The Setbacks for Research Practice in Higher Education: A Perspective from English Language Teaching in Iran

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A B S T R A C T

While research is abundant on academics' research engagement in higher education, very little has been done to study the setbacks for research practices in English language teaching (ELT) in higher education. Adopting a qualitative research design, the present study explored the research setbacks for ELT in higher education. To this end, 10 masters students, 10 doctoral students, and 10 university instructors of ELT in different state universities in Iran took part in the study. A narrative frame was applied to collect initial data, followed by conducting individual semi-structured interviews to gain more in-depth knowledge about the participants' research practices. Thematic analysis, used to analyse the data, uncovered a number of themes and categories addressing the masters and doctoral students' and university instructors' research setbacks in higher education. A number of themes were generated for the following categories of research setbacks: issues with research projects, insignificant contribution, and pressures from the immediate context. The findings are discussed in the light of the literature and the status of research practice in higher education, and implications are suggested for research practice in higher education.

Keywords: research practice; higher education; ELT

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Introduction

In many universities around the world, masters students, doctoral students, and university instructors (i.e. academics) in higher education are required to engage both with (through reading) and in (through doing) research (Borg & Liu, 2013) in order to contribute to the growth of knowledge and skills in their field of study in general, and their own research skills and professional development in particular (Hajdarpasic et al., 2014). Academics' engagement with and in research is thought to improve the educational system (Hajdarpasic et al., 2014; Mägi & Beerkens, 2016), contribute to the academics' professional development (Brew, 2010; Neumann, 1993) and teaching effectiveness (Hattie & Marsh, 1996; Robertson & Bond, 2001), and enhance students' learning (Lindsay et al., 2002) in higher education. However, there are both internal and external setbacks for the academics' research activities in higher education, such as research manipulation (Hasrati, 2013) and publish-or-perish culture (Harland & Staniforth, 2000; Yuan & Lee, 2014), which have unfavourable influence on their professional development. In the present study, research setbacks refer to some issues, such as not being involved in research activities, competitions among the researchers for issues like promotion, problems of the published research, and the deterrent effect of the immediate context, which can hamper the researchers' professional development.

There have been a number of studies in English language teaching (ELT) in higher education addressing the impact of research on professional development and the related contextual factors (Borg & Liu, 2013; Rahimi et al., 2018; Xu, 2013). However, there is a lack of research in ELT in higher education deeply exploring research setbacks of the three groups of masters and doctoral students (i.e. postgraduates), and university instructors. Exploring and comparing the research practices (interchangeably referred to as research engagement throughout the current study) of masters and doctoral students and university instructors, as the ELT researchers in higher education, might generate insights into how setbacks for research practice impede professional development and how research is discouraged in the immediate context. Inspired by this existing lacuna, the current study explored masters and doctoral students' and university instructors' attitudes and perceptions towards the academic-based contextual factors that were perceived to be the setbacks for research engagement in higher education. Based on the findings, practical implications are proposed for ELT research in higher education.

Literature Review

Drawing on Wenger's (1998) communities of practice theory, the present study explores the setbacks for research engagement by exploring the attitudes and perceptions of masters and doctoral students and university instructors in ELT in state universities who mutually participate in and negotiate meanings around a shared academic research practice using a shared repertoire in pursuit of a joint enterprise. Some of these participants, especially masters and doctoral students, might be regarded as the peripheral and some, especially university instructors, might be regarded as the core members of the given academic community of practice. Wenger (1998) argues that peripheral members of the community of practice do not have as much access to the repertoire of resources of the community as core members. Hence, enhanced participation in communities of practice (in this study, research engagement) leads to better learning outcomes (in this study, professional development) (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In this study, research engagement refers to researchers' engagement both with and in research in the community of practice, and is thought to contribute to researchers' professional development and improvement of educational system (Borg, 2010). Researchers engaging with research might read books, published research, such as research published in academic and professional journals, professional magazines, newsletters, and web-based sources of research. Researchers engaging in

research might conduct qualitative and/or quantitative research individually or collaboratively with other researchers and/or colleagues (Borg, 2010). On the other hand, professional development, which is thought to be enhanced through research engagement in communities of practice, is a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improve academics' knowledge base and effectiveness in teaching and research practices (van den Bergh et al., 2014). It is argued that professional development encompasses the academics' daily practices in higher education and it is not restricted to just one particular context and/or time. Considering the purposes followed in higher education, academics might be engaged in professional development activities, such as attending workshops, writing descriptions of the effective teaching/research practice, following experts' opinions or peer consultation, and being involved in course development processes. In the present study, the researchers' direct involvement with research activities and their collaboration with other researchers in the community can contribute to their professional development. However, research setbacks can impede their professional development.

