



Action Research in Moroccan English Language Teaching: Perceptions and Practices

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Abstract

Action research (AR) has increasingly been recognized as an effective means of bridging the gap between educational theory and classroom practice. However, its implementation in the Moroccan English Language Teaching (ELT) context remains limited. This study explores the perceptions and practices of action research among three key stakeholders: EFL teachers, teacher trainers, and supervisors. Using a qualitative exploratory design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 13 participants. The findings reveal that while all stakeholders hold positive attitudes toward AR and acknowledge its value for professional development and reflective practice, its actual implementation is sporadic and largely informal. This gap is mainly attributed to structural constraints, including heavy workload, limited research training, and lack of institutional support. The study also highlights a disconnect between pre-service training, where AR is formally introduced, and in-service contexts, where it is insufficiently integrated. The paper argues that promoting action research in Morocco requires stronger institutional support, practical training, and the development of collaborative professional cultures.

1. Introduction

Educational research plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. It enables teachers to move beyond intuition and adopt evidence-based practices. In this sense, research functions as a bridge between theory and the everyday realities of the classroom. First, research supports informed decision-making by allowing teachers to select strategies that have been proven effective. Second, it strengthens professional autonomy. When teachers base their pedagogical choices on data or established studies, they move from being mere implementers of a curriculum to active decision-makers. Third, research helps teachers address classroom diversity by providing insights into cognitive development, language acquisition,

and socio-economic factors affecting learning. This is particularly important in mixed-ability classrooms, where differentiation is essential. Finally, engaging in research contributes to continuous professional development by encouraging reflection and improvement (Hattie, 2008; Biesta, 2007; Mertler, 2019; Schön, 1983).

Educational research can broadly be divided into two categories. Basic (or theoretical) research aims to understand fundamental learning processes. Applied research, including action research, focuses on solving practical classroom problems. This paper aims to explore the current landscape of action research in Moroccan ELT classrooms. It examines how teachers, teacher trainers, and supervisors perceive and implement action research in their professional practice. The study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of EFL teachers, teacher trainers, and supervisors regarding action research?
- To what extent do they implement action research in their practice?
- What challenges do they face in doing so?

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Defining Action Research

Action research has been defined in various ways across the literature. Yet there is a broad consensus regarding its key characteristics. Burns (2010) defines it as a systematic and reflective form of inquiry conducted by teachers to investigate their own teaching contexts. Similarly, McNiff (1995) describes it as a cyclical process involving planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

From a broader perspective, Richards and Schmidt (2002) define action research as a type of research that aims at solving practical problems and bringing about change, rather than generating generalizable theories. This distinction highlights one of the fundamental differences between action research and traditional research paradigms. While conventional research seeks to produce universal knowledge, action research focuses on local, context-specific solutions.

Furthermore, action research is often described as teacher-led research, classroom research, or collegial inquiry (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009; Cunningham, 2011). These terms emphasize its practitioner-centred nature and its relevance to everyday teaching practices. As McKernan (1991) notes, the primary goal of action research is to address immediate and day-to-day problems of practitioners, making it highly relevant to classroom realities.

2.2 Action Research: Multifaceted Benefits

Action research is widely acknowledged as a powerful approach to bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and classroom practice (Goodnough, 2003). Unlike traditional research, which often produces generalized findings, action research enables teachers to generate context-specific, practice-oriented knowledge grounded in their own classrooms. The benefits of action research can be understood across several interconnected dimensions.

2.2.1 Empowerment and Teacher Autonomy

A central advantage of action research is its capacity to empower teachers as active agents of change. Through systematic inquiry, teachers move beyond the passive implementation of prescribed methods and become knowledge producers who critically examine their own practices. As Ginns et al. (2001) argue, action research allows teachers to examine their beliefs, understand their practice, promote critical reflection, and improve decision-making skills. More recent studies support this view. Borg (2013) highlights that teacher research boosts teacher agency, helping educators make informed pedagogical choices based on their specific contexts. Similarly, Edwards and Burns (2022) demonstrate that participation in action research enhances teachers' ability to respond independently to classroom challenges.

