Extent of ESL teachers' access to, utilisation and production of research

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This study employed the survey design on a purposive sample of 100 English Second Language (ESL) teachers from Swaziland and South Africa's Eastern Cape Province, to investigate the extent to which they accessed, utilised and conducted research to better their practice. A survey questionnaire and follow-up structured interviews generated quantitative and qualitative data. Findings pointed to grossly restricted physical and intellectual access to research findings and correspondingly low engagement with, and in research, by teachers. Respondents attributed this to inaccessible and inapplicable research, the nature of the school system, which is characterised by conservative examinations and leadership, time and material resource constraints, as well as inadequate teacher preparation and support. Recommendations for improving teacher knowledge, school support system, as well as accessibility and relevance of research are proffered to provide incentives for teachers' study, actualisation and generation of research findings to inform classroom practice.

Keywords: academic researcher; conducting research; teacher as consumer; teacher as researcher; utilising research

Introduction

Second language teaching literature attests to a virtual explosion of research aimed at improving classroom practice. What remains to be established is the extent to which massive investment in research has been met with commensurate access and the extent to which that access to research has translated to its actualisation, and the generation of teacher research. Teachers' access to, as well as implementation and conduct of research, indexes research's potential to improve classroom practice. Davis (2007) registers concern over the extent to which his extensive publications have found significant application in the classroom. His concerns stem from realising that feedback from the field suggests the presence and persistence of a theory-practice gap, with bridges between the two remaining tenuous and unsteady. Research represents the theory, and teaching and learning constitute the practice. The theory-practice gap raises questions regarding the cost-effectiveness and relevance of research, and the justification of phenomenal time, as well as human and financial investments in research.

Ellis (2010) sees basic research as preoccupied with development of general theories and epistemologies characterised by "internecine feuding and fragmentation" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:165), whereas applied research concerns itself with the specifics of teaching and learning, and is cognisant of classroom realities. The promise of establishing a nexus between researchers and practitioners lies with applied research. Basic research has been faulted for not having practice in mind and lacking sufficient validation for claims about teaching and learning (Han, 2007).

According to Belli (2010), the theory-practice dichotomy in research is analogous with the rigour-relevance gap, where rigour and theory are associated with researchers, while relevance is associated with practitioners. Another distinction attributable to the theory-practice chasm has been articulated by Labaree (2003) in Hatasa (2013:4), who posits that "…researchers' cultural orientation is analytical, intellectual, uni-versal, and theoretical, whereas teachers' orientation is normative, personal, particular, and experiential". For a teacher, a focus on the research consumption role to the exclusion of their research production role reduces the teacher to a mere technician, who unquestioningly implements others' ideas and prescriptions. Swaziland and South African teacher visibility across these two distinct research roles is investigated here.

The active perception of the critical role of research in teaching is manifest in the terms such as research-led teaching (which focus on understanding research findings); research-oriented teaching (which focus on research processes); research-based teaching (whose curriculum is designed around research activities); and research-informed teaching (which consciously draw on research in the teaching and learning process). The growing acknowledgement of the symbiosis between research and practice is further attested to by terms such as 'evidence-informed,' 'evidence-influenced,' and 'evidence-aware' practice.

Internationally, education and teaching are regarded as evidence-based practices. Biesta (2007) reports on the several initiatives in Britain to bridge the theory-practice chasm, some of which include conducting systematic research reviews, availing research outcomes to relevant educational constituencies, and setting educational research agendas, reflected in research content and methodology. The recognition of the role of educational research in shaping educational practice and vice versa has also radically transformed the American educational research landscape. According to Biesta (2007), the 1990s saw an increased preference for experimental research to determine cause and effect, and thereby to establish what works and does not work.

Experimental research needs to be contextualised, considering that a diversity of educational contexts and practitioner research is best suited to meet that need. Writing from within the Australian context, Hempenstall (2006) laments education having been slow to attend to research as a source of practice knowledge. Hempenstall (2006) further notes the lack of research culture in teacher education institutions, with teaching largely regarded as an art, where practice derives from experience, personality, intuition, and creativity.

Hiep (2006) has observed both the paucity of research on teachers and their relation to research, as well as the concentration of available research in Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States of America (USA), despite the international popularity of the 'teacher-as-researcher' notion. The need for research-based knowledge and practice is even more pronounced in contexts like South Africa and Swaziland, where there is an increased prominence of standardised testing. In South Africa, fixation on student outcomes is reflected in the provincial and national benchmarking tests, which in Swaziland, manifests itself in the national ranking of schools in accordance with student outcomes. This necessarily puts pressure on schools to determine 'what works' to improve student outcomes. Research-based knowledge is best placed to provide the answer, rather than mere intuition, or what Hempenstall (2006) calls spurious claims to knowledge.