In the field of ELT in some academic settings, engagement both with and in research has remained a minority activity (Borg, 2010). Xu (2013), for instance, exploring ELT university instructors' research practices, found that the university instructors' research practice was limited by teaching, lack of resources and support, and shortage of self-efficacy beliefs. Moreover, the university instructors were more engaged with research than in research and they were extrinsically (that is, for promotion) rather than intrinsically (that is, for professional development) engaged with and in research. The lack of engagement and lack of contribution of research practice in some higher education settings might be related to low academic legitimacy, adverse impact of the immediate context on academics' research performance (Johnes & Li, 2008), individual/non-psychological and/or intrinsic/psychological factors, such as lack of motivation to read and do research (Lindsay, 2015), and conformity to Western-oriented studies (Lillis & Curry, 2010) rather than locally appropriate research (Hwang, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). As Johnes and Li (2008) argue, the research performance of higher education institutions in developing countries is not as effective as those in the developed regions. The universities in the developing countries require the masters and doctoral students and university instructors in higher education to conduct and publish research in order to contribute to the institution in general and to the university instructors' promotion in particular (Hasrati, 2013; Johnes & Li, 2008; Tavakoli & Hasrati, 2018).

The aforementioned research setbacks could be related to Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) concept of symbolic violence which Bourdieu (2001) conceptualises as "a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition" (p. 1-2). Bourdieu (1991) considers misrecognition or the recognition of domination as legitimate and key feature of such violence. Misrecognition is a form of forgetting that dominated groups deem the domination as natural and legitimate and willingly accept the violence to be exercised on them (Webb et al., 2002). The dominated groups sense that there is something wrong but they are not able to recognise it. The joint publication by the university instructors and their manpower (i.e. masters and doctoral students), for example, is affected by symbolic violence exercised through doing and publishing research in higher education, which subsequently subordinates the masters and doctoral students to the university instructors (Hasrati, 2013). Through such joint-research practice, the university instructors can obtain the necessary credentials for promotion in their career, and the masters and doctoral students improve their curriculum vitae (CV) to continue their studies in a higher academic level and/or find a job (Hasrati, 2013; Tavakoli & Hasrati, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The review of the literature indicates that there are no studies exploring the setbacks for research practices of university instructors as well as masters and doctoral students in ELT in higher education. To deal with this gap and to address the purpose of the study, we explored the masters and doctoral students' and university instructors' attitudes and perceptions towards the setbacks for ELT research practice in higher education. Therefore, the following research question was addressed:

- What are the setbacks for research practice in ELT in higher education according to masters and doctoral students and university instructors?

Method

Design and Context of the Study

The study adopted a qualitative orientation and proceeded as narrative frame (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008) and one-on-one interview (Kvale, 1996) "to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewees with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 6).

Higher education in Iran consists of Master of Arts (MA) (2-3 years) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (4-5 years) programmes. To accomplish MA and PhD degrees, masters and doctoral students in ELT are required to take a number of ELT courses, carry out and write research for each course, and, if possible, publish the research. Finally, the masters and doctoral students in ELT need to carry out their dissertation/thesis and publish one or more research, accordingly. The masters and doctoral students, considered as the university instructors' manpower and ghost writers, are not allowed to defend their dissertation/thesis unless they publish one or more studies, extracted from their dissertation/thesis, in high-ranking peer-reviewed journals.

On the other hand, the university instructors, after getting their PhD qualification, start their career in universities as assistant professors. Having taught BA courses for a few years, the university instructors get MA and then PhD courses in which they are supposed to do and publish research with their masters and doctoral students. For promotion purposes, the university instructors are annually evaluated against the research they have published with their masters and doctoral students and the dissertation/thesis they have supervised. Depending on the credibility of the journal in which the university instructors publish their research, they receive high or low marks from the university. For example, by publishing in JCR (Journal Citation Reports) indexed journals, the university instructors receive high points from the university and get their promotion to an associate and then to a full professor.

Participants

Thirty masters and doctoral students and university instructors (10 in each group) in ELT in several high-ranking state universities in Iran, a country outside the Anglophone centre, participated in the study. Purposive sampling (Ary et al., 2018).) was used to select the participating masters and doctoral students and university instructors based on some pre-defined characteristics of the target population. The masters students had an age range of 25-33 years, comprised both male and female, and were in the second year of their academic studies. The doctoral students were in the first, second, or third year of their academic studies and included both genders with an age range of 29 to 35 years. The university instructors comprising assistant, associate, and full professors, were all male, in the 4th to 15th year of their professional teaching

experience in higher education, and in the 34-45 years of age. Due to unavailability of female university instructors, we failed to collect data from female university instructors, which is admittedly a limitation of this study.

