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The Involvement of Preparatory School Teachers in Educational Research: Attitudes, Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

This study investigated the attitudes of English language instructors towards educational research as well as the perceived catalysts and barriers to their research engagement. To this end, the study adopted a mixed design; therefore, the data were collected by means of the Teachers Attitude Scale towards Educational Research (TASTER) scale (*N* = 131) that was developed by İlhan et al. (2013) and semi-structured focus group interviews (*N* = 10). The quantitative data revealed that instructors working at preparatory schools in Türkiye have a positive attitude (*M*=75.91 out of 100) towards educational research. Furthermore, the findings of a two-way ANOVA showed that overall attitude grades of the participants were not significantly influenced by factors like the kind of organization they work for or their job experience. Finally, to gain more insight into obstacles and possible catalysts for research involvement, in-depth, semi-structured focus group interviews were held online with ten of the volunteer participants. The findings were analyzed deductively and discussed as barriers and potential catalysts for increasing research engagement. The results showed that instructors' participation in research is hindered by a number of factors. The challenges cited by the participants included a lack of time and research expertise as well as feeling compelled to address the gaps in the literature rather than focusing on local problems. Beyond these constraints, it was found that participants' institutional environments seldom promoted research activities, and the participants did not see research as a fundamental aspect of their professional responsibilities. Instructors did, however, identify a number of possible facilitators which may improve their involvement in research. These included establishing collaborative partnerships with English Language Teaching (ELT) departments, possessing cooperative and voluntary research opportunities, and establishing active and well-organized professional development units at preparatory schools.

Keywords: action research, educational research, research engagement, research motivation, teacher research

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Introduction

Teacher research is characterized as a "systematic, intentional, and self-critical inquiry by educators concerning their own pedagogical practices" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 22) through which educators attempt to direct, assess, and enhance their classroom-based choices and actions by looking at their own issues (Carey, 1953). Teachers might be engaged in or with research, which are two separate but linked behaviors (Borg, 2010). The former involves actively conducting research, analyzing, and disseminating the results, while the latter involves reading articles, attending conferences, or applying research insights to their practice.

It is evident in the literature that teacher research is an effective professional development strategy, leading to enhanced teaching practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998; Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2021; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Leuverink & Aarts, 2019), enabling educators to adopt a more comprehensive approach to learning, facilitating greater understanding of their students' life experiences (Goodnough, 2011; Kosnik & Beck, 2020), and beginning to use reflection in their teaching process (Bergmark, 2020). Being involved in teacher research also leads to increased self-efficacy (Edwards, 2016; Esparza et al., 2022; Hemmings et al., 2012; Ortaçtepe & Akyel, 2015), greater autonomy (Burns, 1999; Ecclestone, 2000; Leat et al., 2015; McKay, 2009), and a more analytical approach to teaching practices (Borg, 2010; McLaughlin et al., 2008; Sato & Loewen, 2018) by being able to make data-based decisions in their classrooms (Dassa & Nichols, 2020; Esparza et al., 2022). Participation in teacher research enhances individual teachers' professional development and fosters broader improvements in the classroom and school environment (Admiraal et al., 2016; Borg, 2010; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Gibbs et al., 2017; James & Augustin, 2018).

The comprehensive literature analysis indicates a growing interest in the frequency of research undertaken by educators (Ballıdağ, 2024; Borg & Liu, 2013; Flores, 2024; Li & Xu, 2024). Notwithstanding the potential influence of teacher research on educators, pupils, and educational institutions, prior studies reveal a minimal or inadequate involvement of instructors in research endeavors (Bai, 2018; Dagenais et al., 2008; Li & Xu, 2024; Ren & Zhou, 2023; Sakarkaya & Bümen, 2022). To provide insight into the low levels of research participation reported in the literature, several studies have investigated people's attitudes toward research, and a large body of the research revealed perceived necessity and value of the research endeavors (Baş & Kvılcım, 2017; Beycioğlu et al., 2009; Kahraman & Köleli, 2017; Özgenel & Metlilo, 2021; Yilmaz & Kiliçoğlu, 2013) even though a consensus is not reached regarding the applicability of the findings (Baş & Kıvılcım, 2017; Pekel & Akçay, 2018; Uztosun, 2019). Despite the positive attitudes of the teachers towards research, their participation in research endeavors stays limited (Yeşilçınar & Çakır, 2018) with the perceived lack of benefit to their professional development (Baş & Kıvılcım). The literature also suggests some other factors influencing teachers' attitudes towards research, such as workload (Yeşılçınar & Çakır, 2018), institutional attitudes (Durmuş & Yıldırım, 2025), age and working experience (Akçöltekin et al., 2017; Beycioğlu et al., 2009; Erdamar & Akpunar, 2017; Özgenel & Metlilo, 2021).

