

THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF ACTION RESEARCH AS A PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENTAL STRATEGY

A Master's Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF ACTION RESEARCH AS A PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENTAL STRATEGY

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There is considerable emphasis on teachers' professional development through action research in the literature. However, the long-term effects of action research as a professional developmental strategy has not been specifically investigated in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Taking this gap as an impetus, this study aimed to investigate the long-term effects of action research on teachers' professional development and instructional practices. The study also aimed to explore how action research is conducted by Turkish EFL instructors and the most effective ways of implementing it.

The study was carried out with the participation of eight EFL instructors working at various departments of universities in Turkey. These universities were Bilkent University, Middle East Technical University, Hacettepe University, Anatolian University, and Near East University. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and analyzed qualitatively.

Analysis of data revealed that action research engagement may contribute to teachers' classroom practice and professional development in the long run and in many ways. The findings also revealed that although the teachers followed a systematic process while conducting action research, they did not always share the findings of their studies, which is considered one of the vital steps of action research processes. Another finding was that individual teacher research is more commonly implemented than other types of action research, collaborative or schoolwide action research. In addition, it was also seen that having the guidance and support of a mentor, colleagues, and administration in a supportive context is considered crucial for the effective implementation of action research. Finally, the findings of the study revealed that the teachers who had advanced degrees appeared to have more positive attitudes towards action research than the teachers who had only BA degrees. In the light of these findings, it can be said that school administrators and teacher training units should seek opportunities to promote the implementation of action research in schools, which would result in better outcomes in teaching practices and student learning.

Key words: action research, collaborative action research, professional development

ÖZET

BİR PROFESYONEL GELİŞİM STRATEJİSİ OLARAK EYLEM ARAŞTIRMASININ UZUN SÜRELİ ETKİLERİ

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Eylem araştırması yoluyla öğretmenlerin profesyonel gelişimi, literatürde önemle vurgulanmaktadır. Ancak bir profesyonel gelişim stratejisi olan eylem araştırmasının uzun süreli etkileri özellikle bir yabancı dil olarak İngilizce ortamında araştırılmamıştır. Bu durumdan yola çıkarak, bu çalışma eylem araştırmasının, öğretmenlerin profesyonel gelişimleri ve sınıf pratikleri üzerindeki uzun süreli etkilerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, aynı zamanda, bir yabancı dil olarak İngilizce ortamındaki Türk öğretmenlerinin, eylem araştırmasını nasıl uyguladıklarını ve eylem araştırmasının en verimli uygulanma şekillerini araştırmıştır.

Araştırma, bir yabancı dil olarak İngilizce ortamında, Türkiye'deki üniversitelerin çeşitli bölümlerinde çalışan sekiz İngilizce okutmanının katılımıyla yürütülmüştür. Bu üniversiteler şunlardır: Bilkent Üniversitesi, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Anadolu Üniversitesi ve Yakın Doğu

Üniversitesi. Veriler yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır ve nitel olarak analiz edilmiştir.

Veri analiz sonuçları eylem araştırması yapmanın öğretmenlerin sınıf pratiklerine ve profesyonel gelişimlerine uzun vadede ve birçok yönden katkıda bulunabileceğini göstermiştir. Çalışmanın sonuçları, aynı zamanda öğretmenlerin eylem araştırması uygularken sistematik bir süreç izlemelerine rağmen, eylem araştırmanın en önemli adımlarından biri olarak görülen, çalışmalarının sonuçlarını her zaman paylaşmadıklarını göstermiştir. Bir başka sonuç bireysel eylem araştırmasının, eylem araştırmasının diğer türleri olan, işbirlikçi eylem araştırması ve okul çapında eylem araştırmasından daha yaygın olarak uygulandığını ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, eylem araştırmasının verimli uygulanabilmesi için öğretmenlerin, destekleyici bir okul ortamında, okul idaresinin, bir danışmanın, ve meslektaşlarının rehberliğini ve desteğini almalarının önemini göstermiştir. Son olarak, bu çalışmanın sonuçları, yüksek tahsil derecesi olan öğretmenlerin eylem araştırmasına karşı sadece lisans derecesi olan öğretmenlerden daha olumlu tutumları olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu çalışmanın sonuçlarından yola çıkarak, okul idarecilerinin ve öğretmen eğitime ünitelerinin, öğretmede ve öğrenci öğreniminde daha iyi sonuçlar getirebilecek eylem araştırması uygulamalarını teşvik etmeleri için fırsatlar yaratmaları gerektiği söylenebilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: eylem araştırması, işbirlikçi eylem araştırması, öğretmenlerin profesyonel gelişimi

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Learning to teach is a lifelong process. Considering this notion of lifelong professional learning, teachers are expected to keep up to date with the recent developments in their fields, reconsider and evaluate their classroom practice and make changes in order to address the changing needs of their students (Richards & Farrel, 2005). Traditionally, teachers have been expected to implement the changes that are proposed by outside researchers (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). Today, however, there is considerable emphasis on teachers' learning through engaging in action research. The research engagement of teachers is considered to be important since it helps teachers to develop professionally. More importantly, action research gives teachers the opportunity to understand and improve their own practice by assigning them the role of the researcher (Richards & Farrel, 2005). In that sense, action research is considered a tool that can be used by teachers to clear up the complexities that occur in the profession and raise their autonomy in discussions of educational reform. It also has the potential to yield results that are directly related to teachers' own practices in their own contexts (Wallace, 1998).

The recognition of the action research method's potential to enhance teachers' classroom skills, resolve their concerns about their practice and endow them with professional knowledge has led me to design this study which explores the long term effects of action research. The participants are language instructors from different universities in Turkey.

Background of the study

Teachers' continuous professional development has received increased attention in educational research in recent years (Richards & Farrel, 2005). The profession of language teaching constantly changes as a result of changes in educational paradigms, methodological trends, and institutions, as well as in student needs. In order to update their professional knowledge and skills, teachers' engagement in professional development activities is seen as crucial and this interest has resulted in many studies. Studies of teachers' professional development emphasize the ways teachers learn and change through professional development processes (Avalos, 2010; Erikson, Minnes Brandes, I. J. Mitchell, & J. Mitchell, 2005; Penlington, 2008). Others emphasize personal, task, and work environment factors affecting teachers' participation in professional learning activities (Chang, Yeh, Chen, & Hsiao, 2011; Kwakman, 2003; Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Lüdtke, & Baumert, 2010). Still others emphasize teachers' professional development as an important factor in the efficacy of the practice of teaching (Bruce, Esmonde, Ross, & Dookie, 2010).

Teachers may take up a number of professional development strategies and procedures both at the individual and group based level. Among the activities proposed for professional development, action research has recently been considered important (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). The roots of the concept of 'action research' can be traced back at least as far as Dewey, who referred to teacher research as a process of progressive problem solving and suggested that incorporating reflective practice is crucial in order to improve teaching instruction

(Ermeling, 2010). Action research was first developed in the social sciences and has been used for over 50 years in many different branches such as health, education, and psychology. Although action research has been used in education since the 1940s (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001), it has been used more extensively over the last 20 years (Ermeling, 2010).

The notion of the involvement of teachers in the research process is a controversial one. The defenders of teachers' involvement in research claim that when teachers are engaged in research they can improve their practice, and in turn better ensure students' success (Pine, 2009). However, Hillage et al. (cited in Hopkins, 2002) note that some researchers question teachers' expertise and the validity of their research output and the degree of importance of research activity as a means of teacher learning.

Current interpretations of action research vary along a practical to critical continuum. Wallace (cited in Burns, 2005) views action research as a reflection on professional practice and generally focuses on the practical techniques and procedures that the individual teacher researcher can make use of in his or her practice. Freeman (1998) also investigates how research can be adapted into teaching practice, and help teachers gain an increased understanding of teaching. Freeman is interested in describing how teacher research can be done and how research may reshape the knowledge base of teaching. Burns (2005) adopts a more critical stance and attempts to show that action research can achieve institutional change by creating conditions for teachers to work collaboratively. Although there are varying interpretations of action research along this practical–critical continuum, both types are considered valuable since action research is seen to have a potential impact on

teachers' practice and their professional development. Research has shown that an action research approach to development leads teachers to develop professional expertise by encouraging them to investigate their own teaching in a systematic and organized way and this, in turn, helps them achieve both personal growth and institutional goals (Bradley-Levine, Smith, & Carr, 2009; Chou, 2010; Kember, 2002).

Richards and Farrel (2005) define action research as teacher conducted classroom research that aims to understand and resolve practical teaching issues and problems. They emphasize that action research can be a beneficial way for language teachers to explore and improve their own practice. Insights gained from conducting an action research study can help teachers to investigate their own practice and share their results with their colleagues. Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001) state that action research as a professional development strategy is valuable in that it deals with issues and difficulties that teachers confront in their classes. Furthermore, it is the teacher that decides on the issues to be investigated and generally the procedures are under the teacher's control.

Stenhouse (1975) emphasizes that action research is capable of not just solving problems, but also enhancing practice and building theory in a way that classroom teachers can access. In the UK, Furlong and Salisbury (2005) found that participating in action research helped teachers become more confident and knowledgeable, and led them to collect and use evidence, and learn about their own learning. Atay (2008) explored the positive effects of action research on teachers' professional development. The findings revealed that teachers engaged in action research improved their ability to make instructional decisions and became more

aware of the concept of research as a source that they could make use of for instructional decision-making. Henson (2001) found that participation in teacher research affected teachers' self-efficacy, especially in the area of instructional practices. In a longitudinal case study, Reis-Jorge (2007) investigated the role of formal instruction in teachers' conceptions of teacher-research and self perceptions as enquiring practitioners. The researcher found that academic work helped teachers to develop critical and analytical reading and writing skills. Thus, Reis-Jorge concluded that action research projects could be an alternative for teachers' professional development.

Despite the flourishing interest in the teacher as a researcher in the educational context, the long term effects of action research on teachers' professional development and instructional practice have not yet been explored. Though the literature seems to favor action research as an effective approach, there is a need for further research to reveal whether the previously reported benefits and advantages remain consistent over time and in different contexts.

Statement of the Problem

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on action research and its effect on teachers' professional development and improvement of their practical teaching skills (Chou, 2010; Ponte, Ax, Beijaard, & Wubbels, 2004; Wallace, 1998; Young, Rapp, & Murphy, 2010). These studies primarily emphasize the contribution that action research makes to teachers' subject matter knowledge and their methodological, decision making, and social skills (James, 2001). Teachers' views and conceptions of action research were found to be of interest by some researchers (Atay, 2008 & Borg, 2009). However, the field lacks research studies that focus on

the long-term effects of action research on teachers' classroom practice and their professional development. Exploring the long-term effects of action research on practitioners' classroom practice and professional development in the preparatory programs of different universities in Turkey will provide an understanding of how it is practiced in different schools and the extent to which action research contributes to teachers' classroom practice and professional development practices in the long run. The study will also provide insights into teachers' beliefs about ways of successfully implementing action research.

Action research can be considered an important issue for administrators because of its arguably positive impact on teachers' professional development and in turn on their classroom practice and students' success. In the preparatory school of Kocaeli University, a teacher training program has just been established and training workshops are held for all the teachers. However, no information is given on conducting action research as a professional development strategy.

Research Questions

1. How is action research conducted by EFL instructors at different universities in Turkey?
2. What are the reported long-term effects of conducting action research on teachers' classroom practice and professional development practices?
3. What are teachers' beliefs about the effective ways of implementing action research?

Significance of the Study

The need for ongoing teacher development has attracted a growing interest in language teaching circles in recent years and action research has been given much focus as a professional development strategy (Richards & Farrel, 2005). However, studies on action research have largely neglected to explore the long-term effects of action research on teachers' professional development and classroom practice. Exploring the long-term effects of action research may contribute to the literature by providing an understanding of its effectiveness as a professional development strategy in the long run.

At the local level, this study attempts to find out the reported practices of practitioners in action research and their beliefs about its effective use as a professional development activity in the long run. This information is valuable for Kocaeli University because the results may lead to making new decisions about staff development. The study may also provide insights about conducting action research for the teacher training programme in Kocaeli University. The implications of this study may also lead to the forming of a permanent action research study group in the institution and encourage teachers to work in a more collaborative manner.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided reasons that led me to study the long-term effects of action research as a developmental strategy. In the second chapter, I present the literature relevant to my study. The third chapter provides a detailed account of participants, data sources and data analysis methods. The fourth chapter presents the procedures for data analysis and the results of the findings. In the last chapter, discussion of data and conclusion are given.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, the literature relevant to the present study will be reviewed. The first section discusses the concept of action research. In the next section, different models of action research are presented. This section is followed by a review of the stages of the action research process. In the next section, different approaches to action research are discussed. In the following sections, studies related to action research are presented.

Meaning of Action Research

Although the term ‘action research’, also known as ‘teacher research’, and ‘teacher inquiry’ (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009), is relatively new, the notions of teaching as inquiry and teachers as inquirers are not. Dewey’s notion of research by teachers defines teachers as *reflective practitioners* (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). He claimed that teachers become inquiry-oriented classroom practitioners when they reflect on their ‘action’. Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist, who coined the term ‘action research’ in about 1944, identified the process of action research as ‘planning, acting, observing and reflecting’. He emphasized the importance of involving every participant in every phase of the process to facilitate and bring about social change. He proposed that the focus of the action research process should be group social problems within their own environment and it should involve all the members of the social group in that environment to develop action and theory together (Burns, 2005). Another conception of action research is provided by Rapoport (1970) who sees the objectives of action research as to come up with

practical solutions to the problems in an immediate problematic situation and help achieve goals of social science with mutual collaboration.

A definition of educational action research was devised by participants in a National Invitation Seminar on Action Research held at Deakin University, Australia in 1981. Carr and Kemmis, who chaired the seminar, defined action research as a form of 'self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social (including educational) situations in order to improve rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices' (cited in Hopkins, 2002). Like Lewin, Carr and Kemmis claim that although often employed by individuals, action research is most empowering when carried out by participants collaboratively. Kemmer (2000) argues that three conditions are essential to conduct action research: a subject matter of social practice such as education which involves the direct interaction of teachers and group of students; a spiral cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting; and widening participation to involve others that are affected by that social practice and ensuring collaboration. These definitions by Kemmis, Lewin, and Kemmer place emphasis on the collaborative nature of action research and they argue that a single teacher researcher is likely to achieve less investigating his/her practice than he/she could achieve more studying in a more collaborative manner.

Burns (1999) sees action research as a systematic process of studying issues or concerns in a particular context. She also emphasizes that data collected by teachers through action research is primarily gathered in their specific teaching situation and this fact makes action research different from some other forms of traditional research which provide findings and validate these findings independently. Dave Ebbutt's notion of action research also involves the systematic

study of attempts to improve educational practice by a group of participants by means of their own reflection on the effects of those actions (cited in Hopkins, 2002).

Wallace (1998) also explains the term *action research* as systematic collecting of data on teachers' everyday practice and by drawing on that data, deciding about what future practice should be. Another definition of action research is provided by Richards and Farrel (2005), who also see it as systematic classroom research conducted by teachers in order to investigate and collect information to understand an issue or problem to improve classroom instruction.

McNiff (2002) defines action research as a process of collecting data, reflecting on the action as it is presented through the data, gathering evidence from the data and drawing conclusions from validated evidence. In his notion of action research, McNiff emphasizes that action research is not a linear process but it is like 'dialectical interplay between practice, reflection and learning' which does not ensure a final outcome but always progression (p.12).

Like McNiff, Pine (2009) also sees action research as a 'sustained, intentional, recursive, and dynamic process of inquiry' in which the teacher takes an action in the classroom context to improve teaching and learning (p.30). He emphasizes the importance of action research since it provides teachers the opportunity to reflect on their classroom practice, become more autonomous professionals, and enhance their own expertise. He argues that in the action research approach, teachers who have been the passive subjects of research become active agents who conduct research within their own situations and circumstances in their classrooms.

As described above, the term *action research* is perceived and valued in various and diverse manners. However, all of these definitions of action research place emphasis on the *systematic* nature of the inquiry conducted by teacher researchers to find solutions to the problems in a classroom context. Thus, in this study, I consider action research a systematic and purposeful inquiry about anything that happens related to teaching and learning in a classroom.

Theoretical Background

In this section, three main research paradigms are described and the place of action research within the research paradigm is discussed. In the field of educational research, three main research paradigms have been widely accepted. One line of thought derives mainly from empirical research paradigm, which views the world as a set of interrelated parts and which can be observed objectively (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). Empiricists rely heavily on the process of experimentation usually involving control and experimental groups and their main aim is to show how variables can be controlled to predict behavior in terms of cause and effect. Educational research in this paradigm is known as process-product research (Hinchey, 2008). The process-product research sees teaching as a primarily linear activity and defines teachers as technicians and the teacher's role is considered to be that of implementing the research findings in their classrooms (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). However, this approach to research is considered to be insufficient since it views teachers as technicians, not as active agents. It also fails to take into account the cultural and contextual factors affecting teaching and learning (Pine, 2009).

In contrast to the empirical approach, the interpretive approach accepts the existence of practitioners as real participants in the research. The interpretivists put effort into understanding the multiple factors in an educational setting (Hinchey, 2008). In this approach, the researcher is empowered to see people as objects of study and make statements and evaluations about their actions. Although interpretive educational research tries to capture a deep understanding of the variables in a specific setting, the studies situated in this paradigm are criticized for being conducted by university researchers exclusively for academic audiences (Dana & Yendol- Hoppey, 2009).

Another research paradigm has come to be known as the critical research paradigm. Critical theorists argue that current methodologies are not adequate for social science enquiry since they do not consider the historical, cultural and social context of researchers (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). They argue that people should understand how their context shapes their own experience before they comment on it. These theorists accept an ideology which helps people become aware of their historical and cultural conditioning and create their personal and social realities under the light of this awareness. However, the aim of critical theory is to critique rather than bring about change. Therefore, it remains at the theoretical level and falls short of providing accounts of practice which may bring change towards improvement.

