

## **Investigating Language Teachers' Agentive Practices in Their Research Engagement**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Undertaking research and addressing the research-practice nexus are among the academic obligations that language teachers are expected to fulfill in higher education. However, contemporary research has shown their differing levels of interest, involvement and performance which are attributable to diverse personal and contextual constraints. This study aims to gain insights into teachers' perspectives on doing research and the ways in which they exercise their agency in their research endeavors. Four language teachers, two male teachers of English, one female teacher of Japanese and one female teacher of Korean, who worked at the same university were invited to complete a narrative frame. This research tool focused on the teachers' past research experiences, present research capacities and performance, and their projections on future research commitment. Findings reveal that the teachers realized the rewards of and opportunities for their research engagement despite a number of challenges. They also exercised varying degrees of agency through their self-regulated involvement and awareness of responsibility toward research. This study reiterates the significance of teacher research in tertiary language education whereby language teachers reflect on their research practices and policy makers consider possibilities for promoting teachers' more dynamic research engagement.

**Keywords:** language teachers; research engagement; teacher agency; research capacities; higher education

## **Introduction**

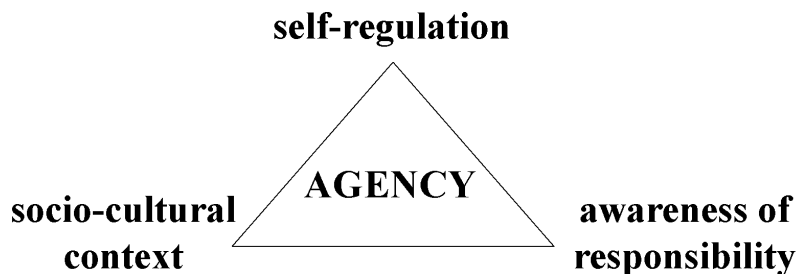
Contemporary empirical studies reveal that research tends to be conceptualized as an unfeasible practice among language teachers (Bahrami et al., 2019; Banegas, 2018; Borg & Liu, 2013; Truong, 2018; Vu, 2021). With the sample of 725 college English teachers from around 20 different provinces in China, Borg and Liu (2013) asserted that the English teachers read research at the moderate level and did research occasionally. Of the 568 English teachers from 31 public universities in Vietnam, Truong (2018) pointed out that the extent to which these English teachers were engaged in research remained relatively modest. In the context of Vietnam, as stated in the joint circular issued by Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training and Ministry of Internal Affairs (2014), the professional standards for lecturers in tertiary institutions entail research performance (e.g., quantity of annual publications) and professional credentials (e.g., doctoral degrees). In other words, language teachers at universities are expected to do research as part of their professional responsibilities and obtain higher degrees after a certain number of years in their profession. In addition to the regulation on professionalism, lecturers are required to devote 400 to 600 hours to research activities in an academic year (Vietnam Ministry of Internal Affairs & Ministry of Education and Training, 2011). By the same token, research has become a compulsory component of language teachers' professional tasks apart from their heavy teaching workload (Nguyen & Marjoribanks, 2021). This scenario is more or less the same in educational institutions around the world where language teachers are subjected to required research engagement culminating in their overall academic performance (Borg, 2010; Dugas et al., 2020; Kutlay, 2013; Mehrani, 2015; Peng & Gao, 2019; Xu, 2014). Our study thus aims to explore language teachers'

perspectives on doing research in terms of its rewards, opportunities, and challenges. We also investigate the ways in which they exercise their agency in their research endeavors.

## **Literature review**

### ***Teacher agency in research engagement***

Research engagement is an arduous and demanding undertaking that requires teachers not only to expend time and personal effort but also make various evaluations and decisions depending on their institutional ethos, research policies and their own research capacities and experiences (Borg, 2010, 2017). In other words, teachers are involved in constant appraisals of personal and contextual elements provoking the extent of their research engagement. Teachers' commitment to research is thus largely contingent on their agency, generally defined as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). This view of agency departs from an intrinsic and distinct nature of human activities which underscore their "capacity to exercise control over one's thought processes, motivation, and action" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175). A host of sociocultural and individual factors impact on teachers' decision to undertake research and their resilience. In this vein, van Lier's (2008) tripartite model of agency including sociocultural context, awareness of responsibility and self-regulation could aptly reflect such processes. These three elements interact with one another, representing the mediation of context and academic obligations in teachers' research endeavors.



