MAG SCHOOL TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD PRACTITIONER

RESEARCH IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS IN SHARJAH

A THESIS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

Presented to the faculty of the American University of Sharjah
College of Arts and Sciences
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

by
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Sharjah, UAE
May 2010

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RESEARCH IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS IN SHARJAH

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American University of Sharjah, 2010

ABSTRACT

Teachers' attitudes towards classroom research show differences from teacher to teacher. Some teachers believe that involvement in classroom research can benefit students, teachers, administrators, and the school. Other teachers are reluctant to become involved in research because they feel that it disrupts their teaching schedules and adds considerably to an already heavy workload. In this study, the terms classroom research, teacher research, and practitioner research are used interchangeably and refer to research conducted by teachers in a classroom setting. Much research stresses the importance of classroom research in the language learning/teaching practice. Although there has been a lot of research to show benefits of conducting classroom research, there has been little study done on teachers' attitudes toward practitioner research in language classrooms, particularly in the UAE.

Since classroom research plays an important role in improving the quality of education, the purpose of this study was to investigate MAG (Madares Al Ghad/ Schools of the Future) school teachers' attitudes toward practitioner research. The study answers the following two questions: What benefits, if any, do MAG school teachers see in conducting practitioner research? What reasons do MAG school teachers have for not conducting practitioner research? The data for this study was

collected through questionnaires and interviews. Subjects for this study included 25 teachers, two TDSs (Teacher Development Specialists), and two ILCs (Instructional Leadership Coordinators). The findings show that the majority of MAG school teachers have positive attitudes toward the benefits of conducting practitioner research although not all of them conduct research. They consider classroom research a powerful tool to improve their teaching practice, overcome their classroom problems, enrich their professional knowledge, and to identify what methods and techniques work for their students. However, the findings indicate that teachers face two main obstacles that distract them from conducting practitioner research: heavy school duties and time factor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a significant role in everyone's life. Every teacher, as an educator, embraces different attitudes, expectations, possibilities, and constraints in his/her educational life. In the same way, research depends on teachers themselves: their objectives, professional attitudes, beliefs, status, and training. Some teachers avoid research while others strive to develop themselves in order to be better educators, and thus enhance the learning of their students. Teachers can investigate individual learners, groups, classrooms, and the school environment. They can conduct research focusing on teaching methods, learning strategies, and school programs in order to investigate a situation or problem in a detailed way to find the answer as to why and how it happened. In this way, they can gain a deeper understanding of the problem and try to fix it.

Nevertheless, some teachers hesitate to become involved in research because of their heavy teaching loads. Some teachers take teaching for granted and continue to use the same familiar teaching methods and techniques they learned at the beginning of their teaching careers. They feel that research is extra work rather than a tool for professional development. Some concern about the reasons why teachers do not want to get involved in research might be the time factor, heavy school duties, lack of financial support, lack of facilities, or lack of recognition for conducting research.

In this study, I wanted to investigate what the MAG (Madares Al Ghad/ Schools of the Future) school teachers' views were about practitioner research. I examined the research from the teachers' points of view and asked them how they think research can benefit them and what reasons prevent them from becoming involved in such research. In addition, I compared the findings of this study with the literature to see whether MAG school teachers share similar experiences with teachers in other parts of the world.

Education in the United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates offer a comprehensive education for both boys and girls, all the way from kindergarten to university, with a large number of public and

private schools. Education for citizens at government schools is completely free at all levels. For children older than 4, full-time education is compulsory for all primary (6-12 years old) and secondary schools (12-18 years old) up to the ninth grade. Schools can adjust their programs to their students' needs, so there are a large number of international schools which follow foreign curriculums. School hours in most of the Government schools are from 7 am to 2 pm for boys and from 8 am to 3 pm for girls, with generally one to two breaks.

The Government education system in the UAE focuses on preserving local traditions, principles and the cultural identity of the UAE while maintaining world-class standards and improved professionalism. The educational structure of the UAE is a four-tier system covering 14 years of education, that is, kindergarten (2 years) , Primary (6 years), Preparatory (3 years), and Secondary (3 years). There are 24 periods a week and each class lasts 50 minutes.

MAG School ILCs, TDSs, and Teachers Background Information

There are three cycles at the MAG schools: Cycle 1 (grade 1-5), Cycle 2 (grade 6-9), and Cycle 3 (grade 10-12). In the MAG program, there are teachers, Instructional Leadership Coordinators (ILCs) and Teacher Development Specialists (TDSs).

Generally, TDSs and ILCs are in charge of providing help and development to the MAG teachers. They supervise, co-teach, and give model lessons. The TDS and the ILC have both administrative and teaching roles.

One ILC is assigned to every MAG school's Cycle 1, 2, and 3 throughout the UAE. The ILC builds a bridge between teachers, principals, and the Ministry of Education. The ILC is mainly an administrator who assesses both the teachers and the TDSs. The ILC works in collaboration with school principals and makes sure that all aspects of MAG objectives are implemented at the school level. In this context, they facilitate ongoing professional development related to the creation of a learner-centered teaching environment. They assist the school principal in the development of school-wide policies and they strive to build the leadership capacity of their assigned principal and other leaders in the school by mentoring and role modeling. Furthermore, they assist principals with the observation and summative appraisal of

all teachers. They manage and distribute MAG resources related to teaching and learning. They plan, coordinate and supervise the ongoing professional development in the school.

The TDS mentors, observes, and develops the teachers through co-teaching or demonstration teaching in their school settings according to the MAG program objectives. Moreover, they maintain assessment development and analyze the MAG guidelines and support school-wide reforms. Cycle 1 TDS mentors teachers work in integrated classes of English, math, and science. Cycle 2 or 3 TDSs work with English language teachers.

MAG teachers teach 24 periods a week with four to five periods a day. They do not use a guided text-book in English language classrooms. They teach on a topic base and TDSs help them find materials for the topics. Teachers in Cycle 1 are responsible for teaching English, Math, and Sciencesto their classes. Cycle 2 and 3 teachers are responsible for teaching English as Foreign Languages. They have to cope with managing daily lessons, correcting assignments, and preparing, reading, and grading exam papers and students' exercise books. In fact, these duties indicate that teachers are very busy during the school days.

Research Questions

Teacher research can provide valuable insights both to individual teachers and to the field of second language learning. I believe that teachers can bring a wealth of background knowledge and experience to the research process. When teachers become involved in research, they can lead to change and improvement of practice. Teacher-researchers develop more power over their professional lives, extend their teaching repertoires, and are better able to create motivational classrooms and schools by becoming self-conscious, collaborative and critical about their teaching. Involvement in research projects provides, undoubtedly, professional and personal development. All in all, the main aim of becoming a teacher researcher is to improve practice through better understanding of classroom settings and school programs.

Although there is a growing literature on the positive outcomes associated with teachers doing research, not much information exists which describes the attitudes of classroom teachers towards classroom research. This study examined

attitudes of MAG school teachers towards conducting practitioner research in their English language classrooms. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What benefits, if any, do MAG school teachers see in conducting practitioner research?
2. What reasons do MAG school teachers have for not conducting practitioner research?

<center>Overview of the Chapters and Appendices</center>

Chapter 1 addresses the purpose of the study, gives some information about the UAE education system, and explains the research questions. Chapter 2 reviews the related literature which shows the benefits of conducting classroom research and the obstacles that hinder teachers from doing classroom research. Chapter 3 explains the methodology of the study. It also provides information about the participants of the study. Also, it describes the instruments used as data collection tools which are survey and interviews. Chapter 4 focuses on the findings which are obtained from the surveys and interviews. The findings are analyzed and interpreted. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings, their implications, and the limitations of this study. There are 2 Appendices. Appendix 1 contains the actual research instruments: the survey questionnaire (with closed and open-ended questions) and sample of the interview questions. Appendix 2 provides teachers' survey results about teachers' attitudes toward conducting classroom research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Teachers' attitudes towards classroom research show differences from teacher to teacher. Every teacher, as an educator, embraces different attitudes, expectations, possibilities, and constraints in his/her educational life. In the same way, research depends on teachers themselves—their objectives, professional attitudes, beliefs, status, and training. Some teachers believe that involvement in classroom research can benefit students, teachers, administrators, and the school. Other teachers are reluctant to become involved in research because they feel that it disrupts their teaching schedules and adds considerably to an already heavy workload.

This literature review is composed of four sections. First, I will explain the terms *action research, teacher research, classroom research, exploratory practice,* and *practitioner research* to give a better understanding of what kinds of research projects are being conducted in language classrooms. Second, I will examine teachers' attitudes towards academic research, thirdly, I will investigate some of the benefits for teachers to be involved in research, and fourthly, I will examine some obstacles to conducting classroom research from the related literature.

Definitions of Research Terms

Action research

Bailey (2001) defines action research as "an actual research method" to collect and interpret data which involves a set of reiterated procedures (p. 489). McBee (2004) points out that "Research done by members of a local context to improve that context is called action research" (p. 53). Wallace (1998) defines action research as "basically a way of reflecting on your teaching … by systematically collecting data on your every day practice and analyzing it in order to come to some decisions about what your future practice should be" (p .4). According to Richards and Farrell (2005), action research refers to teacher-conducted classroom research and takes place in the teacher's own classroom. Also, Mackey and Gass (2005) highlight that action research is one form of teacher-initiated research. Lacorte and Krastel (2002) state

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that an action research project in the classroom can help teachers recognize and find solutions to the problematic issues at an instructional level in the "here and now," and make connections between research and practice directly (p. 909). According to Wallace (1998), action research is different from other more conventional or traditional kinds of research due to mostly focusing on individual or small-group professional practice and avoiding making general statements. Through action research, teachers investigate their own classroom practice deeply, and seek answers to problematic areas. Teacher engages in a cycle of activities such as identifying a problem/issue, collecting information, developing a strategy to address the issue, trying out the strategy, and observing its effects.

Mackey and Gass (2005) highlight that action research can be used interchangeably with "practitioner research" or "teacher research or "teacher-initiated research". Also, Bailey (2001) states that action research, teacher research, and classroom research can overlap.

Classroom-centered research

Bailey (2001) defines classroom-centered research as "the setting in which the data are collected" (p. 489). According to Allwright (1983), classroom-centered research "simply tries to investigate what happens inside the classroom when learners and teachers come together" (p. 191).

Classroom research

Hopkins (2008) defines classroom research as "an act undertaken by teachers, to enhance their own or a colleague's teaching, to test the assumptions of educational theory in practice, or as a means of evaluating and implementing whole school priorities" (p.1). Hopkins explains that classroom research done by teachers is research "in which teachers look critically at their own classrooms and use research primarily for the purpose of improving their teaching and the quality of education in their schools" (p. 6).

Exploratory Practice

Allwright (1997) introduced the concept and term "Exploratory Practice." According to Allwright (2005), "Exploratory Practice offers an epistemologically and ethically motivated framework for conducting practitioner research in the field of language education. It does not offer a technical framework in itself, but it does make practical suggestions" (p. 361). Allwright (2005) sees Exploratory Practice as a form of practitioner research for the language classroom, with teachers investigating their own practices to better understand the teaching and learning process.