All the masters and doctoral students and university instructors formed a community of practice in the higher education context. That is, all the three groups read and did research in higher education settings to contribute to the ELT context. As masters and doctoral students have to be engaged in carrying out their dissertation/thesis project and read, do, and publish research each term, we considered them as ELT researchers in the community of practice. Moreover, as the university instructors are supposed to be engaged with and in research activities, such as reading, doing, and publishing research, so as to get promotion to a higher education rank, we regarded them as ELT researchers in the community of practice.

Instruments

To develop a narrative frame and some interview questions, first, some tentative ideas about research practice were generated based on a thorough analysis of the existing literature and the present researchers' conceptualisation of research in ELT in higher education. Afterwards, three masters students, three doctoral students, and three university instructors were selected and interviewed to explore their attitudes and perceptions towards ELT research practice in higher education. The purpose of this initial interview was to design a tentative narrative frame and a number of interview questions. The narrative frame and interview questions were piloted with five participants and consulted with some experts in the field of ELT in higher education for any possible modifications.

Narrative method has been addressed in social sciences in general (Riessman, 2008) and in ELT context in particular (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008; Farrell, 2013). Barkhuizen and Wette (2008) argue that narrative frame provides the participants with guidance and support in the structure and content. To this aim, both hard copy and online (through Google Forms) forms of the developed narrative frame (see Appendix A) were created and used to explore the research practices of masters and doctoral students and university instructors who represented a whole community of practice in ELT in higher education context.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants individually to further tap into their attitudes and perceptions towards their research practices in higher education. The interview questions (see Appendix B) address the contribution of the research engagement to the participants' professional development, the way they meld research knowledge with their own practical knowledge, and their views on the extent to which their working context supports or impedes their research activities in higher education.

The narrative frame and the interview questions were complementary in collecting the required data. In completing the narrative frame, the participants had enough time to reflect on their own research practice; consequently, they were able to provide extensive explanations before the interview. In contrast, in the interview sessions, the participants had to speak extemporaneously; as a result, there was little time for pondering upon what they stated as the research setbacks. Through collecting data via oral procedures in which the participants elaborated on the interview questions, it was aimed to see if something had been missing from the written data (narrative frame) and could be extracted from the interview. The first author/researcher carefully scrutinised the narrative frames to ask more questions in the interview sessions and enhance the richness and depth of the responses. In most of the studies that have utilised triangulation, written forms of data collection precede oral forms (due to the aforementioned reasons).

To check the credibility of the narrative frame and the interview data, member checking techniques (Creswell, 2007) were carried out. To this end, the information was clarified in each question during the interview sessions to help enhance the accuracy of the participants' responses. Then, the transcribed narrative and the interview data were returned to the participants to check the accuracy and authenticity of the data and make modifications and alterations, if needed.

Data Collection Procedure

The first author/researcher obtained all the participants' consent before conducting the study. The narrative frame was subsequently sent to the participants either online using Google Forms or in hard copy. The participating masters and doctoral students and university instructors (10 in each group) were requested to respond to the narrative frame items in English or Persian. The narratives were rewritten in English as coherent and condensed stories, and then, they were sent back to the participants to check their accuracy. The participants made alterations to their stories, if needed. Furthermore, the participants were negotiated to generate some themes out of their stories that accurately described their research practice. To this end, the participants were requested to clarify and elaborate on the information they provided in each section of the narrative frame.

Afterwards, the participating masters and doctoral students and university instructors took part in the in-depth individual semi-structured interview. During the interview sessions, the participants elaborated on their written narratives, followed by answering the interview questions. Depending on the participants' first language (i.e. their mother tongue), the interviews were conducted either in Kurdish or Persian. Each interview took approximately 30 to 50 minutes, tape-recorded, and transcribed and translated into English. In both the narrative frame and semi-structured interview, the informed consent of the participants was obtained. That is, the participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and the information they provided would remain strictly confidential.

Data Analysis Procedure

Thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) was adopted to analyse the data of the narrative frame and interview. To this aim, based on open thematic coding, the transcribed narratives and interviews were coded (i.e., open coding) to generate some themes about the impediments that are involved in the masters and doctoral students' and university instructors' research engagement processes. The themes were categorised based on their content (i.e. axial coding) and then a label was assigned to each category to cover the shared themes within that category (i.e. labelling). The segmentation, categorisation, and labelling followed a bottom-up approach.

Inter-rater reliability was carried out to reduce the subjectivity and bias in the segmentation, categorisation, and labelling of the data analysis (Gass & Mackey, 2000). To this end, not only the first author/researcher, but also another expert and experienced ELT researcher checked the processes of segmentation, categorisation, and labelling of the transcribed data. As a result, some modifications were made to the codification, categorisation, and labelling of the uncovered themes and categories. Similar way of analysing the qualitative data and addressing the reliability of data has been carried out in such studies as Gatbonton (2008) and Mullock (2006).

