

Classroom Action Research (CAR): An investigation into English language
teachers' perceptions, practices, and reflections after engaging in CAR

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Abstract

This study investigates language teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research (CAR). Language teachers in this context are those who teach EAP, ESL, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), as a Second Language (ESL), as a Foreign Language (EFL), to non-native speakers of English. This research explores English language teachers' understanding and perceptions of CAR, specifically whether they have engaged in or are currently engaged in CAR, and the extent to which they collaborate and perceive autonomy in their classrooms. It also examines teachers' reflections following the completion of their CAR.

Forty-six EAP/ESL/EFL tutors completed a questionnaire, exploring perceptions of CAR, collaboration, and autonomy. Semi-structured interviews with fifteen EAP/ESL/EFL teachers provided further insight into their views of CAR and autonomy. Additionally, four EAP teacher-researchers received CAR training and implemented CAR in their classrooms. These teacher-researchers participated in two focus groups, maintained reflective diaries, and completed final exit interviews to explore perceptions during and after conducting CAR.

Findings revealed that teachers viewed CAR as valuable, recognising its positive influence on teaching and learning. English language tutors engaging in CAR, often informally, with reflection, planning, and experimentation forming an integral part of their practice. They also reported strong autonomy in selecting, administering and adapting classroom materials. Even so, many still lack a comprehensive understanding of CAR, largely due to limited training and workplace support, as research is frequently undertaken only for qualification purposes. Teachers who conducted CAR voiced the importance of collaboration and critical self-reflection as key enablers to CAR.

The implications of this research provide valuable insights for language teachers, teacher-researchers, managers, and teacher educators seeking to embed CAR into professional development frameworks. It highlights the importance of accessible training, collaborative and

reflective opportunities to support language teachers in integrating CAR meaningfully into their practice.

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List of Abbreviations

AR	Action Research
PB4L	Positive Behaviour for Learning
CAR	Classroom Action Research
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EP	Exploratory Practice
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
IGCSE	International General Certificate for Secondary Education
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
L1	First Language or Mother Tongue
L2	Second Language
LEAs	Local Education Authorities
MA	Master of Arts
PAR	Participatory Action Research
RQs	Research Questions
TAS	Teacher Autonomy Scale
TREQ	Teachers' Research and Engagement Questionnaire
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Language teachers often work in high accountability contexts but have limited opportunities for sustained professional learning, structured reflection and collaborative inquiry. Although Classroom Action Research (CAR) has the potential to address challenges, language teachers remain unsure of how to conduct it and often face institutional constraints that restrict autonomous professional practice. This research examines language teachers' understanding and perceptions of CAR and explores how their sense of professional autonomy influences their potential and willingness to engage in CAR, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This introductory chapter outlines the background, motivations, and rationale for the study. It presents the theoretical and professional foundations underpinning the research. Highlights the significance of CAR for language teachers and concludes with a brief outline of the subsequent chapters in this thesis.

1.1 Early Explorations with Classroom Action Research

Since beginning my overseas career in 1989, I have worked as a Second, Foreign or EAP teacher, vice principal, and principal. My 38-year teaching career has spanned seven countries (England, Sudan, The Gambia, Hong Kong, Denmark, Senegal, and Qatar) and has included roles ranging from classroom teacher to principal. Across these professional contexts, many tutors under my management expressed frustrations related to classroom behaviour, student engagement, and the challenges of working with diverse language learners. Some described students as 'lost causes', reflecting a sense of professional discouragement that warranted further exploration.

In many of the international schools where I worked, tutors faced considerable pressure to meet performance targets, including expectations that students achieve high grades (typically A or A*) in all IGCSE subjects in a single sitting. These international schools were very focused on maintaining their rankings; therefore, teachers had to justify their results annually, which contributed to a culture of scrutiny and limited willingness to discuss challenges openly. As a consequence, across these settings, teachers were often hesitant to share their experiences or concerns, particularly in contexts such as Hong Kong, The Gambia, Senegal, and Qatar, where results-based accountability was emphasised. Teacher peer observations and collaborative discussions were rare, and conversations about improving classroom practices were frequently perceived as exposing professional weakness.

During the last 15 years of my career, I became more interested in teachers' emotional well-being, their sense of autonomy, and how I could better support them as a line manager. It became very apparent that many teachers experienced similar challenges, yet felt isolated and reluctant to voice their concerns, often fearing that doing so might be viewed as a weakness or negatively affect their career prospects. This growing awareness also prompted me to reflect on where and whether space existed for these concerns to be expressed. Departmental meetings provided opportunities for discussion, but these meetings were typically agenda-driven and seldom addressed classroom-level issues. As a result, teachers' perspectives were frequently overlooked.

My current role as an Academic Leader and researcher in an international pathways college continues to reflect these dynamics. Here, international students are taught EAP alongside their academic subject-specific modules before progressing to their undergraduate or master's degrees. Within this context, there is still a stigma attached to discussing challenges within language classrooms. Addressing this, I have aimed to foster a culture in which collaboration, discussing classroom experiences, and sharing effective practice are normalised.

At the same time, my close involvement in daily decisions may have shaped the selection and framing of this topic, potentially prioritising issues that reflect institutional interests and my own personal interests in CAR as a method to address classroom challenges.

1.1.1 Why Classroom Action Research?

Whilst working at an international school in Sudan, an MFL tutor approached me, distressed by the disengagement of her Year 9 class. She explained she had been struggling for weeks, but worried admitting this would reflect poorly on her professional competence. Through discussion, it became apparent that she was solely focused on completing the scheme of work, without considering learners' needs or motivation. Students were L1 Arabic speakers studying French, taught through the medium of English. They did not intend to continue French at the IGCSE level, and therefore, they did not perceive French as part of their academic future. As a result, students' behaviour deteriorated, making the lessons unbearable.

I encouraged her to gather feedback from her students, and based on their responses, we adopted a game-based approach to her lessons with short spoken and written plenaries. We met weekly to review students' responses and reflected on the effectiveness of the new strategies. This process aligned closely with the core elements of CAR: reflection (our discussion, surveying students; data collection), planning (planning game-based activities), action (implementing the new lesson plans), observation (making short notes and discussing in the weekly meeting, reviewing planning), continued cyclically and became embedded in her practice. She reported increased confidence and greater enjoyment of the lessons, which encouraged her to share her experiences with other teachers.

At this time, CAR was not a conscious process for either of us; this experience reflected the fundamental principles of CAR as a reflective, practice-oriented approach to professional

learning. Whilst I had heard of action research, I had not consciously applied it until later in my career.

During my ten-year contract in Sudan (2004-2014), I sought to foster such practices by developing a mentoring scheme and initiating peer observations to normalise discussion of classroom challenges. These initiatives led me to reflect more systematically on my own teaching and engagement and elements of action research. One example was explored through my MA 'Reflective Practitioner' Module, where I engaged in structured reflection on a critical leadership situation encountered while working as a principal. The trigger for this situation was the lack of student progress and outcomes identified while completing an accreditation process. Drawing on experiential learning theories and Kolb's learning cycle, I examined my initial responses to the situation, which were primarily driven by the need to demonstrate rapid improvement. Reflection revealed that my actions were largely informed by a 'fix-it' approach, attempting to address surface issues without sufficiently interrogating underlying assumptions or systematic factors. Through follow-up inquiry, data analysis, and engagement with relevant literature, I recognised that my leadership decisions reflected a short-term approach, rather than stepping back to consider how solutions could be embedded for longevity. Although this process was not framed explicitly as action research at the time, it closely aligned with its core principles: reflection on practice, data-informed decision-making, and a cyclical relationship between action and evaluation. A later example of reflective practice closely aligned with action research emerged from my work with early pre-master's students who demonstrated persistent difficulties with academic writing. Initial assessment data (IELTS eligibility scores) and classroom observations indicated that students were unable to produce coherent academic texts despite receiving instruction and support. Reflection on this prompted me to question assumptions about students' prior educational experiences, language proficiency, and the effectiveness of existing teaching strategies. In response, I gathered further evidence through

diagnostic tasks, informal student feedback and close analysis of written work. This reflective process informed the introduction of targeted instructional adjustments, including scaffolded writing tasks and more explicit modelling of academic conventions. Students' progress was monitored over time, and outcomes were reviewed to evaluate the impact of these pedagogical changes.

These experiences directly informed the decision to undertake the present study, which commenced in 2019, shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought unprecedented change in the educational landscape. The data collection for this research took place during lockdown, a unique period in which research has shown that teachers faced wellbeing challenges arising from changes in their routines, workload, use of technology, and professional responsibilities (Sacre et al., 2023). Increased anxiety and isolation from colleagues and other professionals have also been reported (Pourbahram & Sadeghi, 2022). The classroom environment for this research (online) was somewhat different from the norm (face-to-face) for participants in this study, as was the case for education systems globally. The transition from face-to-face to online teaching was abrupt, and, in general, there was inadequate preparation for this mode of teaching (Sidi et al., 2023). This was also the case for the context of this study. As a line manager, teacher and researcher, I felt somewhat destabilised and quite vulnerable, as I perceived an expectation to project confidence navigating unexpected challenges, including technological difficulties, adapting teaching strategies, and managing teachers' and students' cognitive and emotional-social challenges in a time of uncertainty (Sidi et al., 2023, p. 12).

1.2 Background and Rationale of the Study

This research explores language teachers' perceptions of CAR, specifically whether

they understand CAR, what their perceptions are, and whether they have previously conducted it. This study aims to link autonomy with CAR and to explore teachers' perceptions after engaging in professional development and conducting their own CAR. The focus on language teachers is particularly important to me as I have been an English language teacher, and I am currently a manager of EAP tutors within an international college. My desire is to make an impact that extends beyond academic research for my doctorate, but to make a significant contribution to the wider English language teaching community. This is achieved by showing practical insights of CAR, teachers' perceptions, and professional development that all language teachers can access and relate to. Therefore, my motivation for this research is also driven by my commitment to improving professional practice and examining how CAR can be realistically embedded to empower teachers. Although this study is situated within my own institutional context, perceptions of CAR, engagement in research and teachers' sense of autonomy are issues that have been reported across international settings. Through this research, teachers' professional identity, empowerment and professional growth can be enriched, strengthened and sustained.

CAR is recognised as having the potential to enhance teaching practices and student performance, but CAR remains an area that English language teachers rarely explore. The nature of CAR provides a structured and reflective approach to investigating classroom practices, identifying challenges, and implementing evidence-based solutions (Burns, 2010; Mertler, 2012). Despite this, there are negative perceptions of CAR as a complex, time-consuming process (Borg, 2009; Edwards & Burns, 2016). I am interested in exploring language teachers' understanding and engagement in CAR to find out how they approach perceived problems, whether they investigate their classrooms and the extent of their understanding of CAR. Understanding the opportunities language teachers have to engage in CAR in their training or workplace would allow me to position CAR, not only as a means to

address classroom problems within my own workplace, but to highlight to the English language teaching community how teacher engagement with CAR can be practically cultivated. Burns (2010) and Saeb et al. (2021) acknowledge that successful CAR often depends on collaboration and a supportive environment, as these factors enhance engagement in CAR. Additionally, action research is often absent from initial teacher training programs, which can leave many educators lacking knowledge or confidence in conducting research in their own teaching contexts. Vula and Saqipi (2015) perceive that action research involves the ‘involvement of teachers in their own growth’ (p. 6). I sought to create opportunities for teachers within my own workplace to conduct CAR not only to collect real-time data, but to emphasise that whilst this research is situated locally, it has wider implications and relevance for the teaching community as it provides a model for how structured support, reflection and collaboration can enable teachers to meaningfully engage in practitioner research.

Applying CAR to English language education, where diverse learning needs and evolving pedagogical demands require an adaptive and reflective approach, is an effective method for teachers’ growth (Burns, 2010; Edwards & Burns, 2016). Additionally, CAR engages teachers, fosters autonomy, and strengthens collaborative practices, which drives sustained improvements in teaching and learning (Mertler, 2012; Borg, 2019). A component of Deci and Ryan’s (2002) Self-Determination Theory, autonomy is particularly explored in this research, as language teachers’ ability to make informed decisions is a key component in the success of CAR. CAR enables language teachers to foster autonomy and make informed pedagogical decisions about their classrooms through the identification of challenges, planning, acting on these plans, and reflecting to inform further decisions. Smith and Erdoğan (2008) note that autonomy is not about being free to act independently but rather using evidence and reflection to make sound pedagogical choices, a process closely aligned with the principles of CAR. Providing training and supporting language teachers when conducting CAR might

not only enhance classroom practice but might also foster a collaborative community of autonomous practitioners.

1.3 Significance of this research

My experience with CAR suggests that, with appropriate guidance, teachers and educational practitioners can effectively conduct CAR to improve their practice and enhance students' learning experiences. However, this depends on how informed the educational community is about CAR, as action research was not incorporated in my own teacher training, nor has it been part of any CPD during my teaching career. This thesis contributes to theory, practice and policy in several ways. Theoretically, this research extends understanding of CAR by explicitly linking it to teacher autonomy and positioning teachers as capable, reflective contributors to pedagogical knowledge related to their contexts rather than passive implementers of external knowledge. Practically, this research provides a professional development model on CAR and guides tutors through the CAR process, providing collaboration and continued support, which offer key opportunities for sharing good practice, "knowledge, ideas and skills with others to achieve a particular goal" (Burns, 2022, p. 5). Despite its potential, many teachers remain unfamiliar with the practical approaches to CAR and often perceive it as laborious and time-consuming, likely due to limited professional development (Garcés & Granada, 2016), and the inclusion of teachers' own CAR illustrates the feasibility of CAR to the professional community and not just my own context. By fostering a professional community that is confident in critically evaluating classroom performance and in exploring diverse teaching strategies, this study aims to enhance both teacher growth and student learning outcomes and impact the global ELT community, as this study has wider positive implications for sustainable professional development.

Because teaching quality is closely associated with student achievement, sustained Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is essential. This research is significant because it also provides CPD on CAR, delivered with my support in my dual capacity as researcher and line manager. While my position as an insider-researcher might raise ethical considerations, my dual role enabled me to give much-needed support at a time when teachers felt vulnerable. Any potential bias must be understood, as changes in professional practice rarely occur without intentional intervention. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that this dual role, together with teachers' heightened vulnerability moving to online teaching, made me question my positionality within this study, which is further discussed in the methodology chapter (section 3.3.1). I recognise that my dual role as line manager and researcher may have shaped how colleagues chose to participate and what they felt they were able to share. Existing power dynamics within the institution could have influenced participants' willingness to take part and may have affected the openness of their responses, particularly where the discussion of challenges might be perceived as professionally risky.

Previous studies on language teachers' involvement in CAR have highlighted time constraints, a lack of understanding, and workplace pressures as factors contributing to their reluctance to engage in action research (Haristiani et al., 2023; Mehrani, 2017). However, very few studies incorporate training, support, and monitoring of teachers through the CAR process, highlighting a gap in the existing literature, which further highlights the significance of this research. As noted in section 1.1, the situation with one of my teachers in Sudan showed how engaging in CAR with my support changed her experience with a Year 9 class. Empowering language teachers to share their experiences comfortably by equipping them with appropriate methods and tools for action research could be somewhat liberating. The importance of this research is significant as it enables language teachers to be autonomous, collaborative, and

curious about their work, with the hope that their experience with CAR becomes a sustainable, embedded pedagogical practice and not an additional burden.

1.4 Aims of this study

This research aims to investigate language teachers' perceptions of CAR and examines the extent of their engagement with CAR. It also considers how teachers' perceived control over their classrooms affects tutors' willingness to explore new strategies. Consequently, the study aims to clarify the relationship between engagement with CAR and teacher autonomy. A further aim is to provide a practical CPD model on CAR which can be adapted across diverse institutional contexts, creating opportunities for collaboration and reflection that facilitate successful engagement with CAR (Saeb et al., 2021). By evaluating teachers' perceptions after training and following the completion of their own CAR projects, this study will provide further insights into the impact of the CAR training and process on EAP tutors. Finally, this research seeks to inform institutional policy on CPD programmes as it advocates sustainable, research-informed development rather than isolated training events that have limited influence on everyday practices of the language teacher.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

Chapter Two builds on the study's background and research questions and presents a literature review of the key themes, including the history, origins, definitions, characteristics, and models of action research. It also examines teachers' perceptions of CAR, institutional culture, and CAR training, reflection, teacher autonomy, and critiques of CAR. Following this, the research questions on which this study is based are presented. Chapter Three outlines the methodology, including the data collection stages and the sample population. Chapter Four presents the findings, which are discussed in Chapter Five. This thesis culminates in Chapter Six, which presents the main conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

CAR offers teachers the opportunity to investigate a phenomenon within their classrooms. Although the concept of action research is not necessarily new, CAR remains a relatively uncommon practice. This thesis explores language teachers' perceptions of CAR, the professional development they have experienced, and how their perceptions might change after engaging in CAR in their classrooms. This chapter situates CAR within the broader field of teacher research, outlines its historical development and key definitions, and examines how teachers experience and enact it in practice. Particular attention is given to autonomy, self-determination, professional development, models of action research, and the role of reflection. The chapter concludes by considering the current status of CAR in language teaching contexts.¹

2.1.1 Teacher Research: Positioning CAR

Within a wider research context, teachers are positioned as active producers of knowledge rather than passive recipients of externally generated research. In an educational context, teacher research delves into the relationship between inquiry, professional knowledge and practice. Various approaches of teacher research also examine teachers as knowledge holders within a social and political context that shapes their work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009). CAR is not an isolated method but sits within a broader framework. It constitutes one form of practitioner inquiry, interconnected with participatory action research, reflective and exploratory practice in language education (Hanks, 2019).

¹ Where there is reference to 'the language teacher', this refers to teachers of EAP, EFL, ESOL, and ESP.

CAR's unique features distinguish it from the broader context of teacher research, and Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014) highlight that in CAR, contributing factors to professional knowledge occur through a more collaborative aspect rather than individual reflection (problem-solving, decision-making). This collaborative dimension is particularly important in EAP settings, where there are probably negotiations surrounding course design, assessment practices and learner needs, all within specific institutional constraints. In language teacher research, exploratory practice (EP) can be used as a point of comparison that further clarifies CAR's position and other forms of practitioner development, such as reflective practice (Farrell, 2007). Essentially, CAR is positioned as change-oriented and occurs through structured cycles that aim to improve practice through clear, planned interventions followed by evaluation (Kemmis, 2009). In contrast, EP focuses more on understanding as research outcomes and challenges the problem-solution notions often linked to CAR. CAR has a stronger emphasis on action and improvement. Whilst CAR as a practical inquiry might prioritise action and improvement, EP would focus on a deeper understanding and sustainability. On reflection, these two approaches complement each other within the wider field of teacher research (Hanks, 2019; Kemmis, 2009).

2.1.2 Teacher Research and Teacher Knowledge

When defining CAR within the realms of teacher research, the discussion needs to consider what constitutes "research". Mockler and Groundwater-Smith (2017) would argue that teacher research extends beyond informal reflection, but it becomes research when it is systematic, there is transparency and generation of claims about practice that are supported through evidence (data, research findings, credible sources). Teacher research is valuable as it is derived from the credibility established with claims from the context. The use of evidence and reflection, and making this knowledge visible, enables it to be transferable beyond a single classroom (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2017). Political factors influence research on

teacher knowledge, as settings are often accountability-driven. Teachers are affected by external factors such as targets, league tables, comparisons and inspections, which guide professional values and discourse that is either taken seriously or dismissed. Ball (2003, p.216) argues that teacher research is expected to “fall within a field of judgement” as it “determines what is to count as valuable”. This aligns with Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) view that this political idea revolves around the power and authority of those making decisions on what counts as official knowledge. Here, the power relationships are clear; academic researchers and policy-makers are positioned as producers of knowledge and teachers as users of knowledge. They further posit that teacher research poses a challenge to policy-driven forms of ‘official’ knowledge that is produced about teachers rather than by teachers, as teacher research asserts that practitioners’ experiential knowledge is also valuable and challenges the hierarchy by positioning teachers as active contributors to educational theory and practice but how to “define and justify appropriate “outcomes” of inquiry-based teacher education” and “co-construction of knowledge by teachers” are key questions that need to be considered (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 22).

Situated within the wider context of teacher research, Noffke (2009) poses three dimensions through which AR operates: personal, professional and political. Teachers are positioned as knowledge producers, and at a personal level, CAR begins with lived experiences, values and concerns arising from their own classrooms. Both Noffke (2009) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) share the view that AR is rooted in issues that matter to classroom practitioners and that this gives legitimacy from situated and experiential knowledge; thus providing a valid starting point. From a professional dimension, CAR generates professional knowledge from within practice. Noffke (2009) further argues that CAR raises questions about whose knowledge is valued, and this reflects political struggles over power and knowledge in education. Within the teacher research movement, CAR occupies a

central position as a form of inquiry within teachers' own classroom practice. Politically, it can challenge dominant, policy-driven forms of 'official' knowledge, as teachers are best placed for experiential understandings of teaching and learning, which contribute to professional development. Noffke (2009) argues that CAR's capacity to challenge power relations may be limited despite enhancing professional learning. Politically, when comparing CAR to other forms of research, such as Participatory Action Research (PAR), PAR might involve a wider research context, such as community members, local organisations, which extend beyond teacher research and the classroom (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014). Therefore, a distinguishing feature of PAR is the power of co-researchers to influence the research process and decide what is deemed as evidence, how findings are interpreted and what actions follow. Unlike CAR, which centres on teacher knowledge within a more constrained system and is teacher-led, PAR extends beyond the classroom context. Noffke (2009) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue that CAR is politically constrained; it may generate local improvement, but rarely challenges broader structures. When situated within the wider context of teacher research, CAR functions as ongoing professional development by positioning teachers as reflective knowledge producers who generate context-specific evidence on which to improve practice. This contests the idea that valid educational knowledge only comes from external 'official' sources.

2.2 History/Origins of Action Research in Education

The term 'action research' is generally attributed to the social psychologist Kurt Lewin, who, in the mid-1940s, focused primarily on using it to address social problems. Lewin aimed to encourage active participation to promote decision-making through a democratic process. Lewin (1946) proposed that action research would be the means to address social issues, particularly within minority groups, to promote "independence, equality and co-operation" (p.7). Wright Mills (1959) further explores the importance of action research within the context

of solving social problems by highlighting action research to “give credence to the development of powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people participating in collective research on mutual 'private troubles'” (cited by Adelman, 1993, p.8). Lewin’s (1946) recognition of action research in the early 1940s was characterised by group discussions of existing social problems, followed by discussions of the steps to be taken next. The key element of the follow-up would be active collective participation. The stages of this process reflected the action research cycle (reflection on a problem, plan of action, implementation, and observation of the impact). McKernan (1996) argues that although Lewin is recognised as the originator of Action Research, social reformists had previously used action research to evaluate social situations.

An overview of distinct movements and developments that have had historical and philosophical impact on action research was provided by McKernan (1988) and Masters (1995).

These distinct periods are the foundations on which action research has been developed:

- Science-in-Education Movement
- The Experimentalist-Progressive Philosophy of Education
- The Group Dynamics Movement
- The Post War ‘Corey-Era’ Action Research in Curriculum Development
- Contemporary Curriculum Action Research Development
- The Teacher-Research Movement

2.2.1 Science-in-Education Movement

Action Research in the social sciences has aimed to make sense of the world and social settings to improve them. The Science-in-Education movement was prominent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. McKernan (1988) cites Boone (1904), who stated the

need for “trained observers” to view “everyday undertakings” through a critical lens with a fresh perspective. It was suggested that ‘professional problems’ should be addressed with an open mind and likened to objective laboratory work (p. 175). When reflecting on this 1904 statement, several points resonate with the current interpretation of action research. For example, the notion of teachers as teacher-learners and teacher-researchers, and of being critical of their work through an objective lens, working scientifically in their classroom (laboratories). Several progressive and reconstructionist thinkers later developed this image of the teacher as a scientist (McKernan, 1988, p. 175), emphasising that teaching should be viewed as an ongoing process of inquiry and experimentation as well as the transmission of knowledge.

Buckingham (1925) argued that “[i]f you substitute the teacher for the psychologist, the schoolroom for the laboratory, and a class of pupils for half-dozen learners, you have conditions for a very much more fundamental and satisfactory experiment” (p.238). Buckingham also comments on the methodology of investigation for teachers and suggests that a mixed method of inquiry would be more beneficial than just a quantitative or qualitative inquiry, and goes so far as stating, “[t]he psychologists have spent much time dealing with nonsense syllables, digits, and arbitrary symbols” (p.237). Regarding teachers, Buckingham stated, “let no one persuade you that your opportunities for study and investigation are small,” and stressed the need to ensure that teachers did not perceive action research as worthy only of “the university professor” (p. 237). Buckingham’s work was influential and quite forward-thinking, as it aligns with what is now termed action research, in which teachers critically reflect on their teaching methods, test new approaches, and contribute to knowledge.

2.2.2 The Experimentalist-Progressive Philosophy of Education

Following the Science-in-Education movement, the Experimentalist-Progressive Philosophy of Education emerged as a prominent approach (1900-1915). This movement rejected a rigid, traditional, and authoritarian approach to schooling and favoured learner-centred inquiry. However, the boundaries between these two periods are not particularly distinct. Dewey (1910) exerted a significant influence on the progressive period, advocating that teachers explore pedagogical issues and that the notion of teachers as researchers is a “neglected field” (1929, p. 48). The progression made a significant contribution to curriculum development through the application of the scientific method, as Dewey advocated, with a clear set of principles to guide the investigation, suggesting a systematic approach to the investigation at hand. Generals (2000) contested that the movement initially focused on improving society, and the second phase was more distinct, with a focus on developing “pedagogical theories and curriculum development” (p. 215). Generals propose that although Dewey founded educational theory, “Booker T. Washington’s ideas on curriculum reflect the belief that the personal experiences of the student should serve as the basis for their educational experiences” (p.216). This is further clarified by examining experiences in an educational setting and by considering students’ social context. These ideals further support the position that action research in an educational context should focus on the classroom and students.

2.2.3 The Group Dynamics Movement

Further to the progression era, whereby a reflective problem-solving approach is adopted, Lewin (1946) coined the term ‘action research’, emphasising collaboration to generate change through cycles of action and collective problem-solving. Lewin’s insight into the action research process in the early 1940s is summed up (Cited by Adelman, 1993, p.8) as:

‘No action without research; no research without action’

It was proposed that theory and research should be connected, culminating in action that has a positive impact on societal problems (Lewin, 1946). This interpretation of action research shares some similarities with the concept of teachers conducting research as it is currently understood, for instance, in terms of the practitioner (teacher) and problem-solving (classroom problems). However, there are fundamental differences: the impetus for action research was not initially driven by an educational context but by the necessity to seek solutions to societal problems, thus adopting a more functionalist approach. The prominent feature of the Group-Dynamics Movement was its focus on problem discussion and active participation (Dewey, 1910).

Further to Dewey, the concept of successful action research, which involves discussing problems and specifying outcomes for managing the identified issues, was also supported by Lewin (cited in Adelman, 1993). Following this, an investigation would ensue, and decisions would determine the most appropriate action. The process would be documented and reviewed regularly, and when there was no further action, discussion on “newly perceived problems” would follow. This process would also focus on collaborative problem-solving through systematic inquiry, thus reflecting the key foundation on which action research is currently performed and providing clarity on the “action research cycle” (Adelman, 1993, p. 9). McKernan (1988) noted that these processes, highlighted by Lewin, “made action research respectable inquiry for social scientists” (p. 178). It has been argued that the development of action research as a method of investigation and problem-solving was evident before Lewin was recognised. The term ‘action research’ was developed and used by Collier a year before Lewin (Neilsen, 2006). One of the key differences was the emphasis of “democratic collaboration” (Collier) as opposed to being “more science oriented” (Lewin) but as Neilsen points out, these two “intimate colleagues” were involved in this era through which “action

research” (Lewin) and “social action research” (Collier) was brought to the forefront of social investigation (Neilsen, 2006, p.389).

2.2.4 Post-war ‘Corey-Era’ Action Research in Curriculum Development

The post-war era of action research was somewhat shaped by the work of Corey (1954, p. 375). He stated that action research was essentially “operational research” and that research is aimed at improving practices. Corey also recognises that the scientific approach is not practised or accessible to the broader educational community. He proposed that “the professional educational investigator” should drive the research and “tell us what to do”. Corey stresses that the fundamental difference between action research and traditional educational research lies in the motivations. That, rather than the “desire to arrive at the truth” which is common to traditional educational research, action research aims to improve practices and “[i]t is conducted by teachers or supervisors or administrators in order that they may have evidence as to whether or not they are accomplishing the things that they hope to accomplish” (p.376-377). Furthermore, “action research in education is no more than attempting to solve practical school problems by using research methods”. Corey advocated that teachers should investigate their classroom practices using a scientific method, so they would be better informed to improve them. This suggests a positivist approach, which seeks a single reality, but does not align in practice with classroom situations. According to Corey, this practice would be conducted collaboratively, and this co-operation would underpin the values of democracy and the possibility of multiple realities.

2.2.5 Contemporary Curriculum Action Research and Development

Between the Corey era and the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a decline in the pursuit of action research in education. Following the post-war Corey era, the action research approach to curriculum change experienced a revival. Sanford (1970) attributes it to the

division between science and practice. Carr (1994, p.428) cites Sanford. “I would say now that action-research never really got off the ground; it never was widely influential”. Carr advocated the “positivist paradigm” (science), which was dominant, and was subsequently “rejected” as it did not address social issues. Following this, the Contemporary Curriculum Action Research and Development movement emerged, which was followed by the Teacher-Researcher Movement, laying the foundations for CAR.

The notion behind the Contemporary Curriculum Action Research and Development movement was that success would be greater with “school-based problem approaches to curriculum change” rather than with large-scale studies (McKernan, 1988, p. 179). The focal element of this approach is to conduct the research through interaction and reflection. This movement advocated the importance of those involved in the research being grouped and working together. Through collaboration with teachers, a researcher, and those in the institution responsible for development, come together to address curriculum issues. McKernan (1988) poses that collaboration involves “planning, implementing, analysing, and reporting the research and that team members contribute unique skills and expertise in a collective process” (p.180). This philosophy was somewhat promoted in the United States, and following this, a different philosophy led to a new movement, driven by Stenhouse (1975), which emerged in the UK and Europe, known as the Teacher-Researcher Movement.

2.2.6 The Teacher-Researcher Movement

From the late 1960s onwards, Stenhouse (1975) and his colleagues emphasised the value of teachers conducting research for personal development and as a foundation for teacher education and classroom improvement. While action research had primarily focused on curriculum development, this led to the emergence of CAR, which challenged previous models of research, such as natural science and interpretive research, as CAR was interpretive and

context-specific rather than seeking generalisable laws. Whilst teachers conducting research remained central, the focus was still on the curriculum. McKernan (1988) reviewed Stenhouse (1975), who argued that “[a]ll teaching should be based on research, and research and curriculum development are the preserve of teachers” (p.181), emphasising that teaching improvements arise through an understanding of the curriculum and examining the challenges and effects of implementing any defined line of teaching. (p.181). Stenhouse (1975) advocated for systematic, self-critical inquiry, highlighting the importance of reflection. He emphasised the need to break free from authority, be “emancipated”, and autonomous. Despite advocating for emancipation, he acknowledged the importance of researcher support and monitoring.

Throughout the 1970s, the teacher-researcher movement was seen as growing and gaining momentum. At this time, concerns existed about the gap between research and practice, as what teachers believe they need to research is not necessarily what researchers believe needs to be investigated. This links to the previous discussion and Sanford’s (1970) position that research (positivism) and practice do not match. The teacher-researcher movement addresses these concerns, as it positions teachers as legitimate producers and knowers rather than just implementing externally generated research. Teacher research promotes teachers’ capacity to generate professional knowledge and practice in relation to situated understandings within the social and political relations that structure their work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2000). Here, CAR is situated within a broader group of practitioner inquiry approaches, which makes teacher knowledge known, shared, and warranted. When relating this to language teachers and language education, this perspective supports arguments that practitioner research is conceptualised as practice-embedded knowledge-making and supports teachers as researchers and producers of knowledge (Hanks, 2019).

2.2.7 Further Development of Classroom Action Research (CAR)

When considering the wider landscape of practitioner inquiry as noted above, the development of CAR can be understood as connecting change-focused teacher research with systematic inquiry within their own settings. AR is best seen as a practice-based approach aiming to improve teachers' work, providing a deeper understanding and reshaping the conditions in which they practise. When CAR is collaborative, it becomes a social process and professional knowledge is built through shared reflection, dialogues and collective understandings rather than only individual reflection. What works for language teachers cannot always be easily applied to a wider context or from one context to another. However, CAR's value lies in its ability to generate well-grounded, context-sensitive insights which support professional judgement and can be shared within local teaching communities and beyond.

Carr and Kemmis (1986), Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), and Carr (1994) significantly shaped action research by proposing frameworks grounded in critical theory and emancipatory models. Grundy (1987, p.154) supported these views, arguing that critical action research fosters "critical consciousness" that drives both "political and practical action to promote change". In line with these perspectives, Burns (2019, p.7) posits that such approaches empower "practitioners as participants in the research" to foster "more democratic forms of education, and the reform of education from the insider perspective". This emancipatory view enables teachers to overcome constraints and take control over the direction of their classroom practices, providing them with a sense of 'liberation' to use their professional judgement to problem-solve based on informed decision-making and, to a large degree, have control (teacher autonomy). Classroom practitioners are therefore better positioned to address classroom concerns and create meaningful, context-driven change through a systematic, intentional process that aligns with emancipatory models, as noted above, that empowers teachers to

generate knowledge from an insider perspective. (Sachs, 2000; Vieira, 2000; Benson, 2001; Ramos, 2006; Mello, et al., 2008; Benson, 2013).

From the late 1980s onwards, action research gained acceptance as a practical approach to investigate school processes, teacher practices, and driving change. John Elliott (1991), a colleague of Stenhouse, proposed a multi-level approach to action research aimed at enhancing students' learning. In this model, senior staff examined their managerial roles while supporting their colleagues' classroom enquiries, and teacher-researchers were, in turn, "facilitated by a university-based partner who carried out second-order action research into his or her own practice as facilitator" (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009, p.8).

2.3 Definitions of Classroom Action Research

Early literature on CAR for educational practitioners focuses on the process of Action Research for educational change rather than on classroom practitioners exploring and improving their own teaching practices and methods. The previous section discussed the historical background of CAR, but the definition of Action Research in an educational context needs to be further explored before providing a clear definition of CAR for this study. There are numerous variations in definitions of CAR, and presenting them all would be rather like interpreting action research models, which can be messy (Somekh, 2006). The definition of CAR is often inseparable from its process. The following discussion presents some of the key definitions of action research and classroom action research, as presenting them all would be exhaustive. The samples selected demonstrate the diversity of definitions and models while maintaining clarity and depth.

As discussed in the previous section, the origins of action research have been credited to Lewin (1946). Lewin defined action research as a cyclical or 'spiralling' process comprising

planning, action, and interpreting the results of the action, as shown in the figure below (Figure 1).

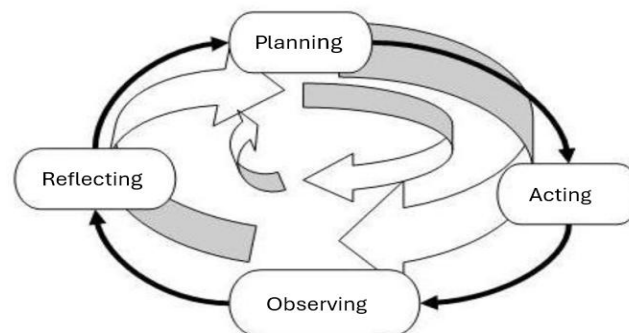


Figure 1. Lewin's (1946) Action Research Model (Amin et al., 2019, in EPRD, 2008)

Lewin's work on action research was initially applied in the field of social psychology, but Corey (1953) soon introduced the concept to education. Corey defines action research as involving reviewing problems, taking action to address them, and evaluating the consequences of those actions, which, in essence, follows the model proposed by Lewin.

Further to a focus on a social context, Rapoport (1970) defined action research as “[a] type of applied social research differing from other varieties *in the immediacy* of the researcher's own involvement in the action process”. It ‘aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration with a mutually acceptable ethical framework (cited in Foster, 1972, p.529-556). Carr and Kemmis (1986) also stress working “in the moments of the activity”, and this element of their definition is supported by Best and Kahn (1989), who placed a key emphasis on ‘immediate application and not theory building (cited in Womack, 1997, p.4).

Hult and Lennung (1980) support Lewin's initial description of the spiral process of CAR and highlighted that action research is not a single-action process and that it does not have an end, but that it involves a “cyclical process of problem definition, action planning,

implementation, data feedback and evaluation” (p.245). In both ‘traditional’ research and practitioner action research, there is active participation, and this is at the heart of all definitions of action research. A distinctive feature that could be argued when giving definitions between ‘traditional’ research and (educational) action research is whether theory is generated by the action research and how the process is controlled. Teacher action research is somewhat context-specific and fluid, and this is due to the varying teaching contexts; thus, it is difficult to generalise to a broader community. Educational research focuses on the practitioner and members of that educational community (controlling members), which is described by Wallace (1998, p.98) as providing “an alternative paradigm from the “bottom up” working within a collaborative environment. This reflects the view that action research is “a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention” (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.186).

Kemmis and McTaggart (1982) argue that action and research are essential components involved in the process of action research. They suggest that improvement is achieved through experimenting with various strategies and enhancing knowledge of curriculum, teaching, and learning. They also consider that a collective community is a focal point, and that action research is a collective self-reflective inquiry to improve the “rationality and justice of social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of those practices and the situation in which the practices are carried out” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p.5).

The notion of improvement and making positive change, particularly with preservice training programmes, was central to Cameron-Jones (1983). Khasinah (2013) cites Cameron-Jones (1983), who argues that practitioners conduct action research “with a view to improve their professional practice and understand it better” (p. 108). However, Elliott (1991) does not support this view, defining action research in terms of improvements in classroom practice rather than knowledge production.

Challenging the idea that action research should not extend knowledge, McNiff et al. (1996) argue that whilst “informal personal enquiries” provide “a sound basis” for teachers to assess their teaching, they lack critical engagement. They stress “[t]o be action research; there must be praxis rather than practice” (p.8). Therefore, although teachers might informally evaluate their work, CAR requires an “informed, committed action from which knowledge is derived”. Despite differing opinions on the purpose of action research, whether to further knowledge or to improve practice, definitions of action research are quite complex and cannot rest on assumptions or isolated extracts. McNiff et al (1996) also suggest “the whole point of researching is to find out something we did not already know”, thus contributing to the notion that action research aims to build on knowledge (p.10).

Macintyre (1991) offers a somewhat “comprehensive definition” of action research as “rigorous self-appraisal” of a problem or issue, followed by evaluation, planning, and the application of practical measures by those involved in the research context (cited in Macintyre 2000, p. 1). CAR is not a solitary process; McNiff et al. (1996) highlight the importance of incorporating the viewpoints of others involved, ensuring that action is intentional and informed by research findings and participants’ values. p.55).

Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 192) describe action research as being emergent, an on-the-spot procedure designed to address a concrete problem located in an immediate situation. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) view action research as a continually monitored process using a variety of mechanisms (questionnaires, diaries, interviews, and case studies). They argue that feedback enables modifications, adjustments, directional changes, and redefinitions to ensure lasting benefits to the ongoing process itself, rather than to some future occasion, thus concurring with Cohen and Manion that the process addresses a current situation.

Additionally, Bassey (1998, p.93) describes “action research as an inquiry which is carried out in order to understand, to evaluate and then to change, in order to improve educational practice”. Kasihani (1999) emphasises CAR research as a practical approach which serves to address specific “deficiencies” within the classroom and then act to “repair” them (cited by Purrohman, 2011, p.2). This understanding does not suggest a positive approach to action research; instead, it highlights an element of ‘poor practice’ that needs to be addressed for the classroom practitioner to be effective.

Prior to this, McNiff et al. (1996, pp. 7-8) offer a broader definition of action research not just for an educational context: “Action Research is a form of practitioner research that can be used to help you improve your professional practice in many different types of workplaces. Practitioner research simply means that individuals themselves do the research into their own practices”. Building on this definition, McNiff et al. (2002, p.14) distinguish action research from other traditional forms of research, noting it “requires action”, and is “focused by the researcher’s professional values”, and it is “insider research”. Mettetal’s (2002) interpretation of CAR differs somewhat in that “CAR occupies a midpoint on a continuum ranging from teacher reflection at one end to traditional educational research at the other” (see Figure 2 below).

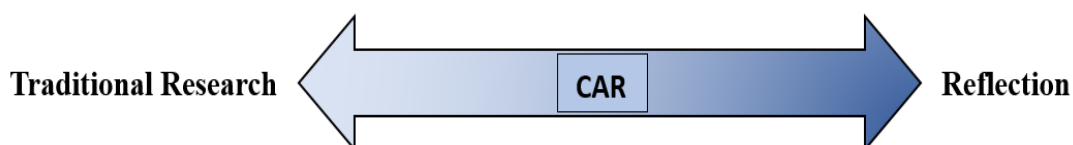


Figure 2. The CAR Continuum: the relationship between traditional research and reflection (Mettetal, 2002)

Mettetal (2002) explains that action research “is more data-based and systematic than reflection, but less formal and controlled than traditional educational research” (p.1). Although

simplified compared to other definitions, it effectively positions the teacher as a researcher, with CAR being systematic and context-specific. Thus, CAR enables instructors to discover what works best in their classrooms, allowing them to make informed decisions about teaching. Armstrong and Moore (2004) similarly highlight its cyclical nature, involving collaboration and “carrying out the evaluation of a particular intervention which has an identifiable focus and purpose, but which does not predetermine outcomes, or discard those that are unexpected” (p.2).

CAR, according to Kemmis et al. (2013), is a system of inquiry aimed at determining what is most effective in a classroom setting to improve the student learning experience. Teachers adopt reflection to assess what was successful and what was not successful to consciously consider how they can adapt or change their teaching approaches and strategies. McNiff (2002) notes that this reflection in action research refers to a checking process to assess whether the work performed in the classroom aligns with the practitioner's expectations. In her later work, McNiff (2017) further clarifies that action research is most suitable for those in the field of education as it is distinctive, allowing ‘insider researchers’ to investigate their work to improve teaching practices and “describe what” has been done and “explain why” it was done (p.18). The clarification here suggests reflective practices within the action research process, making the research process somewhat analytical and thereby building on knowledge of the practice being investigated.

To summarise, definitions of CAR generally emphasise teacher-researcher growth, and this is summed up by Hopkins (2002, p.41), who maintains that “action research combines a substantive act with a research procedure; it is action disciplined by inquiry, a personal attempt at understanding while engaged in a process of improvement and reform”. Burns (2010, p.2) similarly frames action research as “taking a self-reflective, critical and systematic approach to exploring your own teaching context”. The only element worth investigating, according to

Allwright and Bailey (1991), centres on what is happening inside the classroom, which was also the focus of Glickman's (1990) definition. Glickman asserts that action research aims to improve teachers' classroom practices within a school context. Borg (2010, p.24) adds that research should not be constrained in terms of the "scale, its methodology or the status of the researcher" but sees it "as planned, systematic, purposeful, empirical inquiry which is made public" which is distinct from other types of research in that teachers are the researchers, it is conducted in the classroom and the aim is to make a difference to the teachers' own work. As it "allows teachers to understand themselves, their teaching and their students; such understandings can also contribute to the growth of the organization teachers work in" (p.24). Like Carr and Kemmis (1986), Norasmah and Chia (2016, p.44) summarise CAR as "an active process that involves planning, action, observation or evaluation, and reflection on the action taken to identify its (action) influence on research participants and improve the action researcher's practices".

The discussion above highlights different perceptions of the understanding and definition of CAR, as well as its purpose. It is clear that many definitions and understandings of the CAR process intersect, and there are many commonalities which I move on to discussing next.

2.3.1 Characteristics of Action Research

Through the exploration of definitions of action research and CAR, the following common characteristics have been identified.

- i. Action research adopts a cyclical nature. Each cycle is related to and impacts the others. The cycles occur in stages, which, referring to Lewin's (1946) model, are planning, acting on these plans, observing, and then reflecting on the process. This

cyclical process can then be repeated based on the interpretation of the results and the change that occurred (Cohen & Manion, 1994; Hult & Lennung, 1980).

- ii. It aims to provide the basis on which change takes place. This change is informed by the information gathered through the action research process and might lead to changes in teachers' classroom practices, thus making action research emergent (Cameron-Jones, 1983; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Glickman, 1990).
- iii. CAR involves an active approach through participation by the teacher, collaboration between teachers and colleagues, and, in some cases, between teachers and researchers (McNiff, 2002; Mettetal, 2002).
- iv. Evaluative reflection is essential to AR, driving change and improvement based on reflection and/or observations, and decisions are made (Edwards & Burns, 2016; Rapoport, 1970, 2000).
- v. AR addresses specific problems in the context in which the teacher is working, making it personalised and context-specific (Bassey, 1998; McNiff et al., 1996).
- vi. It focuses on investigating teachers' practices in 'real' situations, resolving challenges encountered in a classroom context (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Kember, 2000).
- vii. The teacher sets the agenda for CAR, making it participatory and not top-down directed (Armstrong & Moore, 2004; McNiff, 2002; Kemmis et al., 2013).

Therefore, based on these characteristics taken from various definitions of CAR, there is a need to pose a working definition, which aims to add clarity to the understanding of CAR for this research.

2.3.2 Posing a working definition for this research

For this study, the definition of CAR merges concepts from those of Glickman's (1990, p.61) and Edwards and Burns (2016, p. 6), in that CAR is: *'an active process which involves cycles of planning, action, evaluation, either individually or collaboratively, and through reflection, there is understanding and informed action, which improves elements of teaching and learning within a classroom context'*.

The reason for posing this definition is that it establishes a clear framework on which my research is focused, and I wanted to bring together previous definitions to establish theoretical perspectives for my own research. This definition was used in the training with participants for Stage Three of the data collection, in which language teachers conduct their own CAR. In the context of EAP teachers, which forms the focus of Stage Three of this study, this definition particularly frames CAR as an active, cyclical and practice-embedded process rather than simply a research activity. Emphasising the cyclical nature of CAR, this definition addresses both individual and collaborative inquiry, significant for EAP contexts. This also provides a clear emphasis on reflection, shared practices and emphasising the collaborative nature of CAR rather than keeping the meaning to localised classroom contexts. Thus, with this definition, the expectation is to share knowledge, experiences and pedagogical decisions. Additionally, providing this definition focuses on improving elements of teaching and learning and framing CAR as professional learning and supporting EAP teachers as reflective practitioners and producers of knowledge rather than positioning research as something that exists outside of teachers' work settings. On reflection, while a definition of CAR was provided for EAP teachers unfamiliar with the process, such definitions tend to explain how inquiry occurs, rather than clarifying its broader benefits. Despite this definition including 'improving teaching and learning within a classroom context', after further examination, there should be an acknowledgement of the wider implications of CAR, knowledge generation and

professional learning to fully clarify that CAR can contribute to a wider teaching community than just describe a generic cycle of action. Therefore, it could be concluded that there are complexities within CAR that a single definition cannot fully express. CAR operates across multiple purposes such as professional development, knowledge generation, and possible critical and political engagement depending on contexts, intent and constraints. Providing this definition does not weaken CAR. At the time, it guided participants as teacher-researchers and highlighted CAR's flexibility and evolving nature, rather than presenting it as a fixed methodological process.

2.4 Models of Action Research

This review will now focus on the action research process, presenting various models and analysing common characteristics related to language teachers and CAR. Whilst there is no single approach to conducting CAR, it generally involves stages centred on a particular issue. Models that address broad perspectives (Altrichter et al., 1993) and specific problems (Lewin, 1946; Kemmis, 1980; Ebbutt, 1985; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998) will be discussed, along with an overview of methodological models (Elliott, 1991).