Based on the literature, teachers' lack of research engagement can be discussed under three main aspects. To start with, there are personal reasons. Teachers are of the idea that research does not have a direct contribution to classroom practices, believing that when they conduct research, it will not yield practical solutions to their classrooms (Çepni & Küçük, 2003; Sadeghi & Abutorabi, 2017; Sippel & Sato, 2022). It is evident in the literature that teachers do not follow the academic papers in educational research or conduct research themselves

(Ballıdağ, 2024; Butt & Shams, 2013; Linden et al., 2015; Shkedi, 1998) due to the gap between theory and practice (Ateş & Yıldırım, 2015; Cheng et al., 2010; Gore & Gitlin, 2004; Kaestle, 1993). However, in the past decades, teachers have started to become more involved in the research thanks to the emphasis made by Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) to close the gap between theory and practice and make language teaching and learning processes more quality (Borg, 2013). In order to be involved in the literature, which is expected to close the gap between theory and practice, the attitudes of teachers towards educational research are crucial since it is the first step of practitioner research.

Besides the lack of perceived connection between the theory and practice, another significant cause of negative attitudes of teachers towards educational research has been reported as the complexity of research designs and the way the results are reported (Jiang & Wang, 2023). Therefore, in order to have better attitudes towards research, educators need to have a solid knowledge of research (Başar et al., 2023; Erbay & Beydoğan, 2017).

In addition to insufficient research expertise and a perceived lack of connection between theory and practice, there are other institutional challenges hindering teacher involvement in research. To start with, teachers' motivation to be involved in research was found to be closely related to their context (Sippel & Sato, 2022). Furthermore, lack of administrative support (Chumwichan et al., 2023) or disagreements between administrators and teachers (Alhassan & Ali, 2020) have been found to have an adverse effect on the research involvement. Another important obstacle impeding instructors' research efforts is the absence of an expert who is involved in research activities within institutions (Gao & Xu, 2014; Li & Xu, 2024). In fact, when there is a colleague with research knowledge, it is likely to raise others' engagement in research (Jiang & Wang, 2023; Sakarkaya & Bümen, 2022) with a further motivation to publish (Randazzo et al., 2021).

Finally, the extent to which the teachers are engaged in research activities has been found to be impacted by the national policies of the country as well as resource-related constraints. While some teachers are unwilling to engage in research due to personal or institutional reasons, the fact that the education system in a country is an exam-oriented one (Borg, 2010) impacts teachers' desire to conduct research. Furthermore, teachers' workload, namely the lack of sufficient time, was also found to be a significant debilitative factor by a large body of researchers (Aga, 2017; Borg, 2010; Li & Xu, 2024; Sato & Loewen, 2018). Apart from limited time, since teachers need resources and teaching materials to be able to conduct research, low research engagement was also found to be directly impacted by a lack of financial support (Abrenica & Cascalan, 2022; Bulut, 2011; Sayyed, 2024).

Problem Situation

It is evident in the literature that there are numerous advantages of research engagement including a robust professional development strategy that improves teaching practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998; Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2021) and heightened self-efficacy (Edwards, 2016; Esparza et al., 2022). Furthermore, teachers engaging in research report enhanced decision-making, increased reflective practice, and greater innovation in teaching, which positively impacts student learning and curriculum development (Borg, 2010; Sato & Loewen, 2018). However, previous studies indicate a limited or insufficient participation of teachers in research activities (Bai, 2018; Ballıdağ, 2024; Dagenais et al., 2008;

