy in their teaching practice (Cabaroğlu, 2014).

Lindsay, Breen and Jenkins (2002) and Neumann (1993) explored the perceptions of senior academic administrators towards the impact of research activities in higher education, finding that research developed knowledge, enquiry and publications. Lindsay et al. (2002), on the other hand, examined undergraduate and postgraduate students’ perceptions towards the impact of lecturer research practice on student learning. They indicated positive perceptions held by the students on the increased quantity and quality of the lecturers’ research. Similarly, Hajdarpasic et al. (2014) indicated that undergraduates had a positive attitude towards academics’ research practice. They also revealed that academic research practice had a positive influence on undergraduates’ learning, motivation and research performance. Hattie and Marsh (1996) and Jensen (1988) capitalised on the link between research and teaching in higher education. Similarly, Smith and Smith (2012) maintained that research and teaching “together ... are more than just the sum of the parts” (p. 471). Mägi and Beerkens (2016) further suggested that academics, actively engaged both with and in research in higher education, link their research outcomes to their teaching practice and motivate their postgraduate students to conduct and publish research studies with them.

Moreover, academics may encourage students to be involved in a variety of research-based activities and apply different pedagogical practices for their learners to adopt a deeper approach to their learning (Belcher & Hirvela, 2005; Brew 2010; González-Ocampo & Castelló, 2018; Ohashi, Ohashi & Paltridge, 2008; Ozay, 2012; Trigwell, 2005) and become more satisfied (Jenkins, 2004) and motivated (Durning & Jenkins 2005) in their learning. In order to link research and professional teaching in higher education, the research practice of the academics should be managed in a way that develops their own knowledge and students’ learning (Jenkins, 2000). Jenkins and Zetter (2003), on the other hand, argued that the academic departments should create this link in order to fulfil a productive relationship. Elton (2001) claimed that positive links between research practice and professional teaching in higher education might be due to the processes rather than the outcomes of research and teaching and that student-centred teaching and learning processes are more favourable towards a positive link between research and teaching. This link between research and teaching in higher education has been conceptualised variously as “research-enhanced teaching” (Brew, 2010), “research-led teaching” (Mayson & Schapper, 2012), “teaching-research relationship” (Jenkins, 2004), “teaching-research nexus” (Neumann, 1993) and “research-based learning” (Brew, 2013).

However, a number of studies have found no association between research engagement and professional teaching practice in some academic settings (Benton & Cashin, 2012; Brown, 1995; Centra, 1983; Feldman, 1987; Hattie & Marsh 1996; Jenkins, 2004; Marsh & Hattie 2002; Ramsden & Moses 1992). For example, Ramsden and Moses (1992) explored the association between research and undergraduate teaching in an Australian higher education setting. They showed either no relation or a negative relation between research output and the effectiveness of professional teaching, both at the individual and department levels in all subject areas. Centra (1983) further investigated associations between research productivity and teaching effectiveness of a large number of academics in various fields of study from a variety of institutions. The findings indicated that, save for social science disciplines, there were no significant correlations between research productivity of academics and students' ratings of their teaching effectiveness. This might be due to the fact that publishing research in such academic contexts is high on the researchers' list of priorities and that the increase in the number of publication has not changed the number of research articles that these research producers read (Weiner, 2001).

Theoretical framework

The current study hinges on Lave and Wenger's (1991) *Communities of Practice* (CoP) theory. To this aim, this study explores the impact of ELT research engagement on professional development by exploring and disentangling the views of masters and doctoral students and university professors in ELT higher education, who cooperatively partake in and negotiate meanings around a shared academic research practice using shared repertoires in pursuit of a joint enterprise. In this academic CoP, masters and doctoral students could be considered as peripheral members and university professors could be considered as the core members. Based on this theory, the peripheral members do not have full access to the repertoire of resources of the community (Wenger, 1998). Moreover, increased participation in the academic CoP (in this study, participation in research activities) should lead to better learning outcomes (in this study, professional development) (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

An academic CoP involves a number of mechanisms that lead results and discussion in the present study. Mutual engagement in research practice, considered as one of the CoP mechanisms, deals with the researchers' collaboration in their research activities and considers the researchers as a social entity. Research practice as a joint-enterprise, considered as another mechanism, deals with the researchers' objectives in engaging with and in research practice in the CoP. The third mechanism, shared repertoire, shows how the communal resources in the CoP, such as discourse of the community, tools, genres, etc., facilitate the researchers' research activities (Wenger 1998). In this study, researchers collaboratively publish research studies, whilst using the shared resources of the community, in order to pursue their own goals, such as promotion, qualification, etc.