**Figure 1:** A Tripartite Model of Agency (van Lier, 2008)

In their research with 49 teachers of English from a Philippine university, Tarrayo et al. (2020) found that the teachers were cognizant of the link between research and teaching. The teachers also demonstrated enhanced perceptions of the role of research engagement and high receptivity to research. The majority of the teachers were agentively involved in research-related activities such as reading research, attending conferences or workshops, joining research networks, and conducting collaborative projects with peer researchers. In a similar study, Xu (2014) worked with 104 university EFL teachers in China to gain insights into their research practices and constructions of identity as researchers. This study revealed the teachers' increased research engagement and mixed attitudes due to external top-down pressures and contextual constraints such as required annual publications, dense teaching timetables, the lack of experienced mentors, and the implicit motto "no publication, no promotion" (Xu, 2014, p. 248). Such education administration and policy rendered teachers as vulnerable since they had no choice but to conform to stringent obligations. It was also found that "the teachers' identities as researchers may be more or less fragmented, depending on how they manage different influences in their professional life phases" (Xu, 2014, p. 255), meaning the variations in the levels of research engagement of these teachers at different stages in their academic career. Teachers' struggles with research requirements were also reported in Mehrani's (2017) research with 68 Iranian teachers of English.

The participants agentively attributed their research commitment to their own professional needs as reflections of their pedagogical concerns and the practical aspects of their professional lives. These teachers also saw themselves as change agents through research engagement.

In relation to teacher research in Vietnam, there have been drastic shifts in teachers' attitudes toward doing research, research policies, resources and dissemination of publications (Pham, 2006; Tran et al., 2017). These changes not only reflect a shift in policies and stakeholders' awareness of the role of research in language education but also teachers' self-regulation and perceptions of the value of doing research (Borg, 2009, 2010). This indicates that teachers have started to exercise their agency in enhancing their research skills, efficiency and output. Vu's (2021) study explored 11 university language lecturers' conceptualization of research and their research practices from a professional point of view. The findings show that the participants displayed varying attitudes toward research engagement in terms of realities (how things are) and ideal practices (how things should be), pointing to the dilemma of being practitioners and academics. This reveals their agentive struggles between the two roles university lecturers have to fulfill, namely teachers and researchers. This study also addressed opposing issues existing in language teachers' research involvement including quality and quantity of research output, and research arising from teachers' genuine interest (research from within) or stipulated by faculty/institutional management (research from above). In a similar research project, Tran et al. (2017) investigated language lecturers and faculty leaders' experiences of the changing research policy in Vietnam's higher education and its impact on their academic identities and emotions. This study presented a contrasting picture in which some teachers expressed enthusiasm and satisfaction as such changes aligned with their academic and professional goals whereas others

were overwhelmed with frustration, uncertainty and discontent due to the mounting pressure in their professional life. These empirical findings reiterate the changing beliefs in the value of doing research, the agentive regulation and escalating awareness of language teachers in relation to their research commitment and performance.

### ***Language teachers' challenges in their research engagement***

Despite a great number of reported benefits, language teachers' research engagement confronts potential obstacles that hinder them from engaging in research effectively at personal and contextual levels. Personally, limitations in language teachers' awareness, beliefs, research skills, and knowledge hamper their involvement in research. Language teachers are not cognizant of the necessity of research in their teaching and professional development (Alhassan & Ali, 2020; Borg, 2007, 2010). They are strongly attached to their traditional identities as "just teachers" (Banegas, 2018, p. 69) and "knowledge consumer" (Borg, 2010, p. 409). Language teachers are also skeptical about generalizability of research findings, failing to see their applicability to their classroom practices (Kutlay, 2013). Even with language teachers highly aware of the benefits of doing research and truly interested in becoming a teacher researcher, their initial endeavors to engage in the research are still deterred by their insufficient research-related skills and knowledge (Alhassan & Ali, 2020; Yuan et al., 2016). Indeed, language teachers conceive of themselves as less competent in understanding and interpreting research (Anwaruddin & Pervin, 2015), analyzing statistics (Kutlay, 2013), writing, publishing, and sharing their research (Gao & Chow, 2012).