Kahraman & Köleli, 2017; Li & Xu, 2024; Ren & Zhou, 2023). Since a correlation exists between instructors' ascribed values and their perceived practices of professional learning activities, which vary according to the kind of school in which teachers are employed (Altuntaş-Özben et al., 2024), it is essential to examine the attitudes of English instructors working in preparatory schools to uncover the underlying reasons for their limited engagement in research.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study seeks to explore the attitudes of instructors working at preparatory schools in Türkiye towards educational research as well as factors hindering and promoting their research engagement. Despite a large body of research conducted to see research-related attitudes of teachers working at the K-12 level (Akçöltekin et al., 2017; Yeşilyurt & Demiröz, 2008; Günyel & Bilgivar, 2023; Kuru et al., 2024; Özgenel & Metlilo, 2021;Yeşilçınar & Çakır, 2018; Yeşilyurt & Yılmaz & Kılıçoğlu, 2013), a limited number of studies have investigated university instructor's views toward educational research (Cárcamo et al., 2024; Tanış & Dikilitaş, 2018; Tat et al., 2025; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2015). Furthermore, even though there are studies investigating the impact of such variables as gender and working experience on research attitudes (Akcöltekin et al., 2017; Beycioğlu et al., 2009; Özgenel & Metlilo, 2021; Uçgun & Ünal, 2015), limited evidence exists in the literature regarding the attitudes of instructors toward research by contrasting state and private universities.

Furthermore, language instructors are hired in university environments; nevertheless, they are not often seen as typical academics, since their major role is teaching English rather than engaging in research. In contrast to faculty members in several academic departments, research is often not a specified requirement of their official employment obligations. Nonetheless, understanding university language instructors' perspectives on research is crucial, since these perspectives may affect their propensity to participate in research endeavors. Understanding their viewpoints and the challenges they face might assist institutions in formulating strategies and support systems that may enhance research participation among English language teachers working at preparatory schools - officially referred to as instructors- in Türkiye.

To this end, this study aims to contribute to the literature by addressing the following research questions:

1. How do instructors working at preparatory schools at universities in Türkiye feel about educational research?
2. Do demographic factors influence the attitudes of instructors at preparatory schools towards educational research?
   a. Is there a difference between instructors working at state and private universities regarding their research attitudes?
   b. Is there a difference between the instructors with various experiences regarding their research attitudes?
3. What are the obstacles and catalysts for instructors working at university preparatory schools to carry out research?

Method

Research Design

This study aims to explore the attitudes of instructors towards educational research and the barriers and potential catalysts for them to foster their research engagement. Since the integration of quantitative and qualitative aspects provides a greater understanding of the study topic compared to either method independently (Creswell & Clark, 2018), the present study employed a mixed design. While with TASTER more generalizable and statistically measurable data regarding the participants' attitude towards educational research were collected, interviews provided in-depth data regarding the factors inhibiting their research engagement and potential drivers to encourage their research engagement.

Participants and Setting

This study was conducted with English language instructors - the academic title commonly used for English teachers at universities who focus primarily on language teaching - working at preparatory schools of both private and state universities in Türkiye. In the Turkish higher education system, students who are accepted into university programs conducted in English are often mandated to exhibit English language fluency prior to commencing their first-year departmental studies. At the start of the school year, they often undertake an institutional English proficiency assessment. Students who achieve the requisite proficiency level will be admitted to their departments directly, while those who do not are assigned to a one-year intensive English preparation program. To be able to begin their freshman year in their department following the preparatory period, students must either succeed in the university's proficiency examination (usually conducted at the end of the first semester or at the conclusion of the preparatory year) or achieve a comparable score from an internationally recognized examination sanctioned by the university and endorsed by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK).

In the quantitative phase of the study, 131 instructors filled out the survey. Table 1 displays the demographic information of the participant instructors taking part in the quantitative part of the study.

In the qualitative part of the study, ten instructors (5 private, 5 state) who completed the TASTER scale volunteered to participate in the semi-structured focus group interviews, which were held online through the Zoom platform.

Table 1

Participants' Profile

		N	%
Gender	Male	29	22.1
	Female	102	77.9
Years of Experience	0-5	20	15.3
	6-10	37	28.2
	11 and more	74	56.5
Institution	Private	62	47.3
	State	69	52.7
Publication Experience	Yes	56	47.2
	No	75	57.3

Data Collection Tools

As a quantitative measure, in order to answer the first and second research questions, the Teachers Attitude Scale towards Educational Research (TASTER) that was developed by İlhan et al. (2013) was sent to participants through online Microsoft Forms. The scale included a total of twenty items under three factors: the necessity of educational research (7 items), valuing educational research (6 items), and applicability of educational research (7 items). The item-total correlations calculated by the researchers ranged between 0.394 and 0.644, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were between 0.781 and 0.84. For the total scale, Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.881. The items in TASTER were rated on a 5-point Likert scale: "I totally disagree (1), I disagree (2), I am neutral (3), I agree (4), I totally agree (5). The total points that can be taken from TASTER vary between 20 and 100.