Contrary to the approaches described above, action research is said to have the capacity to produce theories that bring about social change since it goes beyond only offering a theoretical model (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). In the action research model, teachers are seen as knowledge generators since they are involved in

the research process by designing the research, collecting data, and interpreting data around the research question (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). By investigating their own problems, teachers also become collaborators in the educational research process. In this research paradigm, teachers attempt to improve their teaching practice and this in turn is supposed to bring about personal and social change.

Models of Action Research

The concept of action research was first developed by Kurt Lewin (1946), as a strategy of social change in a community. In his theory of action research, he sees the process as a spiral of steps involving ‘planning, fact-finding and execution’ and this cycle, as he noted, continues with the change in action and thinking. In the UK, Lawrence Stenhouse was inspired by Lewin’s work and made a connection between action research and the concept of the teacher researcher (Hopkins, 2002). With Stenhouse, other researchers, including Stephen Kemmis, David Hamilton, Barry Macdonald, Jean Rudduck, Hugh Sockett, Robert Stake and Rob Walker, contributed to the establishment of action research as an educational tradition. Among those, Stephen Kemmis and John Elliot developed two influential models of action research. Together with Wilf Carr, Kemmis identifies four stages of action research, namely plan, act, observe and reflect, which are of vital importance for undertaking action research to improve an educational situation. However, as McNiff and Whitehead (2002) state, Kemmis’s model fails to capture the spontaneity and untidiness of the action research process since one cannot assume to control the occurrence of related issues in the process. Subsequently, John Elliot, drawing on the work of Kemmis, developed a similar but refined model of action research. He emphasizes that the action research process should constantly recur in the spiral of

activities, rather than only occurring at the beginning. Dave Ebbutt (1985), a colleague of Elliott, developed another model, claiming that instead of using the metaphor 'cyclical' we can think of the action research process as consisting of a series of successive cycles and that each cycle allows for the feedback of information within and between the cycles. McKernan (1996) also proposed a time process model in which he emphasized the importance of not seeing action research plans to be fixed in a rigid time and highlighted the necessity of flexibility in the process of conducting action research. In his theory of action research, McNiff (2002) considers the process 'a spontaneous, self-recreating system of enquiry' (p.56). Although he accepts the notion of action research as consisting of a process of observing, describing, planning, acting, reflecting, evaluating and modifying, he does not consider it as a sequential process. As he noted, in action research processes, it is possible to deal with multiple issues while still focusing on one, and it is possible to begin at one place and end up somewhere entirely unexpected.

Among the action research models presented above, McNiff's (2002) model seems to capture the spontaneous nature of action research since what is practiced in a classroom may not always match what is said in theory. Thus, in contrast to the other models, which tend to be prescriptive and linear, his model is more open to development and self-recreation.

Action Research Process

Although there are variations in the procedures of implementing action research projects, they all share some basic activities (Hinchey, 2008). Action research projects involve several steps: a) developing a question, b) formulating a research plan, c) systematically collecting data, d) analyzing the data, e) recording

the project in writing, f) evaluating the action research project, and g) sharing the study with others (Bailey, Curtis & Nunan, 2001; Freeman, 1998; Hopkins, 2002; Pine, 2009; Richards & Farrel, 2005).

According to Hubbard and Power (1999), teachers' concerns and questions come from 'their real world observations and dilemmas' (p.20). Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009) emphasize that teachers should understand the interaction among five elements in order to identify felt difficulties or teaching dilemmas that prompt the development of research questions. They worked with hundreds of teacher researchers and identified these five elements as the student, the context, the content, the acts of teaching and the teachers' own beliefs or dispositions (p. 21). In their analysis of 100 teacher inquiries, they also found eight areas that teachers have concerns about: helping an individual child, desire to improve and enrich curriculum, focusing on developing content knowledge, desire to improve or experiment with teaching strategies and teaching techniques, desire to explore the relationship between their beliefs and their classroom practice, the intersection of their personal and professional identities, advocating social justice, and understanding the teaching and learning context.

Before implementing action research, devising a research plan is considered to be useful since it identifies the route that the researcher should follow (Hinchey, 2008). A research plan may include some basic components, such as the purpose of the research, research questions, methods and timeline. It is also important to collect sufficient, appropriate data over an appropriate length of time (Hinchey, 2008). Common data collection strategies for teacher researchers are field notes, documents, artifacts, student work, interviews, focus groups, digital pictures, video as data,

reflective journals, weblogs, surveys, quantitative measures of student achievement (test scores, assessment measures, grades), critical friend group feedback, and the literature as data (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). As Hinchey (2008) suggests, in order to observe their actions, teachers should write their own thoughts related to their intentions and purposes, and their activities in their diaries systematically. Teacher researchers may also ask their colleagues to observe them and give feedback since it is valuable to involve a critical friend to look at their data and make suggestions in order to modify their actions.

The central aim of the data analysis should be to identify certain patterns that may have common features. McNiff and Whitehead (2002) mention two of the most beneficial strategies of data analysis: coding and memoing. Coding involves breaking the data into manageable segments in order to analyze a large amount of data. Memoing is a procedure of data analysis which includes commenting on the meaning of coded categories, or description of a specific aspect, setting or phenomenon. At the data analysis stage, the teacher researcher is also required to support the findings with evidence. It is considered essential to get help from critical friends to validate the findings. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2006) suggest that a validation group may help at critical points throughout the research process by analyzing the data, commenting on the findings, making suggestions, and deciding whether the findings are valid. Pine (2009) argues that it is important to involve colleagues in the process of collaborative enquiry whether it is an individual research study or a team study, since it is helpful to have critical friends who will help the researcher to define the research problem, collect and analyze data and discuss the outcomes of the study.

As for the written reports of the action research projects, they may be in the form of narratives or may be similar to a traditional research report. These reports may include background information, the design of the research (procedures, data collection, and data analysis), and evidence for the statements with data and conclusion. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009) argue that in order for action research to bring a change for the profession and the school, it is essential that teacher researchers share their work with their colleagues. Informal meetings or organizational meetings can be held to share experiences with colleagues and principals. Within the school, formal meetings can also be held by devoting special portions of faculty meetings to teacher inquiry. In that way, teachers may have the opportunity to interact and share their experiences and learn from each other and advance their knowledge and expertise. Another way to share the written work is to submit it to a journal or online action research websites and online journals. Posters, powerpoint presentations, and podcasts are considered to be useful ways to share an action research project. In addition, colleagues from different districts may come together on in-service days or conferences to share their enquiries. A center can also be founded in order to support teacher research activities for school improvement in schools in a certain district.

Hinchey (2008) emphasizes that although the steps in an action research process seem linear, in practice they are recursive. The teacher researcher may have to move back and forth among many steps since the work may bring questions, ideas, and issues and the researcher may have to make adjustments to the original plan. Thus, the teacher researcher should be aware of the fact that the cycles in action research projects can be flexible and can be adjusted through the process of

implementing the action research. McNiff and Whitehead (2004) state that the time the researcher spends in this 'trial and error' process (p. 71) should not be seen as wasted since it enhances teacher learning, which is seen as the ultimate goal of the action research.

Different Approaches to Action Research

Three different types of action research are conducted in the field of education: individual teacher research, collaborative teacher research and school wide action research. Calhoun (2009) emphasized that faculties and individuals should choose the type of research according to their needs by considering six elements, which are purpose and process, support provided by outside agencies, the kind of data utilized, the audience for the research and expected side effects.

Individual Teacher Research

The aim of the individual teacher researcher is to find solutions for the concerns in his/her classroom practice (Calhoun, 2009; Hopkins, 2002; Kember, 2000; Richards & Farrel, 2005). The teacher researcher identifies an area or problem of interest, which may be related to classroom management, instructional strategies, materials or students' cognitive or social behavior (Calhoun, 2009). This type of research may also involve students or parents. In the process of conducting action research, the individual teacher researcher may get support from a supervisor, principal, staff development coordinator or professor. Teachers may also use both qualitative and quantitative data by using a number of different measures. Teacher researchers primarily use the results for themselves; however, they may also share their results through staff development presentations, professional conferences, or articles in professional journals (Calhoun, 2009). Although the decision to share their

findings depends on the collegiality of the individuals, when that sharing occurs, there is the chance that the collegiality at the school can also increase (Calhoun, 2009).

Collaborative Action Research

Collaborative action research is the kind of research done in cooperation with colleagues, with students, or with university faculty, or with parents or a combination of partners (Pine, 2009). As Calhoun (2009) states, collaborative action research can be conducted to solve a problem in a single classroom or occurring in several classrooms. A research team including a few or several teachers and administrators working with staff from a university or external agency may pursue individual studies on a common concern and then meet to share their work and come up with a set of recommendations for educational improvement. Collaborative action research is often conducted in school-university partnerships and follows the same reflective cycle as the individual research (Pine, 2009). In collaborative action research, the results are shared with a wider audience than in individual teacher research. As Calhoun (2009) states, collaborative action research is beneficial both for school practitioners and university personnel. The university personnel help schools to develop tools necessary for inquiry and in that way the university personnel's own technical skills and proficiency in research continue to improve. Burns (1999) states that collaborative action research is more beneficial than individual teacher research since it has the potential to serve the original goal of action research, which is to bring about change in social situations by means of problem-solving and collaboration.

Schoolwide Action Research

Schoolwide action research is carried out by a group of teachers or everyone in the school. In schoolwide action research, a school faculty identifies a problem of collective interest and investigates the area by collecting data from other schools, districts or the literature, and then organizing the data and interpreting it. A school executive council or leadership team composed of teachers and administrators are held responsible to keep the research process going (Pine, 2009). As Calhoun (2009) states, schoolwide action research seeks to improve schools in three areas. First, it aims to encourage members of the school to work as a problem solving team. Second, it aims to improve instructional practice for the benefit of the students. Third, schoolwide action research intends to extend the content of inquiry by involving every classroom and teacher in the study and assessment. Schoolwide action research processes can be demanding since this process requires full participation on the part of all members in the school. It also calls for the support of the administration.

The following section is reserved for studies that investigate teachers' perceptions of the concept of research, since this might give insights into the different understandings of the concept of research and in what ways it is similar or different to the concept of action research. Understanding teachers' perceptions of research is also considered important since the way they perceive the concept of research might have a bearing on their action research involvement.

Teachers' Perceptions of Research

Several studies have investigated teachers' conceptions of research. One of them is a study by Allison and Carey (2007), which attempts to explore language teachers' conceptions of the relationship between research and language teaching. Through an open-ended questionnaire and follow-up discussions, Alison and Carey examined the research issues that language teachers are interested in and how the insights gained from teaching may enhance research. The participants were language teachers from a School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at a university in Canada. The open-ended questionnaire was given to 22 teachers and 17 of them were interviewed. The researchers gathered interpretive data on the most frequently mentioned issues through the questionnaire. Interviews with the teachers on issues such as projects in contemplation or in progress showed that teachers were 'aware of the concept of research that involves the processes of question-raising, planned investigation and rethinking assumptions in the light of evidence' (p.75).

Teachers' conceptions of research were also investigated by Everton, Galton and Pell (2002). Data was collected through a questionnaire published in the journals of two teacher organizations in 1998. Another set of questionnaires was distributed during a conference in 2000. A total of 572 questionnaires were collected for the analysis of teachers' conceptions about research. The analysis of data revealed that teachers value research that has implications for classroom practice and issues related to it.

Another study investigating teachers' views on research was conducted by Borg (2009). The participants were 505 teachers of English from 13 countries. He

gave a questionnaire to the teachers and interviewed 22 of them. He aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of research and how often they read research and do research. Borg presents the results of the study in two ways: teachers' perceptions of research and levels of reported research engagement. The findings of the study revealed that teachers conceive of research as a study which involves large sample, statistical data analysis, and academic output. Borg states that these conceptions of research might discourage teachers from becoming involved in a research activity. Teachers' conceptions of research as formal written publication might also be another factor that de-motivates teachers' engagement in research. Teachers generally defined the characteristics of good research as 'objective' and 'hypotheses are tested'. The third highly selected characteristic was the need for its being practical so that it can provide them with results that they can apply in their classroom practices.

A similar study investigating teachers' perceptions of the impact of educational research and their views on the value of educational research was conducted in Turkey (Beycioglu, Ozer, & Ugurlu, 2010). Participants were 250 high school teachers in Malatya, Turkey. In order to gather a set of quantitative data, the researchers used the questionnaire which was developed by Everton et al. (2000). The results of the study revealed that sixty eight per cent of the teachers considered educational research findings important and most teachers had positive views on educational research. On the other hand, 32% of the participants reported that they had never taken research findings into consideration. The researchers also investigated teachers' views on the value of educational research for classroom practice and their research involvement with regard to their teaching experience. The study showed that teachers with varying amounts of teaching experience consider

research important and want to be involved in the process. As the researchers suggested, these findings showed that ‘rather than engage with research they preferred to engage in research’ (Everton et al., 2002, p. 393).

Reis-Jorge (2007) conducted a longitudinal study in order to explore whether formal instruction and involvement in research could shape teachers’ views of teacher research and of themselves as researching practitioners. The participants were nine teachers following a degree program in TEFL in Britain. Reis-Jorge observed the teachers submitting their research based dissertations from the beginning till the end of the program. Data was collected by using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and field notes. The results of the study showed that the participants defined teacher research in two different ways: structural and functional. At the early stages of the program, the participants considered research as a tool that they could use in order to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching methods and techniques. At the end of the first year of the program, teachers began to see research as a process which teachers were involved in to deal with classroom related issues. There was also a distinction between formal and informal research, in that the former was aligned with academic research and the latter was associated with practitioner based inquiry. Practitioner based inquiry was considered different from traditional academic research since it did not involve systematic data collection and data selection as in formal research. However, towards the end of the course, teachers’ perceptions of teacher research began to change as they began to perceive it as a process that involves traditional and systematic data collection and that deals with issues related to classrooms. However, teachers were not in agreement on the publication of research results. Some of the participants believed that research results

should be written in the form of written reports and others emphasized the burden that this may put on teachers' daily work.

The studies presented above show that, contrary to the notion of action research, which is done in teachers' own classroom settings, teachers' notion of research in different kinds of settings is systematic investigation which is carried out outside the classroom. Teachers also consider research an academic endeavor, the results of which are supposed to be statistical and objective. One common theme that emerges from the studies is that teachers expect research findings to be practical and applicable to their own classroom settings, and this is what action research approaches consider to be a vital goal of research. However, it should be highlighted that teachers may face many challenges in the process of conducting action research. Hence, the following section deals with the challenges of implementing action research.

Challenges of Implementing Action Research

Although action research is considered a beneficial professional developmental strategy (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009), it should also be acknowledged that it may pose challenges that teachers have to face in the process of conducting it. In order to get a clearer picture of teachers' degree of research involvement, it is essential to understand what these challenges are.

Several studies have investigated the challenges teachers encounter in their research involvement. Burns (1999) emphasizes the organizational constraints and personal obstacles that may be experienced by teacher researchers. She points out the institutional conditions that may hinder teachers from conducting classroom research. She mentions that teachers are not considered researchers and they are not

believed to be capable of conducting research in the way academicians do in the universities. The other institutional constraint is that time is not devoted to research activities. Teachers may also face opposition since the idea of conducting classroom research may be perceived as a threat to accepted school norms and conventions. Teacher researchers may also feel the pressure of their colleagues who do not carry out research since those teachers may fear that they will be criticized for not doing research. McKernan (1996) conducted a survey in order to explore the constraints on conducting action research. The participants were 40 project directors in educational settings in the USA, UK and Ireland. The findings of the survey revealed that lack of time, lack of resources, school organizational features, and lack of research skills were the most frequently ranked constraints. Other constraints were getting support to conduct research, the language of research, pressure of student examinations, and disapproval of principals. Among the personal factors, disapproval of colleagues, beliefs about the role of teachers, professional factors, and student disapproval were also noted as important constraints that hinder teachers' research involvement. The time factor was also noted as one of the most important factors in Burn's study as teachers mentioned the lack of time to collect data and write the report. Teachers' extra workload, limited local support for continuing and publicizing the research, their lack of confidence about research skills and producing a written report of the research, fear about reporting their classroom practice, and their doubts about the value of their research were also counted as challenges that teachers encountered in their research process.

The challenges of conducting teacher research were also investigated in another study by Gewirtz, Shapiro, Maguire, Mahony and Cribb (2009). In an attempt to understand the purposes, processes, and lived experiences of teacher researchers, the researchers provided an analysis of 14 semi-structured interviews conducted with participants in a teacher-researcher project. Analysis of these interviews revealed a common theme. The participants reported that they were anxious about their changing roles at the beginning of the research project. They also expressed their concerns about time constraints since they had a workload at school and it was difficult for them to set aside time for conducting research. Gewirtz et al. emphasize that time constraints and heavy workload were two important factors that force teachers to follow their routine.

Given the similarities of the findings of the studies mentioned above, it is possible to say that teachers may encounter both personal and institutional challenges. Lack of confidence in research skills, lack of time, extra workload, and beliefs about the roles of teachers can be noted as personal challenges. Lack of resources and lack of effective organizational features can be noted as institutional constraints. However, there are ways to overcome the challenges of action research. Thus, the following section is reserved for studies investigating the effective ways of implementing action research, which is also one of the aims of this study.

Effective Ways of Implementing Action Research

One of the focuses of this study is to explore the effective ways of conducting action research. In order to implement action research effectively, collaboration is considered crucial. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009) give four reasons why teacher researchers should collaborate. The first reason they put forth is that conducting

research is hard work. Since teachers already have a busy work life, it may be demanding and challenging for teachers to set aside time and effort for conducting action research. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) noted, the fact that teacher inquiry should be conducted as a part of your teaching rather than apart from your teaching makes the work of research challenging. However, doing action research in a collaborative manner may provide teachers with the motivation and support needed to sustain their research. The second reason that collaboration is important is that teacher talk is considered important during all stages of conducting action research. Analyzing and interpreting data individually and collaboratively, teachers may become aware of their implicit knowledge and the knowledge that they generate about teaching in the process of conducting action research. Teacher talk may also allow teachers to reconsider their assumptions of teaching practice and come up with alternatives to teaching practice. Another reason to collaborate is that knowledge is power. The knowledge teachers gather from research may not be accepted and may serve as a threat to other teachers' assumptions of professional development. Thus, teachers can get the support to share their findings when they work collaboratively. Finally, when communities of teacher-inquirers share their work, findings become more difficult to ignore than the findings generated by an individual teacher researcher.

