

***Research and Pedagogy: Aspiring English Teachers' Perspectives on the Role of Educational Research. A Philippine University Context***

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**Abstract**

Inspired by the notion of promoting research-engaged teachers, this research follows the footsteps of Simon Borg (2009) in his works in relation to encouraging teachers to engage in and with research; with teacher-trainees in mind, rather than experienced in-service teachers. This research sees the advantage of the Educational Research module in the curriculum of teacher education in the Philippines, and examines whether this can be a possible medium in promoting research-engaged teachers by analyzing the perspectives on educational research of 63 aspiring English teachers from a state university in the Philippines. A variety of roles in doing research emerged from the answers of the teacher trainees including: learning problem-solving, improving educational system and methods, enhancing researching skills, and a preparatory for postgraduate degree. Although some teacher trainees were able to recognize the relevance of research in teaching, including data from their interviewed Research Professors stating the link of research and pedagogy as one aim of the module, the majority of these teacher trainees are still not able to directly reflect on the link between researching and its benefits to teaching. Thus, the findings on the gap between the module's syllabus objective - "to identify the important role that research plays in education," and the limited awareness of student trainees towards it have led this research to echo Ellis' (2009) proposals: to give emphasis on the role of teacher educator as awareness-raisers, and the addition of "provisional pedagogical implications" section in the thesis projects of the teacher trainees.

Keywords: Educational research, pedagogy, teacher training, research-engaged teachers, English language teaching, pre-service teachers

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## **Introduction**

Research as a basis for teaching, evidence-based teaching, teachers as researchers, and research-engaged teachers; these are just a few of the titles of research articles, papers and journals written for the purpose of promoting research in teaching. One fundamental argument behind this drive “is that when teachers engage with (through reading) and in (by doing) research and make pedagogical decisions informed by sound research evidence, this will have a beneficial effect on both teaching and learning” (Hargreaves 2001, cited in Borg 2009, p.358). However, even though the debates and proposals in making teaching more effective through educational research has evidently been an issue decades ago, from Stenhouse (1983) and Hargreaves (1996) to the contemporary ones such as Borg (2009) and Ellis (2009), with such influx of researches (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Everton, Galton, & Pell, 2000; Macaro, 2003; Watkins, 2006; Borg, 2006) that concentrated on the drive to engage classroom teachers more fully both in and with educational research in order to promote the idea of teaching as an “evidence-based profession” (EBP), still, the case remains that teachers engaging with and in research does not seem to be a widespread practice for teachers. This is further supported by a study conducted by Borg in 2009, wherein it was found that the top reasons for teachers not doing and reading research are: their lack of time; they have no access to books and journals; they need research training; or they do not find research results to be practical in their teaching. Moreover, institutional culture was also highlighted from the same study to be one of the key factors that affect in-service teachers’ attitude towards engaging in and with research. These teachers’ views of research, as argued by Borg (2009), are relevant empirical data that should be gathered because “initiatives to promote EBP are more likely to have an impact if they are based on an understanding of teacher’s conceptions of research and of the role research plays in their work (p. 732).”

As the focus of Borg’s study, he then pointed out the lack of literature on research engagement in the field of English language teaching (ELT) as compared to the volume of empirical work in this area under education in general. That the nature of teachers’ research engagement and their conceptions of research seem to have not been studied in any systematic way in ELT. He argued that if “we are to develop an evidence-base which can inform policy and initiatives aimed at promoting research engagement by teachers in ELT, empirical research into these issues is required (p. 733).”

### **1.1. A case in the Philippines**

Unfortunately, in terms of teacher research engagement, the same scenario is also true in the case of the Philippines. A study in 2007 by Salazar-Clemeña and Almonte-Acosta has been conducted to see the perspectives of forty faculty members from 14 universities and colleges in the country to evaluate whether they consider any of the following aspects of research culture in their institutions as being strong: the impact of research, administrative practices, inter-institutional collaboration, institutional research strategy, financial reward system, infrastructure, the presence of ethical policies, and the availability of research funding. The faculty however, did not consider any of the aspects of research culture in their institutions as being strong, and deemed them as present only to a moderate extent (Salazar-Clemeña and Almonte-Acosta 2007, p. 6).