Besides the quantitative part of the study, in order to answer the third question seeking to uncover the barriers and catalysts for preparatory school instructors' research engagement for conducting research, in-depth, semi-structured focused group interviews were held since they combine open-ended and closed-ended questions to provide effective methods of gathering trustworthy data (Adams, 2015). Among 131 instructors who participated in the quantitative part of the research, a total of ten volunteer instructors from working at a private university (5 people) and a state university (5 people) were interviewed. Interviews were conducted online using the online Zoom platform due to its simplicity of recording and convenience for both the participants and the researcher. The interviews were recorded after having the verbal consent of the participants. The durations of the two interviews were 88 and 91 minutes, respectively.

Data Collection Process

Quantitative data were collected online through the Teachers Attitude Scale towards Educational Research (TASTER). The researcher uploaded the scale questions to Microsoft Forms and sent the link to instructors working at various universities in Turkiye via their

institutional e-mail addresses. Having collected the quantitative data, to gain a deeper understanding of the quantitative findings, focus group interviews were conducted to explore participants' shared experiences and attitudes in a dynamic setting (Krueger & Casey, 2015). To this end, the researcher approached a total of ten instructors who had filled out the questionnaire (5 instructors working at a state university and 5 working at a private university). After getting the consent of the participants, the link for the online meeting was shared with the participants, and focus-group interviews were conducted online lasting 88 and 91 minutes, respectively. The two focus group interviews were conducted on two different days, and during the interviews, the participants were asked about the barriers hindering their research endeavors as well as possible catalysts that would potentially make them involved in research.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the quantitative data, SPSS 25 was used. To start with, to check the normality of the values, a Shapiro-Wilk test was run, and they were not found to be normally distributed with a value that is below 0.05. However, as Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) characterize values of skewness and kurtosis between ± 2, the values were accepted as normally distributed; hence, parametric tests were administered in analyzing the data. So as to find out the overall attitudes of the participants, their total scores were calculated, and a two-way ANOVA was run to see if there is a significant effect of their work context (state or private) and working experience on the participants' overall scores.

In the qualitative phase of the study, the data that were collected through semi-structured focus group interviews were initially transcribed verbatim, and deductive content analysis was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). That is, the comments of the instructors were analyzed by the researcher deductively to reveal the barriers and the catalysts for research engagement and debriefed with a peer (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To increase the trustworthiness of the findings, during the analyzing process, a curricular process was adopted (Patton, 1990) by returning the data consistently to make sure that the statements are representative of the themes being investigated and the quotations were debriefed with another researcher to ensure that they represent the relevant theme. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity.

Ethical Issues

The research was carried out following ethical principles. This research was approved by İstanbul Medeniyet University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board. It was carried out with the permission obtained by the decision dated 27/02/2024 and numbered E-38510686-050.04-2400017243.

Findings

Research Question 1

How do instructors working at preparatory schools at universities in Türkiye feel about educational research?

In order to find out about the attitudes of instructors working at university preparatory schools towards educational research, descriptive statistics (Table 2) were run. The results revealed that the average attitude points of the participant instructors were 75.91.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Institution and Working Experience

Institution / Working experience	*M*	*N*	*SD*
Private university	78.27	62	9.10
State university	73.79	69	12.01
0-5 years	77.65	20	10.18
6-10 years	78.64	37	8.55
11 years and above	74.08	74	11.89
Total	75.91	131	10.92

Given that the scale's minimum and maximum points are 20 and 100, respectively, the mean score of 75.91 indicates a positive attitude of the participants towards educational research.

Research Question 2

The second research question of the study sought to answer if demographic factors influence instructors' attitudes towards educational research by focusing on the following research questions;

a. Is there a difference between instructors working at state and private universities regarding their research attitudes?

b. Is there a difference between the instructors with various experiences regarding their research attitudes?