The Swaziland and South Africa Teacher Education Context in relation to Research Knowledge Preparation of Teachers

Swaziland's teacher education sector comprise four publicly funded institutions namely the University of Swaziland (both Conventional and Distance Education), two primary teachers' colleges, and one secondary teacher's college; compared to more than a dozen South African universities offering teacher education. According to the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA, 2009), the fourth of five main Higher Education goals is teaching research skills and inculcating a culture of research for personal, professional and social development. Borg (2003) has observed that the generality of undergraduate teacher education programmes comprise a separate course on Research Methods, which focuses on developing research skills, from the design to the reporting of a study, which can be said to hold true for both the Swaziland and South African context. In both countries, teachers' colleges (which are current in Swaziland although now obsolete in South Africa) had, however, not always included the research component in their instruction to prospective teachers, which meant that participants in this study who had undergone teacher education prior to the introduction of research methods component had

received no research-based preparation.

In the teacher education institutions in the two countries, the teaching of research skills is deferred until the final year(s) of study. Similarly, in the UK, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) report (2014) notes a lack of systematic sustenance of research in teachers' lives from their teacher education period and on into the rest of their working lives. The report proposes a movement from mere data-rich classrooms to research-rich and evidence-rich practices and classrooms. This raises questions about the adequacy of students' preparation for real world research from a year or less of exposure to research. Research methods, in our experience, were only offered as a course to final year Bachelor of Education students and not to Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students. This denied the PGCE holders requisite research preparation strategies.

The focus of the small-scale research conducted by students in teacher education was in the form of a thesis in partial fulfilment of the degree or diploma qualification requirements. Hiep (2006) reports similar observations within the Vietnamese context, where teachers only conduct research for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of their studies, and hardly undertake any research after graduation. Neither the skill of interpreting research-based papers, nor of applying and adapting research findings, were found to be mature in the students concerned. This, the current researchers found similar to their own training in both the teachers' colleges and universities in Zimbabwe for their teacher education qualifications. Such a narrow research-based skills development focus can hardly produce teachers who see research as outliving and transcending their degree studies. Because this study is based on the English language second language teachers, the English Language Teaching (ELT) context merits further discussion.

The English Language Teaching (ELT) Context

Warschauer (2000:512) posits an expansion of the role of English, considering that globalisation "places a premium on the ability to communicate in a lingua franca." English's unrivalled global lingua franca status, combined with the new technologies which occasion the transformation in notions of literacy, requires educators abreast with developments in ELT pedagogies in particular, and the emerging economy more generally. That L2 speakers of English now outnumber its L1 speakers (Warschauer, 2000), speaks to both the globalisation and localisation of the language, which merits its adequate development, not only within its L1 contexts, but also in its L2 contexts. Whereas globalisation allows for global networking, its localisation generates local identity.

As a global lingua franca, English is the language of power and influence. The hitherto

marginalised postcolonial societies, and emerging economies require access to this power to effect necessary transformation of their societies. Research in ELT provision becomes a key pathway towards empowering the country's citizenry for participation in the global arena. In post-colonial emerging societies such as South Africa, whose colonial history was "characterized [*sic*] by European domination, linguistic inequality and denial of rights to non-European languages and speakers" (Brook Napier, 2011:58), access to, and proficiency in English is synonymous with having a 'headstart' in life. The need is further exacerbated by the observation that:

> South Africa is embroiled in the global enterprise of education, knowledge economy, international competitiveness, international comparisons of student achievement as indicators of educational effectiveness and priorities linked to economic development that translates to emphasis on mathematics, science, technology and English (Brook Napier, 2011:59).

The observation holds true for most emerging economies as it does for South Africa, where emerging economies undergo rapid globalisation and the need for the role of a lingua franca for international and domestic exchange becomes even greater.

Dewey and Leung (2010:1) see the spread of English as responsible for ELT's status as "a major international 'industry'" and the need to "disentangle our notion of English from its supposed ancestry", seeing that it no longer belongs exclusively to the British or Americans. According to Canagarajah (2005:419) "globalization [*sic*] has made the borders of the nation-state porous and reinserted the importance of English language for all communities, through multinational production and marketing relationships, pop culture, cyber space, and digital technology." With globalisation has come the knowledge economy, which has placed the English language at the fore of mediating the multiple factors, such as the internet and related communication technologies, that push towards global convergence. English language teaching becomes a priority, to allow for a single market in knowledge and ideas for individual and national growth. English has assumed the role of gatekeeper through high stakes tests. The momentum of the English language (occasioned by the mutually reinforcing globalisation and the internet as well as its adaptability), accounts for ELT's pivotal role.

Despite the plethora of initiatives and massive investment in the field of ELT, outcomes for most emerging economies have been disappointingly disproportionate. As an example of the need for responsive and proactive ELT, Warschauer (2000:521) observes that the shift of reading practices from the page to the screen occasions "different psycholinguistic processes related to decoding information from a screen instead of a page" and compels "English language educators to think more about how texts combine with graphics, images, and audiovisual content to communicate a message".

In ELT pedagogy, a case in point underscoring the ever-evolving nature of knowledge is the centuries-long search for the right L2 teaching method in the method era, which has given way to variations of the post-method era. The disjuncture between research and practice explains Michel Thomas' argument that

> while method has been discredited at an etic level (that is, in the thinking and nomenclature of scholars) it certainly retains a great deal of vitality at the grass roots, emic level (that is, it is still part of the nomenclature of lay people and teachers) (Bell, 2007:135).