Results

By exploring the attitudes and perceptions of masters and doctoral students and university instructors towards the setbacks for research practice in ELT in higher education, several themes and categories emerged (see Table 1).

Table 1

Uncovered Themes and Categories related to the Setbacks for Research Engagement in ELT in Higher Education.

Categories	Themes	Masters students	Doctoral students	University instructors
1. Issues with research projects	1. Reading, doing, and publishing research for instrumental purposes	✓	✓	✓
	2. Not being practical and/or applicable	✓	✓	✓
	3. Being irrelevant to the teaching/learning context	✓	✓	✓
	4. Having inaccurate and/or doubtful findings	✓	✓	✓
	5. Having poor writing	✓	✓	✓
	6. Getting the research published in a short time	✓	✓	✓
	7. Not considering the ethics of research	–	✓	✓
	8. Researchers not reading the relevant studies adequately	✓	✓	–
	9. Not having new and creative ideas for research projects	–	✓	✓
	10. Under-estimating one's research performance	–	✓	✓
	11. Using some strategies to get the research published	–	✓	✓
	12. Consuming the foreign researchers' research findings	–	✓	✓
	13. Having the studies reviewed by biased reviewers	–	–	✓
2. Insignificant contribution	1. Research serving as a tool to only promote the university instructors' rank to associate or full professors	✓	✓	✓
	2. The university instructors (i.e. the first and/or corresponding authors) being the non-contributors of the published studies	✓	✓	✓
	3. Having incapable or incompetent university instructors with no expertise to help the research projects appropriately	✓	✓	✓
	4. Not supporting the researchers	✓	✓	✓
	5. Not having cooperation with other researchers	✓	✓	✓
	6. Having instrumental (rather than genuine) purposes	✓	✓	✓
	7. Publishing research through a hierarchical system of authority	–	✓	✓
	8. Demotivating the real researchers	✓	✓	–
	9. Determining the researchers' academic success through the number of the published studies, not the quality of the studies	–	✓	✓

	10. Facing financial hardship	–	✓	✓
	11. Not recruiting the competent researchers in higher education	–	–	✓
3. Pressures from the immediate context	1. Being under the pressure of time and stress	✓	✓	✓
	2. Having difficulty in collecting the required data	✓	✓	✓
	3. Suiting the university instructors' preferences	✓	✓	✓
	4. Being involved in a competitive process	✓	✓	✓
	5. Not receiving financial support	✓	✓	✓
	6. Receiving less or no contributions from the university instructors	✓	✓	–
	7. Spending most of the time on teaching, not research	–	–	✓

Note: Ticks (✓) indicate that the corresponding theme was extracted from the group's collected data, while dashes (–) show the lack of the theme in participants' data.

Issues with Research Projects

Several issues with research conducted in higher education were highlighted. For instance, all the participants agreed that research was done and published primarily for instrumental purposes. They claimed that research was carried out mainly for the sake of publication and getting promotion to a higher education rank, not for the sake of research, and developing the research skills and disciplinary knowledge. They all contended that research findings had no practical implications for and were irrelevant to the education in general and teaching/learning in particular, and that research was done for instrumental purposes.

> *Although there are many teaching and learning issues in this educational setting, research is not carried out in line with these issues. Research is done in order to be published and serve instrumental purposes. (Doctoral student 8, interview)*

All the participants claimed that they were not sure about the accuracy of the research findings, since in the current context, research was done under the pressure and stress of time, and that the researchers did not find adequate time and support to address their research well, thus, they accomplished their research projects one way or another and got it published in a short time. Due to the time constraint, the participants argued that the academic writing was not dealt with appropriately in the published studies. The doctoral students and university instructors stated that ethics of research, such as collecting valid data, were not considered properly in the studies, while the masters students took no notice of this research issue. The masters and doctoral students believed that masters and doctoral students did not read the related studies for their own research adequately, and they only paraphrased the previous studies. This could be due to the time limit they faced in their research and lack of knowledge, which did not allow the researchers to generate creative ideas and produce useful research findings with which the doctoral students and university instructors agreed.

