

Teachers Motivation towards Research- A Pedagogical Discussion

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I. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Instructed second-language acquisition (ISLA) research endeavours to make positive changes in pedagogical practices. In this regard, there is a recent debate concerning whether teachers are (or should be) willing to engage with research. To investigate the research-pedagogy link, the current case study conducted interviews with 12 EFL teachers in Chile. The findings suggested that teachers' understanding of research was relatively consistent with SLA researchers' practices, although their awareness of instructionally oriented research was low. Teachers were willing to use research because it gave them emotional support and helped them deal with novel pedagogical issues. The use of research was facilitated by external pressure in the current landscape of higher education. However, teachers lacked physical accessibility to research such as time and resources as well as institutional support. They have invaluable advice to researchers in promoting the research-pedagogy dialogue, such as creating communities of practice and conducting classroom research.

Instructed second-language acquisition (ISLA) research aims to provide teachers with evidence-based pedagogical recommendations, by examining L2 learning and teaching issues with scientifically rigorous methods. ISLA puts instruction as a central issue, building on traditional SLA research that primarily focuses on phenomena related to 'how people learn languages later in life, above and beyond the mother tongue(s) they learn from birth' (Ortega 2015: 270). Although the transferability of individual research studies to the classroom varies, an ever-growing focus on pedagogy among ISLA researchers is evident in recent books (e.g. Loewen and Sato 2017) as well as empirical studies (e.g. DeKeyser and Prieto-Botana in press). As a result, researchers have become more concerned with whether they are disseminating their findings to teachers effectively. Additionally, there is an ongoing debate about the extent of teachers' interest in ISLA research. Both researchers and teachers need to be willing and open for there to be an effective research-pedagogy dialogue. As a start, we need to know (i) whether researchers intend to inform teachers, and (ii) whether teachers are interested in incorporating research findings into their teaching. The current study addressed the latter issue.

Concerning the research-pedagogy dialogue, some scholars argue that teachers need not interact with researchers at all. For instance, Medgyes claimed that 'the findings of academic research are bound to be no less misleading and unreliable than teachers' experience and intuitions' (Medgyes 2017: 509). Indeed, researchers report conflicting findings and provide inconsistent pedagogical suggestions that sometimes change over time. Nonetheless, we believe that ISLA researchers have produced considerable empirical evidence that teachers can reliably use in the classroom. Consequently, it can be beneficial for researchers to seek ways to facilitate the dialogue between teachers and researchers. Efforts to impede dialogue may put teachers 'in danger of rejecting evidence a priori and prioritizing experience and intuition' (Paran 2017: 507).

Recently, Marsden and Kasprovicz (2017) investigated the research-pedagogy interface by surveying 574 foreign language (FL) teachers and practitioners in the UK, focusing on their exposure to research and barriers to research engagement. Overall, results revealed a 'lack of interface with research for non-English FL educators' (Marsden and Kasprovicz 2017: 624). For instance, only 6 per cent of journals mentioned by respondents were included in the Social Sciences Citation Index (Thomson Reuters)—arguably the most important venue for researchers to disseminate their research findings. Respondents mentioned common barriers to research engagement, including practical constraints (e.g. time), access and understanding of research (e.g. lack of professional development opportunities), and negative perceptions of research (e.g. relevancy to teaching).

While Marsden and Kasprovicz's (ibid.) large-scale study is important, the population was limited to UK FL teachers. In contrast, teachers of English might have different access to and use of research due to English's global status and ubiquity in professional communities. For example, the fact that the majority of SLA research has investigated English as the target language may increase the chance for teachers being exposed to empirical findings. Also, belonging to a large professional organization (e.g. TESOL, IATEFL) may facilitate teachers' participation in research conferences. Another issue of Marsden and Kasprovicz's (ibid: 617) pioneering study is that they provided participants with a definition of research in their survey. Borg (2010),

however, emphasized the need to understand how teachers conceive of research because teachers 'vary in their understanding of what counts as research, and thus some who claim to be reading research may in fact be reading about practical teaching ideas' (Borg 2010: 412). Indeed, if teachers' understanding of research is inconsistent with researchers' practices, investigation into teachers' use of research may be methodologically flawed. Hence, one of the objectives of the current study was to examine teachers' understanding of research in one specific EFL context, that of Chilean higher education. The following research questions were explored:

RQ1: How do Chilean EFL teachers describe L2 research? RQ2: How do they feel about research?