The creation and demise of methods would, in that case, occur at the level of research oblivious to classroom practice.

Although the present study is set within the South African and Swaziland context, the theory-practice gap has plagued education systems globally. The concern for the impact of research in practice transcends geographical and disciplinary boundaries, speaking to an international and cross-disciplinary audience. This is all the more so within an emerging economy, where research for research's sake can be perceived as being neither productive nor cost-effective. This justifies the need for the present study, guided by the research questions below.

Research Questions

- To what extent do teachers access and read relevant, current research articles on ESL?
- How much does research inform ESL teachers' classroom practice and what are the other sources of ideas that they use to better their practice?
- To what extent do ESL teachers conduct classroom-based research, and for what purposes?

Literature Review

The traditional model in relation to the teacher's role in research envisages a partnership between the researcher and the teacher in improving classroom practice. The researcher provides the theoretical expertise, which the teacher actualises, rendering the teacher a consumer of research generated elsewhere. Research and theory building are the preserve of the academic researcher, a view Johnson (1992:212) faults when he asks "are teachers merely an audience for researchers? Are they simply to consume, apply and learn from the research of others?" While the teacher's role as a consumer of research is not the problem, confinement to that role is. The traditional view is limited and limiting, but not obsolete, as the teacher's implementation of sound, externally-generated research is still crucial.

The modern perspective is premised on the teacher-as-researcher conception, holding "…the greatest promise for linking theory with practice in ways that are meaningful to teachers" (Johnson, 1992:214). It finds leverage in the dissatisfaction with the teacher-as-consumer model, which is riddled with challenges that compromise the utilisation of research by academic researchers in the classroom. We have chosen four exemplary cases. First, certain research findings are considered too theoretical to be pedagogically relevant, on account of pursuing wrong questions and narrow parochial interests, and consequently offering unusable, decontextualised answers, which pay little attention to actual classroom settings (Hirschkorn & Geelan, 2008). These authors ask the question, "how specifically, though, does a classroom teacher – or his or her practice or his or her students' learning – benefit from an article published in an academic journal or a presentation made to a group of academics at a national conference?" (Hirschkorn & Geelan, 2008:6).

Second, most of the research is too esoteric in its form and style, and so speaks to the academic researcher, rather than to teachers. Obscurity or impenetrability of language in research is sometimes considered synonymous with sound scholarship (Hirschkorn & Geelan, 2008), where abstruse language may deny teachers access. At an American Educational Research Association (AERA) meeting, Whitehurst fabricated a paper title "Episodes of Theory Building as a Transformative and Decolonizing [*sic*] Process: A Microethno-graphic Inquiry into a Deeper Awareness of Embodied Knowing" to exemplify the way in which esoteric titles discourage and exclude those outside a particular research niche and become incomprehensible to teachers (Drill, Miller & Behrstock-Sherratt, 2012). Johnson (1992), meanwhile, blames inaccessibility on the characteristic statistical depth of most research of a quantitative nature.

Third, research is sometimes not as generalisable as research experts may prefer to impress upon their readership (Richards & Renandya, 2002). This is because the research rarely emanates from issues that concern teachers (Johnson, 1992), and is not informed by valuable insights from teachers, where therefore, it becomes abstracted from the classroom experiences of the very teachers who would actualise the findings. Ultimately, the audience of the research is more often than not the research community itself. Such decontextualised research may risk misguided, unsubstantiated and misleading claims.

Fourth, some researchers have never been teachers, and those who have been, may have been out of touch with those classroom realities and dynamics that may compromise the congruence of research with classroom realities. The perception of research as overly-theoretical orientations from non-practitioners militates against its implementation in the classroom, which is exacerbated by the lack or absence of staff development workshops on current relevant research. Teacher research has, however, been accused of lacking the rigour of scholarship, an argument which compromises its authenticity (Borg, 2006).

Showler (2000) notes that the absence of teachers' voices in the research generation renders them invisible, and makes them forfeit the benefits that accrue from teacher research. These include self-reflexivity in their practice and the ability to transform their practice from an intuition basis to evidence basis.

That teachers are at a vantage point to decide the critical aspects that merit research in the classroom, should necessarily propel them to conduct research. Mooko (2005) investigated the application of theory by secondary school teachers in Botswana, and found that teachers relied on: intuition; their own wisdom; experience; theory gained during pre-service training; creativity; prescribed texts; knowledge gained from in-service workshops; informal discussions with colleagues; their own notes; and the internet, as sources of ideas they used for teaching. The infamous theory-practice chasm that has plagued education for a long time can be bridged through teachers actualising findings from academic researchers, while at the same time, conducting their own research. Neither role would suffice to the exclusion of the other.

Theoretical Framework

Practice-based and research-based knowledge define the teaching profession's knowledge base. According to Toom, Kynäslahti, Krokfors, Jyrhämä, Byman, Stenberg, Maaranen and Kansanen (2010), research-based knowledge, which engenders autonomy and reflection, is best developed in teachers at the incipient stages of their teacher education. That knowledge should develop prospective teachers' skills as both consumers and producers of research. Reading research literature and becoming familiar with research methods feeds into the research consumption role, whereas production of the research thesis addresses the production component (Toom et al., 2010).