> *We do not know whether the researcher himself/herself has done the research, or whether the findings are accurate or not. Thus, it is not logical to judge somebody's knowledge based on their published studies. In this context, the researchers do not spend one or two years working on a study and publish it in a high-ranking journal, but try to publish many studies, especially in low-quality journals, in that time span and receive the requirements, as determined by the university. Most of the time, the researcher who receives the reward is not the competent one, but one who knows about the strategy of publishing research. (University instructor 2, narrative frame & interview)*

The doctoral students and university instructors argued that underestimating one's research abilities and not having new and creative ideas for research were the reasons that they could not accomplish useful research. Additionally, the doctoral students and university instructors ironically claimed that the best researchers in this context were those who apply some strategies to get their research published. These researchers were claimed to increase the number of their published studies in a short time, receive a reward from the university and/or educational system, and get their promotion (that is, they became associate or full professors).

> *Most of the points required to become an associate professor is related to our research publication, MA dissertation/PhD thesis supervision, translation, etc. Even being the first or second author and the corresponding author in published studies influence our promotion. After getting promoted to a higher education rank, the university instructors gradually lose their enthusiasm for publishing joint research with their students. (University instructor 4, interview)*

Additionally, the participants in the present study thought that researchers who were extrinsically engaged in research practice did not apply their own research findings to the education, teaching, and learning contexts, since they knew that they were neither applicable nor useful, and that they would try to consume and adapt foreign researchers' research findings in such contexts. Finally, the university instructors claimed that the journals in which Iranians were the editors or reviewers tried not to accept Iranian researchers' research, which might be due to the competition in which the researchers in this context were involved.

> *The researchers in higher education do not produce new findings, they consume the other researchers' findings. (Doctoral students 7, Interview)*

> *In the present context, we are not sure whether the research findings of our studies are addressed practically. Therefore, sometimes it is irrational to consider local educational issues and carry out research accordingly. (Masters student 3, narrative frame & interview)*

Insignificant Contribution

The findings also highlighted the lack of contribution received, especially from the university instructors, for doing the research projects. They all stated that research was done and published mainly to promote the university instructors' rank to associate or full professors. They all claimed that the university instructors either did not contribute to the research projects or contributed insignificantly; nevertheless, they mostly became the first and the corresponding author in the published studies. They all contended that the university instructors did not always have sufficient skill and knowledge to help the masters and doctoral students, which might be due to the university instructors' indirect and inactive participation in research.

Furthermore, the university instructors' research performance was not monitored and/or evaluated by any organisation, while the masters and doctoral students' research performance was monitored and evaluated by the university instructors. They all argued that there was a great deal of competition among the researchers to publish more research, a complication minimising the chances for cooperation among the researchers. In addition, they all agreed that the masters and doctoral students would do and publish research to do the course requirements and get their academic degree. The doctoral students and university instructors stated that research was done through a hierarchical system in which the university instructors published research, because the university wanted them to do so and the masters and doctoral students did and published research, because the university instructors wanted them to do and publish research. These findings highlighted that research was done mainly for the sake of publication not for the sake of research.

> *Some university instructors do not even know about the content of the published studies in which they are the corresponding and/or the first author, since it has been only the students who have carried out and written the research. Maybe the university instructors do not have enough time, since they are involved in other part time jobs. (University instructor 10, narrative frame & interview)*

Some masters and doctoral students, who considered themselves as competent researchers, claimed that they were not supported enough by the university instructors for their research projects, and they did the research projects alone. The doctoral students and university instructors claimed that researchers' academic success was decided based on the number of their published studies, not their quality and applicability. They further contended that they were not in a convenient economic condition, thus, they were not to spend long time on doing research. Finally, the university instructors claimed that the real and competent researchers had difficulty finding their way to higher education, since the other university instructors did not accept them as new university instructors. The already recruited university instructors considered the competent researchers, who were candidates for recruitment, as strong opponents in the research publication processes.

> *Even if you are a competent and great researcher, you might not be accepted and recruited as a university instructor, because other university instructors want to have a colleague like themselves, and they are afraid of your knowledge as a competent researcher. (University instructor 6, interview)*

Pressures from the Immediate Context

The last category of research setbacks was the pressure of the higher education claimed by masters and doctoral students and university instructors in reading, doing, and publishing research. All groups complained about the time limit in which they must accomplish research. The masters and doctoral students stated that they had to deliver their completed research for each course in a term in order to accomplish the course requirements, and the university instructors stated that they had to deliver a number of published studies to the university each academic year in order to stay in their career. They claimed that the aforementioned research accomplishment and publication were supposed to be done in a short and limited time.

> *The university instructors determine the time limit for the research projects, and they want us to deliver them in the due time. In that time limit, you might not be able to do anything. (Masters student 7, interview)*

The participants all thought that they encountered many difficulties in collecting the required data from unwilling participants, and this made their findings unreliable and invalid. In addition, they claimed that the university instructors' research preferences must be met first. For instance, the masters and doctoral students were encouraged to work on the areas in line with the university instructors' research interests.

