

Teachers' Attitudes towards Doing Research

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate teachers' attitudes towards doing research in the Department of Language Studies at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). The subjects were ten English language teachers who had been teaching in the department for more than four years. The subjects were interviewed separately, based on questions which covered advantages, disadvantages, problems, solutions, and support in doing research. The findings reveal that, while most of the subjects seemed to understand the purposes and advantages of doing research for teaching, there was one subject who did not; also, most of the subjects expressed the need for the department to support them in doing more research and by providing statistics teachers, mentors, research training and funding.

Research definition

Nunan (1992) defines research as a process of formulating questions, problems or hypotheses; collecting data or evidence relevant to these questions, problems or hypotheses; and analyzing and interpreting data. Stringer (2004: 14) explains further that research may be defined as "a process of systematic investigation leading to increased understanding of a phenomenon or issue of interest". In general, research is conducted in many different fields, such as fiction, journalism, police work, medicine, science and technology as well as language teaching. In different fields, the term 'research' has different purposes (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). Thus, there are many kinds of research methodology for particular situations. For teachers, conducting research can be a powerful way to investigate and improve their own practice (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Purposes and benefits of conducting research

To define the purposes of conducting research, Nunan (1992) summarizes the results from interviewing graduate students about the purposes of conducting research, as follows: to get a result with scientific methods objectively, not subjectively; to solve problems, verify the application of theories and lead on to new insights; to enlighten researchers and any interested readers; to prove or disprove new or existing ideas; and to discover the cause of a problem and its solution.

For teachers, McCutcheon & Jung (1990, cited in Day, 1999: 34) say "the purposes of doing research are understanding of practice and of a rationale or philosophy of practice in order to improve researchers' practice". Thus, conducting research has many benefits for teachers, as Kincheloe (2003, cited in Lankshear & Knobel, 2004: 6) states:

- to understand (in deeper and richer ways) what teachers know from experience;
- to become more aware of how they can contribute to educational research;
- to be seen as 'learners' rather than 'functionaries' who follow top-down orders without question;
- to be seen as 'knowledge workers who reflect on their professional needs and current understandings';

- to research their own professional practice;
- to explore the learning processes occurring in their classroom and attempt to interpret them.

Besides, teachers can develop a deeper understanding of many aspects of teaching, learning and classroom investigation skills through the process of conducting research (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

How to conduct research

Kervin et al. (2006: 14) give a rough idea of the process of conducting research; this is shown in Figure 1.

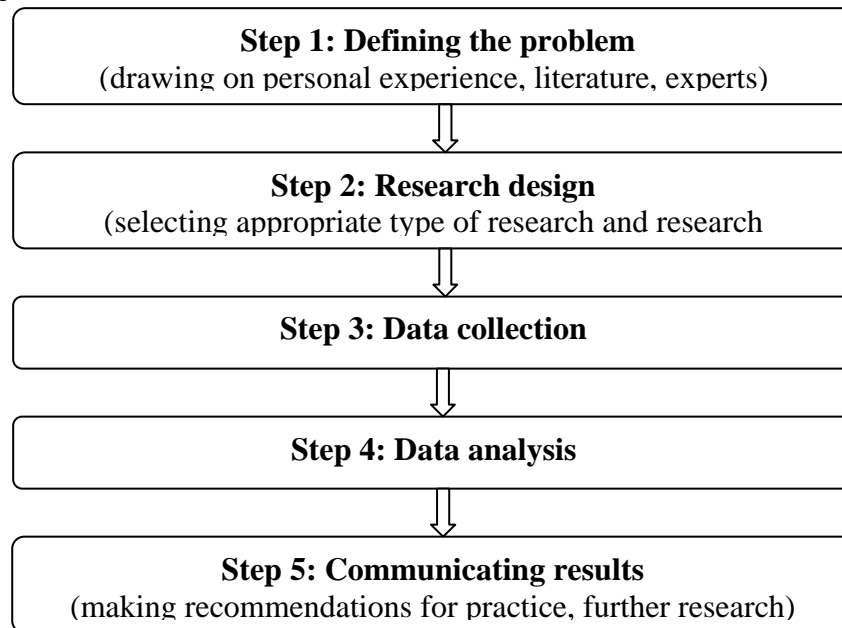


Figure 1: The research process (Kervin et al., 2006)

Kervin et al. (2006) explain that doing research is a systematic process with the following steps: in the first step, researchers have to begin with a broad area of interest and then clearly define the research question; in the second step, they have to select the appropriate type of research and plan the location, participants, data collection and data analysis techniques for the third and fourth steps; in the third and fourth steps, they have to collect and analyze data using the research methodology from the second step to match the research question from the first step; and, in the last step, they have to disseminate their work widely, decide how it will be reported and consider the implications for practice and further research.

