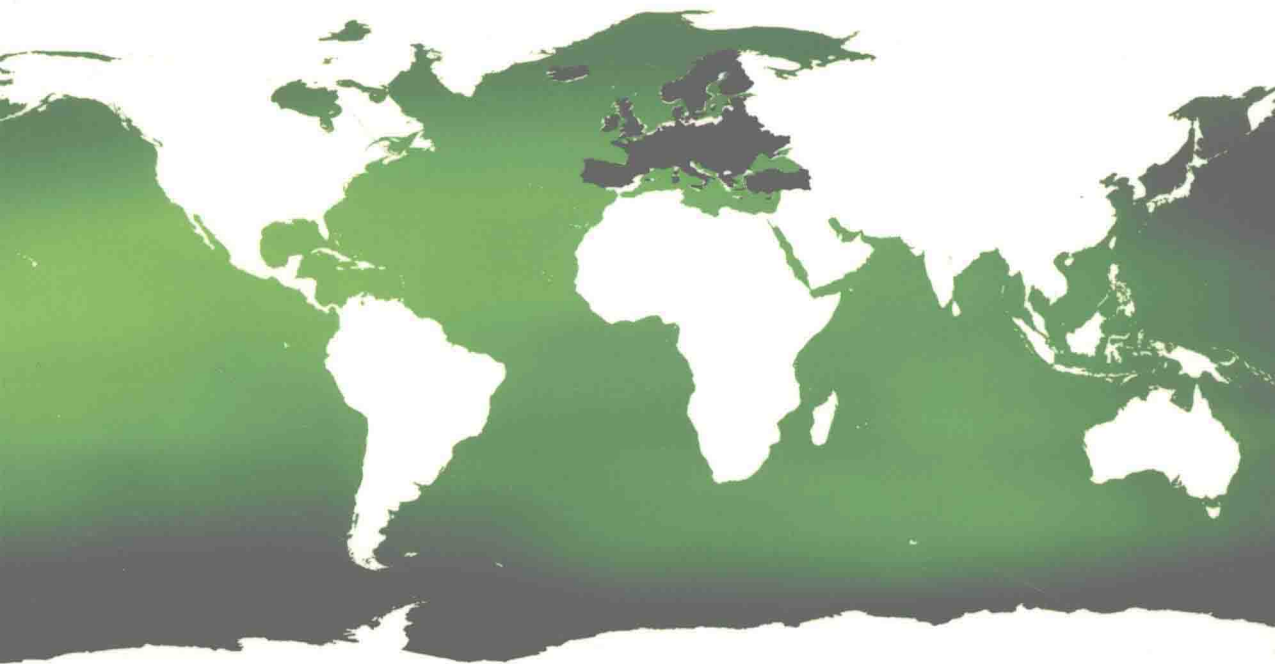# Language Teacher Research in Europe

Edited by Simon Borg

Language Teacher Research Series

Thomas S. C. Farrell, Series Editor

TESOL Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.

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Acknowledgments

Series Editor's Preface

The Language Teacher Research Series highlights the role language teachers at all levels play as generators of knowledge concerning all aspects of language teaching around the world. This idea may seem alien to many language teachers. Often, they either think that they have nothing to say about their teaching or that what they have to say is of little significance. Teachers generally are accustomed to receiving knowledge from so-called *real* researchers.

In my opinion, language teachers have plenty to say that is valuable for colleagues around the world. One of the main reasons for the Language Teacher Research Series is to celebrate what is being achieved in English language classrooms each day, so we can encourage and develop communities of likeminded language teaching professionals who are willing to share these important experiences.

In this manner, the TESOL community can extend its understanding of English language teaching in local, regional, and international settings. The series attempts to cover as many of these contexts as possible, with volumes covering the Americas, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and New Zealand/Australia. Each account of research presented in the Language Teacher Research Series is unique in the profession. These studies document how individual language teachers at all levels of practice systematically reflect on their *own* practice (rather than on other teachers' practices).

When practicing language teachers share these experiences with teachers in other contexts, they can compare and contrast what is happening in different classrooms around the world. The ultimate aim of this series is to encourage an inquiry stance toward language teaching. Teachers can play a crucial role in taking responsibility for their own professional development as generators and receivers of knowledge about what it means to teach English language learning.