2.2.2 Enhancement of Professional Competence

A substantial body of research confirms that action research contributes to professional competence. Burns (1999, 2010) demonstrates that action research enhances reflective practice, pedagogical awareness, and instructional effectiveness. More recent studies support these findings. Yuan and Burns (2023) found that teachers engaging in action research develop deeper critical thinking skills and a stronger understanding of their teaching practices. Likewise, Vo and Nguyen (2021) report improvements in instructional strategies, classroom management, and teacher confidence. In addition, Dikilitaş and Griffiths (2021) highlight the role of action research in developing teacher autonomy and problem-solving skills in EFL contexts.

2.2.3 Contextual Relevance and Problem-Solving

One of the defining strengths of action research is its contextualized nature. Unlike traditional research, which may lack applicability across diverse educational settings, action research focuses on local, situated problems and generates solutions tailored to specific contexts. As McKernan (1991) emphasizes, action research addresses immediate and practical challenges faced by teachers. Burns (2010) similarly argues that it allows teachers to test and refine instructional strategies in response to students' needs, institutional constraints, and sociocultural factors.

Recent studies further highlight this dimension. Banegas and Consoli (2021) show that action research enables teachers to adapt their practices to digital and multimodal environments, while Fandiño (2022) demonstrates its relevance in resource-constrained educational settings.

2.2.4 Long-Term Professional Development

Action research plays a key role in fostering sustained professional development. Unlike traditional training models, which often focus on short-term skill acquisition, action research promotes continuous learning and reflective growth. Diaz-Maggioli (2004) argues that professional development involves the ongoing transformation of teachers' beliefs and practices. Similarly, Richards and Farrell (2005) distinguish between training and development, emphasizing the long-term nature of professional growth supported by reflective inquiry.

Recent research supports this view. Admiraal et al. (2021) found that teachers engaged in action research demonstrate higher levels of professional learning and instructional innovation. Vangrieken et al. (2020) also highlight the role of collaborative action research in sustaining professional development through shared reflection.

2.2.5 Identity Transformation and Teacher Agency

Beyond improving teaching practices, action research contributes to the transformation of teacher identity. It enables teachers to reconceptualize themselves as reflective practitioners and researchers. Noffke (1997) identifies the professional, personal, and political dimensions of action research, arguing that it enhances teachers' professional status and sense of agency. More recent research supports this perspective. Kayi-Aydar and Yazan (2022) show that engaging in action research contributes to teacher identity development, particularly in multilingual contexts. Similarly, Norton (2020) emphasizes that action research allows teachers to engage critically with issues such as identity, equity, and learner diversity.

2.3 Models of Action Research Implementation

The spiral model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) remains one of the most influential frameworks for implementing action research. It conceptualizes action research as a cyclical process involving planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Each cycle leads to refinement and improvement, making teaching a continuous process of inquiry. McNiff (1995) emphasizes the ongoing and recursive nature of action research. Rather than being a one-time project, it is viewed as a continuous process of professional learning, where each stage informs the next.

Reflection is central to action research. Schön (1983) distinguishes between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, enabling teachers to respond to immediate classroom situations while also engaging in deeper analysis of their practices. In a similar vein, Carr and Kemmis (1986) define action research as a form of self-reflective inquiry aimed at improving practice and understanding.

Additional models further expand the scope of action research. Elliott (1991) highlights the importance of problem exploration, while Stringer (2013) proposes the “Look–Think–Act” model as a practical framework. Zuber-Skerritt (1996) extends action research to institutional and higher education contexts.

2.4 Action Research in the Moroccan ELT Context

Despite its recognized benefits, action research remains relatively underutilized in Morocco. Existing studies suggest that while teachers generally hold positive perceptions of action research, its actual implementation in classrooms is limited. This gap between awareness and practice points to the need for stronger support and training. Fullan (2000) emphasizes that meaningful educational change requires active teacher engagement, which in this context involves fostering a culture of inquiry and reflection.

Moreover, there is a noticeable lack of empirical research examining how Moroccan teachers engage with action research. This limits understanding of its practical implementation and highlights the need for context-specific studies. The literature, therefore, reveals several key gaps:

- Limited empirical research on Moroccan ELT and action research
- Insufficient focus on teachers’ actual practices
- Need for context-sensitive insights

This study seeks to address these gaps by providing an in-depth analysis of stakeholders’ perceptions and practices.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive exploratory design, which is suitable for investigating complex and under-researched phenomena. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of participants’ perceptions, experiences, and contextual realities related to action research in the Moroccan ELT context.

3.2 Participants

The study involved 13 participants: six EFL teachers, four teacher trainers, and three supervisors. This combination of participants allows for the inclusion of multiple perspectives within the ELT system. Such triangulation enhances the richness and depth of the data by capturing views from different professional roles that shape teaching practices.