## **1.2. Purpose of the Study**

With all the information discussed above, this study sets out to further concentrate on research engagement in the field of English Language Teaching. More specifically, this paper digs into a fundamental aspect of teacher training; and that is, teacher education.

Inspired by the notion of promoting research-engaged teachers, this study sees the relevance of pre-service teacher training or teacher education as a breaking ground in promoting the research-engaged teachers movement. Primarily, this paper aims to do this by examining the existence of Educational Research as one subject in the teacher education curriculum in the Philippines through the pre-service teachers' research experience.

Similarly, the study is centred at analysing the perspectives of the pre-service teachers on the role/s of educational research. This will provide empirical data as to what do student teachers think to be the purpose of doing research in order to provide an informed understanding on how to make researching more impactful to these aspiring teachers, so that the relevance of research in pedagogy is embedded and sustained in their curiosity and interest.

## **Methodology**

### **2.1. Research Questions**

1. What are the pre-service teachers' perspectives on the role of educational research?
  - 1.1. To what extent are these perspectives leading to them recognizing the relevance of research in pedagogy?
2. What are the practical research professors' perspectives on the educational research subject?
  - 2.1. Do these perspectives reflect similarities with the students' perspectives of research?
3. Can this module/subject be a medium towards promoting research-engaged English Language teachers?

### **2.2. The Survey and Interview**

Firstly, the syllabus for the Educational Research subject was examined to find its objectives and then later on compare this to the respondents' answers. Then, a survey composed of seven open-ended qualitative questions was conducted among 63 pre-service teachers. Open-ended questions are opted for as to not influence the answers of the respondents if choices are provided. Additionally, the questions aim to gather empirical, naturally-occurring data without the influence of presupposed answers. After answers have been gathered, an analysis of the data was done by identifying frequencies and categories. Additionally, an email interview for the two teacher educators, who both taught them the subject Educational Research, were gathered.

### **2.3. Design**

The following questions were asked from the respondents, from which questions 1 and 6 aims to gather initial thoughts from respondents on the role that their educational research subject plays in their training. Questions 2, 3, and 4 were asked to identify what areas in ELT research the students are interested in; while question 5 and 7 aim to gather what more personalized conceptions and values of research have been embedded among the student teachers after they have experienced research.

1. In general, what do you think is the importance of educational research?
2. What was your research topic/area? What was it about?
3. Why did you choose this topic?
4. What have you discovered in your research and why do you think it is important?
5. How would you describe your educational research experience?
6. Why do you think we have research as a part of the bachelor's degree in teaching?
7. Any other comments/additional thoughts regarding your experience on educational research?

### **2.4. Administration**

This study, is done for the completion of a master's degree taken in the UK, and thus barriers in distance with the respondents are taken into consideration. The survey is sent through email and is printed and mass produced to be disseminated in a class from a state university in the Philippines. The papers are then compiled, encoded, and sent through an email. Additionally, the same thing is done with the interview questions for the professors. Lastly, a request for a copy of the Educational Research was sent and approved by the said university. Each of all transactions were sent with a letter of consent for the university, students, and administrators involved. All identities are kept private and anonymous.

