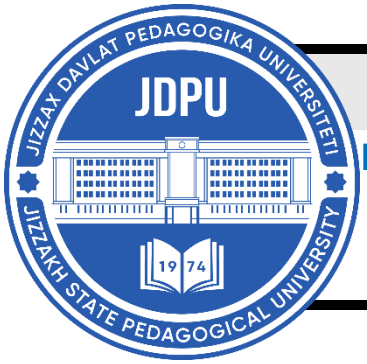
DOI: https://doi.org/10.37547/mesmj-V6-I1-34 Pages: 256-261

MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC – METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL



MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC – METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL

http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index

EXPLORING EFL TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT RESEARCH COMPETENCE

Dilafruz Sarimsakova
PhD, Associate Professor
Namangan State University
Namangan, Uzbekistan
E-mail: dilafruz89@gmail.com

ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: research competence, language teaching, teachers' beliefs, professional development, research activity.

Received: 21.01.25
Accepted: 23.01.25
Published: 25.01.25

Abstract: This article explores language teachers' beliefs about research competence and its role in effective language teaching. Using mixed approach, it examines how teachers perceive research competence, the factors shaping these beliefs, and the impact of these perceptions on their professional practices. The findings highlight significant gaps between teachers' beliefs and their engagement in research activities. This indicates the need to improve continuous professional development programs with topics to develop teachers' research knowledge, research skills, and research competence to conduct research activities in teaching.

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of research competence among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers has gained considerable attention in the field of teacher education (Pinninti, 2025). Research competence is defined as the ability to critically engage with, conduct, and apply research in teaching contexts and it is increasingly regarded as a vital skill for professional growth and effective teaching. It enables teachers to address pedagogical challenges, adopt evidence-based practices, and foster a culture of lifelong learning within their professional communities.

The ability to critically evaluate academic literature, design classroom-based studies, and apply findings to real-world challenges is integral to fostering meaningful learning experiences and teaching practices. Moreover, engaging in research helps teachers develop reflective practices, enabling them to identify areas for improvement and implement targeted strategies to enhance student outcomes (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2009). Despite its importance, many teachers face challenges in developing and utilizing research competence. Factors such as time constraints, lack of training, and limited access to resources often hinder their ability to engage in research activities. Furthermore, teachers' beliefs about the relevance and practicality of research in their specific teaching contexts can significantly influence their willingness to invest time and effort in building these skills. By understanding the perceptions and barriers faced by educators, this research aims to provide actionable insights for teacher education programs, professional development initiatives, and institutional policies that support research engagement.

This research aims to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What are EFL teachers' beliefs about the importance of research competence in their professional practice?
2. How do EFL teachers perceive their own research competence?
3. What factors influence EFL teachers' engagement with research activities?

Literature Review

Research competence refers to the ability to identify, analyze, and apply research findings effectively in educational settings. In EFL contexts, research competence is particularly significant as it allows teachers to address specific challenges such as diverse learner needs, language proficiency disparities, and cultural differences (Pinninti, 2025). For language teachers, it encompasses a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to engage with research in meaningful ways such as understanding research methodologies and design it, critically evaluate the validity and reliability of academic studies and apply research findings to solve pedagogical challenges and improve classroom practices.

Borg (2010) emphasizes that research competence is not merely about conducting research but also about becoming a reflective practitioner who can adapt and innovate based on evidence. Developing research competence involves both theoretical understanding and practical application, fostering a proactive approach to professional growth.

Teachers' beliefs significantly influence their professional identity and decision-making processes (Li & Walsh, 2011). Beliefs are a powerful determinant of behavior,

influencing how teachers perceive and approach their professional responsibilities. Pajares (1992) argued that beliefs act as a "lens" through which teachers interpret their experiences and construct meaning. In language teaching, beliefs about research competence shape how teachers perceive its relevance and applicability to their classroom contexts.

Research by Farrell (2015) highlights the role of reflective practice in shaping teachers' beliefs, suggesting that those who value research are more likely to engage in inquiry-based teaching. However, many teachers hold misconceptions about research, viewing it as an abstract or overly academic activity disconnected from their daily practices. This perception often leads to low levels of research engagement, despite acknowledging its potential benefits. The interplay between beliefs and practices underscores the need for targeted interventions that address these misconceptions, promote positive attitudes toward research, and provide opportunities for hands-on research experiences.

In language teaching research competence has been linked to enhanced pedagogical effectiveness, improved learner outcomes, and sustained professional development. Burns (2019) advocates for action research as a practical approach for language teachers to address specific classroom issues while simultaneously building their research skills. However, despite its potential, many language teachers encounter barriers to developing and applying research competence. Gao (2021) identifies several key challenges such as having limited access to academic journals and research databases, particularly in resource-constrained settings; heavy teaching workloads that leave little time for research activities; a lack of confidence in research skills, having insufficient training during pre-service education.

Effective integration of research competence into language teaching requires institutional support, such as professional development workshops, mentorship programs, and collaborative research initiatives. Furthermore, fostering a culture of inquiry within schools and universities can encourage teachers to view research as a valuable and achievable aspect of their professional roles. By addressing these challenges and promoting research competence, language teachers can become more reflective, adaptable, and innovative, ultimately contributing to better outcomes for their students and themselves.