Furthermore, they all had a complaint about the competitive research processes in which they were involved and the lack of financial support, which they thought greatly influenced academics' publication patterns. Finally, the masters and doctoral students stated that they received no contribution from the university instructors, and the university instructors reported that they spent most of their time on teaching and had no time to do and/or significantly contribute to the research projects.

> *There is an inverse relation between our research and teaching. If I spend most of my time on reading and doing research, I cannot teach well. And if I spend most of my time on teaching, I cannot read and do research well. (University instructor 1, interview)*

Discussion

Drawing on Wenger's (1998) communities of practice, this study explored ELT researchers' research setbacks in higher education setting. The research setbacks of masters and doctoral students and university instructors were explored qualitatively and a number of themes and categories were uncovered. The emerged categories along with the related themes are discussed in the following sections.

Issues with Research Projects

The first set of themes highlighted the research issues in ELT in higher education, such as doing and publishing research for promotion rather than professional development. Borg and Liu (2013) and Xu (2013), in a similar line, argue that university instructors are extrinsically engaged with and in research in academic communities of practice to get their promotion to a higher education rank. In stark contrast to this finding, Borg (2010) argued that engaging with and in research should help develop professional language teaching practice. Similarly, Lindsay et al. (2002) indicated positive impact of lecturer research practice on student learning. The findings in this regard might make masters and doctoral students and university instructors become both teachers and researchers within university departments, as this might contribute to the university education system in general and the academics' professional development in particular (Mägi & Beerkens, 2016). Hence, following Hattie and Marsh (1996), universities need to encourage the integration of teaching and research in higher education.

The first set of themes in this study also highlighted that the researchers who are extrinsically engaged with and in research (e.g. they publish research to get promotion) do not apply their own research findings to the educational settings, as they doubt about the accuracy of the findings. To deal with such an unprecedented policy on research publication in the present context, the ELT researchers are obliged to conform to the definition and prescription of research and scholarship by the broader global academic communities of practice, such as Western universities and research institutions in the inner circle Anglophone contexts like Britain, the United States, Australia, and Canada, which can subsequently influence the ELT researchers' decisions on research productivity in their local higher education context. Lillis and Curry (2010), in this line, claim that researchers who are interested in only getting their research published, write on issues that are more pertinent to the developed countries and disregard their local educational issues. For instance, Hasrati (2013) argues that chemistry researchers in higher education context are engaged in studies that are absolutely Western-based and chiefly target towards being published in journals indexed in JCR rather than research that is contextually appropriate.

In marked contrast to the findings of the present study and those of Lillis and Curry (2010), Hwang (2005) argues that Korean experts use and adapt research findings produced in Western countries for their local practices. Similarly, Kumaravadivelu (2012) criticises the non-Anglophone ELT researchers who do research in conformity with Western researchers' research frameworks and deliberately ignore the usefulness of their research to the local context. As such research practices are retroactive, Kumaravadivelu calls for an epistemic break from the Western-oriented conceptions of research, so as to invoke and develop proactive and locally appropriate research. The participants' ample justification for doing retroactive research in the present study was that locally appropriate research does not have a good chance to be published in accredited peer-reviewed international journals and the research findings of such research are not addressed and implemented by policymakers, administrators, and officers in the present educational systems in order to improve the different factors involved in the ELT contexts of higher education and English language teaching and learning.

These issues with research might be due to the purposes for which ELT research is done and published in higher education context. As the researchers are compelled to publish a number of studies in a limited time, they have no alternative but to publish research one way or another. Such research engagement processes are in harmony with Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) concept of power and symbolic violence in which the victims (i.e. academics) cannot recognise the violence exerted on them. Following Yuan and Lee (2014), masters and doctoral students and university instructors in the present context, are involved in a struggling process to do and publish research in order to survive in the academic communities of practice. The university instructors pursue their career and get their promotion through joint-research practice with their students, the students complete their dissertation/thesis and enrich their CV in order to be admitted to a higher education level and/or become university instructors, and the universities continue to keep such research activities as compulsory components on their curricula in order to boost the students and university instructors' research productivity (Hasrati, 2013).

Insignificant Contribution

The second set of themes in this study addressed the insignificant contributions of the institution and university instructors and their indirect involvement in carrying out research in ELT in higher education. Researchers who are directly involved in reading and doing research in academic communities of practice are supposed to enhance their professional development to a great extent (Neumann, 1993). In this study, the masters and doctoral students were directly involved in reading and doing research in the academic community of practice, while the university instructors were indirectly involved in the joint-research with their masters and doctoral students – they only supervised their students' research projects. The research practice exercised by the university instructors was usually deteriorated by heavy workloads of the university instructors, which impeded them from supervising the students utterly (Rahimi et al., 2018).