Although other models exist, these examples have been selected as they capture the breadth of CAR approaches. It is important to highlight varying models as this captures the breadth of CAR and the diversification of CAR models.

To begin, Altrichter et al. (1993, p.7) identify some “typical broad stages [that] can be found in any action research process” (see Figure 3 below).

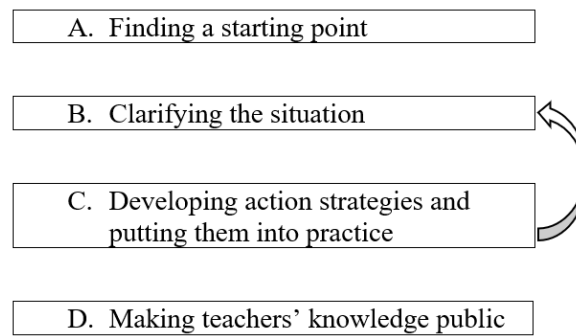


Figure 3. Typical Stages of Action Research (Altrichter et al., 1993)

Altrichter et al (1993) later identify the final stage, which suggests sharing the teacher's knowledge as "[a]nalysis and theory generation" (p.9). However, they emphasise that to improve educational institutions and classrooms overall, teachers' findings from action research must be shared. This final stage could be debated, as the primary goal of action research is to enable teachers to make informed decisions about how to improve their own classroom practice. Sharing this knowledge is recognised as a vital part of a holistic educational process, but not necessarily an essential component of teachers conducting CAR. Expecting teachers to share these experiences and findings might place undue pressure on them and potentially hinder their motivation to engage in CAR (see section 2.5 for further discussion).

Lewin (1946) recognises action research as a cyclical process that involves identifying a question or area for investigation, which entails reflection, planning, action, and observation, as depicted below.

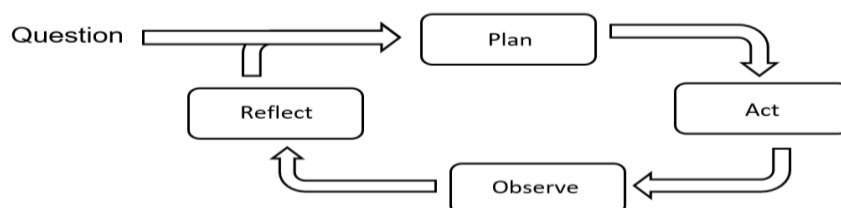


Figure 4. Cyclical process of Action Research (Lewin, 1946)

This model then lends itself to a spiral of cycles, and each cycle informs the next, thus moving forward. Planning, action, observations, and reflections are present at each cycle. For example, Figure 5 below illustrates the spiral of cycles (comprising two cycles) as posited by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988).

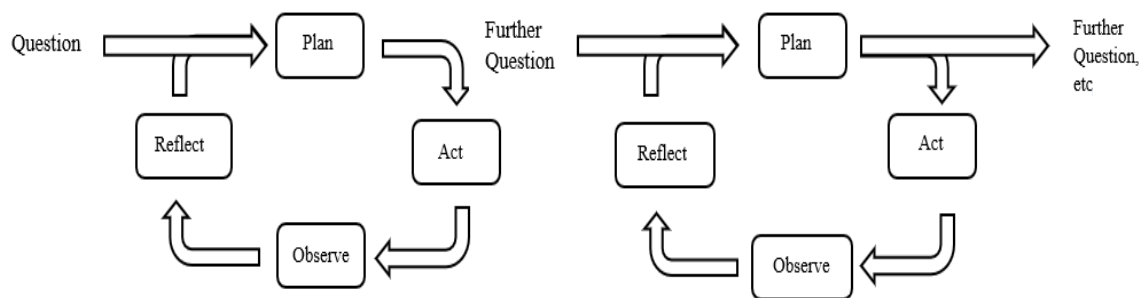


Figure 5. Action Research Cycles

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988)

Burns (2007, p.988) acknowledges Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) as producing “the best-known action research model,” which ‘minimally involves’ the *plan-action-observation-reflection* process in the form of “a spiral of cycles” (this model forms Stage Three of the data collection process for this research).

Burns summarises the planning, action, observation and reflection process as follows: The first stage involves *planning* and posing a question influenced by the ‘the recognition of real constraints, and the potential for more effective action’. The *action* phase follows, where *action* ‘deliberate and controlled’. Kemmis and McTaggart stress that this action is “critically informed in that it recognizes practice as ideas in action mediated by the material, social, and political ‘struggle’ towards improvement”. The *Observation* phase focuses on observing and recording responses, using “open-eyed” and “open-minded” observation plans, categories, and measurements. Finally, the *reflection* phase evaluates and describes to make ‘sense of the

processes, problems, issues and circumstances in which it arises' (p.988). This process might then lead to further questions and a repetition of the cycle. For example, an EFL tutor might pose the question, *'How can I encourage students to be more focused when writing?'*

Building on the above, Figure 6 below presents a more detailed model from Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and is a popular model for language teachers when conducting CAR.

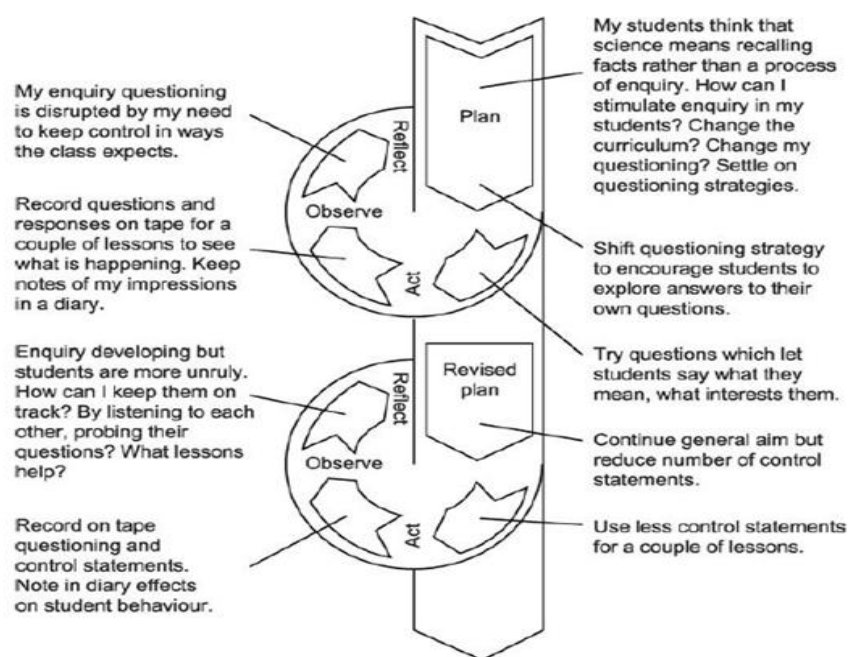


Figure 6. The Action Research Spiral (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988)

In this model, the action research process is not limited to a single cycle. After the first cycle, further questions would be posed based on reflections from the previous cycle. The next cycle would then ensue, and this spiral process enables the teacher-researcher to move forward. Depending on the findings and their reflections, practice changes, which then creates the opportunity to reflect critically. After this process, there is an opportunity to ask further questions, or further questions will arise. This will lead to the identification of additional elements to apply in the next cycle.

McNiff (1988) posits a more three-dimensional view of the action research cycle to highlight its flexibility and to emphasise that action research is not a rigid process; it can move forward, expand, or loop back as insights emerge. With each cycle or layer, there is a deepening understanding and growth. The stages reflect those of Lewin (1946), Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), which involve planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, and the cyclical nature of the process can be repeated. The illustration below (Figure 7) also depicts a spiral action.

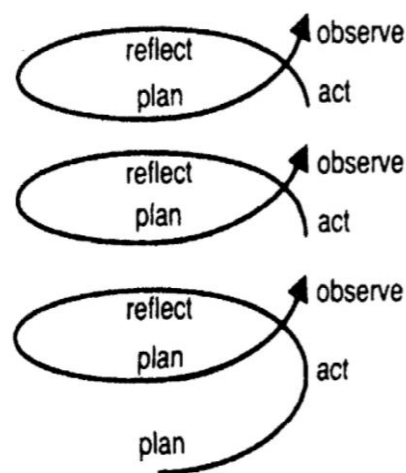


Figure 7. Three-dimensional spiral of spirals (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p.45)

2.4.1 Critiques of Lewin's model: Elliott (1991) and Ebbutt (1985)

Whilst Lewin's model (Figure 1, p.23) has been generally accepted as the basis for the action research process, Elliott (1991) and Ebbutt (1985) questioned it, believing it was too simplistic. Elliott (1991) proffered a revised model, noting that Kurt Lewin's model was somewhat 'straightforward'. Elliott argues that there is no one fixed idea in the initial stages of the action research process and that "[t]he general idea should be allowed to shift" (p.70). He argues that the initial stage of "reconnaissance or fact-finding" should include a form of analysis and that it should not be an activity that takes place only in the initial stages of the

action research process; rather, it should “recur in the spiral of activities”. Elliott acknowledges the implementation phase of the research cycle as a challenging one and that proceeding further should depend on monitoring “the extent to which it (action) has been implemented”. Therefore, Elliott (1991, p. 7) proposes the following model of action research, based on a revision of Lewin’s model (See Figure 8 below).

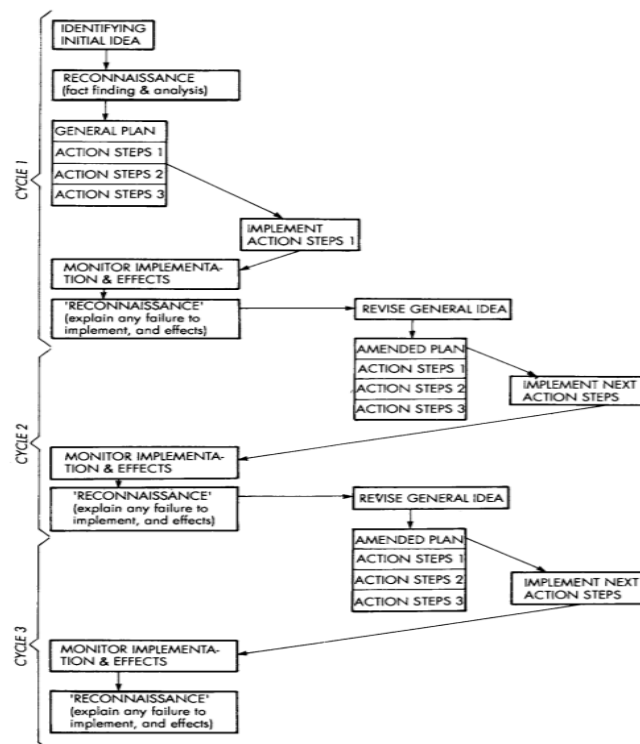


Figure 8. Revised version of Lewin's AR model (Elliott, 1991)

Elliott’s model above is based on an understanding that action research, in this case, is addressed through a practical approach. While this model is valuable for revising Lewin’s framework, it risks narrowing the scope of action research and potentially overlooking its broader emancipatory and critical dimensions, as emphasised by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). Whilst Elliott’s (1991) model enables teachers to focus on tangible issues, such as learner participation, through step-by-step cycles without requiring research expertise, the practicality of following this model assumes that teachers can consistently follow all parts of

the cycles; in reality, teachers might struggle to balance this task with other classroom demands.

Further to Elliott, Ebbutt (1985, p.164) also critiques Kurt Lewin's model of action research. Ebbutt questioned the use of a spiral form for action research, arguing that it does not accurately depict the action research process (Hiltunen, 2010). Ebbutt posits that whilst there are successive cycles, there are opportunities to consider evaluative feedback not only between cycles but also within them (Figure 9 below).

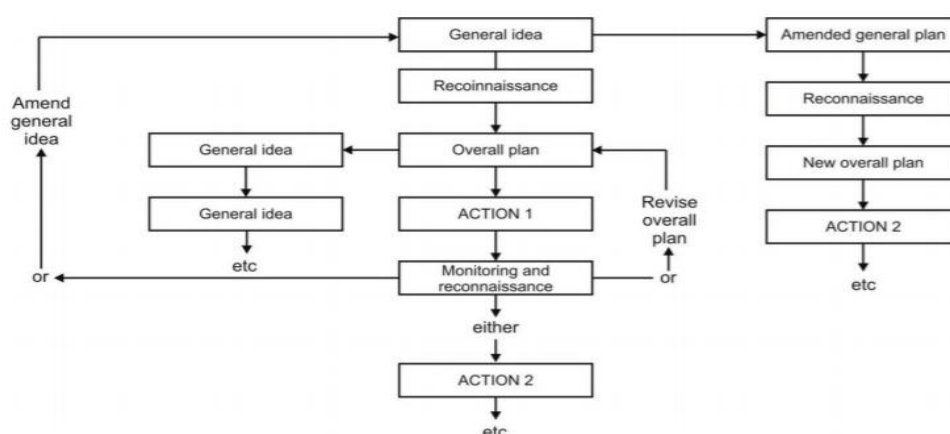


Figure 9. Ebbutt's model of Action Research (Ebbutt, 1985)

However, this model could be perceived as over-complex, making it harder for practitioners to follow. Moving away from a simpler model could reduce accessibility and practicality, as noted with Elliott's (1991) model, which lacks a clear direction for the teacher, especially for those new to conducting CAR. Models that are overly complex would potentially hinder engagement in CAR and possibly act as a deterrent to those attempting CAR for the first time.

Other views on what Action Research models should consist of have been put forward by Koshy (2005), who argues that there is no single ideal model for action research and that the model should suit the research's purpose. "Excessive reliance on a particular model too

rigidly could adversely affect the unique opportunity offered by the emerging nature and flexibility which are the hallmarks of action research” (Koshy, 2005, p. 8). After reviewing varying models of action research, if language teachers are to follow a specific model, it needs to be somewhat ‘simple’ in that it needs to be easily followed. Presenting teachers with models such as Ebbutt’s (1985) or Elliott’s (1991) might pose a further barrier to them conducting CAR.

This section has highlighted the various ways CAR is conceptualised by presenting models of action research. One key element in the success of these models is reflection and reflective practices, which enable teachers to reflect, identify areas for improvement and then act critically. Therefore, the following discussion will explore reflection and the challenges it entails in the context of CAR.

2.5 Reflection and Classroom Action Research

Teacher reflection is a key element in the CAR process. Reflection on previous classroom situations informs future planning and delivery. Teachers cannot change past events, but they can affect what happens in the classroom in the future (Dewey, 1933). Dewey (1933, p.17) further argues that “[r]eflection commences when one enquires into his or her experiences and relevant knowledge to find meaning in his or her beliefs. It enables teachers to direct their activities with foresight and to plan according to ends-in-view”.

Collier (1999) concluded that “[r]eflective practice is a unique and individual developmental process’ and influences ‘how student teachers adapt and assimilate their experiences and conceptual levels” (p.179). Whilst this conclusion provides a relevant insight into the reflective process, Collier also acknowledges that once student teachers are fully engaged in their role as fully-fledged teachers, they are often “so distracted by the process of teaching that they do not concede to the process of learning” (p.179). Being a teacher-learner

and teacher-researcher is a characteristic of CAR, in which teachers develop a level of self-awareness to facilitate more effective classroom practices. Given this, reflection and CAR are often discussed in conjunction. CAR is self-reflexive (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), involving teachers' mental processes and contemplation, and is seen as having consequences for practice (Luttenberg et al., 2017). Reflection and how to reflect might need to be more concrete for some teachers, especially in the early stages of understanding the role of reflection in improving their own practices. Therefore, the following will explore how teachers can develop reflective practices and the role they play in action research.

2.5.1. Reflective Diaries, Informal Meetings, Peer Observations, and Critical Friends

Teachers who are engaged in reflective language teaching and CAR can explore and develop their reflective practice through reflective diaries. Reflective diaries could serve as the basis for informal meetings with other language teachers or focus group discussions. Diaries provide the opportunity to record events and ideas as they happen (should time allow) and can be used to reflect on afterwards, coined by Schön (1983, pp. 68-69) as “*reflection-on-action*”. Teachers can then share their diary reflections through informal meetings. The danger here might be that teachers adopt a purely descriptive process as previously discussed, but these entries, thoughts, and feelings could initiate critical thinking.

If teachers are confident and willing to trust other practitioners, then peer observations provide a different perspective on classroom practices. Again, teachers can meet informally to discuss findings and reflect on the experience from two different perspectives. As mentioned, this does require the teacher to be willing to trust the observer, and the observer the teacher. The observee may highlight specific areas for comment. This practice could lead to the notion of a “critical friend” (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 157) or a “learning partner” (McNiff, 2002, p.18). Whilst these terms are particularly associated with action research, there are distinct parallels

with reflective language teaching and the process involved. Teachers often juggle heavy workloads and face pressures such as administrative tasks, making it challenging to find time for meaningful reflection.

2.5.2 Challenges of Reflection in Classroom Action Research

Reflective teachers are expected to review their classroom practices by reflecting on their teaching and critically examining what they have done, in order to understand what is happening in the classroom. This is not a one-time process, but rather a continuous one. Like the action research cycle, reflection aims to inform the teacher about experiences and how their teaching might need to change based on the evaluation of those experiences, making it cyclical. Reflections on experiences inform reflective decision-making and actions that are initiated, then reflection on these new actions, and so on. Teachers often engage in this practice without consciously recognising it as reflection or formalising the process. As a result, reflection may remain descriptive rather than critical.

Like CAR, critical reflection may require addressing through professional development, initial teacher training, and collaboration. Identifying elements of practice requires the practitioner to use metacognition and, as previously stated, consider a variety of perspectives. Research by Rozimela et al. (2025) highlighted that Indonesian EFL teachers were adept at reflecting on lessons, but their engagement in reflection during lessons was limited. Likewise, Widiastari and Fithriani (2024) noted that EFL teachers employed strategies to capture their reflections, such as keeping diaries, recording, and engaging in peer discussions. Despite this, their reflective practices were often inconsistent and superficial, highlighting the need for clear support and guidance.

Reflection must also extend to other stakeholders involved in the teaching and learning experience, such as the students' perspective of the experience. This might prove a challenge

to the teacher, as it may challenge the teacher's own beliefs. It is assumed that teachers know how to reflect, as reflection can often be “low level” as experienced by Watts and Lawson (2009). Watts and Lawson later employed a distinct rubric that encourages critical reflection to make practice transformative. The rubric was employed with trainee teachers and posed four levels of reflection: *routine* (through making simple statements); technical (examining problem-solving); dialogic (considering the views of others); and *transformative* (deep thought), achieved through questioning assumptions. Findings showed that trainee teachers were better informed on how to reflect rather than be descriptive. Therefore, it can be assumed that challenges to the success of the reflective process within the action research cycle may arise if teachers do not fully understand how to reflect and apply the reflective process to inform change. The dialogic stage is integral to the success of Watts and Lawson’s rubric, which means that opportunities to gather others' opinions and to collaborate need to be considered. However, the *dialogic* stage might leave the teacher feeling vulnerable and accepting of such critiques, as they might challenge the teacher’s taken-for-granted assumptions.

Building on Dewey's work, Rodgers (2002, p. 845) identifies four key problems associated with teachers' reflective practices and focuses on distinguishing between reflection and thinking in everyday use. He posits that the key distinctions are that reflection is “meaning-making”, systematic, rigorous, and disciplined, and occurs in collaboration to promote growth (personal and intellectual). Mann (2005) argues that there is a continuum, with reflective practice, conducted through teaching in the everyday sense, at one end, and, at the other end, “more structured and rigorous forms of teacher research, which include action research” (p. 108). Research findings highlight that teachers do reflect and act on these reflections, but they are not formalised. Reflection is an integral part of the action research cycle, as it enables teachers to identify problems, act, and evaluate outcomes through reflective practices. The discussion previously noted some challenges in reflection, such as inconsistent engagement

and superficial reflections. Therefore, these challenges might affect how teachers perceive CAR, given that reflection plays a valuable role in CAR. The discussion will now focus on perceptions of CAR.

2.6 Perceptions of Classroom Action Research

Educational Action Research has been of interest since Lewin coined the term in the 1940s, and subsequently, the concept of ‘teacher research’ emerged. The professionalisation of teaching has sparked debate on whether teachers are recognised as autonomous professionals or simply implementers of policy. Hancock (1997) highlights this tension in a UK context, noting that teachers’ skills were undervalued in the 1990s. Action research was promoted to enhance teachers’ professional status, generate knowledge and expertise, and increase their autonomy. This section will therefore explore teachers’ perceptions of action research in general and the obstacles to CAR, before focusing specifically on language teachers and CAR.

Hancock (1997) highlights the education profession’s efforts to gain recognition as a professional body and maintain professional status. In the late 1990s, teachers’ skills were undervalued by society, politicians, children, and colleagues. Despite well-planned lessons, teachers were struggling to keep control of classroom behaviour and were further burdened by a heavy workload. Hancock summarises this accordingly: “[t]eachers’ working conditions mitigate against any activity that is not contributing to the ‘hands on’ work with pupils” (p.89), concluding that “most teachers are too fatigued to contemplate it [research]”. Official bodies such as those responsible for monitoring performance and processes in educational institutions (Ofsted, DfE, LEAs)², prioritised delivering the curriculum and not asking questions about their classroom practice. Therefore, Hancock (1997) identified four key factors as barriers to

² Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education; DfE: Department for Education; LEAs: Local Education Authorities

classroom inquiry: lack of expectation to conduct research, demanding routines, ‘current lack of professional confidence and marginalisation of teachers from government’ reforms (p.93).

There are discrepancies concerning the appropriate methods for classroom research. Robinson (2003) suggests that a traditional view of research is that teachers do not produce research but rather use the results of research conducted by others. He criticises the division between researchers and teachers, stating, “[t]he oppositional discourse of practitioners versus researchers is unfortunate, because it emphasises difference and separation, rather than similarity and overlap” (p. 27). Stenhouse (1975) argued that teachers should investigate their work, but this requires a shift in teachers’ self-image and working conditions and states “it will require a generation of work, and if a majority of teachers, rather than the enthusiastic few, are to possess this field of research, that the teacher’s professional self-image and conditions of work will have to change (p.142)”. This implies that teachers need to be autonomous and self-determined to conduct CAR, and the link between CAR, autonomy, and self-determination will be explored later in this chapter (see section 2.10).

Challenges with engaging in CAR exist, and Negi (2016) reports that teachers might not engage in CAR due to the practicalities, such as time constraints, reluctance to share, potential criticism of their own performance, and a lack of understanding of how to perform classroom CAR. Bialen’s (2025) small-scale study (n = 5) found that while action research is regarded as a valuable tool and plays a significant role in professional development, it identified similar key barriers, including workload, resistance to change, and sustainability issues. Building on these points, Cain (2011, p.6) notes that teachers who work alone with limited professional interaction may not see collaboration as necessary and that teachers might feel that findings from CAR are deemed unsuitable or irrelevant, as they cannot be generalised, given that they focus on a specific classroom setting. Students should be the “rightful focus for

their professional lives” (Cain, 2011, p. 7). Advocates of CAR stress the need to be reflexive and collaborate by sharing experiences to enhance students’ experiences further.

These findings concurred with Allison and Carey’s (2007, p.64) investigation of English teachers in a Canadian university linguistics programme. Despite operating in “an ideal environment for collaboration between theorists and practitioners,” participants (n=22), questionnaire responses (22) reported that a lack of time was a factor limiting active engagement in research, and perceptions that there was very little value in conducting research, insufficient knowledge of the research process, and methodology associated with action research. Many felt they were not ‘real’ researchers and were unsure what to investigate. Allison and Carey (2007) conclude that their findings paralleled those of McDonough and McDonough (1997), highlighting “complexity and ambivalence of research for language teachers”, shaped, in part, by academic hierarchy, sometimes restrictive but occasionally valued as a source of expertise (p.74).

Another potential barrier to CAR was identified by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992, p.304) as “teacher isolation”. Teachers may be reluctant to pose questions perceived as challenging in their institutions, as it might be perceived as questioning the system, which could be a step they might be reluctant to take. They state that “serious obstacle[s]” need to be overcome before teachers can be expected to engage in research. These are caused by “teacher isolation, a school culture that works against raising questions, a technical view of knowledge for teaching, and the negative reputation of education research”. Further to this, there might be limited training and opportunity to engage in CAR in the workplace. Peters (2004) cites Grundy (1995), who argues that professional development is often a quick fix, delivered in isolation by external providers and typically in a top-down manner, shaping how teachers view professional development and their willingness to engage in CAR.

Although not directly related to CAR, Cho's (2014) doctoral study provides an overview of EFL teachers' perceptions of changes in teaching practices. Cho conducted primary research among EFL teachers in South Korea to examine their perspectives on CPD and changes in classroom practices. The findings revealed that EFL teachers generally lacked enthusiasm for implementing any form of change in the classrooms. Isolation and a perceived lack of support from the institution where they worked were noted. Cho linked negative perceptions with self-confidence, such as reluctance to adopt any proposed new practices. Additionally, teachers who were well-established within the institution were perceived as failing to value their newly qualified counterparts, further compounding their resistance to change. Cho finally likens this attitude to a cyclical effect, where teachers attempt to engage in new practices but are not successful due to limited support. Hence, the teacher gives up as the experience has not been a positive one.

Prior to Cho's (2014) study, Peters (2004) examined the 'Innovative Links Project' at the University of South Australia, a 12-month, action research-based CPD initiative involving six schools and six teacher educators. The project explored teachers' motivation, the value assigned to action research, engagement in professional writing, and the value of learning and education outcomes. Using a grounded theory approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, research meetings, seminars, informal discussions, reflective journals, meeting minutes, and the researcher's reflective journals. Peters (p. 538) cites Stenhouse (1985, p. 39) and justifies the decision to use "portrayal" as the method to report the findings by highlighting Stenhouse's perspective on portrayal as "an attempt to preserve some of the qualities of narrative in descriptive writing that lacks a natural storyline". The findings reflected mixed attitudes toward action research and the value attached to conducting it in a school setting. There was general enthusiasm for the opportunities teachers had to discuss their work, in particular, teaching and learning, especially when the focus was on the students and

what was happening in the classroom. Teachers were more forthcoming about the positive impact of dialogue and the opportunities to discuss their students and classroom practices. Many dismissed reflective writing as valuable and did not want to formalise their reflection (p 541). Some teachers doubted the benefits of action research altogether.

These findings mirrored Hancock's (1997) observation that teachers believe research is conducted by professional researchers outside of schools or in higher education and that the research might hinder "good teaching practice" (p.93). Hancock identified teachers' morale and confidence as factors inhibiting research practices. This was also a factor, as Peters (2004) reported that teachers were more likely to conduct research if they had confidence in their research objectives. Teachers found collecting data challenging and wanted this part of the process to be part of 'normal lessons' and not as part of an identified methodological process. Some of the teachers involved in the study found it challenging to maintain focus on action research, whereas those with prior knowledge and experience in CAR were more successful. Adopting new practices in any teaching environment might prove to be challenging, and creating time when time is the most precious commodity teachers have could prove somewhat frustrating.

Workload, timetable pressures, and unanticipated demands hindered teachers' engagement with action research. Personal commitments led to an overload, and another teacher reported spending the holiday writing her reflective diary. Additionally, other teachers were committed to family events, and thus, academic writing posed significant challenges. Whilst a budget was allocated to release teachers to attend meetings, they came to a common consensus that meetings required for the study should take place outside of school hours. Despite these challenges, teachers acknowledged personal growth, particularly in questioning processes and understanding student learning.

Overall, the outcomes of Peters' research led teachers to question "structural reform at the school-wide level" (p. 550), as there was consensus that their insights into the project related to students' learning styles, teaching approaches in general, and conscious questioning of the impact that classroom activities had on their students. As regards the overall assumptions of the project, it was found that 'some of these conditions were present for the teachers in school and as a result they were not able to fully meet the project expectations' (p.552). The following highlights Hancock's (1997) reservations about teachers conducting CAR and further explores teachers' engagement in CAR.

2.6. Doubts concerning teachers' engagement in CAR

Medgyes (2015) analysed over 2,000 presentations given at the IATEFL-Hungary annual conferences. One area the conference requested papers on was "Bridging the gap between research and practice in ELT". This study highlighted that very few of the presentations were related to research in any form. These findings may suggest that language teachers are not engaging in research. Medgyes stated that a vast majority of the presentations focused on the teaching of language-related skills, IT, examinations, and resources. He concluded that this was because "[t]eachers are primarily people of action: they do not need highfalutin theories and elaborate words to do a decent job, which is not to suggest, of course, that they lack the capability of reflective thinking" (p.492). Echoing Maley's (2016) view that both teaching and researching do not run together and that they follow differing paths.

An earlier study by Snow-Gerono (2005) examined how Professional Development School teachers gain insight into teachers' perceptions through a "living an inquiry stance toward teaching" (p.79). The study recruited volunteer teachers who identified as having an "inquiry stance" (p. 80). Snow-Gerono focused somewhat on reflective practices in the inquiry and adopted Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1993) definition of teacher inquiry as "systematic

intentional inquiry by teachers” (p. 80). Initial interviews with the participants aimed to gain their perspectives on what inquiry meant to them. Snow-Gerono found that participants often did not recognise that what they were doing was inquiry-based. One interviewee stated that she would do anything that seemed like a good idea. Six participants in the study were prospective teachers and mentor teachers who had to complete an inquiry, either individually or collaboratively, with mentors providing support. Snow-Gerono aimed to create portraits of teachers’ understanding and perceptions of conducting research (inquiry) through one-to-one and semi-structured interviews with the participants. Participants reported that the inquiry was beneficial, enabling them to improve their classroom practice.

Additionally, it was observed that the inquiry process motivated them to engage in activities that addressed their students’ needs. One key finding describes “a shift in understanding.” This shift involves moving from procedural actions to inquiry-based in a conceptual positioning toward knowledge and what it means to know’ (p.94). Snow-Gerono’s study provides some positive evidence for professional development for trainee teachers and their mentors. However, the conditions of the study are not necessarily reflective of a typical teaching environment, as the students had somewhat optimal support and an opportunity to conduct inquiry as part of their training, which ran parallel to their training courses. As Snow-Gerono (p.94) acknowledged, “the data produced here suggests there is more to teacher inquiry than conducting a project” but ultimately this research goes some way to show the participants had a positive experience of classroom inquiry and that teachers who experienced a “conceptual shift involves teachers moving to a new position, a position in which they are comfortable with the continual posing of questions about their teaching and its impact on learners” (p.93).

Studies on English teachers’ understanding of research show a distinct gap between research and practice (Borg, 2009; Kutlay, 2012; Borg & Liu, 2013; Tabatabaei & Nazem, 2013; Mehrani, 2015) Whilst these studies focus on teachers’ conceptions of research rather

than conducting CAR, they do highlight teachers' understanding of research as being more scientific and concerned with testing hypothesis (Kutlay, 2012; Roux et al, 2013).

The discussion on perceptions of CAR has briefly included specific reference to the language tutor. This will now be discussed in greater detail, as narrowing the focus in relation to CAR for English language teachers links directly to the target group for this research.

2.7. English Language Teachers' Perceptions of Research

Research conducted by Borg (2009) provides insight into language teachers' "conceptions"³ of research, which provides a valuable comparison to teachers' perspectives in general. Borg believes that to promote teacher research, there needs to be a clear understanding of "teachers' views in what research is and how often they read and do it and why or why not in each case" (p.358). Borg does not explicitly state CAR, but highlights pedagogical decision-making resulting from research, which would in turn benefit teaching and learning. His large-scale study involved 505 English language teachers from 13 countries; quantitative data were collected through a survey, which was followed up with a random sample (21 respondents) providing more in-depth written responses, and interviews, resulting in qualitative data. Findings indicate that just over 50% of teachers engaged in research infrequently, with 8.1% stating they had never engaged in research (p.371). Whilst the empirical findings need to be viewed cautiously, qualitative results gave a clearer insight. Reasons for conducting research included the need to "find better ways of teaching" to enhance problem-solving skills and support teacher professional development (p.372). However, Borg reports that the predominant reason for not doing research was a lack of time (81.7%). One key conclusion highlighted in this research is that English language teachers' understanding of research does not relate to "productive, realistic classroom action research" (p. 373).

³ Borg uses conceptions which parallel perceptions in my research.

Other research into English language teachers and their engagement with research followed Borg's (2009) methodology or adapted quantitative data collection method (questionnaires) and had similar findings (Kutlay, 2012, UK EFL teachers; Mehrani, 2015, Iranian EFL teachers; Kantaridou and Kaltsiou, 2018, Greek EFL teachers; Mohammed, 2019, Iraqi EFL teachers). Teachers' conceptions of research tended to be geared towards research being scientific, hypothesis testing, and the collection of extensive data. Whilst these studies focused on engagement rather than CAR, they do go some way to reflecting the perceptions and highlighting possible barriers. For example, Kutlay (2012) and Mehrani (2015) found that teachers did not perceive research problems as relevant to their classrooms; research was used to produce knowledge rather than inform practice. These findings somewhat reflected those of Borg (2009) and Borg and Liu (2013).

Borg and Liu (2013, p.292) reported that EFL teachers in China spent time on doing secondary research (79%), but there was limited evidence to support this. Additionally, EFL teachers expressed that there was insufficient time to do research. Although teachers valued the impact of research, their workplace did not allocate time for it, even though they were expected to conduct research (Borg & Liu, 2013). Some teachers viewed research as "time on top of teaching" (Denny, 2006, p.8) and that engaging in research was "another level of work requiring its own time, creative energy and commitment" (Hancock, 1997, p.89).

One of the key findings for language teachers conducting research is the degree of involvement in the workplace and the level of institutional support. Mertler (2012) describes the process of CAR as empowering, highlighting that the concept of Action Research is collaborative in nature, aiming not only to share goals and objectives specific to a teacher's classroom but also to foster professional learning communities. Professional development on action research is achievable if there are clear guidelines and an infrastructure that supports

this process. Thus, it could be assumed that this requires institutional support, and the following section of this review will discuss CAR and institutional culture.

2.7.1 Institutional Culture

The institutional culture in which EFL teachers work is also deemed a contributing factor for teachers' success or lack of success in engaging in research. Tabatabaei and Nazem (2013) studied 150 EFL teachers in Iran. EFL teachers had a range of experiences, qualifications, and taught in various settings. The study focused on conceptions of research, collaboration, and institutional culture. They highlighted that EFL teachers' reluctance to engage in research stemmed from a lack of institutional support, which acted as a barrier (p. 529). Teachers in a university setting, supported by their institutions, demonstrated positive attitudes towards research (Tavakoli, 2015). Additionally, Greek EFL teachers were divided over whether they should conduct their own research or receive assistance from other higher education authorities (Kantaridou & Kaltsiou, 2018), suggesting a lack of support from their own institutions. Teachers seeking promotion were expected to conduct research to enhance their professional development and secure promotion (Borg & Liu, 2013; Mohammed, 2019). Conversely, Tavakoli (2015) found that EFL teachers with university experience valued research more as the setting was much more supportive of a research culture. Without institutional support, CAR is viewed as too challenging and not viable or worthwhile. Borg (2009) also goes so far as to state: "Productive teacher research engagement, then, is unlikely to occur without the organizational, collegial, emotional, intellectual, and practical support structures which are needed not only to initiate it but also more importantly to sustain it and enhance its quality" (p.377).

2.7.2 The Emergence of Classroom Action Research and the English Language Teacher

Over the last few decades, English language teaching (ELT) has sought to implement a variety of methodological strategies to emphasise the importance of language teaching and provide a variety of methods to address the needs of the language learner. Historically, approaches such as grammar-translation, Direct Method, Audio-lingual Method, The Total Physical Response, Communicative Language Teaching, Task-based Language learning, and Suggestopedia (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Reflected broader efforts to refine classroom practices. While critics like Crookes (1993, p.130) dismissed these trends as a “fad” or “anything the ESL field takes up and finds fashionable”, others would view it as pursuing a method through which to be most effective.

In the 1980s, action research and teachers as researchers gained attention. However, action research within the realms of ELT was still not as prominent (Burns, 2019). Allwright (1988, pp. 244-245) highlighted the potential of systematic observation in teacher training. It was “much more closely associated with research on learner achievement and on teacher behaviour change”. It described it as a “mirror” through which teachers could see their behaviour clearly, reflect, and make changes. Allwright (1983, p.191) previously emphasised that CAR, in relation to the language teacher, is: “At its most narrow, classroom-centred research is in fact research that treats the language classroom not just as the setting for investigation but, more importantly, as the object of investigation. Classroom processes become the central focus”. As the previous discussion highlighted, teachers need to avoid viewing the gap between research and classroom practice as a problem, and this requires a change in mindset. Bailey et al. (1991) propose that the future of action research in language teaching “holds great promise for language teachers because of its practical nature and its focus on locally defined problems” as there is a lack of theory on which to pin language teaching and learning; therefore, research in Applied Linguistics and language teaching and learning should

be encouraged. They identify key characteristics of action research in the field of language learning and teaching as “context-based,” which focuses on collaboration because researchers and practitioners work together. Bailey et al. (1991) also advocate that the classroom practitioners act as researchers, and they are in essence the ‘subjects’ themselves, and since “it is self-evaluative, since there is ongoing and repeated evaluation of the impact of the changes introduced and the improvements achieved” (p.95). They argue that despite theories such as communicative language teaching, there is still a lack of research on which to “optimize language acquisition in the classroom” (p.91).

Whilst Bailey et al. (1991) are advocates of action research for language teaching and learning, they acknowledge that it has both strengths and limitations, and that success with action research depends on the purpose. Despite the previous reservations from Crookes (1991, p.133) that action research could be viewed as a “fad”, Crookes outlines some of the key benefits for teachers engaging in CAR and makes specific reference to second language teachers. Crookes highlights that the critical element of action research is particularly pertinent to second language teachers, as it provides opportunities for reflection, professional development, and results that are directly relatable and address potential needs and classroom challenges. Cain (2011) also observed that “[t]eachers sometimes stand back, to observe their students, to give them independence, to allow them to learn from each other or to learn from making (safe) mistakes” (p. 7), thus allowing teachers to investigate and examine their work in the classroom. The extent to which the language teacher could stand back without intervening could be questioned, thus influencing the nature of the observations for the action research process.

Burns (2005) draws on Brumfit and Mitchell (1989, p.3) who argued that “serious practitioners, in any field, [should] monitor their own performance as objectively as possible”. From this perspective, “language teachers should always be engaging in ‘research’, if they are

to work responsibly and professionally”. This further links to previous observations on language teachers conducting CAR and questions how “equipped” they are to engage in CAR that is rigorous rather than using routine “reflective practice[s]” (Wallace 1992, p.56 cited in Burns 2005, p.61).

Parallel to the debates outlined above, Bailey (2001) examined the effectiveness of teacher training with non-native English-speaking teachers teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Bailey proposed research questions on classroom activities, learner engagement, effective teaching methods, and promotion of language learning. Bailey argued that research into these areas is suggested to achieve the “primary goal of research [which] is to produce new knowledge or new understandings and, in the TESOL profession, improve education” (p.611).

Interest in action research in the language classroom was explored by researchers such as Elliott (1991); Lomax (1994); Nunan (1994); McLean (1995); Ellis (1997); Wallace (1998); Somekh (2006), who promoted interest in CAR on language teaching and learning, some resulting in action research models. Much of this work focused on foreign and second language learning and classroom practices. Supporting the interest of CAR Wallace (1991, pp. 56-57) upholds that action research, particularly being reflective through the action research process, is “an extension” of the practice that teachers usually adopt. However, to date, relatively few published works on action research and ELT have featured in research journals, which means that the dissemination of CAR is limited, which could hinder teachers' involvement in CAR.

In the 1990s, CAR for language teachers was a relatively new concept. Despite previous studies highlighting the need for teachers to research their own classrooms, the focus was not necessarily on teachers' own classrooms, but rather on more institutional needs and somewhat theory-driven approaches. Whitehead and Lomax (1987) recognised that CAR in the field of

second language teaching was significantly underrepresented at this time. Crookes (1991, p. 134) advocated that the “teacher-researcher” concept, in which professionals conduct action research, is the most prominent type of action research representative of the language teaching community. This has subsequently been acknowledged in research papers, and there has been a trend towards teachers as researchers, especially within the field of English language teaching (Burns, 2019).

Additionally, teacher research bridges the gap between researchers in the field and teachers (Burns, 2009). It is also acknowledged that a teacher-as-researcher does not necessarily imply that teachers are engaging in practical CAR. Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, action research gained the interest of the international language teaching community and was being conducted in several countries. For example, Burns (2005) outlines the growing number of publications in the field of language teaching and research methods in particular work throughout the 1990s and 2000 with significant contributions by Crookes and Chandler (2001); Brown and Rodgers (2002); Dörnyei (2002); Holliday (2002); Porte (2002); Richards (2003); Bartels (2005) and McKay (2006) and describes this time as reflecting ‘an even healthier increase in the number of volumes directed at conducting research in the language teaching field’ (Burns, 2005, p.62). Although there is a greater interest in action research in language teaching, Burns (2005) acknowledges that there is still a lack of understanding and research on how CAR can be conducted. Anne Burns (1999, 2007, 2009, 2010) has made a very significant contribution to the field of action research and language teaching, further promoting the value and process of conducting CAR, the importance of collaboration, and the sustainability of language teacher action research (Edwards & Burns, 2016).

Recent studies have reinforced this trajectory. Building on earlier case studies (Kuang, 2016; Kuang & David, 2015), Kuang and David (2017) concluded that CAR enables teachers

to become more critical and that it “reforms teaching techniques” (p.171), which will “elevate the quality of their own teaching and class management” (p.171). These findings align with Puspitasari’s (2022) quantitative study of 33 Indonesian EFL teachers' levels of engagement in action research. The motivations for conducting action research were to reflect on and improve classroom practices, thereby enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. The study further highlighted that “teacher career regulation required teachers to conduct TAR”⁴ (p.74). Findings generally supported a positive engagement in action research. The study was a quantitative one, and evidence of actual action research and its impact was somewhat sparse, as acknowledged by Puspitasari as a limitation (p. 78).

Building on Puspitasari’s (2022) study, recent research has highlighted a growing interest in action research and collaborative approaches. English teachers in Nepal were examined by Mahara (2024), and findings show that participatory action research (PAR) empowered teachers to improve their practices. Additionally, there was a strong sense of shared ownership while fostering collaboration. Rauteda (2025) also found that English teachers recognised action research as an effective tool for professional development. Both studies highlighted that CAR/PAR helped to build meaningful reflective practices. Rauteda (2025) also noted that success depended on strong support systems, and where support was in place, teachers reported that conducting CAR was transformative. Where support was not in place, research was reported as burdensome.

This section reviewed teachers’ perceptions of CAR. What features are quite predominant is the impact of CPD and initial teacher training as an important factor in teachers’ success in investigating their own work. Constraints such as time, limited understanding of the CAR process, and institutional expectations have been identified as barriers to CAR. The following will now examine CPD and English Teacher Training in relation to the role of CAR.

⁴ Puspitasari referred to CAR as TAR (Teacher Action Research)

2.8 Continuing Professional Development and Initial Teacher Training

For this research, the terms ‘Continuing Professional Development’ and ‘In-Service Training’ are used somewhat synonymously and refer to any form of professional development and/or training undertaken (Craft, 1996). Given that this research focuses on the language teacher, it is pertinent to look at perspectives of CPD for English language teachers within different cultural contexts. Craft (1996) further acknowledges the statement from the DfEE (1998) that whilst there has been a distinct move for accountability for professional standards this has had a ‘knock-on’ effect with professional development and that the ‘emphasis on competence-based professional learning and assessment has increased in education as it has in other professions, although there remains an acknowledgment at government level that research and award-bearing courses still have a role to play in teacher development’ (p.11).

2.8.1 Action Research in Initial Teacher Training

In her investigation of ‘Action Research in Teacher Education’, Burns (2005, p 63), acknowledges that action research, as a component of teachers’ professional training, often results in a required piece of coursework, dissertation, or a mandatory component for that required qualification. Although there are indications that action research is being investigated with ESL teachers to identify classroom issues, “there is little comment on the impact of action research” (p. 63). Burns (2005) cites Jones (2004), who further supports this point, noting that his own students demonstrated “resistance” to learning about action research, as they were unlikely to pursue it or deepen their understanding after graduation. There is resistance to understanding the benefits of action research for the classroom practitioner in initial teacher training, and these perceptions are so deeply ingrained that they persist throughout a teacher’s career. It may also indicate that, as a trainee teacher, introducing CAR as part of Research

Methods in a degree or teaching training programmes does not provide the opportunity to make links with CAR practices.

TESOL/TEFL programmes are somewhat demanding, and although teaching practice is integral to training, incorporating action research methods within a teaching practice context may be too demanding. At this stage of training, the focal point might naturally be on the trainee teacher developing their craft, classroom management, teaching techniques, and generally coming to grips with the demands of the teaching practice, rather than affording a space for CAR, rendering “conditions for teacher research inhospitable” (Borg, 2006). Nevertheless, Allwright (2005) argues that novice TEFL teachers are more likely to embrace new initiatives as they enable them to develop through such professional developmental activities.

Moreover, Vula and Saqipi’s (2015) perspective on CAR in teacher training is that it is “not training done to teachers but rather involvement of teachers in their own growth” (p. 6). Their study of student teachers in Kosovo provides an insight into student teachers’ responses to conducting CAR in a classroom context. The participants were undertaking an MA in Curriculum and Teaching Educational Leadership Master's Programme, exploring their perceptions of engaging in CAR. The reasons for including this study in this review are that it incorporates CAR within an initial teacher training programme and reviews student-teachers’ perspectives on CAR. Initially, fifty-four student teachers were selected to participate, and only those who responded to an open-ended questionnaire were included in the study, resulting in a sample of twenty-four participants. Trainee teachers included English language teachers and teachers of other subjects. Four themes emerged: improving teaching practice, identifying student needs, developing the teacher as researcher, and collaborating with critical friends. Vula and Saqipi (2015) concluded that teacher research needs to be carefully considered through a contextual approach. They further stress that teacher training and development

should be teacher-centred and enable teachers to become researchers in their own classrooms and schools (p.16).

Building on the positive findings from Vula and Saqipi's (2015) research, which emphasised the cultivation of collaboration and critical friends, Arefian (2022) investigated trainee English teachers' engagement with CAR. Arefian also noted that CAR has great potential for reflective practice, bridging its theoretical aspects with the practical realities of the classroom. Trainees worked in groups, which encouraged collaborative support in which challenges were highlighted and, collectively, practical solutions were sought. These findings echoed those of Clayton and Meadows's (2013) study of English language teachers who had CAR embedded within their training. Trainees were able to monitor their practices and embed investigative behaviours, which enabled them to close the gap between theory and practice. Both studies noted there was strong support for trainee teachers and highlighted the importance of structured guidance and a clear mentoring programme. Without this support, preservice teachers would have struggled to employ research methodologies, conduct data collection, and engage in reflective processes. Therefore, these studies suggest that trainee teachers who engage in CAR are better prepared to do so throughout their careers.

2.8.2 Continuing Professional Development/In-service Training

It is often perceived that well-established teachers perform their duties in an almost mechanised fashion, with routines dominating. "[A]fter several years in the job, many teachers feel that their professional development has come to a standstill", reports Altrichter et al. (1993, P.4). Opportunities for meaningful CPD might be few and far between. CPD programmes might also be routinised due to constraints such as budget limitations, institutional demands, and CPD requirements imposed by education authorities or governing bodies. Al-

Asmari (2016) noted that opportunities for CPD in a Saudi Arabian context tended to be generic and lacked connection to their own classroom environments.

The value of action research in CPD allows the opportunity to focus on specific areas related to the teacher's own practice not discounting the opportunity to collaborate and work as a team "the focus is on *your* school, *your* classroom, *your* students, and their improved achievement; the process (or rather, the focus of the process) is customizable to meet *your* specific needs. One-size-fits-all professional development does not accomplish this" (Mertler, 2013, par.14). An effective teacher possesses a combination of skills and knowledge to strive to improve their students' learning. Therefore, CPD opportunities that enable classroom practitioners to acquire and enhance their skills are primary motivators for attending CPD. "Learning about new techniques and ways to empower teachers in English language teaching seems to be both motivating and encouraging for both experienced and novice teachers" (Alibakhshi & Dehvari, 2015, p.30). Burns et al. (2016) further noted that embedding CAR in CPD strengthens language teachers' sense of identity.