In his study, Ermeling (2010) investigated teachers' collaborative inquiry experiences by analyzing teachers' collective work and individual efforts and looking for evidence that the experience had a specific effect on their instructional practices. The participants of the study were four high school science teachers working in a team. Throughout the collaborative inquiry process, the teachers

identified their instructional concerns, connected theory to action, reflected on the data they collected and worked to adjust their classroom practice according to the findings of the research they had conducted. The researcher acted as a project facilitator by helping the teachers to define problematic areas, plan and find solutions to the problems addressed in the research process and analyze the findings of their research. The findings of the study indicated a positive change in the participating teachers' classroom practices. Ermeling (2010) suggests that substantial improvement in teachers' classroom practices was the result of the effective implementation of collaborative inquiry. The researcher emphasized many factors that led to the effective implementation of collaborative inquiry. One of the important factors was the teams which allowed the teachers to work in collaboration and help each other to adjust their instructional approaches. The second important factor was having a trained teacher-leader assigned to guide and support the process and ensure that the group was focused and persistent in the research process. Furthermore, establishing a protocol for conducting teacher inquiry helped teachers to improve their inquiry skills. Finally, providing a stable setting where teachers got the opportunity to meet also enabled teachers to work effectively in collaboration.

In a similar vein, Ponte, Ax, Beijaard, and Wubbels (2004) described a case study that was conducted as part of a two-year project called Action Research in Teacher Education International Project, in the Netherlands. The aim of the study was to investigate teachers' professional development through action research and how the facilitation of the process by teacher educators affected this over two years. The development of teachers' knowledge in three domains, including ideological, empirical, and technological, was detected. Twenty-eight teachers formed seven

groups at six secondary schools and each group was supported by a teacher educator which together formed a network. Logbooks of teachers, interviews with the teachers and the facilitators, and the documents that teachers wrote their action research and their comments on were analyzed. The findings of the study revealed that when teachers were not guided by the facilitators, they mainly developed knowledge in the technological domain. As the research progressed, teachers were observed to focus on the domains of knowledge in which they were guided by the facilitators. The researchers also observed that the action research experience proved to be more beneficial when the facilitators provided the teachers with support in the research area they did their action research on. The researchers concluded that the facilitators should direct teachers to focus on specific domains of knowledge and provide as much support as possible so that the teachers can get insights from carrying out the action research.

Considering the studies reviewed above, conducting action research in collaboration with teachers and getting support and guidance from a facilitator is seen as crucial. Action research is considered beneficial since it brings about results that are beneficial for teachers' classroom practice skills and their professional development (Dana and Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). The following section addresses the studies that investigate the impact of the action research experience on teachers' professional development.

Action Research and Teachers' Professional Development

Since one of the aims of this study is to investigate the impact of teachers' action research involvement on their professional development, it is considered important to review some of the studies that have touched this issue. Action research

is considered to be an effective professional development approach since it allows teachers to investigate their classroom practice and deepen their knowledge of the teaching profession. As Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009) suggest, it differs from traditional professional development, which only shares the knowledge generated by an outside expert. In action research approaches, teachers take active roles as inquirers in their own practice, which may ensure the possibility of change and professional growth.

There are a number of studies that have investigated the impact of research engagement on teachers' professional development. Rathgen's (2006) study investigates the impact of teachers' engagement in classroom-based research projects on their professional learning. The study was conducted with five teachers working with Graham Nuthall, a prominent researcher, and his research team on classroom-based research projects between 1985 and 2001. Some of the teachers working with Nuthall were novice teachers and some of them were experienced teachers. Apart from exploring the impact of research involvement on teachers' professional learning and the changes it brought to their practice, Rathgen also aimed to investigate the effect of the research engagement experience on novice and experienced teachers. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews done with the teachers. The analysis of data revealed strong evidence of Nuthall's success in establishing a collegial relationship with the teachers which, in turn, resulted in high appreciation of research on the part of the teachers and their becoming more receptive to learning. The findings also revealed positive evidence of teachers' self-improvement through involvement in classroom research projects both for the novice and experienced

teachers. As the teachers reported, it was the professionalism of the research team and their support that made the experience beneficial for their professional learning.

In another study, Brown and Macatangay (2002) investigated the impact of teacher inquiry on the professional development of three teachers involved in an action research project. The aim of the project was to foster a research culture and enhance teachers' classroom practice and teaching standards. The three teachers conducted action research in their own classrooms with the support of local education authorities and university faculty, who provided academic help. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews done with the teacher researchers about the action research processes, factors affecting the implementation of action research, and their beliefs about its impact on their professional development. The findings of the study revealed that action research had a positive impact on the teachers' professional development since through the process of conducting action research, the teachers learnt to be critical in problem-solving and systematic in planning and evaluation. The experience also enhanced their leadership, communication and decision-making skills. Seeing that their work was valued by academics also led to an increase in their self-esteem.

Henson (2001) aimed to investigate the impact of participating in an academic year-long teacher research initiative on teachers' self-efficacy, empowerment, collaboration, and perceptions of school climate. The teacher research study was conducted in an alternative education school in a large southwestern city in the United States. Teacher educators and researchers worked in collaboration in order to enhance teachers' professional development, instructional practices and self-efficacy. The participants were eight teachers and three instructional assistants. Data

were gathered through multiple sources. General teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy were measured by using teacher efficacy scales. Teacher empowerment and teachers' perceptions of school climate were also measured. Moreover, in order to find out the degree of teachers' engagement in the teacher research project, an internal rating was implemented. Teachers' level of collaboration was also measured by using multiple perspectives. Finally, interviews were conducted with each teacher both at the beginning and at the end of the project. The results of the study revealed a recognizable change in teacher efficacy during the teacher research project. Furthermore, the study showed a positive relationship between conducting research and efficacy. Henson concludes that teacher research can have a significant effect on teachers' efficacy since teachers are involved in research to investigate the issues related to their own instructional practices and teaching.

Atay (2008) investigated participating teachers' experiences and perspectives of teacher research through an INSET program carried out by the researcher herself. The participants were 18 English teachers at the English preparatory school of a state university in Istanbul, Turkey. The purpose of the INSET program was to provide experienced teachers with theoretical knowledge on pedagogical issues and research, and involve them in conducting research through reflection and collaboration. The professional development program lasted for six weeks. In the first two weeks, the participants were given theoretical knowledge on ELT topics that they asked for. In the following two weeks, the participants were introduced to concepts such as 'action/teacher research', 'reflection', and 'collaboration'. They were also given the opportunity to discuss the notion of research through collaborative dialogues with

their colleagues. After the training program on conducting research, teachers were asked to conduct research in their own classrooms and write a report on their studies. Data was collected through teachers' narratives and journals. The results of the study showed that teachers were aware of the importance of research; however, they also had concerns about conducting research because of lack of knowledge and the insecurity it creates. The results of the study also revealed that the process of collecting their own data seemed to have resulted in positive perceptions towards research and gave teachers the courage to make changes in their classroom practice. Although some teacher noted that collaboration helped them reflect on their own practices, for some it was difficult to cooperate with others. The researcher concluded her study by stating that although teachers perceived of research as a difficult and challenging task, 'teacher research' brought about positive results to teachers' professional expertise.

In yet another study, Chou (2010) investigated elementary English teachers' professional development through collaborative action research in an in-service teacher training program. The participants of the study were twenty-one elementary in-service teachers, attending an English teacher certificate program at a university of education in Taiwan. The researcher aimed to find out whether including collaborative action research in an in-service teacher training program may provide professional development for teachers. The participants were required to implement a small-scale action research project in one of the courses they were teaching. They were asked to design information gap activities with the guidance of the researcher in a four-hour workshop. The participants also had a four-hour workshop on conducting action research. They made use of their peers' comments and suggestions while they

were designing their lesson and worksheets. Later on, the participants were required to conduct action research in their lessons. They shared video clips of their lessons during their presentations and peers and the researchers made their comments on the lessons. Later on, the participants wrote a report on their experiences of teaching and analyzed the results of students' learning. Data were collected from a number of sources including transcripts of the audio-taped meetings of the teacher learning community, a questionnaire on teachers' perceptions of conducting their action research and learning with this learning community, and teachers' action research papers. The results of the study showed that the training program contributed to teachers' professional knowledge about implementing information gap activities, since 89% of the participants reported after having been involved in teaching inquiry that they learnt how to design information gap activities and incorporate them in their teaching well. Chou (2010) concludes that collaborative action research in an in-service teacher training program provided the trainees with opportunities to explore teaching principles, and reflect upon and share their learning results. This, in turn, proved to be useful in teachers' knowledge construction and improved their teaching practices and built up their confidence in teaching English.

In a similar vein, Bradley-Levine, Smith, and Carr (2009) investigated the impact of implementing action research on the perspectives of participating teachers in terms of their classroom practice and professionalism. The participants of the study were twelve teachers who were attending a master level course on action research at a research university in the midwestern US. The program consisted of a course in research methods and two action inquiry courses. During all three courses participants got the support of their peers via a professional learning community.

Multiple sources of data were collected through email exchanges between the participants and the instructor, interviews with the participants and observations of students interacting in the course. The results of the study indicated that the action research process experienced within a professional learning community model led to an increase in teachers' confidence to implement action research in their classrooms. The experience also allowed them to be more reflective about their teaching practice and enthusiastic about improving their classroom practice. The researchers concluded that the professional learning community provided the teachers with an opportunity to discuss and share their experiences and receive supportive feedback, and this process led teachers to question their classroom practice and encouraged them to make meaningful changes in their pedagogical decision making process.

From these studies, it can be concluded that teachers' action research involvement has positive effects on teachers' professional development and, in turn, on their classroom practice. Based on these findings, it is clear that promoting teachers' research engagement is crucial to foster their professional learning. However, there is also a need to explore whether action research is effective on teachers' classroom practice and professional development in the long run. The next section deals with the long-term effects of action research on teachers' practical skills and professional development, which is also one of the focuses of this study.

Long-term Effects of Conducting Action Research

Given that action research has been shown to be a beneficial professional development activity, there is also a need to understand whether teachers continue conducting action research after their first experience with it and whether the experience of conducting action research has any effects on teachers' classroom

practice and professional development in the long run. In their study, Seider and Lemma (2004) worked with teachers who engaged in conducting action research as a capstone to their Master's program during the years 1992 through 2001. They aimed to investigate to what extent teachers preserved their research mindset gained through the process of conducting action research and how this experience affected their professional sense of efficacy and their students' success in the long term. The researchers also investigated teachers' perceptions of the long-term value that they associated with conducting action research as part of their Master's program. Three sets of data were collected. For the first source of data, surveys were sent to 40 teachers who had conducted action research in the Master's program that they were attending during the years 1992 through 2001. The second set of data consisted of in-depth interviews conducted with 18 of the teachers who responded to the survey. For the third set of data, surveys were sent to 14 colleagues and 14 administrators who worked with the teachers during the implementation of action research. The findings of the study indicate that teachers preserved the research mindset that they gained in the processes of implementing action research after many years. Teachers also reported that they continued using some aspects of the processes they learned through the experience of implementing action research, such as reflecting on their instructional practices and using student data to make instructional decisions. However, a few teachers reported not having conducted new action research projects since the implementation of original action research during the Master's program. The findings of the study also showed that although many years had passed from the first implementation of action research, the experience had a positive impact on teachers' sense of professional efficacy and also on their teaching strategies. Most of

the teachers reported that they still implement the teaching strategies from their action research projects. Conducting action research was also reported to bring immediate positive outcomes in students' learning; however, the long-term benefits of action research on students' success could not be ascertained by most of the teachers.

As a coordinator of an initiative called the Action Learning Project, which lasted for six years, Kember (2002) investigated the outcomes of engaging in the process of action research. The purpose of the project was to support teachers in higher education in Hong Kong to engage in action research projects in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their courses. Data were gathered through a survey reflecting the participants' perceptions of their projects' outcomes. In addition, interviews were conducted with the participants in eight project teams, which were chosen randomly out of 90 projects. A panel was also held in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the overall project. The longer-term outcomes of engaging in the Action Learning Project were also observed in the changes of the participants' attitudes and practices. Most of the participants reported that involvement in the Action Learning Project had a positive impact on the quality of their teaching practice and half of them reported having some impact on the teaching attitudes of others. The participants also reported that they became more reflective on their teaching and developed their ability to work with others in a team. Kember (2002) concludes that action research can be considered as a cost-effective way of improving teaching and learning because of the beneficial longer-term outcomes it brings.

Slutsky, Christenson, Bendau, and Covert et al. (2005) conducted case studies with five teachers to investigate their learning and changing attitudes about research and their research projects in a graduate program based on classroom based inquiry. The aim of the course was to develop a research proposal for a research project that was going to be conducted in the teachers' classrooms for the next year's first semester. Data were gathered through three semi-structured interviews during the five-week intensive course. Teachers' reflective journals and field notes of small group discussions also served as data. After the completion of the course, the researchers conducted follow-up calls in order to see if teachers were conducting action research. As for the long-term effects of conducting action research, all teachers reported that action research contributed to their teaching as it made them more knowledgeable teachers. They also reported that they continued using some research procedures such as keeping journals to write down their observations. The researchers concluded that follow-up conversations done into the fourth year after the course completion indicated that the long-term impact of conducting action research was even greater since the teachers continued using research methods in order to examine their practice and students' learning and all the teachers considered action research as valuable for their professional development.

The overview of the studies in this chapter shows that action research can be considered an effective strategy to improve teachers' classroom practice. It is also seen that action research may contribute to teachers' professional development in many ways. Additionally, this chapter reveals that action research may have positive long-term effects on teachers' professional development. Although there have been several studies investigating the long-term effects of action research on teachers'

professional development and classroom practice, no such studies have been conducted in Turkey. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap in the literature with an attempt to explore the long-term effects of action research on EFL teachers' classroom practice and professional development in Turkey.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the concept of action research, the historical development of the concept of action research, theoretical framework, and studies related to teachers' views on action research, challenges of implementing action research, the effective ways of implementing action research, the effects of action research on teachers' professional development, and the long-term effects of action research. By this, I aimed to introduce a critical presentation of ideas that are prevalent in studies in the field of education. In the next chapter, I present the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the long-term effects of conducting action research on teachers' professional development and their practical teaching skills. The study also aims to examine how action research is conducted by the instructors at different universities in Turkey and their beliefs about the effective ways of conducting action research. The following research questions are specifically addressed in this study:

1. How is action research conducted by EFL instructors at different universities in Turkey?
2. What are the reported long-term effects of conducting action research on teachers' classroom practice and professional development practices?
3. What are teachers' beliefs about the effective ways of implementing action research?

This chapter covers the participants, instruments, procedure and data analysis.

Participants

For this study, eight EFL instructors who had done action research before and work at various departments of several state and private universities were interviewed. These participants were instructors in the following universities: Bilkent University, Middle East Technical University, Hacettepe University, Anatolian University, and Near East University. In order to investigate the long-term effects of action research on teachers' professional development and classroom practice, by using e-mails, internet networks and phone calls, individual teachers who had done action research before were contacted and asked for permission to conduct interviews

with them. Among the eight participants, four of them conducted action research one year ago. The other four participants conducted action research three, five, seven and fourteen years ago. Based on this range, in this study, ‘long term’ is considered the time that has passed since the participants’ first action research experience. Among the eight participants, six were female and two were male, with different majors in English Language. Their teaching experience ranged between 0-5 years and 21 years and above. Moreover, the participants held degrees that ranged from B.A to Ph.D. Table 1 displays information about the participants’ gender, years of experience, majors, highest degree earned, their administrative roles, the departments where they teach and the years since their first action research experience.

Table 1 - The instructors participating in the study

Gender	Female	6
	Male	2
Years of Experience	0-4 years	1
	5-9 years	3
	10-14 years	1
	14+ years	3
Highest Degree Earned	B.A	3
	M.A	4
	PhD	1
Majors	English Language and Teaching	4
	English Language and Literature	2
	English Linguistics	1
	English Language and Translation	1
Type of university	State Universities	5
	Private Universities	3
Teaching context	Prep Schools	4
	Departmental English Courses	4
Administrative Roles	None	4
	Level Responsible/Assistant Coordinator	1
	Co-coordinator	1
	Head assistant	1
	Head	1
Years since 1 st Action Research Experience	1 Year	4
	3 Years	1
	5 Years	1
	7 Years	1
	14 Years	1

Instruments

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data. The reason for using semi-structured interviews was to gather in-depth information (Boyce & Neale, 2006; McNamara, 1999) about the participants' action research experiences, their perceptions about the long-term effects of conducting action research on their professional development and instructional practices, and their beliefs about the effective ways of implementing it. In that sense, conducting semi-structured interviews was believed to provide relatively rich qualitative data and allow the researcher to get at deeper meanings and understandings of the participants' action research experiences and their perceptions about it. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted, since by not limiting the researcher to pre-set questions, such interviews allow the interviewer to ask questions as new issues emerge in the course of the interview (Hoepfl, 1997).

The total number of the questions in the interview was ten. The questions in the interview were based on the previous studies in the literature since these studies proved to be effective in answering these questions. One set of questions in the interview was asked in order to explore how action research is conducted by Turkish EFL instructors. The participants were asked to express the stages that they went through in the process of conducting action research in order to explore whether action research was practiced as a systematic inquiry or as an informal research process (Burns, 1999; Richards & Farrel, 2005; Wallace, 1998). They were also asked about the types of action research they had conducted, whether it was individual, collaborative or schoolwide action research (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). In order to investigate the reasons for conducting action research, the

participants were asked how they had come to know about action research and for what reasons they had initiated their action research projects.