The findings reveal that the average score of the participants working at private universities is 78.27 (*SD* = 9.10), and it was found to be slightly lower, 73.79, for the ones working at state universities (*SD* = 12.1), indicating instructors working at private universities demonstrate more positive attitudes towards educational research. Also the averages of instructors with 0-5 years, 6-10 years, and 11 years and more were found to be 77.65 (*SD* = 11.18), 78.64(*SD* = 8.55), and 74.08(*SD* = 11.89), respectively. In order to see if workplace and experience impact the attitudes of the participant instructors significantly, as well as if the interaction between the types of institutions where instructors work and their working experience has an impact on their research attitudes, a two-way ANOVA was run through SPSS 25. The results from the two-way ANOVA are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

The Results of the two-way Analysis of Variance for Research Attitudes of Instructors

Source	Sum of squares	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η2
Corrected Model	1397.512	5	279.502	2.47	.036	.090
Intercept	576094.81	1	576094.81	5097.620	.000	.976
Institution	129.355	1	129.355	1.15	.287	.009
Working experience	388.296	2	194.148	1.72	.184	.027
Institution* Working experience	353.106	2	176.553	1.56	.214	.024
Error	14126.565	125	113.013			

As Table 3 displays, there was not a statistically significant difference between the attitude grades of the participants and the type of institution (state or private) they work at (F(1,125) = 1.15, p = .287, η2 = .009), indicating how they felt about educational research was not significantly affected by whether they worked at a private or state university. Similarly, the research attitudes of the participants did not differ significantly by their working experience (F(2,125) = 1.72, p = .184, η2 = .027), suggesting that working experience was not a significant factor explaining the differences in the participants' research attitudes. In addition, there was no interaction effect between the institution and working experience (F(2,125) = 1.56, p = .214, η2 = .024), suggesting that the interaction of dependent variables does not affect the research attitudes of the instructors.

Research Question 3

What are the obstacles and catalysts for instructors working at university preparatory schools to carry out research?

In order to have an in-depth understanding of the attitudes of instructors working at preparatory schools of universities in Türkiye, semi-structured focus-group interviews were conducted with ten of the volunteer instructors who also took part in the quantitative part of the study. Interviews were conducted with five participants from a state university and five from a private one, and the total duration of the interviews was 179 minutes. The results of the deductive thematic analysis are presented under two main themes: barriers and catalysts for research engagement. To ensure anonymity, instead of real names, pseudonyms were used in the findings.

Barriers

Deductive analysis of the interview results revealed barriers that hinder the ability of the participants to do research. One of the major issues which debilitates the participation of the instructors in conducting research is the fact that most of the educational research seeks to find a gap in the literature rather than focusing on the local needs of the departments. As Yavuz states, "*When you need to narrow down what you study, you conduct research on a very specific field, whether the knowledge of which makes a difference in education starts to*

pose a question. And this question demotivates us." In a similar vein, Kemal also highlights the importance of working on local needs rather than the gap in the literature, as he asserts;

> *The starting point of the researchers is the current research in the literature. That is the problem. The researchers do not look around and try to see the problem around them. They search for what is missing in the literature, so they start off with a theoretical motivation that is independent of real life.*

Pelin also supports the idea above by underscoring the need for needs analysis prior to conducting research if the ultimate aim is to involve the preparatory school instructors in the research. As mentioned by Kemal and Pelin, conducting any research that does not stem from a local need does not motivate the instructors to conduct research in their context.

The extent to which the research results will benefit is another concern that the participants stated. In this regard, Pelin states, "*When the teacher feels the need, she conducts it, and she wants to see how the results of that finding affect the institution." The research will be meaningful once this process has been completed*. This finding is closely related to a concern uttered by Elif as she states;

> *I sometimes enjoy the research that I conduct; I have fun, but then I ask this question to myself. Who will want to read what I write? Who does it address, and what will happen at the end? I am happy with what I write, some people will quote it, and that is all. I feel like we are not touching anywhere with what we do.*

As evidenced by the interviews, research which does not originate from a real problem or it does not have a direct impact on the learning environment is not appreciated by the participant instructors. The in-depth interviews with the participants revealed further challenges that working as an instructor bears when it comes to conducting research. One of the most recurring codes was the time constraint, as Zekiye argues that "*In an ideal world, we should be involved in conducting or reading research; however, both teaching so many hours a week and immersing yourself in academic studies are not realistic at all*." Therefore, instructors end up teaching the coursebook and do not have time for extra things (Aylin).