As the basis for her research, Poon (2008) identified the lack of formal subject-specific training for current English language teachers. The aim was to investigate the feasibility of employing action research to support the professional development of English language teachers in Hong Kong. The rationale behind the study was that a significant proportion of English teachers had not received subject-specific training, which impacted the quality of English language teaching in primary and secondary institutions. Three primary school teachers, who did not hold any formal English language teacher-training qualifications, were selected for an action research case study. The rationale for selecting action research is that "[a]ction research is concerned with social practice and because of its flexible approach it can capture the complexity of teaching and learning better than the positive technical-rational approaches" (Kember, 2000, cited by Poon, 2008). A primary approach was adopted, and

qualitative data were collected through pre- and post-interviews, student interviews, lesson observations, conferences, and teacher journals. The findings indicated that through reflection, teachers surpassed their expectations, especially in developing their skills. This was confirmed through qualitative observations made during the two-week research cycle. Teachers reported that prior to the CAR, they felt ill-equipped to teach a variety of English language skills and to integrate these skills into areas such as literature. Whilst the results are encouraging in terms of CAR as an approach to initial teacher development, there needs to be close supervision or guidance from a mentor, which might not be realistic in full-time teaching. The study involved a limited sample size, and limitations acknowledged by Poon include the possibility that a large-scale action research programme might not be financially viable and that it places demands on those supervising the participants. Despite these limitations, the study demonstrated that CAR was a successful method for these three teachers to engage in communicative Language Teaching, particularly with teachers who were not trained English language teachers.

2.9 Critiques of Classroom Action Research

This section aims to review critiques of CAR, which have been perceived as lacking rigour, focus, and generalisability to broader contexts (Hammersley, 2004; Kock, 2004; Cook, 2009; Pearson, 2017). Hammersley (2004, p.167) frames the argument that “action” and “research” are contradictions in terms by positing this as derived from “an ancient view” in that there is a distinct gap between action (practice) and research (forming knowledge). Looking back to the derivations of the words ‘theory’ (theoria) and ‘action’ (praxis) concerning ancient Greek perspectives, a theoretical perspective is seen as superior, given it “involves detached contemplation of the world, divorced from human activity; in which the universe’ is essential, and therefore eternal, characteristics are comprehended” (p.167). Whereas praxis and other related thinking forms are insignificant as they are associated with human affairs and so

do not pose any “significance for the universe as a whole”. Whilst this view from the ‘great Thinkers’, such as Plato and Aristotle, at that time, Hammersley affirms that traces of this way of thinking up to and including ideals in the twentieth century.

Hodgkinson (1957) suggested that teachers and teacher training institutions do not focus on the acquisition and use of statistics, thus believing teachers are not qualified to conduct rigorous research. Hodgkinson further states, “[p]erhaps it would be better to define action research as quantified common sense rather than as a form of scientific, empirical research’ (p.146). If action research is used for problem-solving, Peters and Robinson (1984) view it as weak; in terms of being emancipatory, they argue it could be viewed as strong. Other approaches to research are deemed ‘predictable’ and ‘well-established’ in terms of methodological approach. In contrast, action research is somewhat more ‘dynamic’ and ‘flexible’, which calls into question views of validity and action research (Burns, 2017).

Further questioning the purpose and method of CAR Marris and Rein (1967) noted that research would have a definitive purpose that remains consistent throughout the entire research process. CAR lends itself to flexibility and adaptability, lacking a clear direction throughout, which contravenes the ideology of pure research. Further to this, Kock (2004) suggests that CAR is too subjective as results cannot be checked or verified, the researcher is too involved to be objective, and that there is too much bias when presenting and analysing results. CAR is also perceived as ‘value-laden,’ and the research cannot be impartial because it is conducted in a setting laden with conflicting values, making it an unknown entity and somewhat unpredictable. Cohen and Manion (1980, p. 30) suggest that empowering teachers as researchers may be overly optimistic, as teachers are, in fact, powerless and have no direct impact on how society functions. They question the claim that action research is emancipatory, citing a lack of supporting evidence. Action research is not robust, lacks rigour, and does not

provide the opportunity for generalisability; thus, it does not focus on the broader context (Morgan, 2009) and lacks authenticity (Kemmis, 2009).

Additionally, Pearson (2017) argues that if teachers are to publish, then action research might be too “risky”. Given that action research is inherently “messy”, it would be challenging to understand the complexities of one’s practice and the conditions that shape it (p.50). Pearson further suggests that action research could be subject to criticism, as the view that teachers might ‘be creators of their own theories of education’ would challenge education conventions. Pearson (p.6) also suggests that “[t]eachers’ reflections on their own practice can now be used to judge teaching and learning as measured by a tick-box criteria”, which suggests that the process is less than effective and lacks meaning, but is merely designed to satisfy the auditing process. This could be the result of top-down external pressures on an educational institution. Pearson (2017, p.7) further poses that “to conduct AR in its true form is to pose a challenge to the social structures that shape our classroom through the exercise of agency. This disruption is a daunting prospect”.

Hammersley (2004, p.176) further critiques CAR as being “contradictory”, making “action research inherently unstable”. This instability may be linked to the adaptive nature of action research, which lacks clear lines of investigation from the outset, instead weaving a ‘golden thread’ throughout. The process of adapting research as the study progresses enables issues that arise to be addressed, which in the context of the classroom would prove somewhat beneficial in those moments. The pathways of investigation might lack clarity and can lead the research “as ‘being in a mess’” (Cook, 2009). Cook concludes that “convoluted practice and published models of neat research” created doubts that they were conducting “proper research” or doing “research properly”. The concept that research needs to be “neat and tidy” for Cook led to feelings of deviance (p.278).

The notion, therefore, is that CAR and the adaptive nature of action research do not fit neatly into the perspective of research having a clear focus, definitive research questions, and the overarching aim, which is to answer these key questions. It is possible that the “messiness” of research, as perceived in the context of “proper research”, is not reported, and that when research reaches the published stage, it has been “tidied up” for viewing purposes. Cook (2009, p.278) argues that the “messy area” can be regarded as an essential element in interpreting and understanding, and that there is an essence of “interpretive rigour” and its role in understanding certain situations. Evaluations from researchers aiming to interpret situations from a distance may not fully reflect the essence of that situation. AR and the “messiness” that ensues enable a more objective interpretation and are less likely to be distorted towards the participants' perspectives. It has been suggested that action researchers do not have objections to traditional forms of research; however, the reverse is not entirely accurate (Thomson, 2015). Action research is often perceived as occupying the lower echelons of the methodological scale. The reasons are that impactful AR is often viewed as small-scale, involving smaller groups of people, and changes might be minor. In contrast, the most valued research is impactful and on a larger scale.

Further to criticisms of CAR as a methodology, one criticism of the action research model for investigation pertains to its reliance on a specific process. CAR models exhibit a distinct pattern in the research process, which can be construed as somewhat rigid (Carter & Halsall, 1998, as cited in Burton & Bartlett, 2005, p. 5), highlighting that the research process follows a distinct order, rather than being somewhat flexible. Teachers following a set research pathway might struggle when the research direction does not align with the prescribed stages depicted in such diagrams. However, the cyclical nature of action research would counteract this and allow for further directions to be explored.

2.10 Self-Determination Theory, Teacher Autonomy, and Classroom Action Research

The Self-Determination Theory, as posited by Deci and Ryan (2002), holds that an innate interest and curiosity lead to the development of knowledge and learning. The Self-Determination Theory also accounts for other factors that influence growth and development, as in the case of teachers. External factors can be perceived as inhibiting and undermining teachers' self-determination and willingness to engage in action research. Deci and Ryan posit a series of 'mini theories' to explain the overall concept of self-determination, but for this review, the elements concerning three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, provide the focal point for discussion in relation to teachers conducting CAR. *Autonomy, competence, and relatedness* are fundamental psychological needs that play a crucial role in the success of teachers engaging in CAR. To engage in CAR, teachers need to possess a certain degree of autonomy and self-determination. Autonomy is not a fixed state, but rather a continuum, and factors such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play a significant role. This section will explore teacher autonomy, self-determination, and the relationship between teachers conducting CAR.

Despite the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) conceptualising motivation through the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness, my research places autonomy in the foreground as I believe it is directly aligned with the aims of CAR and practitioner inquiry as those involved exercise choice, professional judgement, decision-making and the capacity to act and make change (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Autonomy has also been highlighted as central to language teaching and learning, especially in constrained and context-sensitive environments. The focus on autonomy does not mean that competence and relatedness are excluded; it is just that autonomy is used as the focal point for analysis. Consequently, the results focus on autonomy but present a fuller picture of SDT by evaluating how competence

and relatedness merge from the data and link with autonomy and contribute to shaping participants' experiences.

Much of the research on autonomy and ELT focuses on teacher and learner autonomy in terms of language learning. Additionally, there are references to autonomy in teacher professional development. By comparison, there is still relatively limited research focusing specifically on autonomy and teachers engaging in CAR, or in terms of being autonomous with the delivery of the curriculum. Whilst there are various definitions of teacher autonomy, Callan (1988) presents the notion of autonomy within an educational context as an ideal which connects intrinsic values and freedom. Although there is a degree of autonomy involved with performing CAR, it also considers significant others, such as students, colleagues, school leaders, and other professional networks/researchers. This can also be related to Callan's view that to be fully autonomous, others need to be considered; autonomy does not simply mean being isolated. Smith and Erdoğan (2008) support the notion of teacher autonomy, which encompasses cooperation with others and professional development. Smith (2000) identifies teacher autonomy as having different dimensions. To support these points, Smith cites Little (1995), Tort-Moloney (1997), and Anderson (1987). The different dimensions of autonomy as posited by Smith (2000) are:

- having self-direction for “professional *action*”. Teachers should have “a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection” and “cognitive control of the teaching process” (Little, 1995, p.179).
- possessing “self-directed professional *development*” and being conscious “of why, when, where and how pedagogical skills can be *acquired* in the self-conscious awareness of teaching practice itself” (Tort-Moloney, 1997, cited in Smith, 2003, p.2).
- “*Freedom from control by others* over professional action or development” (Anderson, 1987, cited in Smith, 2003, p.2).

When considering Smith's three dimensions of autonomy, there are key elements that relate directly to research on successful teaching and CAR. "Continuous reflection, self-conscious of teaching practice itself" and "affective and cognitive control of the teaching process" have been highlighted as contributing factors in CAR. It involves teachers making decisions about their work and then reflecting on the outcomes of these decisions. Smith somewhat concurs with elements of Hackman and Oldham's (1976, p.258) perspective of autonomy in that it involves "substantial freedom, independence and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out".

Within the field of Applied Linguistics, the topic of teacher autonomy is often discussed in terms of teacher-learner autonomy and student-learner autonomy and Moreira (2009, p.255) posits that the "principles of teaching and supervision, learner autonomy and action research relate strongly to one another within a critical view of education as a personal and social endeavour aimed at transforming the learner and the learning context". Benson (2001, p. 174) posits the notion of "self-directed professional development" as an integral factor in teacher autonomy. Conscientious teachers regarded as successful are those who are continuously reflective, analytical, and have "effective and cognitive control of the teaching process" (Little, 1995, p.179). The notion of teacher-researchers being autonomous teacher-learners and teacher-researchers is supported by Larsen-Freeman (1983), particularly within the role of teacher training and education.

Measuring autonomy is not necessarily straightforward, as it not only depends on the individual's perspective of their own independence, but it is also multidimensional. It could depend on extrinsic factors such as institutional pressures and career advancement. Conversely, Mello et al. (2008) view autonomous teachers as those who actively investigate their work to understand their teaching and learning and extend their investigations to seek innovative

solutions to challenges in their own unique situations. Benson (2001) posits that to be autonomous; teachers should not be constrained but rather have the freedom to act within the organisations and structures in which they work. Thus, linking to the perceptions teachers might have of conducting action research, as previously discussed.

Autonomous teachers are often perceived as being more successful, and the relationship between autonomy and motivation is a factor identified in those willing to conduct CAR. Little (1995) infers that successful teachers “have always been autonomous in the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest possible degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploiting the freedom that this confers” (p.179). Little’s reference to the reflective processes here is to those expected when engaging in CAR and using reflection as a basis for future classroom practices. This reflection is determined by the teacher’s willingness to review their work and be self-critical. Likewise, Vieira (1997) argues that autonomy is the central element for CAR. Vieira’s (1997) paper explores teachers’ professional development and autonomy as a pedagogy and proposes a framework for professional development programs that incorporate action-research projects, evaluated by teachers, to develop autonomy. Jiménez Raya et al. (2024) frame autonomy as a personal capacity and advocate that education programmes should foster inquiry and self-direction.

Proponents of CAR advocate that through the research process and reflection, changes are made to teachers’ classroom practices. Autonomy is highly featured in language learning and teaching, and research indicates that teachers who foster learner autonomy are more likely to be successful language learners. By association, teachers’ ability to self-regulate their own progress is dependent on their willingness to develop. Whilst it is challenging to adopt a single, clear definition of autonomy, many characteristics are featured in writings about teacher autonomy, such as teachers’ awareness, critical reflection, and the ability to evaluate their

practices and then act to effect change. Allwright (1990, p.12) posits that autonomy is not a fixed state but “is constantly changing”. Given these characteristics, the language teacher is well-suited to engage in CAR. Little’s (1995) understanding of teacher autonomy aligns with the idea that autonomy involves “self-directed teaching or professional action,” which entails “continuous reflection and analysis” (p. 178). The concept portrayed here places the onus on the teacher to develop professionally, be prepared to adopt practices that may evoke change, and engage in CAR and the exploration of classroom practices. Motivation and self-determination are factors linked to autonomy and the drive for teachers to investigate their own work rather than be directed by external agencies (Altrichter et al., 2008). This will be explored in the following section.

2.10.1 Motivation, self-determination, competence, and relatedness

Intrinsic motivation is a driving factor that provides a strong basis for teachers to engage in additional work outside their “ordinary teaching duties”. Intrinsic motivation is a determinant of autonomy in that it is representative of self-determination and autonomy, which is driven by an interest in engaging in a particular activity. It is also important to recognise that extrinsic motivation, such as institutional recognition, professional development, or career advancement, might shape EFL teachers’ willingness to engage in CAR. Teachers who are autonomous and feel they are competent will sustain intrinsic motivation to engage in activities such as exploring their own work. Studies that outline successful CAR highlight teachers’ impressions as being those of satisfaction and stimulation, and that the results of the research have contributed to their understanding of their own practices and learning something new about their classrooms, students, and themselves. McNiff et al. (1996) further qualify this by stressing that practitioners who engage in action research are those who are “committed and impassioned” (p. 9), thus suggesting they are self-determined. Although intrinsic motivation is more likely to aid practitioners in sustaining interest in exploring their classrooms, extrinsic

motivation can act as an incentive for language teachers to engage in CAR. Zheng and Huan (2022) suggest that teachers' motivation fluctuates between intrinsic interest and extrinsic pressures. The previous discussion on institutional support (see section 2.7) highlighted these incentives; therefore, aligning CAR with institutional goals, such as professional recognition, promotion, and acknowledgement in terms of time provided, are factors that contribute to greater success in engaging in CAR. If external pressures conflict with intrinsic motivation, then engagement in CAR might not be sustained.

Many of the factors explored previously regarding why teachers are reluctant to investigate their work revolve around teachers' perceptions of their own ability and competence, as well as their self-determination to perform CAR. Teachers need to feel effective in their craft and have the competence to engage in tasks that further develop their classroom practices. Facing the challenges of new situations and maintaining skills to be effective are now expectations of teachers, particularly within professional development programs in educational institutions.

Advocates of CAR highlight the importance of collaboration and support. For teachers to be willing to engage in collaborative CAR and expose their work to scrutiny, they need to feel assured and have a sense of connection to colleagues and the wider educational community. Teachers have an inherent need for *relatedness* (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017), and this is best achieved without any hidden agendas or ulterior motives. Feeling nurtured, valued, and having a sense of belonging within their organisation enables teachers to collaborate more effectively and feel empowered to make autonomous decisions, including engaging in activities such as CAR. Intrinsic motivation is impacted by how teachers perceive themselves within their teaching community. Providing support and showing value for teachers' work will impact the intrinsic motivation teachers have and their own self-efficacy, and teachers would be more likely to engage in new practices such as CAR.

CAR appeals to teachers who are willing to exercise creativity, as this allows them to develop their own materials to meet students' needs (Mello et al., 2008). Autonomy often fosters originality, and independent teachers might design practices that reflect imaginative approaches. As previously mentioned, continuing professional development may not adequately address the individual needs of teachers and the unique situations they encounter. Relatedness in this circumstance might be affected if teachers feel they are just 'going through the motions' with professional development and do not feel that CPD is related to them and their needs are not catered to. "Initiative and imagination are essential to any sense of autonomy; yet too often management fails to use the creative abilities of employees. Consequently, they display their initiative and imagination in the form which management disapproves" (Sayles & Strauss 1986, p.16). Sayles and Straus go so far as to state that "[o]ften the creative individual is considered a troublemaker". Finally, findings from Kimura, et al. (2022) on language teachers in Asia highlight the tension between professional ideals and institutional realities. Although this study reinforces the motivational implications of limited autonomy a valuable point is made that autonomy is often examined as an outcome rather than a process cultivated through systematic, research-informed practice.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a valuable review to establish a contextual foundation for my research on language teachers and CAR. Reviewing the origins of action research, theories, models, and their subsequent development in the context of CAR provides a clear basis for the foundation of my research. The importance of teachers' understanding, perceptions, and perceived barriers to CAR provides an insight into how current English language teachers in an international setting might feel when participating in this study. This is particularly relevant as the teachers in my study are English language teachers, which allows me to make comparisons with the target group in my research and those of previously discussed.

Additionally, acknowledging the importance of institutional constraints on the language tutor and the value of institutional support in the research process means that the insider research for this study is better informed, ensuring that these potential barriers are addressed. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) further challenge the perceived limitations of insider research by arguing that insider researchers are best positioned to understand the true nature of the environment in which the research is conducted. Finally, equipping language teachers with the knowledge of how to perform CAR and providing support during the process would empower language teachers to embrace the process, feel autonomous, and have the ‘tools’ to be successful in their CAR, both for this research and with CAR in general. Very few studies have examined the relationship between autonomy and CAR among language teachers, which is a key area of focus for my research.

The literature reviewed above has established a foundation on which my research has been based. This research will investigate language teachers’ perceptions of CAR, examine the link between autonomy and CAR, and provide CPD and support as they conduct CAR, aiming to gain an understanding of perceptions in real time. Considering that CAR is still not commonplace, the following research questions provide the basis on which this study is founded:

1. **Research Question 1:** What do English language teachers understand by the term ‘Classroom Action Research’?
2. **Research Question 2:** What are English language teachers’ perceptions of Classroom Action Research?
3. **Research Question 3:** What Classroom Action Research has been or is currently being conducted by teachers?
4. **Research Question 4:** To what extent do language teachers perceive they have autonomy over their classroom?

5. **Research Question 5:** What are English language teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research after participating in Continuing Professional Development and conducting Classroom Action Research in their own classrooms?

The next chapter will outline the methodology and approach adopted for this study, providing an overview of the research and data collection methods to address the research aims, objectives, and questions.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the aims, research approach, methodology, and procedures adopted to investigate English language teachers' perceptions of CAR and the impact of Continuing CPD on these perceptions. A mixed-methods design was adopted to examine teachers' understandings of CAR, their engagement with it, and their sense of autonomy, as well as exploring how participation in CPD and CAR shapes these views. This chapter begins by presenting the rationale for the research methodology in relation to the research questions, followed by an overview of the research paradigms, the three key stages of data collection and the procedures for participant recruitment, data management, and ethical considerations, including those linked to insider research.

3.2. Rationale for the study

The Literature Review highlighted that although CAR is generally a well-established concept, there is still a lack of empirical studies from language teachers' own perspectives. Burns (1999) recognises that research is typically viewed from the perspective of academic researchers rather than from that of teachers themselves, which has contributed to a lack of understanding of how teachers perceive and engage in CAR. This gap provides the foundation for this study.

Research suggests that teachers' attitudes towards CAR have often been mixed, though more recently, CAR has been positioned as a process that is beneficial for language teacher development and classroom practice (McNamara, 2002; Allison & Carey, 2007). These findings justify RQ1 and RQ2, which examine teachers' understanding and perceptions of CA, recognising that misconceptions or negative perceptions may influence engagement. Studies

show that although teachers might value CAR, the extent to which they conduct it remains unclear. Edwards (2016) suggests that participating in CAR was impactful, but there is a need to examine teachers' training and experiences of CAR, highlighting a gap which RQ3 will address. Teacher autonomy has been highlighted as an enabling factor in CAR. Sachs (2000, p. 35) posits that there are “issues of teacher autonomy and research priorities encountered in the process of conducting action research projects”; therefore, autonomy (RQ4) is a key area for further investigation.

CPD is often a top-down process, which may limit teachers' opportunities to focus on issues directly relevant to their own classrooms. CAR provides a more individualised, practice-oriented form of CPD, enabling teachers to investigate specific aspects of their work and apply their findings in classroom situations. Analysing the teacher reflections on CAR after engaging in CPD will provide a deeper understanding of the decisions, challenges, and successes experienced by English language teachers in an authentic, live classroom setting, rather than those derived from abstract accounts. However, there is still limited empirical evidence on how teachers experience CAR following CPD, representing a clear gap in the literature. Providing a ‘safe space’ for teachers to share ideas creates opportunities for collaboration and encourages CAR as part of established practices. Riel (2019, p.1) reiterates the importance of collaboration when conducting CAR, stating that teacher-researchers “develop their understanding of the events from multiple perspectives”, while Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) stress that sharing findings and reflecting on the process would enhance “the development of progressive problem-solving” (Riel, 2019, p. 1). Yet, opportunities for collaboration and idea sharing regarding CAR remain scarce. Thus, this study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of collaboration on CAR through focus groups conducted during the CAR process.

Based on the above rationale, synthesis of the literature review and the gaps identified, the following presents the research questions that underpin this study. Addressing these

questions will provide a more up-to-date understanding of teachers' perceptions and practices in CAR, as well as the extent to which CAR is being conducted. Teachers' perceived autonomy and CPD on CAR would provide insights into the links with the degree of success of English language teachers' engagement in CAR.

RQ1. What do English language teachers understand by the term 'Classroom Action Research'?

RQ2. What are English language teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research?

RQ3. What Classroom Action Research has been or is currently being conducted by teachers?

RQ4. To what extent do language teachers perceive they have autonomy over their own classroom?

RQ5. What are English language teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research after participating in Continuing Professional Development and conducting Classroom Action Research in their own classrooms?

With reference to the research questions and the study in general, attention is drawn to English language teachers who teach English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or EFL/ESOL/ESP teachers. The reason for highlighting this group of teachers stems from my experience as an ELT tutor in international settings (Senegal, Hong Kong, the Gambia, Denmark, and Sudan), as well as my role as a line manager for current EAP tutors at an international college in the UK. Ding and Bruce (2017) argue that professionalism in ELT extends beyond classroom competence or reflective practice but is defined by actively engaging in research as a key element of being a professional in ELT. Framing my study within this perspective recognises the practical realities the ELT community faces and the institutional pressures to establish professional standing through research-informed practice.

The methodology section thus far has outlined the introduction to the research topic and rationale, and has presented the research questions. The following outlines the epistemological and methodological perspectives for this research in relation to the three key stages of the data collection process.

3.3. Epistemological, theoretical, and methodological perspectives for this research

This research was conducted in three stages. Whilst the stages are somewhat distinct, they are linked in that each aims to collect, interpret, and gain a complete understanding of English language teachers and CAR. Stage One employed a quantitative approach, utilising a combination of closed and semi-structured questionnaires to investigate RQ1, 2, 3, and 4. To gain further insights, interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data, thereby enhancing the understanding of RQ1, 2, 3, and 4. RQ 5 adopted a qualitative approach. The aim of conducting the research in three distinct stages was to explore the constructs that emerged at each stage and to develop a deeper understanding of perceptions of CAR; thus, a predominantly interpretivist approach was adopted.

3.3.1 Positionality

My research is predominantly situated within an interpretivist paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This assumes that reality is socially constructed and that knowledge from the results of this study is produced through interpretation and context. Within this epistemological stance, my role as an insider-researcher and position as a line manager to participants might be viewed as subjective and, as such, impact the data findings and interpretation. Here, I explicitly acknowledge my positionality within the organisational setting for the study and posit that it is integral to the research process rather than one that is viewed as contaminating the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

My personal and professional investment in teachers conducting CAR in their classrooms further shaped the study. As both a line manager and a researcher, I recognise that my positional authority may have influenced my assumptions about how participants should engage with CAR. My aspirations for their engagement were closely aligned with organisational priorities for practice and improvement, which may have shaped both the design of the study and participants' responses. Rather than deliberately set aside these assumptions and aspirations, I adopted a reflexive approach, maintaining ongoing awareness of my professional and researcher positioning throughout the study.

My positionality was informed by my roles in delivering CPD on CAR, leading focus groups and engaging with participants' reflective diaries. In these roles, I was positioned as the knowledge provider and researcher, and this might have caused inherent power relations that might have influenced how participants engaged with CAR and relayed their experiences. Data collection took place during COVID-19, which could have further affected my relationship with participants and the research process. During this time, contact with those under my line management was not as regular as if we were working face-to-face, which is a reason for incorporating focus group meetings so that I could assist with guiding participants. Therefore, this might have impacted the perceptions of participants of me as an authority figure and could have influenced the participation and openness of their responses. Additionally, these contextual constraints might have shaped the nature and depth of the data generated. Acknowledging the potential impact of these power dynamics on possible data collected and the way it is interpreted, a second coder who acted as a critical friend independently analysed a sample of the qualitative data, which worked to focus on participants' accounts and mitigate the influence of my position and interpretations of the data.

Being open about my role in this study strengthens the research's credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It allows for a clearer and more authentic interpretation of participants'

experiences and the findings, rather than claiming neutrality. The results of this research could help other managers think about their own positions and apply my experience to adjust the CPD model to fit their own contexts. They can consider their own power dynamics and adapt the CPD model to suit their organisational cultures and challenges. This approach would further widen the impact of this research within the language teaching community.

The following will provide the research approach for this study.

3.3.2. Defining the Research Approach

For this research to have a clear focus and direction, it is essential to establish a clear understanding of the philosophical, theoretical and methodological approach underpinning the research problem studied. The overarching paradigm, along with its underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions, provided the foundation for this investigation. Building on these components, the chosen methodology and methods offered a coherent framework to support this study into teachers' perceptions of CAR. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasise, clarity in philosophical stance, paradigm, and methodological choices is critical in guiding the research process and ensuring internal consistency throughout the study. Research paradigms refer to a set of beliefs about the world and how these beliefs are interpreted. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017, p. 26) refer to this as "the lens through which a researcher looks at the world. It is the conceptual lens through which the researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research project to determine the research methods that will be used. How the data will be analysed". Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that "beliefs" about the world "must be accepted simply on faith (however, well argued); there is no way to establish their ultimate truthfulness" (p. 107). Guba and Lincoln further posit that paradigms are "human constructions" and that "any given paradigm represents simply the most informed and sophisticated view that its proponents have been able to devise". This means that this research acknowledges that CAR

is not just a set of techniques, but a socially constructed process connected to teachers' context, values, and professional practices. This study acknowledges that the paradigm guiding this research is shaped by particular assumptions and values and does not claim to reveal a universal truth; rather, it aims to present a contextual understanding of teachers' perceptions of CAR and how teachers engage with and interpret it.

3.3.3. Conceptualising Mixed Methods Research for this Study

Building on Guba and Lincoln's perspective on belief systems, they propose the following inquiry paradigms (1994, p. 108). "What is the form and nature of reality ... what can be known about it?" This ontological question addresses whether "a singular, verifiable reality or truth" exists or whether there are "socially constructed multiple realities" (Patton, 2002, p. 134). In this research, quantitative data provided a structured means of capturing broad patterns in teachers' perceptions of CAR and autonomy through a questionnaire containing both closed- and semi-structured questions. In contrast, Stages Two and Three primarily drew on qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews, participant reflections, focus groups, and classroom-based CAR) to explore the context-specific meanings that teachers attributed to CAR and autonomy. Qualitative research was the predominant approach, as it best suited the purpose of my study. This approach enabled the emergence of rich data that reflected the complexity of teachers' environments, rather than reducing it to a quantifiable single reality (Patton, 2002).

The use of multiple primary data sources enabled triangulation (Denzin, 1970), thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings, as it allowed me to identify and compare patterns across questionnaires, interviews, and participants' own CAR experiences. This design not only revealed contextual insights such as institutional culture and professional background, but it also allowed me to capture change over time, showing how participants' perceptions

developed before, during and after CPD and their own CAR. This reflects an ontological stance that reality is multi-dimensional and dynamic. By prioritising qualitative exploration within a mixed-methods framework, this study focused on teachers' lived experiences to reveal diverse, context-specific understandings, rather than pursuing universal truths. Therefore, I aimed to explore teachers' perceptions, and a predominantly qualitative method gained rich interpretive insights rather than generating a new theory. My research aimed to uncover how teachers perceive their own autonomy and make sense of CAR, prioritising contextualised meaning and multiple realities over the search for a formalised theory of the phenomenon, as in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

The following figure illustrates the research stages described above (see Figure 10 below).

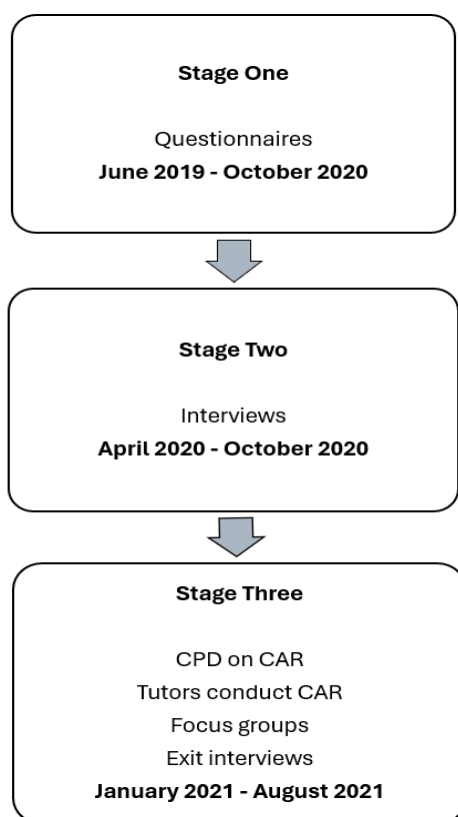


Figure 10: Overview of the data collection stages

3.4 Research Design and Establishing the Research Questions

This study was designed to address the research questions in a way that enabled both depth and breadth of understanding of teachers' perceptions and experiences of CAR. A primary research approach was adopted to collect data first-hand, as such data are "original to the problem under study" (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 193). To strengthen the credibility of the findings and achieve a greater understanding of the research problem, a mixed-methods design was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative methods (Wasti et al., 2022).

RQ1 explored what teachers understood by the term CAR, establishing a conceptual baseline for this research. RQ2 examined teachers' perceptions of CAR, offering insights into the attitudes and beliefs that might shape their willingness to engage in it. Following on from this, RQ3 investigated whether teachers had previously engaged in, or were currently engaging in, CAR, and whether their conceptual understanding and perceptions aligned with their actual experiences of CAR. RQ4 explored teachers' perceptions of autonomy, a key factor influencing their capacity to participate in CAR. The combination of methods enabled me to map the overall trend within the participant group alongside insights from individuals, yielding a more holistic picture of language teachers' understanding and perspectives on CAR and autonomy.

Research question 5 extended the trajectory from RQs 1, 2, 3 and 4 by shifting the focus from teachers' existing knowledge and perceptions to their first-hand engagement with CAR. RQs 1 - 4 captured what teachers already know or have experienced. In contrast, RQ 5 examined how these views developed when teachers received professional development (CPD) on the principles of CAR identified an area of their own classroom practice to investigate, and developed research questions. This stage of the study adopted a qualitative approach, drawing on reflective diaries written during the CAR process and exit interviews conducted after its completion.

To support this process, participants engaged in focus group meetings to share experiences and collaborate on aspects of their CAR. Reflective diaries were used to document participants' evolving insights, thoughts, challenges and reflections, while exit interviews provided an opportunity to explore their post-CAR perceptions and the impact of the CPD and focus group experience. The use of multiple qualitative methods enabled triangulation of data across different contexts and points in time (Denzin, 2015). For example, I could evaluate insights recorded in the reflective diaries and compare them with contributions made in focus group meetings, which could be corroborated with their exit interview responses. Triangulation at this stage could connect with the findings from questionnaires and interviews for RQ1, 2, 3, and 4, thus strengthening the study's internal validity by examining how and why teachers' perceptions evolved as they experienced CAR.

The table below summarises the research questions and the data collection tools used.

Research Question	Data Collection Tools
RQ1. What do English language teachers understand by the term 'Classroom Action Research'?	Questionnaires Interviews
RQ2. What are English language teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research?	Questionnaires Interviews
RQ3. What Classroom Action Research has been or is currently being conducted by teachers?	Questionnaires Interviews
RQ4. To what extent do language teachers perceive they have autonomy over their own classroom?	Questionnaires Interviews
RQ5. What are English language teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research after participating in Continuing Professional Development and conducting Classroom Action Research in their own classrooms?	CPD on CAR Focus Group Interviews Reflective Diaries Individual Exit Interviews

Table 1. Summary of the data collection tools for each Research Question

3.4.1 Instrument Design and Data Collection

This section provides a detailed rationale for the construction and application of the selected data collection instruments used to address Research Questions 1 – 4 to evaluate teachers’ understanding, perceptions and engagement in CAR and perceptions of autonomy and teachers’ experiences of CAR following professional development (RQ5). Questionnaires are widely used to investigate language teachers’ perceptions of research (Peters, 2004), and this research adopted a similar approach to generate data for RQ 1, 2, 3 and 4 (see Appendix 1 for questionnaire). Item 9 addressed RQ1, which was open-ended, requiring participants to express what they thought Classroom Action research was. To address perceptions of CAR (RQ2) and the current practices adopted by teachers (RQ3) a mixture of closed, open and Likert-style statements covered perceived benefits (items 21, 23, 24, 25, 31, 35) and barriers (items 17, 18, 26, 27, 28, 30) and professional development (items 25, 32, 34) were all central to perceptions of constructs investigated in Peters (2004), Borg (2009), and Kantaridou and Kaltsiou (2018). Engagement with CAR (RQ3) was further explored through self-reported items focusing on exposure to and participation in CAR, along with reasons for non-participation (items 10-16), similar to practice-focused reported by Snow-Gerono (2005) and Mello et al. (2008). CAR is closely associated with reflective and collaborative teaching practices, such as evaluating lessons and experimenting with new activities; additional items 36-45 were included (Little, 1995; Mello et al., 2008).

Since not everyone completed the questionnaire, the interview protocol was designed to act as a follow-up on the questionnaire to build on findings as well as serving as an independent data source. As noted previously, the pandemic impacted access to participants and only a few teachers who filled out the questionnaire agreed to a follow-up interview. For this reason, the interview protocol included questions similar to those in the questionnaire, ensuring the main topics were still covered. For example, interview questions 4 and 5 build on

responses from questionnaire items concerning understanding and engagement in CAR. After evaluating items 11-13, it was noticeable that there was limited engagement in CAR, which is the foundation for asking interview question 6 (what type of research they had undertaken). Items 38-45 of the questionnaire address adaptive teaching methods, lesson evaluation, collaborative opportunities and experimentation with new activities and therefore, interview questions 8, 18 and 19 ask participants to expand on how they manage a problem in class or address a teaching problem. A further example is items D1-D18 (TAS), which are explored in interviews (Q13 and 14), which ask participants to explain the extent to which they perceive autonomy, and this provides an opportunity to assess how teachers understand and interpret autonomy.

To investigate perceived autonomy (RQ4), the questionnaire included the Teacher Autonomy Scale (TAS). This was situated in section D (D1-D18) in the latter part of the questionnaire (see section 3.6.2). The dimensions surveyed reflect research discussions on autonomy and focused on decision-making regarding curriculum, materials, assessment, and classroom management (Larsen-Freeman, 1983; Little, 1995). Follow-up interview questions further explored perceived autonomy in both the classroom and professional settings. The strength of this instrument was being able to explore decision-making authority and autonomy directly, and include learner-centred practices, such as *‘When you are planning your lessons, do you ever ask your students what they like to do?’* This directly links to autonomy and learner-centred, reflective teaching, consistent with the findings of Mello et al. (2008).

In addition to questionnaires and interviews, this study included CAR CPD intended to support teachers and position them as teacher-researchers rather than passive participants (see Appendix 3 for CPD PPT). This intention reflects the work of Burns (2010) and Edge (2011), who emphasised the transformative impact of support in CAR. This also aligns with Mello et al. (2008), who noted that CAR enhances confidence, empowering teachers to be autonomous

and to explore their own classrooms through the CAR cycle (plan, act, observe, and reflect). The decision to use reflective diaries was informed by Mello et al (2008), whose study of Brazilian EFL tutors showed how diaries were used to record shifts in beliefs and CAR over time. Likewise, Burns (2010) argued that journals can be used to make sense of these changes retrospectively. To complement data from diaries, focus group meetings and individual exit interviews were conducted. The rationale for using focus groups was to provide an opportunity to share experiences and co-construct understanding, as focus groups facilitate the sharing of meanings that are not often voiced in individual settings (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Edge, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Individual interviews conducted after CAR allowed for a deeper, more personal exploration of challenges, successes and perceptions (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Finally, combining the instruments for RQ1-4 enabled a broad account of teachers' understandings, perceptions, engagement and autonomy, while qualitative instruments used for RQ5 captured how teachers' views and practices developed through participation in CAR. The use of reflective diaries⁵, focus group meetings and post-CAR interviews allowed for triangulation across methods and at different timepoints (Denzin, 2015).

The following section provides an overview of the research setting and participants, as well as more detailed information on the data collection instruments for the questionnaire, interviews, and participants conducting CAR.

3.4.2 Research Setting and Participants

My research focuses on English language teachers' perspectives on CAR. In this context, English language teachers are those who teach or have taught English to international

⁵ See Appendix 4 and 5. N.B. Two different samples were provided for the diary entry as there was no one given format.

or non-native English speakers in the U.K. or in international settings in other countries⁶. These teachers were selected because they reflected my current setting and research interest. I embarked on this research with the intention of providing language teachers with the opportunity to engage in CAR (Stage Three). A detailed overview of participants and recruitment is now provided for each stage of data collection: questionnaires, interviews, and teachers conducting their own CAR.

3.4.2.1 Sampling and recruitment of participants: questionnaires

The target population for the questionnaires was language teachers, as identified above, as this reflects the shared professional experience that shaped my background and the participants' teaching environments (Cresswell, 2013). Given the aims of my study, to understand teachers' perceptions and experiences of CAR, a non-probability purposive sampling strategy was adopted. This allowed me to focus on teachers most likely to provide rich and relevant insights (Rose et al., 2020). Participants for Stage One (questionnaires) of this study were recruited through the internal mailing system where I work, and language teachers known to me who were teaching in Asia and Africa. Therefore, the target population were teachers of the English Language who are currently or have been employed in an international context or were teaching international students in the UK or were teaching English overseas. To further recruit participants, an email from the postgraduate administration of the language and Linguistics department team was distributed. The response was not particularly high, and so I relied on a snowball sample and word-of-mouth to further increase the sample size. While I was able to recruit 46 participants for the questionnaire, I could not keep track of the makeup

⁶ Teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English as a Foreign Language or to Speakers of other Languages (TEFL/TESOL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and any other related language programme that involves teaching English to non-native speakers

of the sample as intended.

The impact of COVID-19 was significant for me personally; I was dealing with a heavier workload, sometimes managing up to 30 language teachers, and more online meetings were in place to support teachers' wellbeing. Many others were in the same situation, and the pressures of working during COVID-19 could have impacted their decision to participate. The questionnaire itself has sixty-three items (including demographic information), which may have seemed a lot to busy teachers. So it is likely that those who had more time or fewer well-being concerns were the ones who were able to participate. Those teachers experiencing professional stress might not have been fully represented. By relying on snowball sampling, those recommending others to participate might have held the same views or experiences, and this might have limited the scope of views. Although the sample size was not particularly large ($n=46$), it would still have provided valuable insights into the research topic.

Questionnaires were distributed to 46 language teachers currently teaching English to non-native speakers or who had previously taught it to such students. 34 female and 12 male teachers were from the UK, Korea, Spain, Argentina, the Middle East, Greece, Pakistan, Portugal and Hungary. Ages range from 26 to 71, and teaching experience ranged from 2 to just under 36 years. Demographic data on participants for the questionnaire included their first language (L1). This was to show the linguistic diversity of the sample, even though L1 data were not used in the analysis. Teachers' perceptions of CAR are shaped by an understanding of its methodological process, institutional support, expectations and engagement in professional development or training and not linguistic backgrounds. Additionally, teachers' perceptions of autonomy were investigated, and this is linked to participants' institutional settings, workload, and these were the focal points.

Table 2 below provides an overview of the participants for Stage One of this study:

Questionnaire data

Participant	Native Language	Age	Gender	Length of teaching (y/m)
P001	Korean	26	F	8.3
P002	Spanish	42	F	20
P003	Arabic	31	F	3
P004	English	41	F	18
P005	English	68	M	20
P006	English	47	F	12
P007	English	56	M	20
P008	English	49	M	23
P009	English	53	F	20.5
P010	Persian	38	F	10
P011	English	42	F	19
P012	English	47	F	15
P013	Greek	31	F	10.3
P014	English	26	F	2
P015	English	56	F	35.11
P016	English	43	M	11
P017	English	61	M	7.9
P018	English	43	F	21
P019	English	36	M	15
P020	English	35	M	10
P021	Arabic	30	F	6
P022	English	35	F	3.5
P023	English	55	F	25
P024	English	28	M	6
P025	English	32	F	4.6
P026	English	38	M	10
P027	Urdu	34	F	9
P028	Hungarian	47	F	23
P029	English	40	F	12
P030	Portuguese	43	F	7
P031	Hungarian	46	F	15
P032	English	39	F	11.4
P033	English	52	F	28.2
P034	English	31	M	6.7
P035	English	31	F	3
P036	English	42	F	9.1
P037	English	41	F	10.2
P038	Spanish	29	F	2.3
P039	English	31	F	8.4
P040	Arabic	41	F	22.3
P041	English	28	F	2.6
P042	English	32	M	3.8
P043	English	51	F	28
P044	English	46	F	23.11
P045	English	71	F	25
P046	English	36	M	8

Table 2. Stage One Questionnaires: Demographic data of participants

Once the target population had been identified, participants were invited to complete the questionnaire distributed by the Postgraduate Secretary. Participation was anonymous, and

those who were willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview could indicate this on the consent form and include a contact email address. Using email was deemed the most suitable method for communicating with prospective participants, as it was the quickest and most effective way to reach the target population. Using a central mailing system for the university and international colleges would maximise the opportunity to reach more participants and further maintain anonymity.

3.4.2.2 Sampling and recruitment of participants: Interviews

Participants indicated on their consent form before completing the questionnaire their willingness to be contacted for a follow-up interview. Fifteen participants were interviewed at Stage Two of the study. Five of the 46 participants who had completed the questionnaire were also part of the interview process. Recruitment for interviewees relied on responding to an email sent out via a circular through the university's emailing system outlining the study criteria for any EFL/ESP/EAP teachers to take part, and on a direct approach to known English teachers and word-of-mouth (snowball sampling), as direct access to prospective participants was limited due to COVID-19. I acknowledge that this may have resulted in the possibility of a more homogenous sample, which potentially increases the risk of bias and limits the diversity and generalisability of the findings. The intention was to adopt purposive sampling, which meant selecting participants who were all teachers of English to international students, whether this be in the UK or overseas. Including the five participants who had completed the questionnaire meant they would have had exposure to the research topic, and this might have shaped their answers. These answers potentially reinforce questionnaire findings and risk confirmation bias; however, this also allowed a more focused discussion of the key themes, allowing elaboration on their questionnaire responses. At the time, I was very concerned about how few responses there were to take part in the interview, and so I included everyone willing to participate who met the criteria for this research.

Telephone interviews were arranged via email because data collection took place during a time when participants were not particularly familiar with working remotely, and understanding video-conferencing platforms such as Zoom was still a challenge. Face-to-face interviews were not a possibility given the conditions of lockdown, and the original decision was to arrange a Zoom call to conduct interviews. Participants outside of the UK expressed the wish to have their interview via telephone. As a response to this, all interviews were conducted by telephone to ensure procedural consistency across all participants and to minimise any further professional pressure during a particularly stressful time. I acknowledge that conducting interviews via telephone is somewhat unusual because it might limit communicative richness and the quality of interaction compared to other modes. Given the situation at the time of this research was unprecedented, this approach was deemed the most appropriate as it enabled me to access a greater number of participants in a safe and efficient way. Responding to participants' preference to be interviewed via telephone was an important ethical consideration, and I did not want to add to the pressure on participants. As a result, I decided to maintain the same conditions for all interviews.

When considering the use of telephone interviews from a methodological standpoint, this method was still aligned with the interpretivist aims of this study (Cohen et al., 2018). The focus of the interviews was content-based; reflections, understanding of CAR, CPD and their own classroom contexts and not on the analysis of body language or other non-verbal cues. Given this, the lack of visual interaction did not detract from the quality of the data collected and enabled me to focus on listening to participants' accounts, which can produce data equally rich as conducting face-to-face interviews (Novick, 2008). Therefore, using telephone interviews as a methodological choice given the conditions of the pandemic reflects a thoughtful and ethically considered decision rather than a limitation. Although the interviews were conducted without any complications, one participant lost connection 3 times, and this

was a little frustrating. The participant felt very apologetic, and I had to reassure her several times. Telephone interviews may not provide depth of information as visual cues are absent, despite the focus being on content. Building a rapport and putting participants at ease is important so they do not perceive that they have failed in any way, as emphasised by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015). Not being in face-to-face interviews meant I was not able to act on uncertainty or hesitation. For example, P101, who had also completed the questionnaire, was uncertain about his answer when asked to elaborate on his understanding of CAR and stated, *“I need to look up a couple of things whilst you’re on the phone”*. I could not guarantee that this participant did not look up information which could have influenced their understanding and response.

Fifteen participants (Table 3 below) were recruited for the interview stage: two male and 13 female interviewees were aged between 23 and 71, with varying years of teaching experience (2–21 years) in a range of settings⁷ and were English (11), Greek (2), Argentinian (1) or Chinese (1).

Participant	Native Language	Age	Gender	Length of teaching	Completed questionnaire
P101	English	44	M	12	N
P102	English	49	F	20	N
P103	English	42	F	20	Y
P104	English	26	F	2	Y
P105	Greek	32	F	11	Y
P106	Spanish	43	F	21	Y
P107	English	46	F	2	N
P108	English	25	F	3	N
P109	English	33	M	4.8	Y
P110	Greek	31	F	4	N
P111	Chinese	28	F	2	N
P112	English	23	F	1	N
P113	English	71	F	26	N
P114	English	46	F	24	N
P115	English	42	F	6	N

Table 3. Stage Two Interviews: Demographic data of participants

⁷ University, International College, Language centres

Following the recruitment of participants for interviews, Stage Three of the study involved participants attending professional development and conducting CAR in my own work setting with language tutors under my management. As Koshy (2010, p. 22) advocates, “[a]s an action researcher, the new knowledge you generate and the personal theories you develop will be based on your experience”. Koshy (2010, p. 25) further posits that the context or situation for action research can be specific and that “it involves continuous evaluation and modifications”. Participants worked at an international college that provided pathways and pre-sessional programmes for students who needed a specific boost in English and various core subjects to enter the university.