The second set of questions was designed in order to investigate whether teachers sustained their research mindset and continued implementing action research projects after their first experience of conducting action research. In order to understand their degree of involvement in action research projects, how often they had conducted action research and whether they would continue implementing it in the future was explored. In a study conducted by Seider and Lemma (2004) it was concluded that although action research was perceived as a beneficial professional developmental activity by teachers, they were reluctant to say whether they would conduct action research in the future. This study also aimed to explore whether action research was perceived by the teachers as a valuable professional activity to carry on implementing and the reasons behind this idea were also explored.

Teachers' beliefs about the influence that the action research experience had on their teaching practice and professional development in the long run were also investigated (Kember, 2002; Slutsky, Christenson, Bendau, Covert, Risko, Dyer, Johnston, 2005; Seider & Lemma, 2004). The third set of questions aimed to explore teachers' beliefs about the effective ways of implementing action research. In order to answer this question, the challenges of conducting action research and the kind of support structures that teachers need in the process of conducting action research were investigated. (Ermeling, 2010; Ponte, Ax, Beijaard & Wubbles, 2004). Apart from these pre-set questions, probing questions were asked as the new issues emerged, in order to get further information about the participants' experiences and perceptions of action research (see Appendix A for the Turkish version of the

interview questions and Appendix B for the English version of the interview questions).

The interviews were conducted in Turkish to enable all participants to better understand the questions and to overcome the conceptual problems that may stem from participants' misunderstanding the questions. Conducting the interviews in Turkish also enabled participants to better express their ideas and comments on the issue. The interviews were conducted by the researcher and were tape-recorded to be analyzed and categorized later in terms of action research processes that teachers went through, perceived effects of action research on their professional development and classroom practice skills, and their beliefs about the effective implementation of action research.

Procedure

This research was carried out with the participation of eight English instructors from various departments of state and private universities in Turkey. First of all, a request mail was sent to former MA TEFL students and they were asked if they had conducted action research before and if they would like to be interviewed. They were also asked to send this email to their colleagues in their institutions. Apart from this, a request mail was sent to the foreign language departments of some universities. In addition, individual teachers, known to the researcher, were contacted and asked if they had conducted action research before and if they were willing to participate in the study. After getting in contact with the teachers who said that they had conducted action research and were willing to be interviewed, they were questioned about the processes they had gone through in order to understand whether what they experienced was actual action research. Drawing on these talks, some of

the teachers had to be eliminated since what they had done did not meet the concept of action research that is defined in this study. The data were collected through interviews that were conducted by the researcher. The interviews were conducted in Turkish –the native language of the participants- and tape recorded. Although most of the interviews were conducted face to face, a few of them were conducted by using Skype and telephone. The interviews lasted between 19 minutes to 51 minutes and they were all conducted in a quiet room. The interview recordings were transcribed (see Appendix C for an extract of an interview in Turkish, and Appendix D for its English translation).

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were produced by interviews with the English instructors. The tape-recordings of the interviews were first transcribed. After reading the transcripts several times, the parts that seemed related to the focus of the study were marked. The parts that were directly related to the questions were marked by using color codes. Common themes that emerged in the transcriptions were also identified by the researcher. The interviewees were also assigned different codes, instead of using their names (Merriam, 1998). (See appendix E for the coded sample of the transcript).

The following elements were considered in the analysis:

- how action research is conducted by the instructors
- the long-term effects of action research on practitioners' professional development and instructional practices
- the effective ways of implementing action research

In order to answer the first research question, the participants' answers to four questions were analyzed. After reading the transcripts thoroughly, the researcher identified the common key concepts in order to explore the participants' introduction to action research, their reasons for initiating action research projects, the types of action research they had conducted, and the process that they went through while conducting action research.

In order to answer the second question, responses to three questions were analyzed. The themes that occurred frequently were identified in order to define teachers' level of action research engagement, perceived effects of action research on their classroom practice and professional development, and their intentions to conduct action research in the future.

In order to answer the third question, responses to three questions were analyzed. The transcripts were analyzed in order to identify the challenges of conducting action research, information and support structures teachers need in the process of conducting action research, and teachers' beliefs about the effective ways of conducting action research.

Direct quotations from the participants were included in order to give examples from the responses and these quotations were translated for inclusion in the thesis.

Conclusion

The central aim of this chapter was an overview of the study, to describe the participants, to indicate the instrument that was used in gathering the data, and to describe how the data were gathered and which steps were involved in the data analysis. In the chapter four, the results of the study will be presented.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This study was designed to explore the long-term effects of conducting action research on teachers' professional development and their practical teaching skills.

The study also aimed to examine how action research is conducted by the instructors at different universities in Turkey and their beliefs about the effective ways of conducting action research. In this attempt, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight instructors at different universities in Turkey. In this chapter, the results of the analysis of data gathered from the interviews are provided. The following research questions are addressed:

1. How is action research conducted by EFL instructors at different universities in Turkey?
2. What are the reported long-term effects of conducting action research on teachers' classroom practice and professional development practices?
3. What are teachers' beliefs about the effective ways of implementing action research?

Interview Results

The interviews conducted with eight participants were transcribed and analyzed to reveal the common patterns with respect to the types of action research processes that the participants had gone through, the participants' perceptions of the long-term effects of conducting action research on their classroom practice and

professional development, and their beliefs about the effective ways of conducting action research.

Of the eight instructors interviewed, one was the head of the engineering department at a Faculty of Academic English program, one was the head assistant at a preparatory school, one was the academic coordinator at a School of Foreign Languages and one was the assistant coordinator and level responsible for advanced level classes at a preparatory school. The rest of the interviewees had no administrative roles. One of the interviewees had more than 20 years of teaching experience. Two of the interviewees had between 12 to 19 years of teaching experience and four of the interviewees had less than 10 years experience in their profession. The number of years since the participants' first action research experience ranges from 1 year to 14 years. I will refer to the interviewees as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7 and T8. Information about the participants is summarized in the table below.

The interviews were conducted in Turkish and later transcribed. After several readings of the transcriptions, those parts that seemed to reveal information about the focus of this study were identified and translated into English.

Table 2 - Information about the participants

Inter-viewees	Gender	Under-graduate Degree	Highest Degree Earned	Years of Experience	Position	Currently enrolled in an academic/certificate program	State/Private University	Years since 1 st Action Research Experience
T1	Male	ELT	PhD	19	Head of Engineering Department	No	Private	1 year
T2	Female	English Language and Literature	MA	5	Instructor	PhD	State	5 years
T3	Male	ELT	MA	12	Head Assistant of a School of Foreign Languages Department	PhD	Private	7 years
T4	Female	English Language and Literature	BA	6	Academic Coordinator at a School of Foreign Languages Department	No	State	1 year
T5	Female	ELT	MA	9	Level Responsible and Assistant Coordinator at a School of Foreign Languages Department	No	State	3 years
T6	Female	English Language and Translation	BA	4	Instructor	MA	State	1 year
T7	Female	English Linguistics	BA	26	Instructor	MA	Private	1 year
T8	Female	ELT	MA	18	Instructor	PhD	State	14 years

How action research is conducted by EFL instructors from different universities

In order to explore the ways action research is conducted by the participants, they were asked four questions, namely, Q1, ‘how did you first come to know about action research?’, Q3, ‘For what reasons did you initiate an action research project?’, Q4, ‘What types of action research have you conducted?’, and Q5, ‘Can you explain the process that you went through while conducting action research?’

Q1 How did you first come to know about action research?

The interviewees mentioned different ways of getting acquainted with the concept of action research. The interview data indicates that teachers became acquainted with the concept of action research in MA and in-service training programs or in formal meetings held in their institutions.

Two interviewees (T4-T6) reported that they were informed about action research in a meeting by the coordinator of the department where they taught English. T2 first came to know about action research in an in-service training program in her institution in the first year of her teaching. T1, T3, T5, T7, and T8 stated that they became familiar with the concept of action research in the MA program they were attending.

Q3 For what reasons did you initiate an action research project?

The majority of the interviewees (T1, T2, T4, T5, T6, and T7) reported that they initiated their action research projects because of external factors. T2, T4 and T6 reported that they conducted action research at the request of the administration. T2 stated that as a novice teacher, the administration required her to attend an in-service program and in this program she was asked to conduct action research and report the results of her study. Upon that request, she defined a problem in her class and

decided to act and solve it. In a similar vein, as novice teachers, T4 and T6 had training on how to conduct action research and were asked to implement it in their classrooms. The following extract sheds light on one reason for initiating action research project:

In our institution, novice teachers are recruited as temporary staff and they are expected to gather points in the first 3 years of their teaching. Each year, they have to gather at least 90 points. Action research is one of the things to be done in order to gather points. (T4)

T1, T5, and T7 reported having conducted action research in order to meet the requirements of the course they were attending in an MA program. In that sense, it is possible to say that they had conducted action research because of external motives. However, they can also be said to have conducted action research because of their own personal interests. As they stated in the interviews, they were doing research on their personal wishes. In his interview, T1 emphasized that he wants his action research to be published in a journal.

It is very difficult to design a research and collect and analyze data about your research when you have to teach 15 hours. I am talking in terms of time that it takes. For instance, doing a good literature survey... However, in action research, you have less burden in terms of doing research and in the end you get something scientific in your hand. Although it is somehow little to be published in a type A journal, you still have something to publish. (T1)

T1 added that he had not shared the results of his study yet since he wanted to write an article about his study and share its results in that way. This, in a sense, may reveal his motives for conducting action research.

T7 reported that she was conducting her second action research project in order to write her thesis. However, she also emphasized that she found action research meaningful because it helps her to solve the problems directly related to the

classroom. It is clear that T7 also conducts action research because of personal motives in addition to external motives. Although she reported that conducting action research was one of the requirements of the course she was attending in an MA program, she also stated that she was planning to write her thesis by conducting action research and also found action research meaningful for dealing with classroom related problems.

Like T1 and T7, T5 can also said to have conducted action research for personal motives. T5 stated that she conducted her first action research in order to write her thesis. However, the need to conduct her second action research stemmed from her own observations of a problem in her class and the need to solve it.

I, myself, wanted to do this study. It was a vocabulary study done with the lowest level of students. I did the study because I believed that the students in the lowest level needed more support in terms of input than the students in other levels. That is, I did the study to provide the students with more support in terms of vocabulary. (T5)

Likewise, T3 also reported having conducted two action research projects so far. He stated that he initiated his research because he felt the need to solve the problems that he was experiencing in his classes. The following extract exemplifies his reasons to conduct action research:

Both action research projects I had done completely stemmed from needs... Because in action research, there should be a problem... And, as teachers, we search for a solution to the problem... Why do the students behave like this? Why cannot they learn the vocabulary? What problems do they have in writing? and so on... I conducted action research projects in order to find answers to these questions. Actually, these were the questions, as teachers, we had been discussing in our regular meetings. However, the action research I conducted was not initiated on an administrative decision. Both action research studies were related to my own field of interest. Corpus studies and vocabulary teaching... Especially, my thesis was about vocabulary teaching... so I initiated the studies with my own will. (T3)

Table 3 - Reasons for initiating action research projects

Participants	Educational Background	Currently enrolled in an academic program	Reasons for initiating action research projects
T1	PhD	No	as a course requirement of an MA program AND personal interest in academic studies
T2	MA	PhD	at the request of the administration
T3	MA	PhD	to deal with classroom-related issues
T4	BA	No	at the request of the administration
T5	MA	No	as a course requirement of an MA program AND to deal with classroom-related issues
T6	BA	MA	at the request of the administration
T7	BA	MA	as a course requirement of an MA program AND to deal with classroom-related issues
T8	MA	Phd	as a course requirement of an MA program AND to deal with classroom-related issues

Drawing on the interview data related to the third interview question, it is possible to say that the teachers who had not done an MA before initiated their action research studies because of external motives. On the other hand, the teachers who were doing MAs or had completed their MA degrees initiated their studies at least partly because of their internal motives, because they were interested in these kinds of research studies or they wanted to improve their classroom practice. However, it should also be noted that these teachers were also motivated to get an external

reward such as getting their studies to be published or passing a course in an MA program.

Q4 What types of action research have you conducted?

Before the results of the types of action research that the interviewees have conducted are presented, it is important to mention the differences among the three types of action research, which are individual action research, collaborative action research and schoolwide action research. Individual action research is conducted by the individual teacher in order to solve classroom related problems in his/her classroom practice (Pine, 2009). Collaborative action research is the kind of research done in cooperation with colleagues, with students, or with university faculty, or with parents or a combination of partners (Pine, 2009). In schoolwide action research, a group of teachers or everyone in the school conducts action research on a common problem that is identified by the school faculty, and data from other schools, districts or the literature is collected, organized and interpreted (Pine, 2009).

Of all the teachers that were interviewed, none of them reported having conducted schoolwide action research. All but one of the teachers reported that they had conducted action research on an individual basis. Although T1 and T7 stated that they got the support and guidance of the lecturer in their MA program, they worked alone in most of the stages of conducting action research. That is, they collected and analyzed the data and wrote the reports of their studies themselves. They met their lecturers on a regular basis in order to share what they had done in each stage and determine what to do in the following stages of action research. T7 stated that she got support from her colleague in terms of classroom observation. That is, her colleague observed her in the classroom in order to minimize observer subjectivity. T1 also got

the support of his lecturer in terms of classroom observation. The following extract indicates how his action research project was conducted.

I conducted my action research project individually in my own classroom. But, of course, I was in contact with my lecturer all the time. We kept in touch with the lecturer in all the stages of conducting action research... determining the materials to be used in the classes, in deciding which tools to use to collect data ... (T1)

Similarly, T4 and T6 conducted action research projects individually.

However, they got the guidance of a trainer in all stages of the process.

I conducted individual action research. Every teacher conducted action research in their own classes. I also shared the process with my coordinator in one-to-one meetings. In this process, the coordinator gave me guidance. However, I did not meet with other teachers who were conducting action research and I did not share the results of my research with them. (T6)

T2 also reported conducting action research individually. She stated that at the beginning, she was informed about the stages of action research and she had training on how to do a literature survey and how to write a report. Apart from these, she was alone in the whole process. She also stated that there was no collaboration with other teachers who were doing action research at that time and they all conducted action research individually.

T5 stated that her first action research project was an extension of a school project. She wanted to improve this project by doing an action research project and she documented this project in the form of a thesis. T5 stated that the action research project she conducted was completely team work. However, when we consider the stages that she went through while conducting action research, it may not be possible to call the process collaboration. As she stated, her colleagues only supported her by helping her to administer the instruments that she prepared and they were not involved in any other stages of the action research process. Additionally, she did not

hold any meetings with her colleagues in the process of conducting action research to share the experience with them. Considering these, it is more appropriate to call this process individual action research. T5 added that her second action research project was an individual action research project done alone in her own classrooms.

Similarly, T3 has conducted two action research projects so far. In one of his projects, he worked alone, while in his other action research project, he asked for help from his colleagues.

In one of my projects, I worked on graded readers and I did it all by myself. However, while I was conducting action research on learner corpus, I asked for the help of my colleagues since I had to deal with a thousand learner essays and enter the data into the computer to evaluate these essays... However, I analyzed the data by myself...that is to say, it was a study conducted individually, not collaboratively or schoolwide. I presented the results of the study to the administration and my colleagues in one of our regular seminars. Our colleagues, who had conducted similar projects, shared the results of their studies in these seminars. But I was alone in the process of conducting the action research projects. (T3)

Considering what T3 and T5 said about the types of action research they conducted, it is possible to infer that the concept of ‘collaboration’ is not perceived in the same way by all teachers. While T5 considers getting the support of her colleagues’ collaboration, T3 hesitated to call it true collaboration. Although collaborative action research is the kind of research done in cooperation with colleagues, it is called collaborative when these people work as a team in all stages of conducting action research. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to call the type of action research projects that these teachers conducted individual action research.

T8 conducted action research projects both individually and collaboratively. She stated that although she and her colleagues planned to conduct some of the action research projects collaboratively, they had to change them into individual action research later since they were too busy to share their action research

processes. Although they shared the results of their studies with each other, there was not any cooperation or collaboration during the process. However, she reported having conducted collaborative action research while she was working in the writing center of the institution she taught at. There, as she stated, she worked with her colleagues as a group, that is, two coordinators and an assistant, and they helped each other by observing and critiquing each other.

It is striking to see that only one of the interviewees (T8) reported having conducted collaborative action research. Although collaborative action research is considered more beneficial than other types of action research (Burns, 1999), the majority of the interviewees reported having conducted individual action research. In that sense, what T8 said in her interview may shed light on one of the reasons for not conducting collaborative action research. As reported above, T8 stated that they could not conduct collaborative action research since they were too busy to share what they were doing in the action research process.

Table 4 - The types of action research participants have conducted

Participants	Individual action research	Collaborative action research	Schoolwide action research
T1	✓	×	×
T2	✓	×	×
T3	✓	×	×
T4	✓	×	×
T5	✓	×	×
T6	✓	×	×
T7	✓	×	×
T8	✓	✓	×

Q5 Can you explain the process that you went through while conducting action research?

Action research projects typically involve several steps: a) developing a question, b) formulating a research plan, c) systematically collecting data, d) analyzing the data, e) recording the project in writing, f) evaluating the action research project, and g) sharing the study with others (Bailey, et al., 2001; Freeman, 1998; Hopkins, 2002; Pine, 2009; Richards & Farrel, 2005).

The inquiry with the interviewees about the action research processes that they went through revealed a common pattern. All of the interviewees seemed to follow a systematic process while conducting action research.

The interviewees began their action research process by developing a research question. When they were asked how they developed their research questions, the majority of the teachers stated that they defined the most common problem that they observed in their classrooms and aimed to investigate that question by first developing and designing a research plan.

T1, T7, and T8 stated that they formulated their research questions by first observing their classrooms. They defined the most problematic areas for their students and developed a few research questions. At the stage of determining the research question to investigate and the research plan to follow to answer that question, they got the guidance and help of their lecturers and the feedback of their classmates in their MA programs. They were also required to write a proposal explaining the research question, data collection procedures and the timeline to adhere to in order to conduct action research.