Regarding contextual constraints, five primary obstacles are reported as hindrances for language teachers' research endeavors, including research resources, research organization

structure, research policies, research culture, and research-specific difficulties. Limitations in research resources such as funding, time, facilities, reference material, and support networks are evidently present worldwide (Alhassan & Ali, 2020; Borg, 2010; Gao & Chow, 2012; Truong, 2018). Research funding is limited and negligible in comparison to the considerable amount of time and endeavor that language teachers invest in a research project. High teaching workload that is frequently assigned to language teachers leaves them less time to do research. A shortfall of research materials and limited library capacity are also reported to hamper language teachers' research engagement, particularly to those that work in regional educational institutions. There is a widespread scarcity of academics with prominent research capacity, so young teacher researchers have fewer opportunities to learn through academic consultation or collaborative research. The second obstacle, the ineffective research organizational structure, includes a shortage of detailed guidelines for language teacher researchers, countless paperwork and multiple levels of appraisal in a procedure of a research project, and the lack of experts in evaluation panels for appraising research in the field of language and linguistics (Pham, 2006; Truong, 2018). The third obstacle, the inefficient research policies, deters language teachers from doing research since availability of non-research activities and a shortfall of insensitivity to their needs (Alhassan & Ali, 2020; Truong, 2018). The replacement of non-research activities, such as taking on more teaching hours, in evaluating teachers' research performance allows them to fulfill annual research obligations. Further, research rewards fail to motivate most language teachers. The fourth obstacle, the nascent and non-collaborative research culture, emerges from the recent integration of research into the traditional role of teaching in universities (Nguyen & Marjoribanks, 2021; Truong, 2018) and disproportionate levels of research engagement among language teachers (Alhassan & Ali, 2020; Borg, 2010). The last obstacle is directly related to the research process undertaken by language



teachers, such as unavailability of eligible samples and reliable data (Truong, 2018). In short, language teachers are subjected to a multiplicity of personal and contextual challenges in their research engagement which require them to utilize their agency in diverse ways to respond to their personal research interests and fulfill institutional obligations.

## **Research methods**

### Context

Since higher education institutions are recognized as having profound significance in the advancement of the Vietnamese economy, the research capacity enhancement within the whole system has been current government priorities in Vietnam (Truong, 2018). All universities were strongly encouraged to “create a research culture and be proactive in ‘revolutionizing’ research, not just for university rankings and personal promotion, but also for effective teaching and its social impacts” during 2017–2025 (Thu, 2017). Faculty are therefore required to undertake research as part of their academic obligations alongside their teaching and other administrative responsibilities. This responsibility is quantified into specific research hours depending on academic ranks in Circular 47/2014/TT-BGDĐT and is considered an indispensable condition for working as tertiary lecturers (Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training, 2014). Failure to fulfill the mandatory research hours is reported as unsatisfactory job performance in teachers’ annual evaluation reports, which has an impact on the benefits and bonuses that they are entitled to.

### *Participants*

The participants in the present study comprise four language teachers working in a university in Ho Chi Minh City (see Table 1). Two of them are teachers of English while the other

two teach Korean and Japanese. The reason for inviting teachers of different languages to join this project is to see whether there are any discrepancies in their attitudes, personal efforts as well as challenges and opportunities in doing research in their respective languages.

**Table 1:** Participants' Profiles

Pseudonym	Gender	Language	Qualification	Teaching experience
Nam	male	English	PhD	21 years
Hieu	male	English	MA	09 years
Thao	female	Korean	MA	12 years
Hanh	female	Japanese	MA	03 years

### Instrument

This study draws on a qualitative research design using a narrative frame as the primary research instrument (see Appendix). A narrative frame is “a written story template consisting of a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths ... for participants to produce a coherent story by filling in the spaces according to their own experiences and their reflections on these” (Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 402). This research tool allows the participants to work on their narratives in their own time and at their own pace, thus producing rich and insightful input (Barkhuizen, 2014; Shelley et al., 2013). The narrative frame used in this study invited the participants to share their past and present research experiences and performance as well as their future research plans. The framework involves three timescales: (past) the participants looking

back at their research activities and limitations, (present) the participant describing their research capacities, challenges and opportunities, and (future) the participants sketching their research plans. In this way, they could retrospectively evaluate the extent of their research engagement in the past which served as a point of comparison and contrast with their current practices and projections for their future commitment. Both the English and Vietnamese versions of the narrative frame were sent to the participants and they could respond in the language they felt most comfortable with. We only translated those narrative entries we found relevant to the themes under analysis into English.