According to Nilsen, Nordström and Ellström (2012:404), whereas research-based knowledge emanates from "[…] empirical research as well as concepts, theories, models and frameworks […] practice-based knowledge is gradually built up from practitioners' experience, which is manifested in their craft expertise and skills […]." The authors posit that while practice-based knowledge is tacit and difficult to communicate, research-based knowledge is fundamentally explicit and easy to

articulate and access. As Nilsen et al. (2012:406) have observed "it is neither possible, nor desirable, to draw a strict line of demarcation between these two types of knowledge." Each should derive from, and feed into, the other. Although the relevance and applicability of each knowledge form is context-dependent and circumstantial, they are mutually reinforcing in real practice, one providing creative learning, and another providing adaptive learning. Nilsen et al. (2012) acknowledge that the greater challenge is that of ensuring creative learning, which emanates from research-based knowledge.

Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler (2002) see thoughtful pedagogic practice as resting upon a growing and improving teacher knowledge base, which cannot be offered by archived research. This calls for teacher access to, application of, and production of relevant research that engenders teacher renewal, and impacts on practice. The three, namely research access (both physical and intellectual), research application in practice, and research production, constitute the data collection, organising and analytical framework for the study. These first two represent teachers' research consumption role and the third, their research production role. The three also represent a bridging of the theory-practice gap, viz. between intellectual access to research and research utilisation and production.

Methodology

Research Design

A survey was employed to enhance the validity of the research findings. The design allowed the use of a large sample, which was characteristic of the present study, where $N = 100$.

Instruments

A 12-item questionnaire was used to collect data from 80 teachers in Swaziland and 20 in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The questionnaire's amenability to quantification was found to be advantageous to the study. Open-ended questions accounted for 7/12 of the items and the Likert format accounted for the remainder of the items. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 30 purposively selected teachers from the questionnaire sample, so as to further probe their responses. The follow-up interviews were conducted after an initial and general analysis of the questionnaire data, so as to identify areas that needed probing. They were meant to complement questionnaire data by filling in the information gaps, so as to ensure adequate data responsiveness to the research questions.

The questionnaire designed by the researchers was rated by eight raters (out of 20), as a measure of teachers' perspectives on their access, study, actualisation, and generation of research. Rating scores were correlated and yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.82, reinforcing the instrument's perceived reliability. The validated questionnaire was piloted on 20 teachers, with similar characteristics as those of the study sample, resulting in minor modifications to the questionnaire, after which, it was adopted for use with the sample of the main study.

Sample

One hundred teachers were sampled in Swaziland and 20 in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, in sites where researchers were teacher-educators. Without researching the actual quantitative distribution of language teachers in Swaziland and South Africa to come up with a corresponding sample for the study, we purposively drew up criteria deemed reflective of the language teacher profiles, and decided on the distribution for each criterion. We worked from the sample size of 100 teachers (80 from Swaziland and 20 from the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, the former representing a national sample and the latter; a provincial sample). The criteria were gender (55 female and 45 male teachers); level taught (60 primary school i.e. Grade 1 to 7, and 40 high school teachers of English); and highest teaching qualifications held (65 diploma/certificate, 32 undergraduate i.e. PGCE and B.Ed. degrees, and 3 postgraduate degree holders). Random and convenience sampling were then applied to each of the categories to generate the pre-determined figures. The resultant sample had an average teaching experience of 19 years (ranging from one year to 34 years), and an age mean of 38.6 years. All the teachers taught in government schools. The majority were employed in rural schools, with less in township or peri-urban schools, with the least number of participants coming from urban schools. Respondents' diversity was not meant to allow for generalisation of findings or for comparison of different groups' perceptions, only to ensure diversity in terms of the pre-determined categories.

Data Collection Procedure

One researcher personally administered and collected questionnaires during teaching practice supervision visits in schools in Swaziland. The same was done by the researcher in South Africa, ensuring a 100% return rate, which enhanced the study's validity. Coding questionnaires upon collection by school code and grade/form taught, allowed researchers to trace respondents whose responses merited follow-up through the interviews. Such were included in the interview sample, if they were free and willing to participate.

Ethics

Informed consent was granted by the research participants, and assurance was given that the information they volunteered would only be used for the present study, where its confidentiality and their anonymity would be respected. The aggregate

form in which data was presented rendered individuals' identification impossible. Their right to withdraw from the study was also guaranteed.

Results

Data are presented in crosstabs, with percentages used to report the results. Questionnaire items were taken as rating scales, and as such, were analysed individually. Both presentation and discussion of data are in accordance with the themes of access to research (both physical and intellectual) (items 1, 2, 5, 7, 8 and 9); utilisation of research (items 3, 4 and 10); and conduct of research (items 11 and 12), with item 6 being generic. Follow-up interview data are incorporated in the discussions of particular items and themes, as interview probes were meant to provide explanations to particular item responses. Items requiring many reasons, explanations or aspects had these tallied to produce their percentage occurrences, which did not necessarily add up to 100% per item.