T2, T4, and T6 also observed their classrooms in order to determine the research questions of their studies and came together with their coordinators to discuss the necessity and importance of their questions and design a research plan to answer these questions effectively. The following extract exemplifies how the research question was defined:

Two weeks after I met the class, I detected the problematic areas that were most striking. I observed the class and defined four problems. Later, I met my coordinator and we decided on the problem we should study... The first stage was to observe students. For two weeks, while teaching in the class, I observed and determined the most problematic areas for the students and I listed them... Later, I discussed these with my coordinator... the necessity of the research question that I asked... Together with the coordinator, we decided on the most necessary question to ask. (T6)

T5 also determined the research question of her study by observing her classrooms and teachers in her institution. In order to understand her colleagues' and students' views about the research question she wanted to investigate, she conducted a questionnaire. According to the results of the questionnaire, she came to a conclusion that what she wanted to investigate was also a matter of concern for other teachers and the students in her institution. At the stage of developing a research plan and throughout the whole process of conducting action research, she was guided by her thesis advisor.

In contrast to the other teachers, T3 determined the research questions of his action research projects drawing on his teaching experience.

The problem to investigate was already out there... That is to say, this is what is special to the nature of action research... Asking the question, that is why this problem occurs...and every context has its own dynamics... As teachers, we have had this problem for years...why the students are not successful in learning the vocabulary or why they make so many mistakes in their writings...At the stage of defining the problem, I drew on my own experiences... (T3)

All interviewees followed a systematic data collection process, and both quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures were used by the teachers, including teacher and student questionnaires, interviews, video recordings, student diaries, student essays, and quantitative measures of student achievement. As the interviewees reported, they determined the data collection procedures that they used according to the research questions of their action research projects.

The following extracts from the interviews with T6 and T8 illustrate how they collected data.

The first action research I conducted was about vocabulary teaching techniques. Because it was one of the areas in which the students had the most difficulty... Which teaching techniques are most useful?... it was related to that question. I gave a pretest to the students. It was a questionnaire investigating the vocabulary teaching techniques that help students to learn the vocabulary best. According to the questionnaire results, I determined the three techniques that helped the students most and I tried to implement those techniques more intensively in the class. In every lesson, according to the syllabus, I used these techniques. In every lesson, I taught the vocabulary by using these techniques. After using these techniques, I conducted a second test and compared the results of the tests. I used questionnaires and documented them by using SPSS. (T6)

In one of our action research projects, we investigated the improvement of the graduate level students' writing skills over time. After surveying the literature, we decided that we needed to use qualitative data collection procedures. We observed the student over time. We conducted interviews and video recorded them. We put a distance between these interviews. In the interviews, we tried to understand what the student believed he got from his tutorial; if he perceived an improvement in his writing skill... what his individual perception was... We asked what we heard in the video recording in the interviews... for instance, why he chose that particular verb in his writing... (T8)

When interviewees were asked if they kept diaries to observe their own actions in the process of conducting action research, T6 reported having taken notes of her observations in the process of action research although it was not in the form of diary. Only T4 reported having kept a diary.

In the first semester, I regretted not having taken notes because I could not remember what I had done. In the second term, I was going to conduct activities from three units in total. After each activity, I wrote down what I had observed. And it really helped! (T4)

Teachers reported having used both quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures, such as SPSS and content analysis. The following excerpts from the interviews with T1 and T3 may illustrate how they analyzed the data of their studies.

I analyzed the students' journals by doing content analysis. I looked for the data that answered my research questions in these journals. I also analyzed the interviews by doing content analysis. I first transcribed the interviews. After I transcribed them, I highlighted what the students said in relation to the research question. (T1)

My research question was this ... if we used graded readers regularly, would the students be more exposed and retain more vocabulary? I had a control and an experimental group and I wanted both groups to read these graded readers since it was a requirement of the lesson. But, in the control group, I did not do any extra vocabulary studies. I gave a pretest and posttest to the groups and compared the results by using SPSS. (T3)

All of the interviewees wrote reports of their action research projects. They were all required to hand their reports to the administration, coordinators or lecturers. The following excerpt describes what one written report included:

I wrote a report. It was like a mini thesis. The report included sections like literature review, methodology, defining the problem, results and suggestions. It was a 20-25 page report... (T6)

Teachers came together with their coordinators, lecturers or thesis advisors in order to evaluate their action research projects. However, only one of the teachers (T8) reported having their colleagues as critical friends to evaluate the research projects in the process of conducting action research.

I know all the stages of conducting action research but I have to say that I may not have conducted all the stages of action research effectively. My colleagues helped me in entering the test results of the control and experimental groups into the computer, after getting permission from the administration to do so... But, we did not make any critical evaluation with my colleagues. (T3)

All of the interviewees wrote reports of their action research projects. However, when they were asked if they shared the results of their research with their colleagues, not all of them reported having done so. T2, T4, and T6 stated that they did not share the results of their studies with other teachers in the school. However, they shared them with their coordinators. Since T4 and T6 were temporary personnel at that time, they were required to conduct action research to be evaluated on their performance and get points to be permanent staff. This may be a reason for not having shared the results with their colleagues. However, although they stated that they only shared their findings with their coordinators, they also pointed out that they may have shared their experiences with their colleagues informally.

T1, T7, and T8 shared the results of their action research projects with their lecturers and classmates in their MA programs by means of power point presentations. However, they did not share their experiences with their colleagues in their institutions.

The action research project I conducted was very specific to me. I did not share it with my colleagues ...but it was a part of my lesson in the MA program... I reported the results and handed it to my lecturer... I also shared the results with my classmates. (T7)

T3, T5, and T8 shared the results of their action research projects with their colleagues and principals formally in professional development meetings and seminars held in their institutions on a regular basis.

This is what makes action research different from other kinds of research. In the end, you need to share what you have found with others in order to take an action and do something to solve the problem. That's why I handed the written report to the administration and gave a presentation to my colleagues in one of our regular seminars... I presented the results and told them that doing things in that way proved to be better...So, by sharing this written report, we met one of the most important requirements of action research, which is sharing and acting on the problem. (T3)

Table 5 - The process participants went through while conducting action research

Steps of action research	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
Developing a question	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Formulating a research plan	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Systematically collecting data	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Analyzing the data	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Recording the project in writing	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Evaluating the action research project	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Sharing the study with others	√	×	√	×	√	×	√	√
Educational Background	PhD	MA	MA	BA	MA	BA	BA	MA
Motives for conducting action research*	3	1	2	1	3	1	3	3

*1 = External motives, 2 = Internal motives, 3 = Both

When all the excerpts taken from the interviews are considered, it can be seen that the teachers came to know about action research in different ways by becoming informed about it in MA and in-service training programs or in formal meetings held in their institutions. The teachers also mentioned different reasons for their initiation of action research projects. While some of the interviewees reported having conducted action research at the request of the school administration or as a course requirement of an MA program, others mentioned personal motives for conducting action research since they were interested in research studies or felt the need to solve their classroom related problems. The analysis of the data also reveals that teachers who had not done an MA before appear to have initiated their action research studies because of external motives. However, teachers who have Masters' degrees appear to have conducted action research for personal motives. Considering this, it is possible to infer that being familiar with the concept of research helped the instructors who have Masters' degrees to approach action research with more positive feelings rather than seeing it as an obligation. As for the types of action research, the majority of the interviewees reported having conducted action research on an individual basis. None

of the interviewees reported having conducted schoolwide action research and only one of them reported having conducted collaborative action research. From the interview data, a lack of time to share what teachers were doing in the process of conducting action research may be considered one reason for not conducting collaborative action research. Additionally, all the interviewees followed a systematic process while conducting action research.

The reported long-term effects of conducting action research on teachers' classroom practice and professional development practices

In order to investigate the long-term effects of conducting action research on teachers' classroom practice and professional development, they were asked three questions. These questions were Q2, 'How often have you conducted action research?', Q6, 'Would you say that conducting action research has had any influence on you or has changed you as a teacher? Could you comment on whether or not this is true for you?', Q10, 'Do you think that you will go on conducting action research projects in the future? Why or why not?'

Q2 How often have you conducted action research?

When the interviewees were asked how often they had conducted action research, T1 and T2 reported having conducted action research only once. T3, T4, T5, T6 and T7 reported having conducted action research twice. T8 reported having conducted the highest number of action research projects. Although she did not remember the exact number of action research projects she had conducted, she stated that she might have conducted four or five action research projects.

From these findings, it is obvious that action research is not a professional developmental strategy that is practiced by the instructors all the time or on a regular

basis. When the interviewees were asked about the reasons for not conducting action research more often, they mentioned different reasons. The following excerpts taken from the interviews may illustrate the reasons for not conducting action research more often.

T2 explained the reason for not having conducted action research after her initial implementation of action research as follows.

At that time...while I was conducting action research, I did not have a Master's degree. I believe that people understand the concept 'research' better after they have had their Master degrees... Since I had a BA degree in Literature, not in ELT, we did not do anything about research. Because I was not informed about action research in BA education, it was new to me. I have just received my MA degree and I only realized how to conduct research during MA education or after that... (T2)

Considering what T2 said about the reasons for her not continuing to conduct action research projects, it is possible to say that being familiar with the concept of research and knowing how to conduct research is important, since the lack of research skills may discourage teachers from initiating action research projects.

As stated previously, T4 and T6 conducted action research since they were required to do so in order to be permanent staff. Both of them reported having conducted two action research projects because it was mandatory and they have not conducted action research since then.

I could not find time for it. I have also administrative roles here. I also have to study at my office after lessons. But if I have time and if there is a problem in the class, I can conduct action research. I can do things like giving questionnaires, interview questions because these processes were really useful. Actually, if there is a problem in the class, I can conduct action research, not considering lack of time an excuse. (T4)

There was not an obligation. I wasn't asked to and actually I would not want it, either. Actually, it is not so much related to its being an obligation. If I felt that it was beneficial, I would conduct action research. (T6)

It is evident from the above quoted excerpt that T6 does not think that action research is beneficial.

As can be seen above, teachers mentioned different reasons for not conducting action research more often. It is clear that being familiar with the concept of research and having the necessary research skills to conduct action research are important factors affecting teachers' decision to implement action research. It is also important that teachers see the effectiveness of their action research studies to initiate action research projects.

Table 6 - The number of times participants have conducted action research

Partici-pants	The number of action research implementations	Educational Background	Motives for conducting action research
T1	One	PhD	as a course requirement of an MA program AND personal interest in academic studies
T2	One	MA	at the request of the administration
T3	Two	MA	to deal with classroom-related issues
T4	Two	BA	at the request of the administration
T5	Two	MA	as a course requirement of an MA program AND to deal with classroom-related issues
T6	Two	BA	at the request of the administration
T7	Two	BA	as a course requirement of an MA program AND to deal with classroom-related issues
T8	Four or five	MA	as a course requirement of an MA program AND to deal with classroom-related issues

Q6 Would you say that conducting action research has had any influence on you or has changed you as a teacher?

All of the participants except one (T6) stated that the experience of conducting action research contributed to their classroom practice and professional development in some ways. They also mentioned that the experience increased their self-confidence as teachers and improved their students' success.

Classroom practice

Tackling Classroom Related Issues

In terms of classroom practice, T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T7 and T8 stated that the action research experience proved to be beneficial since it enabled them to solve the problems that they faced in their own classrooms. The following extracts taken from the interviews may shed light on the issue:

In terms of classroom practice, there is something you want to improve in your own classroom... so, you ask the question... you search for an answer to your question... you find the answer by working with the students who will be affected by the answer in the end... so, you see the results of your research immediately in your own classroom. (T1)

I find action research meaningful because it is directly related to solving the problems specific to the lessons. So, as a teacher, you got motivated to solve it...How can I do this?... How can I help the students?... and you enter the class and get feedback directly from your students. And the students give you very good feedback...and it also affects the students' success. In my context, action research is the most meaningful research. (T7)

In fact, it is possible to say that every teacher is an action researcher or he/she has to be an action researcher. Because you have to ask questions all the time... you have to question your teaching methods. Seeing the results of this, that is defining a problem and adopting an approach to solve the problem and seeing if the approach you adopted works or not provides you feedback in terms of your classroom practice. It enables you to reconsider things. (T3)

The above quoted excerpts indicate that action research experience is beneficial since it helps teachers to enhance their classroom practice. As the interviewees reported, by conducting action research, they learnt how to solve classroom related problems in a systematic way in their own classrooms.

Self-confidence in Tackling Classroom Related Issues

All participants but T6 reported that having conducted action research increased their self-confidence since they learnt how to deal with the classroom related problems.

...There is a problem in the classroom...and you define this problem and try to solve it. And seeing that your solution works is very satisfying. I can say that it increased my self-confidence since it is really good and satisfying to see that you can change something that goes wrong or does not serve its purpose in your institution. (T5)

Now, I know what I can do when I encounter a problem in class and what I can do to solve it. (T4)

As can clearly be seen from these excerpts, these teachers benefited from conducting action research projects since it gave them the opportunity to deal with classroom related issues and solve problems by conducting systematic research. This, in turn, led to an increase in their self-confidence to tackle the problems as teachers in their own classrooms.

Effective Teaching Methods and Techniques

Another important point made by the teachers about the benefits that the action research experience brought to their classroom practice was that they learnt some effective teaching methods and techniques which affected their students' success positively and which they believe they can use in their future classes.

First of all, I have to say that while conducting action research you discover the problem and you realized that you can handle the problems in your subsequent classes more easily. Especially, in the action research project

that was about vocabulary teaching, I observed that the students learnt the vocabulary better by watching videos. So, from time to time, before I start reading classes, I use videos. In that way, I can activate the vocabulary that the students will encounter in the reading texts...and I believe that when the motivation increases, the success rate of the class increases... I even filed these videos to use them in the following year and shared these files with my colleagues who taught English in the same level... they really liked them! (T5)

I think I liked the second action research project which was about discovery grammar teaching more. The students were also more interested in it because they were fed up with the same method of grammar teaching. This increased the students' motivation and affected my motivation, too... Discovery teaching is a good technique and I still use it in my lessons. I have been using this technique unconsciously, not being aware of it very much... I liked it very much because it enhanced the students' curiosity and attracted their attention. When the students get motivated, the teacher also gets motivated, too ...It enhanced my classroom practice in that way. (T4)

...The feedback I received from the students was very positive. There were students criticizing the worksheets; however, all of them stated that these worksheets provide them with guidance and they affected their class participation positively. In terms of questions in the worksheets, they liked some of the questions, criticized some others... but they liked the content of the worksheets in general. (T1)

Especially, the action research project that was about teachers' questioning behaviors contributed to my classroom practice a lot. I still listen to myself ... what I am doing...because there is the third eye...This affected the students' participation in the lesson... and I saw that I could teach the lesson more successfully... (T8)

However, another teacher has a different point of view about the action research experience in terms of its effectiveness in improving classroom practice.

I do not think that it improved my teaching practice. I had already been using these techniques. It was not necessary. I had already known what the students needed from three years of teaching experience... The only thing I learned was how action research report is written, how research questions are formulated, how questionnaires are prepared and conducted. It may be useful in terms of improving academic skills but it did not add something new to my teaching practice... As teachers, we already write everything in our minds and I believe that this is one of our most important characteristics. (T6)

It is evident that the action research experience of T6 did not prove to be meaningful for her for many reasons. However, for the majority of the teachers, the action research experience was beneficial in that they learnt some teaching methods and techniques which helped their students to learn better. This, in turn, raised both the teachers' and the students' motivation. In addition, as the teachers stated, they still use these teaching techniques and methods in their classes, which shows the effectiveness of the action research experience on classroom practice.

Professional development

Academic Research Skills

All the interviewees mentioned that having conducted action research improved their academic research skills. The following extracts taken from the interviews may illustrate what they think about the issue.

... Conducting action research is also very good in terms of professional development since you do a literature survey on the subject you investigate...you read the studies and see what people have done on the subject... you try to implement these in your class... you learn the research design and improve methods of data collection and data analysis. In that sense, the experience enhanced my professional development. (T3)

...Writing a report was an important study... it improves your writing skills. Doing research, for instance, doing a literature survey was something that I did not do in my BA education, so this was an important point for me. Looking at the studies and seeing what people have done in the field and analyzing these studies critically was also important for me... (T2)

It is clear that action research involvement had positive effects on teachers' professional learning since they reported having learnt how to conduct research.

More Reflective about Teaching Practice

Apart from improving their academic skills, some of the interviewees (T1, T2, T4, and T8) mentioned that the action research experience made them more reflective teachers.

For instance, the problem may seem simple; however, I realized the importance of considering the problem in a systematic way and making it better step by step. It is not like saying that I enter the class and I can try to change it anyway... and if it does not change, then it does not change... but if I could change it, then it is fine... You realize that it is not that simple. Tackling the problem by breaking it down to pieces and reconsidering what you have done in every step enables you to grasp the issue better. (T2)

T8 also stated that the action research experience made her more aware and reflective as a teacher. She stated that she always observes herself and considers what her students say. Similarly, T1 stated that he revises his materials according to the feedback he receives from his students and reconsiders what he needs to do all the time.

T4 also stated that action research made her question the materials she brings to the class.

I actually like developing materials. It helped me in that way. Before, I used to bring materials to the class; but did not think much about it. But, now, I learned how to put them in a sequence. (T4)

As the above excerpts display, it is evident that action research experience led teachers to question their classroom instruction and allowed them to be more reflective about their teaching practice.

Considering all excerpts taken from interviews, it is possible to say that for the majority of the interviewees the action research experience proved to be beneficial in terms of improving their classroom practice and enhancing their professional development.

Table 7 - The long-term effects of action research on participants' classroom practice and professional development

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
Tackling classroom related issues	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓
Self confidence in tackling classroom related issues	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓
Effective teaching methods and techniques	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓
Academic research skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
More reflective about teaching practice	✓	✓	×	✓	×	×	×	✓

Q10 Do you think that you will go on conducting action research projects in the future? Why or why not?'

Although the majority of the interviewees reported that the action research experience enhanced their classroom practice and professional development in certain ways, not all of them said that they would go on conducting action research in the future.

T1, T3 and T7 reported that they would certainly go on conducting action research. The following extracts taken from the interviews may illustrate what they think about the issue.