Teacher-generated, teacher-initiated, teacher-based, or teacher research

McDonough and McDonough (1997) discuss "teacher-generated" and "teacher-initiated" research, and refer to teaching as "action" and research as "understanding." According to them, both teachers and researchers can do both types and both be parties in research. Bailey (2001) defines teacher research "by who conducts it" (p. 489). Hopkins (2008) uses the terms "teacher-based research", "classroom research by teachers", and the "teacher-researcher" in the same sense, and believes that these terms identify the main actor and the process involved. McBee (2004) points out, "Action research performed by teachers to refine and improve teaching is known as teacher research" (p. 53

In the rest of the study, the term practitioner research will be used to mean for research done by a teacher in a classroom setting. In this context, I will refer to a teacher researcher as a "practitioner-researcher." This term can include teachers, supervisors, and administrators. In this study, as Allwright (2005) states, I will see teachers "as classroom practitioners developing their own understandings of language classroom life" (p. 353). The aim of practitioner research is to improve practice through better understanding. I believe that practitioners have more knowledge of practice through their experiences than external researchers and this can create more useful information in the field of education. In this study, the terms classroom research, teacher research, and practitioner research will be used interchangeably. The important thing to keep in mind is that all research is centered on the classroom, investigates what goes in the classroom environment, and is conducted by people involved in the situation, i.e., the teacher himself/herself, not an outside observer.

Teachers' Attitudes towards Academic Research

Van Zee (1998, cited in Sozbilir, 2007) discusses the question of why teachers should become researchers. Van Zee believes that if teachers become researchers, "[They] might be influenced to change their practices more readily by reading reports of research by other teachers rather than by university researchers" (cited in Sozbilir, 2007, p. 43). This is because as Crookes (1998), Kaplan (1998), Shkedi (1998), McBee (2004), and Mackey and Gass (2005) believe, the field of education suffers from a communication breakdown between university-based researchers and classroom-based practitioners and that much of existing research literature is not accessible and relevant to the typical teachers' daily experiences in classroom settings.

On this basis, McBee (2004) shows some reasons why teachers do not use research conducted by academics. McBee believes that academic research includes extensively statistic and experimental design and teacher education programs typically do not train teachers on these matters. Besides, as Kaplan (1998) states the teachers see that "[academic] research is something done by strange and mysterious people (who hold doctorates) in strange and mysterious [places] (labs?)" (p. 16). Likewise, Mackey and Gass (2005) note that teachers often think that others' research findings are unrelated or inapplicable to their own particular classroom settings. McBee further explains that although teachers are considered as objects of study and as implementers of research results, the teachers' current concerns, questions, and views are not presented in the academic research. For these reasons, McBee concludes that teachers find much of existing academic research is inaccessible, and irrelevant to their daily experiences in the classroom.

Crookes (1998) and McBee (2004) believe that to provide practical guidance in an investigation and to increase the use of research findings by practitioners, the communication networks between academic researchers and practicing teachers should be improved. In addition, teachers should be encouraged to do their own research by making teachers and researchers the same people.

For these reasons, Van Zee (1998, cited in Sozbilir, 2007) believes that "Questions asked and findings reported by teachers might make more sense to other teachers and be more directly applicable to classroom contexts than research

conducted by university researchers" (p. 43). In this context, Ekiz (2006) conducted a study to investigate elementary school teachers' attitudes towards educational research. Ekiz's study indicates that teachers prefer practical educational literature that deals with practical questions of education rather than literature that deals with theoretical issues. In Ekiz's study, the teachers believe that practical literature provides them with solutions regarding their existing problems because educational research undertaken by academicians does not correspond with their practical world. Markee (1998) makes clear that teachers, primarily, are more "interested in the practicalities of teaching than in abstract discussions of language learning that seem to them to have little direct applicability to the classroom" (p. 135).

Benefits of Classroom Research

There has been a lot of research to show how teachers benefit from becoming involved in conducting classroom research in the literature. Besides, much research stresses the importance of classroom research to practitioners in the language learning/teaching. Hopkins (2008) asks the question "Why classroom research by teachers?" and mainly focuses on the areas of professionalism, classroom practice, the social control of teachers and the usefulness of educational research. Hopkins believes that each of these areas presents a rationale for teacher research. As Hopkins states, there are a number of good reasons for teachers to conduct classroom research such as benefiting from being actively involved in doing research.

Classroom Research Can Present Practical Solutions Immediately Applicable to Daily Classroom Problems

Teacher research allows teachers to focus on classroom life and find practical solutions to their classrooms' immediate problems or concerns. Belangar (1992) states, "classroom teachers are in the best position to solve many of the complex problems of education" (p. 16). Also, Allwright (1983) emphasizes that the classroom is the first place to look if classroom-centered researchers really want to understand how to help their students learn more effectively. Moreover, McBee (2004) defines teacher researchers as, "teachers who have become empowered to seek answers to the

questions they have about practice and to adopt critical attitudes toward programs imposed upon them by outsiders" (p. 57).

Classroom Research Can Offer Simple Research Design Options

According to Mazzillo (1994), classroom research can be initiated by using simple tools such as observing problems, asking questions, and making tests. Lacorte and Krastel (2002) believe that "The flexibility of the options allows for a richness of data collection through multiple sources" (p. 910). Allwright (1997) points out the importance of bringing research elements into teaching and learning processes in a simple way. Instead of research with a big R, he suggests a research perspective. "Research perspective," in Allwright's terms, "[is] a research for local understandings rather than for incontrovertible findings and universalistic theory" (p. 369). He believes that if teachers can integrate into this process and build a durable level of investigative activity, the research done can begin to meet local needs. Similarly, Belangar (1992) states that "big research with six-figure funding and complex scientific procedures is no longer regarded as the only way to learn something about education" (p. 16). Likewise, McBee (2004) points out that "classroom research does not need complex inferential statistics, teacher researchers can simply examine group means or correlations without testing for statistical significance" (p. 54). Mackey and Gass (2005) mention that there are different kinds of research ranging from large-scale examination of the effects of instruction, small-scale analyses of issues in classroom setting, detailed ethnographies of specific classes over time, research on learners' aptitude and learning strategies, to qualitatively oriented description of classroom discourse. Through these different types of research options, teachers can put their beliefs into operation. Teachers can find the topics meaningful to their students' age, educational background, culture, and interests.

Classroom Research can Offer a Closer Examination of the Language Classrooms' Teaching and Learning Practice

As Mackey and Gass (2005) mention, classroom research contributes to teachers' understanding of both second language teaching and learning practice. Teachers can investigate the classroom environment, student(s), class materials, and

school policies. Hiebert (1999) states, "Research can document what students can learn under what kinds of conditions. Research can show that students can reach certain goals and that some kinds of instruction are especially effective in helping them get there" (p. 9). Johnson (1999) addresses the fact that teachers are aware that they often cannot teach the same thing the same way twice, because what works with one group of students may fail with another. In this context, Johnson believes that teachers need to figure out how to teach a particular issue and how to act and interact with a particular group of learners in a particular time and environment. Lacorte and Krastel (2002) state, "Action research can give teachers-as-classroom-researchers an in-depth, practical look at issues related to their teaching, their students, and the dynamics of their classroom" (p. 909). As a result, they can discover specific problems and identify the depth of feelings on particular issues. Belanger (1992) states that teachers can investigate their own practices. According to Belanger teacher research "revitalizes teachers, promotes ownership of effective practices, verifies what methods work, widens the range of teachers' professional skills, and enables teachers to become change agents" (p. 18). In this way, they can find satisfactory answers to problems, and make an improvement or change in such situations. Seliger (1983) states that "good teaching involves a constant re-evaluation of how we perceive the role of the classroom, the learner, and the process of language acquisition within the classroom" (p. 189). Through re-evaluation, they can develop new strategies with their experiences and accumulate knowledge to deal with problems, improve their practice, and solve some of their own classroom problems. As McBee (2004) points out, "classroom teachers see research as a tool for determining effective methods of classroom instruction, and believe that it should be as pragmatic as possible" (p. 52).

Classroom Research Can Present Mutual Benefits for Students and Teachers

According to Allwright (2003, p. 138), practitioner research, particularly explanatory practice, improves "quality of life" in the language classroom. Similarly, Gunn (2005) believes that mutual development and understanding between teachers and students are important for an improved quality of classroom life. Hiebert (1999) notes that "The research process can place people in position to see things in a new

way and imagine new possibilities" (p. 7). Hiebert believes new ideas such as "new ways of teaching, new curriculum materials, new ways of organizing schools" can improve the learning process for students (p. 7). McBee (2004) points out that teacher research permits practitioners "to make better decisions regarding curriculum, instructional techniques, grouping arrangements and materials" (p. 54). McBee highlights that basing these decisions on classroom research rather than intuition increases the probability that effective choices will be made. Chaudron (2001) points out that research on classroom instruction is a primary source for knowledge on language teaching practice. Chaudron believes that:

> The findings of classroom research are a vital base for professional practice, if for no other reason than that through classroom investigation we can verify or disconfirm the effectiveness of specific or general approaches to instruction and curricular content, and identify and understand the nature of interactive communication in the classroom. (p. 58)

For these reasons, teachers and students can have mutually beneficial outcomes as an indispensable advantage in their educational life. Chaudron (2001), being aware of the aforementioned benefits, justifies spending time and effort that "go into the preparation of materials, planning of curriculum, training of teachers, development of tests, and so on" (p. 58).

Classroom Research Can Improve Teachers' Critical Awareness

Furthermore, while making observations, interviews, questionnaires, audio or video recordings, diaries, portfolios of student work, transcripts of classroom interaction, and analysis of classroom events, teachers can improve their critical awareness. McDonough and McDonough (1997) state that research sharpens teachers' critical awareness through aforementioned research elements in practice and theory. Also, Lacorte and Krastel (2002) state, "teachers must take a critical look at their own actions within the classroom and consider possible issues within their systems of practical knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes that could be improved" (p. 914). McDonough and McDonough point out that teachers can build more challenging targets for themselves and for their students, take responsibility for student outcomes, and persist when faced with obstacles to learning basing their research findings.

Richards and Ho (1998) note that teachers should engage in a process of critical reflection upon their current teaching beliefs and practices. Hopkins (2008) believes that conducting research in their own or colleagues' classrooms helps teachers take increased responsibility for their actions and create a more energetic and dynamic environment in their schools in which better learning and teaching can take place. Teachers come together to discuss their findings, share their opinions, and make evaluations about problems around them. They pay motivated and careful attention in this interactive network. Moreover, McBee (2004) points out, "research that is performed by classroom teachers gives teachers a critical attitude toward programs created by outside sources" (p. 54).

Accordingly, critical awareness about what they are doing and collaborating with other teachers in practice will provide advantages to teachers for examining their own classrooms to realize what works best for them, for their students and for their schools, and they can explore new research options. Moreover, Lacorte and Krastel (2002) state that, through critical examinations of their actions, teachers should investigate "what they have learned from their involvement in the research into their teaching and professional development" (p. 914). Becoming a critical viewer may promote becoming a reflective practitioner-researcher.