## Findings

### 3.1. Document Analysis

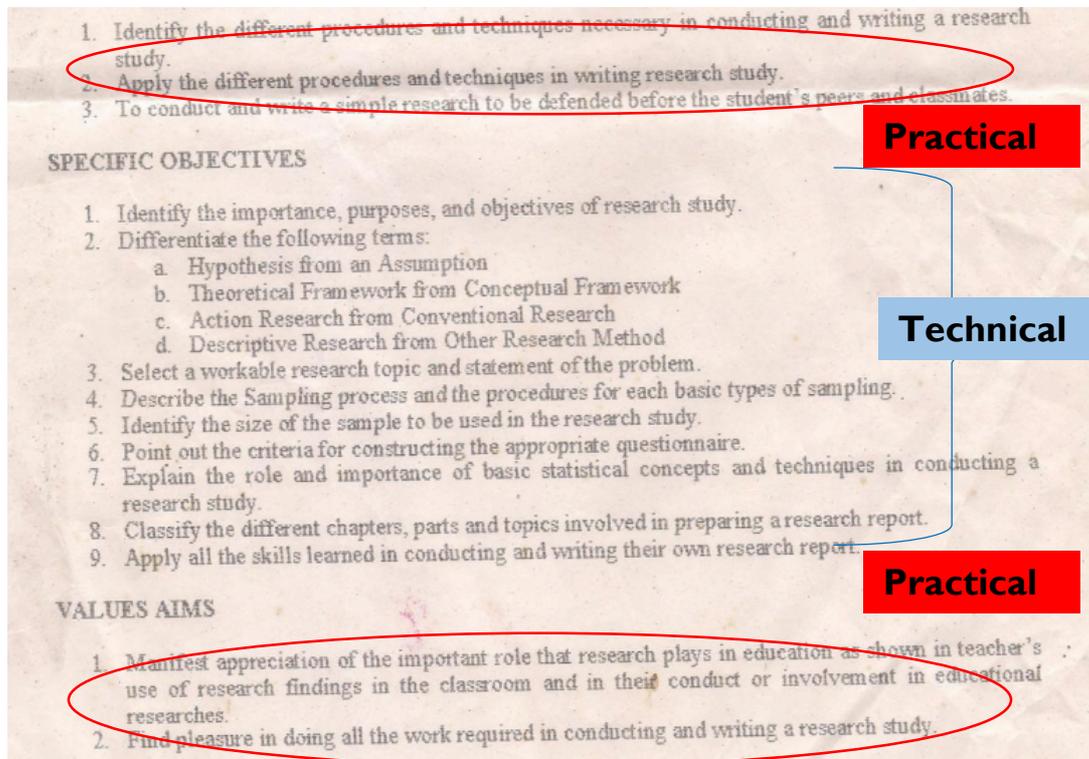


Figure 1. Educational Research Syllabus' Objectives

As reflected at the above sample of research syllabus, both technical knowledge and the practical knowledge of researching are considered to be the core of this subject. However, can easily distinguish that more technical-based knowledge are evident in the syllabus which might affect how pre-service teachers, and even teacher educators, see and approach the subject. This is clarified further later on as we discuss the pre-service and teacher educators' responses on their survey.

### 3.2. Survey Answers

#### 3.2.1. Questions 1 and 6

1. In general, what do you think is the importance of educational research?
6. Why do you think we have research as a part of the bachelor's degree in teaching?

Q1: Importance of Educational Research	
It helps in different pedagogical aspects .....	28
It helps in problem-solving.....	14
It enhances academic and researching skills...	11
It prepares us for postgraduate studies.....	3

Q6: Reasons for doing research as part of the degree	
To Help Improve Education/Teaching or Raise Awareness on Issues in Education.....	27
For Enhancing Researching and Thinking Skills.....	12
To Prepare for Postgraduate Degree.....	8
To Acquire Problem-Solving Skills.....	4

Figure 2. Similar Emerging Themes for Question 1 and Question 6

The importance of educational research and the reason for doing research as part of the respondents degree as English language teachers are both primarily for improvement of pedagogical aspects as seen through the data above. This means despite having the majority of answers spread through technical and academic reasons for doing research, the top answer among the respondents is still pedagogically linked.