Gaps in the literature and the aim of the study

As the review of the literature displays, being engaged with and in research in academic CoP might have a positive (Lindsay et al., 2002) or no impact (Ramsden & Moses, 1992)

on academics' professional development (developing knowledge base and skills in teaching and research practice in higher education). Although the influence of research practice in higher education has been explored extensively, no research studies have explored the impact of research engagement on the professional development of university professors as well as masters and doctoral students in ELT higher education. To deal with this gap and to address the purpose of the study, we explore the impact of masters and doctoral students' and university professors' research engagement on their professional development in the academic CoP. Therefore, the following research question is addressed:

How does engagement with/in research contribute to the professional development of masters and doctoral students and university professors in ELT higher education?

Method

Context of the study

Master of arts (MA) and doctor of philosophy (PhD) courses in ELT higher education in the present context require these postgraduates to cover ELT courses and do research projects accordingly. Moreover, the courses require the masters and doctoral students to conduct their dissertation/thesis and extract and publish research studies. Through such research engagement, masters students enrich their curriculum vitae (CV) to be admitted into a PhD course and doctoral students enrich their CVs to become university professors in the academic CoP. University professors are required to publish research studies with their masters and doctoral students in the ELT higher education in order to remain in and continue their academic work and achieve promotion.

Participants

The target sample of the study were 10 masters students, 10 doctoral students and 10 university professors in ELT in several high-ranking state universities in Iran. All three groups are considered to be within the academic research CoP in the Iranian ELT higher education setting. The masters students comprised six males and four females, aged about 25 to 33 years, and were in the second year of their academic study. The doctoral students comprised seven males and three females, age range 29 to 35 years and in the first, second, or third year of their academic study. The university professors included assistant, associate and full professors, age range of 34-45 years, all male, with professional teaching experience in ELT higher education ranging from 4 to 20 years.

In order to protect the identity of the participants and for ethical reasons, M1, M2, ... and M10 were used as the masters students' pseudonyms, D1, D2, ...; D10 for the doctoral students' pseudonyms; and U1, U2, ... and U10 for the university professors' pseudonyms.

Instruments

A narrative frame (Riessman, 2008) (see Appendix A), developed by the present authors, was applied to collect initial data about the participants' research practice. Narrative frames provide the participants of the research study with guidance and support in the structure and content (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008). Following this, the first author/researcher developed a template of frames comprising 8 items. The narrative frame examines the participants' demographic information, the institutional requirements for research activities, the characteristics of good research, engagement with and in research and the influence of such research practices. The validity of the narrative frame was checked by piloting it with five participants and consulting with some experts in ELT in higher education over the pilot results. The narrative frame was distributed both in hard copy and online.

In-depth semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B), developed by the authors, were conducted with the participants individually to check their views about the impact of ELT research engagement on professional development. The interview questions explored the nexus of research practice with practical knowledge, the impact of research engagement on professional development, the influence of contextual factors, etc.

The narrative frame and the interview questions were complementary in that they both contributed to the collected data. The participating masters and doctoral students and university professors had adequate time to ponder over the narrative-frame items and provide deep and extensive explanations. Although during the interview sessions the participants had little time to think about the questions, the first author/researcher could ask more questions, based on the participants' responses and look for more and relevant details. In the interview sessions, the first author/researcher carefully scrutinised the narrative frames and connected the narrative-frame items with the interview questions so as to elicit more information about the impact of research practice on professional development for the three groups of stakeholders in ELT higher education. Due to the above-mentioned reasons, we used written forms of data collection before oral forms in order to triangulate the collected data in a preferable way.

Procedures

The data collection for the present study took place during the academic year of 2017-2018. The narrative frame, providing an emic perspective to the area under investigation, was first distributed among the participants either online (12 participants) or in hard copy (18 participants). The participants were asked to address the narrative frame items in Kurdish (14 participants), Persian (9 participants), or English (7 participants). After rewriting the narratives in English as coherent and condensed stories, they were returned to the participants to check their authenticity. The first author/researcher also negotiated with the participants to uncover a number of themes out of their stories. The participants were asked to illuminate the information they provided in the narrative frame. The masters and doctoral students and university professors then participated in semi-structured interviews, which further provided an emic perspective to the area. The

interviews were in Kurdish or Persian and took about 30 to 50 minutes. In the interview session, the participants elaborated on their written narratives and the interview questions. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and then translated into English.