RQ3: What obstacles do they report in applying research?

RQ4: What do they think researchers can/should do to facilitate the research–pedagogy dialogue?

We conducted a case study in order to 'gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon being studied, of which the case is an exemplar' (Duff 2014: 237). We felt that university-level EFL teachers in Chile would provide unique insights into the research–pedagogy link in the field of L2 teaching; however, Chile is perhaps similar to many other EFL contexts as well. We focused on 'engagement with research' as opposed to 'engagement in research' (Borg 2010: 391), the latter involving teachers conducting research by themselves (e.g. action research). Our scope was limited to higher education where English teachers often hold graduate degrees (cf. Marsden and Kasprowitz 2017).

Chile shares educational issues with other EFL contexts worldwide. Classrooms at primary and secondary levels typically contain more than 30 students, English is taught primarily in the learners' L1, lessons focus on grammar teaching and vocabulary memorization, and classes tend to be teacher centered. In the wake of globalization, however, the Chilean government has started to prioritize English education. As of 2012, the national curriculum emphasizes communicative skills as the primary goal of English education. Nonetheless, the policy implementation has not resulted in the desired level of English proficiency among Chilean EFL learners (Barahona 2016). English classes in higher education are similar to those in compulsory education; however, an instructional focus on the development of communicative skills tends to increase, possibly due to the fact that there is no national paper-based exam that university students need to take and, thus, curricula can more flexibly incorporate communicative activities.

The current case study examined an English department at a large private university in Santiago, Chile. The department oversaw required English classes across different disciplines. At the time of data collection, the department hosted 373 classes with 8710 students. All classes followed the department's general curriculum, while specific syllabi differed depending on the nature of classes (e.g. tourism versus English pedagogy). The first author was faculty at the university and had conducted several research studies in this context. Indeed, one teacher in the current study had previously participated in the author's research. While this relationship might have influenced the teachers' accounts of research, this close association also provided us with an intimate understanding of the case study context.

The first paragraph of the department's curriculum states:

The state-of-the-art of English Language Teaching (ELT) has evolved considerably throughout the world over the last 30 plus years as different methodologies have been introduced, based on more extensive research on the language acquisition process, new teaching/learning strategies and the nature of written and oral language usage itself.

The curriculum's emphasis on research was based on the university's strategic plans. Reacting to the global trend in higher education to data collection and analysis prioritize research productivity to increase international profiles (de la Torre and Perez-Esparrells 2017), the university had increasingly promoted its research agenda by, for instance, awarding financial rewards for publishing in indexed journals regardless of discipline (i.e. Thomson Reuters and SCOPUS).

The case study included 12 teachers (8 female and 4 male). Their ages ranged from 28 to 65 years old (mean = 41.75; SD = 11.57). They shared several key learning/teaching backgrounds. First, most were experienced EFL teachers, with an average teaching experience of 18.7 years (SD = 11.03; range = 2–40). Second, all teachers spoke English as an L2, with 11 Spanish L1 speakers. Third, except one teacher, all had formal training as English teachers by completing Bachelor's (2 teachers) or Master's (10 teachers) degrees in TESOL or equivalents. None of the MA holders, however, reported conducting empirical research for a thesis.

Two teachers were undertaking PhDs. Only one teacher had experience conducting research individually; however, another had taken courses related to action research. Four teachers had taught teacher training courses to pre-service English teachers, which may have influenced their perceptions of research.

The teachers were in charge of English classes for the teacher training programme as well as ones for other majors. In addition, the teachers had taught (or were teaching) content courses (e.g. applied linguistics, L2 pedagogy).