How This Series Can Be Used

The Language Teacher Research Series is suitable for preservice and in-service teacher education programs. The examples of teacher research written by practitioners at all levels of teaching and all levels of experience offer a window into the different worlds of English language teachers. In this series we have attempted to impose some order by providing authors with a template of headings for presenting their research. This format is designed so that language teachers with varied expertise and educational qualifications can pick up a book from any region and make comparisons about issues, background literature, procedures taken, results, and reflections without having to work too hard to find them. The details in each chapter will help readers compare and evaluate the examples of teacher research and even replicate some research, if so desired.

This Volume

This volume in the Language Teacher Research series, *Language Teacher Research in Europe*, documents different forms of practitioner inquiry that involve systematic, intentional, and self-critical inquiry about language teaching in different European settings. It will be interesting for the reader to compare and contrast these research stories from Europe with studies from *Language Teacher Research in Asia*, the first volume published in this series, as well as from the other volumes in the series.

Thomas S. C. Farrell, Brock University, Canada

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Language Teacher Research in Europe

Simon Borg

Teacher research refers to "all forms of practitioner enquiry that involve systematic, intentional, and self-critical inquiry about one's work" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 22). It goes beyond thoughtful teaching of the kind often associated with reflective practice and should also involve, as Freeman (1998) argued, making public one's findings. This notion has a long history in the field of education (e.g., Stenhouse, 1975), and more recently a number of book-length guides for teachers on the subject (Campbell, McNamara, & Gilroy, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) have demonstrated the continuing interest in it. The emergence in recent years of evidence-based practice (EBP) as a model for professional action in education has emphasised even further the idea that teachers' engagement in research is desirable. A fundamental argument behind EBP is that when teachers are able to engage in research and to make justified pedagogical decisions informed by sound research evidence, this will have a beneficial effect on teaching and learning (Davies, 1999). Although the precise manner in which this research should or can take place has been the subject of much debate, it is generally accepted that more teacher involvement in research can enhance the quality of education.

In the field of TESOL, although varied perspectives have been adopted in defining what teacher research is and how it relates to the process of teaching (Burns, 1999; Freeman, 1998), a similar overall message emerges: enquiring into

their own practices, individually or collectively, is a process which benefits teachers' professional growth and pedagogical activity.

Although the value of teacher research is widely discussed in the field of English language teaching, evidence of teacher research is less conspicuous. One of the reasons this volume is valuable, then, is that it makes available to a wide readership concrete examples of teacher research conducted by language teaching professionals. These professionals work in a range of different language teaching contexts, yet the contributions to this volume are united by the way in which they adhere to the definition of teacher research presented here: they all illustrate and make public ways in which professionals in the field have systematically examined, in their own working contexts, issues of immediate relevance to them and their learners. Collectively, the research reported in this volume highlights the many methodological forms which teacher research can assume and the manner in which it can be applied to a diverse range of professional issues, problems, and challenges. The chapters in this volume are also united in the way that they highlight several characteristics shared by teacher researchers: a desire to grow professionally, a determination to improve the quality of education that learners experience, a commitment to innovation and constant self-evaluation, and an interest in sharing their work with others.

Whilst acknowledging these positive aspects of teacher research, however, the authors do not pretend that their research was accomplished without problems. On the contrary, the contributors candidly describe the different types of challenges they encountered in their research. Ultimately, however, by focusing on the benefits of enquiring into teachers' own professional practices, this collection makes a persuasive argument for the relevance and value of teacher research to our field generally.

Language Teacher Research in Europe presents research conducted by language teachers at different levels, from high school English teachers to English language teacher educators. The countries represented cover a range of European contexts stretching from England to Turkey. In terms of the volume's organization, the chapters are presented in alphabetical order of the first author's surname and each chapter follows the same pattern of main headings: Issue, Background Literature, Procedures, Results, and Reflection. This common structure supports the coherence of the collection and facilitates the reader's ability to make comparisons across the chapters.