3.4.2.3 Setting, sampling and recruitment of participants: Stage Three Conducting CAR

A majority of the time for this part of the study, teaching was conducted online, but at the time, there was a phased return to face-to-face teaching. In some cases, this required teachers to adopt a blended approach. This posed an additional complication, as there was a lot of student movement, and when transitioning to face-to-face, it was not guaranteed that students would have the same tutor. Online students were located in varying geographical areas, and not all were in the same time zone. Some students were in South America, while others were in the Far East. This meant some students were either studying very early in the morning or late at night. In some cases, there was only one student in a class, which posed additional challenges for both the student and the language teacher. Online students were less immersed in an English context, and there were distinct differences in progression scores between online and face-to-face students. Therefore, the context in which participants were currently teaching was unique and presented challenges in terms of mode, student movement, time zones and teachers’ lack of experience teaching in an online classroom.

There was only a two-day training session on how to manage an online classroom before the switch from face-to-face to entirely online instruction; as well as teachers' involvement in this research, they were also coming to terms with changes within their teaching context.

Following the interview phase, EAP teachers working in my current setting were approached to participate in the action research phase of the study. All participants taught both EAP and academic skills and were under my line management. Initially, six EAP teachers responded and agreed to take part, but only four completed Stage Three of the research (CPD, focus groups, conducted CAR, completed reflective diaries and exit interviews). During a departmental meeting, I informed tutors of my research (some were already aware) and asked if any were willing to participate in this stage of the study. Those willing replied via email, and six tutors expressed interest. Two withdrew from the study after the CPD, leaving four who completed Stage Three. All participants (one male, three females) were English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers aged 30 – 44, with 3-21 years of teaching experience. They represented both native and non-native English speakers (English, Spanish/Argentine, and Greek) and held a range of qualifications, including BA, BED, MA, PhD, and CELTA. Collectively, they had taught in a variety of international settings, including Spain, Argentina, Japan, the United States, France, Morocco, Cyprus, Germany, and the UK. Table 4 below provides an overview of the demographics of participants for this stage of the study.

Participant	L1	Age	Gender	Length of teaching	Completed questionnaire	Interview
Demi	Spanish/ Argentine	43	F	21	Y	Y
Izzy	Greek	31	F	4	N	Y
Ken	English	30	M	3.5	N	N
Elizabeth	English/ USA	33	F	2	N	N

Table 4. Overview of participants for Stage Three: Conducting CAR

Recruiting participants from my own workplace for this stage of the research enabled me to have a strong contextual understanding, be on hand to support and have access to teachers, and it was my intention for my teachers to benefit from the CAR process. They could also have ease of access to each other, aiding greater collaboration as they had all worked together before the pandemic. As Dwyer and Buckle (2009) point out, whilst being an insider-researcher has its advantages, there are also ethical challenges, possible power-relations issues and interpreting data due to the nature of the relationships between myself and my teachers. Being close to participants might lead to sympathetic interpretations of the data, contrary to my prior assumptions of what to expect from participants. For example, Zoe, who participated in conducting CAR, was a PhD graduate, and I wrongly assumed that she would be comfortable in writing a reflective diary. This is further discussed in section 5.6.3.

During the initial recruitment process, participants were informed about the stages of the study, so they were aware of what was expected of them. By being transparent and informing participants about the study's purpose, time commitment, and tasks involved, it enabled them to make an informed decision about whether to participate. This approach reduced the possibility of anxiety or misunderstanding and ensured that my research met ethical expectations. Table 5 below shows an overview of the substages for this part of the study.

Substage	Purpose	Time Frame
Deliver CPD on CAR	Input on what CAR is and How to conduct CAR	Week 1
Focus Group 1	Progress so far Focus area for CAR Establishing a research question	Week 6
Focus Group 2	Perceptions of CAR so far/update on progress so far	Week 13
Reflective Diaries	Gather thoughts and feelings throughout the CAR process	Submit at the end of CAR
Individual Exit Interview	Overall perceptions of the process	After the diary submission

Table 5. Overview of the substages of Stage Three: Conducting CAR

3.5 Ethical Procedures

Ethics and risk management are fundamental in any research project. Burns (2010, p.34) notes that “research ethics are to do with conducting research in a moral and responsible way”. Accordingly, potential ethical issues were identified during the proposal stage of my study, and an application for ethical approval involving human participants was submitted in line with the Language and Linguistics Department, University of Essex guidelines. As Rose et al. (2020, p.111) emphasise, ethical approval ensures that researchers take precautions to avoid coercion, protect privacy and identity, inform participants of expectations, and maintain respect throughout the process. These principles guided all stages of the study to ensure participants were not exposed to harm and that no personal information or identifying data were compromised.

The questionnaire was administered via a secure online platform (Google Forms), which posed minimal risk to participants (see Appendix 1). All participants were fully briefed on the purpose of the study, the nature of the data being collected, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Completion of the questionnaire was only possible once participants had provided consent (see Appendix 6). For telephone interviews, participants received a consent form via email prior to the interview (see Appendix 7), which was reviewed and checked before the interview commenced. Verbal consent was also obtained at the start of the interview, and participants were reminded they could withdraw at any time. The interview process was designed to be non-intrusive and supportive, encouraging participants to share their views freely without fear of giving a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer. Building trust and maintaining a respectful tone were prioritised to ensure openness and comfort.

All questionnaire and interview responses were coded to preserve anonymity, with no identifying features retained. Questionnaire participants were assigned codes, such as P01 and

P02, while interviewees were identified by codes starting with P, followed by a number, such as P101, P102, and so forth. Participants were informed that findings might be disseminated in presentations or publications but were assured that no identifiable data would be disclosed at any stage. This approach to ethics ensured transparency and protected participants' rights. It fostered a climate of trust, enabling the collection of authentic and reliable data while meeting the institutional and professional research standards.

Stage three of the data collection involved teachers investigating their own work. The setting of this phase was an International College, and the participants included members of the English Language and Academic Skills Department. Members of the department were approached to take part in this phase voluntarily. Although the research had previously obtained ethical approval from the university at which I was based, ethical approval was also sought by the company in which the participants and I were employed; this also involved a workplace consent (See Appendix 8 for workplace consent form).

If participants decided to withdraw, they were reassured that this was a condition stated in the consent form they had signed. It was acknowledged that this might have an impact on the amount of data collected at this stage, which was an expected outcome of the research. I had also acknowledged that Stage Three of the research was a lengthy process, and sustaining engagement over six to seven months might have posed a challenge to the participants. Nevertheless, I believed that some data would be better than no data.

As tutors investigate their own classroom practices involving students, they were also mindful of the ethical considerations related to collecting data from these students. Additionally, tutors were reminded of the expectations regarding anonymity and confidentiality, as outlined in the company's and research ethics policies.

3.6 Data Collection

3.6.1. Questionnaires

Forty-six questionnaires were used to gain an overview of English language teachers' perspectives and understanding of CAR and autonomy (RQ1, 2, 3, and 4). Administering a questionnaire provides a direct and effective method to reach participants during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering opportunities to gain insights into participants' perceptions on an individual basis and achieve "unprecedented efficiency" when making comparisons between participants (Dörnyei, 2002, p. 6). The participants for this study were in various countries and geographical locations throughout the UK. Therefore, administering a questionnaire would be an effective way to reach the sample population. Dörnyei also states that questionnaires are "versatile" and cites Bryman (2008, p.6) that constructing a clear, well-written questionnaire would "increase the consistency and reliability of the results". The questionnaire was constructed in four parts, with the first three parts (A-C) designed by me and peer-reviewed before administration. Part D was a previously known questionnaire, the Teaching Autonomy Scale (TAS, see Part D Appendix 1).

The rationale for not using a pre-existing questionnaire was that none of the existing questionnaires specifically aligned with the research questions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3). Designing my own questionnaire enabled me to consider the conceptual framework being investigated, as supported by Cohen et al. (2017). Custom-building the questionnaire enabled me to consider the specific educational and linguistic context of the population under investigation (Bryman, 2016; Dörnyei, 2007). This allows for breadth and depth of data as advocated by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The following gives details of the questionnaire and its relationship to the research questions, and piloting of the questionnaire follows in section 3.7.

Classroom Action Research is the key concept being investigated with language teachers in this study. At the beginning of the questionnaire, I deliberately omitted a definition of CAR as I did not want to influence participants' perspectives or lead them to assume there was a right answer; providing a definition could have influenced the responses given. Research Question One aimed to address language teachers' understanding of the term, and I wanted to gain answers based on their understanding of the term at that time. Providing a definition might have shaped their answers, and by asking participants to use their own words, I believe I would gain a clearer insight.

Part A contained 16 questions. Q1-8 related to demographic information, such as age, experience, type of work and first language. Additionally, this section focused on whether participants understood what CAR was and whether they had any previous experience with CAR (Q9-14). The last two questions (Q.15 & 16) asked if teachers met with other teachers to discuss either issues related to CAR or general classroom issues, thus exploring whether teachers collaborated to problem solve.

Part B further explored teachers' understanding and experience of CAR (Q17-35). Responses were recorded using a Likert-style scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Questions were positively and negatively worded to minimise the chance of participants selecting items automatically, thus reducing the possibility of bias (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009).

Part C explored teachers' concepts about their own classrooms (Q36-45). These questions were constructed with the process of CAR in mind, so that as many elements of CAR as possible could be included in the questionnaire. For example, questions concerning reflective practices, evaluating lessons with other teachers, including students in lesson planning, and researching teaching methods. Answers were recorded using the scale 'always',

‘often’, ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’, and ‘never’. Questions were worded both positively and negatively (Tanujaya et al., 2023).

Part D of the questionnaire (QD1 – D18) was a complete replication of the Teacher Autonomy Scale (TAS). Pearson and Moomaw (2005, p. 46) recognised that teacher autonomy is linked with motivation and empowerment, and that teachers “thrive on autonomy”. Their study, which aims to validate the TAS further, is based on the original study on teacher autonomy conducted by Pearson and Hall (1993). The reasons for keeping the TAS intact follows below.

3.6.2 Teaching Autonomy Scale (TAS)

Research on teacher autonomy is often linked to professionalism, motivation, satisfaction, stress and burnout. However, ‘[i]f teachers are to be empowered and regarded as professionals, then like other professionals, they must have the freedom to prescribe treatment for their students (as doctors and lawyers do for their patients and clients)’. This freedom is defined as “*teacher autonomy*” (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005, p. 44). For teachers to engage in CAR, they require a certain degree of autonomy and the freedom to explore issues within their own classrooms. Therefore, Pearson and Hall (1993) aimed to develop and validate a research instrument to measure teachers’ perceptions of autonomy. Through two studies, they developed the Teaching Autonomy Scale (TAS), which aimed to measure ‘those perceptions that teachers have regarding whether they can control their work environment’ (p. 173).

Pearson and Hall’s initial study involved developing a “psychometrically sound and reliable” instrument which “would also decrease response time, making it useful for research purposes” (p. 173). During this first stage of Pearson and Hall’s validation of the TAS, the 35-item scale was piloted with 74 teachers and analysed for reliability using SPSS and Cronbach’s alpha. After this process, twenty items were retained because they showed correlations and an

internal consistency coefficient of .91, reflecting a good degree of reliability. Person and Hall's second study involved administering the 20-item scale to 204 teachers with diverse teaching backgrounds. Further analysis revealed that two items had poor correlations and were dropped from the final scale. Pearson and Hall concluded that "[b]ecause of the factors of the Teaching Autonomy Scale are internally consistent, well defined by the items, and logically consistent with the literature, the instrument apparently is both reliable and valid for use as a research tool" (p.177). Pearson and Hall clarified that they aimed to develop a research tool that would enable further research into teachers' perceptions.

Following Pearson and Hall's development of the Teaching Autonomy Scale, Pearson and Moomaw (2006) conducted a study titled 'Continuing Validation of the Teaching Autonomy Scale' to provide further validation as "instrument validation is a continuing process, the researchers wanted to determine whether prior factors derived from exploratory factor analysis would replicate, thus demonstrating a stable factor structure" (p.46). The results supported those of the original study and Person and Moomaw conclude that the Teaching Autonomy Scale "is psychometrically sound because the items are internally consistent and well-defined" (p. 50). One limitation identified was the use of a smaller sample group, but the analysis showed that "[t]he factor structure remained stable" (p. 50).

Based on a review of the development of the TAS and subsequent validation studies, the decision was made to retain the TAS for this research. Using a previously validated instrument would allow the production of research results generalisable to the current context, rather than risk compromising the study's internal validity. Choosing the TAS would provide the opportunity to generalise the results and compare them with those reported by Pearson and Hall (1993) and Pearson and Moomaw (2006), thus adding to the existing data. Rose et al. (2020) support the use of "an existing measure for the construct of interest that is theoretically

supported, reliable, well-validated and appropriate to use with a certain population” as there “is no point in a researcher ‘reinventing the wheel’ by designing a novel instrument” (p.155).

3.7. Pilot studies

Before the data collection instruments were launched, a series of pilot studies was conducted. Dörnyei (2007, p.75) advocates that whilst the value of conducting pilot studies “is universally endorsed by research methodologists.....all too often piloting either does not happen or is superficial”. Three key reasons why this is so:

- i. There is a general lack of understanding of the importance that piloting plays in the research process
- ii. The need to source data and see results is far greater than going through the pilot phase
- iii. Piloting can be somewhat time-consuming, and this phase is often not considered because of this.

Therefore, the aim was to ensure that the instruments used in this research were thoroughly scrutinised and piloted.

3.7.1. Piloting the Questionnaire – Stage One Data Collection

Stage One of the data collection involved distributing a questionnaire to EFL/ESL/EAP language teachers; before this research instrument was deployed, it was scrutinised and piloted in two stages. The purpose of this pilot was to test the instrument (Baker, 1994) and identify any potential issues with ambiguity, wording, bias, item discrimination, and possible distributional concerns. “The designing and piloting stages are generally cyclical, meaning that information gleaned from piloting is then incorporated back into the research design and then piloted again. Whilst this is a time-consuming process, it is a critical stage for the research to

have a high level of validity” and confidence in knowing the tool used is the most suitable for this stage of the research (Loewen & Philp, 2012, p.70).

The first draft of the questionnaire was sent to my supervisor and a PhD colleague. Amendments with revised wording, follow-up responses to ‘yes/no’ questions, and scrutiny of the instrument against the research aims and research questions were prioritised. Additionally, providing participants with a slightly more detailed introduction to the questionnaire was recommended.

The second draft of my questionnaire was piloted with a PhD research group, which comprised 11 PhD candidates in Language and Linguistics and three PhD supervisors from the Language and Linguistics Department. Of the 14 members of the research group, nine were currently or had taught English to international students. The group consisted of both native and non-native speakers of English, thus mirroring the prospective sample group as closely as possible. The pilot questionnaire was sent to the research group two weeks prior to the meeting, as it was essential to have a “critical discussion of the tool” as soon after completion as possible (Rose et al., 2020, p. 162). The group highlighted three improvements to the wording of questions in the first part of the questionnaire. The main discussion centred on whether the scale for the final part of the research instrument should be modified to a sliding scale. This part of the questionnaire was based on the TAS, and maintaining its authenticity would likely preserve the greater integrity of the research instrument, as the TAS had been previously tested for robustness and feasibility.

3.7.1.1 Strengths and limitations of questionnaires as a source of data

Questionnaires used in this research aimed to provide a general understanding of language teachers’ perceptions of CAR and autonomy, and, for this purpose, the instrument was effective. It enabled me to collect data and reach participants with relative ease, and I

gained responses quite quickly. Using a questionnaire enabled generalisable findings across a broad range of perspectives (Cohen et al., 2018). Additionally, surveying the target population through this method enabled me to make the questionnaire anonymous, thereby encouraging honest responses. The limitations include the possibility of brief responses, which impacts the richness of the data, and a lack of clarification for participants who do not understand. Questions may be misunderstood without the opportunity for me to clarify or probe incomplete or vague responses.

3.7.2 Interviews (Stage Two and Three)

To gain a deeper understanding of teachers' perspectives on CAR, fifteen follow-up interviews were conducted in Stage Two and at the end of Stage Three. Interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of language teachers' perceptions of CAR and autonomy, as previous research combining these two concepts is generally lacking, particularly the use of qualitative methods (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). By combining questionnaires with interviews, my research provided a more comprehensive overview of teachers' perspectives and enabled data triangulation. I decided to use semi-structured interviews because they provide a general framework of questions while allowing for deeper probing of participants' responses. Whilst it was important to maintain consistent conditions, I was aware that participants might respond differently, which could necessitate "on-the-spot" revisions to the protocol, thereby enabling more fruitful information (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 5). I was generally aware of the outcomes I wanted to achieve using this approach, but it would also provide an exploration of unexpected but relevant issues as they arose (Cohen et al., 2017). Initially, I had planned to conduct face-to-face interviews, but the COVID-19 lockdown made this impossible. Although Zoom was considered, some participants lacked reliable internet access and were based outside of the UK. To ensure equal conditions and accessibility, all interviews were conducted over the telephone, and a standardised interview protocol was used.

Although protocols are important to maintain the focus of the interview, the questions needed to be flexible and adjusted according to participants' responses.

3.7.3 Interview protocols

Using an interview protocol ensures the interviewer stays on topic and that each interview is conducted under similar circumstances (see Appendix 2 for the interview protocol). Adopting a single, consistent interview method ensured that all participants experienced identical conditions, therefore reducing methodological bias and improving comparability and reliability (Cohen et al., 2017). Additionally, telephone interviews were particularly appropriate, as my study did not focus on nuances such as non-verbal cues, such as body language, which might be significant in other forms of qualitative research. My study aimed to gather teachers' perceptions and experiences, and so verbal accounts in a voice-only format were appropriate. Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) note that telephone interviews can encourage greater openness and reduce social pressure, as visual contact can make participants feel uneasy. Prior to the interview, participants were required to complete a consent form via a Google Formstack. Interviews were then conducted after the completed form was received. The protocol begins with an introduction to the study, an explanation of what the interview entails and a reminder that participants can withdraw at any time. It then covers general questions related to the interviewee's experience, which are designed to relax the interviewee, as they can be easily answered. Whilst it was important to maintain the same conditions for all interviewees, it is acknowledged that participants would answer differently, and this might mean "on the spot" revisions to the protocol, which could lead to more fruitful information (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 5).

The following is an example from one of the interviews, when the interviewee was unable to answer a question or relate to it.

Interviewer: *What are your opinions of collaborative planning? Have you had experience of that during your teaching career?*

Interviewee: *No, I haven't.*

Interviewer: *No, okay. When you're planning for your teaching practices, what opportunities do you have to discuss your planning, your teaching or your classes?*

Interviewee: *Oh, with regards to the CELTA course, I obviously discuss with fellow students and other teachers and training students. Also, with the course instructors themselves, so in terms of my planning it would be a lot of you know, analysis or what would be the problems for students in terms of you know, pronunciation or grammar points so I tend to ask other teachers who are non-native if there are any issues with pronunciation that they might see whatever I am particularly working on for that lesson. Also, the tutors are very helpful in terms of planning my lessons.*

This example illustrates how questioning was adapted to facilitate the interviewee's ability to answer and relate their experience to the topic being questioned. Following the initial interviews in Stage Two of my research, interviews were also conducted at the end of Stage Three, after the language teachers had conducted CAR. Once participants had submitted their reflective diaries, final individual interviews were conducted. These interviews took place within one or two weeks of the diary submission, so that recollections were relatively fresh; leaving this too late might affect how participants viewed their experiences. The purpose of these interviews was to gain English language teachers' perceptions of the overall process of conducting CAR in their classrooms. The interview protocol was followed for this stage of the data collection. Questions were open-ended, aiming to gain an overall understanding of teachers' perceptions and triangulate data collected at the beginning of the study with participants' responses in the interviews during stage two of data collection. One question related to their experience in keeping a reflective diary, and this might prove helpful when analysing the diary entries and linking responses to participants' thoughts. Example questions were:

What did you think of CAR before starting?

How do you think it differs from traditional research?

How did you feel about writing a diary?

What are your thoughts on the collaborative meetings?

3.7.4 Piloting Interviews

Before conducting interviews, an interview protocol (see Appendix 2) was prepared and piloted to assess whether the questions were clear and logical and to determine whether the collected data were closely linked to the study's aims. This was conducted with two ESL/EFL/EAP language tutors, one of whom was a PhD candidate. Neither of these tutors were involved in the final study.

Feedback on the protocol highlighted that Q.7 could be worded more openly, '*Why don't teachers do Classroom Action Research?*' This assumes teachers do not do CAR, and so it was reworded to gain insight into the perspectives on potential barriers. '*What do you think are the barriers to teachers doing CAR?*' Piloting the interview protocol enabled me to refine my interviewing skills, eliciting responses that helped identify areas that might be misunderstood and ensuring the questions asked yielded rich data.

3.7.5 Participant Focus Group Meetings

Two focus group meetings (FG1/FG2) were conducted to explore teachers' perceptions and experience conducting CAR in Stage Three. These were planned to take place in weeks 6 and 13, with flexibility in the dates depending on participants' availability. All four participants conducting CAR attended these, and the meetings were also open to other EAP teachers not taking part in the study, as this promoted inclusivity. I wanted all teachers to have the opportunity to share perspectives as a whole departmental activity. Data from non-participants were not recorded or used in this study. The aim of these meetings was to share ideas, thoughts, and perceptions on CAR as the teacher-researchers progressed through their research, as participant focus group meetings represent "a specialised form of communication between people for a specific purpose" (Anderson, 1990, p. 222). FG1 centred on a research focus and questions, while FG2 addressed progress and experiences, though participants were free to

discuss later stages if relevant. Although there was no distinct protocol for these meetings, there was some structure as I aimed to elicit purposeful discussion around defined topics (Anderson, 1990, p. 222). Dilshad and Latif (2013, p.192) suggest that focus groups are valuable when researchers have limited prior information about participants; the intent here was to provide a collaborative space for teacher-researchers to articulate and refine their projects by fostering a “synergistic environment” for deep discussion (Dörnyei, 2007, p.144). As a facilitator, I aimed to ensure that the discussion remained relevant while allowing participants to speak freely, as “unexpected diversions” are common, particularly “where participants know each other” (Patton, 1990, p.336).

To mitigate against me as the researcher, leading and dominating the discussion, I ensured that at the beginning of the meeting, all participants were aware that they each would contribute to the discussion by giving an update on progress at the time. The intention was not to use the focus group meetings for data generation but rather as an opportunity to aid collaboration and use the sessions for development, given the potential teacher isolation during the pandemic. Despite this intention, I did at times use my role as a knowledge giver and support teachers during the CAR process, which meant the focus was on teacher learning and not data generation.

These meetings aimed to support teacher development through reflection and collaboration (Kember et al., 1997). This structure provides an open space for teacher-researchers to discuss their experiences, challenges, and progress, thereby encouraging collective reflection. Each focus group lasted approximately 70 minutes. Participants spoke in turn, engaging in discussion during and after each contribution.

The following is an example of how I elicited discussion for the first focus group, as shown below (See Appendix 9 for sample transcript):

“Let’s have a few minutes each to say where we are at in the process, and some of the interesting things we have kind of discovered along the way. Then we can all join in”.

Teacher-researchers also had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss challenges faced. Such as this extract from the first meeting:

I: Have you faced similar issues with your students? Have you had quiet students, that they don’t want to talk?

D: Yes, yes, of course. I think all of us

(All agreed)

Me: What kind of strategies do you adopt as well for that, anyone else?

D: What I usually do, because I have had tutorials like you, so I make up my own within the lessons. I take them to a room with me and I talk to them, so in that way they are more willing to share their ideas, and they are more confident to tell me what they need, and they find difficult.

The above conversation from the focus group meeting illustrates how teachers exchange ideas, identify a shared challenge (quiet students), and collaboratively discuss strategies to address it. By facilitating the conversation (*What kind of strategies do you adopt as well for that, anyone else?*) I created a collective learning space and peer exchange, encouraging collaborative problem-solving that allowed them to adapt and adopt effective classroom strategies from real experience. This type of conversation encourages reflection, not only on teaching challenges but also on underlying pedagogical choices. This collaborative conversation also reassures teachers that they are not alone in these challenges and provides opportunities for others to share their experiences.

3.7.6 Strengths and limitations of interviews and focus group meetings

Previously in this chapter, I noted the strengths of conducting telephone interviews, which encouraged participants to be open, reduced pressure, and allowed for flexibility in modifying questions (section 3.7.3). Participants might feel more at ease discussing issues

when not in a face-to-face situation (Dörnyei, 2007). Without visual contact, I could not see what the participants were doing, and this poses a limitation. Although this research does not focus on non-verbal communication or emotional nuances, one interviewee acknowledged that he was researching answers to the questions I posed. This admission highlights how interview conditions can influence responses. I could raise important issues such as the extent to which the data reflects constructed or idealised answers rather than spontaneous, experience-based reflections.

Further to the strengths and limitations of interviews as a data-collection method, focus group meetings also have key strengths and potential limitations. I previously acknowledged that the purpose of the focus group meetings in my research was to create a collaborative space (section 3.7.5). To this end, focus group meetings were successful, as the aim was not to use them as a data-collection instrument; all participants in Stage Three of the study noted their value in bringing the leaders together to share ideas and work collaboratively (Luke and Goodrich, 2019). Despite these meetings creating a supportive space for open exchange, there was a danger that they would become sessions to complain about classroom situations rather than focusing on the CAR process and discussing how to approach identified areas of concern. I was very aware of my role in these meetings, which was to facilitate and to guide the discussion to stay meaningful and productive. I was also aware that I sometimes dominated the discussion, which may have led teachers to focus on specific issues rather than allowing the conversation to unfold naturally. For example:

Me: Yeah, and you have gone into another cycle. Because the circumstances have changed, you had the initial cycle, then you re-evaluated that the environment changed, then you asked another research question. This is natural, because as teachers, and I don't want to put words into your mouth, this happens all the time without being conscious of it, I think. And as you are saying, you are looking for solutions now rather than making problems the key point of focus.

Izzy: and it think it depends on the students as well. When I had only two students then one of them was online the other face to face. Everything was easier, now I have two students online and rest f2f, this is a mixed level class, so I have beginners and native speakers all attending the same class (all laugh). So, let's say that I have to be creative in my class.

Although it could be perceived that I dominated some of the conversation, this example also shows how I was able to refocus the point on looking for solutions, rather than focusing on the problems. The following section will discuss the training session for initiating CAR and provide an overview of the use of reflective diaries in Stage Three of my research.

3.8. Stage Three: Professional Development and Reflective Diaries

Stage Three of the data collection process addressed Research Question 5, which aims to explore English language teachers' perceptions of CAR after they have conducted their own CAR. To gain a clear understanding of these perceptions of the CAR process and subsequent completion of CAR, CPD was conducted, and English teachers performed CAR in their own classrooms and kept a reflective diary. Focus group meetings and final interviews, which are also part of this stage, were discussed in the previous sections (sections 3.7.4 and 3.7.5).

3.8.1. Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

To prepare for Stage Three of the data collection process, CPD on CAR was delivered. This aimed to inform participants about the purpose and process of conducting CAR in their classrooms. At this stage, none of the participants had previously been involved in CAR, but they had either completed the questionnaire (Stage One) or the interview (Stage Two). Participants attended a 2-hour CPD session I delivered via Zoom. An informative PowerPoint presentation was delivered, guiding participants through the key stages for conducting CAR.

Seven members of my department attended this CPD as it was open to everyone, even if they were not taking part in the research. Those who did not participate in the study were informed that their contributions would not be recorded, and those who signed a consent form were informed that they could withdraw at any time during the study. Including all members of the department provided an opportunity to offer CPD that was not part of the mainstream CPD calendar, and I wanted to offer this to anyone interested without requiring them to commit

to participating in the research. This initial training session provided participants with the opportunity to meet one another, creating a collaborative and safe space in which they could discuss CAR-related issues as the study progressed. I planned the training to be active and discursive rather than a one-way process (See Appendix 3 for CPD PPT), and the outline of the training session is shown in the slide below (Figure 11).

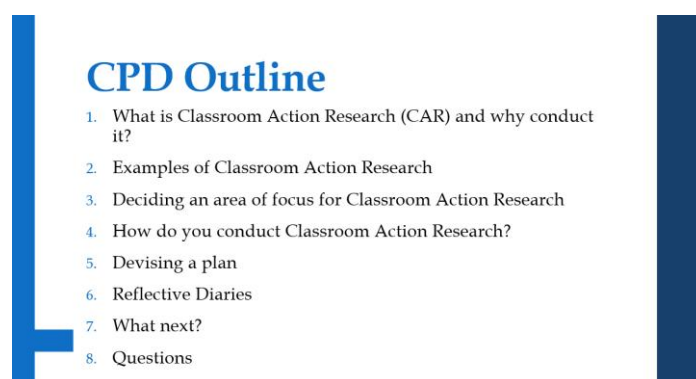


Figure 11. Outline of CPD for Stage Three

In the first instance, I aimed to elicit teachers' understanding of CAR and why CAR is conducted. This was followed by an exploration of the features and benefits of CAR, along with examples of possible CAR projects, as shown in the slide below, which were used for discussion.

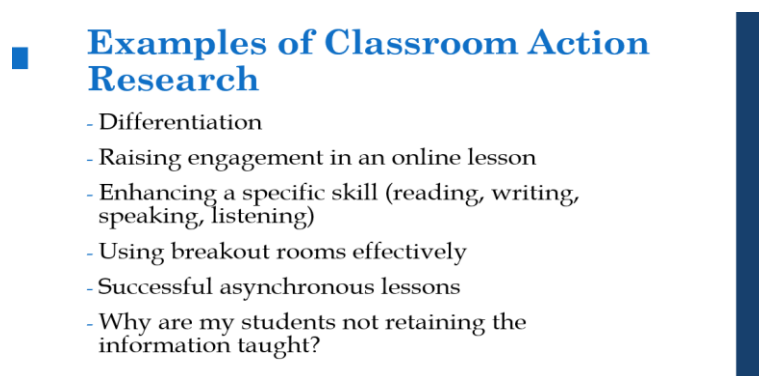


Figure 12. Examples of CAR discussed in CPD

The rationale for providing these examples was to elicit discussion on real issues that language tutors had previously raised, making this more relatable to their classrooms. Following this, the training session proceeded to selecting an area of focus and developing a research question. After explaining the research cycle, a practical example (Appendix 10) was given, and the stages for the research were broken down (Lewin, 1946). Figure 13 below shows the CAR cycle discussed in the CPD.

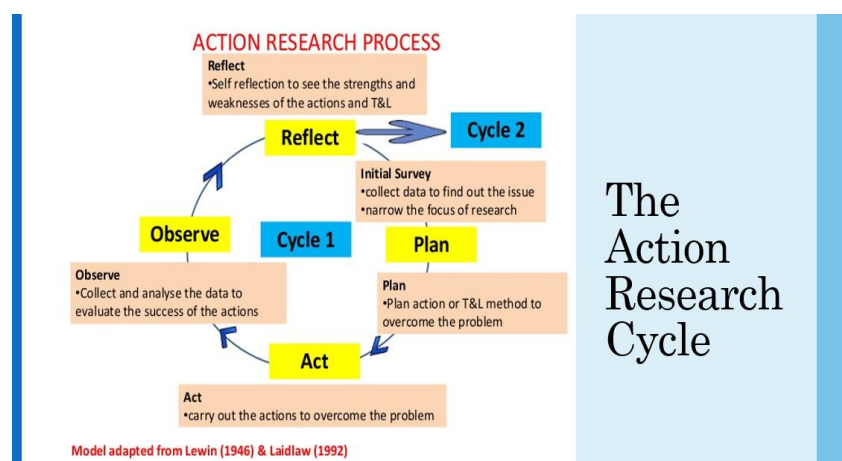


Figure 13. Stage of CAR discussed in the CPD

After this session, participants were asked to identify an area for CAR by reflecting on their current classrooms and to formulate a research question to guide their CAR. This would then form the basis of the first focus group meeting. To assist participants in deciding on an area to focus on, I provided a list of sentence starters for reflection and subsequent discussion. For example:

1. *I would like to improve...*
2. *I am not happy about...*
3. *I would like to know more about...*
4. *I would like to try ...*
5. *I would like to change...*
6. *I am curious about...*
7. *I am worried about...*

The subsequent content of the CPD included types of data collection and a breakdown of how participants could put CAR into action (See slides 24-35, Appendix 3). The latter part of the training included the use of reflective diaries, with a sample entry to be discussed later in this section.

3.8.1.1 Piloting CPD

Prior to delivering CPD, the training materials were discussed with two language and linguistic professionals (my line manager and supervisor) to ensure clarity of the content and logical progression of the materials. This involved reviewing the initial training materials to ensure clarity and logic of the training session and supporting materials. As participants had not engaged in CAR prior to this, a clear overview of the stages involved was necessary. This was reviewed to ensure that expectations for the participants' involvement were clear but not overwhelming. Initially, the PPT used was quite lengthy and was not particularly engaging. For example, initially, sentence starters were not included, but their inclusion promoted discussion and provided starting points for participants. Examples used in the CPD related to an online classroom were initially omitted because, at the design stage, lockdown had not occurred.

3.8.2 Participant Diaries

During the CPD, participants were given information about reflective diaries and the expectations for this study. During the training, I emphasised that reflective diaries could take any form, as I wanted to avoid imposing restrictions or specific standards on word length or content. The overarching aim of the diaries was to record thoughts, feelings and general progress of CAR. One entry per week was encouraged, as weekly entries help capture experiences while they are still fresh, meaningful, and authentic. Reflection is most effective when it is habitual, and sustaining a writing rhythm encourages critical reflection and

incremental improvement (Schön, 1983). It also reflects the stages of CAR (plan, act, observe, reflect). Maintaining one entry per week helps sustain momentum throughout the CAR process and encourages teacher-researchers to stay engaged. They were not expected to edit, rewrite, or submit a word-perfect diary; instead, they were advised to focus on their thoughts and feelings rather than a descriptive text. There was no restriction on how diaries were written, and teacher-researchers could use either paper and pen or an online method. During the CPD session, I shared an example of what a diary entry might look like, for example:

Week One Entry

CPD and finding a question

After the CPD, I understood most of what I need to do, but I'm confused about data collection – it seems to be a lot of work, but I will try.

Data collection seems an enormous task. Not looking forward to it.

-spoke with others –shared ideas – simple method – ask students

-think I will look at why students are not productive in their writing

-will ask the class in an anonymous poll what they think about it

-found a paper on this, will scan for key ideas and talk to other tutors

The above entry example was provided to demonstrate to teacher-researchers that entries did not need to be detailed. It illustrates the progression from uncertainty (*confusion about data collection*) to seeking a collaborative solution (*through discussion with others*) and formulating a plan (by *asking the class*). I also wanted to provide an example that demonstrated elements of CAR based on reflection: identifying a problem, collaboration, and informed planning. The following table shows an entry from Ken's reflective diary (week 2).

Action taken	Initial thoughts	Reflection	Action plan
- Prepared a pre-examination lesson in order to prepare students for reading & listening exam (KITE) on 07.04. - Began brainstorming ideas from teaching experience to formulate ideas for classroom action	Due to the nature of this week's lesson focussing on listening and reading, it was difficult to factor in student vocal input beyond responses to questions, peer feedback and brief discussion of topic material.	- Realistically, I could have implemented more student talk time - Some quieter students seemed a little more keen to discuss media in English, e.g. watching Netflix and YouTube, etc.	- Pool ideas together within repertoire to decide what may be of use or hasn't been used yet. - Began using "Learning Teaching" by Tim Scrivener as reference for ideas.

Table 6. Ken's reflective diary entry for week 2

Ken's week 2 entry above shows elements of the CAR cycle (planning, acting, reflecting, and reflecting on areas for improvement). Also, it shows that Ken engaged with pedagogical theory, with his reflections supported by professional literature and his analysis of student participation (talk time).

Whilst diaries can provide a valuable source of qualitative data, this method has specific strengths and weaknesses which will be presented in the next section.

3.8.2.1. Participant Diaries: strengths and limitations

The use of reflective diaries with teacher-researchers enabled a valuable means of gathering authentic, first-hand data recorded in a natural teaching context. Dörnyei (2007, p. 157) noted that "[d]iary data is by definition an insider account," providing access to teacher-researchers' immediate experiences and evolving perspectives. Additionally, they are particularly effective for tracing how teachers' perceptions and practices change over time, which is especially relevant in this research, given the exploration of shifts in teachers' understanding of CAR following CPD. Writing soon after class or during class "reduces inaccuracies stemming from not remembering something correctly," offering more reliable

reflections than those reconstructed later (van Eerde et al., 2005, p.151). Bolger and Scardamalia (2003, p.580) cite Reis (1994) stating that diary methods capture “events and experiences in their natural, spontaneous context.” Although retrospective diary entries are still valuable, they might not truly reflect the authentic situation, as over time, perceptions might change due to deeper interpretation. Whilst I encouraged teacher-researchers to write notes and submit these notes without changing them, as I was also their line manager, I was aware they might have preconceived ideas of what they thought I was expecting. This was the case with Zoe, who struggled to submit her diary at the end of the study. In the exit interview, when asked about her diary, Zoe stated: *“I was writing knowing that someone else will use this for their PhD. I was worried, but you know what? You have to do a good job; otherwise, someone will struggle”*. The “someone” noted here was me. To counteract this, I gave constant reassurances that there were no expectations, as I did not want diary writing to be burdensome, as it might lead to incomplete or selective reporting (Corti, 1993; Reiman, 1996, cited in Sheble & Wildermuth, 2009).

3.9 Data Management and Analysis

3.9.1 Quantitative Data Management

Data management for Stage One involved handling numerical data. As the questionnaire was conducted through Google Forms, the CSV file was downloaded and converted into Microsoft Excel format for ease of organisation and analysis. Each questionnaire item was examined in sequence and coded according to the focus areas and research questions, ensuring that relevant data were appropriately categorised and ready for statistical processing. Once the Excel file was prepared, the data was ‘cleaned’ to rectify errors, mistyped codes, and inaccuracies. Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009, p. 88) propose the following checks when cleaning data: correcting impossible values and incorrectly entered values, addressing contradictory values, and scrutinising implausible values. Following this, missing data was addressed. Data

for Research Question One (what teachers understand about CAR), Research Question Two (perceptions of CAR), and Research Question Three (whether CAR has been or is being conducted by language teachers) were prepared for descriptive statistics. The Excel file for Research Question Four (teacher autonomy) was also prepared. The quantitative data gathered at this stage were more akin to a content analysis approach, particularly in how responses were summarised and interpreted. This enabled me to gain an initial insight into patterns of teacher understanding and practice, which revealed the extent to which participants were familiar with the principles and processes of CAR. These preliminary insights enabled me to identify themes that might warrant further investigation in the qualitative stage and to triangulate and deepen the interpretation of teachers' perceptions.

3.9.1.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

As noted above, data from the questionnaire were prepared in an Excel file, and the data set for each research question was organised to facilitate visual representation in tables. Some questions in the questionnaire were open-ended, and they were handled the same way as the qualitative data collected in the interviews. For quantitative data, information was displayed in table format, which provides a clear overview and allows patterns and trends to be more easily seen. Descriptive statistics, such as means, were calculated and embedded into the analytical framework for each research question. These visual summaries supported the interpretation of the findings and enhanced the clarity of the results section by showing a concise representation of the quantitative data. For example, when collating data on teachers' perceptions of CAR for RQ2, teachers responded to a Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, Neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). The number of responses for each category was tallied and presented in a table format. The example below shows the responses to Q.21: CAR enhances the quality of teaching, Q.22: CAR does not make any difference to the education

performance of students, and Q.23: *CAR promotes positive change*. This was presented accordingly:

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
21. CAR enhances the quality of teaching.	1	0	4	26	15
22. CAR does not make any difference to the educational performance of students.	10	28	6	2	0
23. CAR promotes positive change.	0	0	5	28	13

Table 7. Example of presentation of questionnaire data

By presenting the quantitative data in this way, patterns and relationships between variables can be more easily identified. Similarities with responses for those who agree (26 & 28, respectively) and strongly agree (15 & 13, respectively) are evident in questions such as Q21 and Q23, highlighting a consistent positive attitude among participants. Visualising data in a table like this facilitates quick comparison among items and subtle variations between response categories. These visual summaries enhanced how I could interpret the findings, which supported clearer discussion between these quantitative trends and qualitative insights later in the stages of analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.9.2 Qualitative Data Management: Transcription

All Stage Two interviews conducted by telephone were recorded using a Homder digital recording device, which produced high-quality audio. All Stage Three recordings were made via Zoom's recording function, downloaded, and labelled, ready for transcription. Qualitative data management involved transcription of the interviews in Stage Two, the CPD session, focus group meetings, and the final interviews in Stage Three. Participants' reflective diaries were coded and evaluated. In the first instance, all qualitative data were transcribed.

Kowal & O'Connell (2013, p. 3) note that transcription, whilst being somewhat “problematic”, is “an inevitable” part of the qualitative data analysis process. There is no systematic process in place to capture an “accurate and comprehensive narrative of the original performance.” Transcription can be somewhat complex and “in principle selective and entails the inevitable risk of systematic bias of one kind or another”. Similarly, MacLean et al. (2004, p. 113) emphasise that transcription depends on how the material is heard, perceived, and represented, thereby influencing both the content analysed and the reliability of the findings.

Understanding the aims of individual interviews and focus group interviews might impact this process. Interactions between members of a focus group interview might provide insight into relationships, but these insights might not be captured in a word-for-word transcription. The extent to which transcription can fully ascertain the complexities of relationships and interactions in focus group interviews is unclear (Sandelowski, 1994). I decided to do a verbatim transcription for both individual and focus group interviews. The rationale for this method in embedded is the need for the process to be deemed reliable and to avoid threats to the validity and trustworthiness of the analysis of qualitative research (Easton et al., 2000).

Transcription for individual interviews in Stage One was outsourced to an agency approved by the University of Essex, and a single transcriber was utilised. The decision to use a third party was to expedite the transcription process, and using a trained transcriber who is not involved with the research provides ‘an objective record’ (McMullin, 2021, p.2). Once the process had been completed, I checked the transcriptions to ensure there were no misinterpretations. As MacLean et al. (2004, p.119) point out, “[c]ommon errors appear to occur when the transcriptionist is not actively processing the information heard and is doing touch typing or “shadowing” rather than active listening. Mistakes are discovered by the person performing the analysis, because the content just does not make sense”. Although this process

can be lengthy it “results in a more accurate transcription” (MacLean et al., 2004, p.119). However, I conducted the transcription for the focus group meetings. Given the nature of the meeting I decided that focus group meetings were best transcribed this way as the research would be able to understand the relationship and conversation between participants, I would be able to better distinguish between different speakers and make appropriate notes and give a critical ear to the recording in relation to the research aims, “especially in view of an increasing interest in bridging the gap between qualitative and quantitative methods” (Kowal & O’Connell, 2013, p.3). Following the transcription process, qualitative data were coded and prepared for analysis.

3.9.2.1 Qualitative Data Analysis: Coding and content analysis

After transcribing open-ended responses from the questionnaire, interviews, and focus group meetings, the qualitative data were prepared for coding. This process aims to use coding to identify themes related to the research questions and to use the findings to evaluate teachers’ perceptions of CAR. In short, this refers to “content analysis” which, according to Cohen et al. (2009, p.475), refers to “the process of summarising and reporting written data- the main contents of data and messages”. Whilst this research does not aim to adopt a ‘grounded theory’ approach, it does aim to explore perceptions through an inductive approach, and Stage Three of the data collection explores teachers’ perceptions after completing CAR, and this aims to create change through CAR. I decided on thematic analysis because it moves beyond descriptive statistical analysis of quantitative data to explore the underlying meaning, relationships, and significance of the qualitative data collected. As I aimed to explore meaning through an inductive approach, no prescribed codes were applied at the outset of the analysis. This means that an inductive coding process allowed patterns, categories, and themes to emerge

directly from the data rather than being shaped by a predetermined theoretical framework or assumption (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Mann (2006, p.212) suggests a six-phase model for coding. These stages identify codes in relation to thematic analysis and generating labels that reflect the key research questions, but this does not discount any new themes that may arise. The key steps identified by Mann and the process used for this study were:

- Familiarisation with the data
- Coding
- Searching for themes
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming themes
- Writing up

During the initial coding phase, short descriptive codes were applied, which were often taken from participants' own words. These were also colour-coded to ensure I could identify them easily. These codes were then refined and grouped. For example:

P. No.	Q9. In your opinion, what is Classroom Action Research?	Code
P001	Finding and examining the nature and more than what is going on, such as aspects, problems, and challenges in class, to clarify and in turn, help teachers	Exploring/researching Identify/solve problems/challenges Assist teachers
P002	Research teachers undertake in their own classrooms to improve their practices and enhance their students' learning process.	Exploring/researching Assist/improve teaching Improve learning
P003	Research carried by teacher to reflect on their instructional practices	Exploring/researching Reflection on practice
P004	Using real practice to help teachers make research into what can help achieve best practice	Exploring/researching Improve teaching/practices

Table 8. Example coding for qualitative data

Table 8 above shows the initial stages of coding for RQ1: 'What do teachers understand by the term Classroom Action Research?' The responses in the middle column are participants' own words (*in vivo*) to ensure the analysis remained grounded in the data and reflects the authentic voices of the participants. Also, by keeping participants' own words, I aimed to avoid

imposing interpretive labels, thus focusing more on allowing codes and themes to emerge more naturally. The following stage (reviewing themes) involved a second coder or critical friend to give a more ‘objective’ view (Miles et al., 2019). A PhD graduate who specialised in analysing discursive text acted as the second coder or critical friend. He was asked to review a sample of the qualitative data. Using a critical friend aids understanding by “combin[ing] different interpretations from the findings (Mat Noor & Shafee, 2020, p.8). Once this had been completed, I met with them to discuss codes and themes. These codes were evaluated, and agreed-upon themes were applied. Table 9 below gives an example of this process.

Initial codes	Theme	Interpretation
<i>Assist/improve teaching/improve learning/improve practices.</i>	<i>Improve teaching and learning outcomes.</i>	<i>CAR is viewed as a means to improve teachers' practice, refine instruction, and support improved student learning</i>

Table 9. Example of the development of codes into themes

Table 9 above shows the development of initial codes that I discussed with the second coder (inter-coder) and the theme that was agreed upon. Reviewing these themes from agreed codes strengthens the overall rigour of the research findings to ensure the themes are grounded in the data rather than reflecting any possible bias. By grouping agreed codes into broader themes, a movement towards more meaningful interpretation is observed, as noted in the ‘Interpretation’ column of Table 9 above. This process allowed for more transparent communication of the findings. Some of the responses from the interview data were quantified to gain a clearer picture of the findings (see Fig. 14 below). By aligning qualitative codes or themes with numerical trends, I was able to triangulate and communicate findings more transparently and combining this with narrative extracts allows a greater appreciation of the data (Sandelowski, 2001).

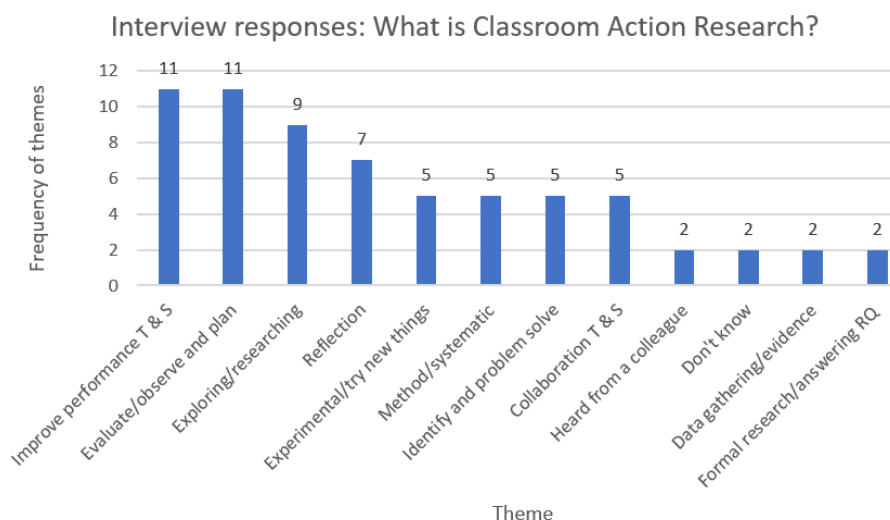


Figure 14. Sample figure after quantifying themes from interview data

Figure 14 above shows the main themes from interview data that were coded and then quantified. As Sandelowski (2001) noted, including qualitative extracts alongside quantitative data enhances the richness of the findings. Quantitative results show the overall trends in the findings, but participant extracts provide context and depth, which reveal underlying experiences, emotions and reasoning behind the quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For example, in response to the open-ended question ‘In your opinion, what is Classroom Action research?’, using the extract from respondent P1 gives more depth to the answer than just thematic coding and quantitative analysis. P1 stated:

"Finding and examining the nature and more than what's going on, such as aspects, problems, and challenges in class, to clarify and, in turn, help teachers."