In-depth individual interviews were conducted in December 2017. Both researchers were present for the interviews, which took from 25 to 45 minutes, yielding 404 minutes of audio-recorded data. Thesemi-structured interviews involved several sections with specific prompts (see Appendix). The first section elicited participants' learning/teaching backgrounds. Questions pertained to their experiences as English learners (e.g. types of instruction they received), training experiences as teachers (e.g. L2 theories covered in training courses), and teaching experiences (e.g. age group, institution type, learner type). The second section focused on their understanding of research. Before eliciting any opinions about research, we asked them to define second-language research in their own words. Then, we asked questions related to their perceptions of research and researchers. In addition, we asked about their sources for accessing research. The third section elicited comments about their use of research.

For instance, we asked whether participants thought research was useful for their teaching. Other questions probed teachers' integration of research into their teaching as well as obstacles for doing so. Finally, we solicited teachers' advice on how researchers could facilitate teachers' access to and use of research.

Immediately after each interview, the researchers together discussed prominent themes based on detailed interview notes. Subsequently, the audio-recordings were transcribed. Due to the lack of a particular theory or empirical evidence pertaining to the research–pedagogy link, the transcripts were analysed using grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Recurring themes were first identified in each transcript (conceptual labelling and open coding), and the themes that emerged. Findings and discussion Perceptions of research and researchers were then explored in the other transcripts to increase coding validity. Grounded theory allowed development of an emic understanding of teachers' views of the research–pedagogy link. The resulting categories were: research perceptions; emotional support; pedagogical issues; external pressure; accessibility; institutional support; teacher/researcher initiative; community of practice; pedagogical tools; and classroom research. Concerning teachers' definitions of L2 research, the most frequent concept, used by seven teachers, related to L2 learning processes. For instance, Pia (all names are pseudonyms) explained that L2 research 'collects and analyses data to have a better understanding of topics or issues related to L2s such as learning processes ... also how people learn L2s in classrooms'. Six teachers used words such as 'well-organized', 'innovative', and 'systematic'. Although their understanding of research was generally consistent with SLA researchers' practices (Ortega 2015), teachers did not generally mention research examining effects of instructional interventions aimed at facilitating L2 learning processes—a core component of ISLA. Only three teachers discussed instruction by mentioning concepts such as 'how L2s can be best learned and taught' or 'what teachers can do to help students'. Nonetheless, the similarity between researchers' practices and teachers' understanding of research allowed subsequent questions about teachers' perceptions and use of research. Next, we asked teachers about their impressions of research and researchers. Ten teachers shared overall positive perceptions (coded under research perceptions). For instance, Matias said:

It is an important work because all teachers go through this stage of feeling insecure about what they do in their classes or having issues with their students. Research is important for helping those teachers and that's what researchers do, no?

Such positive perceptions are crucial because if teachers are suspicious of research and researchers, then researchers' efforts to make their findings useful to teachers may be unproductive. However, although few in number, two teachers shared their 'attitudinal barriers' (Borg 2010: 410) towards researchers. Paula pointed out researchers' 'lack of generosity' in sharing research findings and communicating with teachers. Pia said researchers 'don't share knowledge and they are in their own circle'.

Like Marsden and Kasprovicz's (2017) school-level FL teachers in the UK, the Chilean university-level EFL teachers in our study generally thought that research was relevant and useful for teaching. Six teachers used the word 'confidence' to describe their feelings about research (coded as emotional support). For instance, Felipe said: 'Research gives you confidence in what you do, especially when you are dealing with so many students in so many classes with so many problems.' Some teachers mentioned specific types of research such as immigrants in classrooms, special educational needs, and online teaching (coded as pedagogical issues). Teachers expressed that research had aided their pedagogical decisions because these issues were 'new' to them and they were unsure what to do with such students. For instance, although she seemed relatively reluctant to use research, Camila's attitude changed drastically when discussing learners with special educational needs, saying 'we definitely need research'. However, despite these positive comments, none of the teachers referred to specific research findings that they had integrated into their teaching. Another factor influencing teachers' feelings about research was external pressure exerted by their educational context. For example, Paula, who also served as the MA TESOL director, explained:

In the last five years or so, the Ministry of Education has been focused on trying to implement ways of getting professionals involved with research. ... They [the government] are more worried about getting connected to universities abroad and they are pushing universities to be more globalized and internationalized. If you don't do that [getting involved with research], little by little, those teachers are ... you know ... not gonna

be considered ... in the team.