Following Creswell (2007), the credibility of the narrative frame and the interview data was checked using member checking techniques. The first author/researcher clarified the information in each question during the interview session to develop the accuracy of the responses. Then, the transcribed narrative and interview data were returned to the participants to check for their accuracy and authenticity.

Data analysis

Grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) was applied to analyse the data of the narrative frame and the interview. Grounded theory is a way to uncover the prominent themes in a particular area through systematic observation and/or interaction (Charmaz, 2006). It provides guidelines for qualitative data collection and analysis through which grounded theory constructs its own theories (Charmaz, 2006). As a result, following the open thematic coding, the transcribed narratives and interviews in this study were coded (i.e. open coding) to uncover a number of themes about the impact of research engagement on professional development. The uncovered themes were then categorised based on their content (i.e. axial coding). Additionally, a label was assigned to each category to cover the categorised themes (i.e. labelling). The processes of open coding, categorising and labelling of the themes and categories followed a bottom-up approach.

Following Gass and Mackey (2000), inter-rater reliability was conducted to diminish the subjectivity and bias in the segmentation, categorisation and labelling. To this aim, the first author/researcher and another expert and experienced researcher checked the segmentation, categorisation and labelling of the themes and categories and made the required modifications.

Results

In this section, the uncovered categories and themes related to the research impact of masters and doctoral students and university professors, who form an academic CoP in an ELT higher education setting, are reported. By analysing the data, a number of categories and themes related to the participants' attitudes and perceptions towards the impact of their research practice on their professional development were uncovered (see Table 1).

Growth of knowledge and skills in ELT

As the results indicate, the participants in all groups stated that the most important impact of their research activities is that it develops their knowledge and skills in ELT and helps them stay up-to-date in this realm. The doctoral students and university professors claimed that being engaged with and in research contribute to their academic writing skills, since they read relevant research articles and do their own research projects accordingly.

They could further develop their research skills through the journal reviewers' constructive comments and advice. The masters and doctoral students argued that research practice helps them find and address the research gaps in the literature and develop a close relationship with other researchers in the academic CoP.

Table 1: Categories of research impact on professional development in ELT higher education for masters students, doctoral students and university professors

Categories	Themes	Examples	Masters	Doctoral	Professors
1. Growth of knowledge and skills in ELT	1. Increasing one's knowledge	Doing research has a great impact on my professional development, since I read a lot of relevant articles through which I increase my knowledge. (M1, Interview)	✓	✓	✓
	2. Keeping one's knowledge up-to-date	I read research a lot, because I think I can keep my knowledge up to date by reading these articles. (U3, Interview)	✓	✓	✓
	3. Developing academic writing skills necessary for research articles	The research that I read makes me familiar with the writing and structure of the article. (D9, Narrative Frame and Interview)	–	✓	✓
	4. Developing research ability through the reviewers' constructive comments	The feedback that we receive from the reviewers can influence our experience and knowledge to a great extent. (D5, Interview)	–	✓	✓
	5. Finding and bridging the gaps in the literature	I read research and find gaps in the literature and conduct research to bridge the gaps. (M2, Narrative Frame)	✓	✓	–
	6. Developing a close collaboration among the researchers	Doing research makes an amicable relationship and cooperation with other classmates and researchers and contributes to our professional development. (M1, Interview)	✓	✓	–
2. Positive impact on professional teaching practice	1. Connecting research findings to the classroom context	I think about these findings and apply them in the class; if they are successful I do it regularly in the class. (U2, Narrative Frame and Interview)	✓	✓	✓
	2. Having direct impact of doing and indirect impact of reading research	When we do a research study, we are directly involved in the study, so it has more impact on our professional teaching practice than reading research. (D10, Interview)	✓	✓	–
	3. Becoming a more proficient instructor	We can find teaching and/or learning issues in our classes, conduct research studies accordingly and find the solutions to those issues. (D4, Narrative Frame)	–	✓	✓