### 3.2.2. Questions 2, 3, and 4

2. What was your research topic/area?
3. What was it about?
4. Why did you choose this topic?

Topics	Frequency
Language Learning Competency	11
Learning Environment	2
Teacher Training	3

Figure 3. List of Educational Research Topics/Areas of Pre-Service Teachers

Reasons	Frequency
To Identify Problems in Language Learning	30
To Explore Learning Experiences of Students	9
To Enhance Their Teaching Skills	14
To Apply Different Pedagogical Techniques/Strategies	1
Topics Were Rejected	5
To Learn About the University's Teacher Training	1
To Learn What Employers Look for Fresh Graduate Employees	3

Figure 4. Reported reasons for choosing their research topic

Perceptions	Frequency
To Identify Language Learning Difficulties and Competencies	40
To Help Improve Their (Pre-Service Teachers) Teaching Skills	17
To Help Develop Teaching Strategies	4
No Answer to "Why is it important?"	2

Figure 5. Reported perceived importance of research outcomes

Questions 2, 3, and 4 received a top answer for the topic that the students are interested in doing for their research as well as for the reason in doing so is for them to "identify language learning difficulties and competencies, followed by their interest in improving their teaching skills. This shows both a direct classroom research interest, as well as language learning/teaching inclination in choosing their research topics.

### 3.2.3. Question 5

5. How would you describe your educational research experience?

Experience	Frequency
Research Was Hard	22
Research Was Hard but Fulfilling	10
Research Was Hard but Fun	8
Research Was Hard, but A Good Learning Experience	15
Research Helped in Teaching	8

Figure 6. Reported pre-service teachers' Educational Research experience

Some qualitative answers for question number 5:

Research was hard:

S1: Educational research experience was not easy. It was time consuming, effort giving and very costly

S6: Our educational research is very laborious, expensive, and psychologically challenging. Laborious because it take all your time and effort to produce a good research. Expensive, naturally, we need to spend money, and psychologically challenging because it also affects your relationship with your group members.

Research Was Hard but Fulfilling

S3: It was a roller coaster journey. We've been through a lot of different problems and it was hard for us to come up with their topic because our proposal for the topic and title took a lot of time. But then we finished the whole research, it was a fulfilling experience.

S8: I would describe our educational research experience as terrible but full of excitement. Terrible because it takes a lot of time, effort and perspiration. It's hard to create a problem and solve it at the same time. Full of excitement it allows friendships to be intact and create memories together as we go along.

Research Helped in Teaching

S18: It is stressful yet full of fun. With my experience I was able to know that there were different problems arising in our educational system. Even though it is stressful for it really asks for hard work and patience, I can say that it made our group stronger individuals and it is a lot of fun to work with them.

S46: My educational research experience is tasky, yet fulfilling. Being able to attain answers form questions are really overwhelming though the results are not purely able to be proud of it is awakening to know that there is a lack of development in the field of writing.

Although from what we gathered in the quantitative answers to number 5 represents that among the emerging criteria, Research helped in teaching receives one of the two lowest answers by the pre-service teachers in describing their research experience, which I have described earlier to be the question to generate a more personalised answer, it is also worth noting that from the qualitative descriptions of the respondents, some aspiring teachers shows explicit realization, if not appreciation, of the true value of what they did. It is but a good sign that their research experience help them to directly identify the purpose of researching.

### 3.2.4. Question 7

Any other comments/additional thoughts regarding your experience on educational research?

Comments/Thoughts	Frequency
None	1
Research is Hard But is A Good Learning Experience	26
Research is Helpful	3
Research is a Good Experience	3
Research Helps Education and Pedagogy	3
Researching is Undergoing a Variety of Challenges	23
Research Requires Patience	4

Figure 7. Additional comments/thoughts on their research experience

The additional comment section became a leeway for student teachers to express their transparency towards how they feel about research. Generally, the respondents felt that doing research might be exhausting and challenging, but it has also brought them good learning experiences, which fortunately, is positive towards the subject.

### **3.3. Teacher Educators: Educational Research Professor Written Interviews**

#### **3.3.1. Professor 1**

- Why do we have educational research in the teacher training course?
  - A. To build/develop interest among students the love to research
  - B. To enhance awareness on the concerns, issues or problems in teaching English subjects that will ultimately help the students in their methods of teaching.
- What do you think should students take from this course programme to their teaching career?