Not only did teachers feel expected to access research, they also felt pressure to conduct research themselves. Felipe, who had written a research article, explained his motivation saying: 'I am interested [in doing research]. ... But, to be honest, it is for getting a better job too.' When asked if research was part of their job description, Valentina replied: 'Not really but nowadays the university wants us to do research. ... Someday, we are going to have to do it.' Consequently, this political desire for internationalizing universities seems to have, sometimes begrudgingly, raised teachers' awareness of research.

When asked about access to research, teachers mentioned 'database' 36 times (coded under accessibility). Among the 29 ISLA journals mentioned by Marsden and Kasprovicz (2017), however, the Chilean university's database held only six, with an average of 8.5 issues for those journals.

Given this lack of accessibility, teachers reported using various other methods to access research. Five teachers who had graduated from UK or US universities said they used their previous institutions' libraries.

Others mentioned ERIC, JSTOR, and EBSCO, to which the university had subscriptions. Interestingly, five teachers mentioned belonging to social media communities (e.g. Facebook) in which journal articles were freely shared, emphasizing their need and willingness to access research by potentially unconventional means. When asked to name specific journals, one teacher mentioned *Language Learning* and another *TESOL Quarterly*.

Despite their willingness to access and use research, teachers unanimously expressed a lack of time for either finding research materials, reading research articles, or attending conferences. Another commonly expressed obstacle was financial (seven teachers); teachers were not inclined to pay to attend academic conferences (see Borg2010). These comments highlight the necessity of institutional support. Institutions could help maintain the research-pedagogy dialogue by giving teachers time off or financial aid to participate in conferences. No matter how interested teachers are in using research to inform their pedagogy, there must be affordable options for teachers to access and use research. Another obstacle teachers shared was related to the initiator of the research-pedagogy dialogue (coded as teacher/researcher initiative). Interestingly, while expressing their own willingness to integrate research into their teaching, seven of them were dismissive of other teachers' lack of interest in research. We asked Matias to clarify what he meant: 'So, you don't think other teachers are interested.' In reply, he said: 'No, I know they are not.' Fernanda explained that after teaching several years, teachers 'feel comfortable with their pedagogy and reach their teaching plateau'. In Paula's words, teachers 'get stuck'. It may be the case that when teaching becomes routine, teachers tend to stop accessing research unless unique pedagogical issues, such as the above-mentioned ones, arise. Those obstacles call for ISLA researchers' efforts in initiating the research-pedagogy dialogue.

The teachers provided a variety of useful advice for researchers. The most common was to hold talks and workshops in which they can participate for free (coded under community of practice). Although most of them (ten) expressed that it was the teacher's responsibility to access research, they also shared their wish that researchers actively reach out to teachers.

Additionally, teachers felt it was important for meetings to be held face- to-face, implying the psychological distance they felt from research/ researchers. Trinidad stated that teachers 'want to talk to researchers' rather than spending 'two hours reading an article and planning [their lessons] based on the article'. Similarly, Paula suggested: 'We should create a community of practice where teachers and researchers solve educational issues together.'

Another type of advice related to the difficulty of using research findings (coded under pedagogical tools). Given their limited time, teachers often seek tools and techniques that can be readily implemented in their classes. Researchers should not expect teachers to devise pedagogical tools based on empirical papers written in technical language. Pia shared her frustration: 'It doesn't make sense that researchers come to the classroom, collect data, yet not let the teacher know what happened in the study later. ... It's a sort of feedback to teachers.' To this end, we concur with Marsden and Kasprovicz's conclusion that 'research could better find its way into practitioners' communities of practice, for evaluation by them' (Marsden and Kasprovicz 2017: 632). However, when doing so, researchers need to provide tools or techniques that can actually be evaluated by teachers.