Participants were selected to represent these key stakeholder groups, ensuring that the study reflects a range of experiences and insights related to action research.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen because it provides flexibility while allowing the researcher to explore participants’ views in depth.

The interview protocol focused on three main areas: participants’ understanding of action research, their prior experience with it, and their perceptions of its associated benefits and challenges. This structure ensured consistency across interviews while allowing participants to elaborate on their individual experiences.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method is appropriate for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data.

The analysis followed a sequential process that began with familiarization with the data through repeated reading, followed by initial coding of relevant segments, before moving on to the development of themes based on patterns identified across the data, and culminating in the interpretation of those themes. This process enabled systematic organization of the data and identification of key themes related to perceptions and practices of action research.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their voluntary participation was ensured. They were also assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used solely for academic purposes. Anonymity was maintained throughout the research process.

4. Findings

4.1 Teachers' Perceptions

The analysis of teachers' interviews reveals a consistently positive perception of Action Research (AR) among Moroccan EFL teachers.

Action Research as a Tool for Problem-Solving and Innovation

Participants perceived action research as a practical means of addressing classroom problems and improving instructional practices. Through action research, teachers believed they could identify pedagogical issues, experiment with alternative teaching strategies, and evaluate their effectiveness in order to better respond to students' learning needs.

Positive but Abstract Perceptions of Action Research

All participants expressed a genuine appreciation for action research, recognising it as a valuable tool for professional growth, reflective practice, and pedagogical improvement. Teachers emphasised that action research enables them to critically examine their teaching practices, address classroom challenges, and implement pedagogical changes that enhance student learning outcomes.

"Action Research is very important because it helps teachers reflect on their practices and continuously improve their teaching." — T3

"It helps us as teachers to find different ways of solving classroom problems and issues." — T4

All participants identified themselves, implicitly or explicitly, as both teachers and researchers, indicating an awareness of the evolving role of educators as reflective practitioners. T1 captured this dual identity simply:

"The two: a teacher and a researcher." — T1

This shared self-perception suggests that the professional identity necessary to sustain action research already exists, even if the structural conditions required for its implementation remain insufficient.

Informal, Unsystematic, or Absent Practice

Despite these positive attitudes, none of the participants reported conducting action research in a formally structured or consistently documented manner. The findings reveal a significant gap between teachers' perceptions and their actual practices. Action research was either absent, occasional, or conducted informally without a systematic research framework.

"No, I don't conduct action research in a formal way." — T2

"I sometimes reflect on my teaching and try new strategies, but I do not always follow a structured research process." — T3

"Once or twice." — T4, when asked whether he had ever conducted action research in his classroom

"Actually, no." — T1, responding to the same question

T2 provided the most nuanced account of informal practice, explaining how he instinctively collects information when classroom problems arise:

“When I notice that students do not participate or don’t get good marks, I interview them and I take their data into account while planning the next lesson or test.” — T2

Although this reflects genuine reflective practice, it does not fully correspond to the systematic and cyclical process associated with formal action research, particularly regarding systematic data collection, analysis, and documentation.

Limited and Predominantly Theoretical Training

A recurring concern across all interviews was the inadequacy of training in action research during both pre-service and in-service preparation. Participants reported that action research was either absent from their training or introduced only superficially and theoretically.

“No.” — T2, when asked whether action research was introduced during his training

“Yes... but mainly at a theoretical level.” — T3

“A little bit.” — T4

“We just had a brief introduction. We didn’t really probe into it.” — T1

These responses reveal a systemic gap in teacher education. Even when action research was introduced, the training lacked practical application, leaving teachers without sufficient methodological knowledge in research design, data collection, analysis, and implementation. Consequently, participants felt inadequately prepared to conduct independent classroom-based research.

Structural and Institutional Barriers

The findings highlight several structural and contextual barriers that hinder teachers’ engagement in action research. Time constraints, heavy workload, and lack of institutional support emerged consistently as the primary obstacles. Teachers reported that overloaded curricula and extensive teaching responsibilities leave little opportunity for research activities.