This response shows that they understand CAR as a diagnostic process aimed at helping teachers improve their practice. Triangulating extracts with other quantitative data and qualitative themes aids in strengthening the credibility and interpretive richness of the analysis, allowing visibility of a clear connection between numerical trends, thematic interpretations and authentic voices (Miles et al., 2019).

3.10 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

This section outlines the procedures undertaken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments chosen. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews served as the primary tool for data collection, and it was necessary to confirm that they accurately captured participants' understandings, perceptions and experiences related to CAR and their autonomy. Establishing validity aims to ensure the intended constructs are measured, whereas reliability procedures aim to assess the extent to which there is consistency or stability in the measurement across contexts and participants (Cohen et al, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009).

Analysis of the questionnaire aimed to determine language teachers' understanding of CAR and whether CAR had been conducted or been part of CPD in teacher training or ongoing professional development. To ensure the validity of this instrument, both content and construct validity were considered, which means whether the items within an instrument adequately represent and capture the constructs being measured and ensure it is covered thoroughly (Cohen et al., 2018; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). When designing the questionnaire, content validity was established through reviews by language and research specialists in language and linguistics and teacher education, who examined the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the aims of my study. Construct validity was supported by including items from the Teacher Autonomy Scale (TAS) designed by Pearson & Hall (1993). The TAS has been used and validated in prior studies (Pearson & Hall, 1993; Aoki, 2002). Additionally, piloting the questionnaire with a group of language teachers who were also PhD candidates and supervisors further contributed to reliability by identifying potential ambiguities or misinterpretations in item wording (Dörnyei, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to enhance the validity and depth of findings through triangulation of data (Patton, 2015). Interviews explored teachers'

perceptions, experiences with CAR and autonomy and the use of semi-structured questions allowed for flexibility while maintaining comparability across participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). An interview protocol was used to reduce bias and maintain equal conditions for all participants. As previously noted, I was able to rephrase and adapt questions to enable clarification of responses to capture meaning (Patton, 2015) accurately. Thematic analysis of interview data was conducted alongside descriptive statistics collated from questionnaires to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the overall research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.11 Chapter Summary

To conclude, this study adopted a three-stage mixed methods design to investigate language teachers' perceptions of CAR and autonomy. Stage One involved administering a questionnaire to collect quantitative data on teachers' understanding and engagement with CAR and their perceptions of autonomy. Stage Two consisted of semi-structured interviews to gain deeper qualitative insights into these concepts, and Stage Three involved delivering training on CAR, after which teachers conducted their own CAR projects and kept reflective diaries. This stage also involved focus groups and individual interviews to capture participants' evolving perspectives and experiences of CAR and collaboration within the CAR process. The relationship between the instruments chosen and the research questions was discussed. This section also addressed ethical considerations and how data were collected, managed and analysed. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches enabled data triangulation, providing a rich, comprehensive understanding of teachers' engagement with CAR. Stage Three was particularly significant as it collated data through teachers' direct engagement in the CAR process, yielding insights into how CAR influenced teacher-researchers' professional reflection, collaboration and classroom practice.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to present the findings for the three stages of data collection for this study: questionnaires, interviews (RQ 1, 2, 3 and 4), and language teachers⁸ conducting their own Classroom Action Research (RQ5). The results are presented in order of the research questions to demonstrate how each they were addressed.

Generally, results indicate that CAR is not widely practised among language teachers, and when it is, it is often informal and not aimed at addressing specific teaching and learning issues. Many of the components of CAR appear to be practised but not necessarily in a systematic way. The findings underscore the value of collaboration and engaging in reflective practice to enhance teaching and learning. Most teachers report having autonomy and control over the ‘how’ and ‘what’ is taught, but one notable theme that emerged from Stage Three was teachers’ tendency to be highly self-critical. The following will now move to discuss the results of each question.

4.2 Research Question One: What do teachers understand by the term ‘Classroom Action Research’?

Research Question One aimed to discover what language teachers understand by the term ‘Classroom Action Research’. To answer this question, data from both the questionnaires and interviews were considered. Establishing respondents’ understanding would give a clearer

⁸ All reference to ‘teachers’ or ‘language teachers’ refers to teachers of English for Academic Purposes/Foreign or Second Language/Speakers of Other Languages

picture of the extent to which they are aware of the action research process, or whether the view of CAR is more linked to ‘traditional research’ (not involving the teachers themselves).

4.2.1 Teachers’ understanding of the term ‘Classroom Action Research’: questionnaire findings

Items 1 to 8 collated demographic information on the sample, as noted in the Methodology. Therefore, data collection begins with Item 9, an open-ended question: ‘What is classroom action research?’ Responses ranged from not knowing what CAR is to giving a detailed explanation of the classroom action research process. Questionnaire participants were asked: *Item 9. ‘In your opinion, what is Classroom Action Research?’* Figure 15 below illustrates the main themes that emerged after coding, categorisation, and theme development. See section 3.9.2.1 for an example of the coding process, and Appendix 11 (questionnaire) and 12 interview), respectively, for participants' original responses and the categorisation of central themes that emerged from the qualitative data collected via the questionnaire (open-ended questions).

Figure 15 below shows the main themes that emerged from questionnaire data, and shows that the prominent themes emerging are that CAR involves improving teaching, learning through exploring and researching.

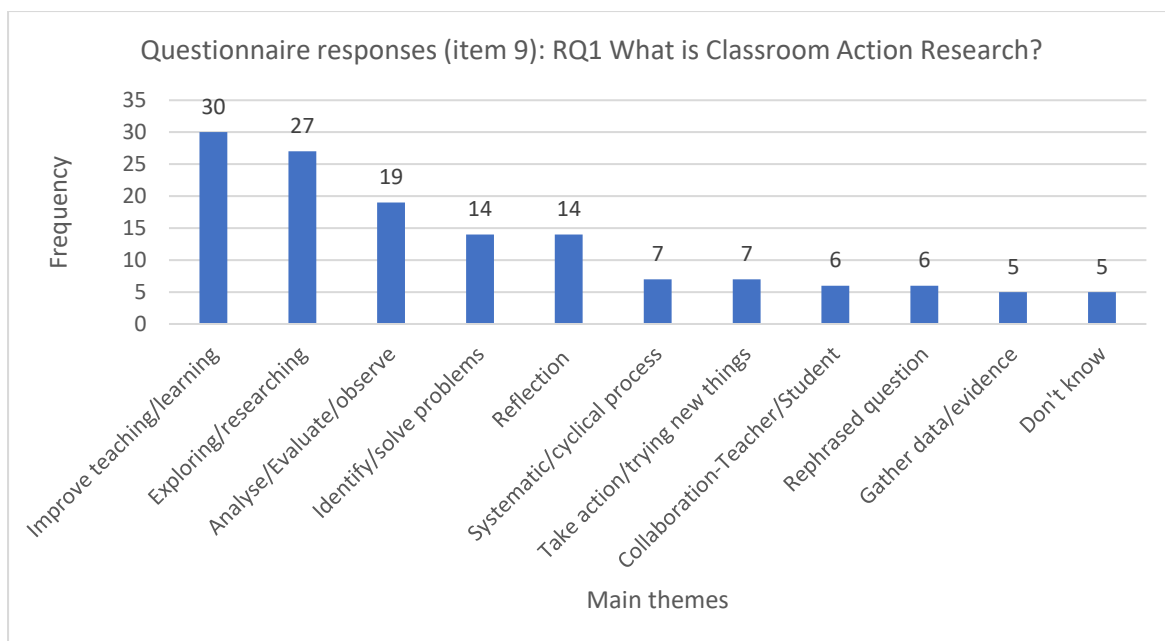


Figure 15. Central themes for RQ1: questionnaire responses

As shown in the figure above, the most frequent themes identified were that CAR “*helps teachers improve their teaching and student learning*” (n=30), ‘exploring or researching’ (n=27), followed by some form of “*analysis/evaluation/ assessment*” or “*observation*” (n=19). CAR was also described as a “*process that identifies and solves problems and challenges*” and as involving “*reflection*” (n=14).

There was a significant representation (n=7) highlighting CAR involving a “*clear process, systemic and/or cyclical*” approach, as well as “*action that needs to be taken; being proactive and trying new things*” (n=7). Six respondents included “*collaboration with teachers and/or students*” as part of CAR. Some responses (n=6) appeared to rephrase the question as an answer, such as “*research done in the classroom*”, and did not elaborate on what this meant. Although not a dominant theme, five participants (11%) mentioned that data gathering was part of CAR. Similarly, approximately 11% (n=5) stated they “*did not know*” or “*had no understanding* of the term. Following on from this, 3/5 went on to explain CAR. P13 stated they were unsure, but then noted, “*I would say it refers to reflection on teaching through*

identifying how effective different teaching strategies are". Further to this, although stating 'not sure', P38 responded as such, *"researching your own classroom and students"*, which could be seen as derivative from the term CAR itself. The final respondent admitted to checking the definition online as they were not familiar with the term CAR: *"I am not familiar with this term. However, reflecting on learning, monitoring student learning, getting input from students about their learning, discussing with peers approaches and strategies for learning and/or behaviour management and doing research if/when required are all actions I do. Supported by a quick check online, I think these activities represent Classroom Action Research"*. This response demonstrates an implicit engagement with some of the principles associated with CAR (reflection, input from students/evidence, collaboration, active engagement).

As Item 9 was open-ended, a qualitative response was provided, resulting in responses that incorporated a range of ideas. This result could be expected, as teachers deduced several meanings of the term 'Classroom Action Research', and it is reasonable to expect multiple themes to emerge from their answers. The overall findings suggest that language teachers generally hold a positive understanding of the term CAR, with most teachers associating CAR with improving teaching and learning, exploration, analysis and evaluation of classroom practices. This indicates an awareness of CAR's reflective and developmental nature. Also, responses indicate that CAR is a problem-solving process that involves reflection and responses, to some extent, describe CAR as systematic or cyclical.

The following extracts reflect language teachers' interpretations of the term CAR, commonly described as a process involving exploration, investigation, analysis, evaluation, and the identification of problems and solutions to enhance teaching and learning. For instance, P1 defines CAR as a means of *"Finding and examining the nature and more than what's going on, such as aspects, problems, and challenges in class, to clarify and in turn help teachers."*

This interpretation emphasises problem identification through investigation but does not extend to proposing solutions or outlining future actions. Similarly, P2 highlights key features of CAR but adds an explicit focus on action aimed at improving teaching and learning:

"Research teachers undertake in their own classrooms to improve their practices and enhance their students' learning process."

P11 builds on these ideas by introducing the notion of data collection, referring to teaching itself as a “*source of information*” for research, reflecting multiple themes emerging from one response. *"Using your teaching as a source of information to inform research. Action research is normally done to help solve a problem or make improvements to one's teaching"*. All three extracts highlight CAR as a problem-solving approach designed to enhance educational practice and were common themes in 24 out of 46 responses. This reflects a strong level of understanding of CAR despite not explicitly referencing the systematic nature of CAR. Collectively, these responses demonstrate that language teachers perceive CAR as practical, reflective and aimed to improve teaching and learning, and this reflects the nature and core purpose of CAR.

Further to this, several respondents (n=7) conceptualise CAR as a method, process, or cycle, which indicates the systematic nature of CAR. P6, for example, describes CAR as a continuous, collaborative process involving both colleagues and students, with a strong emphasis on reflection.

"Continual reflection and feedback, an ongoing collaborative dialogue with colleagues (and students) about teaching and the classroom environment. The aim is to identify areas that need improvement and to take positive action to improve the learning experience for the students and raise the standards of teaching and professional delivery. The overall intended outcome is to raise performance and achievement levels".

P7's understanding aligns with P6's in identifying CAR as a process, but frames it as a *'diagnostic tool for analysing current classroom performance to inform future improvements'*. Notably, this response does not specify whether the focus is on teacher or student performance. Additionally, P14 and P43 describe CAR as a cyclical process centred on experimentation and evaluation. P43 succinctly outlines the steps involved in problem identification, strategy exploration, testing, and reflection, emphasising the iterative nature of the process.

Ability to reflect in order to improve on practice. Find a problem, look at sources and other strategies and then try them out – reflect and assess if these strategies were successful. If not, repeat the process.

P14 provides a more detailed account, highlighting the active and reflective dimensions of CAR and emphasising the importance of teacher autonomy in adapting practices to enhance outcomes. This shows a strong understanding of the CAR process in terms of reflecting on practice, implementation of change (action), evaluation and analysis of outcomes, reflecting to inform further cycles.

"In my view, Classroom Action Research is the process of actively seeking improvements to teaching practice. This primarily involves reflecting on teacher and learner experiences, implementing changes based on this reflection, and analysing the outcomes of these changes in order to improve teaching practice. This requires the practitioner to be proactive – the teacher leads the research into their own practice and experiments with variables related to their teaching. This is followed by close analysis and reflection on the outcomes of the changes, before the process can be repeated, informed by the results. In this sense, Classroom Action Research is in some ways a reflective cycle of improving teaching practice".

Both responses demonstrate a clear understanding of the CAR cycle and underscore the importance of reflection and experimentation in professional development, even though they do not mention data collection in the CAR process. Thus far, while definitions vary, a common thread across responses is the emphasis on addressing classroom challenges to

improve teaching and learning. The following now explores how language teachers perceive the role of reflection within the CAR framework.

Reflection was reported by 14 out of 46 respondents as a key feature of CAR, specifically in exploring, researching, and improving classroom practices and activities. Some of these respondents also highlighted other elements associated with CAR, such as analysing, evaluating, identifying, and solving problems, as well as trying out new things. The following is an example of the notion that reflection is a part of the CAR process.

Respondent	Response
P3	<i>'Research carried out by teacher to reflect on their instructional practices.'</i>
P8	<i>'Inclusion of and reflection of classroom activities with subsequent research.'</i>
P9	<i>'Assessing yourself through reflection and informal assessment.'</i>
P32	<i>'Carrying out research (formally or informally) on your own classroom, and practice in order to reflect and improve your teaching practice.'</i>

Table 10. Extracts from Item 9 related to reflection as part of CAR

Viewing the data in the above table, respondent P3 identifies reflection and teachers' practice as an explanation of CAR, which is somewhat similar to P8's response. P8 further clarifies that research is conducted based on this reflection, and P9 identifies CAR in relation to self-reflection and the assessment of teachers themselves through informal assessment. Here, there was no clarification of what 'informal assessment' meant to this respondent. It could refer to teachers' spontaneous evaluations of students, without using marking criteria or similar summative assessment methods. P32 also highlights CAR being informal (and formal) and identifies reflection on classroom practices. The concept of 'formal' research may involve some form of empirical study. This leads to the following results, which incorporate data collection.

In addition to CAR being identified as a process, 5 out of 46 respondents (P15, P16, P24, P44, and P45) explicitly referenced data collection or empirical inquiry as part of the understanding of CAR. These responses (see Table 11 below) also frequently included elements of reflection and cyclical practice. While some participants used terms like ‘data’ or ‘empirical’, others implied it through phrases such as ‘collecting evidence’. Notably, P15 and P24 described CAR as a structured, ongoing process involving planning, action, observation, and reflection.

P15	<i>‘Where a teacher identifies an area he or she would like to improve in their class ‘They identify an issue, then gather baseline data/evidence, and then research the topic’ ‘The teacher then creates an action plan and implements the action plan. At the end the teacher then gathers more evidence and reflects and reports on the impact their action has had on learning ’</i>
P16	<i>‘A method of finding out what works in my classroom. This can be achieved conversations with peers, empirical studies, self-reflection’</i>
P24	<i>‘Conducting research in your classroom to find out what works best for your students in the context that you’re teaching. This mostly refers to empirical work, but it can be a simple process of trial, observation, reflection, and then modifying your teaching.’</i>
P44	<i>‘Reflecting on classroom activities from informal personal perspective to peer feedback or data collection to improve teaching and learning.’</i>
P45	<i>Collecting evidence of what works and doesn't work to improve students' progress.’</i>

Table 11. Responses for the meaning of CAR in relation to data collection

The inclusion of data or empirical inquiry by these five respondents suggests a more developed understanding of CAR as a research-informed practice. While P45 does not explicitly mention 'data,' the reference to 'collecting evidence' implies an empirical approach. This aligns with the broader definition of empirical research. P15 and P24 demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of CAR as a cyclical process, incorporating baseline data, intervention, and post-intervention reflection. Their responses align closely with the established CAR model, indicating a deeper understanding of and engagement with the methodology. However,

ambiguity remains in some responses. For instance, P44 and P45 refer to informal or unspecified forms of data collection without clarifying what constitutes '*informal*' or how evidence is used. This lack of specificity may reflect varying levels of familiarity with formal research methods among respondents.

So far, language teachers' understanding of CAR is widely understood as a reflective, cyclical process involving problem identification, data collection, and modifying teaching practices. Definitions vary, but key themes include empirical inquiry, informal assessment, and improving teaching and learning; this variation highlights the need for clearer professional development around the research dimension of CAR.

The preceding analysis has explored what the questionnaire responses provided in terms of exploring teachers' understandings of CAR, and has highlighted key themes such as reflection, data use, and cyclical practice. I now move to present findings from the interview data, which further explored their understanding of CAR and which offer more qualitative insights into language teachers' conceptualisations of CAR.

4.2.2 Teachers' understanding of the term 'Classroom Action Research': interview findings

At Stage Two of the data collection, fifteen interviewees were asked what their understanding of CAR is. After coding and analysing the data, the themes in Figure 16 below emerged. Responses suggest that most teachers have a fairly sound understanding of CAR. They strongly associate CAR with being practice-oriented, involving improvement and reflection, but there is less association with systematic data collection or a research process.

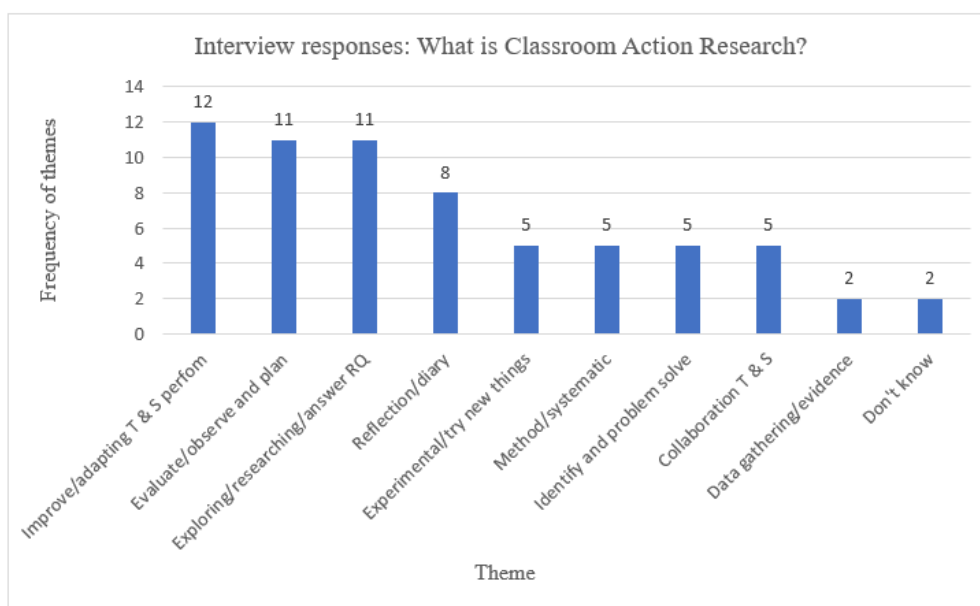


Figure 16. Interview responses ‘What is Classroom Action Research?’

Figure 16 above builds on the discussion from the questionnaire findings and shows that most responses incorporated more than one theme. The most frequent theme that emerged was improving or adapting to improve teacher and student performance ($n=12$). This reflects the central purpose of CAR, which is primarily to improve teaching and learning. Interviewees recognised that CAR involves planning, acting, observing and reflecting ($n=11$), with five of these responses incorporating the themes of CAR being a method or systematic. This shows a good understanding of the CAR cycle, but more as a procedure rather than how evidence informs planning. These results show a strong understanding of the reflective nature of CAR and that it involves documentation ($n=8$). The experimental nature of CAR ($n=5$) and problem identification and collaboration ($n=5$) also emerged as key themes, and “*trying new things*” test interventions, which shows that teachers understand the need to adapt, change or discuss their practices. Table 12 below shows extracts from five interviewees' responses on their understanding of CAR. These have been selected to show how responses incorporate one or

more of the main themes that emerged from the data (reflection, collaboration, and addressing a problem).

Interviewee	Extracts on the meaning of CAR
P102	<i>“research within the classroom....experimental... practical level with the students that you have in the classroom, observing.... feedback that you get from them in terms of how and reflecting on that and developing yourself, your students and also the process that you are using for teaching.”</i>
P103	<i>“Investigate or there is maybe a problem that you would like to fix with your teaching.....investigate further is that you review what you do in class whilst you are doing it.....things into practice, the ideas that you have had or strategies.”</i>
P105	<i>“using reflections....revise plans or revise action in the classroom... evaluating and understanding from the students, and trying to use that as feedback.... or using the information from the students to adapt the lesson, either next lesson or the lesson taking place.”</i>
P107	<i>“see a problem in the classroom....the teacher identifying this issue, maybe talking to other people, getting other people on board kind of thing was always the thing to do with research,.....put a plan into place to figure out a solution to this problem.”</i>
P109	<i>“practiced and theorised methodologies of pedagogy....of proactive teaching and proactive learning.....teacher’s perspective and student’s perspective as well. For example, looking at different ways of using flipped learning....so being reactive to how this research is applied as well, being reflective upon what is successful and what isn’t....Also, it being very flexible, fluid kind of process.”</i>

Table 12. Interviewee extracts on responses for RQ1

Table 12 above gives an overview of five interviewees' understanding of CAR, and they are presented here to highlight many commonalities between these responses. All responses included identifying some form of problem or issue, which was reflective of the responses from all 15 interviewees. A common theme that also ran through these responses was adopting some form of action, evaluation, and being flexible in applying a plan or exploring different ways to teach or improve teaching and learning. The responses above suggest that this process is not limited to the teacher involved but may also involve students and colleagues, thereby indicating the need for collaborative action. These responses somewhat mirror those from the questionnaire data in that there is a strong alignment with CAR being practical, reflective and focused on improvement. Questionnaire data highlighted an improvement in teaching and student performance (n=12), and there were multiple references to improving practice and enhancing student learning in the interview data (n=12). As well as identifying areas for

improvement and addressing them through experimentation and new practices, interviewees also identified CAR as a reflective and evaluative practice. Four interviewees (P104, 105, 106, 113) noted that reflection, evaluation and adaptation are elements of CAR, and this aligns with the plan-act-observe-reflect cycle central to CAR (see Table 13 below).

Interviewee	Response
P104	<i>"Being reflective about your teaching practice"</i>
P105	<i>"Using reflection and...feedback from students to revise plans"</i>
P106	<i>"Having a diary...talking to students...improve it for the next time"</i>
P113	<i>"Teachers reflect on what works and what doesn't...more formal, measuring how effective teaching has been"</i>

Table 13. Interviewee responses highlighting reflection as a component of CAR

The extracts from the interview data above align with the questionnaire responses (reflective/diary: n=8; evaluate/observe/plan: n=11) and show that both sets of data link CAR with ongoing reflection, evaluation and adaptation. This reveals a consistent understanding of CAR as a reflective, improvement-driven, and teacher-led process which is situated within real classroom contexts. Across both data sets, common themes emerged, and most frequently, CAR was associated with enhancing teaching and learning, which demonstrates a strong awareness of its practical nature. Interviewees, like questionnaire respondents, described CAR as a means of improving performance through reviewing practice, identifying problems, and implementing solutions. For example, P101, P103, and P111 referred to improving teaching and students' achievements, closely mirroring the dominant theme emerging from the questionnaire *"improve/adapting T&S performance."* Reflection also emerged as another shared theme and was consistently viewed as central to CAR. Observing, evaluating, and revising teaching strategies related to classroom experience reflects the cyclical nature of CAR, and both questionnaire respondents and interviewees conceptualised CAR as a problem-

solving and diagnostic activity, identifying classroom issues and experimenting with alternative strategies to enhance teaching and learning.

Overall, these parallels show a strong understanding of CAR, but both sets of data revealed a limited understanding of systematic data collection, with only two interviewees and five questionnaire respondents explicitly referring to gathering evidence or measuring outcomes, suggesting that CAR is often understood as more of a reflective practice rather than a structured inquiry. However, this should not be viewed as a deficit in knowledge but as a positive foundation on which greater methodological awareness can be developed. The strong alignment between the questionnaire and interview findings provides an encouraging indication of teachers' developing understanding and engagement with CAR. Although there is some variation in methodological understanding, the findings suggest that language teachers are already embracing some of the core principles of CAR (reflection, experimentation, collaboration, continuous improvement). This practical and proactive understanding indicates that teachers are already embracing the essence of CAR as an empowering tool for improving teaching and learning. The consistency of understanding across all participants demonstrates clear potential for cultivating research-informed teaching that is not just an academic exercise but a natural and empowering component of everyday teaching practices.

4.3 Research Question Two: What are teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research?

Research Question One explored language teachers' understanding of CAR and provided insights into how the respondents conceptualise its purpose, processes and value. Research Question Two examines language teachers' perceptions of CAR and moves to explore how their knowledge of CAR shapes their perceptions. To investigate these perceptions,

questionnaire data items 17-19, 21-35 were analysed.⁹ The data from Stage Two interviews were also collated further to establish language teachers' perceptions of CAR data.

4.3.1 Perceptions of Classroom Action Research: questionnaire findings

Table 14 below shows the responses to the items. 17 - 19, 21-35 from 46 respondents to evaluate teachers' perceptions of CAR. Items were positively and negatively worded, and a five-point Likert scale allowed participants to express a balanced range of positive, negative and neutral options, allowing analysis of trends and measurement of attitudes quantitatively.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
17. I think CAR is time-consuming	5	9	8	21	3
18. I have thought about CAR, but I do not know how to use it	2	19	8	14	3
19. CAR involves lots of data from participants	3	19	13	9	2
21. CAR enhances the quality of teaching	1	0	4	26	15
22. CAR does not make any difference to the educational performance of students.	10	28	6	2	0
23. CAR promotes positive change.	0	0	5	28	13
24. CAR encourages teachers to become effective teacher-learners.	0	1	4	29	12
25. CAR should be included in CPD Programmes in all schools.	0	3	6	29	8
26. There is no time for me to perform any kind of CAR.	1	19	8	12	5
27. CAR is the responsibility of individual teachers.	4	19	8	14	1
28. CAR is not applicable to experienced teachers.	14	28	2	2	0
29. All teachers are able to perform CAR.	0	9	4	23	10
30. Only dynamic teachers can apply CAR to their classroom practice.	11	28	3	4	0
31. CAR encourages collaboration and sharing ideas.	2	1	5	27	11
32. I would be willing to attend CAR workshops as part of my professional development.	0	2	2	27	15
33. CAR is performed independently and cannot be collaborative.	14	31	0	1	0
34. Research publications on CAR are of no value for teachers.	13	28	4	1	0
35. CAR encourages creativity and willingness to try new practices.	0	0	4	30	12

Table 14 Questionnaire responses for RQ 2: Language teachers' perceptions of CAR

⁹ Items 20 did not relate to RQ2

Before interpreting the results for individual items, Tables 15, 16 and 17 below provide the analysis for Cronbach's Alpha (reliability statistics), descriptive statistics and item averages for the results for RQ2. Negatively worded items were reversed-scored, reducing the risk of score distortion, and scoring was applied accordingly (Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5). This data was then analysed using SPSS.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.846	18

Table 15. Cronbach's Alpha reliability statistics for RQ2.

The alpha coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of .846 generally indicates a good internal consistency across the 18 items used for RQ 2, suggesting that this measure supports the reliability when assessing perceptions collectively. SPSS was also used to analyse descriptive statistics, as shown below.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perception_m	46	2.44	4.83	3.7766	.44836
Valid N (listwise)	46				

Table 16. RQ 2 Descriptive Statistics for RQ2: Language teachers' perceptions of CAR

Descriptive statistics (n=46) show that the mean of 3.78 for RQ 2 responses indicates moderately positive perceptions overall. The minimum (2.44) and maximum (4.83) reflect a substantial spread, which implies varied responses and that teachers differed in how they perceive or experience CAR. The standard deviation of .448 is moderate, and although there appears to be some clustering around the mean, the spread is sufficient to reflect variation in

perceptions of CAR. Given this range of spread, the average scores do not fully reflect respondents' evaluation of CAR. Before moving on to the individual item averages, the descriptive statistics in Table 16 above (min/max values) refer to respondents' composite scores, not to the item means, which are shown below.

Item Average

Item	Item 17	Item 18	Item 19	Item 21	Item 22	Item 23	Item 24	Item 25	Item 26
Average score	2.83	3.07	3.26	4.17	4	4.17	4.13	3.91	3.02

Item	Item 27	Item 28	Item 29	Item 30	Item 31	Item 32	Item 33	Item 34	Item 35
Average score	2.76	4.17	3.74	4	3.96	4.2	4.26	4.15	4.17

Table 17. Item averages for RQ2

When evaluating the item averages, scores range from 2.76 to 4.26, showing varied responses to different aspects of CAR rather than uniform agreement. Items 21, 23, 28, 32-35 fall at the higher end, indicating a broad agreement; this might reflect socially desirable responses. A small group of items cluster around the mean (items 19, 25, 29, 30, 31), suggesting mixed views that neither endorse nor reject these aspects of CAR, such as data requirements, student impact, who should engage in CAR and whether all teachers are able to use it. Items that have the lowest scores in relation to the mean (items 17, 26, 27) reflect concerns surrounding time and individual responsibility. Item 27 "Car is the responsibility of individual teachers", shows a somewhat mixed response (SD = 4, D = 19, N = 8, A = 14, SA = 1), which might reflect wording ambiguity as the respondents could interpret this in different ways. "Responsibility" could mean the individual teacher needs to initiate or be accountable for CAR. Rewording this item, "How far is initiating CAR your responsibility?" might have yielded different results.

Despite adequate internal consistency, the results show an unevenness across items. There appear to be favourable perceptions of CAR, but these are concentrated around claims of improved teaching quality, professional learning and collaboration. Respondents recognise the potential benefits of CAR but appear to be cautious about scope and implementation. Noticeably weaker perceptions of feasibility (time) and responsibility could hinder engagement in CAR and suggest difficulties in integrating CAR in routine practices and ascertaining whether CAR should be primarily teacher-led or supported by language teachers' institutions. In summary, despite the above perceived constraints, teachers seem to be motivated to engage in reflective inquiry-based practice. The following interview data builds on these insights, offering a deeper exploration of how teachers perceive CAR in their own contexts.

4.3.2 Perceptions of Classroom Action Research: interview findings

The interview was designed to elicit perceptions indirectly through a series of related questions that explored teachers' experiences, practices and attitudes toward reflection, collaboration, engagement in research, and professional development. This approach aligns with a semi-structured interview design, allowing participants to express their understanding of CAR more organically. For example, *'How do you evaluate your lessons?'* encouraged teachers to discuss their reflective and evaluative practices, which are key elements of CAR, without explicitly framing the research-focused terms.

4.3.2.1 CAR as a reflective, instinctual and beneficial process

Data collated from interviewees on perceptions of CAR reinforce the belief that CAR enhances the quality of teaching and also aids professional growth. Several interviewees described CAR as an ongoing, cyclical process involving reflection, feedback, and refinement. For example, P102 stated: *"I think it's important... the whole cycle of feedback and observation and making things [better]"*. This could be viewed as an intuitive understanding of the CAR

cycle, even though this interviewee did not explicitly name the CAR stages. Similarly, P105 described CAR as wholly beneficial, stating: *‘it’s a tool a teacher has if they want to improve their classroom practice. So, there could only be positive points. When you evaluate what went wrong and what went well, then you can always take something to profit and do it better the next time or just keep repeating it with variations until you can come up with something new.’*

This perception also links with the teacher being evaluative of their own practice, involving the reflective process, and subsequently being receptive to trying new practices to enhance classroom practices further. Therefore, it suggests that teachers view CAR as a constructive, reflective process aimed at improving teaching and learning. P105 notes that acknowledging what did not go well is a part of the process. In contrast, other interviewees suggest that teachers may be self-critical and fearful of criticism from others, which may explain why teachers do not perform CAR.

Several interviewees (P102, P104, P105) extended this view by describing CAR as instinctive or embedded in everyday teaching practice. P102 described it as *“beneficial all of the time... a natural part of what we should do”*, whereas P105 emphasised performing CAR *“on a daily basis”*, supported by tools such as reflective diaries. Using diaries to record insights could suggest a systematic reflective practice which bridges the gap between informal reflection and more research-informed practices, transforming observations of their own classroom into actionable evidence which could highlight some level of methodological awareness. P104 echoed CAR as an instinctive process and offered the point that *“As teachers...we do it kind of instinctively... trying a new method or even a new activity in class, we are doing some kind of micro research ourselves.”* Unlike interviewee P105, the perspective of the benefit of CAR here does not necessarily include making a written record. It does imply that this process is related to researching the classroom and that the process is nested within teaching and is possibly intrinsic (*natural*), suggesting it is not a forced activity or imposed by

others. Although these views promote the idea of CAR as a natural, informal activity that promotes positive change, they might suggest that its methodological rigour and recording practices might not be fully developed or consistently applied.

One element that is repeatedly reported in language teachers' perceptions of CAR is that of time (Peters, 2004; Borg, 2009). Having sufficient time or managing time was a theme that emerged from the interview responses, but time did not appear to be a clear-cut factor, and there were other determinants, as well as time, that impacted teachers' perceptions of whether they could conduct CAR. The following highlights interviewees' perceptions of CAR in relation to time.

4.3.2.2 Perceptions of Classroom Action Research and Time

Several interviewees (P103, P107, P108 and P110) mentioned time as a factor, but their opinions on time and CAR were somewhat contradictory. P110 noted that language tutors should make the time for CAR and *“good time management, and to plan their lessons well, and then they can have more time to do that” [conduct CAR]*. This implies that CAR would be successful if teachers managed their time effectively. Further to this time and being the only staff member was an influencing factor when reflecting on perceptions of CAR, but P108 intimated that there could be support in terms of time and conducting CAR *“It was just that I was the only person in the role, and although there should have been extra time given, there wasn't actually time to conduct it”*.

Additionally, time due to stress, being too busy and understanding how to do CAR was pointed out by P107. Interestingly this interviewee linked time with institutional implications and that it might create a situation in which conflict could occur *“One of the reasons they said that people don't do it is people simply don't have time, you know they are stressed, they're really busy, they've got one class coming in after the other and sometimes it's also like against*

the school itself so what's the point in battling it out kind of thing". This response highlights external pressures, including cultural and political dimensions of time, as well as a lack of support, which then discourages teacher research. Similarly, P103 identified time constraints and a lack of understanding of how to perform CAR as potential barriers. *'I think it purely is because people just do not have the time to do it. It's fitting this in with everything else that's going on ... I imagine that it would be very difficult to do that, but I think in terms of language teachers, I would say we are quite lucky in comparison. We do have a bit more time to do this, but time is a factor, but I think also I don't think many people would actually know how to approach it.'* Despite this appearing to pose a time barrier, P103 acknowledges that there is scope and flexibility to conduct CAR and that language teachers are well placed to integrate CAR effectively into their daily practice.

4.3.2.3 The role of others and training

Interviewees also emphasised support as a component of meaningful CAR. P103 advocated that managerial guidance should be given, proposing that a *"Line Manager suggest doing some action research. You know, let's set this up for you, let's show you how to do it"*. This underscores the belief that teachers would benefit from structured guidance and leadership involvement. While individual motivation is important, institutional encouragement and support are critical for teachers to feel confident and capable. Similarly, P104 perceives the success and benefits of CAR if it were more collaborative. *"If we did on a more collaborative scale and perhaps a bit more formally from time to time, it would have a clearer benefit and impact on teachers' practices and you know, their own approaches to their own teaching"*.

Together, P103 and P104 illustrate that teachers view CAR as a professional endeavour that flourishes within a culture of shared dialogue, mutual support and institutional facilitation. P107 posits that support needs to come from both teachers and the hierarchy, as well as from

students. *“I would have loved to have done some classroom research, because I think it could have really helped the kids. I actually think they would have been quite open to it, but it’s about having the right sort of environment, support from other teachers and the headmaster bringing people on board because if you start messing around, people don’t like that either, so you would have to really have everyone’s support”*. Whilst P107 expresses a willingness to perform CAR, there appears to be a dependence on institutional and collegial support as a prerequisite for undertaking it, and possibly a lack of autonomy or empowerment to initiate it independently. There is also a suggestion that CAR might be a risky venture. Stating *“if you start messing around, people don’t like that either”* suggests there may be disapproval or institutional barriers that limit teachers’ confidence in implementing CAR individually.

Further to this perception of others' roles and CAR, a recurring theme across interviews was the influence of institutional cultures and the fear of judgment. P110 linked this to teacher development, by arguing *“if we carry out more classroom observation and if we provide more training to the teachers, we can actually improve them... then learners will learn better, teachers will feel more comfortable... the important thing is to make everyone realise that no-one is judging anyone here.”*

This reflects a possible confusion between developmental observation and evaluative monitoring, which could feel threatening and discourage open and honest reflection. It still reflects institutional positionality in the CAR process. P108 also argues the role of institutional culture by stating, *‘I think it’s a really good idea, but I think you can end up with political difficulties.’* P108 further clarifies this by noting, *‘I think it depends on the institution. I think the mindset and how open people are to change what you find’*. The educational culture was also noted with one interviewee from Argentina (P106) who offers the following with respect to culture, educational mindset, collaboration, and fear of being judged, *“They are afraid of*

being criticised, even if it is by themselves....when you reflect you might find things you need to adjust, and some people don't take that very well".

These comments reveal possible psychological barriers to engaging in CAR and reflective practice, as they might avoid highlighting possible weaknesses in their practices. This highlights the emotional dimension of teacher development and environments in which P106, P107, P108 and P110 function might be perceived as judgmental and non-supportive. Collectively, these findings suggest that institutional and cultural climate play a decisive role in shaping teachers' perceptions and willingness to participate in CAR.

Further to the role of institutional and collegial support, interviewee P103 notes that *"many teachers don't know how to approach it"*. This reflects limited access to formal training or mentoring on CAR and a general lack of methodological understanding of CAR. Whilst interviewees express perceptions that CAR is valuable, the lack of practical understanding might inhibit engagement in CAR, and individual motivation might not be enough to sustain this practice; sustainable CAR requires embedding professional development and organisational commitment.

4.3.2.4 Use of data in Classroom Action Research

Whilst there was no direct question about data and CAR, interviewees implicitly referenced data when discussing evidence-based reflection. For example, P114, who had never conducted CAR, stated that it involves *"observational and systematic evidence, research to prove or disprove a question"*. Similarly, P113 explained that teachers *"devise ways to measure how effective your teaching had been in a certain situation"* and that findings are then reviewed *"to make changes"*. Both these responses indicate a perception that data underpins the CAR process, but this might be more of a conceptual understanding rather than procedural. These examples suggest that there is a lack of clarity on how to gather, analyse and use data

systematically, and possibly an area that could have been probed further to gain a greater insight into the perceptions of data and CAR.

4.3.2.5 Interviewees' perceptions and questionnaire findings

Research Question 2 explores language teachers' perceptions of CAR, and when combining both the questionnaire and interview data sets, some clear parallels emerge. Findings show that CAR is viewed as informal and reflective, which aligns with its exploratory nature, but both sets of data highlight gaps in methodological understanding. Although perceptions of time constraints were mixed, interviewees expressed time concerns from a broader perspective, including workload, stress, and a lack of research experience. Both sets of data reflect perceptions of CAR as a collaborative process, but the findings also show a need for guidance, training, managerial support, and structured collaboration. Interviewees expressed fear of judgment and political conflict, which the questionnaire data did not capture, and this might be a significant emotional barrier to CAR engagement. Data was not necessarily perceived as a barrier to CAR, but interview data reveal a possible gap in understanding how to gather and use evidence effectively. Overall, both data sets show that CAR is valuable for improving teaching and learning, but practical, institutional and psychological barriers could inhibit engagement. Data indicate that teachers show a positive attitude towards CAR but need support and methodological understanding to embed CAR within teachers' professional practice.

The findings for Research Question Three: *'What Classroom Action Research has been or is currently being conducted by teachers?'* now follow.

4.4 Research Question Three: What Classroom Action Research has been or is currently being conducted by teachers?

After evaluating language teachers' understanding of CAR (RQ1) and RQ2, perceptions of CAR, Research Question Three moves from awareness and attitude to the extent of actual engagement in CAR. RQ 3 provides a clearer insight into whether language teachers are actively engaging in CAR themselves or observing it being carried out by others within their contexts. Generally, the results from both the questionnaire and the interview findings show limited engagement in CAR, but some engagement in other forms of research, such as for a qualification or during training. To gain a deeper understanding of these findings, the questionnaire data for RQ 3 will be presented first, followed by the interview data. In addition to the explicit questions on engagement in CAR, items 36-45 were included to capture behaviours that reflect core elements of CAR.¹⁰

4.4.1 Engagement in Classroom Action Research: questionnaire data

Table 18 below presents items 10-14 of the questionnaire regarding whether CAR has been or is being conducted in language teachers' institutions. The aim is to establish the extent to which CAR is taking place within participants' organisations and whether it is, or has been, conducted by the participants themselves.

Questionnaire Item	Question
Q.10	<i>Are you aware of any Classroom Action Research taking place in your organisation? If yes, then please specify what.</i>
Q.11	<i>Have you been involved in Classroom Action Research in your previous organisation? If yes, please specify how?</i>
Q.12	<i>Are you currently actively involved in Classroom Action Research?</i>
Q.13	<i>If 'yes' to Question 12, describe what Classroom Action Research you are currently involved in.</i>
Q.14	<i>If you answered 'no' to Question 12, state the reasons why you are not actively involved in Classroom Action Research.</i>

Table 18. Questionnaire items used for Research Question Three

¹⁰ Collaboration (36, 37, 44), small-scale trials (38, 45), reflection & evaluation (39, 42), evidence gathering (40, 41), engagement with external research to guide planning (43)

Figure 17 below shows the questionnaire responses to Q.10, which sought to determine whether participants were aware of the current CAR in their organisation or were involved in CAR. This provides a baseline about participants' familiarity with CAR within their organisation before moving on to ascertaining individual involvement.

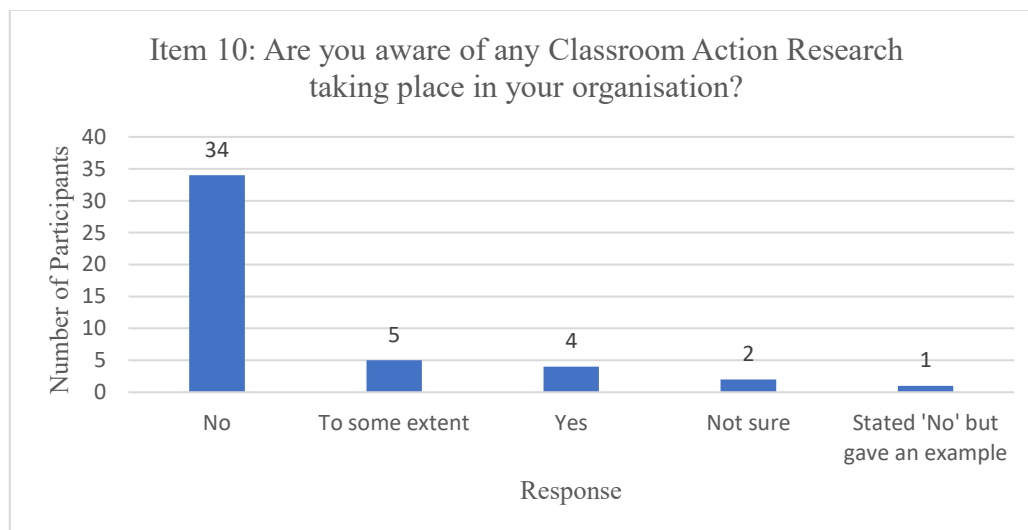


Figure 17. Awareness of CAR in current organisation: item 10 questionnaire responses

The findings presented in Figure 17 above reveal that the majority of participants (74%, $n = 34$) reported that no CAR was currently taking place in their current organisation. This suggests a generally low level of engagement with or implementation of CAR within the respondents' organisations. This might reflect a lack of institutional emphasis on systematic, reflective, or developmental practices, or it might indicate limited staff awareness of the CAR initiatives that do exist. Only 19.5% of participants indicated that CAR was taking place or taking place to some extent (8.6%, $n=4$, indicated 'yes' and 10.8%, $n=5$, to some extent), suggesting that CAR is not widespread. The small proportion of participants acknowledging partial implementation could point to informal or inconsistent application rather than CAR being embedded within organisational practices. Additionally, the 4.3% ($n=2$) of participants who were unsure if CAR was taking place highlight possible communication gaps within the

organisation, suggesting that even if CAR exists, it might not be clearly communicated or visible to tutors. The response of one participant (2%) stated ‘no’ but subsequently gave an example of CAR in the follow-up question, further highlighting a possible lack of clarity and misunderstanding of what constitutes CAR. If ‘yes’, specify what CAR was taking place.

Generally, these results imply a limited prevalence of CAR within language tutor organisations. It is possible that CAR initiatives are taking place, but insufficient communication means tutors remain unaware of them. Not all participants came from the same organisation, but 8 of the 46 participants were from my own organisation. To gain greater clarity on this finding, indicating the type of organisation and/or setting participants worked in could have been useful. Despite this, to further understand respondents’ involvement in CAR, item 10 of the questionnaire required participants to clarify their answer if they stated ‘yes’ to being aware of CAR taking place in their organisation.

Most of the responses indicate some form of research within the institution or for a qualification, but not necessarily CAR. For example, P08 noted that “*Research into use and effectiveness of instructional language*” was taking place in the institution and “*There are two people doing PGCEs here - things like observations etc*”(P23), but again, this does not explicitly state this is CAR. P10 is a participant from my own workplace and noted, “*To some extent, I know that one of my supervisors is doing her PhD research on it. Besides, we run surveys at the end of each term to get students' feedback*”. There was a lack of clarity about how survey feedback was used and whether this was part of CAR. Whilst it is clear that I have made tutors aware of my CAR research within my organisation, this might not be the case in other organisations.

Some respondents (P22 and P32) indicated that CAR was taking place informally, and their responses reflect awareness of reflective practice and elements of the CAR cycle. P22

notes that data is used to inform future planning, but adopting new practices or materials depends on the expectations to cover the set teaching materials. P22 responds accordingly:

Only informally. Teachers reflect using lesson records, but do not necessarily take action based on these reflections. Teachers do collaborate informally. Performance data is analysed in a general way, and this does impact future teaching, but there is often a lack of time to properly reflect in a way that informs change, and we are tied by relatively standardised material teaching.