Although few in number, three teachers extensively discussed researchers visiting their classrooms (coded under classroom research). Fernanda stated that researchers 'should come to the class to find out what's going on'. In order to understand current issues and to advance research, it may be crucial for researchers to encourage 'the teaching profession to influence the research agenda' (Paran 2017: 505-06). Another perspective on classroom research pertained to research methodology. Cristobal had participated in numerous researchers' projects. He particularly referred to our recent project on corrective feedback (see Sato and Loewen 2018), and stated that researchers should 'make an effort to fit their research to the class rather than adapting the class to [their] research'. His comments suggest that while he is willing to participate in and use research, the researcher's approach is crucial in order to promote the research- pedagogy dialogue. Specifically, when conducting a classroom study, researchers should refrain from a 'one-off research activity' (McDonough 2015:

227). Instead, adjusting research materials to teachers' and students' needs in a specific educational context may not only increase the transferability of research findings but also establish a trusting relationship between researcher and teacher communities.

II. CONCLUSION

The current case study adds to the research–pedagogy dialogue, by investigating the access to and use of (I)SLA research in a specific EFL context in Chilean higher education. The findings suggest that teachers' understanding of research was relatively consistent with SLA researchers' practices, although the awareness of ISLA research findings was low.

Teachers cared about research because it gave them emotional support and helped them deal with specific pedagogical issues. The use of research was encouraged by external pressure in the current landscape of higher education. Nonetheless, the teachers reported obstacles, including physical accessibility such as time and resources, lack of institutional support, and limited teacher/researcher initiatives. Thus, even though EFL teachers with master's degrees teaching applied linguistics to pre-service English teachers might be expected to routinely access and use research, such was not the case. As the results showed, no teachers addressed specific empirical evidence to solve a classroom issue and their awareness of indexed journals was low. Finally, teachers provided valuable advice to create communities of practice, translate research findings into usable pedagogical tools, and conduct classroom research with research procedures integrated into existing curricula.

The current study contains some methodological limitations. First, as a case study, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the specific research context. Specifically, the case involved university-level EFL teachers, most of whom had obtained graduate degrees and some were teaching content courses related to SLA research. Consequently, some findings such as external pressure may be particular to the current context. We note, however, it is a global trend in higher education that L2 teachers are required to conduct and publish research in order to maintain their jobs. Additional insights may also be gained by surveying a larger group of teachers in different teaching/learning contexts. Second, the fact that we functioned as interviewers and researchers may have affected the teachers' responses. However, the first author had been teaching and researching in the department for six years and had developed personal relationships with the teachers. As a result, we believe we managed to create a non-threatening, trusting environment, resulting in teachers' honest stories and accounts that otherwise may have been inaccessible.

To widen the dialogue between teachers and researchers, we call for investigations into researchers' perspectives of the research–pedagogy link. We concur with Medgyes that researchers' top-down attitudes will not facilitate the dialogue; however, we contest his claim that researchers are necessarily 'parasitical' upon teachers (Medgyes 2017: 496). While it may be true that ISLA researchers rely more heavily on teachers than vice versa, it is an empirical question whether researchers are categorically 'locked up in their own little cage with no periscope available to scan the whole landscape' (ibid.: 493). A good starting place would be to ask researchers their views on L2 pedagogy and what they do to make their research useful for teachers. Many researchers used to be (or are) teachers themselves (see Lightbown 2016), and such experiences may be reflected in their perspectives.

In conclusion, we are not suggesting that all pedagogical practices must be supported by research. It is impractical for every pedagogical decision to be driven by research evidence, given the complexity of classroom L2 teaching (see Larsen-Freeman 2015). Each class, learner, and teaching/learning context is unique, and teachers themselves are most knowledgeable about their own L2 teaching/learning issues. Additionally, teachers' experiences both as L2 learners and teachers are invaluable sources for improving pedagogy, especially when shared among themselves. Nevertheless, research findings can be an additional resource for teachers to make teaching more efficient and effective, and we hope that teachers will consider implementing evidence-based pedagogical ideas in their classes.

The momentum is here; many researchers (ourselves included) are now more self-reflective regarding the transferability of their research findings into the classroom, and we strive to effect positive changes in teaching practices. Rather than closing the dialogue between teachers and researchers, as suggested by some (e.g. Medgyes 2017), we hope to widen the door and increase the amount of dialogue. Any efforts towards this end are welcome, and while researchers may shoulder the lion's share of responsibility in this initiative, the current study has shown that at least some teachers are willing partners in this endeavor.

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