Methodology

This study targeted EFL teachers from secondary schools and higher education institutions. A total of 120 teachers participated in the quantitative phase, with selection criteria including a minimum of three years of teaching experience and a willingness to engage in both survey and interview components. For the qualitative phase, 20 participants

were purposefully selected based on their survey responses to provide deeper insights into the quantitative results.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. Triangulation was employed to ensure validity and reliability.

Findings and Discussion

The survey results reveal that the majority of EFL teachers in the study acknowledged the importance of research competence for their professional development and teaching practice. Specifically, 85% of participants agreed that being competent in research enhances their ability to address classroom challenges and adopt innovative teaching strategies. However, only 40% of respondents rated their own research competence as adequate, while 35% admitted to significant gaps in their skills and knowledge.

Barriers to research engagement were a recurring theme in both the quantitative and qualitative data. Among the most frequently reported challenges were time constraints (75%), insufficient training in research methods (65%), and limited access to academic resources such as journals and databases (50%) (See table 1). Teachers also expressed frustration with heavy teaching loads, which left little room for conducting or engaging with research.

Table 1: Barriers to Research Engagement

Barrier	Percentage of Respondents
Time Constraints	75%
Insufficient Training	65%
Limited Access to Resources	50%

Addressing these challenges is essential to enhance research engagement among EFL teachers. Additionally, qualitative findings from interviews revealed that many teachers viewed research as an academic endeavor disconnected from their day-to-day teaching responsibilities, further deterring them from active participation.

The interviews provided richer insights into the motivational and contextual factors influencing research engagement. Teachers who reported a high level of intrinsic motivation described research as a means of personal and professional growth, emphasizing its role in fostering reflective practice and enhancing classroom outcomes. In contrast, teachers with limited research experience often cited a lack of institutional support, such as funding and professional development opportunities, as significant barriers. Many participants also noted the absence of a collaborative research culture in their institutions, which they felt could have encouraged greater engagement and shared learning.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the complex interplay between EFL teachers' beliefs about research competence, their self-perceptions, and the contextual factors that influence their engagement. While there is widespread acknowledgment of the importance of research competence, the low self-assessment of research skills among participants reflects a need for targeted professional development initiatives. Addressing this gap requires not only equipping teachers with the necessary skills but also reshaping their beliefs about the practicality and relevance of research in their teaching contexts.

One key implication of the study is the importance of fostering a supportive institutional environment that prioritizes research engagement. Teachers who lack access to resources or feel unsupported by their institutions are less likely to view research as a feasible or valuable component of their professional practice. To address this, educational policymakers and school administrators should consider implementing measures such as providing access to academic journals, funding teacher-led research projects, and integrating research activities into teachers' workloads.

Another critical finding is the role of intrinsic motivation in driving research engagement. Teachers who viewed research as a means of self-improvement and professional growth were more likely to overcome contextual barriers and actively engage in inquiry. This highlights the importance of designing professional development programs that not only build research skills but also inspire teachers to see the value of research for their personal and professional development. Collaborative research initiatives, in particular, could help create a sense of community and shared purpose among teachers, thereby enhancing their motivation and confidence.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of integrating research competence training into pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. This could be achieved through initiatives such as teacher-led research projects, collaborative action research projects, and mentorship programs that connect novice researchers with experienced mentors and opportunities to present findings in professional forums. By fostering a culture that celebrates inquiry and innovation, institutions can empower teachers to view research as an integral part of their professional identity rather than an academic obligation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored EFL teachers' views on their research skills, revealing that while many teachers see research skills as important, many don't feel confident in their own abilities due to challenges such as time constraints, insufficient

training, and limited access to resources. To address these issues, it's recommended to provide targeted professional development programs, enhance institutional support, and foster collaborative environments among teachers. By implementing these strategies, teachers can enhance their research skills, leading to improved teaching practices and better learning outcomes for students.

References:

[1]. Borg, S. (2010). Language teacher research engagement. *Language Teaching*, 43(4), 391-429.

[2]. Burns, A. (2019). Action research in language teaching. *Cambridge University Press*.

[3]. Farrell, T. S. C. (2015). Reflective practice in ESL teacher development groups. *Palgrave Macmillan*.

[4]. Farrell, T. S. C., & Bennis, K. (2013). Reflecting on ESL teacher beliefs and classroom practices: A case study. RELC Journal, 44(2), 163-176. https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882-13488463

[5]. Farrell, T. S. C., & Ives, J. (2015). Exploring teacher beliefs and classroom practices through reflective practice: case study. Language Teaching Research, 19(5), 594-610. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168814541722

[6]. Gao, X. (2021). Researching language teachers' beliefs. *Springer*.

[7]. Koşar, G., & Doğan-Dolapçıoğlu, S. (2021). An inquiry into EFL teachers‘ beliefs concerning effective teaching, student learning and development. Journal of Pedagogical Research, 5(3), 221-234. https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.2021371747

[8]. Li, L., & Walsh, S. (2011). “Seeing is believing‘: Looking at EFL teachers‘ beliefs through classroom interaction. Classroom Discourse, 2(1), 39-57. https://doi.org/10.10-80/19463014.2011.562657

[9]. Lunenberg, M., & Korthagen, F. (2009). The teacher educator’s role in research. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(4), 545-556.

[10]. Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers’ beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*,b 62(3), 307-332.

[11]. Pinninti, L. R. (2025). Developing English language teachers’ action research competencies through an exploratory action research project. Profile: Issues in Teachers’ Professional Development, 27(1), 13–29. https://doi.org/10.15446/profile. v27n1.113465