### ***Data analysis***

*We examined* the narratives thematically based on the six steps proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analytical process entailed familiarizing ourselves with our data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The themes emerging from the narratives of the four teachers in the present study revolve around their perceptions of the value of doing research, the opportunities and challenges confronting them, their self-regulated research engagement and their sense of responsibility.

### **Results**

This section presents the perspectives held by the four language teachers in their research engagement in terms of the rewards of doing research as well as opportunities and challenges in undertaking research. It also demonstrates the ways in which these teachers exercised their agency

in their research endeavors drawing on their self-regulated research engagement and awareness of professional responsibility to engage in research.

### ***The rewards of doing research***

In their accounts, the four language teachers attributed their career development and self-improvement to their engagement in research (i.e., by doing it) and engagement with research (i.e., by reading and using it). Research engagement was also found to enhance their teaching career in terms of teaching quality and knowledge about learning and teaching. In their views, doing research “can give teachers practical solutions to their teaching problems” (Mr. Nam) and “should go hand in hand with teaching because teaching helps us clarify which issues should be deeply studied and then be solved by findings of that study” (Ms. Thao). In accordance with Mr. Hieu on the furtherance of knowledge about learning and teaching as the reward of doing research, Ms. Hanh asserted that “I think doing research is beneficial for teaching because it promotes my teaching knowledge and competencies”. In relation to this, Borg (2010, p. 395) and Borg (2017, p. 168) respectively affirmed that research engagement enables language teachers to deliver “better quality teaching and learning in individual classrooms” and “makes teaching far more rewarding and meaningful for teachers involved.” In addition to career development, Mr. Hieu pointed out that “teachers also become more persistent in their research engagement, accumulate research experience and learn precious lessons by doing research”, indicating that doing research positively impacted on language teachers’ self-improvement (Borg, 2017). In contrast, tangible rewards of research engagement were not commensurate with the time and effort teachers expended. In the words of Ms. Thao, “I will feel more confident if I receive more financial encouragement from the school. I also think there should be a revision on the evaluation and

reward system.” Previous studies asserted that such research-related rewards did not match language teachers’ need (Borg, 2010; Truong, 2018). These examples showed that career development in academia and self-improvement were the exclusive rewards for these language teachers when they were committed to doing research.

### ***The challenges and opportunities in undertaking research***

The challenges that hindered these language teachers from engaging in research far outweighed any opportunities at both personal and contextual levels. The former refers to both their personal constraints (e.g., motivation and research capacities) whereas the latter concerns institutional and research-related obstacles (e.g., research resources, research policies, research-specific difficulties). Personally, being demotivated was obviously one of the limitations that Mr. Hieu encountered. He admitted that “my challenges are that research is inherently boring and thus requires me to have intense passion and concentration, but I don’t have both.” In the same vein, Peng and Gao (2019) asserted that language teachers at universities were found to exhibit little intrinsic motivation. Equally, the insufficient research-related skills and knowledge were also the major deterrents among these language teachers. Ms. Hanh stated that “my challenges involve choosing a topic that is appropriate for the training direction of the school and social practice. I do not have much experience in scientific research and focus on theory-oriented studies rather than practical-oriented studies.” For Mr. Hieu, he asserted “My main limitations included inability to do qualitative analysis and use computational tools, such as SPSS. Additionally, I had difficulty finding research gaps or novel topics.” Sharing the same view with these two language teachers, Alhassan and Ali (2020) and Yuan et al. (2016) propounded that a personal limitation that deterred language teachers from research engagement was a lack of competence in their research-related skills and knowledge.