The first study, presented in the chapter "Primary School EFL Teachers as Researchers," examines the experience of language teachers who are learning to be researchers. Working with a group of primary school teachers in Turkey, Derin Atay documented the process she went through in facilitating a professional development course designed to support these teachers in conducting research in their own classrooms. Drawing on field notes and journals, this study highlights the successes of the course in motivating teachers to do research. It

also, however, provides clear evidence of the obstacles, particularly heavy workloads and a lack of time, which may deter teachers from engaging in research. There are clear implications in this study for the conditions required if teachers are to perceive teacher research as a feasible undertaking.

The next chapter, "Teaching Web-Mediated EAP to Ethnic Minority Students," evaluates the design and implementation of an English for academic purposes (EAP) programme devised for ethnic minority undergraduates at a British university. Mihye Harker and Dimitra Koutsantoni used formative data, summative data, and follow-up telephone interviews with participants to assess the extent to which the course fulfilled its key objective of supporting the development of students' academic writing skills in English. Overall, the data suggest that the programme was successful. Students responded positively to the content and organisation of the EAP materials and to the Web-based approach used to deliver them. The authors also note that end-of-course tests revealed improvements in students' academic writing compared to diagnostic tests taken at the start. Further, interviews indicated that students felt the course might have longer-term benefits for their academic studies. In addition to these positive outcomes, the data highlight areas in which the course could be improved.

In a chapter from Hungary, "Are You Doing Well in English? A Study of Secondary School Students' Self-Perceptions," Judit Heitzmann explores secondary school learners' thoughts and feelings about their own successes and failures in learning a foreign language. Drawing on interviews, written narratives, and self-assessment data from learners, the study illustrates how teachers can find out what learners feel about their own learning. In this case, learners indicated positive attitudes towards studying English, and they recognised their responsibility for working to learn effectively. The study also highlights interesting differences in the way Hungarian learners defined success in language learning compared to British learners.

A chapter from Spain, "The Integration of Literature: A Way to Engage Learners' Intellect and Interest," provides an account of Sacramento Jáimez-Muñoz's experiences in designing and implementing an English course based on literature. Drawing on the notion of literature with a small *l*, she collected data during one academic year through questionnaires, observations, her own reflections, and test scores. She analysed these data to compare the experiences of two classes of secondary school learners. One group participated in the new literature-based course the author designed, and the other group used the prescribed textbook. Whilst acknowledging the challenges involved in designing and implementing the new programme, Jáimez-Muñoz finds evidence of improved learning, enhanced autonomy, and greater motivation in the experimental group.

"Teachers Into Researchers: Learning to Research in TESOL" is the second chapter in this volume which focuses on the processes of learning to do research. In this case, Richard Kiely examines the experiences of students on

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an MA programme at a British university. After describing the novel approach to teaching research methods adopted on this programme, Kiely reports how he examined questionnaires, interviews, and students' written and oral work (including their final dissertations) to assess the impact the course had. Overall, the data suggest that students felt the course helped them develop as researchers, not just in terms of their practical skills but also by allowing them to develop a researcher identity. This study, together with those by Derin Atay and Anna Franca Plastina, will be of particular interest to readers whose work involves teaching research methods.

In the chapter titled "Learning to Speak, Speaking to Learn: Research Perspectives on Learner Autonomy Through Collaborative Work in ELT," Carmen Pérez-Llantada describes the project-based, collaborative, and constructivist methodology which she applied to a language course for engineering undergraduates in Spain. Her motivation for conducting this study was to examine ways of improving the motivation and the speaking and listening skills of the students. Her analysis of data from test scores and from learners' written and oral work suggests that the methodology she adopted on this course had a positive impact on learners' attitudes towards learning English. In addition, their proficiency in speaking and listening improved by the end of the academic year.

"Meeting CEF Standards: Research Action in Local Action Research" reports on research conducted in Italy. In this study, Anna Franca Plastina reflects on her role as a teacher educator responsible for mediating between a national action research initiative examining the Common European Framework and a group of teachers who were required to conduct action research in their own classrooms using ideas developed through the national project. Plastina's account of the thinking behind her work with these teachers and the processes she went through in enabling them to experiment with action research in their own classrooms highlights the challenges for her as a teacher educator and for the teachers themselves. This study ultimately provides insights into strategies which teacher educators can use in enabling teachers to become teacher researchers. This account also shows how Plastina's constant reflection on her work allowed her to develop her own professional competence.