Classroom Research Can Give a Perspective to Teachers to Become Reflective Practitioners

Research closes the gap between understanding problems and taking action by keeping the role of researcher and practitioner in the same scope. According to Allwright (1997), teachers' roles in classroom research have increased immensely. Johnson (1993) discusses the relationship between teachers and research. Johnson states that teachers have usually been viewed as consumers of research who are expected to only read research and then apply findings to their classrooms. Johnson highlights that this opinion changed and teachers are now viewed as "reflective practitioners" (p. 3). Johnson states that teachers can be active researchers who contribute to the research feature by conducting studies in their own classrooms, taking roles in collaborative projects, and/or changing their practice based on their findings. According to McDonough and McDonough, this shows that "doing and

thinking are interwoven" (1997, p. 23). McDonough and McDonough believe that classroom research is essential to develop a sense of the reflective teacher, and reflective teaching can encourage teachers towards doing research. McDonough and McDonough describe reflective teaching as one way of teacher development and enabling teacher understanding of their classroom practices. As McBee (2004) points out, "teacher research forces teachers to be reflective, to ask questions about classroom events, to notice ways that their own behaviors influence the classroom, and to experiment with new approaches to teaching" (p. 54).

Classroom Research Can Build Bridges between Theory and Practice

Another advantage of research for teachers is to help build bridges between theory and practice. According to McDonough and McDonough (1997), there is a relationship between theory and practice. They state that "Applied research without a theoretical base can be random, inefficient and confusing" (p. 32). Bartels (2002) states that "Proponents of action research by language teachers see it as one way to lessen the perceived gap between theory and practice" (p. 75). Also, Duff and Early (1996) state that language classrooms have a vital role in the examination and testing of research, theory, and practice in applied linguistics. Fleischer and Fox (2004) emphasize that teacher research is not just teachers' stories. Fleischer and Fox note that "It is intentional, systematic, and capable of creating both theoretical knowledge and systematic change" (p. 260). Johnson (1993) mentions that, in the last decade, a large quantity of books and articles on conducting and reporting classroom research have been written and published, and growing numbers of specialized conferences devoted to issues in second and foreign language research. According to Johnson, these books are specifically addressed to teacher researchers to guide them in planning and conducting their own studies. These studies help the rise of teacher-researchers or the action research movement in L2 research. Besides, these developments help the researcher learn accumulated knowledge already available in the literature. Wallace (1998) states that teachers can read professional journals for different ideas and suggestions. Belanger (1992) states, "teacher-researchers can publish their findings with interested audiences in journals, research-groups booklets, and share findings in staff-room discussions, department meetings, local professional-

development days, and national, state, or local conferences" (p. 22). Consequently, when teachers get involved in research, they can lead to the change and improvement of practice and establish the originality of their work by building bridges between theory and practice.

Classroom Research Can Foster a Collaborative Research Environment

Farrell (2007) highlights that language teacher researchers can share their own research and opinions with others, get feedback from other teachers, learn from their experiences, and compare what is happening in different classrooms and schools. As Bailey (2001) points out, "By reading or hearing accounts of other people's research, [teachers] can get new ideas for teaching and for their investigations, as well as becoming better connected with the profession at large" (p. 496).

Classroom Research Can Enhance the Professional Development of Teachers

According to Johnson (2002) and Wallace (1998), reflecting on teaching, classroom issues, and how teaching and learning occur has a strong impact on the professional development of teachers. Similarly, Shkedi (1998) points out that action research conducted by individual teachers or with academic partners facilitate teacher professionalism. According to McDonough and McDonough (1997), professional development "portrays teachers as active and questioning professionals willing to reflect and change in a long-term way over the course of their whole career" (p. 31). Teachers can grasp a better understanding of how second languages are learned and taught, together with a commitment to improving the conditions, efficiency, trying to find the most effective ways of dealing with issues related to their own classrooms, and facilitate learning in their classroom setting. Also, teacher researchers can have advantages of improving their personal or institutional development and contributing "for each other's development" (Allwright, 2003, p. 129). Nunan (2001) indicates that "reflective teaching provides a way of developing professional competence by integrating two sources of knowledge, received knowledge and experiential knowledge with practice" (p.198). According to Izumi (2009), conducting action research offers development as a professional and of the profession and help teachers grow throughout their whole careers.

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Classroom Research Can Increase Research Based Decision-Making in Classrooms

James Hiebert (1999) believes that there is a special relationship between research and decision-making in classrooms due to the complex nature of the classroom community. McBee (2004) believes that research "is a powerful way for teachers to become more refined practitioners by helping them to make informed, evidence-based decisions" (p. 53). According to Hiebert (1999), making of meaningful decisions out of complex issues often is based on probability estimates, and research data. Research results help making good decisions with confidence. In fact, teachers involved in "research-based decision making" (Hiebert, 1999, p. 13) are more in control and closer to decision–making in their own specific-context. Besides, McBee (2004) points out that "teaching practices could be improved if teachers used research results as a guide to decision making in the classroom" (p. 53). McBee proposes that the professional status of teachers as experts is enhanced through the growing confidence, knowledge, and authority by using the research experience. Sozbilir (2007) examines student teachers' views on the value of undertaking small-scale research as part of the secondary teacher training course. Sozbilir's study indicates that student teachers see research as a way of improving their teaching and learning practice which can be considered as sign of evidence-based education. Sozbilir believes that evidence-based education can improve teachers' classroom practices "if evidence from research is collected and applied systematically to inform the decisions that practitioners have to take in the course of their work" (p. 57).

As mentioned above, there has been a lot of research to show benefits of conducting classroom research. The literature findings show consistent views that teacher research can provide advantages both to individual teachers and to the field of second language learning. To summarize, as Belangar (1992) states classroom research provides many benefits such as, "an enriched professionalism, increased confidence in instructional decision-making, a defense against burn-out, a new appreciation for theory, a potential avenue for informing theory, the demystifying of research, empowerment of teachers, and a necessary condition for professional development" (p. 18).

Now, I will investigate the obstacles to conduct classroom research for teachers from the related literature.

Obstacles to Classroom Research

Belangar (1992) points out that "the major cost of teacher research is time: time to refine questions, time to read about what others have thought and done on the topic, time to discuss ideas with colleagues, time to plan the research, time to collect and analyze data, time to reflect, and time to publish" (p. 17). Similarly, Gunn (2005) states that within the daily activities of classroom teaching, the time factor for research can be problematic for many ESL teachers.

Ekiz (2006) notes that the factors that prevents teachers from doing research are the lack of time and the lack of facilities if they wish to carry out research. Mazzillo (1994) gives an example from her own life and states that when the idea of classroom research was first brought to her attention, she also was reluctant to support it because of the lack of time and research skills. Hopkins (2008) also notes that many teachers see classroom research as an extra burden that adds more work and consumes a lot of their teaching time. As Belanger (1992) mentions, teachers have to deal with arranging daily lessons, correcting papers, preparing examinations, calculating grades, and so on. Also, Allwright (1997) notes some concern about the reasons why teachers do not want to get involved in research. He proposes the fact that teachers are not given financial support, release time, or recognition for conducting research. Similarly, Austin (1995) expressed that "there are so many things working against researchers, time, energy, levels, and administrative directives" (p. 182). Austin concludes that classroom research is complex and exhausting "it's like crossing a desert" (p. 182). Likewise, McBee (2004) states three obstacles that prevent them from doing classroom research: "teachers already work under severe time restraints, lack training in research skills, and are not provided with institutional or financial support" (p. 55). Moeover, McBee believes that teachers' time is already overburdened, asking them to do research in addition to teaching might not be desired by teachers.

Keeping in mind the above mentioned benefits and obstacles toward involvement in classroom research, through this study I aim to see the MAG school

teachers' attitudes about practitioner research and compare my findings with what has been said in the literature.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Classroom research plays an important role in improving the quality of education for all stakeholders. However, some teachers avoid research while others strive to develop themselves in order to be better educators and enhance the learning of their students. This study aimed to answer questions about teachers' attitudes toward classroom research. I surveyed MAG (Madares Al Ghad/ Schools of the Future) school teachers working in Sharjah to find out their attitudes towards conducting practitioner research.

In this study, the data collection tools were questionnaires and interviews in order to answer my two research questions:

(1) What benefits, if any, do MAG school teachers see in conducting practitioner research?

(2) What reasons do MAG school teachers have for not conducting practitioner research?

The first tool was a questionnaire, composed of open-ended questions and close-ended questions. The questionnaire contained six open-ended questions and nine close-ended questions—six "Yes" and "No" questions and three tick questions. Comments the research subjects provided were also taken into account. After completing the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were held with two Teacher Development Specialists (TDSs), two Instructional Leadership Coordinators (ILCs), and four MAG teachers who had completed the questionnaire.

The Participants

Subjects for this study included 25 teachers who are working in four different MAG schools and four supervisors, two of whom were called TDSs, who supervise these teachers, and two of whom were called ILCs, who supervise the TDSs and the teachers in MAG schools in Sharjah. Participation in the study was voluntary in both the surveys and the interviews.

One of the school was a secondary all-girls schools, one school was a secondary all-boys school, one school was a primary all-girls, and the last one was a primary all-boys schools. Class sizes are around 20-25 students. Teachers were 25 English language teachers (eight males and 17 females) working in MAG schools. They were all Arabs from different countries such as the Emirates, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. Only one of them was from South Africa. All of the MAG teachers were Bachelor Degree holders.

The following tables give information about the participating teachers' years of experience (Table 1) and their nationalities (Table 2):

Table 1: Teachers' years of experience (n= 25)

Participants' Gender	Years of experience					
	0-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21-25 years	26-30 years
Male	1	4	2			1
Female	4	6	3	1	2	1
Total	5	10	5	1	2	2

Table 1 shows that teachers reflected a wide variety of teaching experience. One of the teachers has been teaching for 29 years. Another one is a graduate in her first two months of teaching. The majority of teachers had been teaching for more than five years.

Table 2: Teachers' nationalities (n= 25)

Gender	Countries					
	Emirati	Egyptian	Syrian	Jordanian	South Africa	No answer
Male		3	2	3		
Female	6	3		1	1	6
Total	6	6	2	4	1	6

Data Collection Process

Survey

The survey consisted of two sections (see Appendix 1). The first section was demographic data on the participants considering their gender, age, nationality, years of teaching experience, and the grades they teach (see Appendix 1a). Such information is useful to add the researchers' understanding of the participants'

background. The second section was divided into three parts. This section of the survey contained six open-ended questions and nine closed-ended questions—six "Yes" and "No" questions and three tick-the-box questions. The first part aimed to elicit the teachers' experiences and knowledge about practitioner research. This part had thirteen questions (see Appendix 1b): six questions were open-ended, six questions were "Yes" and "No", and one question asked the participants to tick categories. Survey takers answered the open-ended questions, chose appropriate boxes and ticked suitable statements that reflect their current teaching/researching situation. The second and third parts were about teachers' attitudes towards practitioner research and aimed to answer this study's research questions. The second part (question 14, see Appendix 1c) was designed to learn about teachers' attitudes towards the benefits of conducting classroom research. This part has one question consisting of 18 statements. The third part (question 15, see Appendix 1d) was designed to examine their attitudes towards the obstacles of classroom research, that is, what they believe prevents teachers from doing classroom research. This part included one question consisting of eight statements. Participants ticked as many boxes as they agree with for the second and third parts of the questionnaire.