Theme 1: Extent of Teachers' Access to Research Findings
Sources of teachers' teaching ideas
Item 1 sought the source of ideas teachers relied upon to enhance their teaching, where sources of teaching ideas mentioned were, in order of frequency:
- the textbook and the attendant teacher's guide (82%);
- the syllabus (Swaziland) and the curriculum documents (South Africa) (67%);

- staff development meetings or workshops (48%);
- ministry policy circulars (24%);
- informal interaction with colleagues (12%);
- own experience in teaching (8%) and observations of peer teaching (8%);
- files with notes made during teacher education (6%);
- the internet (4%).

Apparently, there was reliance on two sources of information, namely the official documents and staff workshops, where teaching maxims were developed. These primary sources of information did not conform to either practice-based or research-based knowledge systems. Teachers mediated knowledge handed down to them not one that emanated from research or practice, which amounted to the degeneration of their role to that of executive technicians of a top-down knowledge system, rather than the professionals they are meant to be. Teachers evidently did not interrogate both their own practice, and supposed best practices. The sources appealed to are all not evidence-based. There were parallels in the sources of knowledge amongst Botswana secondary school teachers in studies drawn from by Mooko (2005), as well as those the present study's teachers utilised, namely: intuition, prescribed texts, in-service workshops, informal discussions with colleagues, and the internet. Again, neither research-based nor practice-based knowledge was given prominence. Knowledge was taken to exist 'out there', and was merely given to the teacher to pass to the learners without further intervention.

Table 1a Open-ended items on the theme access to research

Item and Responses
1. What are the sources of ideas you use to improve your teaching? (List as many as you can.)
2. What helps you to keep in touch with the developments in the area of second language teaching?
5. What would make using research easier and more appealing to you? (Give as many factors as you can.)

Interviewees viewed sourcing teaching ideas as being beyond their job description. Their task, in their own view, was to implement teaching ideas given to them. In the words of one respondent, "*if every teacher looks for his own ideas, how can our learners write the same exams? They have to be taught the same ideas if they are to write the same exams. So they have to give us those ideas.*" Some indicated that teachers were too busy to "*run around for*" teaching ideas. While workshops were acknowledged as useful sources of ideas, interviewees noted that their efficacy was compromised by the fact that they lacked focus on what teachers considered critical, being conducted by fellow teachers and being infrequent. Research was conspicuously absent as a source of teaching ideas. Our initial inference that the internet may have served as a means to research journals was found to be inaccurate, where an interviewee instead iden-

tified blogs as a source of teaching ideas. Teachers expressed confidence in experience as a tool for self-improvement.

Keeping abreast with developments in the field
Item 2 sought to ascertain what teachers did to keep up with developments in the field. Textbooks, syllabi/curriculum documents and ministry circulars featured prominently, being cited by 59%, 43% an 18% respondents, respectively. Explanations garnered in follow-up interviews noted that these were constantly changed, where the more current these were, the more reflective they were of the state of knowledge in the field. Curriculum documents were, in particular, identified as repositories of current developments in the field by the South African respondents, owing to their ever-changing nature. Developments in the field were largely interpreted to mean curriculum changes. Develop-

ments in the field were not sought either in the teachers' own practice (practice-based knowledge), or in research in the field (research-based).

Making research easier and more appealing
Item 5 interrogated teachers' perceptions regarding the way in which intellectual access to research findings could be enhanced. Impenetrability of language featured prominently (51%) as a limitation to be addressed. One interviewee remarked that "*the things that are published are not meant for us. You can't read something with a dictionary in your hand and expect to understand it. We read our books, which we understand.*" The jargonistic way in which the research is written compromised the schedule of teachers already pressured for time (32%). Teachers wanted access to research that was direct, and which they could read both easily and quickly. They also wanted research that is directly relevant to their practice (13%). One interviewee noted the discouragement that came from reading through research unrelated to one's teaching. Another put it bluntly: "*researchers think they know what is happening in the classrooms but they don't, so we don't take them seriously.*"

Table 1b Crosstabs on the theme access to research

Item	Responses			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	Not sure
7. Do you have access to published research journals on second language teaching?	52%	20%	13%	15%
Give details for your answer.				
8. How often do you read research on second language teaching in journals?	44%	28%	10%	18%
Give reason(s) for your answer.				
9. How easy do you find it to understand published research findings in journals?	37%	18%	0%	45%
Give details for your answer.				

Physical access to research
Item 7 sought to determine the extent of respondents' physical access to research findings in journals. The 52% who indicated never having access to second language teaching journals, while 15% indicated uncertainty reflected very limited access to research. Access to research was largely occasional for the few who enjoyed it, owing to: a lack of knowledge as to where journals could be accessed, as well as how; schools and teachers not affording journal subscriptions or having no internet access to access electronic journals; not having time to look for journals; and universities allegedly closing their doors to teachers who may wish to access to their libraries once they leave university. Two of the 13 who claimed frequent access to research findings attributed the access to: personal distance education study, which gave access to institutional resources; and to personal resourcefulness. Among the 'not sure' responses were two who confessed ignorance of what journals are by saying "*what are journals?*" and "*we teach in rural areas, we don't know about these things*". There was acknowledgement of ignorance and acceptance of geographic isolation as being synonymous with a lack of access and privilege.