Many of the participants stated that they are not motivated to conduct research since they believe that the findings from the study do not have any implications in practice; hence, they opt for turning to books that provide practical information by highlighting that they do not perceive research as a part of their job. In this regard, Buket makes the following comment:

> *We are instructors, and our job is to teach. That is, we are doing something practical. I do not think reading academic work adds anything to me, so I am not very good at reading academic papers. What I need is practical knowledge; I want it, and I want to get this practical knowledge.*

Another factor that makes it challenging for the preparatory school instructors to conduct research is the lack of necessary skills to conduct research. In this regard, one of the interviewees highlights the importance of this shortcoming by stating, "*I do not think many of the instructors will want to conduct research, as I think they do not know what research is and what their steps are*." It is clear from this statement that the absence of the abilities required to carry out a study is a significant debilitative factor.

When inquired about the potential obstacles that keep them from carrying out a study, some of the interviewees also mentioned how their perceptions about the nature of the research, namely, being a perfectionist, discourages them. In this regard, Berrin argues that

when you wish your research to be original and of quality when you want it to meet some needs, it makes you inactive and unmotivated to conduct research. She also argues that some of the Ph.D. or MA theses that were published tend to be superficial and repetitive of previous studies. Such beliefs serve as demotivators; hence, she holds the idea that getting rid of this mindset might motivate more instructors to be involved in conducting action research.

The interviews further revealed that the working environment also plays a role in affecting instructors' attitudes towards teaching. Seeing not many people who are involved in research in your institution may also make the enthusiastic ones feel marginalized, as indicated by this comment by Kemal.

> *Sometimes some nice ideas come to my mind about conducting research, but then I start to think if I am going to be pointed at or people will think badly about me because no one is doing it. This is also worrying.*

Catalysts for Research Engagement

Apart from the barriers, the in-depth interviews also identified a few potential actions that could boost the participation of preparatory school instructors in Türkiye. One of the most prevalent ideas was related to the professional development office (PDO), specifically how it should function. Many of the participants agree that there needs to be a PDO in which "*Not all the burden should be put on the shoulders of one person"* (Berrin). It is highlighted in the interviews that PDO should take a collective responsibility to encourage instructors to conduct research. Furthermore, regarding the responsibility of PDO in raising teachers' research engagement, it was also suggested that PDO should decide on the topics of the year at the outset of the term and ask for volunteers to work on those topics.

It was found out that the participants also believed in the power of the community of practice (CoP), and they acknowledged that they learned a lot from their colleagues. That's why they favored working in collaboration with their colleagues on a research project; hence, many of the interviewees also suggested that working in small groups on a topic they can choose freely will also motivate more instructors to do research. Regarding the necessity of research to remain voluntary, Hasan stated in the interviews that "*Asking everybody to conduct research will not lead to quality research, especially when it is used as a criterion for the selection of office members.* In this regard, it was found out that people who wish to work in an academic office, such as the testing office or curriculum development office are required to conduct research; however, they tend to conduct research involuntarily. Therefore, the quality of such forced research is questionable to some interviewees. Like Hasan, Reyhan also shares this concern by saying, "*Sometimes we come to a point when we want to do research in order to teach fewer hours; I think this is reverse motivation*." And regarding motivation, the following comment was made by Yavuz regarding the voluntariness of conducting research at preparatory schools;

> *Not everybody has to do research. Of course, some people must do that, and for that, we have MA and Ph.D. education programs. People start these programs by accepting that they can do this. Here, there needs to be a meritocracy. I mean, they spend time for this, and they want it... It is something that a person does with his own wish, and he needs motivation for this.*

It was also found from the qualitative data that the way the administration approaches the instructors could play a significant role in involving more instructors in conducting research. As Zekiye indicated in the interview, besides being a voluntary action, she considers that praise and appreciation are crucial and wishes the administration would use sentences like "*I can see you have the potential to do this research, and we would be glad if you did. And if you decide to do it, we will provide all the assistance we can*." In the same vein, another participant highlights the significance of the attitude of the administration towards academic staff as follows:

> *The attitude of the administration has a direct effect. Its attitude may increase or demolish the motivation of the instructors. Instructors may want to conduct research with the message from the administration as "You are valuable, I need you, and we are here thanks to you," or instructors could end up doing nothing with the message "You are nothing more than somebody we can replace.*

Furthermore, one of the interviewees stated the opportunity of building a connection between ELT departments and school of foreign languages departments at universities wherever it is possible. She believes that working collaboratively with the staff in ELT departments is likely to motivate the instructors at preparatory schools.