As mentioned earlier, the second section of the survey contained six open-ended questions. Besides, I provided space for participants to add their comments if they had any after each "Yes" and "No" questions and tick the box questions. Shkedi (1998) emphasizes that teachers prefer to do qualitative research, because it has the potential to express their professional world. Shkedi also notes that qualitative research "could contribute to raising their professional levels, and could reinforce their status as professionals" (p. 559). In this context, participants made their comments on the questionnaires and interviews in their own words freely. This qualitative information was used to answer my two research questions, which were about their attitudes towards the benefits and obstacles of practitioner research.

I visited five MAG schools in Sharjah. The questionnaire was distributed to 35 teachers teaching in these schools. Two Teacher Development Specialists (TDSs) and two Instructional-Leadership Coordinators (ILCs) helped me ask their teachers to fill out the questionnaires and returned them to me. All teachers were informed that filling out the surveys was optional and their identities would remain anonymous. One

of the schools let me administer the questionnaire to the teachers and I collected the surveys' results on the same day. Other schools did not let me administer the questionnaire myself; they took them and asked the teachers to fill them out and then returned them to me. As mentioned above, I visited five MAG schools in Sharjah, but only received feedback from four schools. In total, 25 out of 35 surveys were returned to me and formed the basis for the data analysis. The questionnaires were all written in English, and were answered only in English.

Interviews

After collecting the surveys, in the second phase of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the richest and deepest information possible. Four female teachers who completed the questionnaire were willing to be interviewed. Although one male teacher volunteered, in order to respect local culture only female teachers were interviewed. I contacted the female teachers through emails or phone calls and arranged the interviews. The teachers' opinions about practical issues of doing practitioner research were asked during the interviews. Furthermore, two TDSs who are supervising the MAG school teachers and two ILCs who are supervising the TDSs and the teachers were interviewed to find their attitudes toward practitioner research. One TDS and one ILC are MA Degree holders and one TDS and one ILC are currently studying for their MA degrees.

The interviews were not conducted with a closed list of prepared questions at hand. Rather, each interview developed its own framework as each teacher told his/her own story using a possible general list of topics for guidance during the interview (see Appendix 1e). Also, I referred to the questionnaire findings during the interviews. I did not interrupt the teachers during the interviews and did not dictate them the responses. Through these interviews, teachers' and supervisors' opinions about the current state of practitioner research in Sharjah were compared. Moreover, this showed whether or not teachers and supervisors shared similar views and opinions about practitioner research or if they had different views. At the beginning of the interviews, I made clear that recording the interview was their choice and the participants agreed to let me record them. Because all the interviewees were female, I assured them that no male would hear their voices. The interviews were held

individually. Each of them lasted for about 15-20 minutes and were all done in English. However, one interviewee did not have time for face to face interview so she instead gave me written answers.

The findings from the surveys and interviews analysis are the focus of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Two sources of data were used to investigate middle school teachers' attitudes towards practitioner research in the UAE context. At the beginning of the study, a questionnaire was carried out. Then semi-structured interviews were conducted with four teachers, two Teacher Development Specialists (TDSs) and two Instructional Leadership Coordinator (ILCs) in MAG schools.

The most important findings of each of the three parts of the questionnaire are discussed in the following order: (1) MAG school teachers' experiences and knowledge about practitioner research, (2) attitudes towards the benefits of conducting classroom research, and (3) attitudes towards the obstacles of classroom research.

MAG School Teachers' Experiences and Knowledge about Practitioner Research

Questions 1-13 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1b) concentrated on issues such as whether teachers have any experience conducting practitioner research in their teaching career, how they solve recurrent teaching problems they come across, whether they read about classroom research, whether they have the skills to carry out research, whether they have pre- or in-service training on research, and whether they have encouragement from their mentors and/or school administration. Data were collected through open-ended questions, close-ended statements, and interviews.

Open-ended Questions Results

Firstly, in the questionnaire, teachers were asked to answer the open-ended question "Have you ever engaged in practitioner research?" This question had two parts: "If yes, could you please explain why you conducted practitioner research?" and "If no, could you please explain why you have not conducted practitioner research?" 25 MAG teachers answered this question with 17 (14 female and 3 male) teachers saying that they had conducted practitioner research. Three of the 17 teachers

carried it out during their college years as part of their graduation requirement. These teachers were at the beginning of their careers and their experience in teaching English varied from two months to three years. 14 of them carried out practitioner research during their teaching careers. These teachers have more than four years experience in English language teaching. Some of the reasons that the teachers conducted practitioner research were as follows: as part of the MAG program, to improve teaching practice, to find the problems of argumentative writing, to examine unmotivated students in the class, to find reasons to use the mother language in group activities, to find reasons for weaknesses of writing, and to find reasons for students' lack of vocabulary. One teacher, who has seven years of teaching experience, wrote, "My colleague and I did a practitioner research about using the mother language in group activities. We noticed that students communicate with each other using Arabic language, so through that research we tried to find out the reasons that make them Arabic during the group activities.[1]" Another teacher, who has 13 years of teaching experience, wrote, "Yes, I did a practitioner research on argumentative writing because I found that my Ss aren't able to perform it in exams." One of the teachers, who has 27 years of teaching experience, wrote, "I did it because I want to know Sts' attitude towards my way of teaching and it was a feedback for me." And another teacher, who has 20 years of teaching experience, wrote, "I made an action research about how to make question because making questions is a problem for most of students."

On the other hand, eight (three female and five male teachers) teachers had not conducted practitioner research. These teachers have more than six years of teaching experience. The main reason for not conducting practitioner research for them was lack of time and having no chance to do it. One of the teachers, who has eight years of teaching experience, wrote, "Because of shortage of time. Sometimes I do think of starting a research of my own just for my own interest in some areas related to the field of education but I never had the time to do any." Also, another teacher who has 10 years of experience wrote, "May be having no time is the reason." Another female teacher with eight years of teaching experience wrote, "Never got round to it." Results of the question are summarized in Table 3 and Table 4.

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[1] All quotes are as written by participants. No editing has been done.

Table 3: Teachers' years of experiences who engaged in the practitioner research (17 Teachers)

Gender	Years of experience					
	0-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21-25 years	26-30 years
Male (n=3)	1	1				1
Female (n=14)	4	3	3	1	2	1
Total (n=17)	5	4	3	1	2	2

Table 4: Teachers' years of experiences who had not engaged the practitioner research (8 Teachers)

Gender	Years of experience					
	0-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21-25 years	26-30 years
Male (n=5)		3	2			
Female (n=3)		3				
Total (n=8)		6	2			

The next question asked, "What do you normally do about recurrent teaching problems you come across?" 13 teachers (10 female, three male), first, prefer asking for solutions from their colleagues, supervisors, senior teachers, principals, or mentors. In addition to that two teachers (male) discuss the problems with their students, use their experiences, and contact parents or social workers in dealing with the problems depending on their source. Ten teachers (five female and five male) also first prefer the above mentioned solutions and then, if they have still problems, conduct their own classroom research to find a solution. One female teacher, who has eight years experience, wrote, "I try to find possible solutions on my own. Sometimes I discuss it with my colleagues or my students. Usually I would look for the causes of the problem, then I would start of looking for the possible solutions." Also, one male teacher, who has 29 years experience, wrote, "I try to study any problem I face, try to go deep and find the reasons. Sometimes I contact the other part [students], and try to find proper solutions; even I can get help from others." Another female teacher, who has three years experience, wrote three reasons using a numbered list:

1- think of reasons for the problem.

2- try to find solutions by practicing different strategies.

3- chose best ways to reduce the problem.

Two female teachers did not answer this question.

When the teachers were asked about the importance of practitioner research to help advance their career, 23 teachers (15 female 8 male) agreed that it is a useful tool for development of their careers and to help them overcome their teaching and classroom or student problems. They believe that practitioner research is a tool for understanding about the issues they face in their classroom settings with a view to updating their knowledge and initiating changes in their teaching practices. One female teacher noted that practitioner research helps her solve teaching problems and develop teaching strategies, techniques, and practice. Another teacher stated that when she solves a problem through conducting research, she will be able to solve similar problems easily in the future. One female teacher wrote, "Yes of course. By doing research you can get a lot of information and improve your skills and answer the problems you have in your career as a teacher." Another female teacher wrote, "Yes, of course, be aware of recent and updated theories, approaches and techniques." One female teacher wrote, "Sure, it widen your knowledge and make you confident about your teaching." Another female teacher wrote, "Yes, because through doing this kind of research, I'll get the chance to read more about the problems the teachers might face and get more experience in how to deal with different kind of problems." One female teacher with three years of experience wrote, "Yes, because it helps to deepen your understanding of teaching and learning by looking into a teaching problem and trying to take care of it. It will help us develop our philosophy of teaching."

Three male teachers believed that practitioner research is useful for exchanging their experiences and information. One male teacher, who has six years of experience, wrote, "Yes, because it is good to exchange information." Another teacher, who has six years of experience, wrote, "Of course, it's useful for exchanging experience."

On the other hand, two female teachers believed that practitioner research does not help advance their career. One of them, who has 22 years of experience, stated that because of some restrictions such as time, she cannot conduct research. The

second one, who has nine years of experience, wrote, "Not yet, because nobody takes it seriously."

One of the survey questions was about whether teachers read about classroom research or not. 19 teachers stated they enjoy reading research papers. They emphasized the importance of reading about classroom research. They believed that they can update and refresh their knowledge of pedagogical issues. One female teacher, who has five years experience, wrote, "Yes. I am a nerd. I love finding out what new studies have to say about techniques, learning, teaching, social attitudes, factors affecting all of the above, reading and writing obstacles children face, etc." Several teachers emphasized that gaining new knowledge can increase the quality of education. They agreed on similar reasons to read about classroom research such as they wanted to see what the other practitioners did when faced with similar situations or problems and they wanted to be aware of the latest developments and events in education for better teaching practice. One female teacher, who has three years experience, wrote, "Yes. to learn about different problems and the ways different people find to solve different problems. It helps, to try and use the same strategies if we found similar problems in our classroom." Another female teacher, who has 2 months experience, wrote, "Yes" and specifically presented five reasons, putting a star next to one of them. She wrote,

-To learn more about the classroom management strategies.

–How to deal with misbehavers.

–Teaching vocabulary to young learners.

–The advantage of using games in the classroom.

*-To develop my teaching skills and students' learning skills.

On the contrary, without giving an explanation, six teachers noted that they did not read about classroom research. They just wrote "No" to answer this question.