	4. Introducing suitable research articles to the students to do research accordingly	Based on the students' needs I read and enhance my professional development in order to help them develop theirs. (U8, Interview)	-	-	✓
3. Qualification	1. Being admitted into a higher education level	Most of the points required to become an associate professor are related to our research publication, thesis supervision, translation, etc. Even being the first or second author and the corresponding author in the published research articles affect our promotion. After getting promoted to a higher education rank, the university professors gradually lose their enthusiasm for publishing joint research studies with their students. (U4, Narrative Frame and Interview)	✓	✓	✓
	2. Fulfilling the course requirements	We can defend our thesis if and only if we publish an article in an accredited journal. (D2, Narrative Frame and Interview)	✓	✓	-
	3. Enriching one's CV	I continue doing and reading research to enrich my CV so that I might be accepted as a university professor in the future. (D10, Interview)	✓	✓	-

Note: Ticks (✓) indicate that the corresponding theme was extracted from the group's collected data, whilst dashes (-) show the lack of the theme in participants' data.

Positive impact on professional teaching practice

The postgraduate students and university professors claimed that they connect the research findings to the classroom context and develop their professional teaching practice in that regard. The postgraduates thought that doing research directly influences their professional teaching practice as they are involved in the research processes; however, reading research has an indirect influence on teaching practice, since they are not directly involved in the research processes. The doctoral students and university professors stated that being engaged with and in research help them become more proficient instructors, whilst the masters students did not take any notice of this research impact. The university professors further claimed that they could introduce suitable research articles to their students through their research engagement so that the students could work on better research studies.

Qualification

The masters and doctoral students and university professors also argued that their research practice positively influences their admission into a higher education level. The postgraduate students stated that reading and doing research help them enrich their CV

for higher education level and/or find a job and the university professors get their promotion to a higher education rank (i.e. they become associate or full professors). The masters and doctoral students could further accomplish the course requirements through doing and publishing research, such as receiving the required mark and passing the courses.

Discussion

Drawing on Lave and Wenger's (1991) CoP, the present study sought to explore the impact of research practice on the professional development of masters and doctoral students and university professors in ELT higher education. The findings generated a number of themes and categories. The results of the study are discussed in the light of the available literature and the status of ELT higher education in Iran.

First, it was found that research practice in ELT higher education improves postgraduates' and university professors' knowledge and research skills. In a similar vein, Neumann (1993) indicated that research engagement develops academics' knowledge in higher education. In much the same vein, Hajdarpasic et al. (2014) argued that academics' research engagement contributes to students' professional development. It is believed that researchers directly involved with and in research (e.g. masters and doctoral students) enhance their professional development to a greater extent in comparison with researchers who are indirectly involved in reading and doing research (e.g. university professors) (Neumann, 1993). The postgraduate students in the present context conduct the research studies themselves and read relevant papers accordingly, which is supposed to contribute to their professional development directly. Most of the university professors, on the other hand, just supervise the research studies with their masters and doctoral students, which might subsequently have an indirect influence on their professionalism in the academic CoP.

The findings also indicated that research activities in ELT higher education develop postgraduates' and university professors' professional teaching practice. In line with the findings of this study, Borg (2010) argued that engaging with and in research develop professional language teaching practice. Similarly, Lindsay et al. (2002) indicated positive impact of lecturer research practice on student learning. Following Mägi and Beerkens (2016) and the findings of the study, postgraduate students and university professors need to be both instructors and researchers in the academic CoP, to enhance their professional development and contribute to the education system more broadly. For this, universities need "to increase the circumstances in which teaching and research have occasion to meet and to provide rewards not only for better teaching or for better research but for demonstrations of the integration between teaching and research" (Hattie & Marsh, 1996, p. 533).

The results further showed that research activities in ELT higher education contribute to masters and doctoral students' and university professors' qualification or promotion. Borg and Liu (2013) and Xu (2014), in a similar line, argued that university professors are

extrinsically engaged with and in research in the academic CoP to get their promotion to a higher rank. Similarly, Sorenson and Lawson (2011) claimed that students carry out research as part of a course of study individually or collaboratively in order to contribute to their final grade for the course, rather than for academic objectives. Even a PhD thesis, which is assumed to be a momentous and long-term research project, is often thought of as “a stepping stone into a PhD career ... not a noble prize” (Mullins & Kiley, 2002, p. 386). In the present context, the pinnacle of masters and doctoral students’ academic achievement is often receiving the academic degree and this is attainable if the students accomplish the course requisites, the most important of which are doing and writing research studies for the courses and thesis. To become an English instructor, educational policies require the qualifications and academic degree of the candidates as evidence for their professionalism (Barduhn & Johnson, 2009), so this provokes a strong desire to gain the academic qualification and might lead to neglect of a professionalism-oriented approach to education.