With regard to contextual obstacles, research resources, including time, funding, and human resources were regarded as barriers to these language teachers' research endeavors. The teachers pointed out that "my challenges are finding time for reading and writing up" (Mr. Nam) and "my main limitations included limited availability of time" (Ms. Thao). In Mr. Nam's view, research funding was negligible, so "to encourage lecturers to do research, the university should provide financial assistance to them to present their studies in national and international conferences before getting published." Apart from these two English teachers, Ms. Hanh, a Japanese teacher, and Ms. Thao, a Korean teacher, reported having few opportunities to learn through team research or academic consultation. Such a shortage of a support network was mentioned in the following:

To encourage lecturers to do research, the university should have appropriate policies to encourage teacher researchers and have experts to support, guide, and encourage language teachers. For example, there should be some seminars where the experts instruct language teachers how to do research and how to find research gaps. Teachers also propose their research ideas and topics, and then they will be consulted by experts to suit the practice and research orientation of the university. (Ms. Hanh)

In the same vein, Ms. Thao pointed out "the university should offer language teachers more opportunities to work with leading experts in the field.". In contrast, Mr. Hieu suggested that "my opportunities include an abundance of people with experience in doing research in my faculty. They are willing to support me during the research process." Interestingly, the shortage of human resources, particularly those with expertise in doing research was encountered by the Japanese and Korean teachers, not English teachers. Indeed, this finding was also contrary to the findings of Truong (2018) and Borg (2010) who asserted that English teachers received less support from experts in their field. In relation to the constraints in research resources, Alhassan and Ali (2020) and Gao and Chow (2012) found that these constraints were conspicuous in the context of language

teaching. The inefficient research policies also inhibited these language teachers from their research engagement. These teachers expected “a worthy evaluation and reward system” (Ms. Thao), “an appropriate research policy” (Ms. Hanh), and “more well-deserved rewards” (Mr. Hieu) from their university. In this sense, Alhassan and Ali (2020) and Truong (2018) revealed that constraints in research policies hindered language teachers from doing research due to the failure to respond to their needs.

Despite the challenges, the teachers reported a number of opportunities embedded in their contexts including access to reference materials and participants’ willingness to join their projects. According to Mr. Nam and Ms. Hanh, their opportunities include “the availability of information and the accessibility to informants from the institutions I work with” (Mr. Nam) and “the research-oriented environment and a lot of support in terms of access to information for research” (Ms. Hanh). As a teacher of Korean, Ms. Thao found her opportunity in “the surging industry of Korean language training that attracts young learners and has many new things to do research”. These examples illustrated the socio-cultural context with both supportive elements and constraints that required the four language teachers to exercise their agency in fulfilling their research commitment.

### ***Teachers’ self-regulation in research engagement***

Postgraduate programs were the primary points of departure for Mr. Nam and Ms. Thao while the tertiary context and/or their intention to undertake doctoral studies were the primary impetus for Ms. Hanh and Mr. Hieu. They started to think more seriously about research and publications when “I finished my Ph.D.” (Mr. Nam) and “I had certain knowledge, knew how to find research gaps, identified research samples, and received complimentary from reviewers”

during her postgraduate studies (Ms. Thao). Likewise, their previous positive experiences in the postgraduate programs helped them to become more involved in doing research. From this point of departure, the two participants became more involved in research:

I felt I needed to keep engaging in research activities as an established practitioner in the field. (Mr. Nam)

I felt I needed to invest more time in doing scientific research and making more research proposals for teaching and learning Korean. (Ms. Thao)

These findings indicated that previous positive experiences of postgraduate training programs significantly developed language teachers' perceptions of research and their research engagement (Bai, 2018; Heng et al., 2020). Nevertheless, in the case of Ms. Hanh and Mr. Hieu, their involvement in master's courses did not bring them any research incentives. Their engagement in/with research started when they commenced their teaching at the university where they had to meet institutional research requirements and when Mr. Hieu had a plan to study a doctoral degree. They agentively thought more seriously about research and publications when "I officially worked at the university environment" (Ms. Hanh) and when "doing research was a mandatory task at university, and I intended to take a PhD course" (Mr. Hieu). These teachers' encounters in postgraduate programs, institutional research requirements, intention for doctoral studies) during their academic lives constantly shaped their self-regulation, contributing to their decision-making regarding engagement in research or engagement with research (Kalaja et al., 2015; White, 2018).