Finally, giving financial incentives was another commonly occurring statement during the interviews. The participants were of the opinion that giving financial aid to the instructors is likely to increase instructors' involvement in research. However, the comment coming from one of the participants in this regard was quite striking. Elif mentioned the experience she had as follows:

> *When I was an instructor at X (not given for ethical reasons) university, the administration asked everybody to conduct research —as if it was something easy— and announced that they would give 6000 liras to the people who publish their research. This was a few years ago, and at that time, it was about the equivalent of two monthly salaries. They grouped us to conduct research. Do you know what the results were? Despite that much incentive, the number of published articles was 0 (zero).*

This observation was important because it raised the potential that, even with large incentives, financial incentives may not be enough to encourage instructors to conduct research.

Conclusion, Discussion and Implications

This study aimed to elucidate the attitudes of English language teachers about educational research, as well as the obstacles and possible facilitators that may enhance their research participation, by addressing three research questions.

The first research question aimed to explore the attitudes of instructors working at university preparatory schools in Türkiye toward educational research. The data revealed that the participants had a positive attitude towards educational research, with a mean score of 75.91 out of 100. This finding corroborates previous studies conducted both at K-12 level (Baş & Kvılcım, 2017; Beycioğlu et al., 2009; Günyel & Bilgivar, 2023; Kahraman & Köleli, 2017; Kuru et al., 2024; Özgenel & Metlilo, 2021; Yeşilçınar & Çakır, 2018; Yilmaz & Kiliçoğlu, 2013) and at the university level (Cárcamo et al., 2024; Erbay & Beydoğan, 2017; Tat et al., 2025; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2015).

The second research question investigated the impact of the institutions (state or private) and the experience of the participant instructors on their attitudes toward research. To start with, the results illustrated that even though the average score of the participants working at private universities (M= 79.18) was found to be higher than the ones working at state universities (M= 75.88), the attitude grades of the participants working with various experiences did not differ significantly. This finding could be explained by the comments of Hasan and Yavuz, in the semi-structured interviews, who postulated that language instructors at private universities feel a greater need in order to be selected to work in an office where they eventually will be teaching fewer hours. Therefore, it can be said that because research participation can be a criterion that increases their chances of being chosen for administrative positions, instructors may be more inclined to conduct research in private universities. Furthermore, consistent with the literature (Beycioğlu et al., 2009; Erbay & Erdoğan, 2017; Özgenel & Metlilo, 2021; Uçgun & Ünal, 2015), the findings from this study showed no significant difference in the attitudes of the instructors with varying levels of teaching experience on their attitudes towards research, suggesting that professional experience does not appear to influence their views on educational research.

The findings from the quantitative phase of the study demonstrated that instructors working at preparatory schools of the universities in Türkiye had a positive attitude towards educational research; however, it is evident in the literature that their research engagement is low (Ballıdağ, 2024; Butt & Shams, 2013; Linden et al., 2015; Shkedi, 1998). Therefore, the third research question sought to identify barriers to research participation and factors that potentially encourage educational research. The findings from the interviews can be grouped under three factors: personal, contextual, and policy-related.

To start with personal barriers, the results of the current investigation showed that one of the obstacles was the lack of research knowledge. This finding is in line with the earlier studies in the literature (Başar et al., 2023; Erbay & Beydoğan, 2017; Jiang & Wang, 2023), which emphasized the effect of inadequate research information on research initiatives. Besides lacking research knowledge, the perceptions of the participants were also found to have a significant impact on their research engagement. Regarding this, interviewees (Yavuz, Kemal and Pelin) in the current study stated that the research they do does not have practical implications in their classrooms, which acts as an impeding factor for their research engagement. This result, which relates to the perceived gap between theory and practice, supports previous research in the field (Çepni & Küçük, 2003; Sadeghi & Abutorabi, 2017; Sippel & Sato, 2022).