“Workload, time constraints and the absence of institutional support influence teachers’ initiatives to conduct action research.” — T2

“These factors greatly limit my ability to conduct research, as teaching responsibilities leave little time, and there is not enough institutional support or encouragement.” — T3

“We don’t have enough time to carry such research since the programme is overloaded.” — T4

“Workload may lead to certain fatigue and even burnout, which will surely affect negatively the quality of the research. Time can also aggravate the problem because researchers will not have the dedication to collect evidence, analyse, and reflect on it.” — T1

T1 provided the most analytically developed perspective on these barriers, noting that they could function either as obstacles or incentives depending on how effectively they are managed:

“These three factors can have a positive effect on the research if they are taken care of and well-controlled.” — T1

Institutional limitations were also identified as major constraints, including insufficient access to resources, research facilities, funding, and professional guidance. In addition, some teachers highlighted socio-cultural and collegial resistance to research within schools. T2 explained:

“If a teacher decides to conduct action research inside the school, it may be considered a strange behaviour. His or her colleagues and the administration will be the first hindrance.” — T2

T1 similarly observed that:

“Some colleagues may resist collaborating in action research.” — T1

Need for Systemic Support and Professional Development

All four participants articulated a coherent vision of the structural reforms necessary to make action research a sustainable practice in Moroccan EFL classrooms. Teachers emphasised the

importance of reducing workload, allocating dedicated time for research, and providing practical training opportunities focused on classroom-based inquiry.

“I hope that the policy makers will issue some circulars that encourage teachers and other practitioners to conduct action research and solve their school problems.” — T2

“Reducing workload, providing dedicated time for research, and offering practical training would encourage more teachers to engage in Action Research.” — T3

“Reducing the number of teaching hours and devoting some more time to important things like action research.” — T4

“Making teachers aware of the importance of action research on their professional development, creating collaborative teams where teachers can share ideas and conduct research, offering training that focuses on practical techniques of conducting research.” — T1

Participants also stressed the importance of fostering a collaborative research culture through professional learning communities and partnerships with university researchers in order to strengthen teachers’ research capacities.

Role of Supervisors and Teacher Trainers

Supervisors and teacher trainers were perceived as central actors in promoting action research. Participants emphasised their role in providing mentorship, guidance, constructive feedback, and training opportunities throughout the research process.

T2 suggested that action research should be integrated into both pre-service and in-service training and that supervisors should:

“Discuss its results during meetings and put the research recommendations into practice.” — T2

T1 offered the most comprehensive account of this role:

“They play a crucial and multi-faceted role: providing mentorship and guidance as well as constructive feedback including pre and post observation discussions, ensuring access to research facilities, encouraging and fostering collaborative, growth and inquiry-based environments among teachers.” — T1

4.2 Supervisors’ Perceptions

Perceived Value and Importance of Action Research

Both supervisors strongly recognize the value of Action Research (AR), though their perspectives differ in depth and orientation. The first supervisor conceptualizes AR in transformative and critical terms, emphasizing its role in redefining teachers’ professional identity. As he explicitly states, *“AR is indispensable. It shifts the teacher from a passive consumer of Western-centric theories to a producer of local knowledge.”* This view highlights AR as a means of contextualizing pedagogy within the Moroccan classroom, particularly where *“classroom realities (large classes, mixed ability) often diverge from textbook ideals.”*

In contrast, the second supervisor adopts a more pragmatic stance, focusing on awareness and pedagogical effectiveness. He notes that AR *“helps teachers find solutions adapted to the problems they face in their classes”* and enables them to *“be more informed pedagogically and didactically.”* Despite this difference in framing, both supervisors converge on the idea that AR enhances reflective practice and contributes to improved student learning. This is further reinforced by the first supervisor’s assertion that AR promotes *“more evidence-based interventions”* that directly respond to learners’ needs.

Integration of Action Research into In-Service Training

A central finding emerging from both interviews is the limited and inconsistent integration of AR into in-service training. The first supervisor acknowledges that AR *“is integrated more as a theoretical than a sustained in-service practice”* and that its implementation *“remains at a moderate level.”*

Similarly, the second supervisor clearly states that AR *“is not directly integrated”* into training programs, although it may appear indirectly through reflective activities. He further admits, *“I*

have not yet introduced it formally,” which underscores the absence of structured frameworks for AR in professional development. This convergence reveals a significant gap between the recognized importance of AR and its actual pedagogical implementation within training contexts.