### ***Teachers' awareness of professional responsibility toward research***

These four language teachers displayed different levels of awareness of responsibility toward doing research. According to Ms. Hanh, doing research "is an obligation and a duty of lecturers". Similarly, undertaking research was reported to be "compulsory for lecturers" (Mr.



Hieu). Their research engagement was attributed to institutional research requirements. Such awareness rationalized their agentic practices in their research engagement as follows:

Overall, what is important in my work and life is teaching and doing research, but in reality, I focus more on teaching. (Ms. Hanh)

Overall, what is important in my work and life is that teaching and doing research should go hand in hand; however, I prioritize teaching due to some objective and subjective factors. (Mr. Hieu)

In this sense, these two teachers strongly perceive their identity as “a passive researcher” (Ms. Hanh) and “a somewhat passive researcher” (Mr. Hieu). In contrast, the word “necessity” was used by Mr. Nam and Ms. Thao to denote research not as an obligation. When they described their identity, they regarded themselves as “an active researcher” (Mr. Nam) and “a practical and meticulous researcher” (Ms. Thao). By the same token, van Lier (2008) stated that a high level of self-awareness was one of the key features that shaped teachers’ agency in informing their research involvement.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

**Our** study contributes to the growing body of research on language teachers’ research engagement and reiterates the significance of such undertaking to teachers’ professional development and enhancement of the quality of language education. It also demonstrates different levels of motivation exhibited by the teachers’ concern and their agentic endeavors in their research commitment. The findings suggest that research in Vietnam is stipulated by academic institutions and stated in ministerial requirements, as is the case in many parts of the world (Kincheloe, 2003; Tarrayo et al., 2020; Vu, 2021; Xu, 2014; Yayli, 2012). This impacts on the extent of motivation, perceived values, and attitudes toward research engagement exhibited by the

teachers in this study as well as those in other settings (Borg, 2009, 2010; Borg & Liu, 2013). The four teachers showed their perceptions of the benefits of either doing or reading research for their ongoing career development and actual teaching performance. Such rewards derived from research engagement also hold true in diverse contexts such as China (Xu, 2014), the Philippines (Tarrayo et al., 2020) and Iran (Farsani & Babaii, 2019; Mehrani, 2015). However, along with the opportunities for doing research, teachers also acknowledged numerous constraints in terms of time management, research budgets, research capacities and specifically intrinsic motivation (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012; Tran et al., 2017; Vu, 2021; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2016). An important finding emerging from this study is that the two English teachers, Mr. Nam and Mr. Hieu, tended to be in a more advantageous position than teachers of other languages such as Japanese and Korean. These teachers of other languages addressed the dearth of a support network for doing research. This shows English teachers in the context of Vietnam have become more aware of the potential value of doing research and initiated certain concerted effort in research practices (Tran et al., 2017; Vu, 2021). Against the challenges in their teaching professions, the teachers were found to exercise varying degrees of agency in their research involvement as they had differing priorities. While Mr. Hieu was deeply cognizant of the need to undertake research, Ms. Hanh considered herself a passive researcher with a low level of interest and commitment. However, Mr. Hieu admitted still spending more time on teaching. These findings provide corroborating evidence for the impediment of teachers' workload on their research performance and their level of commitment (Borg & Liu, 2013; Nguyen, 2016; Thornley et al., 2004; Yayli, 2012).

Doing research is evidently a crucial and rewarding undertaking to language teachers despite certain inevitable challenges. Findings from this study underscores the need to form local, national, and ideally global communities of practice in which established teacher researchers can share their research insights, perspectives, and guidelines for fledgling ones. Such forums also contribute to fostering teachers' interest and motivation to conduct research, inculcating a research culture among language teachers, and disseminating their research findings with others (Barkhuizen, 2009). Peer mentoring within the local community of practice can be a further effort to provide novice teacher researchers with preliminary approaches to doing research, building up their research skills and igniting their passion for initial research involvement (Borg, 2009). Another concerted endeavor among teachers is to develop research groups whereby teachers with similar interests assemble and conduct collaborative research projects (Borg, 2017).