As is evident from the discussions above, research practice in ELT higher education can yield positive results for the researchers’ professional development. However, as was mentioned by the participants, some contextual impediments make the majority of the researchers read and do research for instrumental purposes, which might subsequently discourage the researchers’ professionalism. The findings indicate that universities evaluate university professors by the number of their published research articles and the credibility of the journal in which they have published their research studies, which is consistent to some extent with Xu’s (2014) findings. Hence, in order to obtain promotion to associate or full professor, university professors have no alternative but to increase the number of their published articles in high-ranking journals by compelling their masters and doctoral students to become the university professors’ ghost-writers in order to do, write and publish research studies for university professors, one way or another. The best university professors are those who have more published research articles, especially in high-ranking journals, not those with great, applicable and useful research studies.

On the other hand, some competent researchers who do not use such strategies to increase the number of their published research articles, either cannot find their way to this ELT higher education system, or do not obtain promotion to a higher rank. Competent researchers carry out research to deal with teaching and/or learning issues in education and develop new ideas to improve teaching and learning in this regard, so they might work on their research studies for a long time and be unable to publish many research studies in a short and limited time. As long as the quality and the findings of the research studies are not important for the masters and doctoral students and university professors in the present context, they conduct research studies about topics whose results are already clear, or with findings that may have little or no application for teaching, learning and/or education and hence do not contribute to the researchers’ professional development. However, postgraduate students are encouraged and rewarded (through high marks) by university professors, whilst the professors are rewarded and promoted to a higher rank by the university.

Conclusion

In this study, we explored the impact of masters students', doctoral students' and university professors' research practice on their professional development in ELT higher education, by drawing on CoP theory. Having analysed the data, some themes and categories were uncovered (e.g. growth of knowledge and skills in ELT, positive impact on professional teaching practice and qualifications). The findings of the study might be fruitful for policymakers, officials in higher education and masters and doctoral students, university professors and teacher educators in ELT higher education. More specifically, the findings have implications for ELT higher education in developing countries, such as Iran, where some impediments have made research activities difficult for the researchers.

Educational policymakers and officials in higher education, considering the findings, might be able to help improve research studies conducted in higher education and hence the professional development of the masters and doctoral students and university professors. Masters and doctoral students and university professors could consider the findings and improve their research performance accordingly. With regard to the findings of the study, administrators and teacher educators could further train ELT instructors to develop their research performance to appropriately address their own teaching and students' learning issues in the classroom. The implications of the study can benefit other researchers in various higher education settings, since the aforementioned research practice exercised by masters and doctoral students and university professors are regarded as common goals in many higher education settings.

However, despite the deep exploration of the participants' research practice in ELT higher education, we could not confidently claim that all aspects of research impact have been addressed in ELT higher education. Therefore, future researchers can explore the research impact of masters and doctoral students and university professors in ELT higher education using other methods of data collection and analyses. Moreover, replicating the study in other higher education settings and exploring masters and doctoral students and university professors' research practice from a wide range of disciplines might further our insights into the impact of research practice on professional development in more detail. In addition, as it was found in this study, masters and doctoral students must publish, especially in Western high-ranking and peer-reviewed journals, so as to complete their MA/PhD studies at university. Hence, future research might further address the topic of difficulties encountered in gaining research article acceptances from Western journals publishing only in English. One more potential topic for future research is post-graduation aspirations for ELT career in higher education. ELT researchers may explore the paths that the postgraduates follow from their studies into their career, in order to find optimum ways to progress.

Acknowledgment

This study was one of the six research articles extracted from the first author/researcher's doctoral thesis (Rahimi, 2019). Adopting a sequential exploratory and triangulation mixed-methods approach in the large scale study (ie, the doctoral thesis), he first explored

research practice of masters and doctoral students and university professors qualitatively and deeply and then quantitatively and extensively. The present study was extracted from the qualitative section of his doctoral thesis and is regarded as a basis for the research article published in *Cogent Education* (i.e. Rahimi, et al., 2018). For other extracted research articles from his doctoral thesis so far, see, for instance, Rahimi, et al. (2019a) and (2019b).