For teachers, Stringer (2004) explains further about the last step, saying that researchers may apply the outcome of the study to solve problems, for classroom practices, curriculum development, evaluation, family and community, and school plans. Accordingly, to conduct research successfully, researchers need to have enough research knowledge to follow the research process as presented above.

Problems doing research

Although doing research has many advantages, some teachers do not do it or cannot complete it, perhaps because they encounter problems. Raksasat & Wongsawatdiwat (1990, cited in Intrarat, 2004) studied the productivity of lecturers and indicated the

following reasons why teachers would not conduct research: lack of time due to too much work; difficulty in finding research funds; no support from superiors; lack of attentive teamwork; no progress in research jobs; lack of knowledge in writing research proposals; and lack of knowledge in statistics and data analysis.

Padkate (2005), who studied the attitudes towards conducting research of the members of the Faculty of Humanities at Naresuan University, found that the teachers agreed that their reason for not conducting research was that they had more important duties and experienced obstacles in doing research. Obstacles included complicated regulation for the reimbursement of funding, too much teaching and workload, fatigue from daily work, lack of funding, and lack of facilities for conducting research (resources, journals, computers, etc.).

Nonetheless, even research-active teachers experience problems. Nunan (1992) studied the problems that may happen in the research process and found, among other things, the following:

- lack of time;
- lack of knowledge about doing research (formulating research questions, statistics, etc.);
- difficulty in identifying research areas;
- no teaching background;
- difficulty in designing questionnaires;
- lack of literature in chosen areas;
- unfamiliarity with libraries;
- lack of knowledge about where to start.

Bell & Opie (2002) recorded the research experiences of five postgraduate research students on their long journey to complete their research study. All of the students faced different problems depending on their experiences and their background in doing research. The problems they faced were as follows:

- lack of knowledge about how to conduct simple statistical procedures, especially for people with an arts background;
- they had never owned or used a computer;
- they had difficulty interpreting the results from statistics software;
- they had limited time because of job, family and other responsibilities, so they could not work on their research as much as they wished;
- they had difficulty accessing resources due to the shortage of quality literature;
- they had difficulty accessing resources because of distance;
- they had difficulty analyzing data;
- they could not gather useful data;
- they took a long time to write up their research because English is not their first language.

Teachers' attitudes towards doing research

Teachers' attitudes towards their research could affect their research achievement or their intention to do it. McKernan (1993, cited in Burns, 1999) surveyed the constraints on doing research of forty project directors in an educational setting and found that some constraints came from researchers' doubts about the usefulness of doing research. Stringer (2004) explains that those who are excited and interested in their work can do

the best research projects whereas those who are apathetic about their work or resistant to it find it harder to attain productive work.

However, Burns (1999) reports on twenty ESL teachers who had a good attitude towards doing research because of its benefits. These teachers explained their views, saying that doing research could help them evaluate their teaching, give them a chance to have discussions and share ideas for solving problems with others, increase their self-awareness, and let them understand more clearly the reasons and needs for institutional curriculum change. However, some teachers who lack understanding about doing research may believe that they do not have the skills, training or knowledge to do it; in such cases, they do not have the confidence to do it even though they are interested in the research and applying for research funding.

To summarize, with high expectation and high responsibility, teachers need to develop themselves and learn new things all the time. Conducting research has many benefits, which can help teachers develop their teaching skills and learn new things; however, teachers' attitudes towards doing research may affect their research quality or their intention to do research.

Purpose of the study

This study comprises a survey of teachers' attitudes towards doing research in the Department of Language Studies at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). The outcomes of this study may be helpful for teachers who would like to do research or teachers who would like to develop professionally.

Methodology

This section describes the subjects, instrument, procedures and data analysis.