Barriers to Implementation

Both supervisors identify several structural and contextual barriers that hinder the effective adoption of AR. Time constraints emerge as a major issue, with the first supervisor referring to *“the heavy credit hour load for most Moroccan teachers.”* Another critical barrier highlighted by the first supervisor is the evaluative culture, where *“teachers often fear that admitting to a classroom problem... will be viewed as a professional weakness.”* This perception discourages teachers from engaging in reflective inquiry, which is the foundation of AR. The second supervisor anticipates similar challenges, including *“time constraints, the large number of teachers, and teachers’ willingness and readiness to take part.”* Together, these insights point to both systemic and psychological obstacles that limit teachers’ engagement with AR.

Supervisory Support Practices

Supervisory practices appear to vary significantly between the two participants. The first supervisor describes a relatively structured and research-oriented approach, explaining that he supports teachers *through “simple data collection tools—like teacher journals—to clarify the real problem before jumping to a solution.”* He also refers to collaborative initiatives such as *“a district-level WhatsApp study group”* aimed at fostering professional exchange. By contrast, the second supervisor adopts a less formal approach, relying mainly on reflective dialogue: *“Through asking them reflective questions and providing feedback.”* However, he acknowledges a lack of systematic follow-up, stating, *“I have not implemented it yet.”* This discrepancy suggests that support for AR is largely dependent on individual initiative rather than institutionalized supervisory practices.

Teacher Agency and Professional Identity

Both supervisors emphasize the role of AR in enhancing teacher agency and professional autonomy. The first supervisor explicitly links AR to empowerment, arguing that it *“promotes professional autonomy and teacher agency”* and helps teachers develop *“a sense of ownership over their professional growth.”* Similarly, the second supervisor notes that AR allows teachers to *“act both as researchers and teachers,”* reinforcing the idea of a dual professional identity. However, both participants stress that this transformation requires adequate preparation, with the second supervisor highlighting that teachers *“need training... and should also be informed about the benefits.”*

Institutional Support and Recommendations

Both supervisors underline the necessity of stronger institutional support to promote AR. The first supervisor proposes structural changes such as *“Credit-Based Recognition”* and access to research resources like *“institutional subscriptions to ELT research databases.”* He also advocates for collaborative models, suggesting *“cluster research”* and *“annual AR symposia”* to disseminate findings. The second supervisor similarly emphasizes recognition and motivation, proposing that teachers’ efforts should be *“acknowledged and recognized... for example, having awards for the best Action Research projects.”* He also calls for *“more collaboration and communication between all stakeholders.”* These recommendations collectively highlight the need for systemic reform to embed AR within a supportive professional ecosystem.

Briefly, Action Research (AR) is widely perceived by supervisors as a powerful and transformative approach to professional development in the Moroccan EFL context. One supervisor describes AR as *“indispensable”* because it shifts teachers from passive recipients of knowledge to active producers of context-sensitive practices. This perspective aligns with the work of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), who conceptualize AR as a cyclical and emancipatory process. Similarly, the emphasis on reflective practice echoes Donald Schön

(1983), while the more pragmatic view of AR as a tool for improving classroom decision-making and student outcomes reflects Anne Burns (2010). Together, these perspectives confirm that AR is both theoretically grounded and practically relevant in language education. Despite this strong endorsement, the findings reveal a clear gap between theory and practice in the integration of AR into in-service training. Supervisors acknowledge that AR is often treated as a theoretical concept rather than a sustained professional practice, with one noting that it is “*not a sustained in-service practice*” and another confirming that it “*is not directly integrated.*” This disconnect reflects what Kenneth Zeichner (2003) describes as the persistent divide between academic knowledge and classroom realities. It also supports Borg (2013), who argues that teachers’ engagement in research is often constrained by contextual and institutional limitations rather than lack of awareness.

The study also identifies significant structural and cultural barriers that hinder the implementation of AR. Time constraints, heavy workloads, and limited access to resources are major challenges, as highlighted by the reference to the “*heavy credit hour load*”. In addition, the presence of an evaluative culture discourages teachers from engaging in reflective inquiry, as they may fear that acknowledging classroom problems could be perceived negatively. This concern aligns with the arguments of Kemmis (2009), who emphasizes the importance of supportive environments for AR. Furthermore, issues of teacher readiness and motivation suggest that successful implementation requires both structural support and a shift in professional culture.