I will certainly conduct action research because I got some results...if I had not got any results or if it had turned out something completely different than what I had expected then I would think that the problem had stemmed from me... maybe I could not construct the study well or I could not collect the data in a proper way or I could not evaluate the results... so, I would think I should do some other things...

For instance, I am teaching 400 (technical writing) now, next term I will teach 401, the next term 400 again. Considering the problems now, I can make a preparation for the course next term... the research design should be ready then, the process should be clear in your mind so that you can collect data...there should be a clear research plan... (T1)

When asked if he would conduct action research in the future, T3 reported that he certainly would.

Because of my PhD study, I have not been able to conduct action research recently. But, I continue asking questions in every stage of teaching such as why this happens, why it does not work, how it could work better... as long as you ask these kind of questions, you will need to conduct action research...and because it raises awareness, it should be conducted in a team-work design...because in some of the conferences I attended, I saw that there were collaborative groups working in that way...After I have completed my PhD, and as soon as I continue teaching, I will think of conducting action research studies and I believe that people should conduct action research studies. (T3)

As stated previously, being familiar with the concept of research may be a motivating factor in teachers' decision to be involved in research-related studies. Since T1, T3 and T7 have Masters' degrees and they are interested in academic studies, they can said to be more willing to conduct action research.

It is also evident that having time and energy to conduct action research is important. The following lines may illustrate how this factor may affect teachers' initiating action research projects:

Yes, I may think of conducting action research... I have not conducted action research in a formal way since the last time I conducted it, but I have been thinking of conducting it informally. I have not conducted action research for 5-6 years, but I would want to conduct action research in the future...when I have the time and energy...because people need to see themselves in the mirror... (T8)

Although T8 believes in the effectiveness of conducting action research, it should also be noted that she would consider conducting action research when she had time and energy to do it. From what she said, having time and energy can be considered one of the important factors affecting teachers' subsequent decisions to conduct action research.

T2 and T5 also stated that they may conduct action research in the future.

I do not think of conducting action research now, but if I realize that I cannot solve a problem in my usual practice, I may conduct action research. That is, I may consider conducting action research when there is a problem, and I cannot solve it today, tomorrow or in a certain period of time by my usual manner... there should be a big problem on which I needed to consider and think of what would be better to solve it. (T2)

Similarly, T5 stated that she may conduct action research if she encounters a problem in the class.

I may conduct action research; it is very tiring, though. If there is a problem and I realize it, then why not?... Because seeing that the results of the study changed something motivated me very much at that time. It was very nice to see that it worked. (T5)

When asked if she would conduct action research in the future, T4 hesitated to say that she would at first.

Writing a report is so boring. It is also very stressful when you have to complete something in a certain amount of time. But, if I did not have to write reports and it was not mandatory, I would want to conduct action research. Because, in that way, you can improve yourself and the lessons become more exciting... if I have time and if there is a problem in the class, I can conduct action research. (T4)

It can be said that from the viewpoints of these teachers, action research is a strategy teachers may adopt when they face problems in their classes. Since action research is a professional development strategy which enables teachers to deal with classroom related issues and they believe in its effectiveness in that sense, these teachers consider conducting action research when they encounter a problem in their classroom practices.

T6 was the only interviewee who said that she definitely would not conduct action research in the future. When asked for reasons, she said:

I think it is a burden. It is unnecessary. I don't think it's effective. Instead of giving so much time on conducting action research, teachers should invest more time on exercises and materials, and the students can learn better. I

would prefer having done action research at the very beginning of my teaching profession. I think experienced teachers do not have to conduct action research. It does not teach you anything in terms of teaching practice. It improves your academic skills; but, it does not add to your teaching practice. The things done in the action research process are the things teachers already do in their practice. There is no need to prepare a written report for this. It's teachers' duty to observe the things that students have difficulty in doing. The time given for conducting action research can be used more effectively. (T6)

As can be seen above, teachers put forth different reasons for continuing to conduct action research in the future. For some of the teachers, action research is valuable because it works in solving classroom related problems and enhancing classroom practice. For some others, action research can be conducted when teachers encounter a problem in their classes. Having time and energy to conduct action research is another factor to be considered. Finally, for one teacher (T6), it is certain that she will not conduct action research in the future because she believes it is an ineffective and time-consuming strategy. However, there can be many reasons for this teacher's negative attitude towards conducting action research. First of all, the fact that she conducted action research because it was mandatory may have caused her negative feelings about her action research experience. However, it should also be noted that this teacher does not have ELT background and does not seem to consider teaching as an important profession. Moreover, she does not believe in the importance of teacher education and teachers' professional development since she maintains that teachers may learn things in a lesson hour and they do not need to take up professional developmental practices. Another important thing to be noted about this teacher is that although she is doing her MA in ELT, she is leaving the profession of teaching. Considering all of this, the reasons for her negative feelings about conducting action research may become clearer.

Table 8 - Participants' willingness to conduct action research in the future

Participants	Definitely yes	Willing to	Certainly no	Educational background
T1	✓			PhD
T2		✓		MA
T3	✓			MA
T4		✓		BA
T5		✓		MA
T6			✓	BA
T7	✓			BA
T8		✓		MA

The data taken from the interviews reveals that action research proved to be a useful experience in terms of developing teachers' professional development and classroom practice for all of the interviewees, except one (T6). However, it is also evident that action research is not practiced frequently by the teachers. Although the interviewees pointed out the benefits of conducting action research, they also reported that they did not conduct action research so often. Most of the teachers reported that they had conducted action research only once or twice. However, they reported that having conducted action research improved their teaching practice and increased their confidence in dealing with the classroom related issues. Moreover, they reported that they still use the teaching strategies from their action research projects. They also reported having observed their students' success, especially in the subject they conducted action research in. In the professional sense, the action research experience led them to improve academic research skills and update their knowledge of the profession. They also reported having become more reflective and critical about their teaching practice.

Teachers' beliefs about the effective ways of implementing action research

In order to explore the teachers' beliefs about the effective ways of conducting action research, they were asked three questions. The questions were 'Q7 In your experience what are the challenges of conducting action research?', 'Q8 What kind of support structures or information do you think teachers need as they conduct action research?', 'Q9 What do you think is the most effective way of conducting action research?'

Q7 In your experience what are the challenges of conducting action research?

The analysis of the interview data revealed four major challenges that teachers face in the process of conducting action research, including lack of research skills, heavy workload and lack of time thereof, students' lack of interest in class activities, and physical constraints of the schools. The following quotes taken from the interviews may shed light on the challenges of conducting action research from the viewpoint of the teachers.

Lack of research skills

Four of the interviewees (T1, T2, T3, and T4) mentioned the lack of academic research skills as one of the biggest challenges that teachers may face in the process of conducting action research. Although T1 did not have such difficulty, he pointed out that teachers may face that difficulty in the process of conducting action research.

Lack of research skills is one of the major difficulties that teachers have. It can be action research or another thing... the person who will conduct research should certainly have a good knowledge of research. (T1)

T3 also mentioned the challenges that teachers may face at each stage of conducting action research.

There are so many challenges... First of all, you should ask the right question... or you may have asked the right question, but you should also design the right action plan. Collecting data, analyzing the data, and preparing a written report are the most important steps of conducting action research and you have to take the right steps. There are challenges...the challenges of collecting and analyzing data... (T3)

Lack of time and heavy workload

Some of the interviewees (T2, T4, T6, T7 and T8) mentioned the lack of time as one of the challenges of conducting action research since they all had heavy workloads in the programs in which they taught.

Getting prepared for the lessons already takes a lot of time. In addition to this, getting prepared for action research in fact lowered my performance in class. For instance, you need extra time to conduct the questionnaire but, no extra time is given for this. In a lesson that lasts for 45 minutes, you try to implement the action research as well. In order to conduct action research, I taught the lessons fast...there was a lack of time and our schedule was very busy. (T6)

Similarly, T2, T4, T7 and T8 stated that it is not possible for every teacher to spare time for action research without being lost in the daily workload since it takes a lot of time.

Students' lack of interest in class activities

Some of the teachers reported having difficulties with the students since they were not very willing to participate in the activities. The following extracts from the interviews with T1 and T4 may illustrate the challenges they had in terms of students.

In the process of collecting data, it was very difficult to collect the students' journals. I wanted the students to bring their journals but sometimes they did not bring them, they forgot... The students did not give so much importance to it since it was not their own studies. (T1)

Students may also cause difficulties. For instance, I gave them a group assignment which was a part of the action research. But, only one group did their homework. I also had difficulties stemming from students' laziness in

implementing the class activities. I especially had all these difficulties in my first action research related to speaking anxiety. (T4)

Physical constraints of schools

T6 reported having difficulties in the process of conducting action research because of the physical constraints of the school where she taught.

There were also physical constraints. Getting photocopies was problematic. There was no photocopy machine and place to get print out. And you have to pay for this. (T6)

Similarly, T1 reported having difficulties in terms of video recording the lessons.

You see the necessities in the process of conducting action research. One of them was... I was having the class videotaped, but when I listened to the recording, there was a strange echo. Then, I called the advertising department of the school and they set up a mechanism there. The quality of the recording was better there. Each of us has a microphone. You need someone who knows how to do things well, not an ordinary person. (T1)

The excerpts above taken from the interviews demonstrate that lack of research skills is one of the biggest challenges that teachers encounter in their action research involvement. It is clear that without sufficient knowledge of research skills, it is very difficult to follow the stages of action research, which involves research skills, such as literature survey, data collection, and data analysis, and academic skills, such as writing reports. The heavy workload was another challenge mentioned by the teachers. As most of the teachers stated, because of their heavy workload, it is difficult to spare time for conducting action research. Another important challenge that some of the teachers encountered in the process of conducting action research was the students' lack of interest in activities, which made it difficult for the teachers to collect data. Lastly, physical constraints of the schools were another difficulty that two teachers reported having in the process of conducting action research.

Table 9 - The challenges of conducting action research

Partici- pants	Lack of research skills	Lack of time and heavy workload	Students' lack of interest	Physical constraints of schools	Educational background	Motives
T1	✓		✓	✓	Phd	3
T2	✓	✓			MA	1
T3	✓				MA	2
T4	✓	✓	✓		BA	1
T5					MA	3
T6		✓		✓	BA	1
T7		✓			BA	3
T8		✓			MA	3

*1 = External motives, 2 = Internal motives, 3 = Both

Q8 What kind of support structures or information do you think teachers need as they conduct action research?

The majority of the teachers (T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, and T8) stated that the teachers should be provided with theoretical knowledge about the stages of conducting action research. T2, T4, T5, T8 also added that the teachers should get guidance from a more experienced teacher educator or coordinator in the process of conducting action research. The following extracts taken from the interviews with the teachers may illustrate what they think about the issue.

Teachers should know the stages of conducting research, so they need to get informed about the stages of conducting action research from a teacher-educator. They may need help in formulating the research question... it is difficult in terms of knowing how to formulate the research question so that one can adopt the right method to answer the question. Apart from these, the data analysis of action research is rather simple, that is it does not require statistics. Because the data is not that large quantity. (T2)

T2 added that teachers may need the help of a mentor in terms of finding the right resources while doing a literature survey.

For instance, there may be certain names in the subject that you are investigating and you do not know these names. But, a mentor may help you by telling you to look at the studies of these people. (T2)

T3 also maintained that teachers need theoretical knowledge in order to conduct action research.

Teachers need theoretical knowledge and support. Most teachers hear action research and listen to conferences where the stages of action research are told. But, when it is time to conduct action research, they may not know how to plan and conduct the stages of action research. They may need help in these stages... that is, how to define a problem, how to write the research question, and how to collect data. They definitely need support... (T3)

T3 also added that there should be an action research working group that conducts action research in his institution or there should be teacher educators who can provide the teachers with the support and knowledge they need while conducting action research.

Likewise, T5 stated that there should be the guidance of an outsider who is knowledgeable about the issue.

There should certainly be someone who can guide the teacher who wants to conduct action research. The person should be someone who has conducted action research before or someone who has a lot of knowledge about the issue. Because it is possible that the teacher can get stuck in some of the stages of conducting action research. It is very good to have someone to ask in these stages. (T5)

T6 also maintained that teachers need to get informed about action research. She also pointed out that teachers especially need information in the stage of doing a literature survey.

Likewise, T8 highlighted the importance of teachers getting informed about the stages of conducting action research and getting the guidance of someone who is experienced in conducting action research.

The teacher should know how to start conducting action research, the research methods, sustaining objectivity and triangulation... If the person has not conducted action research before, s/he may need an experienced advisor who can guide him/her in every stage of conducting action research. (T8)

It is clear that becoming informed about the stages of conducting action research and getting the support and guidance of someone who is more experienced and knowledgeable about the issue is crucial in the process of conducting action research.

In addition, most of the teachers (T2, T5, T7, and T8) also highlighted the importance of getting the support of their colleagues. T2 and T7 highlighted the importance of getting the help of colleagues in terms of class observation. T8 pointed out that it is important to cooperate with a partner to look at your study and give feedback about it.

Apart from getting the support and guidance from an expert and colleagues, the teachers also mentioned the importance of the school context in encouraging teachers' research engagement, in terms of both providing physical support and maintaining a positive attitude towards research. The following extracts taken from the interviews with T2, T7, and T8 may highlight the importance of school context in motivating teachers to conduct action research.

You should also see your colleagues' attitudes... in my institution, people share the staff rooms and you are influenced by your colleagues having conducted it. So, when people see that you are successful, you are affected positively. But, if you never hear something like this, and if the administration does not motivate you to do it, then this enthusiasm gets lost in the daily routine of the work. (T1)

The administration usually supports these kinds of studies. There is a teacher-educator unit in our institution. This unit gives us support in every way... and there is also book and article support...the general attitude in the school is very positive... (T2)

T8 also stated that her institution was very supportive in terms of encouraging research.

There are enough resources in my institution... the library is very rich. If you want, you can find online theses... or if you want, you can find a partner on the internet. Also, the administration is very supportive...for example; if you need a camera, they can afford it... they won't make you find it by yourself... (T8)

Considering the above quoted excerpts, it is possible to say that in a school context where teachers are provided with physical support and encouraged by both their administration and colleagues to do research, it may be more possible for them to conduct action research. By drawing on that data, it is also possible to say the type of school where action research is conducted does not seem to have an important effect on teachers' action research involvement since teachers who work at both state and private universities reported having the support of their administrations in the process of conducting action research.

With regard to the support structures that the teachers need to have in the process of conducting action research, some of the teachers (T6 and T7) maintained that their schedules could be arranged accordingly so that they can spare time for doing research. However, as the head of the Engineering department, T1 puts forth a different perspective about the time issue. The following extract may illustrate the issue from the viewpoint of someone from the administration.

If a teacher comes to me and tells me that s/he will conduct action research in his/her class and asks me if I can support her, first I will ask what kind of support s/he wants. If s/he says that s/he needs technical equipment, that's fine. But, if s/he asks for time, I do not have it... And it would be silly. In terms of action research, the administration can only provide equipment and get the necessary consents for doing research. Apart from these, the administration cannot do anything. Teachers can read a book about action research at least in the evening time or do online library search... In that sense, the administration is an irrelevant unit. (T1)

Lastly, T2 made another point by saying that teachers can be supported by being given the opportunity to share their results with others.

Teachers can be given the opportunity to present their studies... for example, in a journal if the study is documented... in that way, it may become a more formal paper. (T2)

As the above quoted excerpts indicate, in order to overcome the challenges of conducting action research, teachers need to get the help and guidance of an expert who can provide them with the theoretical knowledge about the stages of action research and also guidance in the process of conducting action research. In addition, it is also evident that teachers need to get the help of their colleagues in terms of both classroom observation and evaluating and getting feedback about their studies. School context also appears to be an important factor since a positive atmosphere where research is encouraged by both colleagues and administration may positively affect teachers' research engagement. It is also highlighted that schools should provide the teachers with the physical support they need in conducting action research. Since the lack of time is mentioned as one of the obstacles that affects teachers' research engagement, it is not surprising that teachers also mentioned that their schedules should be arranged in a way that they can invest time for research. Providing the teachers with the opportunity to present their results is also noted as important since it may be encouraging for teachers to see that their studies are valued by others.

Q9 What do you think is the most effective way of conducting action research?

When asked what the most effective ways of conducting action research are, the majority of the interviewees (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, and T8) highlighted the importance of having an outsider such as a mentor, facilitator or an expert to provide

the teachers with the guidance necessary in the process of conducting action research. Most of the interviewees stated that action research should be conducted with the help of an expert or facilitator, since it is inevitable that teachers may need the support and guidance in one or other stages of conducting action research.

T3, T4, T7 and T8 also stated that working in cooperation with colleagues to observe each other and share the results of their studies can be beneficial in conducting action research effectively.

It would be better if my colleagues observed me and in turn I also observed them. It's always very useful when someone finds your mistake there and gives you guidance. But, in my case, each teacher had a different topic to search, maybe it would not work well in that way. It would be better if we all had the same topic to investigate and came together to discuss what we had found or how we could improve it and observed our lessons. (T4)

If action research is conducted because there is a need to conduct it, since it is very meaningful, it can be conducted in a perfect way. And, when everyone comes together on a regular basis to share the results, it is more beneficial because you can gain a new perspective. (T7)

As can be seen above, the teachers noted that it may be helpful to involve their colleagues in the process of conducting action research. In that sense, it is clear that having colleagues as critical friends to observe you and evaluate and give feedback about your study is crucial.

In addition, T2 also mentioned that teachers should have the motivation and a reason to conduct action research.

After all, there is the issue of motivation. Every teacher in my institution can conduct action research, but they need to have motivation or they need to see a need to conduct action research. How can they be motivated? Maybe, what other teachers have done should be presented. And, the studies should be published. Of course, not every teacher can write something well enough to be published in a journal, but at least these studies can be published in school magazines. And, people may like this. (T2)

As stated previously, getting a reward for conducting action research is a motivating factor for teachers. As T2 suggested, this reward can be getting their studies published in a journal.

T5 puts forth a different viewpoint about conducting action research effectively. She maintained that action research can be conducted effectively when it is done schoolwide rather than individually. As she stated, if action research is conducted schoolwide, it may be effective in a wider area and give an idea about the whole school rather than a single class. In addition to this, she suggested that teachers should work with small groups so that the research can be conducted more effectively.