Frequency of reading research
Most respondents (44%) confessed to never reading research papers at all, with only 28% and 10% indicating occasional and frequent reading of research papers, respectively. Infrequent or lack of reading of research was alleged as due to lack of time in a congested school programme; lack of incentive for the study of research; lack of access to research; irrelevance of research to classroom practice; research being arcane. In some respondents' words: "*it's like you are reading a language you don't know*"; "*our learners pass exams without us reading this research thing so why do we need it?*"; "*who would have time for all that?*"; and "*you just read it and find that there is nothing you will use in the classroom*". From this, we concluded that research is generally viewed as an unwelcome distraction.

Ease of understanding research
Item 9 enquired after the ease with which respondents accessed content in research papers. That the 'not sure' and 'never' options were the most and second most frequent responses, respectively, indicated that research findings are found to be too challenging to understand, with only 18% claiming occasional understanding. None of the respondents claimed ease of understanding, which evinced limited intellectual access to research. Novel research jargon, suggested in international literature (Drill et al., 2012; Hirschkorn & Geelan, 2008) was considered problematic in remarks like "*these writers just want to use big words to confuse*", and "*you just look at the title*

and you can see that I cannot understand this so you ignore", testifying to the nature of the linguistic challenge restricting intellectual access to available research. Reference was also made to deep statistical analyses, which were reported only to confound the respondents of this study, where, according to one respondent, "*as a language teacher, you read a language paper and you find it is full of mathematical calculations, and you wonder why.*" The respondent did not find merit in having elaborate statistical computations in English language research papers.

Theme 2: Application of Research Findings in Classroom Teaching
Enablers and constraints to research utilisation
Items 3 and 4 solicited enabling and constraining factors respectively, to the use of educational research in the classroom. Item 3 on enablers was either left blank, or indicated as 'none' or 'not sure' by most respondents (84%). Because teachers rarely used research findings in their teaching, they had no enabling factors to cite. The 16% who responded to the item did not, in the majority of cases, identify the actual enabling factors. Rather, they gave reasons as to why research should be used, including the improvement of teaching, along with the ability to understand one's teaching better. The only relevant response was having studied and conducted research, which was given by only two respondents. Generally, there was little, if anything, that eased the utilisation of research findings in the classroom.

Respondents, however, had much to say about factors militating against the utilisation of edu-

cational research in the classroom, which included:
- lack of time to read, interpret and utilise research findings (83%);
- ignorance of source of research responding to classroom teaching needs (78%);
- difficulty comprehending available research (72%);
- no incentive for research in terms of learner outcomes, and no additional compensation or incentive (55%);
- lack of resources to actualise research (32%);
- rigidity of the school system and conservative school heads, who view research innovations with suspicion (27%);
- research focus taking away the time needed to teach for examinations and the inflexibility of the examination system when it came to incorporating research innovations (13%);
- textbooks and syllabi/curriculum documents being sufficient for the learners' educational needs (6%); and
- no support on interpretation and utilisation of research findings provided to teachers (2%).

Lack of time, which was mentioned most, resonates with findings from a study by Hiep (2006), where it emerged that lack of time proved detrimental to Vietnamese teachers' engagement with and in research, owing to their heavy workloads, often characterised by added part-time teaching for additional income. The vice-like grip the examination system, the textbook, and curriculum documents hold on what gets implemented in the classroom was manifest in the responses. The relevance of research to quality classroom practice was not appreciated, and inaccessibility of the language and style of research were viewed as constraining its application.

Table 2a Open-ended items on the theme utilisation of research

Item and Response
3. What enables you to use educational research in the classroom? (Give as many factors as you can.)
4. What prevents you from using educational research in the classroom? (Give as many factors as you can.)

Table 2b Crosstabs on the theme utilisation of research

Item	Responses			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	Not sure
10. Have you ever used published research findings in your own teaching? (Give details for your answer.)	61%	23%	0%	16%

Actualisation of research
In response to Item 10, most respondents (61%) admitted to never having used any research in their own teaching. Most frequently cited explanations given were: teachers' satisfaction with their practice which ensured examination success; suspicion of the efficacy of research findings conceived elsewhere when applied in their own settings; and ignorance of such research and its sources. Only 23% claimed having used research findings occasionally, and none used research

findings often. The occasional research users did not elaborate on how they implemented the research, even in the follow-up interviews, which raised questions about the authenticity of their claims to research use.

Theme 3: Conduct of own Classroom Research
Research-prone classroom situations
In response to Item 11, the majority (58%) claimed never having encountered classroom situations that merited research, despite the classroom being a

research hub. These claimed textbooks and curriculum documents were self-contained, where research served no purpose. Some appealed to their extended teaching experience to handle any classroom situations. The 20% and 13% who claimed encountering classroom research pregnant situations 'sometimes' and 'often' respectively, gave examples of such situations as: high failure rate in English among learners; learners passing examinations but unable to use the language; discipline issues; and ideal grade level at which English should be introduced as the language of instruction in schools. Research aspects identified related to learners and the school system, and not directly to teachers.