Another survey question was "Do the professional conferences you attend ever inspire you to consider doing practitioner research? Why? or Why not?" 19 (12 female and seven male) teachers answered this question "Yes". They believe that the professional conferences affect them positively. They emphasized that these conferences are beneficial for their professional development and can encourage them to conduct research about their practices in their own teaching context. They can get

new ideas, learn new strategies for their teaching practice, and discover practical and different solutions for their classroom problems. One female teacher, who has eight years experience, wrote, "I honestly feel disappointed when I have to answer questions like that. I have attended many conferences related to my career and they always inspire me of new ideas but I never had the courage and time to do my own." Another female teacher, who has seven years experience, wrote, "Yes, because listening to other teachers talking about how they successfully managed the problem they faced, motivates me to take steps forward dealing with my classroom problems." Another female teacher, who has two years experience, wrote, "Yes, they gave me the light I need and also the spot the light on major problems we don't normaly think about."

Six (five female and one male) teachers were not in favor of attending the professional conferences. One male teacher wrote, "No, I haven't attended many." These teachers believed that these conferences did not inspire them to consider conducting practitioner research. One of the teachers felt that no conference aroused inspiration to conduct research and another teacher wrote, "No, not yet."

As mentioned before, one of the reasons that hinder teachers from doing classroom research was lack of time. Some teachers state that they have heavy teaching loads. They view classroom research as an extra burden that adds more work and consumes a lot of their teaching time. When the teachers were asked if they had more time or release of time for professional development would they use it to carry out practitioner research, 18 teachers (12 female and six male) agreed that this would be a tool to create a better teaching environment, improve their knowledge and themselves as well. One male teacher, who has 29 years experience, wrote, "if in that time I feel I need to that research, surely I'll do it." One female teacher, who has seven years experience, wrote, "Yes, because it will be a chance for me to deal with the problems I might face during the academic year." One female teacher, who has 12 years experience, wrote, "Yes I will because it help me do identify my problems and improve my teaching skills." One female teacher, who has 10 years experience, wrote, "Yes, to be updated in the field of education and build the bridges between theory and practice in education because there are a lot of gaps between what teachers study in universities and what they apply." One male teacher, who has five years

experience, wrote," Yes, because it will give me as a teacher a good opportunity to know the SS levels more and specify the apt treatment for them." Also, he added that his judgment will be based on research-based decisions. One female teacher, who has two months experience, wrote, "No" but I considered it as a positive answer because her answer shows that she actually does practitioner research in her classrooms. She added, "I can do my research during teaching because teacher teachs and evaluate and observe while teaching." Moreover, she noted that if she has time she will attend workshops or read more others' research.

Seven teachers (five female and two male) stated that they would not do practitioner research even if they had more time. Four of their reasons for not doing research were long school days, heavy school duties, time factor, and family work. One female teacher, who has 27 years experience, wrote, "I think it is difficult nowadays because of long school days and heavy school duties." Another female teacher, who has 22 years experience, wrote, "No, because no time to apply the solution." The other reasons were their family commitments. One female teacher, who has 10 years experience, wrote, "No, I wouldn't because I have other family work to do."

Close-ended Statements Results

Two questions in the survey were about whether or not teachers had training about how to conduct practitioner research during their teacher education process or in-service training. These results showed that the majority of teachers were involved in the different forms of training, either in-service training or in the initial teacher education process or both (see Table 5).

Table 5: Number of teachers who had pre- and in-service training (n=25)

Questions / Answers	Yes			No		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Was practitioner research part of your initial teacher training?	11	7	18	6	1	7
Have you ever had any in-service training on practitioner research?	5	9	14	8	3	11

As shown in Table 5, 18 teachers (11 female and seven male) indicated that they had received some training to learn research skills during their initial teacher training process, whereas seven teachers (six female and one male) had no training. 14 teachers (five female and nine male) stated that they had received in-service training on practitioner research while 11 teachers (eight female and three male) had no in-service training. At the same time, I checked the participants' answers to see how many of them received pre- or in-service training and I found that 11 teachers (seven female and four male) had two kinds of training on practitioner research. I believe that training programs provide teachers with knowledge and the opportunity to be involved in practitioner research.

The survey results showed that teachers either got pressure (see Table 6) from their school administration or encouragement from their mentors to carry out practitioner research (see Table 7).

Table 6: Number of teachers who got pressure from school administration (n=25)

Statements / Answers	Yes			No		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Do you ever feel pressure from your school administration to carry out practitioner research?	3	6	9	14	2	16

As shown in Table 6, nine teachers (three female and six male) felt pressured from their administration to conduct the research whereas 16 teachers (14 female and two male) did not. One male teacher with five years of experience noted that the reason for not getting pressure from administrators could be that they might not understand the nature or importance of action research.

Table 7: Number of teachers who got encouragement from mentors (n=25)

Statements / Answers	Yes			No		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Do your MAG mentors encourage you to carry out practitioner research?	10	4	14	7	4	11

As shown in Table 7, 14 teachers (ten female and four male) were encouraged by their mentors to conduct the research while 11 teachers (seven female and four male) did not get encouragement. One male teacher, who has five years of experience,

noted that the reason for not getting encouragement from their mentors could be that they might lack of necessary knowledge and expertise. He wrote, "They didn't talk about it. They don't have a good command in English."

Two male teachers stated that they had been encouraged by their mentors and felt pressured by their administration to carry out the research.

Another finding was that 14 teachers (nine female and five male) believed that more practitioner research was carried out in MAG schools than in ordinary Government schools. On the other hand, 11 teachers (eight female and three male) believed otherwise. One of the teachers noted that he had joined the MAG school several months ago, which was why he had no idea about them. In addition, I asked them "Do you have any colleagues who carry out practitioner research?" 15 teachers (ten female and five male) answered "Yes" while the other 10 (seven female and three male) said "No."

When the teachers were asked about which skills they used to conduct practitioner research, the data revealed that they mainly used knowledge about important research skills on conducting classroom research such as how to formulate research questions, prepare a questionnaire, choose data-collection instruments, analyze data, review literature, and write up a research project (see Table 8). The total results of the questionnaire are shown in Appendix 2a.

Table 8: Skills teachers have to conduct practitioner research (n=25)

Statement	Answered			Not Answered		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
I know how to prepare a questionnaire	15	5	20	2	3	5
I know how to conduct classroom research	12	6	18	5	2	7
I know how to prepare data-collection instruments	13	3	16	4	5	9
I know how to prepare research questions	11	5	16	6	3	9
I know how to analyze a questionnaire	11	2	13	6	6	12
I know how to write up a research project	9	4	13	8	4	12

As shown in Table 8, the majority of teachers (20 teachers: 15 female and five male) say they can prepare a questionnaire, while the other five cannot. 18 teachers

(12 female and six male) indicated that they know how to do classroom research, but the other seven are unable to. Furthermore, 16 teachers (13 female and 3 male) could prepare data-collection instruments, and, once again, 16 teachers (11 female and 5 male) could prepare research questions. Meanwhile, 13 teachers (11 female and two male) could analyze a questionnaire, nine teachers (seven female and two male) could research literature, and also, 13 teachers (9 female and four male) could write up a research project. In addition to the views given above, two female teachers added some notes. One of them, who has 2 years experience, noted that she knows how to do research ethically. She wrote, "I know how to ethicly with the researchers." The second one, who has 10 years experience, wrote, "I know how to choose the appropriate methodology of research depending on the problem of the research."

The results indicate that teachers understand research terminology and can design a research project. This shows that they can identify problems with their teaching practice, use the research skills and knowledge they have. Knowing these skills on carrying out practitioner research, they can easily recognize and solve teaching problems which arise in their classroom environment, and put into practice the results of their research.

Interview Results

To clarify and confirm the questionnaire findings, I interviewed four MAG school teachers who had participated in filling out the survey, two TDSs and two ILCs. My interview questions were prepared to follow up the data collected from the questionnaires and examine some interesting findings as well. In this context, I interviewed one female teacher (teacher A) who showed negative attitudes and three teachers (teachers B, C, D) who showed positive attitudes towards the practitioner research in their questionnaires.

According to the questionnaire results, teacher A has not conducted classroom research, does not read about it, and does not attend professional conferences. When teacher A was asked why she did not read about classroom research or attend professional conferences related to her field, she said, "Only one reason because we are having full time, because we are overloaded on things asked to do teachers.[2]" In

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2 All quotes are as spoken by participants and transcribed from the tapes. No editing has been done.

addition, teacher A said, "No, I don't do research myself. But, sometimes, we have to go to workshops or some training sessions, then, we talk about the research and its results and what did you get out about many subjects related to our schools." On the other hand, Teacher B reads about action research that has been done previously to confirm or get some different ideas related to issues in her classrooms. She stated that there are many helpful websites for teachers. For example, she used teacher research to investigate what reasons students have for their lack of vocabulary, from the students' points of view. She also asks to other teachers and educators for their opinions.

Another question was "Do you think more practitioner research should be carried out in MAG schools than in ordinary government schools? Why or why not?" Even though teacher A has said that she had not engaged in classroom research in her teaching career, she stated that MAG schools have a new and different system. Teacher A believes that it should be investigated how this system is affecting schools so that it can be understood whether or not they are going well and whether or not they have reached their planned expectations. In addition, teacher A said,

> If the differences between MAG schools and other government schools are investigated, the Ministry could find out how students feel about the new program, and then the Ministry could compare this with other programs. The Ministry could then make its own decisions based on this data.

Also, ILC A believes action research should be carried out in MAG schools as well as other schools for the sake of developing and enhancing the teaching and learning process. Similarly, teacher C said, "Yes, we should do more research since this is a new program and we need to try new methods. We need teaching materials such as we need to download games and videos related to the lesson topics."

When I asked "Have you had/offered any pre- or in-service training on practitioner research?, ILC B expressed that educational zones in the UAE offer a series of training for first year teachers that they have to go to. ILC B stated that, by being an ILC, she is a role model and has a leadership role at the school. For this reasons, ILC B offers some training sessions at the school level and makes sure that the teachers are updated on new theory, new research, and new practices. Teacher B said, "Our supervisors gave us training on how we should conduct action research.

After the training program we conducted a real one." In this context, I asked her whether she like to share her research results with students, teachers, supervisors, or school administrators. Teacher B said that after finishing their research teachers presented the results in front of their colleagues. Teacher B added, "They discussed the way they did it, and the reasons for what they found, and the conclusion." Likewise, TDS A said, "Of course we like to share results with other teachers because it will be very beneficial." Teacher D, who is a graduate of the American University of Sharjah, expressed that she had knowledge about the importance of practitioner research from her university education. Teacher D believes that all knowledge is useful, and she said, "If a person learn through the training how to apply their knowledge or look up something they need, then pre and in service training is always useful whether to remind someone of an old approach or introduce a new approach."

Teachers were asked, "When you have a problem in your class, do you ask the solution from your colleagues and supervisors or do you conduct your own research?" All the teachers interviewed preferred to handle their classroom problems in similar ways such as relying on their intuition, asking their colleagues for advice, and searching the Internet. Teacher A said, "First, I will use my own experience, and then I will ask my colleagues." She believes that research is a big word for her and professor/lecturers of universities and colleges should do it. Teacher B said, "Sometimes, I ask more experienced friends to get advantage from their experience, sometimes, I want to try things by myself by reading things and try to apply them on my students. I believe both of them are important." Similarly, Teacher C said that she will first use her experience and, secondly, she will either ask her friends to share the ideas or go on to some websites for teachers to find solutions for her classroom problems. She said, "That's how I would basically solve my classrooms' problems."