In the chapter "Sharing a Journey Towards Success: The Impact of Collaborative Study Groups and CALL in a Legal Context," Alison Riley and Patricia Sours report on an action research project conducted in the context of a legal English course at an Italian university. Informed by theories of motivation and self-determination, they introduced a series of measures to their course, such as self-study groups, with the aim of improving students' levels of participation and performance. The authors' evaluation of the course, using several types of performance and evaluation data, suggests that the support systems which they introduced made a positive difference, as students' levels of participation and

their overall performance on the course were better than those of students in previous years.

Linda Taylor's contribution is titled "Aspects of Teacher-Generated Language in the Language Classroom." This study was conducted in the context of preservice teacher education in the UK for teachers of English as a foreign language. Influenced by the fields of classroom discourse, classroom interaction, and language learning tasks, Taylor's motivation in conducting this study was to examine how she and other teachers, in setting up teacher-independent tasks for language learning, used language to manage learning, relate to individuals, and foster interaction in the language classroom. By analyzing audio recordings of language lessons, Taylor identifies several features of the talk teachers use in setting up tasks. She also proposes some rules teacher trainees might use in structuring tasks and enhancing rapport with learners.

In "Do I Talk Too Much? Exploring Dominant and Passive Participation Dynamics," Jennifer E. Thomas reports on a study in which her learners collaborated with her in exploring their oral participation styles. Conducted in a high school in the Czech Republic and drawing on data from questionnaires, learner self-assessments, and Thomas's journal, this study provides insight into what learners think about their own oral participation in the English classroom and how they perceive the participation of their classmates. Thomas was motivated by an awareness that some learners spoke much more than others, and she was keen to understand why this was the case, the extent to which learners were aware of this tendency, and whether making them aware would alter their behaviour. The results indicate that the study made the teacher and the learners more aware of and sensitive to others' perspectives on oral participation.

In another study from Turkey, "Multiple Intelligences Come to the University: A Case Study," Eda Üstünel examines the extent to which multiple intelligences (MI) theory can be applied to content courses on preservice teacher education programmes. Faced with the prospect of teaching a linguistics course to a group of undergraduates, Üstünel documented the processes she went through in designing and implementing a course which reflected the principles of MI theory. Her evaluation of the course, based on data from her own observations, trainees' work, and their end-of-course evaluations, suggests that MI theory can be productively applied to content courses in teacher education contexts. She also acknowledges, though, the demands which working with MI theory placed on her as the teacher educator and on her trainees.

In "Between the Lines: Using Interaction Journals in E-mail Projects," Karin Vogt discusses a project in which German learners of English developed their intercultural competence by corresponding via e-mail with U.S. counterparts. During a period of three months, the German learners reflected on their experiences through interaction journals. By reviewing these journals and the actual

e-mails the learners exchanged, Vogt was able to analyse the nature of the intercultural learning that took place. The study provides evidence that interaction journals stimulate intercultural learning. In addition, Vogt provides insight into the processes learners go through in developing intercultural knowledge.

In summary, *Language Teacher Research in Europe* provides evidence of how, through investigating their own practices, English language teaching professionals can deepen their understanding of their work and enhance the learning experiences of the individuals they teach. Despite differences in the particular themes explored and the contexts in which the research was conducted, the contributions presented here are united by a common concern for improving the quality of teaching and learning in TESOL. I hope that the examples of teacher research in this volume provide inspiration and practical ideas for TESOL professionals who share this concern and who want to use research as a way of exploring English language teaching and learning in a principled and contextually relevant manner.

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Primary School EFL Teachers as Researchers (*Turkey*)

Derin Atay

Probably nothing within a school has more impact on students in terms of skills development, self-confidence, or classroom behavior than the personal and professional growth of teachers. (Barth, 1990, p. 49)

Issue

The 8-year compulsory education system starting in 1997 brought significant changes to foreign language education in Turkey. Under this law it became obligatory for public primary school students to start studying a foreign language in the fourth grade. In 2000, foreign language education in kindergarten and the first three grades of primary education was also officially permitted by the Ministry of Education. As a result of this development, preservice teacher education programmes changed in corresponding ways, in particular by adding a Teaching English to Young Learners course. Little attention, though, has been paid to the needs of practising teachers, and many experienced teachers of English in Turkish state schools have not received specific in-service training relevant to the teaching of young learners.