Conduct of systematic research
Regarding whether they had ever conducted systematic classroom research (item 12), 62% had not, while 17% had engaged in research only occasionally. The major reason cited for not engaging in research was ignorance of the process, evident in responses such as: "*I can't*"; "*it's too difficult*"; "*we are not trained for that*"; or "*I don't know how*". Research was also envisioned as a large-scale, complex, academic, theoretical and time-consuming enterprise, divorced from the everyday pedagogical practices of the classroom. The other reasons were similar to those cited for not reading and utilising research. Some confessed to not having done research courses for their teacher education. Lack of time was a major constraint in a heavily congested teacher's load, which to them did not include research. It emerged that most who claimed to have occasionally engaged in research were making reference to the compulsory research that was in partial fulfillment of their course of college/university study, and not any self-initiated voluntary research work. Some 'not sure' respondents noted that they could have conducted research unknowingly, which betrayed their ignorance of the systematic nature of research.

Item 6 was generic to the three themes, as it sought to identify the support that the respondents received which better positioned them for accessing, utilising and conducting research.

Table 3 Crosstabs on the theme conduct of research

Item	Responses			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	Not sure
11. Have you ever encountered classroom situations you thought needed researching on?	58%	20%	13%	9%
If yes, give details.				
12. Have you ever conducted any systematic research in your classroom?	62%	17%	-	21%
Give reason(s) for your answer.				

Table 4 Crosstabs on the themes access to, implementation of, and conduct of research

Item	Responses			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	Not sure
12. Have you ever received support that enabled you to access, implement or conduct own research?	72%	15%	0%	13%

Support for research work
Responses indicated a lack of support, with 72% having received no support, and only 15% having received support sometimes. From explanations and follow-up interviews, the few who had received support had been supported during their teacher education in terms of conducting research, but not how to translate research findings into practice. One even observed the contrived nature of college/university research projects, where even topics for research were given to them by lecturers. Some noted that there was much plagiarising of other research during teacher education, which meant college/university research did not amount to much preparation for the conducting of classroom research. Those who claimed not having received any form of support in research saw it as indicative of the fact that it was not considered part of their responsibilities. Some held department/ministry officials and researchers accountable for, on the one hand, disseminating relevant research to schools, and on the other hand, helping teachers with its implementation.

Discussion
The discussion brings together indicators from the three major themes. The textbook was acknowledged as the chief source of teaching ideas, to the extent that it potentially deskilled the teachers. Because of the pivotal influence of the textbook in the classroom, the quality of classroom teaching was contingent upon the core textbook used. This is symptomatic of the use of the textbook, not as a resource, but as a panacea to all pedagogical ills, and as a recipe to be adhered to slavishly (Sibanda, 2009). That the textbook is still a common feature of even the technologically advanced communities, speaks to the potential deskilling influence of the textbook more broadly. The same status was accorded to the curriculum documents and syllabi.

Teachers absolved themselves from the role of generation and sourcing of teaching ideas, and considering themselves subject to the implementation of externally imposed ideas. Rather than challenge the imposition of ideas, teachers actually welcomed them, as it put them in a comfort zone.

The washback effect of examinations where, "it is testing, not the 'official' stated curriculum that is increasingly determining what is taught, how it is taught, what is learned and how it is learned" (Ahmad & Rao, 2012:176) was manifest in teachers' disregard for the study, utilisation and conduct of research on the basis that that would not significantly impact learners' examination performance. Research was treated with suspicion, as distracting teachers from focusing on examinations. Ahmad and Rao (2012) also observe the way in which innovative techniques are sacrificed, and risk-taking shunned, where a veritable obsession with examinations dictated teachers' practices. Such a washback effect is a global phenomenon, where high-stake summative assessments are used, underscoring the relevance of this study for a wider readership.

Teachers evidently required greater justification and incentive for using research. True to Borg's (2006) identification of the need for credentials as a major incentive for research, teachers viewed research as a hurdle only to be surmounted in pursuit of a qualification. The question of time constraints linked with the teachers' perception of research work as beyond their parameters of operation, raising the need for attitudinal transformation towards research. By their own admission, teachers were not capacitated to handle research, be this in its interpretation, application or generation. Borg (2006) identifies research knowledge and skills as a critical condition for engaging in, and with, research. The nature of the research component in teacher education had evidently not equipped them with the requisite skills for engaging effectively with the research consumer and producer roles, for the bettering of their classroom practice.

Biesta (2007:2) notes the way in which, in Britain, reports commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment, the Hillage Report and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) Report expresses reservations about the quality and relevance of educational research which they viewed as "[…] fragmented, noncumulative, and methodologically flawed; […] tendentious and politically motivated." Such limitations on the part of academic research is a point in favour of practitioner research, which the present study findings indicate as absent among the respondent teachers.