This implies a constructive use of data to inform future planning, demonstrating an evidence-based approach to teaching. Adopting new practices or materials guided by institutions could signal consistency and alignment with curriculum standards, providing a stable framework within which reflective, data-informed improvements can still occur. Building on this idea of structured yet reflective practice, another perspective offers insight into how such reflection can be more deliberately embedded within its institutional processes. P32 states:

“To an extent, this happens on an informal level naturally - we would reflect on how a class went and make amendments as necessary. We might ask students anecdotally for their feedback. On a more formal level, staff and student module surveys would contribute to this. We also run a best practice CPD session every term to share and reflect on what went well in the classroom, and this sharing enables us to reflect on our practice.”

This shows engagement with reflective practice, but highlights that it occurs primarily “on an informal level naturally,” suggesting that while reflection is embedded in everyday teaching, it might lack the systematic characteristic of CAR. The description of reflecting on “how a class went” and making “amendments as necessary” demonstrates a responsive and adaptive approach to teaching, aligning with the principles underpinning CAR. Although the clearly defined cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting are not mentioned, this respondent shows an encouraging culture of reflection, and references to “staff and student module surveys” and “best practice CPD sessions every term” suggest some degree of

institutional support for reflection and collaboration. These initiatives offer the potential to formalise CAR, as there are opportunities for teachers to share experiences, identify common challenges, and collectively problem-solve. P14 also acknowledges: *‘There are continuing professional development training sessions available to teaching staff, which gives the opportunity for active and reflective research in the classroom, but this is not yet a structured process’*.

However, “*active and reflective research*” was not clarified and suggests only an awareness of what is happening in the classroom and some informal investigation. In essence, this points to a surface-level engagement with CAR but does acknowledge the importance of reflection in research. Two other respondents (P17 and P35) also demonstrate engagement with reflective and developmental practices; the extent to which they reflect the principles of CAR varies. P17 presents a more structured and collaborative approach that closely aligns with the cyclical and systematic nature of CAR:

“Yes. We gather data, set targets, use PD/staff meetings to target areas of concern or development, peer discussions and observations and individual research, which is often shared at staff meetings and by our school staff communication group.”

This respondent describes gathering data, setting targets, and using professional development (PD) meetings, peer discussion and observations to address “*areas of concern or development*”, which could represent a form of action planning, but not necessarily CAR. In contrast, P35 focuses on the individual and ongoing nature of teacher reflection, noting that “most teachers are generally always continually reflecting on their daily practice” and evaluating whether their solutions are effective.

“I think most teachers are generally always continually reflecting on their daily practice and problems within the classroom and working to rectify those, then reflecting on whether the solutions put in place were effective or not or had a desired impact.”

P35 indicates awareness of the reflective component of CAR and informal reflection-in-action rather than a structured inquiry process. These two responses (P17 and P35) demonstrate elements consistent with CAR, but neither fully captures the methodological rigour and cyclical nature central to CAR. Overall, the responses to awareness of what CAR is taking place show varying levels of engagement, ranging from informal, individual reflection to more structured, collaborative practices; few demonstrate the systematic, cyclical, and evidence-based approach characteristic of structured CAR.

Further to the above, item 11 of the questionnaire asked if respondents had been involved in CAR in their previous organisation. Results reinforce the overall trend observed in responses to the previous question regarding CAR in current organisations, highlighting a consistent lack of engagement with CAR across varying contexts. Figure 18 below shows that a majority of respondents had not been involved in CAR in their previous organisations (28/46)

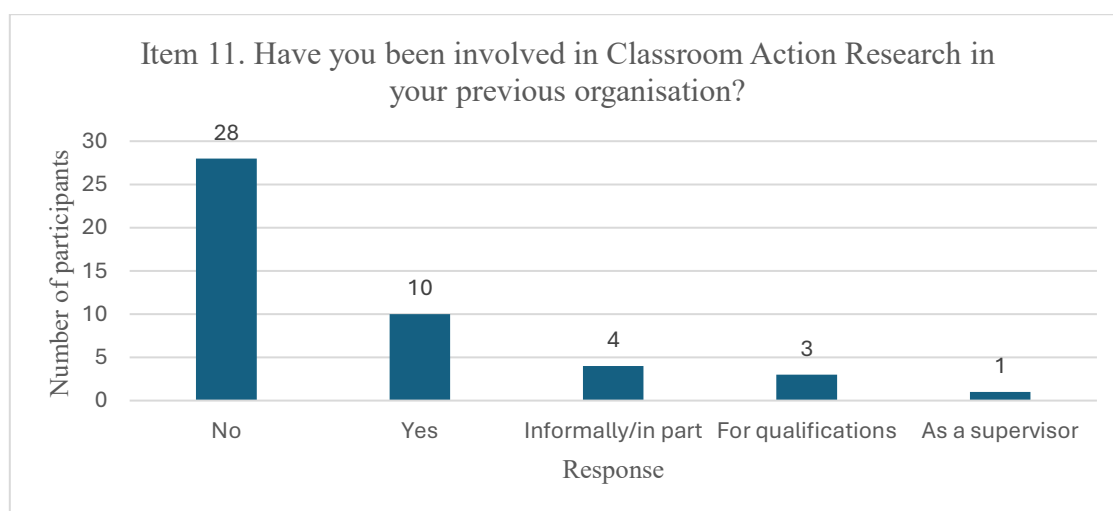


Figure 18. Involvement in CAR in previous organisation: questionnaire responses

Figure 18 above shows the distribution of responses, and although 28/46 (60.9%) stated they had no experience of CAR in their previous organisation, a small number of respondents reported direct involvement (n=10; 21.7%), which highlights that some CAR is taking place within teachers' organisations. A further four respondents described being involved in CAR

only informally or in part, suggesting partial awareness of CAR, possibly reflecting teaching practices rather than the systematic, cyclical inquiry characteristic of CAR. Three participants (6.5%) reported involvement as part of a qualification or training, indicating they had exposure to CAR in academic or professional development contexts rather than within a workplace culture. Finally, one respondent identified participation as a supervisor, implying a limited but existing leadership engagement in CAR. When respondents stated examples of previous involvement, P12 noted engagement “*constantly*” detailing “*Records of work including reflection, notes on lesson plans, etc, peer obs, CPDs, feedback surveys, tutorials, asking students... and more*”. This reflects some elements of the CAR cycle but focuses primarily on reflection, the use of various data sources (surveys, student interviews), and training, though not necessarily on CAR. Three responses clearly outline their involvement in CAR as a process, and all these responses include an element of collaboration. Only one was specific to language teaching and learning and demonstrated a more formalised process. P15 states:

“I was in a cluster of schools where we implemented Positive behaviour for learning (PB4L) and collected evidence pre- and post, and implemented a plan and had training, etc. I also implemented action research on spelling and a larger one on improving writing - this one I presented the strategies implemented and findings to a Ministry of Education 'hui' (gathering) with other teachers.”

The above response demonstrates a strong, well-developed example of prior engagement in CAR. Through the implementation of PB4L, data were collected “*pre- and post-intervention*”, and through independent action research projects on spelling and writing. The mention of data collection, planning, training and subsequent evaluation indicates familiarity with the cyclical nature of CAR. Presenting these findings as a Ministry of Education suggests that the research extended beyond the classroom level, contributing to professional dialogue and shared learning across schools. This example reflects a more formal and comprehensive engagement with CAR and integrates institutional support (through PB4L) and individual initiative (spelling and writing projects). This illustrates how CAR can operate effectively at

both the classroom and organisational levels. Compared to the previous example, P14's response reflects a less formal but still valuable engagement with the principles of CAR:

“Informally, I have collaborated with other teachers to highlight areas of practice or learner outcomes we want to improve and attempted to implement strategies based on this, followed by a discussion of results and feedback, which has informed future plans and actions. I have also informally created and distributed feedback forms for my students based on my practice to review and act upon after terms have finished.”

This participant described collaborative discussions, identification of classroom problems, and trialling of new techniques; activities that align with CAR, particularly the focus on reflection, experimentation with new techniques and collaboration with other teachers. There is also an intimation that data-driven inquiry is involved (*“discussion of results and feedback”*). Although the systematic, cyclical nature of CAR was not explicitly mentioned, this response highlights a positive culture of collective reflection and informed planning, grounded in evaluation and collaboration.

The following results indicate whether respondents are currently involved in CAR (item 12) and, if so, what this entails (item 13). Six respondents (13%) stated they were currently involved in CAR (see Table 19 below). Two out of 46 responses (P14, P15) indicated they were not involved in CAR, but P14 noted involvement was “only informally” and P15 stated, *“I am not currently involved in action research, just usual school data analysis, and reflections and target setting.”* These responses demonstrate an emerging awareness of CAR as both responses acknowledge engagement in reflective and evaluative practices. P15's reference to *“data analysis, reflections and target setting”* aligns with some aspects of CAR, such as reflection and evidence-informed practice.

Table 19 presents respondents' explanations of what CAR they are currently involved in. The data shows varying degrees of engagement, which reflect parts of the CAR process.

Respondent	Q.12.	Q.13. If 'yes' to Question 12, describe what Classroom Action Research you are currently involved in.
P06	Yes	<i>CAR for me is a natural part of my everyday teaching, so in an informal capacity I constantly seek to improve teaching and the environment by talking to colleagues, students and asking for feedback. I'm currently engaged in research around the use of technology and learning.</i>
P09	Yes	<i>Reviewing output/student reaction and response</i>
P10	Yes	<i>I usually ask for my students' feedback and try to take it into account as much as possible. I watch other teachers' videos on the topics I am teaching to see how others would teach the same topic. I run tests every now and then to gauge my students' understanding.</i>
P12	Yes	<i>Constantly reviewing and assessing what happens in the class is an integral part of my job. Project class focus group with students / ILPs, a variety of input methods, tasks, and materials to see what works better.</i>
P14	No	<i>I am only involved in this informally.</i>
P15	No	<i>I am not currently involved in action research just usual school data analysis and reflections and target setting.</i>
P16	Yes	<i>I am in the latter stages of a Diploma in Education and Training, and part of the course focuses on self-reflection, which in turn is part of CAR.</i>
P17	Yes	<i>Researching Independent learning and deeper thinking</i>

Table 19. Current involvement in CAR: questionnaire responses

The responses above indicate varying degrees of engagement with CAR, ranging from informal reflective practice to more structured research, but the extent to which they align with CAR's systematic nature is limited. Participants P06, P10, and P12 describe reflective and adaptive teaching approaches that involve collecting informal feedback from students and colleagues, and P06 further notes that CAR is a “*natural part of everyday*,” illustrating an ongoing commitment to improvement. Similarly, P10 emphasises student well-being and informal feedback, indicating strong reflective practice but appearing to be anecdotal rather than research-driven. P09 and P17 mention research activities such as “*reviewing output/student reaction*” and “*researching independent learning and deeper thinking*”, but these statements are a little too vague to confirm their alignment with the CAR framework. P16 relates their engagement to a “*Diploma in Education and Training*,” indicating that the CAR principles are being applied within a formal academic context, but not necessarily in the classroom.

Earlier findings for this research question focused on language teachers' explicit engagement in CAR. This next section explores whether teachers engage in the underlying practices associated with CAR, whether they are consciously aware of this or not; this serves to triangulate actual engagement with engagement in CAR-related behaviours, thus providing a more credible picture of inquiry-based practice. Items 36 to 45 were used to determine these findings, and these items can be categorised as follows:

Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange:

- Item 36. I talk about successful classroom strategies to other teachers.
- Item 37. I share my lesson planning ideas with other teachers.
- Item 44. I discuss lessons that do not go well with other practitioners.

Reflective Practice:

- Item 39. I evaluate my lessons after teaching them.
- Item 42. I reflect on lessons that were not successful.
- Item 45. I experiment with new activities in my classroom.

Inquiry and Adaptation:

- Item 38. I change my teaching methods to suit the students I teach.
- Item 43. I read research on teaching methods and approaches.

Students' Voice and Evidence Gathering:

- Item 40. I ask students what types of teaching strategies they prefer.
- Item 41. I ask my students what their learning styles are.

Cronbach's alpha was applied to test the internal consistency of these 10 items.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.856	10

Table 20. Cronbach's alpha for implicit items for RQ3.

Table 20 above shows a Cronbach's alpha of .856, indicating that the items in this scale have high internal consistency. This means the items reliably measure engagement in CAR-

related behaviours. Indicating language teachers responded in a similar way, showing that this scale is dependable. After establishing the reliability of the scale, descriptive statistics are examined below to show participants' responses.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Engagement_m	46	2.40	4.90	3.5239	.55184
Valid N (listwise)	46				

Table 21. Descriptive statistics for implicit items for RQ3. Engagement in CAR

On a 1-5 scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always), the mean of 3.52 indicates that teachers generally engage in these implicit CAR behaviours between 'sometimes' and 'often', nudging a little more to 'often'. The standard deviation of 0.55 shows a moderate spread, and most responses generally cluster around the mid- to higher range. The range of 2.40 to 4.90 shows that some respondents are closer to 'rarely' and 'sometimes' while others are near 'always'. The true average is likely to fall between 'sometimes' (3) and 'often' (4), suggesting that teachers generally engage in CAR-related behaviours fairly regularly.

Building on these descriptive statistics, Table 22 below presents the item averages to show which implicit CAR behaviours are most and least frequently enacted.

Item	Item 36	Item 37	Item 38	Item 39	Item 40	Item 41	Item 42	Item 43	Item 44	Item 45
Mean scores	3.65	3.43	4.11	4.09	3.02	2.83	4.54	2.87	3.17	3.52
Category	Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange		Reflective Practice		Enquiry & Adaptation		Students' Voice & Evidence Gathering			
Items	36, 37, 44		39, 42, 46		38, 43		40, 41			
Means	Mean = 3.42		Mean = 4.05		Mean = 3.49		Mean = 2.93			

Table 22. Item and category mean scores for implicit CAR behaviours

The results above show the strongest engagement in reflective practice (mean = 4.05), with frequent lesson evaluation (4.09) in particular reflecting on what did not go well (4.53). Experimentation scored a moderate 3.52 mean score, likewise inquiry and adaptation (3.49). There appeared to be regular adaptation to students (4.11), but one of the lowest mean scores was for reading of research (2.87), which suggests practice is more experience-led than research-informed. Collaboration and knowledge exchange have a mean score of 3.42, with staff more likely to share successes (3.65) than planning ideas (3.43) or discuss less successful lessons (3.17), which could indicate a potential psychological safety mechanism. Students' Voice and evidence gathering shows a lower mean score (2.93) with preferences for teaching style having a slightly higher mean (3.02) than asking about students' learning styles (2.83). This profile aligns with a composite mean of 3.52, indicating that engagement in CAR-related activities sits between sometimes and often. This suggests there are clear opportunities to increase research use, safe discussion of challenges and regular collection of learner feedback. With only 2 or 3 items per category, subscale means should only be taken as rough indicators of implicit CAR-behaviours rather than firm conclusions, as they might not actually reflect real differences in behaviour but might just be due to normal variation, or the effect of one item being slightly higher or slightly lower.

In summary, the questionnaire findings reflect engagement in reflective practices and a willingness to improve teaching and student experience through feedback and collaboration. Results suggest that full engagement in CAR remains limited. There are signs that respondents practice several elements associated with CAR, such as reflection, adaptation and some collaboration. There is limited evidence that these behaviours occur in a systematic, research-informed or cyclical way, which is central to CAR.

4.4.2 Engagement in CAR: Interview findings

This section presents interview findings to triangulate questionnaire data on language teachers' awareness of CAR and their engagement in any form of CAR. To explore this further, the following questions were used:

- In your training or in your experience, have you come across Classroom Action Research, and can you tell me what that means to you?
- In any of your training, were any elements of Classroom Action Research covered in any way?
- What types of research have you done yourself?

As noted with RQ2, there is some overlap with questions from the Interview Protocol, and this also applies to this research question. These questions are appropriate as they gain an overall understanding of participants' awareness and practical experience with CAR. Identifying the types of research participants have engaged in allows a comparison between possible reflective practices, CAR and other forms of research.

Interview data from 15 participants show that a majority of language teachers have never engaged in CAR. Those who have experienced CAR did so as part of their training, as part of their qualifications (MA/PGCE), or as part of training within their work institution. Figure 19 below shows interviewee responses and their involvement in CAR.

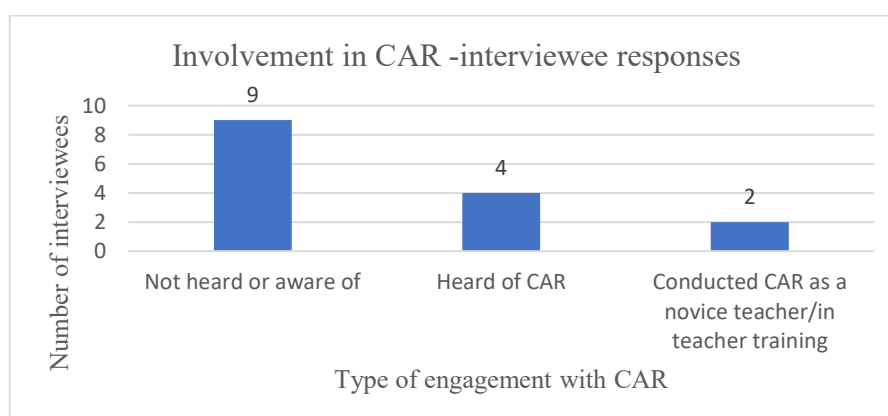


Figure 19. Interviewees' involvement in CAR

Interview data somewhat mirrored the questionnaire findings, showing limited engagement with CAR, with a majority (9/15) reporting they had not heard of or were unaware of it. Suggesting a lack of exposure to CAR or action research methodologies, and could imply that teacher training and education programmes cover other forms of research, or that there were no opportunities to engage with CAR.

Four interviewees had heard of CAR but had not actively engaged in the CAR process, which reflected some level of theoretical awareness despite no practical application of CAR. Only two interviewees stated they had some experience conducting CAR, but this was limited to early teaching experiences or to teacher training. The level of this engagement was further investigated, and P110 clarified the processes followed for CAR. P110 stated:

'I found it quite useful that we would identify, let's say, a problem or a difficult situation, we just want to find a solution, and then we, as a team with other teachers, we would formulate possible actions, whether this has to do with time management, materials, anything that will kind of like have a negative effect on our confidence as a teacher and in our teaching practices, in order to improve the conditions and to promote learning'

It may be that this interviewee's reflection on the perceived CAR process demonstrates intuitive engagement with some key principles of CAR. The initial stages of CAR (identifying a problem and planning) were addressed. This was conducted collaboratively; for example, resources/materials and time management issues were identified through a reflective approach aligned with CAR principles. This extract shows some awareness of the action-planning phase, which is typical of the early phases of CAR, but does not demonstrate the more systematic elements of the CAR cycle, such as structured observation, evidence-based reflection, or planning for further cycles. Although the extract aligns with parts of CAR, they do not reflect a fully robust CAR process, which would require clearer documentation, evaluation and

follow-up, leading to further cycles. Additionally, P111 also stated that they had performed some form of CAR.

P111 stated:

'I think we have done a task about knowing our learners because in our training, we have to do some practical teaching, so we just have a group of students. So, one task is that we need to design the interview questions to interview one of our students and to get to know why they come here, why they learn English in order to help them to design a possible learning plan or something. I think it's quite similar to the action research because you get a student already and you get to know them and you work them together to plan some activities with them and in the future after that, if possible, you can work them together to look at the outcomes.'

This extract indicates some awareness of principles that align with CAR processes, particularly in adopting a learner-centred and reflective approach. This participant used student interviews and collaborative discussion to plan future actions, demonstrating some understanding of evidence-based practice and aligning with the planning and action stages of CAR. As with P110's experience, this shows a positive foundation for CAR, but reference to the cyclical and systematic nature of CAR has not been made.

Overall, while interviewees in this research show some engagement in CAR, this does not appear to be commonplace and is not widely sustained or embedded in ongoing teaching practices or professional development. There is a need to provide more targeted professional development initiatives to promote CAR and support its integration into reflective teaching practices. Given limited engagement in CAR and a majority of responses demonstrating a lack of exposure or understanding of CAR, the extent of research language teachers' engagement in research was evaluated (See Figure 20 below).

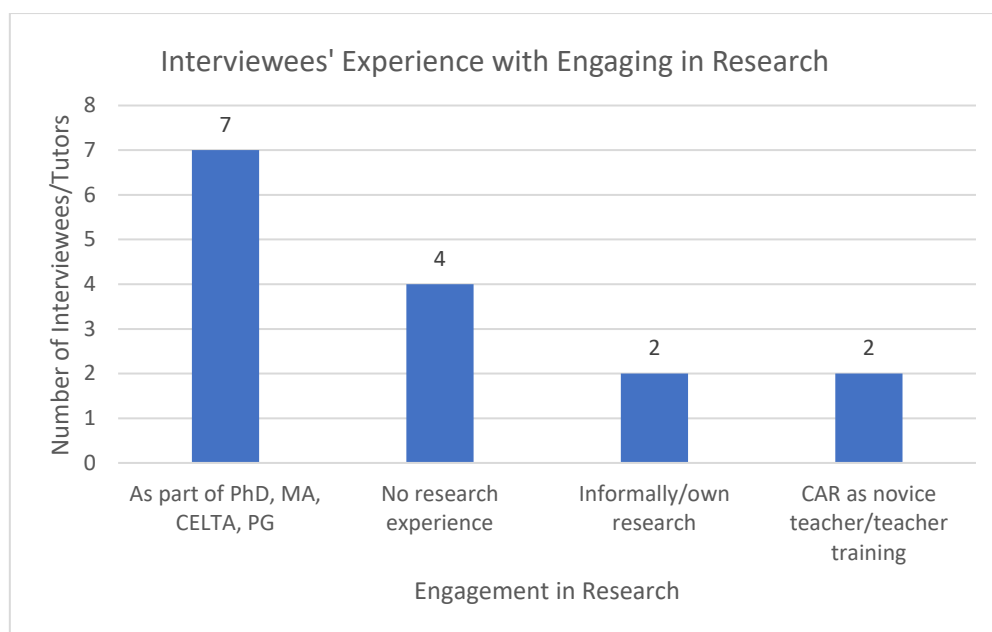


Figure 20. Interviewees' experience with engaging in research

Figure 20 above shows varying levels of engagement among the 15 interviewees. A slight majority indicated they had experience conducting research as part of a formal academic qualification, such as a PhD, MA, CELTA or related postgraduate programmes. This indicates that language teachers in this sample are introduced to research as part of a study requirement rather than embedded in their classroom practices; this result is not surprising, as some form of research is often required at the post-graduate level. Two tutors (P110/P111) noted some engagement in CAR, and P108 noted a desire to conduct CAR on dyslexia, but institutional constraints prevented this. Conversely, four (4/15) tutors reported no research experience at all, either during their training or as part of their professional development and teaching. Table 23 below summarises interviewees' responses on engagement in research, CAR, or any form of action research (AR) and will now be discussed in greater detail.

Theme	Participants	Examples
No awareness	P114, P115	Only aware in the course of this research
Aware but no engagement	P101, P103, P105, P109	Aware through training (e.g., CELTA, PhD, PGCE) did not participate in AR. But engaged in traditional research.
Informal/partial engagement/reflective practice	P102, P104, P106, P107, P112, P113	Collaborative planning/not AR structure. Equated AR with general reflection or academic research Use reflection to find out where to improve and become a better teacher (P102)
Some practical engagement/ parts of the CAR cycle	P108, P110, P111	Research like AR, but with institutional constraints (P108) and limited training. Used interviews, pre- and post-tests (P111), or collaborative problem-solving

Table 23. Interviewees' responses for engagement in research/action research

As shown in Table 23 above, a majority of interviewees reported limited engagement with CAR, but they appeared to be aware of parts of the action research cycle, such as data use, reflection, and collaboration. Notably, the use of reflection or self-directed research to enhance their classroom practices was highlighted. For example, P101 and P106 noted the use of surveys and diagnostic tests to inform decision-making in the classroom, but this lacks the structured stages of CAR. Similarly, P110 noted collaborative problem-solving with colleagues, but again, this does not follow the systematic action research stages expected for CAR. P102 and P106 specifically highlighted reflection as a basis for adapting their classroom practices, which possibly shows some understanding of CAR, but their responses did not encompass the complete action research cycle (plan, act, observe, reflect).

Although several interviewees stated they had CAR experience from their postgraduate/undergraduate/CELTA education, this experience rarely aligned with CAR in terms of being a systematic, cyclical process, and there appears to be variation in how CAR was understood, suggesting a need for teacher training institutions to incorporate action research into their research methods programmes. Despite P104 and P112 acknowledging the value of conducting CAR, they also noted significant barriers, including time, workload, and

the everyday practical demands of their work. Two participants (P110/P111) demonstrated some partial engagement with the principles of CAR. P110 notes that they have adopted a collaborative, problem-solving approach to identify classroom challenges, formulate actions, and implement strategies to “*improve the conditions and promote learning*” (plan/act).

There is an emphasis on teamwork, which reflects a supportive professional environment. Additionally, P111 shows awareness of the concept of CAR by referring to collating information on learners, then evaluating and informing planning. P111 notes they focus on interviewing students to find out “*why they learn English in order to help them to design a possible learning plan.*” P111 also notes, “*I think it’s quite similar to action research*”, which suggests some familiarity but only a partial level of understanding. Overall, both these responses demonstrate an emerging awareness of the principles of CAR (collaboration, reflection, learner-centred practices); however, their engagement lacks systematic data collection and does not quite reflect the cyclical nature of CAR.

To conclude this section, the questionnaire and interviews tend to converge on engagement in several implicit CAR behaviours (especially reflection and adaptation), but there is limited awareness of and sustained engagement in CAR. Interviews triangulate the patterns in the questionnaire data: limited engagement, and where CAR was reported, it was often linked to initial training or one-off tasks rather than ongoing cycles of CAR (plan, act, observe, reflect). Collaboration tended to focus on success sharing rather than evaluating evidence-based challenges, the use of research and using student feedback. Generally, findings suggest that language teachers adopt reflective, experience-led practice, which shows a partial alignment with CAR principles.

4.5. Research Question 4: To what extent do language teachers perceive they have autonomy over their own classroom?

To address Research Question Four, ‘To what extent do language teachers perceive they have autonomy over their own classroom?’, the Teacher Autonomy Scale (TAS) used was the result of Pearson and Moomaw’s (2006) TAS scale, which is comprised of 18 items (D1-D18). This was based on the previous work of Pearson and Hall (1993) on the TAS. Further to the TAS, interviewees’ responses also address language teacher autonomy. Investigating autonomy would provide insight into the extent to which language teachers are willing to take control of their own teaching, and whether other factors impact teachers’ perceptions of autonomy. Autonomous teachers would seek answers to problems posed (Mello et al., 2008) and feel empowered to make decisions about their classrooms. Findings reveal that teachers’ perceptions of their own autonomy are generally positive, providing important implications for the implementation of CAR. Some factors appear to pose barriers in relation to CAR, such as institutional control and decision-making in terms of assessment.

4.5.1 Perceptions of autonomy: questionnaire findings

Presentation of the questionnaire findings will begin with analysing the internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) of the scale used (18 items D1-D18), descriptive statistics and item mean scores.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.766	18

Table 24. Cronbach’s alpha reliability statistics for RQ 4 Teacher Autonomy Scale

A Cronbach’s alpha score of .766 (Table 24 above) for the 18-item TAS indicates an acceptable internal consistency, which suggests this level of reliability is adequate for creating

an overall autonomy score. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded (D2, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18), and the TAS items were scored 1 – 4 (1 = definitely false, 2 = false, 3 = true, 4 = definitely true). The following output from SPSS shows the descriptive statistics for the TAS.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
TAS_whole_M	46	2.22	3.56	2.7029	.26195
Valid N (listwise)	46				

Table 25. Descriptive statistics for Teacher Autonomy (TAS)

The TAS mean of 2.70 (Table 25 above) sits above the midpoint of 2.5, which shows a mild endorsement of autonomy rather than strong agreement. The range (min. 2.22 to max. 3.56) suggests that scores cluster near the mean, which aligns with the results from RQ3 on CAR-related elements of reflection and adaptation. To investigate these results further, the two subscales with the TAS were evaluated: Curriculum Autonomy (CA; items D1-D6) and General Autonomy (GA; items D7-D18). Before reviewing the descriptive statistics for these subscales, the internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha, was examined.

Curriculum Autonomy	General Autonomy								
Reliability Statistics <table> <tr> <th>Cronbach's Alpha</th><th>N of Items</th></tr> <tr> <td>.746</td><td>6</td></tr> </table>	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	.746	6	Reliability Statistics <table> <tr> <th>Cronbach's Alpha</th><th>N of Items</th></tr> <tr> <td>.682</td><td>12</td></tr> </table>	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	.682	12
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items								
.746	6								
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items								
.682	12								
Items D1-D6	Items D7-D18								

Table 26. Cronbach's alpha test of reliability for Curriculum and General Autonomy

The above subscale reliabilities indicate acceptable internal consistency for Curriculum Autonomy ($\alpha = .746$; 6 items) and adequate internal consistency for General Autonomy

($\alpha = .682$; 12 items). This suggests the GA might contain items in this subscale that might not all be measuring the same thing consistently. GA appears to include several different aspects of autonomy, such as teaching methods, classroom management and assessment or scheduling, which might impact the scale being somewhat coherent, which could have a negative impact on its reliability. By looking a little closer at the descriptive statistics for each scale, teachers' responses across the two dimensions of autonomy can be evaluated in greater detail.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
TAS_Curriculum_m	46	1.50	3.50	2.4565	.39974
Valid N (listwise)	46				

Table 27. Descriptive Statistics for Curriculum Autonomy

The mean score of 2.46, as shown in Table 27 above, for CA falls just below the midpoint, which suggests that language teachers only slightly lean towards not endorsing strong control over content and materials. The range 1.50-3.50 shows meaningful variation in that some teachers report limited autonomy and others fairly high, but there appears to be no extremely high CA, which infers structural or policy constraints on curriculum decisions. Generally, this pattern shows that CA is present but constrained for many teachers. A standard deviation of .40 (.399) means that most teachers' CA scores are fairly close to the average (2.46), with only a moderate spread.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
TAS_General_m	46	2.25	3.58	2.8261	.27150
Valid N (listwise)	46				

Table 28. Descriptive Statistics for General Autonomy

The mean score of 2.83 for General Autonomy sits above the midpoint (2.5), which

indicates moderate endorsement of GA. This means that responses were closer to ‘true’ rather than ‘false’, but not strong enough to be ‘definitely true’. The range of scores (2.25-3.58) shows meaningful variability, with some teachers reporting relatively low GA while others report fairly high GA, but there are some high scores, which endorse the previous note that GA appears to be multidimensional, and the overall mean here should be viewed as a broad tendency. The standard deviation is small (0.27), which shows that most scores sit close to the mean, showing that most teachers gave similar responses. The next stage in the analysis for this research question involves looking a little deeper into the overall item averages for each subscale, as this will help to clarify how different aspects of autonomy are reflected in teachers’ responses.

Curriculum Autonomy	Mean
D1. In my teaching, I use my own guidelines and procedures.	2.76
D2. In my situation, I have a say over the content and skills that are selected for teaching.	2.6
D3. My teaching focuses on those goals and objectives I select myself.	2.33
D4. What I teach in my class is determined for the most part by myself.	2.35
D5. The materials I use in my class are those I select.	2.43
D6. The content and skills taught in my class are those I select.	2.26

General Autonomy	Mean
D7. I am free to be creative in my teaching approach.	3.13
D8. The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control.	2.91
D9. Standards of behaviour in my classroom are set primarily by me.	3.17
D10. My job allows for a great deal of discretion on my part.	3.02
D11. The scheduling of the use of time in my classroom is under my control.	2.96
D12. I frequently use alternative procedures in my teaching.	3
D13. I follow my own guidelines on instruction.	2.74
D14. In my situation, I have substantial latitude in how major problems are solved.	2.61
D15. In my class, I have control over how classroom space is used.	2.8
D16. I select the evaluation and assessment activities used in my class.	1.87
D17. I select the teaching methods and strategies I use with my students.	2.98
D18. I have a say over the scheduling and use of time in my classroom.	2.72

Table 29. TAS item averages for Curriculum and General Autonomy.

The mean scores in Table 29 show that CA items (means 2.26-2.76; subscale mean 2.83), indicate limited control over curriculum content and materials. However, teachers report

some scope to use their own guidelines and procedures (D1 = 2.76) and have some control over content and skills selected (D2 = 2.60). The mean scores for selecting goals (D3 = 2.33) and content (D6 = 2.26) show lower agreement. General Autonomy is moderately higher with a subscale mean of 2.83, with the freedom to be creative (D7 = 3.13), setting standards of behaviour (D9 = 3.17), discretion (D10 = 3.02) and using alternative procedures in teaching (D12 = 3) scoring slightly higher than other GA items. Scheduling within class time (D11 = 2.96) and choosing methods or strategies (D17 = 2.98) also fall above the subscale mean (2.83). These scores suggest that language teachers experience autonomy mostly in day-to-day instructional choices, suggesting moderate autonomy with these items. The weakest areas of autonomy reported fall within the assessment and institutional control, such as selecting evaluation or assessment activities (D18 = 1.87), solving major problems (D14 = 2.61), use of space (D15 = 2.80), and having a say over scheduling/use of time (D18 = 2.72). These items fall below the GA subscale mean of 2.83. When combining both subscales, these results suggest that respondents endorse autonomy to a degree but not strongly; responses show that autonomy is more evident in instructional choices rather than curriculum, assessment or structural constraints.

When interpreting the results from the TAS the four-category format (1= definitely false to 4 = definitely true) might not fully allow for nuances such as “sometimes”, so “moderate to high” autonomy is interpreted relative to the 1 to 4 continuum which means the move from false to true would fall above the mid-point of 2.5, signalling moderate autonomy rather than strong agreement. The scale was not altered to incorporate a mid-point or “sometimes” score because it preserves comparability with the original instrument from Pearson & Moomaw (2006) and maintains the validated item wording and structure. As a result, interpreting “moderate” vs “high” needs to be done with caution, and findings from the TAS have been triangulated with interviewee data to show how autonomy is exercised in

practice. Future research could provide a five- or seven-point version of the TAS to reflect a truer picture of autonomy, but this would be a distinct instrument and would have to be piloted and validated separately.

The above provides an overview of the results from the Teacher Autonomy Scale section of the questionnaire. The following presents interviewees' responses to the question regarding the degree of autonomy language teachers had in their current and previous positions. Fifteen interviews were conducted; one participant was not asked this question as I overlooked it.¹¹ Therefore, the following is based on fourteen responses.

4.5.2 Teachers' perceptions of autonomy in their own classroom: interview findings

During the interview process, interviewees were questioned on the extent to which they felt they had autonomy in their current role and/or previous roles with reference to planning and delivery within their own classroom. The key themes that emerged from this data were:

- Planning and delivery
- Overall aims and objectives
- Material creation, selection, and use
- Cultural Setting

Interviewees expressed views on autonomy that reflect some or all of the above themes. Most interviewees stated they had some or quite a lot of autonomy, which was related to how materials were delivered and to their ability to modify or use their own materials. Key aims and objectives were expected to be covered, and the end goal, preparation for assessments and/or exams, was a priority.

¹¹ It was only after reflecting on the data that I realised I had not asked about autonomy with one participant

Section 4.5.2. evaluates the data based on interviewees' responses to problem-solving and autonomy. The aim was to find out what language teachers did to address classroom issues, the extent to which this involved collaboration and research to find answers, and whether they acted on their lesson evaluations and reflections, key elements related to the principles of CAR. The following two questions were asked to gain data for this section:

When you are in your teaching roles, how much autonomy do you think you have or feel you have when you are planning and delivering your lessons?

What about you as a teacher, though? Do you feel you are autonomous as a teacher, not just the learner? (follow-up question if needed)

4.5.2.1 Autonomy: planning, delivery, aims, materials selection, and use

Investigating teacher autonomy in planning, delivery, aims, and the selection and use of materials reveals the extent to which teachers have the freedom to make informed pedagogical decisions in their classrooms. Autonomy in planning and delivery allows teachers to decide what to deliver and how. This gives teachers the freedom to adapt methods and techniques to the overarching aims, meeting both curriculum expectations and learner needs. Autonomy in selecting and using materials allows teachers to adapt, create, or modify resources to suit learner needs.

Interviewee findings show that teachers feel they have a good degree of autonomy, and P101 explains the degree of flexibility and choice to meet the aims of the lesson.

“Well, I’ll apply this to my current post. I’ve got quite a lot of autonomy in my planning, I mean obviously so long as learning objectives and aims are met, I mean we have prescribed material of variable quality often that material needs to be supplemented, and occasionally that material is completely replaced if I think I have better material than something that is on offer, I will use that instead”.

P101 perceived substantial autonomy in terms of how to structure lessons, what to cover, and the activities to deliver. There is freedom to decide, as long as objectives and curriculum expectations are met, which reflects the institution's expectations. There is also considerable autonomy in selecting materials, reflecting professional judgment in adapting or using more suitable materials to meet learner needs. P101 further explains that in terms of delivery, there was less autonomy, and this was somewhat unnatural to her teaching style, but there was acceptance of this to ensure consistency.

“The actual delivery of the lessons, no I would say there's a little bit more control there because of the way a lot of the material is designed and the way it's structured my personal experience is I have had to deliver lessons in a way that is slightly unnatural for my teaching style but I understand why it's done and understand there has to be some consistency across the board and some degree of control despite you know, having autonomy.”

P101 above acknowledges that there is a degree of institutional constraint in the way lessons have to be delivered, but accepts the rationale behind this. This shows there may be limitations on their autonomy regarding what and how content is delivered, as this participant's natural way of teaching is constrained. P104 also reflects a similar situation with their autonomy and states that they had a reasonable degree of autonomy in planning, given the materials provided, and that the materials were appropriate for the overall aims/objectives to be achieved.

“I think I have quite a lot of autonomy in terms of planning, really. I mean in terms of content we are quite or I would say I am quite not I say restricted. I don't mean in terms of you have to, in necessarily a negative way because we have subject content we have to cover to meet those learning outcomes with the students so either way the content kind of has to be or has to follow the guidelines and the materials that we have got but within the way we use the content, approach the content, adapt to it, add to it, change it is quite flexible so I feel there's quite a lot of autonomy to do what

This response shows two perspectives on autonomy: their organisation dictates the content, but there is significant autonomy in how to teach it. Here, there is an opportunity to apply some principles of CAR, such as the ability to experiment, reflect and adapt despite institutional constraints on what needs to be taught. There is a need to balance institutional control and professional freedom, reflecting the conditions teachers face, given that these lessons are often also assessment-driven. These teachers have the flexibility to approach their lessons and adapt the content, even if their institution has dictated the content. This shows the potential and scope to conduct CAR and evaluate how they can bridge external expectations and students' needs to their teaching context.

Interviewees P105, P106, P113, and P114 further acknowledged they had had a good degree of autonomy, but this was within the scope of the plan provided for them. Autonomy was expressed as the ability to decide which materials to use and how to adapt them to students' needs, mirroring the perspectives of P101 and P104. P105 and P106 both perceive that they had considerable autonomy in material use and adaptation, as P105 reflects a strong sense of autonomy and freedom in planning and materials use, but this is balanced by acceptance of institutional expectations. This is clarified through the following comment:

"I feel pretty autonomous. There's always the guide or the teaching review of what should be taught, but other than that, I feel that I have been able to make my own decisions as to what to present to the students, or what materials to use and maybe adapt existing materials. So, I haven't felt restricted in that respect".

P106 somewhat reflects the same perception that they have strong autonomy, but is bound by institutional guidelines and time constraints:

"I think that I have 100%. I mean there is a plan that I need to follow but because of time constraints and because that planning is quite general, then as long as I complete say a unit per week, then it's me who has to think what my students need and what sections of those units should be done as a whole class or as homework."

Here, there is a sense of freedom to make decisions based on students' needs and to make pedagogical decisions, and this allows this participant to experiment with materials and approaches and to evaluate outcomes; this is somewhat synonymous with the principles of CAR. Despite the constraints of time, particularly with reference to completing "*a unit per week*", P106 perceives autonomy within their own classroom and the opportunity to make professional decisions. This was also the perception of P114 notes "*a fair amount of autonomy in terms of choosing relevant material*", but there were institutional norms guided what was taught and when ("*grammar in the morning, functional language in the afternoon*"). This could be because students are more cognitively aware in the mornings, as grammar requires more analytical thinking. At the same time, the afternoon functional language sessions are usually more interactive, which could reflect students' energy levels. P114 also states that "*in terms of what you, what you taught, obviously was dependent on you know, student needs, so there was a lot of flexibility there, um, as long as obviously it achieved student objectives.*"

P115 equally perceives their autonomy in terms of freedom to deliver lessons as they wish, provided this follows the scheme of work by stating:

'I have a scheme, but it is more like an overview really, then I have the autonomy to deliver it how I choose – so yes, I have a lot of autonomy in terms of delivering the lessons.'

Following the plan is not so much an expectation as a reference. This implies that P115 may have more autonomy over what is taught and how. The varying degrees of autonomy expressed above show that all participants are flexible in what they deliver in their classrooms and show the potential to conduct CAR. Although in some cases institutional expectations dictate what is covered, these participants generally have the autonomy to evaluate students' needs, select materials and deliver them as they wish.

Autonomy within a cultural context was another theme that emerged from the interview data regarding materials and delivery. This was highlighted by two participants (P109: UK/Japan and P110: UK/Cyprus).

Table 30 below provides a brief comparison of how P109 and P110 felt about autonomy over their teaching and the use of materials, comparing the UK with another country. In both cases, the two respondents stated they felt they had more autonomy when working in a UK setting. As P110 noted, the focus for the context teaching in Cyprus was exam-driven, thus the difference in perceived autonomy.

P109	UK: <i>Autonomy comes naturally</i> <i>Lots of support materials offered</i> <i>Detailed teaching overview and time frame, but able to use material to address class strengths and weaknesses</i> <i>Intrinsically work out what needs supplementing</i>	Japan: <i>Structured but not planned</i> <i>Materials did not encourage active learning</i> <i>Not enticing</i> <i>Decided to use materials from previous roles/different countries</i> <i>Felt was not teaching as well as could be</i>
P110	UK: <i>Freedom to prepare own lessons/ activities</i> <i>Prefers freedom to use/prepare own materials</i>	Cyprus: <i>Focus on passing an exam</i> <i>Some freedom, but had to obey the rules</i> <i>Curriculum/materials given: no freedom</i> <i>Find ways to be creative, given the constraints</i>

Table 30. Cultural comparison of perceived autonomy in relation to material use and delivery

The comments in Table 30 above highlight how cultural and institutional contexts shape the extent to which these participants perceive their autonomy with planning, delivery and material use. Both participants highlight the freedom to be flexible and that it is more natural to be autonomous in their classrooms. However, examinations and their teaching context in Japan and Cyprus appear to be more restrictive and prescriptive, which was perceived as a possible constraint on the quality of teaching. The influence of cultural and institutional context appears to recur in the data for the previous research questions (RQ 2 & 3) and arises in RQ5, and is not just unique to autonomy. For example, in RQ2, perceptions of CAR are not

only shaped by individual attitudes but also by institutional culture (time, support). The link between the results for all research questions and the cultural setting will be further highlighted in Chapter 5, the Discussion section.

Perceived autonomy depended on a range of factors for the respondents in this study. English language teachers note that generally, there was an overarching plan for them to follow, which would be an expectation in most educational establishments. The setting and purpose of the teaching reflected a range of views concerning perceived autonomy. Planning and delivery were considered areas where respondents felt they had more control and increased autonomy. Perceived autonomy appeared to be lower depending on the cultural setting and the purpose of the course. Despite this, respondents indicated they were able to modify materials and make changes to suit their students' needs, reflecting greater perceived autonomy.

4.5.3 Autonomy and Problem-solving

To further investigate teachers' perceived autonomy and CAR, the question was posed to interviewees: *'If you are faced with a classroom situation that worries you, maybe a student cannot grasp a certain concept or language element, what would you do, or what do you do?'* The aim of posing this question was to ascertain whether language tutors investigated problem-solving strategies and how they approached this. This also served to find whether language tutors' approaches reflected elements of the CAR process.

The following (Table 31) summarises interviewees' responses and the key themes that emerged from the evaluation of data on how participants approach problems in their classrooms.

Theme	Participant	Example
Self-reflection & Adaptation	P101, P106, P107, P114	Reflection and use of student feedback to adapt lessons and improve teaching after finding out what did or did not work.
Individual Support Strategies	P102, P103, P105, P111	Tutorials, informal discussions, and regular communication to address student difficulties.
Flexible-Problem Solving	P102, P103, P105, P111	Independent problem-solving, changing lesson plans, and researching solutions
Peer Collaboration	P103, P104, P109, P112	Getting advice, feedback, and support from other tutors and managers to address classroom challenges
Understanding Learners	P104, P110, P111	Reflect on classroom dynamics, student reactions, and individual learning styles to identify problems.
Creative & Adaptive Techniques	P105, P110, P115	Adapt lessons, be more creative/dynamic, link content to students' experiences, and design visual materials.
Use of Literature	P106, P108, P111, P114	Consulting research papers, Google Scholar and other academic sources to improve classroom practices and inform classroom strategies.
Barrier Identification	P104, P107, P112	Identify obstacles such as class size, institutional constraints, or hidden learner issues that hinder problem-solving.

Table 31. Summary of interviewees' responses for their approach to problem-solving

When discussing autonomy and CAR, interviewees were asked how they respond to problems that occur in their classrooms. The aim of this was to establish to what extent language teachers were autonomous and whether elements of the CAR process were reflected. Results indicate a degree of teacher autonomy, and the processes language teachers followed could be aligned to classroom action research, particularly in the areas of reflection, adaptation, collaboration and learner-centred practices. Teachers demonstrated autonomy by identifying classroom issues, making decisions about what to do, and modifying their approach, all based on student feedback and self-reflection. When analysing interviewees' responses regarding CAR, the following key themes emerged, as shown in Figure 21 below.