More importantly, our study provides corroborating evidence for teachers' increasing awareness of the significance of research not only as an institutional obligation but also as opportunities for personal and professional development. However, limited research knowledge and skills as well as other external factors have hindered them from doing research or thwarted their efforts. In addition to regular seminars and training on research skills and the formation of communities of practice and research groups, it is essential to boost teachers' confidence and self-efficacy in doing research (Thornley et al., 2004; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2016). In other words, there should be regular activities within the institutions or teacher groups that help them formulate tangible research goals and facilitate their access to achieving them. Further, it may be worthwhile to establish a visible connection between research and teaching so that teachers can see the immediate outcomes of their research engagement (Roulston, et al., 2005; Tarrayo et al., 2020).

This will drastically promote their positive attitudes toward research and practicality of their research endeavors. As Gao et al. (2010, p. 75) note, “Sustainable teacher research will be those activities that teachers feel comfortable with and find worthy of doing given all the contextual constraints.” Teachers thus should be empowered to utilize their own agency in research involvement based on their specific circumstances and personal strengths and weaknesses.

At a more macro level, institutional and ministerial policies on research-related requirements for academics should further consider the ongoing dilemmas of “practitioners and academics, external pressures and internal values, visions and realities” (Vu, 2021, p. 585). Particularly, a shift from a focus on teaching to a more research-oriented academic culture would provide teachers with more time and resources for their research engagement (Tran et al., 2017). Such changes will drastically alter teachers’ perspectives on their career not merely as teachers but rather as teacher researchers. Many studies have appealed for more ample financial support for research from academic institutions and the government (Mehrani, 2014; Tarrayo et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2017); however, there remains a lack of guidelines and support structure for appropriately using such fundings for research (Borg, 2009; Dugas et al., 2020). Instead of making financial investments in specific research projects, it is more viable to sponsor training workshops, dynamic research groups and research awards that honor teacher researchers with exemplary performance.

Our paper addresses a deficiency in studies that comprehensively examine language teachers’ agentic practices in their research engagement. It also provides significant implications for language teachers in reflecting on their research practices in their own work contexts and policy makers in promoting teachers’ more dynamic and proactive attitudes toward doing research. However, it should be noted that due to the small sample size, our study has a number of

limitations, particularly in its representativeness of other teachers' perspectives and experiences, thus failing to account for issues related to teachers' research engagement that might arise in other research contexts. Further, we did not incorporate other research methods to triangulate the data. Although the narrative frame enabled the participants to work on the narratives at their own pace and in their own time, the integration of other data gathering tools would undoubtedly add more value to the findings. Further studies can benefit from a larger sample size and draw on a combination of qualitative and quantitative research instruments.

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## **APPENDIX**

This narrative frame invites you to reflect on your research engagement and practices as a language lecturer. Please provide a rich and detailed account of your experiences. Please write a coherent narrative, i.e., link each idea to the next like you would in a story. Thank you for your support.

### **In the past**

I have been teaching \_\_\_\_\_ (language) for \_\_\_\_\_ years. My highest qualification is \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_. When I started working as a university lecturer, my primary concerns were \_\_\_\_\_. Earlier, I had had some experience doing research through \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g. your graduate studies or any other occasions). What I learned from such experiences was \_\_\_\_\_. My main limitations included \_\_\_\_\_. I started to think more seriously about research and publications when \_\_\_\_\_ (what changed your attitudes toward doing research, e.g. policy change, a critical event, ...). I felt I needed to \_\_\_\_\_.

### **At present**

I consider myself as a/an \_\_\_\_\_ (active/passive or others?) researcher because \_\_\_\_\_. I think doing research is \_\_\_\_\_ for teaching because \_\_\_\_\_. It is \_\_\_\_\_ to lecturers because \_\_\_\_\_. In response to the research requirements at my university, I have \_\_\_\_\_. So far I have had (how many) \_\_\_\_\_ publications. My research focus is on \_\_\_\_\_. My opportunities include \_\_\_\_\_. My challenges are \_\_\_\_\_. I overcome them by \_\_\_\_\_. Overall, what is important in my work and life is \_\_\_\_\_. My opinion toward the relationship between my research activities and my teaching can be summarized as \_\_\_\_\_.

**From now on**

My research plans are \_\_\_\_\_. For these, I need to \_\_\_\_\_. I imagine that I will also be able to \_\_\_\_\_. I will feel \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., confident, inferior, ...) when I \_\_\_\_\_. To encourage lecturers to do research, the university should \_\_\_\_\_.