The interviewees indicated that the expectation to undertake research solely due to a literature gap may serve as a barrier to research engagement, especially when they have minimal personal interest in the subject or they regard it as irrelevant to their context and of limited practical significance. These findings are in line with the previous research (Butt & Shams, 2013; Linden et al., 2015; Shkedi, 1998), in which they attributed teachers' unwillingness to conduct research to these obstacles. The findings further indicate the presence of additional barriers such as workload, inability to put the theory into practice, and lack of necessary knowledge to be able to conduct research, which are consistent with previous studies in the literature (Borg, 2013; Çepni & Küçük, 2003; Erbay & Beydoğan, 2017). Furthermore, the limited number of individuals engaging in research, feelings of marginalization, and apprehension about being criticized were identified as significant concerns by participants. Being in line with previous studies (Alhassan & Ali, 2020;

Chumwichan et al., 2023; Jiang & Wang, 2023; Li & Xu, 2024; Sakarkaya & Bümen, 2022; Sippel & Sato, 2022), this finding indicates the importance of the working environment, collegial and administrative support in encouraging instructors to be involved in teacher research by further emphasizing the value of collaboration with ELT departments.

Another crucial outcome from this study, which, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has not been extensively documented in prior studies, is the potential influence of an active Professional Development Office (PDO) unit within the institution. The interview findings indicated that a PDO unit at a university, which directs instructors in performing research while also offering a research subject, may serve as a catalyst. Furthermore, it is evident in the interview data that the administration of the universities could also play a role by creating collaboration opportunities with the English Language Teaching (ELT) departments of the university. The absence of directly similar results from a review of prior studies suggests that this may be an overlooked domain within the literature which needs further attention from scholars.

When examined from the policy-related perspectives, the interviews with the participant instructors also revealed some findings which both match and contradict the previous research. While some of the participants mentioned the lack of financial aid as a demotivation (Abrenica & Cascalan, 2022; Bulut, 2011; Sayyed, 2024), the findings from this study unexpectedly revealed that even a fair amount of money granted to teachers conducting research did not significantly increase research participation. This finding provides significant insight because providing substantial financial incentives for publishing research articles is quite uncommon in Türkiye and although it may seem to be a strong motivation, its existence does not ensure elevated levels of research involvement. A possible reason for this finding could be that the instructors at universities do not want to be forced to conduct research; rather, they wish to conduct research only when they wish and on the areas that they think are worth researching (Çepni & Küçük, 2003; Sadeghi & Abutorabi, 2017; Sippel & Sato, 2022). Additionally, participants stated that their substantial workload is one of the main barriers to their involvement in educational research, which echoes the earlier studies (Aga, 2017; Borg, 2010; Li & Xu, 2024; Sato & Loewen, 2018).

The final question focused on factors that might potentially enhance instructors' research participation. One of the major potentials which is likely to increase research engagement of the instructors was found to be the presence of instructors with research knowledge in their institution. This finding corroborates the findings by Li and Zu (2024), Jiang and Wang (2023), and Sippel and Sato (2022), which also emphasized how important it is for the institutions to have instructors with research experience. When inquired about potential measures to enhance their engagement in research, the participants mentioned the presence of a professional development office (PDO), which, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has not been substantially reported in the literature. Furthermore, the present findings confirm earlier research demonstrating that administrative appreciation (Chumwichan et al., 2023) and providing financial incentives (Abrenica & Cascalan, 2022; Bulut, 2011; Sayyed, 2024) have the potential to elevate the participants' motivation to engage in research activities.

The results of the present study have implications for university and preparatory school administrators by offering potential catalysts to foster the engagement of instructors in educational research. It was found out that teachers already have positive feelings towards educational research; hence, when they are given a chance and appreciation, they are more likely to undertake research-related activities. However, allowing interested educators to do

research freely instead of mandating their participation appears to be an effective strategy to raise the engagement of participant instructors in research endeavors. Furthermore, when administrators acknowledge instructors' scholarly work, it fosters a research-oriented culture at the school, which potentially raises the research engagement of instructors. The findings from this study also suggest that PDOs at universities could take an active role in guiding instructors for research on a problem related to their institutions by not making it mandatory but rather offering opportunities to conduct research collaboratively.

While the findings from this study provide valuable insights into instructors' attitudes towards research as well as the barriers they face and potential catalysts to boost their research engagement, some limitations should be noted. To start with, the qualitative part of the study was conducted with instructors working at one state university and one private university, which may not fully reflect conditions at other universities. Furthermore, a total of ten instructors participated in interviews, which may not represent the target population. Therefore, given the limitations of the study, further studies could be done with more instructors from various universities in Türkiye.

Statement of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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