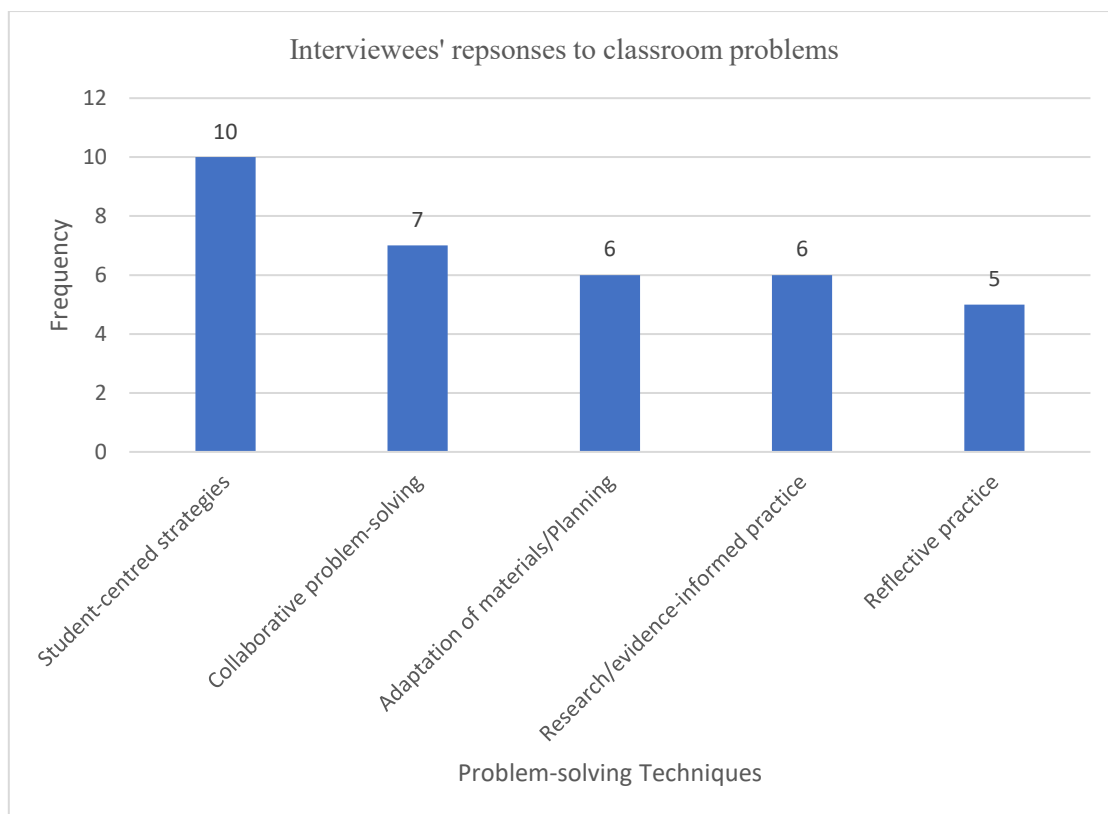


Figure 21. Problem-solving techniques: interview data

The findings show that teachers are quite autonomous in solving problems in their classrooms. Emerging themes, such as student-centred solutions, show that teachers actively take responsibility for identifying challenges and adapting their teaching accordingly. Additionally, seeking peer collaboration and reviewing related literature suggests professional autonomy that is informed and deliberate. Applying reflective practices in the classroom, which lead to action, implies reflection-in-action and the ability to make on-the-spot changes. These practices closely align with CAR, but not necessarily as a systematic process incorporating all stages of the CAR process. There is limited evidence of the acting and observing phases and of future actions that typify an ongoing process expected of CAR. Despite this, evaluating the autonomy teachers perceive indicates the extent to which they unconsciously engage in parts of the CAR cycle. Considering that students are central to decision-making, collaboration to

find solutions, and reflective practice, demonstrates the essence of CAR, showing that teachers in this part of the study report a high degree of autonomy when problem-solving. ,

Both questionnaire and interview findings generally follow a similar trend, but each highlights different aspects of autonomy. Quantitative data shows where autonomy is stronger or weaker, for example, with instructional decisions, curriculum content, assessment activities and scheduling. Whereas qualitative data illustrate how this is enacted in practice, teachers report adapting materials when curriculum content is fixed and making methodological adjustments while assessment requirements remain prescribed. Interviewees' accounts further highlight the contextual factors that shape autonomy, which helps to explain why certain areas appear more constrained in the questionnaire. This might reflect common features of language-teaching contexts, where teachers have freedom in how they deliver lessons but more limited influence over what must be taught or how learning is assessed, which creates uneven autonomy across domains. Although qualitative data generally reflects this pattern, several interviewees highlighted cultural and institutional variations, such as exam-driven settings outside of the UK, reinforcing that perceived autonomy is shaped by context. Additionally, interview data present stronger indications of instructional autonomy (GA), but this could be due to interviewer effects and desirability bias. Constraints reported from questionnaire data are more noticeable with CA being weaker and several facets of GA reflecting constraints (assessment and scheduling). The contrast between the interview and questionnaire findings is that teachers state they have more freedom in their everyday teaching than the quantitative data suggests. Interviewees highlight the on-the-spot choices they can make, whereas the questionnaire (CA/GA) highlights the constraints more clearly.

4.6 Research Question 5: What are teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research after participating in Continuing Professional Development and conducting CAR in their own classrooms?

To address Research Question 5 concerning teachers' perceptions of CAR, four teacher narratives will be presented. This aims to provide a clear insight into language teachers' perceptions of CAR by reviewing their experiences during the CAR process, deciding which topics to research, participating in focus group interviews, using reflective diaries, and their impressions of CAR through a final exit interview. Four participants completed this part of the study, and the following table provides an overview of their profiles.

Participant	Age	Nationality	First Language	Other Languages	Qualifications	Years teaching EAL/ESL/ EAP/ESP	Countries taught in
Demi	44	Argentine / Italian	Spanish	English, Italian, French, German	Bed Teaching English, MA TEFL	21	Argentina, USA, UK, New Zealand
Zoe	30	Greek-Cypriot	Greek	English, Italian	BA English Language, MA TEFL, PhD TEFL	8	Cyprus, UK, Germany
Ken	30	British	English	Japanese	CELTA	3.5	Japan, UK
Emma	33	American	English	French	CELTA	4	USA, France, UK, Morocco

Table 32. Stage Three Participant Profiles

All participants were working under my line management in the same setting. The data used from the findings for this section will be presented for each teacher-researcher in the following order:

- Perceptions of CAR compared to traditional research
- Focus group meetings
- Keeping a reflective diary
- Challenges
- Individual interviews on final thoughts on conducting CAR

4.6.1 Demi

Demi is a bilingual (English and Spanish) teacher of English who qualified in Argentina (BEd in Teaching English) and Spain (MA TEFL). At the time of the study, Demi had 21 years of teaching experience and taught in Argentina, the USA, the UK, and New Zealand. Although working as a full-time EAP and Academic Skills tutor, she was also a part-time PhD candidate.

Demi's perceptions of CAR compared to traditional research

Demi had not previously conducted CAR or any form of action research but had conducted research for her BEd, MA and was in the process of writing a proposal for her PhD thesis. When asked what she thought of CAR before carrying out her own CAR, she viewed the concept of action research as always being in her mind. For Demi, reflection is a significant part of her teaching career, and she views the process as a continual one, highlighting reflection to assess what went well and what could have been improved. She clarifies this during the exit interview after conducting CAR by stating:

"In people like me, I would say, because I'm sometimes I am over-reflective, it's a... it's during the lessons, at the end of the lessons, all the time wondering what you could have done better, what went well, why students reacted in the way they did. What you reacted in the way you did, and what things can be done to improve. So, it has always been there in terms of helping me improve."

Demi also acknowledged that using reflection to improve might not have been successful at the time, but still views reflection as a strategy to help her improve in her work in the institution in which she works. Demi highlighted cultural differences as a factor when comparing CAR to traditional research, and possibly because of her international experience, she might not have held the view of CAR and the reflection process in CAR as a valuable one:

“I belong in a culture that is quite.. umm, that regards things quite generally, so, we are not very good. I mean I learnt it as I attended university in foreign countries, but if I had continued and developed my career only in Argentina, I would have been so tied to procedures.”

Demi's account above suggests that her experience with reflection and acting on strategies to improve classroom practice is due to her experience in international settings. Demi has also had experience in higher education and research, although not action research. In the workplace in her own country, where there was a lack of autonomy, teachers might have been expected to follow procedures closely; there was little room to work outside of these expectations. Demi appears to be very aware of reflection to improve her students' and her own performance, and this represents underlying principles of CAR as she is continually reflecting, analysing and looking for solutions.

Before conducting CAR, participants attended training on how to perform CAR and the steps involved. This training also served to reflect on current classroom practices and to consider possible research questions on which to base their CAR. Following this, two focus group meetings brought all participants together to discuss the stage they were at and to share their experiences generally; an agenda did not drive these meetings as the aim was to bring all teacher-researchers together to encourage discussion on their experience, share any successes and challenges and to build a research community which enhances their motivation and increased autonomy. Below is Demi's view of the focus group meetings

Demi's view of the Focus group meetings during the CAR Process

Demi was asked about her perceptions of the focus group meetings, and here she outlined their value, which was due to the focus being on students and teachers. Ordinarily, I would have set a fixed agenda, but I aimed to make this teacher-focused and wanted to adopt

a more natural flow of conversation. Demi notes the different atmosphere for these meetings compared to previous ones.

“Yeah, that was great, yes. And, er, I really think we should do that more often as the atmosphere is completely different [from] departmental meetings are also relaxed, but there is another focus.....the focus there is the students, and in these meetings, we were the focus, and our feelings are shared experiences. I think that’s the best thing we can do. You managed to see, and this is part of the reflection in my diary when it comes to feedback. When you talk to students you see that your practices are sometimes very similar to that of other tutors but still when you can discuss this, you can share. When you see that others feel the same as you...then, this, this is taken to a different level and it’s much more helpful.”

Demi provides an encouraging and positive response to the collaborative meetings. This reflects the intention of these meetings, which was to provide a safe, non-judgmental space for these participants to share their thoughts and feelings. Demi is generally very self-critical and her acknowledgement of the value of these meetings shows a move from critical self-reflection to a more collective reflective experience, which is transformative and highlights the value of institutional support during the CAR process.

To further evaluate language teachers’ perspectives of CAR, participants were asked to keep a reflective diary to record their ongoing perceptions, thoughts and decision-making processes. The aim of this was to gain an insight into how teacher-researchers used reflections to inform future practices. There were no strict conditions on the format of the diary entries, but guidance was given so participants could understand the expectations of this exercise. It was stressed that the entries should remain as authentic as possible, be keywords, phrases, sentences and that there was no expectation on the length of entries. Participants were informed they should submit their original entries and not rewrite, tidy up or present a pristine diary. The following shows excerpts of Demi’s diary and her thoughts on keeping a reflective diary when asked how she felt about this part of the CAR process.

Keeping a reflective diary: Demi's experience

During the exit interview, Demi made several comments on keeping a reflective diary. She stated that as a young student, she had always made notes and enjoyed doing this. She explained that her notes were based on reflections but were “*cleaned*” before submitting them. Therefore, it might be challenging to fully appreciate Demi's thoughts and feelings whilst conducting CAR. Demi noted that reflection is built into her lessons, and she paid particular attention to this when I was trying to clean my notes.

So, it is apparent that the diary entries were rewritten or tidied up before they were submitted, which reflects Demi's previous point that she is very self-reflective and self-critical. Her response to the process of keeping a reflective diary was:

“That was okay. You know that I like writing, so. And besides, it's something that I always tell students, if you manage to put something in writing, then you will be able to look at it in a different light, so you will be able to remember it, and you will be able to analyse it in a different way. So, writing is always helpful from every perspective. It wasn't a burden if that is what the question is trying to ask. It's something that I always do anyway. So, I would say it's a very useful tool.”

In this entry, Demi confirms that writing reflections is a natural part of her reflective process and finds it helpful. She confirms that keeping a reflective diary “*wasn't a burden*” as she finds writing enjoyable and one she always encourages her students to do. Demi's reflection after the process (reflection on action) might mean that the diary entries on her thoughts and feelings during the process have been edited or changed to some degree.

The following is an extract of Demi's diary in week four, and at this stage, participants were still in the process of deciding on a research area and a possible question.

2. [W4] w/c March 29

Not much time to formalise process. However, I've been thinking about possible areas to focus on. There are so many! Improving learner engagement, cultural differences, how thinking patterns are reflected in writing (from paragraph organisation to text structure), reducing resistance to new ways of learning, using technology without losing focus or wasting time, time management... and FEEDBACK (how to help student to act on the comments they receive!) I have even considered focusing on me, rather than on my students. I wonder whether that is possible: 'self-analysis'!! How effective is my teaching? Do student progress & results reflect my teaching? Why am I so anxious before certain lessons and so relaxed for other? As a role-model, should my English be 'absolutely perfect' (as I think it should be) or am I allowed some opportunities for improvement? Anyway... I need to focus and devise my plan around feedback, which is what 'bothers' me the most right now...

Demi's entry above shows she is deliberating on what to focus on for her CAR, and soon switches to her own anxieties as a language teacher and her responsibility for the students' results and whether her teaching practices are the possible cause for their progress and results. This then leads to her thoughts on being a non-native English speaker and the need to be 'absolutely perfect' given her status as a teacher and role model. Demi is very self-critical, and this extract highlights the possible implications of this, such as causing her stress and a distorted reflection of herself. This can cause emotional exhaustion and especially with the anxiety she feels. When reflecting on the CAR process, Demi's ninth entry, made in week ten, further reflects her self-criticality, but it also reflects her learning in terms of the key processes for CAR. In both entries, Demi notes that time could be an inhibiting factor.

9. [W10] w/c May 24

> I realise I should have used the "Plan / Act / Observe / Reflect / Plan" template...
Old habits die hard I suppose. I'm failing the 'formalisation' process. Still, all elements are included in my notes. Time is tight.

During the training process, all participants were informed they could use the template for making diary notes (see Appendix 11), were given an example (see Appendix 12) or use any system they felt comfortable with. The comment above highlights Demi's thoughts on not

using the ‘Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect’ template and that because of this, she might not be succeeding in the CAR. Again, this reflects Demi’s reservations about her abilities, and then she validates her use of her own system. Demi again intimates that time is a factor for her. Demi selected using feedback in students’ writing as an area for her CAR, and this entry starts with deliberations of what to focus on with students and then switches to Demi as a practitioner. She expresses her anxiety in terms of being a role model, given that she is a non-native speaker of English. Despite being a fluent bilingual speaker of English and Spanish, she questions whether she meets her own expectations in terms of language. This self-criticality is evident in most of Demi’s entries, and more emotive language is used with self-reflection than with reflection on her students’ performance. For example, the following entry, again made in week ten, explains her thoughts.

What else can I do when students do not act on feedback and questions? Their assessments are still weak... Some progress is seen but, in the end, if most students do not respond to feedback and not pass subject whose fault is it? Or rather, how is this perceived by me and others...?

Five weeks gone... CAR not properly conducted (for the standards I set to myself -properly planned research, that is). Too much going on....

I've noticed that those students who act on feedback, only do so on 'easy targets' (e.g. delete this). Mmmm

In the entry above, Demi outlines her thoughts on the CAR process and that she feels she is not conducting it properly. Demi is an experienced language teacher, and she might be focusing more on the methodological aspect of CAR, which is having an impact on her perceptions of how she is performing. Her concerns might reflect the perception that one cycle of CAR would solve a given problem rather than inform future cycles and adopting a systematic approach. The following provides Demi’s concluding thoughts on her experience conducting CAR.

Challenges

When asked about challenges during CAR, Demi noted certain tensions between performing CAR and time management. She had several responsibilities, and this could have impacted her ability to follow the systematic nature of CAR. Demi states:

“It’s probably related to time... I am working, have many students, I still have lessons to teach in Argentina and doing my own research, the family, the mind sometimes wanders.”

This admission reveals the pressure of performing multiple roles both professionally and personally. It appears here that Demi was always cognitively aware of CAR, and she might be intimating in her thoughts that CAR is not a single process and that one cycle leads to another, but it could also reflect Demi’s critical nature and that she is always conscious of what she needs to do next in a professional capacity.

“Even when I am dreaming, I am thinking about the next day and what I need to do...an ongoing process, never stops.”

Demi’s reflections in the exit interview appear to acknowledge the systematic process of CAR and that it has been embedded in her thought processes, but the act of recording and analysing her reflections posed some struggle. She implies that CAR needs to be formal. Demi notes the contextual nature of CAR, and the following extract highlights her thoughts on her current context and the class selected for CAR.

“If in an ideal situation, you can only probably, this is something that you can do in a primary or secondary classroom if you only have one group to teach and you can devote all your time that. And, it’s only one module then, formalising the process would be easier. But, as I’ve always done many, many things at the same time, so that’s probably the challenge to find the time to do it properly in terms of formalising it. If not, it is always, I mean if I don’t think about writing notes, it’s always in my head”

When considering Demi's challenges, it appears that she views CAR as being more successful with the concept of an ideal classroom and making CAR the sole focus. The formalisation process was highlighted, and she notes challenges related to documenting her research. This could impact the systematic rigour expected for CAR. Finally, Demi's busy lifestyle might have impacted her ability to convert her thoughts and reflections about CAR into meaningful, systematic CAR.

Demi's final thoughts on conducting CAR

Demi's thoughts on the CAR process were noted in her last diary entry and during the exit interview at the end of the study. Her diary entry states the strengths, limitations, and possible future research.

Strengths: a simple strategy that worked! Limitations: Sample (not ideal group/time?!)

Time constraints: module/my end (teaching, meetings, PhD panel, personal issues...).

Possibilities for future research: How to give feedback, how much, when (only formative or on final submission AGAIN (Defensive' feedback or Prof. Escardó?))? ¹

Demi's final thoughts highlight possible barriers to CAR. These include the group selected and timing, which was a prior concern outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Demi is currently a PhD candidate, and there were other constraints on her time concerning this. When asked about her perspectives on traditional research versus CAR in the final exit interview, Demi stated:

Well in my case, I tried to be a little more formal in these occasions, so in a way I followed all the steps and stages of traditional research so..I kind of had a blended approach.

This possibly implies that Demi might have been either a little unclear on the CAR process or that, because she was used to following traditional research, she felt comfortable with combining some stages of CAR with what she was used to doing. This is a positive step,

and it shows Demi is aware of CAR and she is attempting to use her familiarity with her own process and integrate what she is learning from CAR. This further reflects her autonomy, which is a positive transitional process to a more systematic CAR investigation. Demi also adds:

“Have I been a good professional so far? Or, should I start following procedure to, to the letter so I can be better. And then, and therefore I try to follow procedure. Still, I wasn’t successful cos at points when you are overloaded with work it’s, just well okay. This is why I haven’t sent you my notes yet they need tidying up because they are just loose words”.

Again, Demi shows she is very critical of her role and performance. Demi’s commitments outside her role as an English teacher are quite demanding on her time, and she also perceives this as a barrier to successful CAR. Although Demi perceives her involvement and diary entries as a limitation, they demonstrate genuine engagement in CAR through her reflections and willingness to follow the systematic nature of CAR. Overall, Demi’s experience engaging in CAR seems to be a positive one, despite the negative evaluation of herself.

4.6.2 Zoe

Zoe is a 30-year-old language tutor who is a Greek-Cypriot. She is a Greek first-language speaker and ranks herself as an English speaker who has ‘Professional Working Proficiency’ and holds a BA in English Language and English Language Teaching and an MA and PhD in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. At the time of this study, Zoe had been teaching EAP/ESL/EFL/ESP for 8 years, and this was her first-year teaching in an international pathway college.

Zoe’s perceptions before conducting CAR and relation to traditional research

During the final exit interview, Zoe was asked what she initially thought of conducting CAR before embarking on the study. Zoe stated:

“Before, I was worried that it would take up too much time. Worried that I would not be able to write, you know, detailed notes. This is something that I have been doing since the start of my teaching career. Always used to reflect on my lessons but because I have never actually followed, you know, specific steps with specific questions I didn’t know how, you know, how well I would be able to reflect on my lessons when I had specific “questions in mind.”

Here, Zoe notes that she was already reflective of her teaching and that the difference is reflecting with a specific focus (research question) in mind. The barriers she perceived initially were those of having the time to conduct CAR, which was also voiced by Demi. Zoe highlighted her concerns with writing a reflective diary, and these reservations were carried throughout the exit interview and feature quite prominently in nearly all of the questions Zoe answered. When asked about her opinion of CAR compared to traditional research, Zoe stated:

“Because I think it is more subjective, it cannot be objective. It depends on any teacher. Of course, there are techniques that the teachers can use in class, especially if, you know, they have to be effective, but I think this type of research, basically because you are reading our diary entries, and er.. You are reading our diary entries for techniques we use with our groups. Because we are dealing with humans, you know, humans are different, so my result from my feedback may be completely from [Ken’s] class because he has a completely different group.”

Zoe has had much experience with conducting research, as she has just completed her PhD in TEFL. She outlines that CAR is subjective and intimates that, as she is dealing with humans, the research environment is not as easy to control. Zoe stresses that her diary entry will be read, and at this stage, she states that the purpose of the diary entry is to review techniques used. It shows that Zoe is trying to critically engage with CAR and her view of the subjective nature of CAR, which is a move away from the controlled nature she probably experienced with her PhD research.

Zoe's view of the Focus group meetings during the CAR Process

Zoe was asked about her views on the CAR training at the beginning of the study. She highlights the value of this and points out the reflective stage of CAR as an important one for teachers. Zoe outlines that CAR has a positive impact on teachers' personal development.

"First of all, I think that it should be part of training in any type of educational institution. I think that it is important for teachers to understand, most, because we are very busy, we don't realise how important it is to, to reflect. And, how important classroom action research is for our personal development as teachers. I mean I have been doing that now for 2, 2 and half months, three months. Personally, I feel that I have developed as a teacher and that my teaching has improved. I know it's a bit, you know, a bit of a statement, but it's true because I actually spent time reflecting on what was going on in the classroom."

Further to Zoe's perceptions of CAR as positive for teachers' personal development, she reflects on her own professional development. This is possibly because the reflection process here was tailored to a specific element of her teaching, and seeing results might have been perceived as measurable for Zoe. Zoe appears to perceive her own development as somewhat surprising. This could imply Zoe's self-perception as a developing teacher and improving in the two to three months of the study, rather than reflecting on the improvement her students have made. Zoe participated in both of the focus group meetings and held a very positive view of these sessions, and highlighted that future meetings should have a CAR focus.

"I absolutely loved them. I completely agree with [Emma], it would be amazing if, actually, in our meetings, our weekly meetings, we devote 10-20 minutes on CAR to discuss about things that are going on in our classes, because even though I didn't directly research feedback, listening to [Demi] and to her actual outcome, it was very helpful. I could learn something."

Zoe appeared to value these meetings as an opportunity to share research experiences with other teachers within the study, but also to share good practices and learning from others. Zoe further highlights how helpful it was to know that other teachers are open to expressing their experiences and that these experiences are similar to her own.

“Also, it is good to know that other teachers are going through the same things that you are going through. For me, that was crucial; that was very important. It completely changed my thinking. It completely even changed the way I was taking notes. Because I used to be very judgmental of myself. Then I realise, it’s not just only you [Zoe], everyone sometimes have, you know has a student that is not engaged. It’s not you; it might be that particular day. This is something that [Ken] pointed out, and it is really nice. It is important to hear that from someone else. We all know it but we all live such busy lives; it is good to hear it from someone else.”

Zoe also stresses that hearing what other teachers are going through was very comforting and acts to validate her as a teacher and that she is performing as she should be. This reinforces collaborative dialogue and problem-solving. Zoe’s perception exemplifies how meetings that focus on teachers’ experiences rather than on agenda-driven items create a supportive environment which normalises classroom problems and teachers’ struggles.

Zoe’s perceptions on keeping a reflective diary featured in many of her responses.

Keeping a reflective diary: Zoe’s experience

Before presenting Zoe’s perceptions of the reflective diary, it needs to be noted that she found it extremely challenging to submit her reflective diary. I met with Zoe several times to discuss this and stressed that if she did not feel comfortable submitting it, she had the right not to. At each stage of this part of the study, participants were informed they could withdraw or not participate in any element, as I did not want to cause undue stress or potentially damage my relationship with her. Zoe set several deadlines for the diary submission and, at each meeting, stressed her anxieties about her diary being read. She was constantly reassured that

she did not need to submit it, but she wanted time to rewrite it. Zoe's last diary entry was on 16th April 2021, and she submitted the diary in September 2021, which suggests this was a somewhat stressful experience for her.

Zoe made six diary entries, and these entries were extremely descriptive, which could reflect her anxieties surrounding the submission of the diary. None of the entries link to her thoughts or feelings during the CAR process, but only describe the actions taken in the classroom and what students were doing.

MARCH DIARY ENTRIES

Main research questions to explore:

1. Getting quiet students to talk

Online tutorials (one-to-one tutoring).

Date 15.04.2021 Tutorial 1

This was my first tutorial with John. The main aim of this tutorial was to help him improve his writing skills. In the beginning of the lesson, I could sense he was not happy to be attending this tutorial. I have tried to break the ice and build rapport, but I realised early on that this would be challenging. His first question was:

"Do I actually have to attend these tutorials? I am very busy". I told him that I will reply to his question at the end of the session. I knew immediately that I had an hour to make him trust me and at the same time to assess his writing ability.

Zoe selected her one-to-one tutorials as a focus for CAR to assist students who needed an uplift in an element of the EAP. She outlines the student's response to having these tutorials and does not give any indication of the CAR process as to whether the assessment was part of the data collection stage. Zoe's entries were labelled with the number of the tutorials; in some cases, it was evident that the tutorials were with different students, but progression through the CAR cycle with these lessons was not evident. Although the intention was positive, as shown by the identification of the students, skill and writing diary entries, the entries were more descriptive rather than demonstrating any evidence of the stages involved in CAR. Zoe's third entry was with a different student and focused on speaking. It describes what happened in the

lesson, but her following entry gives some indication that there was reflection, which informed future planning.

Date 15.04.2021 Tutorial 3

Definitely a very challenging tutorial. The student was very quiet, and it was extremely difficult to engage her in a discussion. Zhenxin was basically looking at me without saying anything for the one-hour tutorial. I tried to ask her general questions, but she would not reply to me. She was definitely using an app to translate what I was saying as I could hear a background voice.

Steps taken:

1. I asked her very simple question (How do you like to spend your free time? Do you have brothers or sisters? Describe your family members).

Zoe then attempts to provide the steps to be taken with this student. Although the specific terminology related to CAR has not been stated, this does indicate there has been some form of observation, reflection, and then following planning. Zoe also decided to review the recording of the lesson, as it would allow her to evaluate and use evidence on which to plan the next steps. Zoe documents this as follows:

Steps to be taken:

- I wrote my questions and statements in the chat box (this is something I have to do for the other tutorials as well). It works.
- Speak slower. After watching my zoom recording, I realised that I speak too fast. I should use short sentences instead of long ones and remember to adapt my vocabulary to the students' level! Crucial.
- I need to prepare statement cards/cue cards with key vocabulary.
- I need to brainstorm/research ways to give clearer instructions.
- Remember to speak slower.

For Zoe, this was a positive step forward in engaging in the CAR process, as it might have allowed her to reflect more objectively to refine her practice.

There was one further entry for this student, and before the lesson was conducted, Zoe spoke with me concerning the lack of engagement from the student. I gave her some strategies to use with the student, and this action suggested she was willing to seek guidance and try new things. The following entry describes the outcome of putting new strategies in place.

“My manager gave me an excellent idea: Just ask them what topics they like. I don’t know why I never thought of this. In fact, when I asked her what are her interests, I realised that she is passionate about shopping and travelling. Realising that was a game-changer. We started having a discussion on the various ways to shop and the advantages and disadvantages of shopping online versus shopping in the shops. Well, clearly there is a long way to go as she was making a lot of mistakes, but at least I could see light in the end of the tunnel! She started talking.”

This highlighted the importance of sharing ideas, and for Zoe to take the step to discuss this with her line manager was a big one. She noted that one simple question resulted in the student’s willingness to speak. This diary entry was less descriptive and reflected a positive step forward with the student and for Zoe’s professional development.

During the final exit interview, Zoe was asked her views on keeping a reflective diary. Here she notes the classroom situation with a reticent student, but reflects on her anxiety with her line manager reading the diary entry.

“Initially, I was struggling a little bit to engage an online student. And to be honest, because I know that you are going to read my entries, it has nothing to do with you being my manager, but you are someone else who will come and read my thoughts. I don’t know, I wasn’t feeling very comfortable.”

This explains why Zoe’s entries were student-focused and rather descriptive and do not reflect her thoughts or feelings about the situation. Zoe did recognise the value of writing a reflective diary and that it would help her improve a classroom situation, but her critical self-reflection was very evident when she further explained why writing a reflective diary was challenging.

“To be honest, it wasn’t only just for, because you would read the, my notes as my manager but, even for me, sometimes when you write something negative down and it is there looking at you, screaming at you, that note was screaming at me telling me, you know what you are not such a good teacher because on that particular occasion your students were not engaged and because I am a perfectionist this has always been a problem and I want my students to enjoy the lesson.”

It is evident here that Zoe was uncomfortable writing down any negative thoughts or feelings as she directly linked this to her proficiency as a teacher, even though during the focus group meetings, she expressed that it was a comfort to know all teachers were having issues with their students. Zoe seems to be more self-critical if this were written on paper, and expresses this as “*screaming*” at her. She further states it was difficult for my ego, and this was the most challenging point to read. Zoe also views herself as a perfectionist, and this might have had an impact on her diary entries, possibly not achieving the results she wanted, therefore not reflecting this in her diary entries. To further illustrate Zoe’s challenge in submitting a reflective diary, she stated:

“I will send you the notes. But I am completely making new diary entries because it has helped me, and I could see the effect on my students, and for me, that’s the most important thing.”

Zoe recognises that reflecting on the situation might benefit her more, and she recognises the positive impact on her students. So, she is employing more evidence-based informed actions, which show a purposeful decision with which she is comfortable.

Challenges

Zoe’s reflections on the challenges of conducting CAR emphasise the emotional demands of CAR rather than the operational constraints of the CAR process. Unlike the other teacher-researchers, Zoe did not identify time as a primary challenge:

“Time is not, wasn’t for me challenging... I take notes immediately after my class because it is when I have things fresh in my mind.”

Zoe’s challenges stemmed from the emotional discomfort of documenting perceived failures. She spoke earnestly about the difficulty of writing diary entries, as noted above, these entries might reflect negatively on her teaching performance and her adequacy as a teacher.

Zoe notes that if a negative point is written down and “*screaming at you*” emphasises that reflective writing could lead to self-scrutiny and not meeting the standards she had set for herself. She confirms this by stating:

“Having to write down that today your lesson was not so engaging...was a little bit difficult for my ego”

Whilst CAR promotes self-awareness and self-evaluation, Zoe’s experience focuses mostly on herself and not the process of CAR. It acknowledges that CAR is not emotionally neutral. Zoe’s anxieties are also heightened as she refers to the reflective diary being read by me, her Line Manager and that it forms part of the data collection process for my PhD.

“I was writing knowing that someone else will use this for their PhD. I was worried, you know what, you have to do a good job, otherwise someone will struggle.”

Although Zoe later confirms that she eventually ‘*completely forgot about [the] PhD*’, it reflects her vulnerability, especially when there are institutional or hierarchical relationships involved. Without the challenge of completing a reflective diary, Zoe’s experience could have been somewhat different.

Zoe’s final thoughts on conducting CAR

The following presents Zoe’s thoughts on the CAR process and reflects on it as a somewhat positive experience. Zoe was asked what she thought of the process, and she stated:

“I was asking challenging questions, because clearly there was an issue, otherwise I would not have spent time researching this research question. So, by the end of the process, I think that my teaching has improved. And, believe it or not, even my mental health because now that I know that I am not the only one. I know that everyone is in the same boat and that everyone is facing the same challenges and every single member of the team are trying their best to improve their classroom practices.”

Here, Zoe notes that she was asking questions about her own classroom practices and demonstrates an interest in the process as she spent time researching the topic area. She compares her experience with that of others in the study, notably facing certain challenges. This point was evident in her response to the focus group interviews. Zoe believes that going through the CAR process was beneficial for her teaching and mental health. It might be assumed that Zoe's reference to her mental health was to come to terms with the acceptance that she was not making as much progress as she wanted, and hearing this from other tutors was a comforting factor. Zoe confirms that time was not an issue, despite her reservations initially when she agreed to conduct CAR as part of this study.

"In my opinion, in my personal, time is not, it wasn't for me challenging, because what I did was, I take notes immediately after my class because it is when I have things fresh in my mind. It actually helped me because I identified the problem, immediately I tried to find sources online, and I read lots on what other teachers have experienced in order to come up with a new technique to use in the next class, so time was not a problem per se."

In the comment above, Zoe further refers to the reflective diary, and although she states that the time to conduct CAR was not an issue, she links the aspect of CAR to taking notes and researching sources to assist her with future lessons. She acknowledges the value of taking notes soon after the lessons to reflect and identify the problems she might be having. Finally, Zoe offers her views on the progress she felt she made conducting CAR and the value of seeing this progress.

"After the first month and especially after I could see results, I could see improvements in my students and in my teaching because I used to record the Zoom sessions and re-watch them, I actually realised how beneficial this process can be. Both for us, as teachers, but also for our students. Because sometimes it's good if you ask, you ask a question, you implement a couple of steps, and then you see the result of this, and you go back to the beginning. Coz usually what I found that, every question kind of brought up another question. It's a kind of puzzle, connecting pieces. For me, the process was like completing a puzzle."

Zoe also makes some reference to the cyclical nature of CAR when asking a question, then implementing a plan and then repeating the process, “*going back to the beginning.*” She also notes that this process leads to more questions and that each of these questions is connected. She further reflects on the success of implementing different techniques in her classroom.

“And, then everyday you test another technique and some of them are complete failure and some of them are really working and you can actually see the difference. And, you can see the difference on other human being’s progress. For me, that completely changed the game. Being able to see the success on my students.”

Here, Zoe believes there is a need to implement a different technique in every lesson, and this might be the reason for not gaining the success she expected, but she holds a positive view of the successes of CAR. She is keen for students to learn and do well, but often attributes lack of success to her performance as a teacher. Zoe’s final comment on implementing CAR, especially with using new or different techniques with reflection, is an interesting one, as it shows strong analytical awareness and Zoe’s development as a teacher-researcher.

“Yes, and to be honest, sometimes we all do things in our classroom and teaching practices and unless we formalise it and you reflect on what’s going on in the classroom, I think it is close to impossible to improve. Because sometimes, I have noticed that we tend to do the same thing, slightly changing the wording and think that we have used another technique, but in reality, it is the same technique just done differently.”

Zoe stresses that there is a need to reflect to improve, but also notes that teachers might only perform the same technique, but delivered in a different way. Unfortunately, this point was not explored further, and therefore, there are no specific examples of what this means to Zoe.

4.6.3 Ken

Ken was the only male tutor to take part in conducting CAR for this part of the study. Ken is a 30-year-old tutor whose first language is English. He has been teaching EAP/EFL/ESL/ESP for approximately three and a half years and has taught in Japan and the U.K. Ken holds a CELTA qualification and also teaches foundation research skills.

Ken's perceptions of CAR prior to CAR and in relation to traditional research

When asked about his perceptions of what he thought CAR involved, he acknowledged that his initial thoughts were somewhat confirmed and linked this to previous training.

“Umm, classroom action research was very much what I was expecting it to be. You kind of confirmed a lot of my thoughts. I remember you saying that it is a process that we already do quite naturally already. But a bit more formalised and a bit more systematic I suppose in a way. I kind of went back to my CELTA days, and I kind of thought of it in a really simple matter of just um, identifying a problem or choosing a problem that you have in the classroom, or an obstacle if you will, doing research in preparation, how to overcome it and then just trial and error. Doing that process in a way, that's essentially how my teaching began.”

Ken identifies that CAR is based on identifying a situation or problem that the teacher wants to address, and that there is a systematic way of addressing this problem, which involves researching and putting a plan in place. Ken further highlights that new strategies might be ‘trial and error’, and this shows an acceptance that new strategies might not be effective. Ken acknowledges that the process of experimenting with this teaching (*“trial and error”*) began early in his teaching career. Here Ken has identified parts of the CAR cycle (plan, act) and intimates he has some awareness of how to investigate his classroom. He then outlines the challenges that he faced:

“One of the biggest challenges was that I, I, very often overestimated the students. I don’t say that in a very negative way. There are some days when they perform brilliantly, and it will go so smoothly, and there are some days when half the class won’t even turn their cameras or microphones on, and they won’t be remotely engaged. Even though the lessons are very similar to something they did so well in.”

Ken expresses his frustrations with the class he has targeted for CAR, especially with online teaching and the challenges of trying to engage students. Ken had targeted an activity that he had success with prior to this lesson, but it was not successful. He further clarifies his thoughts on this situation.

At the time of this study, all lessons were online due to COVID-19. Here, Ken expresses that he was also very aware of his own mental health during this time. This might have added to his frustration with students' lack of engagement. He outlines that he had adopted a style of action that was not one he wanted to take, but eventually, it did yield results. Teaching online EAP lessons needs to be factored into the analysis for this research, as there is a certain lack of control over students' engagement in terms of turning on cameras, engaging in activities, and avoiding distractions such as the use of mobile phones, compared with controlling these behaviours in a face-to-face classroom.

“So, looking at my own data and my own results, it was like there was almost no correlation half the time. Like a potluck sort of draw, if you will. So, it’s difficult to know if there is any sort of correlation, a bit frustrating to be honest with you. And again, my own mental health is part of the mixed bag of variables, too. Like yesterday with [the student], although that’s not completely related, I started getting quite firm with him coz it got to the point where I was asking him really simple questions that I knew he could answer but yet struggling completely. Obviously, it got results in the end, but it was not the approach I wanted to take in the first place.”

This further reflects Ken’s understanding of the flexibility and adaptability when conducting CAR. Additionally, Ken is developing a strong professional awareness, and his

autonomous approach means he is taking responsibility for his choices, even though this might have an impact on his own emotional well-being.

Ken was also asked about his thoughts on the difference between CAR and traditional research. He explains one of the differences in terms of data collection. It is interesting to note that Ken has an awareness of data collection in the CAR process, but this perspective could have been influenced by his participation in this research project. Despite this, Ken does not highlight collecting data as an issue, but makes a distinction between the type of data and how this data is interpreted.

“Well, it is hugely qualitative, which obviously creates a certain, I wouldn’t say challenge but say more of a hurdle in terms of how it should be approached, because it is in nature, because it is very human-centred, it’s obviously incredibly variable, and it’s virtually nigh on impossible to measure as well. So, I suppose that would be the main thing. I suppose the data itself is what we’ve written but it can be interpreted but it can be subjective. It can also change depending on who looks at it or what perspective you choose to take or how you compare it to a different sort of school of thinking for example.”

In the entry above, Ken identifies the role of data in CAR, which is that data is collected, but not the instruments that might be used. He also stated that the data is open to interpretation, and he intimated that CAR is challenging to measure. It is unclear what he means by this statement. Still, it could be that given his view on qualitative data being open to interpretation, it shows his understanding of research philosophies and that CAR is challenging to quantify.

Ken demonstrates a good understanding of the interpretive nature of data and that it is interpretive.

Ken attended both focus group meetings, and the following section outlines his perspectives on taking part in these.

Ken's view of focus group meetings during the CAR Process

The focus of Ken's perspective on the focus group interviews reflects his appreciation of the perspectives of other members of the group and the opportunity to share good practices. He states. Ken felt the focus group meetings were valuable, and this was because he no longer felt isolated in his experiences. The reference to "*this one in particular*" refers to the second focus group meeting, and at this stage, participants had already started conducting CAR.

"I thought they were a great idea. I think they were absolutely fantastic on multiple levels. Um, the most recent meeting, as others did as well, but this one in particular, really alleviated my concerns that I may be the only teacher going through certain difficulties. Every single member of that meeting, including yourself, that spoke said at last a number of things that really resonated with the challenges, with the successes, and the thoughts that occurred during the process, and in terms of confidence and comfort, I really felt that was one of the greatest boons. Taking ideas from everyone else and seeing how they tackled it and problems as well instilled confidence. Also getting a few ideas."

Ken expresses his emotions quite freely, and this was the case for the other participants, especially in terms of voicing challenges and having the confidence to be honest about what they were experiencing. Ken highlights the value of sharing practices and how other participants solved particular problems faced during the process. As noted above with Zoe, sharing experiences and voicing concerns aids collective problem-solving and normalises these challenges. Ken displayed his thoughts and feelings quite freely, and when asked about his thoughts on keeping a reflective diary, he expressed his self-criticality.

Keeping a reflective diary: Ken's experience

Ken's answer to how he felt about keeping a reflective diary highlights the challenge with the timing of when to make notes, the quality of the notes, and concerns about the content of the diary.

“I didn’t have any problem with it but, I think the only issue was the commitment to meeting up and getting everything formally done to a standard where I was happy. I am fairly self-critical with things this, not in necessarily in a dangerous way but a way that is a bit more time-consuming. I would often, because I, a lot of the time, half the time those lessons had things going immediately after them, so getting down to write notes properly and giving that input was a little bit tricky at times. So, what I would do I would take 5 or 10 minutes during that break and do some really quick cursory notes. Enough so that I could come back and build upon it a little bit more. And obviously I have got recordings of all the lessons so there is that too. And I wouldn’t call it the biggest obstacle, but it was just being happy with the content, the organisation.”

Like other participants, Ken self-imposed a standard for the diary entries. Despite making it clear in the training that there were no expectations on the quality of notes, and that writing freely, rather than editing and rewriting the diaries, would suffice, Ken put certain expectations on himself which mirror the feedback from other participants in terms of the quality of what he wanted to submit. Ken demonstrates a high degree of autonomy and ownership with his reflective processes.

Like Zoe, Ken questions the quality of his diary entries, and this is because he might feel there was a certain expectation on him, given that I was his line manager as well as being the researcher.

‘To be honest with you, I could have done it a lot better. You obviously had a template that you gave us as well, provided on Teams, and I think there were 7 or 8 different sections on that. I feel like I completed most of the content that was asked for but not completely and not to a standard where I could be completely satisfied to be honest.

Ken notes the template that was suggested for the diary entries and further remarks that he was not satisfied with the standard of the entries. He acknowledges that he focused on the classroom situation and methods used, but putting down his personal thoughts was also needed.

The diary entry below is an extract from Week 7 of Ken’s CAR.

Objectives:

- This week I wanted to take a few important steps:
 - o Finishing the writing work from last week and moving onto a new approach/atmosphere in the class.
 - o Remind students that mobile phones should not be used in class.
 - o Remind students it is their responsibility to make the most of class time and their teacher(s) for support, questions etc.
 - o Observe how students respond to a lesson not focussing on academic language, centred around student input.
- This week I will take some input from the students to see how they use language outside the class in everyday life to use this as a basis for material and future planning.
- To build more of a rapport with the students in order to work towards more engagement and better communication.

Plan	Act	Observe	Reflect
- Finish writing work from last week promptly (if possible with quick peer review). - Take student input on topics for conversation & future lessons. - Use student input to shape the remainder of the lesson.	- Had students brainstorm what they enjoy speaking about in their L1. - Board topics for lesson and later use in the term. - Students have timed preparation and timed talks on topics of their choice (randomly assigned in order to simulate the nature of a speaking exam).	- Students generally seemed much more engaged throughout, though it was impossible to monitor everyone thoroughly due to the online platform. - It was much easier to connect to students, build rapport and include more elements of humour and enjoyment. - Students were able to give some simple feedback or response to the talks they listened to. - Students seem to respond positively to having the topic central to their own suggestions.	- This was the most engagement I had seen from this class since our first week. - Students responded well to light-hearted humour and casual conversation. - On the basis of verbal input, this was the most productive lesson to date. - Though this did not necessarily improve lexicon or other aspects of academic English, it may have improved confidence and class mentality for multiple students.

Although Ken reported that he wanted to put down his own personal thoughts, this comes across in terms of only the classroom processes and responses of the students. He reports successes and challenges, but this is directed towards the students and not about how he felt. Despite this, he notes that building a rapport with the students and using humour was a way forward to connecting with students. He highlights that student engagement was better. Ken's entries did not necessarily reflect the verbal thoughts and feelings he had expressed in the focus group meetings, which was also the case for other participants.

Challenges

When reflecting on challenges, Ken, like Zoe, notes the emotional demands of CAR, especially with the class he selected; he also found the changing classroom dynamics quite inconsistent. He identified "the class itself" as challenging.

Ken further expanded on this by noting that he found it difficult to maintain consistent data or class outcomes due to variations in student engagement. Ken expressed his frustration with the

apparent lack of correlation between his effort to teach the class and the students' responses.

He states:

"Looking at my own data and my own results, it was like there was almost no correlation half the time."

Ken might have perceived CAR as having clear, predictable outcomes, and this might not be the case. Also, his perceptions of the outcomes might lead him to feel they need to be positive ones. Some degree of correlation might be expected between interventions planned and student outcomes in order to guide future planning and improvements. This predictability might increase over time, but it needs to be noted that at this stage, online lessons and the unpredictability of students' responses in an online classroom were very much a new experience for teachers. Ken previously noted that the qualitative nature of CAR, but is seeking measurable outcomes. This shows early engagement in CAR, and if further cycles were conducted, Ken might have achieved the results he was looking for. This might suggest that Ken had some preconceived ideas about CAR and pedagogical practices and did not realise the emotional dimensions of teaching. Sometimes, frustration, disappointment and even stress could impact the extent to which the planning and acting stage of CAR is implemented.

Ken's final thoughts on conducting CAR

Ken's first point notes the value of CAR in relation to online classes and that it is a process he would try out with face-to-face classes that are particularly large. He also addresses formalising the process, but his view of what formalised means was not explored particularly well. It could be that he means identifying a topic, evaluating the data, forming a plan, acting, then observing and reflecting.

“I think the process has been really insightful to me. I think it has been very helpful, and I think I would use it in the future for particularly difficult classes, especially if they are online. I would love to use the formal process when I start teaching face-to-face groups. But in groups that are as large as that language class. I mean, it will happen, but I don’t know when it will happen.”

Ken goes on to note that the CAR process enabled him to reflect on the processes and approaches he took to his teaching. Ken explains that he is aware of this process but recognises this as some form of improvised action (*“off the cuff”*).

“And I also think it has taught me a little bit about how I approach my teaching or how I have recently approached my teaching. Which I know is always adapting and always changing, but instead of doing more things off the cuff or less formally I suppose I might try this system when I can, a little bit as well, and in the end use it to talk to other teachers about how they are dealing with the same class in a different paradigm, or a different modules, if you will.”

Ken also highlights the value of meeting with other teachers, and this was a point noted by all other teachers. Further to collaborating with other EAP tutors, Ken recognises the worth of meeting with tutors who teach other modules to the same students in his class. This collaborative element resonates with all participants in this stage of the study. Ken further acknowledges the importance of being more systematic with his planning rather than a less structured approach. This reflection is a positive one and shows the shift towards understanding the systematic nature of CAR, and that change is planned and evaluated. Ken infers some constraints with future engagement in CAR: *“I might try this system when I can.”* Suggesting he does not view it as viable in his everyday teaching.

4.6.4 Emma

The fourth participant in this part of the study is Emma. Emma is a 33-year-old female EAP/ESL/EFL/EAP teacher who was born in America. Her first language is English, and she holds a CELTA qualification and an MA in Applied Linguistics. Emma has been teaching for

four years, and her experience has been in the US, France, and Morocco. She has been at a UK pathways college for approximately 6 months.

Emma's perceptions of CAR compared to traditional research

When asked about her understanding of CAR, she noted that interpreting the meaning of what CAR is linked with the meaning derived from the term.

'I generally understand exactly what it was. I mean, the term sounds straightforward enough, but I think, in my head, I thought it was going to be something drastically different. And, I think by the end I sort of realised it's more of kinda putting a bit, a bit of a formal name to something that we do kind of in the back of our heads already. And perhaps making a bit more like formalised and more of a conscious effort. Umm, but if you had told me just classroom action research before, I don't think I would really have understood what that meant.'

Emma explains that CAR was a process that she was already adopting, but not necessarily one that involves deliberate and conscious actions. There is an indication that her understanding of CAR now is based on her experience going through the process and making deliberate decisions, rather than her previous concept that CAR aligned with more academic research. Overall, Emma's initial understanding, although a little superficial, shows a positive awareness, which is a foundation on which to build a deeper, more systematic process.

Emma was then asked about her perceptions of CAR in relation to traditional research. She notes that CAR is more personalised and that CAR provides more flexibility.

Emma also highlights that she perceives CAR as being personal to what is happening in teachers' classrooms and understanding students. She links her perspective of CAR to parts of the CAR cycle in that there is flexibility to adjust the research and reformulate research questions.

“It’s much more personal, um whereas I think traditional research is much more rigid as we’re meeting more standards, new things that you have to be mindful of. I feel like everyone is kind of under a similar set of expectations. Whereas, when I think you were talking, you have the flexibility to really understand your classroom and your students, and you as a teacher. So, I guess if you allow yourself a place to be flexible, you can then, you know, you can change your questions, you can adjust as you need to.”

Another point to note is Emma’s comparison to what she perceives as traditional research, which she views as more rigid. To further expand on her perspective on this, she stated that the grounds for CAR differ from traditional research in that the traditional research process needs to be justified. Emma notes:

“I don’t know if you necessarily need to justify it. I guess it is helpful to reflect and kind of try to explain and justify why it changed. But I think that’s just maybe a part of the process in general. You know, whereas more traditional research, if you end up going in much different direction to what you thought then there is that expectation that you need to figure out why. Whereas I think there is more this understanding that, that’s a possibility that could happen.”