The experience of Patience and perseverance while doing the research project will be the value that they will need when teaching English subjects, The value of meeting deadlines are the same value for “Punctuality” that they should have when they are already in the field.

- In what terms do you consider the educational research programme has been successful?

The realization of the relevance of research findings/results in improving the methodologies in teaching English subjects. Also, the ability/enhancement of writing skills in English as well as the mechanics of writing the components of research paper.

#### **3.3.2. Professor 2**

- Why do we have educational research in the teacher training course?
  - may lead to the development of schools, principles, or theories in teaching.
  - To improve school practices and at the same time to improve those individuals (teacher and students) who strive to improve those practices
  - Serves as a guide to develop new understanding about teaching, learning and educational administration.
  - It allows us to assess and review the quality of schools and education.
  - It gives us results on the patterns of behaviour in teachers, students, and members of a school system.
- What do you think should students take from this course programme to their teaching career?

They should take the procedure on how to analyze data, interpret and gives solution to a problem (if there is).

  - They should take the correct way on how to organize the manuscript.
  - Future English Teachers should consider also the knowledge on statistical treatment.
  - Future English Teachers should take from their educational experience the proper observation and selection of respondents to formulate a good result.
- In what terms do you consider the educational research programme has been successful?
  - in supporting the individuals beliefs/curiosity with valid evidences.
  - It has been successful from my personal experiences.
  - Providing instruction that maximizes students’ learning.
  - Providing solutions to educational problems.

### **3.3.3. The Role of Teacher Educators' as Awareness-Raisers**

The professors' answers when compared to the students as well as when analysed with the syllabus examined in this paper, it is easily illustrated that both the technical knowledge and practical knowledge that the Educational Research subject aims to develop are also both present in the professors' answers. This only solidifies one concept that this paper would also like to echo; that is, Rod Ellis' reminder of teacher educators' role as awareness-raisers (Ellis, 2009). That they play a very important role in embedding what kind of knowledge is retained and sustained in the professional curiosity of their teacher trainees.

### **Conclusions**

In order to provide a comprehensive conclusion, it is important to go back to the main questions of this study and carefully analyse the answers. This research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the pre-service teachers' perspectives on the role of educational research?
  - 1.1. To what extent are these perspectives leading to recognizing the relevance of research in pedagogy?
2. What are the practical research professors' perspectives on the educational research subject?
  - 2.1. Do these perspectives reflect similarities with the students' perspectives of research?
3. Can this module be a medium towards promoting research-engaged English Language teachers?

Let me begin by stating that the multi-layered answers by the pre-service teachers on their research experience only proves and echoes the common struggles that one encounters in doing research. We find it tedious, time-consuming, and costly, together with other negative conceptions associated with the rigorous task of researching. This thus means that pre-service teachers, similar to in-service teachers who are being encourage to engage in and with research, should be provided with utmost support, especially that they are also in training to become teacher researchers as well. That in order to embed in them the essential role of research in pedagogy, teacher educators should be able to provide them with appropriate and direct guidance on the link of researching to their future career. However, we should also not take for granted the positive remarks that the data illustrated in this research. Generally, a positive conception of educational research has been expressed by the respondents, and there are qualitative data that showed pre-service teachers explicitly reflecting the link of researching to pedagogy. By and large, it is justifiable to answer the last research question with a resounding "yes."

The module or subject in educational research, can be a medium in promoting research-engaged teachers in the field of ELT. This can also be further developed and improved by taking into consideration the role of teacher educators. The programme would also like to acknowledge and echo as a recommendation, what Ellis (2009) discussed as inclusion of a "Provisional Pedagogical Implications" in teacher

researches to indicate teaching and or learning implications found, without imposing generalizability through provisional specifications that teachers as readers are to evaluate. Lastly, the programme also aims to avoid institutionalized culture that hinders in-service teachers, since the encouragement to be research-engaged is done during teacher training, where their environment is still centred to developing their teaching skills and professional curiosity is still sustained.

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For Arwin and Arjon with love.

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