Because the group was a crowded group, I may not have been very effective. I would have been more effective if I conducted action research in one or two classes. Because I worked with three classes, it was really difficult. Teachers should work with groups the number of which can be manageable.
(T5)

T6 puts forth an interesting suggestion to conduct action research effectively. She maintained that action research can be conducted effectively when the teacher has an extra class for conducting action research, that is, a class where she does not have to teach the regular class and follow the syllabus.

When all the interview data is considered, it becomes evident that lack of research skills, lack of time and heavy workload, the students' lack of interest in class activities and physical constraints of the schools were among the challenges that teachers reported having encountered in the process of conducting action research. The teachers gave similar answers about what is needed to conduct action research and what is the best way to conduct action research. The majority of the teachers mentioned having the guidance of a mentor and the support of their

colleagues as one of the most important support structures teachers may need in the process of conducting action research. They also highlighted that action research can be conducted most effectively in this way. They also maintained that teachers should be given the opportunity to present and share the results of their studies since it may be motivating for them to initiate action research projects. A supportive school context in terms of encouraging teachers' research engagement and also providing them with the physical support is mentioned as another support structure they need in the process of conducting action research. Finally, conducting schoolwide action research was another suggestion to conduct action research effectively since it is believed to be effective in a large number of classes.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of the analysis of data obtained from interviews. After conducting qualitative data analysis procedures, it was found that the teachers came to know about action research in different ways by becoming informed about it in MA, and in-service training programs or in formal meetings held in their institutions and they mentioned both internal and external motives for initiating their action research projects. As for the types of action research, the majority of the interviewees reported having conducted action research on an individual basis. None of the interviewees reported having conducted schoolwide action research and only one of them reported having conducted collaborative action research. Additionally, all the interviewees followed a systematic process while conducting action research; however, not all of them reported having shared the results of their studies.

The data taken from the interviews reveals that although action research is not practiced frequently by the teachers, it proved to be a beneficial experience in terms of developing teachers' professional development and classroom practice for most of the interviewees in the long run.

When all the interview data are considered, it becomes evident that having the guidance of a mentor and the support of colleagues are one of the most important support structures teachers may need in the process of conducting action research. A supportive school context in terms of encouraging teachers' research engagement and also providing them with the physical support is mentioned as another support structure they need in the process of conducting action research. Finally, conducting schoolwide action research was another suggestion to conduct action research effectively since it is believed to be effective in a large number of classes.

The next chapter will discuss the findings of this study in the light of the previous studies in the relevant literature. It will also discuss the pedagogical implications, make suggestions for further research, and explain the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how action research is conducted by EFL instructors at different universities in Turkey and the reported long-term effects of conducting action research on teachers' classroom practice and professional development practices. The study also aimed to explore teachers' beliefs about the effective ways of implementing action research.

This study was carried out with the participation of eight instructors who work at various departments of state and private universities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers who had done action research before. The interviews were conducted in Turkish –the native language of the participants- and tape recorded. The tape-recordings of the interviews were first transcribed, and the transcripts were analyzed qualitatively in order to explore how action research is conducted by teachers, the long-term effects of conducting action research on teachers' instructional practices and professional development, and their beliefs about the effective ways of implementing action research.

This chapter discusses the findings of the study, compares them to previous studies in the literature, and suggests institutional implications. Following that, the limitations of the study are explained and suggestions for further research are offered. The chapter ends with the presentation of overall conclusion drawn from the findings.

Discussion of the Findings

How action research is conducted by EFL instructors

In order to explore how action research is conducted by teachers, four questions were asked to the participants. The participants were asked about how they came to know about action research, the reasons for initiating action research projects, the types of action research they had conducted, and the process they went through while conducting action research.

The data obtained from the interviews revealed teachers' different ways of getting acquainted with the concept of research. It was found that teachers came to know about action research in MA and in-service training programs or in formal meetings held in their institutions. This suggests that action research is not a concept that teachers come to know about during their BA education. It is clear from the findings that in order for teachers who have only BA degrees to conduct action research, they need to become informed about the concept of action research and how to conduct it in professional development conferences, in-service training programs or seminars held in or outside their institutions.

The analysis of data also revealed that teachers had both personal and external motives for initiating action research projects. Variation in the reasons for initiating action research may stem from teachers' own varied backgrounds since it is revealed in the data that the teachers who did not have MA or PhD degrees initiated their action research projects for external motives, that is, at the request of the administration in their schools. However, the teachers who were doing or had completed advanced degrees can be said to have initiated their action research projects partly because of their personal motives for doing research. Although these

teachers were also expecting an external reward for conducting action research, such as passing a course in an MA program or getting their studies published, they can also be said to have conducted their action research projects at least partly because of their personal motives, since they were interested in these kinds of academic research studies or they were seeking ways to improve their classroom practice.

According to the data obtained from the interviews, the most common type of action research that the teachers had conducted turned out to be individual action research. Only one of the participants reported having conducted collaborative action research and none of the participants reported having conducted schoolwide action research. Although collaborative action research is considered more beneficial than the other types (Burns, 1999; Dana & Yendol- Hoppey, 2009), it is surprising to see that only one of the participants reported having conducted action research in this way. This participant reported that she and her colleagues intended to conduct more collaborative action research projects; however, they could not because they were too busy to share their studies with each other. In that sense, teachers' lack of time may be considered one of the reasons for not having conducted collaborative action research.

Another reason for not conducting collaborative action research might be that institutions may not have a research culture that encourages teachers to conduct collaborative action research. As stated in the data analysis chapter, the participants who had conducted action research for external factors did so because they were novice teachers and their administrations asked them to conduct action research to evaluate them on their performance. The fact that the institutions only required the teachers to conduct individual action research rather than collaborative action

research may indicate that collaboration is not a common feature of the school culture in these institutions.

In addition, when participants were asked if they had conducted collaborative action research, most of them reported having the support of their trainers, lecturers or colleagues in the process of conducting action research. This suggests that the teachers had different understandings of the term 'collaborative action research'. It is clear that the teachers perceive the concept of 'collaborative action research' as getting help from outsiders. However, collaborative action research is defined as the kind of research done in cooperation with colleagues, with students, or with university faculty, or with parents or a combination of partners, and it requires cooperation and collaboration among these people in every stage of conducting action research (Pine, 2009).

The above mentioned reasons for not conducting collaborative action research may also be valid for explaining why schoolwide action research has not been conducted. School administrations may not encourage teachers to conduct schoolwide action research for many reasons. First of all, it is probable that the school administrations may not be familiar with the concept of schoolwide action research. Although they know the concept, they may not implement it in their institutions since they may consider the process too demanding. In their studies, Allen and Calhoun (2009) investigated the challenges of conducting schoolwide action research in two schools that conducted such research for six years. It was found that conducting schoolwide action research posed many difficulties since not all the teachers in the institution were willing to participate. However, it was also noted that the teachers in the school that got the support of the administration in

terms of providing technical support and encouragement benefited from conducting schoolwide action research more than the teachers in the school that did not get this kind of support. It is clear from these findings that not only teachers' willingness, but also the support of the administrations is crucial for schoolwide action research to prove beneficial.

The analysis of data also indicates that all teachers followed a systematic process while conducting action research. The teachers reported having followed the following stages: a) developing a question, b) formulating a research plan, c) systematically collecting data, d) analyzing the data, e) recording the project in writing, f) evaluating the action research project, and g) sharing the study with others (Bailey, et al., 2001; Freeman, 1998; Hopkins, 2002; Pine, 2009; Richards & Farrel, 2005). Apart from following these steps, Hinchey (2008) suggests that keeping a diary in the process of conducting action research may be beneficial since it may help teachers to observe their actions throughout the process. Although keeping a diary is viewed as a beneficial strategy in the literature, only one of the teachers reported having kept a diary and one of them reported having taken notes of her observations in the process of conducting action research; they both reported that they benefited a great deal from keeping diaries. It should also be noted that although all of the teachers wrote reports of their action research projects, not all of them reported having shared the results of their research with their colleagues. However, as Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009) suggest, in order for action research to bring a change to the profession and the school, it is essential that teacher researchers share their work with their colleagues. The interview data revealed that the teachers who had initiated their action research projects for external reasons wrote their reports to

the administration of their schools since it was mandatory, and they did not share the results of their studies with their colleagues. This may stem from the fact that their administrations required them to do action research for the sake of evaluating their performance and not for the sake of the betterment of the school. This may reveal the need for administrations to give teachers the opportunity to present the results of their studies in formal meetings held in their institutions so that the results of the study can be shared with a wider audience; in this way, the action research experience may prove to be beneficial for the other teachers in the institution as well.

The reported long-term effects of conducting action research on teachers' classroom practice and professional development practices

In order to investigate the long-term effects of conducting action research on teachers' classroom practice and professional development, they were asked three questions. The teachers were asked how often they had conducted action research, whether action research had had any influence on them or had changed them as a teacher, and if they considered continuing to conduct action research in the future.

It is clear from the findings that the teachers have not conducted action research frequently. Most of the teachers reported having conducted action research only once or twice. One of the primary reasons cited for not having conducted action research more often was lack of research skills and this finding corresponds to those in the previous literature. Atay (2008) investigated teachers' experiences and perspectives of action research through an INSET program. The results of the study indicated that although the teachers considered research important, they felt insecure with the concept because of their lack of research skills. In that sense, lack of

research skills can be considered one of the most important impediments to teachers' action research involvement.

Borg's (2009) study, in which he investigated teachers' perceptions of research and how they read and do research, may shed light on teachers' reasons for not conducting research more often. The findings of the study revealed that teachers' conceptions of research, as a study which involves large samples, statistical data analysis, and academic output, might be one of the factors that discourage teachers from being involved in a research activity. Another factor that may discourage teachers was teachers' conceptions of research as formal written publication. The findings of the study also revealed that teachers value research that is practical and the results of which can be applied in their classroom practice. This suggests that making teachers aware of the concept of action research might be useful for engaging them in research activities since action research is conducted in teachers' own classrooms primarily to deal with classroom related issues and it brings about results that are practical for teachers. The findings of a similar study done by Beycioglu, Ozer, and Ugurlu (2010) also revealed that teachers consider educational research and its findings important and want to be involved in the research process.

Apart from lack of research skills, one teacher mentioned her belief about the ineffectiveness of action research as a reason for not having conducted action research since the first implementation of her action research project. As she reported, having conducted action research did not bring any change into her classroom. She also added that the classroom time she spent on conducting action research could have been spent more effectively. Everton, Galton and Pell's (2002) study on teachers' conceptions of research suggests that teachers value research that

has implications for classroom practice and issues related to it. The fact that she did not have an MA degree while conducting action research may have caused her negative feelings about the action research experience since she did not have the necessary research skills to conduct it at that time. However, it should also be noted that this teacher had her BA degree in English Language and Translation. Moreover, she does not believe in the importance of teachers' professional development. The fact that she did not have her BA degree in ELT might be one of the reasons why she does not consider teachers' professional development important and the action research experience meaningful. The fact that she is leaving the profession may also indicate that she does not like the teaching profession that much.

The analysis of data also revealed that, although the teachers reported not having conducted action research so often, for most of them conducting action research proved to be a beneficial experience in terms of developing their classroom practice and professional development. Most of the teachers reported having benefited from conducting action research in terms of classroom practice since it enabled them to deal with classroom related issues and solve problems by conducting systematic classroom research. This, in turn, led to an increase in their self-confidence to tackle the problems as teachers in their own classrooms. Data from the literature support these findings. Atay (2008) investigated participating teachers' experiences and perspectives of action research through an INSET program carried out by the researcher herself. The results of the study indicated that although the teachers felt insecure because of the lack of research skills, the process of collecting data to solve the problems in their own classes resulted in teachers' positive perceptions towards research and an increase in their self-confidence to make

changes in their own classrooms. Similarly, the findings of Bradley-Levine, Smith, and Carr's (2009) study revealed that being involved in the process of conducting action research led to an increase in participating teachers' confidence and encouraged them to make meaningful changes in their own classrooms. In another study, Henson (2001) investigated the effect of engaging in an academic year-long teacher research project on teachers' self-efficacy. The study indicated that conducting action research can affect teacher efficacy positively since in the process of conducting action research, teachers deal with issues related to their own instructional practices and teaching. It is clear that through the process of implementing action research, teachers learn many things which may enhance their classroom practice. In addition, their acting on the problems they want to solve in their own classrooms and being successful in dealing with these problems may increase their self-confidence as teachers.

In terms of classroom practice, the teachers also reported having learnt some effective teaching methods and techniques which helped their students to learn better and increased both their and the students' motivation. The teachers also reported that they still use the teaching techniques and methods they learnt from their action research experiences, which may show evidence for the effectiveness of conducting action research on classroom practice in the long run. Sedier and Lemma's (2004) study supports this finding. In this study, the researchers investigated the effects of conducting action research on teachers' classroom practice and professional development in the long run. They worked with teachers who were conducting action research as a requirement of the course in the MA program they were attending. Most of the teachers reported that they still implement the teaching strategies that

they learnt during the process of conducting action research. Considering these, it is possible to say the action research experience may contribute to teachers' knowledge about effective teaching strategies, which may enhance their instructional practices in the long run.

The data obtained from the interviews also revealed that conducting action research contributed to teachers' professional development. As Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009) state, action research differs from traditional professional development because in action research, teachers take active roles as inquirers in their own practice, which may ensure the possibility of change and professional growth. The analysis of data in the present study revealed that, in terms of professional development, the action research experience improved these teachers' academic research skills since they learnt how to formulate research questions, do a literature survey, collect and analyze data, and write reports. Additionally, the experience allowed them to be critical and more reflective about their teaching practice. This finding has roots in the literature. As Pine (2009) suggests, action research involvement provides teachers with the opportunity to be critical and reflective on their own practice, become more autonomous professionals, and enhance their expertise. There are also many studies that investigate the impact of teachers' engagement in action research projects on their professional learning. Brown and Macatangay (2002) found that in the process of conducting action research, teachers learnt to be critical about their classroom practice and this enhanced their decision-making skills. In Bradley-Levine, Smith, and Carr (2009) and Kember's (2002) studies, it was also found that teachers' action research engagement enabled them to be more reflective about their teaching practice and

enthusiastic about improving their classroom practice. Similarly, in Seider and Lemma's (2004) study, it was found that teachers' action research involvement allowed them to continue using some aspects of the action research process, such as reflecting on their classroom practice and using data to make instructional decisions. These findings, along with the findings of the present study, suggest that during the process of implementing action research teachers learnt to be more critical and reflective about their teaching practice, and that they continue to reflect on their practices after their implementation of action research.

It is also revealed that different factors may be at play in teachers' subsequent decisions to go on conducting action research. All of the teachers but one reported that they would conduct action research in the future since they believed in the effectiveness of action research in dealing with classroom related issues. However, it should be noted that the teachers who had advanced degrees appeared to be more certain that they would conduct action research than those who had only BA degrees. In that sense, it is possible to say that familiarity with the concept of research appears to be a motivating factor for these teachers with advanced degrees, as they seemed to be more willing to conduct more action research studies in the future. Some of the teachers maintained that action research can be conducted when teachers have a serious problem to tackle in their classes. This suggests that these teachers consider action research an effective strategy to use when dealing with classroom related problems. For some teachers, having time and energy is considered an important factor for their subsequent action research involvement. As stated previously, lack of time and the heavy workload can be considered one of the impediments to action research involvement.

It is interesting to see that all but one of the teachers with only BA degrees, who had conducted action research for external motives, stated that the action research experience proved to be useful and meaningful for them. Considering the benefits of conducting action research reported by the interviewees on their classroom practice and professional development, action research can be said to be an effective professional development strategy. It can also be considered effective in the long run, since, despite having conducted action research only once or twice, the teachers mentioned many of its benefits on their instructional practices and professional development. Drawing on these findings, it is possible to say that encouraging teachers to conduct action research on a regular basis or more frequently might bring much more fruitful results.

Teachers' beliefs about the effective ways of implementing action research

In order to explore the teachers' beliefs about the effective ways of conducting action research, they were asked about the challenges of conducting action research, the kind of support structures or information teachers may need for conducting action research, and their beliefs about the effective ways of conducting action research. According to the data obtained from the interviews, four major challenges of conducting action research were noted: lack of research skills, heavy workload and lack of time thereof, students' lack of interest in class activities, and physical constraints of the schools. The first two of these challenges are also described in the literature.

Lack of research skills appears to be the one of the biggest challenges in teachers' action research involvement. This suggests that for teachers who do not have sufficient knowledge of research skills, it is difficult to conduct action research,

which involves stages such as literature survey, data collection, data analysis and report writing. The literature supports this finding. In her study, Atay (2008) also found that lack of research skills was one of the important factors that make the action research experience challenging for teachers.

The heavy workload and consequent lack of time was cited as another challenge. As the teachers reported, doing research takes a lot of time and because of their heavy workload, it is difficult to set aside time for conducting research. This finding is in line with those of the previous studies in the literature. For example, Gewirtz et al. (2009) found that time constraints and heavy workload were important factors that force teachers to follow their own routines and that hinder their action research involvement.

In terms of the support structures, teachers may need in the process of conducting action research and the most effective ways to conduct it, there was a great deal of overlap in the teachers' responses. The majority of the teachers mentioned the importance of having the guidance and support of a mentor, coordinator or teacher educator who is more knowledgeable and experienced about conducting action research. They stated that, in this way, teachers can be informed about the stages of conducting action research and get support from a facilitator whenever they need help in the process of conducting action research. This finding is in line with those of the previous studies in the literature. In his study, Ermeling (2010) acted as a project facilitator to help teachers in different stages of conducting action research and investigated the effects of teachers' collaborative inquiry experiences on their instructional practices. One of the findings of the study indicated that effective implementation of collaborative inquiry brought improvement in teachers'

classroom practice, and one of the factors for its successful implementation was the guidance and support that was provided by the trained teacher-leader. In another study, Ponte et. al (2004) investigated teachers' professional development through action research and the effect of the facilitation of the action research process by teacher educators. In this study, the development of teachers' knowledge in three domains, ideological, empirical, and technological, was investigated. The findings of the study indicated that when there was no guidance, the teachers developed knowledge in the technological domain. However, when they were guided, they focused on the domains of knowledge that were guided by the facilitators. It was also found that when teachers were guided by the facilitators, the action research experience proved to be more beneficial for them. This suggests that teachers need the support and guidance of a facilitator, mentor, teacher trainer or coordinator in order to conduct action research effectively and benefit from that experience.