Subjects

The subjects were 10 teachers (Subjects A-J) who were teaching English in the Department of Language Studies at KMUTT. So that they could have enough teaching experience to conduct research, a selection criterion was that they had been teaching for more than four years. Table 1, below, presents how the subjects were grouped under the criteria of their teaching experience and research experience: Group A1 comprised three subjects who had been teaching for 4-10 years and had done some research; Group B1 had four subjects who had been teaching for more than 10 years and had done some research; Group A2 had one subject who had been teaching for 4-10 years and had never done any research; and Group B2 had two subjects who had been teaching for more than 10 years and had never done any research.

Table 1: Teaching and research experience

Experience Group (Subjects)	Teaching experience		Research experience	
	4-10 years (Group A)	More than 10 years (Group B)	Yes (Group 1)	No (Group 2)
A1 (B, E, F)	✓		✓	
B1 (D, G, H, J)		✓	✓	
A2 (C)	✓			✓
B2 (A, I)		✓		✓

Instrument

The instrument used in this research was a semi-structured interview (see appendix) which was used to obtain the teachers' attitudes towards doing research on the following five broad areas: their experience in doing research; their attitudes towards the advantages and disadvantages of doing research; problems and solutions in doing research; problems and reasons why they do not do research; and support and mentoring desired from the department. In order to adjust any unclear points, the instrument was piloted by interviewing five MA participants at the university.

Procedures

Ten subjects were chosen under the criteria that they had been teaching English language for more than four years. The first researcher interviewed the subjects one-by-one, audio-recording each one; each interview lasted about ten minutes. The recordings were then transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed by using grouping under themes and then interpreted in order to answer the research question: *What are teachers' attitudes towards doing research?*

Findings

Overall, it was found that the subjects had both positive and negative attitudes towards doing research. Also, they had views on problems conducting research as well as suggestions on such research-related issues as mentoring and funding.

Advantages of doing research

The results show that nine (90%) of the subjects agreed that doing research had many advantages for them, as will now be elaborated. Two subjects from Group A1 and three subjects from Group B1 agreed that it could encourage them to read more books, acquire more knowledge and develop themselves. One subject from Group A1 and two subjects from Group B1 thought that solving problems in the classroom by gathering information from students could help teachers to find effective solutions. One subject from Group A1 and one subject from Group B1 thought that it was challenging and fun to do research. Two subjects from Group B2 thought that doing research could help recording problems and solutions which could be shared with other teachers who are interested in the same or related topics. They also thought that it could improve their teaching techniques.

One subject from Group B1 had some ideas that the results of his/her research study made him/her better for class preparation and more enthusiastic than before. Moreover, he/she thought that it was the way to find solutions with evidence and supported theories. The more he/she kept doing it, the more he/she found many interesting and useful things for himself/herself or for his/her students as well.

One subject from Group B2 (Subject I) thought that doing research had the advantages already mentioned but added more ideas, as follows:

"I think, normally, all teachers have to experiment and/or find the way to develop their teaching all the time but someone just do not record and present it to the public."

However, the subject from Group A2 had no idea about the advantages of doing research.

Disadvantages of doing research

None of the subjects thought that doing research had any disadvantages. However, the subject from Group A2 (Subject C) had no idea about it, as illustrated from this extract:

“I think doing research is the researchers’ duty not the teachers’, and doing research could improve researching techniques not teaching techniques. Teachers’ duties are to develop, analyze, evaluate teaching strategies and teaching materials, and I think, to do so, it could be the private experiment of each teacher’s class. Moreover, I don’t believe that the teachers who have problems in their classroom will solve their problems by studying from other teachers’ existing research.”

Thus, most of the subjects had positive attitudes towards doing research while one subject had negative attitudes towards doing it and did not understand its advantages and purposes for teachers. However, there are many problems and needs in doing research which these teachers faced, as will now be shown.

Problems and reasons why the teachers do not do research

The subjects from Group B2 would like to do research but they could not do it because of their personal problems such as lack of research skills and time. They thought that doing research could help record problems and solutions that could be shared with others who were interested in the same or related topics, and they agreed that it could improve their teaching strategies. However, as already noted, the subject from Group A2 did not do research because he/she did not see its advantages for teachers; he/she thought that it is the researchers’ duty.