Finally, the findings highlight the importance of supervisory and institutional support in fostering AR practices. While some supervisors adopt structured approaches using tools such as reflective journals and collaborative platforms, others rely on less formal methods, indicating a lack of standardized practices. This variability reflects the need for sustained mentoring, as emphasized by McNiff (2013). Both supervisors also stress the importance of institutional recognition, incentives, and collaboration, echoing the views of Elliott (1991), who argues that AR must be embedded within institutional frameworks to be effective. Overall, bridging the gap between theory and practice requires a comprehensive approach that integrates training, support, and systemic reform.

4.3 Teacher Trainers’ Perceptions of Action Research

Value of Action Research

The teacher trainers expressed a strong and well-articulated conviction that action research is an essential professional tool for EFL teachers. It can simultaneously be a means of reflective practice, problem-solving, and continuous development. Crucially, TT1 positioned action research not as an abstract academic exercise but as a practically grounded activity rooted in real classroom realities.

“Action Research is very important for EFL teachers because it helps them reflect on their teaching and improve their classroom practices based on real student needs. It allows teachers to test strategies, solve problems, and adapt methods effectively, bridging the gap between theory and practice.” — TT1

Likewise, TT2 also placed particular emphasis on the empowering dimension of action research, seeing it as a pathway toward greater teacher autonomy: “It promotes continuous professional development and empowers teachers to become more autonomous and responsive in their teaching.” On the question of whether teachers should be researchers, TT1 was unambiguous:

“Yes, I believe teachers should be researchers because it helps them better understand their students and improve their teaching practices. By observing, reflecting, and experimenting with different strategies, teachers can make informed decisions that enhance learning outcomes.” — TT1

Integration in Pre-Service Training

Unlike the EFL teachers interviewed, who reported receiving little or no formal exposure to action research during their training, TT1 confirmed that action research is formally embedded in the pre-service curriculum through a dedicated module: “*Yes. We have a module called ‘Action Research’.*” This represents an important structural distinction. While the existence of such a module is encouraging, the teachers’ own accounts suggest that this formal integration at the training stage does not appear to translate into sustained practice once teachers enter the profession. The gap between what is taught in training and what is practiced in schools remains a central tension in the Moroccan ELT context.

Role of the Trainer

TT1 articulated a clear and considered vision of what effective trainer support looks like, consistently emphasizing guidance, encouragement, and the creation of psychologically safe learning environments over the transmission of top-down instructions.

“Teacher trainers should play a supportive and guiding role rather than just giving instructions. They need to guide trainees step by step, helping them understand how to carry out Action Research in a simple and practical way.” — TT1

TT1 also stressed the importance of demystifying research for trainees, reframing it as an accessible and practical tool rather than an intimidating academic undertaking:

“Trainers should motivate and inspire trainees, showing them that research is not something complicated, but a useful tool to improve their teaching.” — TT1

The affective dimension of training was equally foregrounded, with TT1 calling for spaces where trainees feel genuinely safe to experiment:

“Trainers should encourage reflection, provide feedback, and create a safe space where trainees feel comfortable asking questions and trying new ideas.” — TT1

Support Conditions

TT1 identified a set of enabling conditions without which engagement in action research remains unlikely, centring on training, guidance, time, resources, and crucially, the emotional and motivational dimensions of confidence-building.

“Pre-service teacher trainees need solid training on how to carry out Action Research, along with guidance from trainers and mentors who can support them step by step. It’s also important to give them enough time and access to resources so they’re not overwhelmed.” — TT1

Beyond material and structural resources, TT1 highlighted the relational and social conditions that foster engagement, noting that peer learning and shared inquiry play a significant role:

“Creating a supportive and encouraging environment where they can share ideas and learn from each other can really boost their confidence and motivation.” — TT1

Systemic Recommendations

TT1’s recommendations extended well beyond the training institution, encompassing changes at the school, institutional, and policy levels. The vision offered was systemic and multi-dimensional, addressing culture, workload, collaboration, and professional recognition in equal measure.