Also, teacher D stated that practitioner research should involve speaking to colleagues as well. Teacher D said, "I usually combine both: asking my colleagues and/or conducting practitioner research." Furthermore, she added that if she is the main class teacher, she will definitely conduct practitioner research. She said, "Because I feel that the child's academic and social progress is my personal responsibility as his or her teacher."

When the teachers were asked about "Can you apply your research results in the classroom or do you have to ask someone such as your supervisor or the Ministry?, teacher C said, "We can apply it in the class as long as it is keeping to the culture of the school and country." In addition, she gave an example and mentioned that they are not allowed to use music in their classrooms. Similarly, ILC A stated that she let teachers implement their results in their classroom. However, ILC A expressed that the teachers first consult with the TDSs or ILCs and if the research results are appropriate for the grade level and the culture of the community, the teachers can implement the results at the school level.

To conclude, I examined MAG school teachers' experiences and knowledge about practitioner research in their English teaching career. The findings that I collected from questionnaires and interviews show that the majority of the teachers:

- have engaged in classroom research,
- read about classroom research,
- attend professional conferences,
- have the skills to carry out research,
- have pre- and/or in-service training on research, and
- have encouragement from their mentors,
- believe more research should be done in MAG schools than in ordinary government schools.

These findings indicated that the majority of teachers appeared to have knowledge and/or experience of the overall concept of practitioner research in their teaching career and school environment although not all of them conduct research. In addition, when I compared the questionnaire results with the interview results, I found that these results are in line with each other. Hence, these findings give me clues in deciding the credibility of the information I collected in order to answer my two research questions.

With such findings in mind, I will now focus on answering my first research question, which is about MAG school teachers' attitudes towards the benefits of doing practitioner research, in the following section.

Attitudes towards the Benefits of Conducting Classroom Research

Here, we will examine the first research question, "What benefits, if any, do MAG school teachers see in conducting practitioner research?" Data was collected through close-ended statements and interviews. Question 14 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1c) focused on examining the benefits of conducting practitioner research. The teachers chose from the statements to indicate the reasons they believed practitioner research is beneficial. The questionnaire, in general, showed that the majority of teachers had positive attitudes toward the benefits of carrying out classroom research.

Close-ended Statement Results

When teachers were asked about the benefits of practitioner research, they expressed a variety of views on this matter. Table 9 below shows the responses of the majority of the teachers. They consider classroom research a powerful tool to improve their teaching practice, overcome their classroom problems, enrich their professional knowledge, make sure what methods and techniques work for students, and provide useful ideas to make changes in schools/classrooms. The total results of the questionnaire are shown in Appendix 2b.

Table 9: Benefits that MAG school teachers see in conducting practitioner research (n=25)

Statement	Answered			Not Answered		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
improves teaching practice	14	7	21	3	1	4
solves classroom problems	15	6	21	2	2	4
enriches teachers' professional knowledge	13	6	19	4	2	6
verifies what methods and techniques work for students	15	4	19	2	4	6
helps build bridges between theory and practice	16	3	19	1	5	6
provides useful ideas to make changes in schools/classrooms	12	5	17	5	3	8
accumulates knowledge to deal with problems	12	5	17	5	3	8
helps update teacher' knowledge in the field of education	8	7	15	9	1	10
helps identify the source of problems easily	11	3	14	6	5	11
improves critical awareness	11	2	13	6	6	12
develops a sense of the reflective teacher, and reflective teaching	9	4	13	8	4	12
develops new relationships with teachers, students, and students' parents	10	2	12	7	6	13
improves students' learning	9	3	12	8	5	13
improves collaboration with colleagues	9	3	12	8	5	13

As shown in Table 9, the majority of teachers agreed on two main benefits of the research: it improves teaching practice and solves classroom problems. 21 teachers (14 female and seven male) indicated that practitioner research improves teaching practice, while the other four disagreed. Also, 21 teachers (15 female and six male) indicated that the research solves classroom problems, but the other four did not agree. Furthermore, 19 teachers agreed on an additional three benefits of practitioner research: enrichment of teachers' professional knowledge, verification of what methods and techniques that work for students, and building of bridges between theory and practice. 19 of the teachers (13 female and six male) agreed that practitioner research enriches teachers' professional knowledge, 19 teachers (15 female and four male) agreed that practitioner research verifies what methods and

techniques work for students, and, once again, 19 teachers (16 female and three male) agreed that practitioner research helps build bridges between theory and practice. 17 teachers (12 female and five male) agreed that practitioner research provides useful ideas to make changes in schools/classrooms. Similarly, 17 teachers (12 female and five male) agreed that practitioner research accumulates knowledge to deal with problems.

Moreover, 15 teachers (eight female and seven male) agreed that practitioner research helps update teacher' knowledge in the field of education. Also, 14 teachers (11 female and three male) agreed that practitioner research helps identify the source of problems easily. In addition, 13 teachers (11 female and two male) agreed that practitioner research improves critical awareness, and likewise, 13 teachers (nine female and four male) agreed that practitioner research develops a sense of the reflective teacher, and reflective teaching. More than 50% of teachers (12 teachers— 10 female and two male) agreed that practitioner research develops new relationships with teachers, students, and students' parents. Meanwhile, 12 teachers (nine female and three male) also believe that it improves students' learning, and improves collaboration with colleagues.

Interview Results

Interview results also indicated that teachers', TDSs', and ILC's had positive attitudes toward engaging the classroom research and their opinions are in line with the questionnaire findings about the benefits of the practitioner research. The findings indicate that classroom research has a significant effect on students and teachers who are the pillars of the educational system.

At the beginning of the interviews, when I asked "Whom do you believe would benefit most from practitioner research? Why?" all the interviewees agreed that teachers and students would benefit most from classroom research. ILC A said,

> If you do something that is related to teachers, such as teacher development or teacher training, the first beneficiary of the research will be the teacher, but then when you develop the teachers, it will reflect on the students so it's a cycle. At the end, everyone would benefit from it.

TDS A stated that teachers, students, and the school as a whole will be benefited from practitioner research and added, "When we do research, I think, we will improve ourselves because of the improvement in our teaching. At the end, all community will benefit." Similarly, TDS B said, "I think the most is teachers and students because the teacher wants to find new and practical ways to develop their teaching practice and increase students' achievement." Furthermore, TDS B believes that when teachers become strong and empowered with research community as a whole will benefit from it, because the teachers shape their community and shape children's life and identity.

Interviewed teachers' opinions about the advantages of practitioner research are discussed in the following five sections.

Enriches Professional Knowledge and Improve Teaching Practice

TDS A, TDS B, and teacher B believe that two of the benefits of classroom research are to develop teachers' professional knowledge and improve teaching practice. TDS A said, "As a teacher, I'm sure it is of great help for professional improvement. In fact, professional development is one of my goals in my field." Similarly, teacher B believes that practitioner research is very helpful for improving teachers' professional development.

TDS B encourages her teachers' to conduct classroom research or if they are not very enthusiastic about doing research she offers them professional development sessions every week related to teaching practices or about a new policy or a new strategy that needs to be applied. TDS B stated that she informs them to how they can apply the new strategies and she asks them for feedback, what they think. TDS A said, "If they have any ideas that can enhance their teaching practice they are taken on board."

Solves Classroom Problems and Gives Helpful Ideas to Teachers to Make Changes in their Classrooms and/or Schools

TDS B and teacher C believes that teacher research is very helpful solving teachers' specific classroom problems and gives helpful ideas to make changes in their class and/or schools. They can get some ideas what seems to be working well, and what they would like to improve or change, as they think about their students and

teaching. Teacher C said, "If you find a problem in your class, teacher research will make you curious to know more about it." Then, teacher C added, "at the end you will have some useful and various ideas and solve your classroom problems." Also, TDS B stated that when educators investigate a problem and when they get the results and then according to the results they can change their teaching techniques or approaches to find a way to solve the problem.

Verifies What Methods and Techniques Work for Students

ILC A, ILC B and teacher D believe that classroom research helps them discover effective methods and techniques for learning and teaching of their learners. Teacher D said, "As educators, teachers must accept that each student and class persona is unique." Teacher D stated that there are groups of students who may respond to her teaching methods and yet another group who may struggle for different reasons. Teacher D expressed that it is teacher's responsibility to search and find a solution for suitable methods, and said, "Classroom problems should be researched to ensure that it is discovered which approaches and techniques are helpful for persona unique students and classrooms."

Accordingly, ILC B said, "Through research, I think teachers grow personally and they contribute to the field because they see what helps, which strategy and technique work for their learners for sure." In addition, ILC A expressed that through classroom research the teachers can try different methods and techniques and see which one is useful for their students learning. In this context, ILC B highlighted that she encourages the teachers to learn about new ideas, try different strategies and methods, and apply theory. Then, ILC B stated that the teachers go to the classroom, implement these strategies and come back with their observations and their data, and discuss which methods are useful for the students and how the children's learning have improved.

Helps Update Teacher' Knowledge in the Field of Education

ILC A and teacher D expressed that engaging in practitioner research helps update their knowledge in their field. Teacher D said,

I regularly aim to attend professional conferences and if it is not possible, I try to search related issues on the Internet or at libraries or by reading literature recommended by colleagues or by doing classroom research myself to refresh and up-to-date my knowledge.

Likewise, ILC A agreed on advantages of reading about classroom research, conducting classroom research, and attending professional conferences and said, "I think it's very important to keep updated and keep strong in your field because it's easy sometimes to slip into routine." ILC A added that the teachers, while updating their knowledge, can learn new ideas and techniques to implement into their classrooms to see how they work or why they do not work.

Improves Students' Learning

ILC A, ILC B, TDS A, and teacher D talked about how classroom research boosts students' learning. Teacher D tries practitioner research as part of the MAG program, and said, "I have worked with a wide range of students varying in age, ability, nationality, first languages and approaches to learning. I have found practitioner research is extremely beneficial to covering all aspects of enhancing students' acquisition of knowledge." Also, ILC A said, "I try to do practitioner research myself and support my teachers to do research for new ideas, new methodologies and techniques, something they can apply in the classroom to boost students' learning performance." In addition, teacher D said, "Any problem that arises with impeded student learning should be researched to find a solution and assist the student's development and learning." Furthermore, ILC B supports the teachers to do readings, take ideas, and do action research to increase students' performance. Similarly, TDS A noted that she always encourages her teachers to use new techniques such as questioning techniques to enhance students' critical thinking. TDS A said, "Because questions that will advocate thinking, questions that will make students think, and develops their critical thinking."

In conclusion, the findings of my study, whether those I collected from surveys or interviews, generally pointed out that majority of the teachers see the research as a useful tool to:

- improve their teaching practice,

- solve their classroom problems,

- enrich their professional knowledge,

- verify what methods and techniques work for students,

- help build bridges between theory and practice,

- provide useful ideas to make changes in schools/classrooms, and

- accumulates knowledge to deal with problems

In addition, they believe that practitioner research is beneficial for the teachers and students, and at the end whole community will benefit from it.