Problems and solutions in doing research

Time management

Time management is the problem faced by all the subjects from Group B1 and two subjects from Group B2. Surprisingly, it is noticed that the subjects who had problems with time management were all teachers who had teaching experience for more than ten years. In the researchers’ view, the teachers who had difficulty with time management should be those who had less teaching experience because they may need more time for preparation and practice; however, the data show that the subjects from Group B1 could handle this problem while the subjects from Group B2 could not. To help the subjects from Group B2 to have some ideas to manage their time for doing research, the department should provide a chance for groups of teachers who have difficulty with time management and groups of teachers who can handle this problem to discuss and share how to solve the problem (see Centre for Research and Services, below).

Statistics teacher

The subjects from Group A1 had problems with how to analyze data and needed a statistics consultant to help them do the statistical part of the research. The data show that the subjects who had problems with statistics were the teachers who had 4-10 years of teaching experience. To support the teachers in using statistics for research, the department should provide training and specialist teachers (see Centre for Research and Services, below).

Mentoring and support desired

Mentors

Normally, mentors are experienced teachers who provide advice and support to less experienced teachers, including discussion on content, learning processes and teachers' experience (Randall & Thornton, 2001). The findings show that subjects from Groups A1 and B1 agreed that a mentor was necessary for them in doing research.

Mentor selection

Most of the subjects from Groups A1 and B2 reported that they needed mentors to support them in doing research; however, a subject from Group B1 did not need a mentor because he/she used to have one but the mentor was not interested in his/her topic and did not have enough knowledge about it, and so he/she was disappointed with the mentor. This implies that mentors should have some knowledge about, and be interested in, their mentees' topics. For this reason, the department should select mentors who are experts and are interested in their mentees' topics.

All the subjects from Groups A1 and B1 agreed that mentors should be able to give consultations on their mentees' topics. They suggested that mentors should be available for the consultation all the time. This shows that mentors never have time for the consultation. One subject from Group B1 agreed that mentors and mentees should have chances to meet each other and he/she also mentioned that mentors of new teachers should help their mentees in every step of doing research, which means that mentors should have more time for non-research-experienced mentees than other mentors who support research-experienced mentees. Moreover, the department should arrange the timetable for mentors and mentees to have the same free period at least one hour each week and then set it as a regular time for working together.

According to the discussion above, in reality, it is impossible for mentors to be available for mentees all the time. However, the researchers would now like to suggest how to select mentors and how to facilitate mentees in conducting research.

Roles of mentor

From the findings, subjects from Groups A1 and B1 had problems selecting topics and analyzing data. They would like mentors to train them how to do research, brief them on research procedures, teach them statistics programmes, help them analyze data and be able to give consultation on a wide range of topics. Since the subjects from Groups A1 and B1 had fewer research skills, they needed support from mentors in all steps of doing research. Moreover, they thought that a good relationship between mentors and mentees could motivate teachers to do research. One of the subjects from Group B1 reported that he/she did not need a mentor because he/she thought that his/her ideas would be dominated by the mentor.

The subject from Group A2 did not think that doing research was essential for teaching. This implies that this subject did not realize the importance of doing research for teachers.

The subjects from Group B2 did not mention mentors; rather, the main problem that prevented them from doing research was lack of time. This implies that they needed mentors who could help them managing their time. Since they had no experience in doing research, their mentors also should be able to assist them in all of the research

process. From the above information, it can be suggested that mentors should know each mentee's background and know how to deal with each one.

To be successful in doing research, mentors should play roles which support mentees well. Randall & Thornton (2001) mention that advice will be more effective if mentors and mentees trust each other and feel relaxed. So, mentors should provide supportive and non-threatening advice to their mentees. Morton-Cooper & Palmer (2000) say that a good mentor should:

- have a sense of humour
- be kind and patient
- be up to date
- be trusted with personal and confidential information
- have a friendly personality
- have a smart appearance
- be a good communicator
- have research knowledge and mentoring skills.

Accordingly, mentors should not only be experts as researchers but should also understand the roles and duties of a mentor. From the discussion about the desirable characteristics of mentors above, the researchers would like to suggest that mentors should be trained to do the job and know his/her roles, such as how to give consultations, explain, give advice, be good listeners and be initiators, in order to create a good atmosphere, rapport, and trust between themselves and their mentees.

Research training

The subject from Group A2 thought that doing research was not important for teachers and it was not the teachers' duty. He/she thought that teachers could develop, analyze and evaluate teaching strategies or teaching materials by doing private experiments in each teacher's class because he/she did not think that teachers could use or study other teachers' existing research to solve their problems and/or gain more knowledge.