“Promoting Action Research in the Moroccan ELT context requires several key changes. First, teachers need proper training and support through workshops and pre-service programs that focus on how to conduct Action Research. Second, schools and institutions should provide time, resources, and encouragement, as heavy workloads often limit teachers’ ability to engage in research.” — TT1

TT1 also called for the development of a collaborative professional culture as a condition for making action research practically viable:

“Fostering a collaborative culture — where teachers share findings and experiences — can make Action Research more practical and motivating.” — TT1

Perhaps most notably, TT1 raised the question of professional recognition, arguing that teachers’ research efforts need to be formally valued if engagement is to grow:

“Recognizing and valuing teachers’ research efforts, for example through professional development credits or promotion, would encourage more teachers to adopt it.” —

TT1

TT1’s interview reinforces and deepens the pattern that emerged from the EFL teachers’ accounts. Across all participants, action research is widely valued in principle but insufficiently implemented in practice. What TT1’s perspective adds is an institutional vantage point: the formal inclusion of action research in the pre-service syllabus exists, yet this structural provision alone is clearly not enough to generate a sustained research culture among practicing teachers. The trainer’s emphasis on confidence, motivation, safe environments, and recognition points toward the human and relational dimensions of this challenge — dimensions that curricula and policy circulars alone cannot address. Meaningful change will require not only structural reform, but a shift in professional culture that positions teacher inquiry as a normal, valued, and supported dimension of EFL practice in Morocco.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a set of consistent and interrelated patterns across all participant groups — EFL teachers, a teacher trainer, and, by implication, supervisors — that both confirm and extend what the existing literature suggests about the place of action research in the Moroccan ELT context.

The perception-practice gap: a familiar but persistent tension

Perhaps the most striking finding is the near-universal disconnect between participants’ positive attitudes toward action research and their limited engagement with it in practice. All four EFL teachers acknowledged the importance of action research, yet none reported conducting it in a formal, structured, or sustained manner. This finding resonates strongly with the broader literature. As Fullan (2000) argues, meaningful educational change requires active teacher engagement and the fostering of a genuine culture of inquiry — conditions that appear largely absent in the participants’ professional environments. Similarly, the literature on the Moroccan ELT context notes that while teachers generally hold positive perceptions of action research, actual classroom implementation remains limited (see section 2.4), a conclusion that this study’s findings squarely corroborate. What the present data adds, however, is a more granular and participant-grounded account of why this gap persists, pointing to intersecting structural, cultural, and pedagogical factors rather than any single cause.

Teacher identity and the researcher self

A notable and somewhat encouraging finding was that all four EFL teachers identified themselves as both teachers and researchers. This dual professional identity aligns with what Noffke (1997) describes as the professional dimension of action research, and echoes more recent work by Kayi-Aydar and Yazan (2022), who demonstrate that engagement with action research contributes to teacher identity development. The teacher trainer similarly affirmed this view, asserting that teachers should be researchers. Yet the study reveals that this identity remains largely aspirational rather than enacted. In Schön’s (1983) terms, participants demonstrated a capacity for reflection-on-action — thinking about their teaching after the fact — but had little opportunity or support to engage in the more systematic, cyclical inquiry that Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988) model envisions. The identity is present; the conditions to act on it are not.

Training: necessary but insufficient

The inadequacy of training emerged as a defining structural gap across the interviews. Three of the four teachers received either no formal introduction to action research during their training or only a brief and superficial one. This finding is particularly concerning given that the teacher trainer confirmed the existence of a dedicated action research module in the pre-service curriculum. The disconnect suggests that even where formal provision exists, it is not translating into practical competence or professional habit. This corroborates Burns’ (1999, 2010) argument that action research must go beyond theoretical instruction to develop

reflective practice and pedagogical awareness. This aligns with Vo and Nguyen's (2021) finding that practical, hands-on engagement is what genuinely builds teacher confidence and instructional competence. The predominantly theoretical character of the training teachers received appears to have produced awareness without capability — teachers who know what action research is, but not how to do it.

Structural barriers: workload, time, and institutional culture

The structural barriers identified by participants — heavy workload, time constraints, overloaded curricula, and absence of institutional support — are well documented in the literature and are not unique to the Moroccan context. Fandiño (2022) highlights the particular relevance of action research in resource-constrained settings, yet notes that such settings also present the greatest obstacles to its implementation. What this study contributes is a vivid, first-person account of how these barriers are experienced. T1's observation that action research within a school can be perceived as "strange behaviour," and that colleagues and administration may become "the first hindrance," points to a deeper cultural obstacle that the literature on professional development has begun to address. Vangrieken et al. (2020) argue that collaborative action research depends on a culture of shared reflection — a culture that clearly does not yet exist in the participants' schools. Similarly, Borg (2013) emphasizes that teacher agency requires enabling institutional conditions, which participants consistently reported as lacking.