The second set of themes also highlighted that research in ELT in higher education is carried out through a hierarchical system in which the university instructors publish research to meet the university requirements and the masters and doctoral students carry out research to meet the course requirements. Johnes and Li (2008) believe that this process of research publication is due to the poor economic condition of the context. They believe that poor economic condition makes the researchers be primarily obsessed by financial issues and not consume much time on their research. In such higher education contexts, the purpose of publishing research is to contribute to the institution and university instructors' promotion.

The participants in the present study claimed that the relationships between students and university instructors would get worse if students did not publish sufficient research with the university instructors or did not select them as their own dissertation/thesis supervisor (most of the time students have the right to choose a university instructor as the supervisor of their dissertation/thesis and this can subsequently contribute to that university instructor's promotion), which may influence the university instructors' behaviour and reaction during the courses, their attitudes and behaviour during the viva, and the mark they give to the student' dissertation/thesis. However, the masters and doctoral students accept such a research process as a means towards an end, that is, in return for their academic degree. Webb et al. (2002), in this regard, argue that the dominated groups (in this study, the masters and doctoral students and university instructors) regard the domination (doing and publishing research for instrumental purposes) as reasonable and accept the violence to be exercised on them.

Echoing Hasrati's (2013) findings, in the current study, the violence is exerted by the university regulations (i.e. the institutional policies) requiring the university instructors to deliver published studies each year, especially in JCR-indexed journals, irrespective of the university instructors' own modes of thinking and believing (i.e. the university instructors thought research should

address learning, teaching, and/or educational issues). The university instructors exert their own symbolic violence on the masters and doctoral students to do and publish research for them, that is, forcing the students to become the university instructors' ghost-writers. The students, who consider such joint publication of research with the university instructors as the legitimate mode for graduation, might not be able to deal with such research practices; thus, they may not accomplish the research well. For instance, some students may fabricate the research data and publish their research in a pay-to-publish journal, which contradicts the university instructors' expectation.

Moreover, undue emphasis laid on JCR-indexed publications in the present context is in line with Bourdieu's (1991) concept of misrecognition in which, save for JCR-indexed journals which are regarded legitimate, other indexing systems are misrecognised as only having marginal weight. To achieve their desired ends (that is, publishing in JCR-indexed journals), the ELT researchers in the present context not only exercise power hierarchies but implement some strategies, such as acting in conformity with the international regulations for research and scholarship. That is, they re-appropriate their local educational research issues based on the international research standards so that their research could be published in an accredited peer-reviewed international journal.

Pressures from the Immediate Context

The third group of themes highlighted that the academic context exerted pressure on the researchers to carry out and publish research. For instance, the researchers in ELT in higher education were under the pressure of time to accomplish their research. Harland and Staniforth (2000) propose that time-limit is a major setback for academics' research practice in higher education. Although, as found in the present study, the time pressures were due to the external or contextual barriers, time pressure as a barrier to research practice in the academic community of practice, might be due to the internal barriers as well. Harland and Staniforth, in this regard, argue that university instructors perceive research practice as a time-consuming activity, since they have previously experienced such research activities, and this could be regarded as an internal rather than an external barrier to university instructors' research practice. Additionally, the uncovered themes addressed such contextual pressures as the difficulties in collecting the required data and the masters and doctoral students' unwillingness to work in line with the university instructors' areas of interest. Although this might be considered as a positive point, since the research projects which are consistent with university instructors' own research interests can be supervised more effectively, the masters and doctoral students might not be engaged in the research projects whole-heartedly.

The themes in this regard also highlighted that the researchers are involved in joint publications, however, they are not supported to carry out their research in the higher education setting. Although such joint publications could be mutually advantageous for both the students (e.g., supporting the students' apprenticeship and academic appropriation) and the university instructors (e.g. helping the university instructors to get promotion) in the academic community of practice, the publications have been made mandatory for the university instructors for employment and promotion purposes. The masters and doctoral students, on the other hand, as the university instructors' manpower and ghost-writers, are not supported, while they have to do, write, and publish research in high-ranking journals. As some university instructors are in an inconvenient economic condition, they cannot do research themselves but supervise the masters and doctoral students to do and publish research for them; hence, the university instructors might not become competent researchers. Moreover, the university instructors' teaching overload and other administrative and supervisory tasks, and their incapability and lack of expertise in research (due to the lack of participation in doing and writing research) preclude them from doing research. The masters and doctoral students, on the other hand, might not have the required skills

and know-how to do and write research so that the research findings might not contribute to ELT contexts.