Some in-service training is provided by the Ministry of Education in Turkey, but this training is infrequent and focuses on generic issues relevant to teachers from different schools and contexts. In these courses, despite an emerging

consensus in the teacher education literature about the need to change dominant practices in K–12 teacher professional development (Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Little, 1993; Richardson, 1994), a training model generally unconnected to teachers' daily work continues to persist as the most common form of delivery. Thus, in most in-service training workshops the norm for professional development is that experts expose teachers to new ideas or train them in new practices, paying little attention to the beliefs and knowledge these experienced teachers already have.

To understand the context of the research discussed here, it is important to acknowledge that teachers working in state schools have heavy workloads—27 to 30 hours a week consisting of three or four different classes at different levels. Thus, finding additional time for in-service training is a challenge for most teachers. This chapter reports on my attempt to respond to the limited opportunities for professional development offered to educators teaching English to young learners at state schools in Turkey. Specifically, I provided an in-service course for such teachers, with the primary goal of encouraging them to conduct research into some aspect of their own classrooms.

Background Literature

Teachers need continuing support through professional development because initial teacher education cannot satisfy educators' learning needs throughout their careers. Teachers can benefit from support when preparing for common changes, such as altering a course syllabus or modifying class objectives, just as they can when changing schools, taking on new responsibilities, positioning themselves for promotions, or taking steps to avoid burnout.

The primary way to support teachers in their personal and professional growth is through professional development programmes. The limitations of the previously mentioned training models have in recent years led educational researchers and practitioners to reassess what constitutes professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Lieberman & Miller, 2001). Consequently, there have been many attempts to alter the methods of teacher professional development so that teachers can assume control of classroom decisions and actively participate in their own instructional improvement on an ongoing basis (Knight & Boudah, 1998). From this perspective, rather than relying solely on generalizations or input provided by outside researchers, teachers are encouraged through in-service training to carry out research to resolve problems or to increase their understandings of their individual classes or situations.

Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1990) broadly defined teacher research as "systematic and intentional inquiry carried out by teachers" (p. 83). This definition is consistent not only with the idea that deliberate learning is research but also

with the notion that every lesson should be an enquiry for the teacher (Goswami & Stillman, 1987). According to McKernan (1988), teacher research suggests basing professional development on a rigorous examination of one's own teaching practices:

> The idea is that each school, and indeed each classroom, is a laboratory in which the curriculum and problems experienced as problems by teachers (not outside researchers) are subjected to empirical examination by practitioners. (p. 154)

Teacher research invites teachers to question the common assumption that knowledge for and about classroom teaching should be generated at the university and then used in schools, following an *outside-in* approach (Kraft, 2002; Lewin, 1946a; Stenhouse, 1985).

Studies have shown that teacher research as a form of professional development often has a profound effect on those undertaking it, in some cases transforming the classrooms and schools in which they work. Researchers' self-reports have revealed that teacher research facilitates teachers' critical thought (Black, 1996; Day, 1984) and teacher collaboration (Tieg, Bailey, Arllen, & Gable, 1993), boosts teachers' self-esteem and confidence levels (Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998), increases their awareness of students' needs (Soo Hoo, 1993), and helps to create a positive school culture—one that is supportive of teacher reflection and experimentation (Francis, Hirsch, & Rowland, 1994).

Yet many of the references in the literature on the value of teacher research are anecdotal and do not result from systematic and intentional exploration of teachers' experiences (Huberman, 1996). Moreover, there is often little or no information about the specific characteristics of the research experience and context responsible for promoting this growth.

Thus, this chapter intentionally explores the research experiences of Turkish primary school teachers of English. First, I present the context and details of the professional development programme, which provided teachers with relevant theoretical knowledge and guided them to conduct research. Then, I focus on the participating teachers' perspectives on this in-service training programme.

Procedures

The impetus for this study came from informal discussions with heads and teachers at public primary schools when I visited them during the practicum period for student teachers completing studies at my institution, Marmara University in Istanbul. The heads seemed to have the same concerns. They recognized that conditions were not the best but emphasized that we should find a