References

- Allison, D. & Carey, J. (2007). What do university language teachers say about language teaching research? *TESL Canada Journal*, 24(2), 61-81.
<https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v24i2.139>
- Allwright, D. & Hanks, J. (2009). *The developing language learner*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9781403985316>
- Atay, D. (2008). Teacher research for professional development. *ELT Journal*, 62(2), 139-47. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccl053>
- Barduhn, S. & Johnson, J. (2009). Certification and professional qualifications. In A. Burns & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *Second language teacher education* (pp. 59-66). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barkhuizen, G. & Wette, R. (2008). Narrative frames for investigating the experiences of language teachers. *System*, 36(3), 372-387.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.02.002>
- Belcher, D. & Hirvela, A. (2005). Writing the qualitative dissertation: What motivates and sustains commitment to a fuzzy genre? *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 4(3), 187-205. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2004.07.010>
- Benton, S. L. & Cashin, W. E. (2010). *Student ratings of teaching: A summary of research and literature*. Idea Paper no. 50. Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University, Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development.
https://www.ideaedu.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/IDEA%20Papers/IDEA%20Papers/PaperIDEA_50.pdf
- Borg, S. (2010). Language teacher research engagement. *Language Teaching*, 43(4), 391-429.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444810000170>
- Borg, S., & Alshumaimeri, Y. (2012). University teacher educators' research engagement: Perspectives from Saudi Arabia. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(3), 347-356.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.10.011>
- Borg, S. & Liu, Y. D. (2013). Chinese college English teachers' research engagement. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(2), 270-299. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.56>
- Brew, A. (2010). Imperatives and challenges in integrating teaching and research. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 29(2), 139-150.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360903552451>
- Brew, A. (2013). Understanding the scope of undergraduate research: A framework for curricular and pedagogical decision-making. *Higher Education*, 66(5), 603-618.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9624-x>
- Brown, R. (1995). *Quality, funding and diversity: The role of research in higher education*. Centre for Policy Studies, University of Leeds.

- Cabaroglu, N. (2014). Professional development through action research: Impact on self-efficacy. *System*, 44, 79-88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.03.003>
- Centra, J. A. (1983). Research productivity and teaching effectiveness. *Research in Higher Education*, 18(4), 379-389. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00974804>
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Daniel, B., Kumar, V. & Omar, N. (2018). Postgraduate conception of research methodology: Implications for learning and teaching. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 41(2), 220-236. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2017.1283397>
- Durning, B. & Jenkins, A. (2005). Teaching/research relations in departments: The perspectives of built environment academics. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(4), 407-426. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500160046>
- Edwards, E. & Burns, A. (2016). Language teacher action research: Achieving sustainability. *ELT Journal*, 70(1), 6-15. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccv060>
- Elton, L. (2001). Research and teaching: Conditions for a positive link. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 6(1), 43-56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510020029590>
- Feldman, K. A. (1987). Research productivity and scholarly accomplishment of college teachers as related to their instructional effectiveness: A review and exploration. *Research in Higher Education*, 26(3), 227-298. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00992241>
- Gass, S. M. & Mackey, A. (2000). *Stimulated recall methodology in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Gibbs, P., Cartney, P., Wilkinson, K., Parkinson, J., Cunningham, S., James-Reynolds, C., Zoubir, T., Brown, V., Barter, P., Sumner, P., MacDonald, A., Dayananda, A. & Pitt, A. (2017). Literature review on the use of action research in higher education. *Educational Action Research*, 25(1), 3-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2015.1124046>
- González-Ocampo, G. & Castelló, M. (2018). Writing in doctoral programs: Examining supervisors' perspectives. *Higher Education*, 76(3), 387-401. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0214-1>
- Gurney, M. (1989). Implementer or innovator: A teacher's challenge to the restrictive paradigm of traditional research. In P. Lomax (Ed.), *The management of change*. Multilingual Matters.
- Hajdarasic, A., Brew, A. & Popenici, S. (2014). The contribution of academics' engagement in research to undergraduate education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(4), 644-657. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.842215>
- Hammersley, M. (2004). Some questions about evidence-based practice in education. In G. Thomas & R. Pring (Eds.), *Evidence-based practice in education* (pp. 133-149). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Hargreaves, D. (2001). Revitalising educational research: Past lessons and future prospects. In M. Fielding (Ed.), *Taking education really seriously: Four years hard Labour*, pp.197-208. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Hattie, J. & Marsh, H. W. (1996). The relationship between research and teaching: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 66(4), 507-542. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543066004507>