The trainer's role and the question of safe spaces

The teacher trainer's emphasis on creating "a safe space where trainees feel comfortable asking questions and trying new ideas" introduces an affective and relational dimension that the structural literature sometimes overlooks. This perspective aligns with Dana and Yendol-Hoppey's (2009) conception of action research as collegial inquiry, which depends not only on access to resources and time, but on the quality of professional relationships and the psychological safety of the research environment. The trainer's call for demystifying research — framing it as "not something complicated, but a useful tool" — speaks directly to the confidence deficit that appears to constrain teachers' engagement and suggests that attitudinal and motivational barriers may be as significant as structural ones.

Towards a culture of inquiry

Taken together, the findings point toward the same conclusion that the literature has long suggested, but which context-specific evidence has rarely confirmed for Morocco: that action research requires not merely a curriculum module or a policy circular, but a genuine cultural shift within schools, training institutions, and the wider ELT system. Admiraal et al. (2021) found that sustained engagement in action research is associated with higher levels of professional learning and instructional innovation — outcomes that Moroccan EFL education clearly stands to benefit from. Achieving this, however, will demand coordinated investment in practical training, reduced workload, collaborative professional structures, and — as the teacher trainer pointedly noted — formal recognition of teachers' research efforts as a legitimate and valued dimension of professional practice.

6. Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Based on the consistent patterns identified across teachers, supervisors, and teacher trainers, bridging the gap between the perceived value of Action Research (AR) and its actual implementation in the Moroccan EFL context requires a multi-dimensional approach. The following recommendations address the structural, pedagogical, and cultural barriers highlighted in this study:

Transitioning from Theoretical to Applied Training

Pre-service and in-service training programs must move beyond theoretical introductions to AR. Training should be heavily scaffolded and practically oriented, requiring trainees to conduct micro-AR projects within their practicum. As emphasized by the teacher trainer (TT1),

this hands-on experience is crucial for demystifying the research process and building the practical competence necessary for sustained engagement.

Structural Adjustments to Workload and Time Allocation

The most frequently cited barriers — heavy workloads and time constraints — must be addressed at the institutional level. Educational authorities should consider structural adjustments, such as dedicated “research hours” integrated into teachers’ weekly schedules or a slight reduction in teaching load for those actively engaged in approved AR projects. Without dedicated time, AR will remain an aspirational, rather than enacted, professional identity.

Fostering a Culture of Collaborative Inquiry

To counter the isolation and potential collegial resistance reported by participants, schools must actively cultivate a culture of shared reflection. This can be achieved by establishing formal Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) or “cluster research” groups, as suggested by one of the supervisors. These collaborative spaces provide the psychological safety needed for teachers to admit classroom challenges and experiment with new strategies without fear of evaluation.

Redefining Supervisory Support

Supervisory practices need to shift from purely evaluative models to developmental, mentorship-based approaches. Supervisors should be trained to guide teachers through the AR cycle, providing constructive feedback and facilitating access to simple data collection tools (e.g., reflective journals). Furthermore, institutionalizing platforms for sharing AR findings, such as district-level symposia or digital repositories, would validate teachers’ efforts and disseminate local knowledge.

Implementing Formal Recognition and Incentives

Finally, sustained engagement in AR requires formal recognition. As proposed by both supervisors and the teacher trainer, integrating AR into the professional advancement system — through mechanisms such as “Credit-Based Recognition,” awards for outstanding projects, or linking research output to promotion criteria — would provide a tangible incentive for teachers to adopt inquiry as a core component of their professional practice.

7. Conclusion

This study has illuminated a persistent and multifaceted gap between the widely recognized value of Action Research (AR) and its limited implementation within the Moroccan EFL context. While teachers, supervisors, and teacher trainers universally acknowledge AR as a powerful tool for professional development, reflective practice, and pedagogical improvement, its systematic integration into classroom practice remains largely aspirational rather than enacted. Key barriers identified include predominantly theoretical training, significant time constraints and heavy workloads, a lack of institutional support and recognition, and cultural factors that can discourage collaborative inquiry.

The findings underscore that addressing this perception-practice disconnect requires more than isolated interventions. It necessitates a comprehensive and systemic approach that transforms initial training into applied competence, structurally alleviates workload pressures, fosters psychologically safe environments for collaborative research, and formally recognizes teachers’ inquiry efforts. By cultivating a genuine culture of inquiry, Moroccan EFL education can harness the transformative potential of AR, empowering teachers as autonomous researchers and ultimately enhancing student learning outcomes. Future research could explore the effectiveness of specific interventions designed to bridge this critical gap.

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