The findings show that that particular teacher did not have a good attitude towards doing research or did not have a clear understanding of its purpose. For this reason, the researchers would like to suggest that the department should cooperate with his/her colleagues and supervisors to motivate him/her to participate in training by making the purposes and the advantages of doing research clear to him/her. Thus, research training should be provided for teachers who would like to do research or learn about it. The training schedule should be planned together and set as regular training that all teachers can join.

Research funding

The subjects from Groups A1 and B1 agreed that they would like the department to make research funds more easily accessible with fewer conditions, such as increasing the time duration for working and decreasing the application steps. This shows that, to ensure that teachers will be confident to apply for research funds, the department should provide strong systems of proposal writing, research training and mentors' supervision (see Centre for Research and Services, below).

In addition, the subjects from Groups A1 and B1 would like the department to pay the registration fee for international research presentations. Research-experienced teachers

should get funds if there are no non-research-experienced teachers submitting papers that year. For this problem, the researchers think that the department should encourage its teachers to do research more by clarifying the distribution of funds and raising awareness of sharing resources and taking turns. The researchers recommend that every member of the department should share and vote for ideas about how to distribute the funds to everyone fairly.

International publishers

A subject from Group B1 would like the department to submit his/her paper to an international publisher for him/her. This shows this teacher had confidence in his/her research work and wanted to share it with other teachers in related fields but did not know where to submit it or even that researchers normally submit their own papers themselves (see Centre for Research and Services, below).

Centre for Research and Services

To respond to the teachers' requirements, the School of Liberal Arts (SoLA) at KMUTT established the Centre for Research and Services (CRS) to support research and to provide academic services. Short sessions are now provided for doing research as follows:

- *Resources*: For teachers who have problems with resources, the centre provides research resources such as Big Applied Linguistics Database and Research Methods Database.
- *Research discussions and workshops*: For teachers who would like to share ideas and discuss problems, the centre provides opportunities to discuss research every month. CRS also provides workshops for teachers who would like to practice their research skills.
- *Statistics support*: To help teachers solve statistics problems, CRS has set up the Data Analysis Support Unit to respond to the needs of researchers or students at the university who have problems in analyzing quantitative data using complex statistics.
- *Research regulations for SoLA funding*: CRS has proposed alternatives for reducing the problems and the difficulties which occurred in the previous situation of SoLA funding.
- *Publishing in international refereed journals*: For teachers who would like to have their papers published, CRS provides information about criteria for choosing a journal, a list of journals with the possibility to be published and the required topic areas, and the steps of writing papers and how to submit them.

(Source: <http://arts.kmutt.ac.th/crs/research.htm>)

According to the discussion above, the researchers suggest that the department should make a clear announcement, on notice boards and/or the university's website, to inform teachers about the support provided by the CRS.

Conclusion

This study attempts to discover teachers' attitudes towards doing research, consisting of the advantages, problems, solutions and support in doing research. The results of the study reveal that one subject did not understand the purposes and the advantages of doing research but the other subjects fully realized its benefits. Most of the subjects had positive attitudes towards doing research but, depending on their experience in teaching and doing research, they faced some problems that affect their research process and

research abilities. So they reported that they needed some support from the university department such as workload reduction, statistics support, mentors, research training, funds for doing research and giving presentations, and help contacting international publishers. To support teachers in doing research, the department should promote the CRS in its work supporting and encouraging teachers to do research. Finally, it is expected that the implications of this study will be useful for the Department of Language Studies at KMUTT as well as similar departments in other universities to have some ideas for supporting and encouraging its teachers in doing research for professional development.

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Appendix: Semi-structured interview

1. How long have you been teaching at KMUTT?
☐ 4-10 years ☐ more than 10 years
2. Have you ever done any research while you have been teaching as a teacher?
☐ Yes ☐ No
3. In your view, what are the advantages and disadvantages of doing research?
4. What are the problems that affect your research achievement?
5. What kind of support do you want from the Language Studies Department to help you do research more smoothly?
6. In your view, what are the advantages and disadvantages of doing research?
7. What are the problems that prevent you doing research?
8. What kind of support do you want from the Language Studies Department to enable you to do research?

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