- Jenkins, A. (2000). The relationship between teaching and research: Where does geography stand and deliver? *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 24(3), 325-351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713677414>
- Jenkins, A. & Zetter, R. (2003). *Linking research and teaching in departments*. LTSN Generic Centre, Learning and Teaching Support Network, Oxford Brookes University, UK. <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/linking-research-and-teaching-departments>
- Jenkins, R. (2004). *A guide to the research evidence on teaching-research relations*. York: The Higher Education Academy. <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/guide-research-evidence-teaching-research-relations>
- Jensen, J. J. (1988). Research and teaching in the universities of Denmark: Does such an interplay really exist? *Higher Education*, 17(1), 17-26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00130897>
- Lankshear, C. & Knobel, M. (2004). *A handbook for teacher research: From design to implementation*. Open University Press.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Lindsay, R., Breen, R. & Jenkins, A. (2002). Academic research and teaching quality: The views of undergraduate and postgraduate students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27(3), 309-327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070220000699>
- Mägi, E. & Beerkens, M. (2016). Linking research and teaching: Are research-active staff members different teachers? *Higher Education*, 72(2), 241-258. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9951-1>
- Mantai, L. (2017). Feeling like a researcher: Experiences of early doctoral students in Australia. *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(4), 636-650. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1067603>
- Marsh, H. W. & Hattie, J. (2002). The relation between research productivity and teaching effectiveness: Complementary, antagonistic, or independent constructs? *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(5), 603-641. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2002.11777170>
- Mayson, S., & Schapper, J. (2012). Constructing teaching and research relations from the top: An analysis of senior manager discourses on research-led teaching. *Higher Education*, 64(4), 473-487. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-012-9505-8>
- Mullins, G. & Kiley, M. (2002). 'It's a PhD, not a Nobel Prize': How experienced examiners assess research theses. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27(4), 369-386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0307507022000011507>
- Neumann, R. (1993). Research and scholarship: Perceptions of senior academic administrators. *Higher Education*, 25(2), 97-110. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01384743>
- Ohashi, J., Ohashi, H. & Paltridge, B. (2008). Finishing the dissertation while on tenure track: Enlisting support from inside and outside the academy. In C. P. Casanave & X. Li (Eds.), *Learning the literacy practices of graduate school: Insiders' reflections on academic enculturation* (pp. 218-229). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Olson, M. W. (1990). The teacher as researcher: A historical perspective. In M. W. Olson (ed.), *Opening the door to classroom research*. Newark, DJ: International Reading Association.
- Ozay, S. B. (2012). The dimensions of research in undergraduate learning. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(4), 453-464. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2011.641009>