Attitudes towards the Obstacles of Classroom Research

In this part, I will examine the second research question, "What reasons do MAG school teachers have for not conducting practitioner research?" Data was collected through close-ended statements and interviews. Question 15 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1d) focused on examining the obstacles to conduct practitioner research. The teachers chose from the statements to indicate the reasons that prevent them from conducting practitioner research. This study indicates that most of the teachers identify two main reasons that hinder them from doing research: heavy school duties and the time factor. The other reasons, such as the loss of teaching time, lack of facilities, and no financial support, are not seen as significant as the main obstacles which are mentioned above.

Close-ended Statements Results

The results about the teachers' concerns about obstacles that hinder them from conducting practitioner research are shown in Table 10. The total results of the questionnaire in this issue are shown in Appendix 2c.

Table 10: Some of the reasons that might prevent teachers from doing practitioner research (n=25)

	Answered			Not Answered		
Statement	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
heavy school duties	17	7	24		1	1
time consuming	13	4	17	4	4	8
takes away from teaching	8	3	11	9	5	14
lack of facilities	6	5	11	11	3	14
no financial support	9	2	11	8	6	14

As shown in Table 10, 24 teachers agreed that heavy school duties are the most important reason that prevents them from doing research. They believe that they are too busy with lots of extra school work besides teaching regular lessons such as being a class teacher, an activity teacher, a substitute teacher, organizing activities, and so on. The second main reason is the time factor. 17 teachers believed that doing practitioner research is time consuming. They believe it is too demanding, too complex, and imposes extra work on them.

These close-ended statements results regarding the above mentioned obstacles are in line with the findings of the open-ended question about what the teachers do about recurrent teaching problems they come across. Mostly, teachers prefer to get advice from their colleagues, supervisors, senior teachers, principles, or mentors for solutions. In addition, they rely on their own experiences or discuss the problem with their students. They believe that doing so saves them time. After that, if they still have problems, some of them conduct their own classroom research to find a solution. This, as the close-ended statements' results illustrate, could be because they do not have time to do practitioner research in their classrooms and schools.

Moreover, concerning the time factor, the close-ended statements finding is also in line with the findings of the open-ended question about whether they would carry out practitioner research if they had more time for professional development. Most teachers agreed that they would be involved in practitioner research if they were given this extra time.

Besides the previous main obstacles, teachers indicated three different obstacles of the same rank: practitioner research taking them away from teaching, lack of facilities, and no financial support.

Interview Results

The findings of the open-ended questions indicated that the main obstacles encountered by teachers in schools are heavy school duties and the time factor. Data collected during interviews provided similar results concerning attitudes towards the obstacles of classroom research.

As mentioned earlier, one of the female teachers (teacher A) showed no interest in conducting classroom research in her questionnaire. In her questionnaire answers, she wrote that she has not engaged in practitioner research in her 10 years of teaching career. I asked to her the reasons for this. She said,

Only one reason because we are having full time because we are overloaded on things asked to do teachers. Teachers asked do many things. We do not have time to do more things. Just for the time and overloaded. We do not have time to breathe.

As teacher A stated, the time factor is one of the major hindrance for teachers to conduct practitioner research. In this context, the teachers were asked, "Do you think research takes more time than asking your colleagues?" Teacher B expressed that practitioner research involves a complex and demanding process, and said, "Research takes time, sometimes the results aren't convenient, sometimes students don't take things seriously, or sometimes they didn't understand the instructions, or sometimes they aren't sincere filling the questionnaire. So, you need to repeat your classroom research." For these reasons, teacher B stated that if she has a problem in her classrooms, first, she will prefer handling them through asking her colleagues or using her experiences, and then doing classroom research.

When I asked the ILC A about her teachers whether they read about classroom research or conduct it themselves she said, "Not all of them I have to say because they are overloaded with work but if they have the time, yes, they will go forward and do that." Also, ILC B highlighted that lack of facilities is another problem in her school

environment. ILC B said, "Our problem is we can hardly find any books, we are trying to do fundraising and build books."

To conclude, the findings that I collected from questionnaires and interviews show that the majority of the teachers see two main obstacles that prevent them from doing research: heavy school duties and the time factor. The teachers said that they do not have the time to carry out practitioner research because they are busy with a lot of school work.

After examining the survey and interview data in this chapter, we come to the conclusion that teachers have knowledge and/or experience of practitioner research. The majority of teachers have engaged in practitioner research, although the others have not conducted practitioner research. Teachers see the research as a helpful tool to improve their teaching practice, solve their classroom problems, enhance their professional knowledge, and benefit themselves, students, and the educational community. However, most of the teachers identify heavy school duties and the time factor as the main constraints that hinder them from conducting practitioner research.

The implications of these findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter discusses the conclusions drawn from this research and the implications of these conclusions. It has four sections: summary of the study, implications and suggestions for teachers, TDSs, ILCs, the school administration, and the Ministry of Education, the limitations of the study, and a final thought.

Summary

This study findings show some similarities with the literature concerning benefits and obstacles of classroom research. The study confirmed that, to a large extent, the participating teachers shared similar experiences with teachers in other parts of the world, that is, MAG (Madares Al Ghad/ Schools of the Future) school teachers showed positive attitudes towards conducting practitioner research.

Findings generally showed that teachers had engaged in practitioner research in their careers. They emphasized the importance of reading and attending professional conferences about classroom research. As Johnson (1993) mentions, they believe that reading about classroom research can help teachers update and refresh their knowledge of educational matters and learn accumulated knowledge already available in the literature. Teachers noted that reading professional journals and attending professional conferences will provide them with different ideas and suggestions for their classroom problems (Wallace (1998). Also, these findings were similar to the findings of Bailey (2001) that "By reading or hearing accounts of other people's research, [teachers] can get new ideas for teaching and for their investigations, as well as becoming better connected with the profession at large" (p. 496).

In addition, the majority of the teachers have been involved in the different forms of training, either in-service training or in the teacher education process or both. They have encouragement from their mentors. They have the research skills to carry out practitioner research. Knowing these skills can help them recognize and solve

teaching problems which arise in their classroom settings, and put into practice the results of their research.

Moreover, they believed that classroom research is a useful tool to contribute to their professional development. This was similar to the findings of Belanger (1992), Chaudron (2001), McBee (2004), and Izumi (2009). Belanger (1992) states that teacher research widens professional skills and improves professional development. Besides, Chaudron (2001) believes that the findings of classroom research are a vital base for professional practice. In addition, McBee (2004) proposes that the professional status of teachers as experts is enhanced by using their research experiences. According to Izumi (2009), conducting action research offers development as a professional and of the profession and helps teachers grow throughout their whole careers.

Furthermore, participants, like Mackey and Mass (2005), believe that classroom research can improve their teaching practice and "verifies what methods work" for their students (Belanger 1992, p. 18). As Rounds (1998) notes, "learners often have varying native languages and cultures, proficiency levels, learning styles, motivation, and attitudes; teachers have their own distinctive belief systems, teaching styles, preferred language, teaching materials, and professional and personal agendas" (p. 45). Teachers also believe that research provides useful ideas to make changes in their teaching practice based on their findings. These were similar to the findings of Belanger (1992) and Johnson (1993). Belanger (1992) states that teacher research "enables teachers to become change agents" (p. 18).

In addition, teachers believe that practitioner research can present mutual benefits for teachers and students, and in the end, the whole community will benefit from it. This finding was similar to the findings of Hiebert (1999), Allwright, 2003, and Gunn (2005). According to Gunn (2005), both teachers and students should work collaboratively in classroom research. She states that "The students and the teacher learn together in the language classroom so it stands to reason that they should team up and work together when researching the classroom" (p. 101). This is very important, as Allwright, (2003) points out, if the teachers want to improve the "quality of life" in the language classroom (p. 114). Allwright explains the classroom is for both teachers and students and instead of solving problems directly teacher

researchers should strive to understand the problem and its causes from the students' points of view as well. Also, Hiebert (1999) notes that the research process can help discover "new ways of teaching, new curriculum materials, new ways of organizing schools" to improve the learning process for students (p. 7).

As for constraints of practitioner research, the majority of the teachers agreed that heavy school duties and the time factor are the most important obstacles that prevent them from doing it. These results are also supported by the related literature (Belangar, 1992, Austin, 1995, McBee, 2004, Gunn, 2005, Ekiz, 2006). Teachers believed that they were busy with lots of school work beside their teaching load. They believed that doing practitioner research is too demanding, exhausting, and time consuming (Austin, 1995, Hopkins, 2008). For these reasons, they first, prefer asking for solutions from their colleagues, supervisors, senior teachers, principals, or mentors, just as McBee (2004) points out in his study that teachers "rarely turn to research, instead they rely on intuition or take advice of colleagues" (p. 52). McBee notes that teachers believe that doing so saves them time and effort. However, this study's findings showed that some of the teachers pointed out that they also first prefer the above mentioned solutions and then, if they have still problems, they would conduct their own classroom research to find a solution. Moreover, they agreed that if they have more time they would carry out practitioner research to enhance their professional development, teaching practice, and knowledge.

Implications of the Study

Implications and Suggestions for Teachers

Overall, the participants in this study acknowledged the importance of practitioner research in the language learning/teaching practice. The majority of the teachers have positive attitudes toward practitioner research, and what is most important now is to support the teachers and give them opportunities to actively engage in classroom research. Although heavy school duties and the time factor are the main obstacles for teachers, they will benefit if they find a balance between school work and doing research.

To start with, doing research should be a requirement for teachers at least once a year. Afterwards, they present their findings to their colleagues and discuss their

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findings, share their opinions, make evaluations about problems around them, and attempt to find solutions to obstacles they come up in their schools (Chaudron, 2001). Therefore, teachers can participate in cooperative projects that foster communication with peers in their classrooms. In this way, they can learn from each other and teacher researchers gain prestige among their peers and superiors since they can make decisions based on their findings rather than on their unsupported personal opinions. Moreover, as they gain experience, they will require less preparation time to do research. Eventually, being aware of these advantages, teachers could do research as a regular routine and become active researchers of their own teaching context. Teachers who conducted research would be an example to motivate other teachers.

Implications and Suggestions for TDSs, ILCs and the School Administration

Teacher Development Specialists (TDSs), Instructional Leadership Coordinators (ILCs), and the school administration have direct contact and work closely with teachers. The study findings showed that teachers have been encouraged by their mentors (TDSs and ILCs) but have also felt pressured by their administration to carry out practitioner research. The study findings showed that if teachers have more time they are more willing to conduct practitioner research. Therefore, to facilitate the research process, mentors and the school administration can either offer a lighter teaching load or give some release time from administrative school duties to such teachers who are willing to conduct practitioner research. As a result, their research will not take them away from their classroom teaching. Also, study findings showed that although the majority of the teachers were involved in the different forms of training, either in-service training, pre-service training or both, some of them had no training whatsoever. Mentors and the school administrations can provide some training sessions to teach them research skills about how to design a research project for such teachers. After gaining the experience of doing research, teachers should be encouraged to continue with research practice in their classrooms.