Apart from getting the help and support of a facilitator, the teachers also noted the importance of getting the help of their colleagues in terms of classroom observation or evaluating and getting feedback about their action research studies. Hinchey (2008) and Pine (2009) highlight the importance of involving colleagues as critical friends to evaluate and make suggestions to modify the teachers' actions in the process of conducting action research. McNiff and Whitehead (2002) also argue that a validation group may be formed with colleagues who act as critical friends, and teacher researchers may get the help of this group to validate their findings. As they suggest, this group may help teacher researchers in the process of conducting action research by analyzing the data, commenting on the findings, making suggestions, and deciding whether the findings are valid. This suggests that working

in cooperation with colleagues to observe each other and share the results of their studies can be beneficial in conducting action research effectively. In addition, forming a critical friends group, which can help teachers at different stages of conducting action research, may also be beneficial. In this way, the teachers may seek help from this group, which is supposed to work systematically and whose duty is primarily to provide help to the teachers in their action research experience.

The findings also indicated the importance of the school context in motivating teachers' action research involvement. It is clear that teachers may be more willing to conduct action research and may benefit from action research engagement more in a school context where they are encouraged and supported by their administrations and colleagues and provided with the necessary physical support. Furthermore, the analysis of data also revealed that the teachers who conducted action research in both state and private universities were encouraged to conduct action research by their administrations. This may suggest that the type of university where action research is conducted may not have an effect on teachers' level of action research involvement.

In terms of the support structures that schools may provide the teachers, teachers noted that administrations could give them the opportunity to present their results in meetings or professional conferences or could help them to get their studies published in a journal. The previous literature also supports this finding. As Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009) suggest, teachers may be given the opportunity to present their studies in organizational meetings, in formal or informal meetings held in schools. Teachers may also be supported in sharing their written work in journals or online action research websites or online journals. As they noted, interacting and

sharing the results of their studies with others may enable teachers to learn from each other and advance their knowledge and expertise.

Another suggestion that was put forth by one teacher about the effective ways of conducting action research is to conduct it schoolwide. In this way, as she stated, action research can be effective in a large number of classes and schools may benefit from it. Calhoun (2009) states that the aims of schoolwide action research are to encourage teachers to work as a problem solving team, improve their classroom practice for the betterment of students and extend the content of research by involving every classroom and teacher in the study. In that sense, it is possible to say that the benefits of conducting schoolwide action research can be wider than conducting individual action research since it involves all the members of the school in the research process.

Institutional Implications

The results of this study reveal that teachers need to be introduced to the concept of action research since it can be considered one of the effective ways of fostering teachers' professional development. In that sense, institutions may consider setting up teacher training units where teachers are encouraged to take up professional developmental practices, and action research can be one of the professional developmental exercises that teachers may be required to do. This indicates the need for institutions to provide teachers with the opportunities to become familiar with the concept of action research through teacher training workshops, professional development conferences, formal meetings or seminars held in or out of the institutions. In this way, teachers may become informed about the concept of action research and the stages involved. The analysis of data revealed that

lack of research skills is one of the biggest challenges that affects teachers' level of action research involvement. This challenge may also be overcome by providing teachers with training on the necessary research skills to conduct action research. It is also clear that teachers need support and guidance in all the stages of conducting action research. In that sense, teacher training units may provide teachers with information, guidance and support they need in the process of conducting action research by means of mentors. This is also crucial since the analysis of data revealed that action research can be conducted most effectively when there is guidance and support of a mentor, coordinator or teacher educator who is more knowledgeable and experienced about conducting action research. In addition, the institutions that already have teacher training units might consider developing and initiating a program which will equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to be actively engaged in action research projects. Institutions may also consider setting up separate action research working groups which will work systematically in order to cater for the needs of individual teachers and institutions. The analysis of data also revealed that even conducting action research only once or twice may affect positively teachers' instructional practices and professional development. In that sense, increasing the amount of teachers' action research engagement may be more beneficial in the long run. The teacher training units may provide this by requiring and supporting teachers to conduct action research on a regular basis.

The related literature suggests that institutions may benefit from conducting collaborative action research (Burns, 1999; Dana & Hoppey, 2009), since it has the potential to reach wider audiences and thus bring about change in institutions. In that sense, setting up collaborative action research groups in institutions may serve the

goals of the institution more effectively. This may also help to initiate peer support and to create a culture of professional learning in the institutions. The institution policies can also encourage teachers to be engaged in collaborative action research projects by building new roles for teachers. Within action research groups, colleagues may serve as critical friends to help teacher researchers by analyzing, evaluating and commenting on the findings of their studies (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). However, Calhoun (2009) also notes that teachers and schools should decide the type of action research to implement by considering the six elements, which are purpose, process, support provided by outside agencies, the kind of data to utilize, the audience for the research and expected side effects. Therefore, it may be suggested that these six factors should be taken into account when choosing the type of action research so that it may bring beneficial results.

It should also be noted that in order for action research engagement to bring change, sharing the results of action research studies is seen as crucial (Calhoun, 2009; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). This indicates the need for institutions to provide teachers with the opportunities to share the results of their action research projects through staff development presentations, professional conferences, or formal or informal meetings held in institutions on a regular basis. The results may also be shared through articles in professional journals or online action research websites. This may also increase teachers' self-esteem and serve as a motivating factor for their involvement in action research projects.

Apart from lack of research skills, teachers' heavy workload and lack of time was noted as another impediment to teachers' action research involvement. This may be overcome by rearranging teachers' schedules so that they can invest time for

research. Although it may seem unrealistic, institutions may consider hiring a sufficient number of teachers in order to decrease the number of teachers' teaching hours and course requirements. Alternatively, time for action research can be set aside on a rotating basis among teachers. Teachers can also be encouraged to collaborate, to help each other in the action research process, and teacher training units can help with the workload involved in research, as well. Teachers should also be supported in their action research engagement by getting technical support from their administrations. Thus, there is a need for administrations to consider the type of technical support and the resources that teachers may need in the process of conducting action research and provide them when necessary. In this way, teachers' action research involvement may be increased and this, in turn, may bring results that are beneficial for teachers, students, and institutions.

As the data obtained from the interviews revealed, the teachers who had advanced degrees seemed to find action research involvement more meaningful and beneficial than the teachers who had only BA degrees. They also seemed to be more willing to conduct action research in the future. In that sense, institutions might consider giving teachers encouragement and support to further their education.

Finally, institutions may also need to take into account teachers' classroom experiences before they require them to conduct action research. In that sense, novice teachers may not be ready to conduct action research since they do not have enough classroom experiences and they may not be able to ask the right questions to conduct action research. Additionally, since they have just graduated, it is probable that they may not have the necessary research skills to conduct action research.

Limitations of the Study

The present study has significant limitations. First, the study was conducted with a limited number of participants since there was a limited number of teachers who had done action research before. Thus, including more participants might have given a better picture for the focus of this study.

Another limitation is about the generalisability of the study. Because this study was conducted with eight instructors that teach in five different universities, the study reflects only the experiences and perceptions of these participants. In that sense, the results may not be generalizable since peoples' experiences and perceptions may vary across context.

Finally, this study reflects only the participants' own perceptions of the long-term effects of action research on their professional development and classroom practice. Thus, the long-term effects of action research presented in this study are limited to participants' self-reports of their perceptions of long-term effects of action research.

Suggestions for Further Research

Considering the findings of the present study, further research can follow four different directions. First, this study may be replicated with a larger and more diverse sample of EFL instructors from different universities in Turkey. In this way, the study may give a broader picture of EFL instructors' action research experiences, their perceptions of the effects of action research experiences on classroom practice and professional development, and beliefs about the most effective ways of implementing it.

Since this study presents only the participants' own perceptions of the long-term effects of action research on their professional development and classroom practice, further study might focus on investigating the actual effects of the action research experience on teachers' professional development and classroom practice.

Second, a comparative study may be carried out by forming an action research working group in a state and a private university in Turkey. The study might give insights about contextual factors that might affect the action research experiences of teachers in both types of universities and opportunities given for professional developmental practices in both contexts.

Third, further study might focus on the long term effects of collaborative action research on teachers' professional development. Although there are similar studies in the literature, the results of the study may contribute to the literature by giving insights about the effects of collaborative action research on teachers' professional development in universities in Turkey.

Finally, the effect of differences in level of education on teachers' attitudes towards action research and their participation in action research might be explored in depth with a larger number of participants.

Conclusion

This study has provided information about how EFL instructors in Turkey have experienced action research. The study also shed light on the long-term effects of action research on teachers' classroom practice and professional development and their beliefs about the most effective ways of implementing action research. The findings revealed that although the teachers followed a systematic process while conducting action research, they did not always share the findings of their studies,

which is considered one of the vital steps of action research processes. Another finding was that individual teacher research is more commonly implemented than the other types of action research, collaborative or schoolwide action research. The results also revealed that even a limited amount of action research engagement may contribute to teachers' classroom practice and professional development in the long run and in many ways. Having the guidance and support of a mentor, colleagues, and administration in a supportive context is considered crucial for the effective implementation of action research. Finally, the study also revealed that the teachers who had advanced degrees appear to have more positive attitudes toward action research than the teachers who had only BA degrees. In the light of these findings, it is suggested that administrators and teacher training units should seek opportunities to promote the implementation of action research in schools, which would result in better outcomes in teaching practices and student learning.

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APPENDIX A: GÖRÜŞME SORULARI

- 1) Eylem araştırması kavramını ilk olarak nasıl öğrendiniz?
- 2) Bugüne kadar kaç tane eylem araştırması yaptınız?
- 3) Hangi amaçlarla eylem araştırması yaptınız?
- 4) Hangi tür eylem araştırması uyguladınız?
- 5) Eylem araştırması yaparken geçtiğiniz süreçleri anlatır mısınız?
- 6) Bir öğretmen olarak eylem araştırması yapmış olmanın sizi etkilediğini ya da değiştirdiğini söyleyebilir misiniz?
- 7) Sizce eylem araştırması yapmanın zorlukları nelerdir?
- 8) Sizce eylem araştırması yaparken öğretmenlerin ne tür desteğe ve bilgiye ihtiyacı vardır?
- 9) Sizce eylem araştırması en verimli nasıl uygulanabilir?
- 10) Gelecekte eylem araştırması uygulamaları yapmayı düşünüyor musunuz?
Neden?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) How did you first come to know about action research?
- 2) How often have you conducted action research?
- 3) For what reasons did you initiate an action research project?
- 4) What types of action research have you conducted?
- 5) Can you explain the process that you went through while conducting action research?
- 6) Would you say that conducting action research has had any influence on you or has changed you as a teacher? Could you comment on whether or not this is true for you?
- 7) In your experience what are the challenges of conducting action research?
- 8) What kind of support structures or information do you think teachers need as they conduct action research?
- 9) What do you think is the most effective way of conducting action research?
- 10) Do you think that you will go on conducting action research projects in the future? Why or why not?

APPENDIX C: BİR GÖRÜŞMEDEN ÖRNEK BİR BÖLÜM

Görüşmeci: Bir öğretmen olarak eylem araştırması yapmış olmanın sizi etkilediğini ya da değiştirdiğini söyleyebilir misiniz?

Katılımcı: Evet, tabi. Sonuçta bir problem var ortada. O problemi ortaya çıkarıyorsunuz ve çözüme gidiyorsunuz. Ve çözümün işe yaradığını görmek gerçekten çok tatmin edici bence. Hatta şöyle bir şey yapmıştım ben: o videoları dosyaladığım için bir sonraki sene, aynı seviyeye giren bütün arkadaşlara o videoları gönderdim. Ve onların da çok hoşuna gitti.

Görüşmeci: Peki, öğrendiğiniz bu kelime öğretme stratejilerini hala sınıflarınızda kullanıyor musunuz?

Katılımcı: Tabi ki. Mesela, öncelikle şunu söyleyeyim, eylem araştırması yaparken problemi ortaya çıkardığımızı görüyorsunuz ve daha sonra da girdiğiniz sınıflarda karşılaştığınız problemleri daha kolay çözebileceğinizi fark ediyorsunuz. Kelime öğretiminde de özellikle video kullanarak öğrencilerin kelimeleri daha iyi öğrendiklerini gördüğümde zaman zaman okuma dersine başlamadan önce video kullanıyorum ve okuma parçasında geçecek olan kelimeleri bu şekilde öğrencilere tanıtabiliyorum.

Görüşmeci: Peki, yapmış olduğunuz eylem araştırması uygulamalarının sınıfınızdaki öğrencilerin başarılarını olumlu yönde etkilediğini söyleyebilir misiniz?

Katılımcı: Evet. Tabi ki olumlu etkisi var... Özellikle, sınıf dışı okumayla ilgili yaptığım eylem araştırmasının olumlu etkisi oldu... Öğrencilerin değerlendirilmedikleri için, okumaya karşı tutumlarının olumlu yönde değiştiğini düşünüyorum... Bunun sadece ders içinde değil, ders dışında da öğrencileri okumaya yönlendirdiğini düşünüyorum. Ve ayrıca öğrencilerin motivasyonu arttıkça da sınıf başarısının da arttığını düşünüyorum.

Görüşmeci: Eylem araştırması yapmış olmak size sınıf pratiğiniz ve profesyonel gelişiminiz açısından başka neler katmış olabilir?

Katılımcı: Sanırım, en önemli şey, öğretmen olarak kendinize olan güveniniz artıyor. Öğrencilerin öğreniminde de bir şeyleri değiştirebiliyor olduğumu görmek güzel ve tatmin ediciydi. Sınıf dışı okumayla ilgili yaptığım çalışma, beni olumlu yönde etkileyen ilk çalışmaydı çünkü artık sınıf dışı okuma aktiviteleri değerlendirmeye dahil değildi... olumlu ve olumsuz yönleri ortaya çıkmıştı. Sonuçta yaptığım çalışmanın bir şeyleri iyi yönde değiştirdiğini görmek kendime olan güvenimi artırmıştı... Ayrıca, ortaya bir çalışma çıkarmak, yazılı bir rapor hazırlayabilmek de önemli... Kaynakları tarayıp, alan bilgilerinizi güncellemek de... Sonuçta, bunu yaparak alanla ilgili bilginizi artırmış oluyorsunuz... daha bilgili bir öğretmen oluyorsunuz.

APPENDIX D: A SAMPLE EXTRACT FROM AN INTERVIEW

Interviewer: Would you say that conducting action research has had any influence on you or has changed you as a teacher?

Interviewee: Yes, of course. All in all, you have a problem there. You define the problem and try to solve it. And, I think seeing that your solution works is really satisfying. I even did something like this: since I filed these videos, the following year, I sent them to my friends who were teaching at the same level at that time. And, they really liked them.

Interviewer: Well, do you still use these vocabulary teaching strategies in your classes?

Interviewee: Of course. For instance, I may say that while conducting action research, you see that you define the problem and you realize that you can handle the problems that you face in your subsequent classes more easily. In terms of vocabulary teaching, since I saw that the students learnt vocabulary better especially by watching videos, I sometimes use videos before I start reading lessons and I can introduce some of the vocabulary in the reading texts in that way.

Interviewer: All right. Can you say that the action research projects that you have conducted have had positive effects on your students' success?

Interviewee: Yes. Of course, it has positive effects... Especially, the action research project which was about extensive reading had a positive effect... I believe that the students' attitudes towards reading have changed in a positive way since they are not evaluated... I believe that this leads the students to read not only in class, but also out of class. Additionally, I believe that when students' motivation increases, so does the success rate of the class.

Interviewer: What other things do you think conducting action research may have added to your classroom practice and professional development?

Interviewee: I think, the most important thing is that it raises your self-confidence as a teacher. It was also very nice and satisfying to see that I could change something in students' learning. The action research project, which was about extensive reading, was the first project which affected me positively since it was decided that extensive reading activities should not be evaluated. Eventually, seeing that my study changed the things in a positive way raised my self-confidence. Additionally, it is also important to be able to produce something...to prepare a written report. Doing a literature survey and updating your knowledge in the profession... By doing this, you add your knowledge in the profession... and become a more knowledgeable teacher.

APPENDIX E: A SAMPLE OF CODING

Interviewer: Would you say that conducting action research has had any influence on you or has changed you as a teacher?

Interviewee: Yes, of course. All in all, you have a problem there. You define the problem and try to solve it. And, I think seeing that your solution works is really satisfying. I even did something like this: since I filed these videos, the following year, I sent them to my friends who were teaching at the same level at that time. And, they really liked them.

effective teaching techniques
in the long-run

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self-confidence in tackling
classroom related issues

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Interviewer: All right. Can you say that the action research projects that you have conducted have had positive effects on your students' success?

Interviewee: Yes. Of course, it has positive effects... Especially, the action research project which was about extensive reading had a positive effect... I believe that the students' attitudes towards reading have changed in a positive way since they are not evaluated... I believe that this leads the students to read not only in class, but also out of class. Additionally, I believe that when students' motivation increases, so does the success rate of the class.

positive effects on students'
success

Interviewer: What other things do you think conducting action research may have added to your

classroom practice and professional development?

Interviewee: I think, the most important thing is that it raises your self-confidence as a teacher. It was also very nice and satisfying to see that I could change something in students' learning. The action research project, which was about extensive reading, was the first project which affected me positively since it was decided that extensive reading activities should not be evaluated. Eventually, seeing that my study changed the things in a positive way raised my self-confidence. raising self-confidence

Additionally, it is also important to be able to produce something... to prepare a written report. Doing a literature survey and updating your knowledge in the profession... By doing this, you add your knowledge in the profession... and become a more knowledgeable teacher. improving academic skills
positive effects on professional development