- Rahimi, M. (2019). *An exploration into the ELT researchers' research practice in higher education*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran.
<https://ganj.irandoc.ac.ir/#/articles/38e81b3b95afd6cf9be81bcf0bf5ee83>
- Rahimi, M. & Weisi, H. (2018a). The impact of research practice on professional teaching practice: Exploring EFL teachers' perception. *Cogent Education*, 5(1), 1-15.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2018.1480340>
- Rahimi, M. & Weisi, H. (2018b). Reflective practice, self-efficacy and research practice of EFL teachers: Examining possible relationships. *Issues in Educational Research*, 28(3), 756-780. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier28/rahimi.pdf>
- Rahimi, M., Yousofi, N. & Moradkhani, S. (2018). Research practice in higher education: Views of postgraduate students and university professors in English language teaching. *Cogent Education*, 5(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2018.1560859>
- Rahimi, M., Yousofi, N. & Moradkhani, S. (2019a). Exploring the professional identity construction of ELT researchers in higher education. *Teaching English Language*, 13(1), 85-117. http://www.teljournal.org/article_87594.html
- Rahimi, M., Yousofi, N. & Moradkhani, S. (2019b). How research is conceived and practised in higher education? Assumptions of Masters/doctoral students and instructors. *Research Papers in Education*, 1-26.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2019.1615119>
- Ramsden, P. & Moses, I. (1992). Associations between research and teaching in Australian higher education. *Higher Education*, 23(3), 273-295.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00145017>
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
<https://au.sagepub.com/en-gb/oce/narrative-methods-for-the-human-sciences/book226139>
- Robertson, J. & Bond, C. H. (2001). Experiences of the relation between teaching and research: What do academics value? *Higher Education Research & Development*, 20(1), 5-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07924360120043612>
- Smith, E. & Smith, A. (2012). Buying-out teaching for research: The views of academics and their managers. *Higher Education*, 63(4), 455-472. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-011-9452-9>
- Smith, R. (2014). Supporting teacher research: The work of Kenan Dikilitaş and teachers at Gediz University, Izmir. *ELT Research*, 29, 16-18.
http://resig.weebly.com/uploads/2/6/3/6/26368747/smith_2014.pdf
- Sorenson, J. & Lawson, L. (2011). Evolution in partnership: Lessons from the East St Louis action research project. *Action Research*, 10(2), 150-169.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750311424944>
- Trigwell, K. (2005) Teaching-research relations, cross-disciplinary collegiality and student learning. *Higher Education*, 49(3), 235-254. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-004-6665-1>
- van den Bergh, L., Ros, A. & Beijaard, D. (2014). Improving teacher feedback during active learning: Effects of a professional development program. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(4), 772-809. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214531322>
- Wald, N. & Harland, T. (2017). A framework for authenticity in designing a research-based curriculum. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 22(7), 751-765.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1289509>

- Weiner, G. (2001). The academic journal: Has it a future? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 9, 9. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v9n9.2001>
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Xu, Y. (2014). Becoming researchers: A narrative study of Chinese university EFL teachers' research practice and their professional identity construction. *Language Teaching Research*, 18(2), 242-259. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168813505943>

Appendix A: Survey of narrative frame

1. I am _____(name), a university professor/doctoral student/masters student, in _____ and working/studying at _____ University. I have been working/studying for _____years and I am now a(n) _____(professional title).
2. The requirements of my university for my research practice are:
3. My university will award or punish university professors'/doctoral students'/masters students' research performance, for example:
4. I think the main characteristics of a good research in the realm of English language teaching are:
5. I read research _____(frequency), because:
6. I do research _____(frequency), because:
7. I think reading and doing research have positive/negative impact on my professional development because:
8. My attitudes/motivation towards research could be summarised as:
9. If _____, my research practice would improve.

Appendix B: Interview questions

1. What are the characteristics of a good research in the realm of English language teaching?
2. What was the best research that you did? Why do you think it was the best one?
3. What was the worst research that you did? Why do you think it was the worst one?
4. What is your main motivation for research engagement?
5. How frequently do you read published research in English language teaching? How and why do you read research? How do you usually access or find out about relevant research?
6. Does the research you read influence your professional practice? Why or why not?

7. How do you meld your research knowledge (through reading) with your professional practice?
8. How frequently do you do research in English language teaching? How and why do you do research?
9. Does the research you do influence your professional practice? Why or why not?
10. How do you meld your research practice (through doing) with your professional practice?
11. What do you think of the relationship between research and studying/teaching in higher education?
12. Do you associate your research engagement with your qualifications, experience and university?

Masoud Rahimi did his PhD in Applied Linguistics at Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran from 22 September 2016 to 13 March 2019. His research focuses on L2 research practice, L2 teacher education and teaching language skills. He has published extensively in international journals, such as *Research Papers in Education*, *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, *Computer Assisted Language Learning* and *Issues in Educational Research*. He has also presented extensively in both international and national conferences.
Email: rahimimasoud87@gmail.com, rahimi.tefl@yahoo.com
Web: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0684-2087>

Nouroddin Yousofi is an assistant professor in Applied Linguistics at Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran. His main research interests include language teaching and translation. He has published research articles in his areas of interest in local and international journals.
Email: nyousofi@yahoo.com

Shahab Moradkhani is an assistant professor in Applied Linguistics at Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran. His main research interests include L2 teacher education and teaching language skills. He has published and presented research articles in his areas of interest in local and international journals.
Email: moradkhani.shahab@gmail.com

Please cite as: Rahimi, M., Yousofi, N. & Moradkhani, S. (2019). Research practice and professional development for university teaching of English: A qualitative study. *Issues in Educational Research*, 29(4), 1295-1312. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier29/rahimi.pdf>