In response to Johnson's (1992) earlier question as to whether teachers were mere audience and consumers of researchers' ideas, we would, on the basis of this study's findings, suggest that teachers do not tend to espouse themselves as occupying the role of research consumers, as they cite a lack of both physical and intellectual access to the research in the first instance, and so have no research to implement, and none to look to in the potential production of their own research.

Recommendations

Without physical and intellectual access to the research, even the most meticulous research is rendered redundant. Recommendations to improve the usability of research and broaden its clientele among teachers includes the interpretation of research within curriculum documents, to provide research-based best practices. Hammersley (2002), cited in Broekkamp and Van Hout-Wolters (2007:207), bemoans the "…lack of systematic reviews and secondary research reports that summarise results in a practice-oriented and objective way." There is a need to filter research to teachers in a way they will understand and appreciate, for example, in the form of bulleted points and brief synopses on research-based best practices (Drill et al., 2012). Filtering should not misrepresent research by diluting research findings. It should indicate how the research is applicable to particular contexts even if it is a product of a specific context. Such filtering is as necessary in second-language speaking contexts as it is in first-language contexts, noting that the academic language of research is denser than conversational language.

There is a need for language-accessible practitioner journals, where "…clarity, simplicity and parsimony…" are ideals to be upheld by authors (Oppenheimer, 2006:139). Research addressing teachers' pedagogical needs should be disseminated in those places where teachers have access to cluster libraries, used by a group of schools in close proximity. Funds should be sourced by schools and provided by the Department of Education to meet the prohibitive subscriptions journals levy on users, so as to ensure teacher access to the intricacies of research conceived and conducted at great expense. Wilson and Corbett (2000) note the need for equipping teachers with the skills to read, unlock and evaluate research findings, and that of adapting and implementing the research findings in their specific contexts through rigorous and systematic in-service staff development programmes. We argue further for the necessity for the teacher of the skill of conducting systematic, transferable, credible, replicable, and dependable research, from which they can gain insight from valuable pedagogical principles and practices being reported upon in the broader corpus of knowledge. Such pedagogically empowering skills would serve not only teaching practice, but would surely break down discourse barriers between researchers and teachers.

To ensure greater sharing of research findings, journals focusing specifically on practitioner research, with no 'per page fees', and which encourage simple presentation of classroom-based research, should be established as an outlet for teachers' findings; by means of which academic researchers can further deliberate upon in their own intellectually robust manner. Labaree (2000:71) argues convincingly that "...there is nothing in the nature of educational knowledge to prevent researchers in education from creating their own standards of rigour and from policing their own ranks in light of these standards." Practitioner journals can have different, but not necessarily inferior, standards of validation as those generally found in academic journals.

There is also a need for researcher-practitioner cooperation, which is complemented by that of "…intermediary organisations with understanding both of research and teachers' needs" (Nelson & O'Beirne, 2014:8), a role universities should undertake as part of the necessity of community engagement. There is need for finding ways to incentivise teachers to study, critique, utilise and generate research, just as much as there are incentives for producing research for university academics. An example would be tying research to promotion, or career advancement prospects, or obtaining sponsorship to attend conferences on the basis of research outputs.

Because unavailability of time was identified as a critical constraint, time for research work can be timetabled, which may necessitate offloading whatever teacher responsibilities are not critical. Teachers could then work in research teams and report on findings in scheduled research workshops at different levels. Availing time needs to be complemented by the provision of material, financial and human resources. As an example, a fund can be created for research for each school, where research experts can act as resource personnel at research workshops. Schools could even partner with particular academic or expert researchers. Sustained effort is certainly indispensable to bridging the research-practice gap, which remains vast.

Conclusion

This study's findings and foregoing discussion manifests severely limited visibility of the teacher's role in all the three aspects of research, namely: research access, research actualisation and research production. The generality of the diverse explanations for teachers' inactivity in all three research aspects investigated are attributable to inadequacy or absence of research preparation in their teacher education. Much responsibility rests upon teacher education institutions to equip prospective teachers with the requisite access to research, as well as research application and production skills, without which relevant current research goes to waste, and opportunities are missed for growing the teachers' knowledge base through principled and disciplined inquiry. The findings point to teachers' practice being influenced by neither practice-based knowledge nor research-based knowledge, and it is therefore concluded that a theoretical framework is necessary in the field of education, which is not limited to describing teachers' knowledge base in terms of extant research and practice-based dichotomies.

Notes

[i.] Beasley and Riordan (1981:17-18) identify the following additional benefits:
- it begins and builds on the knowledge that teachers have already accumulated;
- it focuses on the immediate interests and concerns of classroom teachers;
- it matches the subtle organic process of classroom life;
- it builds on the natural process of evaluation and research which teachers carry out daily;
- it bridges the gap between understanding and action by merging the role of the researcher and practitioner;
- it sharpens teachers' critical awareness through observation, recording and analysis of classroom events;
- it provides teachers with better information than they already have about what is actually happening in the classroom and why;
- it helps teachers better articulate teaching and learning processes to their colleagues and interested community members; and
- it bridges the gap between theory and practice.

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