Following Hasrati (2013), the masters and doctoral students, as the peripheral members of the academic communities of practice, are not regarded as legitimate members, since in comparison with the university instructors, masters and doctoral students are given more demanding research practices to perform. However, the dominated groups (in this case, the masters and doctoral students) deem the domination (i.e., the process of doing and publishing research) exercised by the university instructors as natural and accept the violence in return for their academic degree. With regard to Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice, the masters and doctoral students' and university instructors' joint publications create the opportunities to gain full membership of the academic community and prepare the students for their future careers. However, most of the masters and doctoral students do not pursue their research activities after graduation and the university instructors do not follow their supervision and/or collaboration with the students' research after getting their promotion. This can represent the strict rules and regulations established by the higher education policies for research publications, which not only exert pressures on the masters and doctoral students and university instructors, but also foster their demotivation for future research practices when research publication is not necessary but useful.

Conclusion

The current study explored masters and doctoral students' and university instructors' research practice in ELT in higher education through a qualitative research design. The findings indicated a number of themes and categories that addressed the setbacks for ELT research practice in higher education. We drew on symbolic violence to understand how institutional power relations (the socio-political context) affected the core and peripheral members' research practices in ELT academic communities of practice, which could subsequently bring about more research output in higher education.

The educational policymakers and officials in the higher education might consider the emerged setbacks for research practice. They may deal with the setbacks and contribute to the research of the dominant researchers, the academic profession, and professional development in the higher education. The findings might benefit the university instructors too. The university instructors may consider the implications of the study in their context and improve their research performance based on the generated themes and categories, and train the masters and doctoral students accordingly to appropriately read and do research in ELT. The masters and doctoral students might develop their research performance to produce applicable and useful research findings for ELT in the higher education. Moreover, applying the findings of the study, the administrators and teacher educators could train ELT instructors to properly engage them with and in research, so as to effectively deal with their own teaching and students' learning issues in the classroom.

The study has some limitations, which must be taken into account in interpreting the findings. Although we explored and understood the research setbacks of participating masters and doctoral students and university instructors fully and in more detail, we cannot confidently claim that the findings have addressed all aspects of ELT research setbacks in higher education. As a result, ELT researchers are recommended to collect data from a large number of masters and doctoral students and university instructors in order to explore their ELT research setbacks in higher education setting extensively and comprehensively. This may add greater insights to the literature on the one hand, and generalise the findings of the study to higher education context on the other hand. Similarly, exploring masters and doctoral students and university instructors in ELT in

other higher education contexts can further contribute to the literature. Replicating the study in other institutions can enrich our understanding of the setbacks for research practice in higher education in more detail. Moreover, as the setbacks for ELT researchers' research engagement were assessed only via the researchers' individual perceptions, future ELT researchers are recommended to adopt other research (e.g. longitudinal research) using different data collection procedures in order to shed light on the setbacks for ELT researchers' research engagement, which might not have been mentioned by the participants in this study.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Survey of narrative frame, exploring the setbacks for research practice in ELT in higher education.

1) I am (name), a masters student/doctoral student/university instructor, in (field of study), and working/studying at …….. University. I have been working/studying for ……. years, and I am now a(n) (professional title).

2) The requirements of my university for my research practice are….

3) My university will award or punish masters students'/doctoral students'/university instructors' research performance if….

4) I think the main characteristics of a good research in the realm of ELT are..….

5) I read research …. (frequency), because….

6) I do research …. (frequency), because….

7) I think reading and doing research have positive/negative impact on my professional development, because….

8) My attitudes and perceptions towards research could be summarised as…

9) The biggest challenges confronted my research engagement are… because…..

10) If …. , my research practice would improve.

Appendix B

Interview questions, exploring ELT researchers' research setbacks in higher education.

1. What are the characteristics of a good research in the realm of ELT?

2. When and how did you start doing research? Can you tell a story about it?

3. What was the best research that you did? Why do you think it was the best one?

4. What was the worst research that you did? Why do you think it was the worst one?

5. Do you consider yourself as a researcher? Why or why not?

6. What is your main motivation for research practice?

7. How frequently do you read published research in ELT? How and why do you read research? How do you usually access or find out about relevant research?

8. Does the research you read influence your professional practice? Why or why not?

9. How do you meld your research knowledge (through reading) with your professional practice?

10. How frequently do you do research in ELT? How and why do you do research?

11. Does the research you do influence your professional practice? Why or why not?

12. How do you meld your research practice (through doing) with your professional practice?

13. What do you think of the relationship between research and studying/teaching in higher education?

14. Does your working context support you in reading and doing research?

15. Do you associate your research engagement with your qualifications, experience, and university?

16. Has anybody or anything influenced your research practice? If so, what are they? What has made you persist with or give up your research?

17. What are the attitudes and perceptions of people around you towards your research practice?

18. What challenges did you confront in your research activities? Can you tell a story of how you struggled against it?