Moreover, as one of the ILCs pointed out, the lack of facilities can be a problem for teachers, making it difficult to find professional journals and books in their school library. When I visited the schools in order to distribute the surveys and conduct interviews, I hardly saw computers in front of teachers. School

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administrations can provide schools with the equipment and tools needed to facilitate teachers' research, such as a well-stocked library, computers, and the internet connections needed to access professional journals, books, and useful websites. Mentors and school administrations should value and reward teachers who conduct practitioner research by giving them appreciation, and designating them as teacher of the month.

Implications and Suggestions for the Ministry of Education

Being responsible for the entire educational system, the Ministry of Education plays a very important role. The Ministry has the main role of providing opportunities to conduct classroom research and facilitating teachers' professional development. The Ministry could organize lecture series for teachers to showcase their research where interested teachers can share their research and opinions with others, get feedback from other teachers, learn from their experiences, and compare what is happening in different classrooms and schools (Farrell, 2007). Teachers can build more challenging targets for themselves and for their students, take responsibility for student outcomes, and persist when faced with obstacles to learning. The Ministry can give teachers a certificate of appreciation at the end of such lectures. Moreover, it can choose the best classroom research project at the end of the every semester, and offer some salary increase to such teachers, and can even publish teachers' findings in journals and books. Rewarding the winners might motivate other teachers to conduct practitioner research in the future. This kind of reward system would justify spending time and effort in the research process.

The Ministry can also provide some opportunities to teachers to implement the research findings in schools. This way, as Hopkins (2008) states, doing research in their own or colleagues' classrooms helps teachers take increased responsibility for their actions, gives them a better understanding of how second languages are learned and taught, and creates a more energetic and dynamic environment in their schools.

Limitations of the Study

The study investigated MAG school teachers' attitudes toward practitioner research in English language classrooms in Sharjah alone. The results of the study

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would have been more comprehensive if it had included more schools from other Emirates. Also, the interviews included only female teachers, TDSs, and ILCs because of cultural issues. Having male teachers could have added variety to my study in the sense that having more data from various sources might have strengthened the findings.

Final Thought

Education plays a very important part in people's lives, and knowledge of teachers' attitudes is also very significant in the teaching process. Assessing teachers' attitudes is crucial to supporting and enabling them to engage in research. This study examined some benefits of practitioner research and some obstacles teachers came across. Teachers consider research as providing helpful insights into teaching and learning. Practitioner research can provide benefits to the main components of the educational system, such as teachers, students, and the school, in the field of second language teaching and learning. When teachers get involved in research, they can lead to the change and improvement of practice. Involvement in research projects provides, undoubtedly, professional and personal development. An important thing is that teachers, mentors, and the school administration should work cooperatively in developing the research process. School administrations and mentors should guide/monitor teachers during their research process in order to establish a supportive environment. Also, mentors and school administrations could encourage them to have graduate degrees to develop their expertise in their context and pedagogy (McBee, 2004). I think valuing and rewarding teachers' efforts in conducting research is of paramount importance for the educational success. I believe one of the important contributions of the results of this study is to increase the awareness of the Ministry of Education, school administrations, and mentors about the benefits of practitioner research and the obstacles that teachers face. I think that exploring teachers' attitudes on a larger scale toward practitioner research would help the Ministry of Education to re-evaluate their expectations of teachers and inspire teachers to conduct research for future improvements in the teaching/learning process.

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Appendix 1.

Research Instruments

Appendix 1a: The Survey: Close-ended Statements

MAG School Teachers' Attitudes toward Practitioner Research in UAE

English Language Classrooms

Dear teachers,

This questionnaire will help me understand MAG School Teachers' views and attitudes toward practitioner research. The results of this survey will be used in my MA TESOL thesis. Please note that you do not have to include your names at any stage of data collection. All information you provide will remain anonymous and confidential
The questionnaire is divided into two sections.

Section One:

Please tick/write in the appropriate boxes/blanks that reflect your current situation.

• Gender: ☐ Male   ☐ Female
• Age (optional):   _____
• Nationality (Optional):   _____
• Years of teaching experience: _____ years

• Grades teaching now: _____ grade

• Are you a: ☐ Teacher   ☐ Senior Teacher

Would you like to be interviewed on this topic? In the interview, we will discuss some of your answers so that you will have a chance to explain your opinions in more depth:

• ☐ Yes, I would like to be interviewed.

• ☐ No, I would prefer not to be interviewed.

If yes, please provide your name and contact information so I can contact you:

Name: _____

Phone or e-mail: _____

Appendix 1b: The Survey: Open-ended Questions

MAG School Teachers' Experiences and Knowledge about Practitioner Research

Section two: Part 1

Please write your answers to questions 1-6.

1. Have you ever engaged in practitioner research?

    a. If yes, could you please explain why you conducted practitioner research?

    b. If no, could you please explain why you have not conducted practitioner research?

2. What do you normally do about recurrent teaching problems you come across?

3. Do you think practitioner research might help advance your career? Why? or Why not?

4. Do you ever read about classroom research? Why? or Why not?

5. Do the professional conferences you attend ever inspire you to consider doing practitioner research? Why? or Why not?

6. If you had more time (say half a day a week) for professional development would you use it to carry out practitioner research? Why? or Why not?

Close-ended Questions

Please answer questions 7-12 with a *Yes* or *No* answer. Note that there is a space after each statement if you want to make any comments on any of the points.

7. Was practitioner research part of your initial teacher training?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

8. Have you ever had any in-service training on practitioner research?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

9. Do you have any colleagues who carry out practitioner research?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

10. Do you ever feel pressure from your school administration to carry out practitioner research?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

11. Do you think more practitioner research is carried out in MAG schools than in ordinary government schools?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

12. Do your MAG mentors encourage you to carry out practitioner research?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Please tick question 13. You can tick as many as you agree with. Note that there is a space after each statement if you want to make any comments on any of the points.

13. Which skills do you have to conduct practitioner research?
    a. I know how to conduct classroom research
    b. I know how to prepare data-collection instruments
    c. I know how to prepare research questions
    d. I know how to prepare a questionnaire
    e. I know how to analyze a questionnaire
    f. I know how to research literature
    g. I know how to write up a research project
    h. Other _____

Appendix 1c. The survey: Close-ended Questions

Benefits of Conducting Practitioner Research

Please tick question 14. You can tick as many as you agree with. Note that there is a space after each statement if you want to make any comments on any of the points.

14. Do you believe that practitioner research is beneficial for any of the following reasons?

 a. improves teaching practice

 b. solves classroom problems

 c. develops new relationships with teachers, students, and students' parents

 d. improves students' learning

 e. provides useful ideas to make changes in schools/classrooms

 f. enriches teachers' professional knowledge

 g. helps identify the source of problems easily

 h. improves collaboration with colleagues

 i. improves critical awareness

 j. increases confidence and control in instructional decision-making

 k. helps gain prestige among his/her peers and superiors

 l. verifies what methods and techniques work for students

 m. accumulates knowledge to deal with problems

 n. improves quality of life in the classrooms

 o. helps build bridges between theory and practice

 p. helps update teacher' knowledge in the field of education

 q. develops a sense of the reflective teacher, and reflective teaching

 r. Other

Appendix 1d. The survey: Close-ended Questions

        Obstacles to Conduct Practitioner Research

Please tick questions 15. You can tick as many as you agree with. Note that there is a space after each statement if you want to make any comments on any of the points.

15. What are some of the reasons that might prevent teachers from doing practitioner research?
    a. time consuming
    b. heavy school duties
    c. lack of facilities
    d. classroom research results, usually, cannot be implemented in schools
    e. administrators or supervisors do not value classroom research findings
    f. no financial support
    g. takes away from teaching

Appendix 1e: List of Possible Guiding Questions for the Interviews.

1. Have you tried practitioner research? Why or Why not?
2. Whom do you believe would benefit most from practitioner research? Why?
3. In your opinion, what would encourage you to conduct practitioner research?
4. Do you like to share your research results with students, teachers, supervisors, and school administrators?
5. Have you used your research findings in your classes? Why?
6. Do you feel that you need to have training programs to become involved in practitioner research in order to learn how to conduct it properly? Why? or Why not?
7. Do you think more practitioner research is carried out in MAG schools than in ordinary government schools? Why? or Why not?
8. Do you have other comments about conducting practitioner research?

Appendix 2.

Teachers' Survey Results

Appendix 2a: MAG School Teachers' Research Skills to Conduct Practitioner Research

Table 7: Skills teachers have to conduct practitioner research (n=25)

Statement	Answered			Not Answered		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
I know how to prepare a questionnaire	15	5	20	2	3	5
I know how to conduct classroom research	12	6	18	5	2	7
I know how to prepare data-collection instruments	13	3	16	4	5	9
I know how to prepare research questions	11	5	16	6	3	9
I know how to analyze a questionnaire	11	2	13	6	6	12
I know how to write up a research project	9	4	13	8	4	12
I know how to research literature	7	2	9	10	6	16

Appendix 2b: MAG School Teachers' Attitudes towards the Benefits of Conducting Classroom Research

Table 8: Benefits that MAG school teachers see in conducting practitioner research (n=25)

Statement	Answered			Not Answered		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
improves teaching practice	14	7	21	3	1	4
solves classroom problems	15	6	21	2	2	4
enriches teachers' professional knowledge	13	6	19	4	2	6
verifies what methods and techniques work for students	15	4	19	2	4	6
helps build bridges between theory and practice	16	3	19	1	5	6
provides useful ideas to make changes in schools/classrooms	12	5	17	5	3	8
accumulates knowledge to deal with problems	12	5	17	5	3	8
helps update teacher' knowledge in the field of education	8	7	15	9	1	10
helps identify the source of problems easily	11	3	14	6	5	11
improves critical awareness	11	2	13	6	6	12
develops a sense of the reflective teacher, and reflective teaching	9	4	13	8	4	12
develops new relationships with teachers, students, and students' parents	10	2	12	7	6	13
improves students' learning	9	3	12	8	5	13
improves collaboration with colleagues	9	3	12	8	5	13
increases confidence and control in instructional decision-making	8	2	10	9	6	15
improves quality of life in the classrooms	9	1	10	8	7	15
helps gain prestige among his/her peers and superiors	3	—	3	14	8	22

Appendix 2c: MAG School Teachers' Attitudes towards the Obstacles of Classroom

Research.

Table 9: Some of the reasons that might prevent teachers from doing practitioner

research (n=25)

Statement	Answered			Not Answered		
	Female (n=17)	Male (n=8)	Total (n=25)	Female	Male	Total
heavy school duties	17	7	24		1	1
time consuming	13	4	17	4	4	8
takes away from teaching	8	3	11	9	5	14
lack of facilities	6	5	11	11	3	14
no financial support	9	2	11	8	6	14
classroom research results, usually, cannot be implemented in schools	6	3	9	11	5	16
administrators or supervisors do not value classroom research findings	2	—	2	15	8	23

VITA

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