Here, Emma demonstrates an appreciation that CAR is flexible, meaning that it might take the teacher in unexpected directions, which is acceptable by nature of CAR. Whereas, changing direction when conducting traditional research is more rigid in that a change in the research direction might contradict the original research purpose. This is a very insightful response and shows a strong critical awareness. It shows an acceptance of unexpected results and the mindset that this is essential for the success of CAR.

Emma’s CAR focus was on a group of advanced English speakers who had met their language requirement early in the course. Unlike other tutors, Emma chose to divulge to her class that she was going to be conducting CAR. She then chose to adopt a different practice for each lesson rather than highlighting a specific area, but the overarching focus was on academic

skills and raising engagement with her online class. She highlights the following concerning the challenges:

“I think, um, I was honest, well I thought I could be honest with this group because they were at such an advanced level, that I thought we are going to be doing....I didn’t necessarily mention that this was for a PhD project or something like that. It’s going to be as a group trialing some new strategies, things differently, seeing how they work. I always kind of approached this class in kind of, I guess, I tried to get them excited as being a model for future classes, and get them more engaged in that way. Um, but I think by the time I started doing this in general, the fatigue had started to set in, and they were sort of losing their grip on the value of being this model and testing and trialing. It was either going to be entertaining and engaging, or it wasn’t.”

Emma’s comments above show that students’ awareness of her CAR research might have impacted their attitude to the lessons. This does not necessarily reflect the process of CAR, as there would not typically be “*testing and trialling*” in every lesson.

Emma further clarifies the impact of changing strategies and highlights the need for students to have continuity.

“I don’t know necessarily that I would tell them next time that that we are going to be trying new things from week to week because I think, in a sense them knowing that things are going to be changing was almost exhausting in itself. And they didn’t want to. they kind of wanted to turn up and wanted to know that they had some consistency, and they had something they wanted to do as opposed to coming into class and having to adjust overall again. So, I think them just knowing there were going to be changes contributed to that kind of fatigue.”

Emma confirms the impact of informing students that they were going to be doing different activities each lesson, and how this affected their lack of engagement and possible apathy. The process of CAR aims to address an identified area, and the act of addressing this area is deliberate in that there is a clear focus and strategies are adopted to address this focus and not adopt a strategy first. Therefore, Emma might have confused the cyclical nature of the process, which resulted in the students’ pessimistic behaviour.

Emma's view of the Focus group meetings during the CAR Process

During the second focus group meeting held in June 2021, Emma made the following comment concerning the focus group meeting. Her view of these meetings should have been explored in the final interview after she had conducted CAR, but it was not. Therefore, this extract was taken at the end of the final focus group meeting.

“I think it's really almost reassuring, more so this is me speaking because I am in London and you guys have a chance to, as you say exchange ideas and everything but I don't know if it would be, it's difficult to schedule meetings as it is one thing I think would be helpful is just a section of our department meeting devoted to CAR really, just to bounce ideas, I feel we are just so focussed on business.”

Emma expresses the need to have meetings that are less agenda-driven and focus on what the teachers are experiencing, and use the meetings to share good practice. This reflects all participants' views on these meetings and the need to tailor them to the teachers' classroom practices, as this would be more beneficial. Further to Emma's positive attitude towards the focus group meetings, she also emphasised the value of reflective writing in the focus group meetings.

Keeping a reflective diary: Emma's experience

Emma's response concerning the reflective diaries accentuates the difference between self-reflection as an internal process and writing reflective comments.

“It’s definitely good practice, definitely. Like I was saying in our group discussion. I think reflection happens internally all the time, and it happens in the worst places. And, it’s something we naturally do, but when you write it down, it just becomes more organised. And, you can actually see those thoughts, and I think you’re better able to process them. Whereas, when you do it internally sometimes the thoughts are rather fleeting. They come and go, they are not really, I say, organised in the way we can reflect on them. But, when they are written down you can just go back and look and track your progress and I think overall, it’s just, it seems like the next logical step to what we already do. If that makes sense”

Emma stated that writing a reflective diary enabled her to give more meaning to her reflections and process them. She views these quite positively compared to some of the other participants (Zoe). Emma also intimates that writing these reflections is a natural step forward in teacher development. Emma’s response is very insightful and links to the essence of CAR in that documenting the process moves away from spontaneous reflection to more evidence-based and structured reflection. She further highlights how writing reflections is more meaningful than doing specific lesson evaluations by stating:

“I think it’s a bit less overwhelming, maybe, than having to do a full-on lesson evaluation. You are still engaging, I think you know, still evaluating, but not doing formal paperwork, and that can seem like more admin kind of work. I think you know, if you’re writing a short entry, you are evaluating, you are reflecting. But that sort of extra burden it doesn’t seem as burdensome as having to do, like full-on paperwork and things like that.”

Emma views writing a reflective diary as less demanding than the concept of a lesson evaluation. This could suggest a switch in her thinking of the purpose of the reflective entry as opposed to a lesson evaluation, in that she, herself, is the focus of the reflective entry, or her students, rather than the structure of the lesson itself.

Emma chose to target an advanced EAP group for her CAR. She expressed that she was struggling to engage them midway through the CAR process, and when she discussed this with me, a suggestion was given for her to focus on students deciding what they would like to learn in the lessons, conduct some form of audit (data collection) and then make decisions based on this audit. From this audit, students wanted to use the time to focus on transition activities in preparation for their forthcoming degree programme. Emma notes this in her diary entry on 25th May and recognises the value of collaborating and seeking advice, which shows autonomy in seeking a solution to a problem.

“I’ve taken the advice I received last week and put together a list of resources and topics to discuss purely related to life as an international student/ I know they will likely hear this information again from Essex, but I do feel that I am in a unique position to offer advice to them as moving to the UK was something I did not so long ago myself. Engagement was back in January levels with questions being asked about all things UK – from medical care to transport to shopping. They even had their mobiles out, downloading important apps, looking at NHS content.”

Further to Emma’s entry on adapting her lesson content, although this was not strictly EAP, when considering the impact of this in relation to CAR, it does highlight meaningful change in Emma’s practice, which can be applied to her English language teaching with other classes.

Emma’s diary entry further notes that the shift of focus from what she was trying to achieve to what the students wanted to do was a successful one and shows critical reflection and deliberate action rather than just observing that there was an issue. Involving student participation and a sense of teacher-student collaboration also reflects the dynamic nature of CAR. The following entry describes this process.

“I think one of the downfalls of these last few cycles was sticking to a model of activities that worked well for us in the beginning and hoping that would continue for the rest of the term. I had hoped changing students each week during our seminars would bring fresh perspectives and topics which would keep it interesting, but ultimately the handful of strategies to combat lower engagement that we tried prior to exams seemed ineffective against what I consider to be general fatigue and boredom with the routine. Nonetheless, I will be faced with similar scenarios in the future with EAP classes as it’s almost inevitable that students will be at different progression levels at some point in the course. Perhaps this was a more extreme example, but I think it does generally demonstrate that engagement with advanced students is not only possible but quite rewarding if we allow the class to become more student-led.”

Emma's entry notes that she had learned to accept students' perspectives as a method on which to base her lessons and that what was successful at one point in the term might not be successful throughout. It suggests that Emma might not have perceived herself as having control over the lessons, and this is a point noted in her final diary entry below. It appeared that despite her reflections on the CAR process and admission that the strategies chosen were not effective, after collaborating with others, her approach changed, thus highlighting the value of this collaborative element.

Challenges

Emma's challenges were quite different to those of the other teacher-researchers. Emma chose to inform students of CAR and told them they would be experiencing some new teaching strategies and doing things differently. She stated that she *“tried to get them excited as being a model for future classes.”* Being so transparent might have been counterproductive, as students tended to grow weary of being in an experimental class. She notes, *“The fatigue has started to set in, and they were sort of losing their grip on the value of being this model...that sentiment was waning.”*

Emma has selected an EAP class as the focus for her CAR. The class had already met the English language progression requirements for entry to the University, and so they were not as invested in the lessons as expected. Without a clear aim or goal, students being ‘experimented on’ might leave them feeling a little unprepared for what to expect in future lessons. This was iterated thus:

“They kind of wanted to turn up and wanted to know that they had some consistency...knowing there were going to be changes, contributed to that kind of fatigue.”

Emma’s experience highlights a dilemma when conducting CAR and the extent to which students should be aware of the process. Whilst student involvement could enrich the CAR process, constant change might also derail CAR and impact engagement levels. When reflecting on this, Emma acknowledged:

‘I don’t know necessarily that I would tell them next time that we are going to be trying new things from week to week...them knowing that things are going to be changing was almost exhausting in itself’.

Emma’s account challenges her initial assumption that being transparent with students would be beneficial to CAR; however, the sustainability of CAR also hinges on maintaining consistency, and changing activities each week might have been a result of Emma’s misunderstanding of the purpose of CAR and a clear, focused research question on which to base data collection and planning. Emma’s understanding appeared to be driven by the process and not the needs of the students, and managing their expectations and engagement as part of this process.

Emma's final thoughts on conducting CAR

When asked for her final thoughts on conducting CAR, Emma's final interview response and diary are presented. In the final interview, Emma emphasised the process and the importance of collaboration.

'Yeah, definitely. I think it is something that we should do generally. And, I hate to make it more of an administrative thing because I think it adds burden to it. As I think it is one thing that is so great about the process, that it does not feel like a burden. It is really effective without feeling like you are doing a lot of extra work. And, if it was somehow implemented in a way that we did it more consistently, definitely. I think my fear would be just getting so lost in the grind that you think 'Oh, yeah, classroom action research' I should do that. Just kind of a reminder or some semi-structured, you know component into your daily routine. But, no, definitely, it's so helpful. Even to have a quick meeting with everybody and bounce these ideas off each other can be so refreshing.'

Above, Emma makes the point that other elements of her work could overshadow CAR, but she states that CAR did not feel a burden and that it was a more systematic process that could be integrated without a negative impact on the workload. Her positive view of the focus group meetings was further emphasised, and these meetings would focus on what is currently happening in the classroom. Emma also made a final diary entry at the end of the course and her CAR.

"My experience with CAR has allowed me to more consciously reflect on my practices. I've realized that I am always reflecting mentally, often at more obscure times, but I feel that the act of journaling these reflections makes it easier to recognize successes and failures. At the beginning of this research, my goal was simple: to test strategies which would boost engagement, and with respect to that, I think I identified some things that we were doing right throughout the course. More broadly, however, I think that there were more important discoveries while trialling these strategies in that listening to students before selecting activities to ensure that they are relevant in purpose, timeliness, and content. It's also pushed me to trust students more -in many cases, they have proven themselves when given flexibility and some autonomy over their time. It's forced me to take a more creative and student-led approach to scenarios where engagement after exams is a concern. Being able to discuss my experiences with other teachers in a formal way was incredibly helpful, and at times, reassuring. I feel like these kinds of conversations occur naturally anyway, but having them with CAR in mind seems to make discussion a bit more solution-focused as opposed to focusing on the problem when we tend to vent to others. Overall, CAR has been a positive experience and it's something that I feel would be a really valuable addition to dept. meetings to help prevent ourselves from becoming complacent in our practices."

This final entry is very enlightening, as it shows her shift in focus from trial strategies to being more student-focused. Listening to students and finding out from them what their perspectives were reflects the data-gathering stage in the CAR cycle, and then formulating a plan and acting. It appears that Emma had not followed this process at the beginning of CAR, but recognised through the latter part of her CAR experience how being flexible allowed her to be more creative. Emma also notes that 'formal meetings' were helpful. The aim of the focus group meetings was not to make them appear formal in the traditional sense of having an agenda, but to provide the opportunity for teachers to talk freely without a prescriptive structure. These meetings served to be CAR and solution-focused, which makes them meaningful as teachers could take away ideas and implement them in their own classrooms. Finally, Emma's views on the value of sharing ideas, practices, and possible solutions were very much reflected in all participants' experiences.

Finally, in terms of engagement, all of my tutors showed willingness and commitment to conducting CAR. All teacher-researchers embraced the process and valued the opportunity to have meaningful discussions on their experiences. All teachers demonstrated strong reflective practices, and in some cases, this criticality might have hindered the CAR process (Demi and Zoe). Although diary entries were often descriptive, evidence showed that teachers in my research developed professionally, demonstrated greater autonomy and generally built the foundations for future successful CAR.

When reflecting on these results, it is important to acknowledge that the willingness of these teacher-researchers to participate in this study may have impacted both the outcomes of the process and their commitment to complete it. Those who volunteered were possibly already inclined towards reflection and willingness to engage in professional dialogue, and may have been genuinely invested in their own professional development, which could explain their sustained engagement with this research. While there was no intention to exert

any pressure, my relationship with these participants might have influenced their commitment, whether this was due to professional respect or a sense of loyalty. My positionality would not necessarily be the sole reason for their sustained engagement. It is more likely that the trust and support already established within the language team may have strengthened their motivation and resilience to assist with this research.

4.6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the results of the primary data collection process, including questionnaire and interview data, to address teachers' understanding and perceptions of CAR, the CAR processes adopted by language teachers, and the extent to which teachers have autonomy over their classrooms. This section also presents the findings from Stage Three of this research, in which language teachers conducted their own CAR. The results reveal that CAR is not a common practice among language teachers. When it is conducted, it is rarely formalised and is used for purposes other than addressing an area of teaching and learning in teachers' own classrooms. Further highlighted was the importance of collaboration and guidance on how to conduct CAR, but most teachers reported they had autonomy over their classroom practices and reflected continually and used reflection on which to improve further teaching and learning practices. Finally, one theme that surfaced during the analysis of results was that language teachers are highly critical of themselves. The following chapter will provide a discussion of these results in relation to the research questions, aims and previous literature on the topic of language teachers' perceptions of CAR.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to investigate language teachers' perceptions of CAR. The previous chapter presented the findings from the three stages of data collection to address the five research questions that were posed for this study (Questionnaires, Interviews, and language teachers conducting CAR in their own classrooms). The results chapter was organised according to the research questions, and for each research question, quantitative data were first presented, followed by an analysis of qualitative data.

This chapter is organised in research question order, beginning with Research Question One: What do language teachers understand by the term 'Classroom Action Research'? This will be followed by Research Question Two: 'What are language teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research?' A discussion of Research Question Three follows this: 'What Classroom Action Research has been or is currently being conducted by teachers? Research Question Four is then discussed and addressed: 'To what extent do language teachers perceive they have autonomy over their own classroom?' The discussion chapter ends with Research Question Five, which involves language teachers conducting their own CAR. In order to equip them with the understanding of how to do this, CPD was given, and after conducting CAR, teachers' perspectives were then investigated.

5.2 Research Question One: What do language teachers understand by the term 'Classroom Action Research'?

As discussed in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), the origins of action research were initially encouraged to address social situations and involved a collaborative/democratic

process of decision-making. Over the last few decades, English language teachers have been encouraged to investigate their own classrooms, and action research is becoming more accepted as ‘an empirical approach’ for classroom practitioners to develop professionally (Burns, 2015, p. 187). Burns (2015) further acknowledges that teacher action research is possibly still not a common practice. Research Question One was posed to establish whether CAR is known to English language teachers and what they understand by the term ‘Classroom Action Research’.

Previous literature on CAR has identified it as a systematic reflective process that aims to allow teachers to investigate their classrooms and improve their teaching practices and student learning outcomes (Mettetal, 2001). This question was posed to ascertain what language teachers currently understand by CAR and provide an evaluation of the results for this question in comparison to previous research. By first examining language teachers’ understanding of CAR, this discussion establishes a foundation for analysis and provides valuable context for evaluating the results of this study. The working definition of CAR on which this research is based is discussed in the Literature Review (section 2.3.2), is:

“An active process which involves cycles of planning, action, evaluation, either individually or collaboratively, and through reflection, there is understanding and informed action, which improves elements of teaching and learning within a classroom context.”

(based on Glickman, 1990; Burns & Edwards, 2016)

When analysing the results for this question, it would be somewhat shortsighted to compare responses to this definition as a sole indicator of language teachers’ understanding of CAR. Therefore, the discussion will examine the results in the broader context of existing research on the meaning of CAR. As noted in section 2.3, models of action research can be somewhat messy, but widely accepted models involve spirals or cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Rappaport (1970) also highlights the

researcher's (i.e. teacher's) own involvement in the process. Burns (2015) notes that, unlike research approaches that follow fixed, well-established procedures, AR is marked by its dynamic nature, flexibility, adaptability and cyclical repetition. Nevertheless, distinct overarching phases of the research process can still be identified.

The results from this study on what language teachers understand by the term 'Classroom Action Research' indicated that a majority of respondents noted it was context specific, i.e., within the classroom. This is a positive indication that teachers recognise the relationship of CAR with their own teaching contexts. The questionnaire findings aligned somewhat closely with the interview data, indicating that most language tutors' understanding of CAR incorporated several aspects highlighted in various definitions and models of the action research process, and these are discussed below. The most common themes identified included elements of the action research cycle. Frequent responses incorporated *exploring/searching/analysing/evaluating/assessing/observing and planning*, which align with the systematic nature of CAR. While there might be some variation in individual interpretations, there appears to be a consensus between both sets of data (questionnaires/interviews) that CAR involves finding a solution to an identified area that needs improvement. Gathering data, using evidence and posing a research question were not commonly reported. Although reflection was not amongst the highest responses, it was identified by nearly 50% of language teachers from the questionnaire and interview data as an element of CAR.

Collectively, these themes appear to be closely aligned with prominent models of action research as reflected by Lewin (1946), Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and McNiff and Whitehead (1996). CAR as a form of reflective practice was very prominent among respondents, and this shared understanding aligns with McNiff and Whitehead's (2006) assertion that action research is a systematic process aimed at improving teachers' own

practices. One of the most widely cited models of action research, as affirmed by Burns (2007), is the model posited by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). This outlines a cyclical process of planning, action, observation and reflection, and this is repeated in future cycles. Burns emphasises that the identification of a problem initiates this approach and involves some form of data collection on which to plan, act and observe. This process then moves into critical reflection, which leads to new questions and subsequent cycles. In terms of language teachers' understanding of CAR, this cyclical process was not widely reported, but it is encouraging that elements of individual cycles are evident in the findings.

5.2.1 Classroom Action Research and Reflection

The significance of reflection as a component of CAR is prevalent in the literature and was also reflected in participants' understanding and description of what CAR involves. These results demonstrate an understanding that participants value reflection as an essential component of the CAR process. Although respondents were not explicitly asked to define the term 'reflection,' the themes that emerged from their responses (problem-solving, evaluation, self-assessment and adapting practices) strongly align with the concept of reflective practice as highlighted by Dewey (1933), Schön (1983), and Farrell (2007). The notion that reflective thinking drives action research was highlighted by some interviewees (P102/P103) who referred to 'observing', 'evaluating', and 'revising' classroom practice based on feedback and their experience mirrors Dewey's emphasis on systematic inquiry. When comparing the responses for this research and Schön's dual process of reflection, in-action and on-action, provides a basis on which to understand the cyclical nature of the reflection process in action research.

Both participants, P105 and P106, described using reflection to "*revise plans in the classroom*" (in-action) and "*looking back at results*" to "assess what went well and what went

wrong” bears resemblance to Schön’s notion of reflection-on-action. However, there was limited awareness of planning future cycles of action (Farrell, 2007), and previous cycles provide a basis on which to plan future cycles, possibly indicating that there is a need for deeper engagement and professional development to understand CAR or the concept of action research.

Themes identified across language teachers’ responses tend to correspond with the principles of CAR. Some participants were aware of the methodological process and the cyclical nature of CAR, using data to inform actions. Words such as “method”, “*trial*,” “*observation*,” “reflection,” and “modifying teaching” show an understanding of evidence-based analysis to inform actions (Burns, 2010; Mettetal, 2002). There appeared to be some familiarity with the concept of CAR, even though the responses noted were somewhat intuitive. This was reinforced by language teachers as something they do naturally, showing that they do informally, or it is based on reflective practices. Collaboration was further acknowledged as an important aspect for language teachers, which suggests some awareness of collaboration as an element of CAR. P44 notes that “reflecting on classroom activities from informal personal perspective to peer feedback or data collection to improve teaching and learning” further supports the importance of collaboration and demonstrates some emerging understanding of CAR’s participatory nature. However, this acknowledgement was not consistently highlighted, but this might be due to limited opportunities to discuss their work with other teachers.

The variability in responses and understanding of CAR draws attention to language teachers’ limited exposure to CAR in teacher training or professional development programs, a concern also echoed by Basset (1998) and Burns (2010). Whilst language teachers generally take the view that CAR is reflective and can be used as a problem-solving process, language teachers in this study tend to lack theoretical depth, which highlights a significant gap between theory and practice and further calls for a need for more structured, critical and sustained

engagement with CAR in teacher education, professional development and educational research programmes. There is a strong argument to further highlight Action Research as a healthy classroom practice and to include this in training programmes and professional development programmes. There is also a need to possibly review current definitions of CAR and teachers' literature to give further exposure to CAR and continue to rework definitions to bring this to the forefront of teacher training and development programmes at all institutional levels.

So far, the discussion has highlighted what teachers in this study understand by the term 'Classroom Action Research', which has established that they recognise it as content-driven, involving assessing students' and their own practices in order to improve their practice and student outcomes. They also demonstrate an awareness of the importance of ongoing reflection to inform change. Even though the methodology process might still be unfamiliar to teachers in this study, results show that they are adopting CAR practices, whether consciously or not.

5.3 Research Question Two: What are language teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research?

When exploring teachers' perceptions of CAR, the main findings generally reflect teachers' recognition of CAR as a positive process to make change to enhance teaching and student learning outcomes. Despite this, results show greater variation and unevenness across questionnaire items than originally anticipated. The following will discuss the main themes that emerged from the questionnaire and interview findings, which are:

- CAR promotes positive change and enhances teaching and learning
- CAR as an instinctive or natural part of language teaching
- Time factors and engagement in CAR

- Environmental, collaborative factors and ability to perform CAR

These themes collectively highlight that, while teachers in this study generally value CAR, their perceptions are shaped as much by methodological uncertainty, institutional pressures, and emotional considerations as by pedagogical enthusiasm. This is important, not only for understanding this particular context but also for considering how CAR is experienced across the wider language-teaching profession.

5.3.1. Classroom Action research promotes positive change and enhances teaching and learning.

Research Question Two aimed to explore language teachers' perceptions of CAR. Questionnaire results indicated that teachers largely concurred that CAR promotes positive change, with just under 90% of respondents expressing some opinion on its benefits, and only approximately 10% remaining unsure. Findings also indicated that teachers perceived CAR as enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, and that it has a positive impact on the educational performance of students and teachers as teacher-learners. When reviewing responses to the questionnaire, item 22, which stated '*CAR enhances the quality of teaching*', was viewed positively (89%). Item 22 showed that 82% of respondents disagreed that '*CAR does not make any difference to the education performance of students*'. These results broadly align with the findings from Borg (2009) and the review of case studies by Kuang (2016) and Kuang and David (2015), who explored teachers' engagement in CAR and concluded that it reforms teaching techniques to "elevate the quality of their own teaching and classroom management" (p.171). These positive perceptions were not consistent across all items. Lower-scoring items related to feasibility, time and responsibility demonstrate a degree of caution, suggesting that some teachers may value CAR in principle while feeling unsure about its practical implementation. This nuance is important as enthusiasm does not necessarily indicate

readiness or confidence to perform CAR. Some questionnaire items clustered around neutrality, reflecting uncertainty about data requirements, the role of students, and the extent to which CAR should be teacher-led. This suggests that teachers' perceptions may be partially shaped by misunderstandings in incomplete knowledge of CAR, which is consistent with Snow-Gerono's (2005) observation that teachers might not have a clear understanding of CAR.

Conversely, when conducting research on EFL teachers in South Korea with a view to ascertaining perceptions of changes in teaching practices, Cho (2014) notes that EFL teachers were not enthusiastic when it came to changing their classroom practices. Whilst Cho's study did not particularly highlight CAR as a central focus, it links to this research question in that an element of performing CAR is to review practices/activities that might enhance teaching and learning. Cho further noted that these findings might have reflected teachers' lack of self-confidence, lack of success and support when they previously attempted to change current practices. As a result, EFL teachers in Cho's study became somewhat resistant to engaging in further practices, given their negative experience. Language teachers in this study were generally open to adapting and improving their teaching practices. Nevertheless, the variation in responses indicates that positive attitudes toward CAR coexist with concerns about workload, confidence, and institutional context, themes common across international EAP and ESL settings.

5.3.2. CAR as a natural, instinctive process

Perceptions of CAR as a natural or instinctive process were highlighted in the results of this study. Crookes (1991) noted that CAR was particularly relevant to second language teachers, given its reflective nature and potential for professional development. Cain (2011) concurred with this observation, but to what extent language teachers were 'equipped' to conduct CAR and be critically reflective could be questioned (Burns, 2005; Brumfit &

Mitchell, 1989; Wallace, 1992) and despite this criticism and to whether it was a natural process for English language teachers, language teachers in this study perceived that it was. Qualitative data collated from interviewees (P102, P105, P106) showed that these teachers felt CAR was a process that was done “*instinctively*”, was “*natural*” and “*embedded*” in their teaching, as they pointed out that language teachers are always looking for ways to improve their practice and reflecting on what worked and did not work. These results require careful interpretation as teachers may perceive CAR as instinctive because they associate it with informal reflection or experimentation, rather than with the structured, cyclical nature of CAR. Although these interviewees appeared to be aware of the reflective nature of CAR, in that it was natural to review what worked and what did not work, their comments did not reflect full engagement with the systematic process of CAR.

Participants in this research claimed that reflection was a part of CAR (30%) and that reflection is conducted daily to make informed decisions on their teaching, and these decisions are a ‘deliberate and purposeful act of thinking which centres on ways of responding to problem situations’ (Loughran 1996; Dewey, 1933; Goodman, 1984). Yet, reflection alone does not constitute CAR, and Mann (2005) argues about the extent to which these reflections are formalised. Some teachers in this study framed CAR as self-critical reflection, raising questions about whether these reflections were sufficiently analytical and objective. This distinction has wider relevance to the language teaching community, where teachers can often conflate instinctive reflection with formal CAR, which risks diminishing the methodological rigour of the CAR cycle. As a result, teachers might believe they are “doing CAR” when in fact, they are engaging in informal problem-solving rather than systematic inquiry.

5.3.3. Time factors

Results on perceptions of CAR in relation to time emerged as a significant theme, as it has in previous studies. Both Denny (2004, p.8) and Hancock (1987, p.89) note that teachers possibly viewed research as “time on top of teaching”. Not being allocated time to conduct research, even if the workplace expected teachers to engage in research, was also noted with EFL teachers in China (Borg, 2007; Borg, 2009; Borg & Liu, 2013). Borg and Borg and Liu’s research was of a secondary nature and was not necessarily linked to teachers conducting CAR in their own teaching rooms. Responses in this study were somewhat mixed. Quantitative data from Stage One of this research indicated that just over 45% of language teachers disagreed that time was an inhibiting factor, and 17% were neutral. This indicates a split perception rather than a unanimous view. Hancock (1997) identified time as a significant factor when conducting CAR, and that teaching is demanding, and there is very little time or energy even to consider research. Conversely, Allison and Carey (2007) found that through qualitative interviews with twenty-two participants, lack of time was not a factor when considering CAR, indicating that CAR was viewed as embedded in their daily teaching practice rather than being burdensome.

Interviewees highlighted time constraints more strongly, but the timing of data collection, during COVID-19 and a heavy assessment period, was likely to influence these responses. This was towards the end of the academic year for one cohort, and several interviewees were involved in the exam marking process and tutorials for students needing resits for EAP. The idea of having time to conduct CAR might have been perceived more positively had teachers not simultaneously been adjusting to online teaching, supporting students preparing for exams and managing their own workload. Given this, it could be that these time-related concerns may be situational rather than inherent.

Additionally, teachers in this study viewed that institutional support needs to be given to allow extra time to conduct CAR. Hancock (1997) stressed that, in addition to being overwhelmed with work, their purpose was not to ask questions about their own work, but rather that their primary responsibility was to deliver the curriculum. Findings from this study indicated that although time might be a factor, interviewees did acknowledge the value of finding time to conduct CAR and that if teachers have good time management and plan their work carefully, there would be sufficient time to engage in the action research process. Borg Teachers might be able to embed CAR earlier in the term or under less demanding conditions, but time pressure remains a consistent barrier identified in CAR research (Borg, 2009). Moreover, the need for institutional support emerged in these findings, which aligns with wider evidence from international ELT contexts, where CAR is feasible only when teachers are afforded time, structural support, and manageable workloads.

5.3.4 Environmental, collaborative factors and ability to perform CAR

When evaluating the value of CAR, Mertler (2013) stresses the importance that CAR has in focusing on teachers' own classrooms and their students, emphasising that CAR can be customised to meet individual teaching needs. While his work centres on professional development contexts, it highlights a central principle relevant to this study: teachers benefit when they engage collaboratively and when institutional cultures support practitioner inquiry.

Barriers regarding institutional support have been documented in previous CAR research. Studies such as Burns (2005), Brumfit and Mitchell (1989), and Tavakoli (2015) indicate that teachers working within university environments or research-supportive cultures tend to hold positive perceptions of CAR, whereas those in less supportive environments struggle to sustain or implement it. Tabatabaei and Nazem (2013) similarly found that EFL teachers in Iran were not enthusiastic to engage in research due to the lack of support from their

respective institutions, although these studies focus on research and not necessarily CAR. Tavakoli (2015) further noted that without support from the teachers' workplace, CAR is neither feasible nor sustainable.

Whilst the questionnaire data to address perceptions in this study did not consider institutional support, there were strong indications that CAR encourages collaboration and sharing ideas, with just over 82% of respondents indicating they agree or strongly agree. This finding correlates with item 33 on the questionnaire, which found that just over 89% of respondents disagreed that CAR is performed independently and cannot be collaborative. Interviewees from this study (P103, P104, P107) perceived that the success of CAR would depend on institutional support and collaboration. This suggests a strong underlying belief that inquiry is enriched through collegial engagement.

Having support from institutions, from teachers up to senior management, was noted as being a success factor. This links to the point made previously by Burns (2005), Brumfit and Mitchell (1989), and Tavakoli (2015) that if CAR is conducted within an environment that fosters a research culture, there would be greater success. Burns (2009) further argues that institutional backing enhances teacher-researchers with resources and the confidence to engage in CAR, and without institutional encroachment, teachers might feel somewhat disconnected from the CAR process. The ability to perform CAR very much depends on language teachers' exposure to the CAR Process. This also depends on the link between teachers' ability and their self-confidence to perform CAR. Although collaboration was widely endorsed, perceptions of institutional support were more uneven and arose only in interview data, indicating that support structures were not consistently experienced across all teachers. It is important to contextualise the findings from this study in relation to the broader landscape of language teaching and the evolution of CAR. Methods to improve teaching and learning, such as grammar-translation, Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2002),

do not necessarily challenge teachers' self-confidence and understanding to the extent that CAR might. Language teachers are very much used to shifting their teaching methods to incorporate a range of strategies, but the rigorous demands of CAR involve systematic planning, data collection, reflection, and follow-up, and a lack of exposure to CAR may further impact teachers' self-confidence to implement it (Burns, 2005). There still appears to be a gap in understanding CAR with the current results in this study and those of previous literature. Allwright (1988) and Bailey et al. (1991) emphasise the importance of systematic investigation in classrooms, but as found in my research, teachers understand the value of CAR but might need further guidance on how to conduct it. This misalignment between valuing CAR and feeling prepared to undertake it reflects a wider pattern in international contexts, where teachers conceptually endorse classroom inquiry but frequently report uncertainty about methodological expectations.

The language teachers who responded to this study clearly had experience with engaging in research, but not necessarily CAR or even Action Research as a methodology. Allwright (1988) and Bailey et al. (1991) suggest that a teacher's ability to transition from academic research to CAR depends on training and experience with CAR. Research from Poon (2008) and Vula and Saqipi (2015) indicates that engaging teachers in CAR during initial teacher training or early in their careers can improve self-confidence in applying CAR later in their teaching career. Therefore, embedding CAR early in teachers' careers is essential in building teachers' confidence in their ability to conduct and sustain CAR (Burns, 2005; Edwards & Burns, 2015). Given the variability in perceptions identified, the need for earlier and more explicit training becomes more evident, as inconsistent familiarity with CAR processes may contribute to hesitation, partial implementation, or misconceptions about what CAR entails.

Language teachers generally viewed CAR as a method to promote positive change, and they believed they integrated parts of CAR as an instinctual process. However, time, environmental factors and insufficient institutional support inhibited the ability to perform CAR. The ability to conduct CAR appears closely linked to teachers' exposure to the CAR process and their self-confidence in implementing it. These findings indicate that, although teachers conceptually value CAR, their readiness to undertake it depends on structured training, supportive institutional environments and opportunities for collaborative engagement. When merging the questionnaire and interview findings, clear parallels emerge: CAR is widely viewed as reflective, beneficial and collaborative. Results also show a notable variation in perceptions, with uncertainty surrounding responsibility, feasibility and methodological clarity. Interviewees emphasised issues such as workload, institutional culture, and emotional safety, factors not captured in the questionnaire, revealing that psychological concerns, such as fear of judgement, may be as influential as practical barriers.

Overall, teachers recognised CAR's potential for professional growth and collaborative practice, yet findings suggest that positive attitudes alone are not sufficient. Confidence, methodological preparation and institutional alignment are necessary conditions for meaningful engagement in CAR.

Building on language teachers' understanding of CAR and their perceptions, the following section explores the extent to which teachers in this study engaged in CAR or were aware of CAR taking place in their own organisation.

5.4 Research Question Three: What Classroom Action Research has been or is currently being conducted by teachers?

Findings from Stage One and Stage Two show that conceptually, teachers value CAR and understand that it is designed to address context-specific challenges (Bailen, 2025), and this section aims to discuss the findings in relation to the extent to which language teachers have engaged in CAR. Although it is widely acknowledged as a valuable method for enhancing teaching practices, previous and current research still indicates limited participation among language teachers in CAR (Borg, 2009; Burns, 2005; Burns & Edwards, 2024; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Poon, 2008). The findings for RQ3 show that a majority of participants have limited engagement in or awareness of CAR taking place, which mirrors previous published research reporting similar gaps between valuing inquiry and actually engaging in it, also found by Puspitasari (2022) and Li et al (2024). Despite low levels of engagement in CAR, an important finding, mostly in the questionnaire data, is that teachers consistently engaged in implicit CAR behaviours such as reflection, lesson evaluation, adaptations, improvisation, experimentation with activities and collaboration with colleagues. Interview findings tended to support this pattern, but less systematically. These implicit behaviours suggest that teachers practise several foundational components of CAR even if they do not recognise, formalise or label them as such (Burns & Edwards, 2024; Mertler, 2021). IN relation to the findings for engagement in CAR, this section will discuss the following areas:

- Participants' awareness of action research within their current or previous organisation, and their involvement
- The scope of this involvement in comparison to the CAR process

5.4.1. Participants' awareness of action research within their current or previous organisation and their involvement

A majority of respondents (73.9%) in this study indicated that they were not aware of any research taking place in their organisation, and this was also reflected in their response to item 11, regarding whether they had been involved in CAR in their previous position (60.8%). When looking deeper into the results for language teachers' current involvement in CAR and whether any was taking place within their organisation, there was some indication that CAR was taking place to some extent (<11%, n=5) and a smaller percentage confirming there was some CAR taking place (<9%, n=4). These percentages are extremely low and point to CAR not being embedded in teachers' practices. Many of these responses noted their awareness was due to the nature of this PhD research, and these language teachers (n=4, <9%) were in fact working at the location where this research was taking place. This could create potential bias and inflated awareness within this subgroup, as the results merely reflect what is happening within my own organisation. But, making my staff aware of CAR promotes it as a valued practice, which further promotes its importance. Although this form of insider research might shape the data collected, Rooney (2005) advocates that insider research also enriches the authenticity of the data, as I am in a position to provide a deeper contextual understanding. Insider awareness highlights how CAR visibly varies in global language contexts depending on how local leadership and institutional culture prioritise or support inquiry-based practice; I also recognise that my own intention to promote the value of CAR within my organisation may have impacted on participants' awareness and interpretations of CAR in ways that may have influenced the findings. Burns & Edwards (2024) also note that CAR visibility is context-dependent and is either informal, fragmented or reflection-based depending on whether the institution prioritises a culture of research.

During the 1980s, there was a certain amount of optimism that English language teachers would investigate their work and that some perceived the nature of CAR as having a promising future in the realm of English language teaching (Bailey et al, 1991). More than 30 years later, the results of this research do not entirely support this optimism, and despite the nature of action research being reflective and providing opportunity for development (Crookes, 1991), very few English language teachers indicated they engaged in CAR, were given professional development on it or were even aware of it in initial teacher training. In addition to the lack of engagement among a majority of language teachers who completed the questionnaire, a majority of interviewees also noted that they had not heard of or engaged in CAR. Those who understood CAR reported this was during their initial teacher training stages or as a novice teacher (13%).

Results showed that most interviewees (60%) were engaged in some form of research as part of a formal qualification, such as a PhD, a Master's, CELTA, or a similar postgraduate qualification, or as a trainee/novice teacher. Borg (2009) reported similar findings for language teachers' involvement in research, with just over 50% reporting any engagement with research. Whether these teachers had applied such experiences to classroom inquiry is less clear. Borg (2009 and Borg and Liu (2013) also reported limited evidence of actual engagement in action research, thus concurring with the findings in this study. Crucially, although results show that teachers had little awareness of formal CAR, the implicit-behaviour data showed generally high levels of self-reported reflective practice, lesson evaluation and adaptation, behaviours that align with CAR principles, even when teachers do not label them as such. This suggests a disconnect between what teachers do and what they recognise as CAR. These findings also support those of Li et al (2024), who found that EFL teachers conducted research periodically and utilised research only occasionally, and in this case, this was mostly related to university policies. Li et al's findings highlighted how levels of engagement vary across contexts. In their

Chinese university setting¹², teachers only engaged in research sporadically due to heavy teaching workloads, limited time and administrative loads.

5.4.2. The scope of involvement in comparison to the CAR process

Respondents who reported involvement in CAR stated their engagement was primarily informal or undertaken as part of a higher education qualification. Questionnaire responses and interviewee data showed indications that language teachers were informally conducting elements of the CAR cycle: plan, act, observe, reflect (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998), and particularly highlighting an area that needs attention, reflecting, planning, and trying out new things and then further reflection, which tentatively intimates at an almost cyclical nature. But these were isolated behaviours rather than systematic inquiry. Formulating research questions and the collation of data as a formal process were not necessarily highlighted in the findings, and almost no respondents evidenced full cycles of CAR. Some respondents (P012, P010) acknowledged that reviewing, assessing, and analysing data was conducted and used to make improvements in their teaching practices, albeit informally. This shows a discrepancy between doing reflective teaching and performing CAR as a research methodology.

The strongest evidence of this came from implicit CAR items, which showed frequent lesson evaluation (mean = 4.09), reflection on unsuccessful lessons (mean = 4.53) and regular adaptation to student needs (mean = 4.11). These implicit behaviours suggest that teachers are performing core components of CAR, but in fragmented, unstructured ways and without the intentionality of the full CAR cycle. This pattern is consistent with Mertler's (2021) argument that teachers routinely engage in reflective and adaptive inquiry, such as modifying instruction, analysing classroom problems, although not doing so within formal CAR structures. Mertler

¹² Li et al's (2024) study was with 536 Chinese EFL teachers using the Teacher Research Engagement Questionnaire (TREQ).

also highlights that action research became particularly valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic, not only as a practical tool for responding to rapidly changing teaching conditions but also as a means of sustaining professional growth. McNiff et al (1996) argued that these informal personal enquiries are a foundation on which teachers can assess their teaching, but this does not include the criticality of their own practices. Likewise, Puspitasari's (2022) work shows that although many teachers report attempting action research, their engagement tends to remain moderate and task-oriented rather than cyclical or sustained. The examples in the findings of this study appear to reflect partial or causal engagement rather than intentional, cyclical inquiry, despite high engagement with implicit behaviours.

Further explanations of involvement in CAR included the use of staff and student module surveys to review feedback and follow-up continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities to share feedback and reflect on successful practices. Although these activities were not framed as CAR by participants, they represent early forms of data collection and evidence use. In this study, such practices were generally limited to gathering end-of-module feedback rather than collecting systematic data across CAR cycles. It is important to acknowledge that this might reflect an element of insider-research bias because several participants in my own institution routinely receive data such as language eligibility scores, diagnostic indicators or students' skill levels and module feedback and are encouraged to use these to inform their teaching. This could mean that their reported engagement with data-informed reflection partially reflects organisational norms rather than a broader pattern among language teachers more generally. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) expressed the view that action research is a process that is monitored constantly over time using a variety of mechanisms that inform future directions. Although the findings do not necessarily highlight future directions or explicitly mention the stages of CAR, they do show some conscious awareness of the benefits of researching classroom practices.

The value of institutional support for teachers embarking on CAR was discussed earlier in the literature review (see section 2.7), and one example, from the findings of this research, touched on an interesting factor inhibiting a teacher's engagement in CAR. Tavakoli (2015) and Kantaridou and Katsiou (2018) found that there was a lack of institutional support for language teachers' engagement in CAR, if it were not for reasons other than to achieve a qualification. One language teacher in this study expressed a strong interest in performing CAR (P108) at their own institution; however, they were not permitted to do so. The topic of interest was dyslexia, and support would only be given if the action research was focused on other institutions. Whilst this was not explored deeply, it does suggest that there is a misunderstanding of the nature of CAR as a benefit to one's own practice, or that highlighting dyslexia as a problem might be a sensitive one in the culture in which this interviewee operates. Borg (2009) emphasises the importance of institutional, collegial, emotional, and intellectual support. Without this, teachers who wish to conduct CAR may feel isolated, which could lead to a lack of interest in pursuing CAR opportunities, as reflected by one of the English teachers in my research.

A contrasting example from P15 showed what CAR can look like when substantial support is available. Their involvement in relation to the implementation of Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L), spelling and improving writing in New Zealand included structured planning, collation of data and a clear systematic approach, which would create a conducive environment for reflection, collaboration, dissemination of results to inform future planning and sustained improvement. Such top-down endorsement and resourcing fostered a sustained, systematic CAR process, but these conditions are rarely available to teachers in their everyday capacity. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) argue that these play a vital role for action research to flourish. The response from this teacher highlights that there was strong collaboration with other teachers, and this empowers practitioners to reflect on the value of their work (Vaughan,

2020) and to share outcomes in a professional forum, which considers action research as fostering knowledge producers rather than teachers being passive recipients of policy (Burns, 2010). Although this example does not typify the conditions that all English language teachers in this study are situated in, it does serve as an example that in some sectors of the profession, action research is supported not only at the institutional level but at a ministry level. This fosters a community of supported continuous learning and improvement through wider collaborative networks, which further serves to enhance continuous learning and improvement and enhances the professional development of English language teachers (Meesuk et al., 2020).

Overall, the results tentatively suggest that although some language teachers conduct traditional academic research through qualifications, formal engagement in CAR is still relatively sparse. Burns (2019) noted back in the 1980s that although there was some movement towards encouraging language teachers to investigate their own work, this was still not commonplace, and the results from this study concur with this suggestion that CAR is still not a prominent practice amongst language teachers today. Whitehead and Lomax (1987) agree with Burns that whilst there was growing attention to CAR and language teachers, this was mostly focused on institutional needs rather than what was happening in teachers' classrooms. At this time, there was a distinct lack of action research with regard to second language teaching (Crookes, 1991). These observances were over 30 years ago, and more recently, Bartels (2005), Burns (2005) and McKay (2005) note that there is growing interest in conducting research in language teaching. Despite this, Burns (2005) critiques this understanding by suggesting that gaps in the understanding of how to conduct CAR still exist. The findings highlighted in this thesis would concur with the points noted by Burns, even though they are nearly 20 years apart. A deeper investigation into the prevalence of CAR taking place in the language teaching community is needed to ascertain whether these findings are comparable to

other language teaching communities or whether these findings are atypical of the sample used in this study.

The results of this study show that very few language teachers were aware of any CAR taking place, nor had they engaged in CAR themselves, and this further confirms Burns' (2009) findings that institutional backing provides teachers with both the resources and confidence to engage in CAR. Interest or surface-level engagement does not necessarily translate into systematic action research, particularly when teachers are constrained by workload, institutional expectations, or limited methodological training. The strong engagement in implicit CAR behaviours found in this study reinforces this distinction. Without these enabling conditions, teachers' reflective instincts remain fragmented rather than forming part of a sustained inquiry cycle. This limits the potential for CAR to become a transformative, embedded practice in language-teaching contexts and positions it as an aspirational endeavour that remains out of reach for many practitioners.

The discussion will now move on to the extent to which language teachers perceive that they have autonomy over their own classroom. Evaluating teachers' perceptions of autonomy would provide insight into the extent to which teachers explore their own classrooms and what strategies they adopt to address classroom problems. A strong sense of autonomy is an empowering factor when identifying issues, exploring different strategies and evaluating the impact these have is closely aligned with CAR.

5.5 Research Question Four: To what extent do language teachers perceive they have autonomy over their own classroom

This discussion will focus on the perceptions of autonomy and capacity to engage in meaningful and informed activities that inform sustained change, rather than merely having autonomy as freedom from constraint. Investigating autonomy is one of the main aims of this

study, as understanding teachers' sense of autonomy influences their ability to take ownership of their decision-making and classroom improvements. Both Callan (1988) and Smith and Erdoğan (2008) concur that autonomy is interconnected with intrinsic freedom and the role of others. Therefore, whilst autonomy here distinguishes the individual as a prominent factor, the role of others cannot be ignored when assessing the extent to which language teachers perceive they have autonomy. One factor when interpreting these results, especially for the questionnaire findings, is the difference between Curriculum Autonomy (CA) and General Autonomy (GA). As noted in Chapter 4, CA scores were notably lower and more variable than GA scores, indicating that autonomy over content, materials, goals and assessment is more constrained than autonomy over day-to-day teaching decisions. This pattern differs from Pearson and Moomaw's (2006) findings, which showed that both CA and GA tended to be more evenly endorsed, suggesting that teachers in this study operate within a more restricted curricular environment. Likewise, with Pearson and Hall's (1993) initial validation of the TAS, they did not report major differences in CA and GA levels, but this study was focused on validating the factor structure and not comparing CA versus GA. This difference could be due to the sample population, and those from Pearson and Moomaw's (2006) study were elementary, middle and high school teachers, whereas those in this research were all language teachers and might have less scope to make curricular-based decisions.

5.5.1. Understanding Autonomy Through Curriculum and General Autonomy

The results from the questionnaire and interview findings generally highlight that language teachers perceive themselves as having a considerable degree of autonomy and responsibility for their teaching, delivery of the curriculum, adapting materials, classroom management and approach to problem-solving. This sense of responsibility aligns with the perspective that autonomy is at the discretion of the individual and independent teachers have

substantial freedom in determining how work is scheduled and the procedures used to carry out their work (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Smith, 2000). The TAS results demonstrate only moderate levels of autonomy overall (mean 2.70), and a clear divergence between CA and GA. CA fell just below the midpoint, suggesting limited influence over materials, content and assessment, while GA fell above the midpoint, indicating stronger autonomy in instructional decisions, creativity and classroom procedures. This discrepancy shows that perceived autonomy differs from measured autonomy, with teachers feeling autonomous despite structural constraints that affect CA. This contrasts with the findings of Pearson and Moomaw (2006), where CA and GA had comparable levels.

Smith (2000) outlined that self-direction in professional practice is a key dimension of teacher autonomy. These results generally confirm that English teachers can explore and resolve pedagogical issues in their classrooms in real time. Burns (2009) and Allwright (2003) believe language teachers are best placed to investigate their work in real-time. The results in this thesis somewhat concur that English language teachers have sufficient autonomy over their classrooms in terms of how autonomy is experienced, in that they agreed (n=25) or strongly agreed (n=5) that they follow their guidelines and procedures. The divergence between the survey and interview data suggests that teachers might equate autonomy with in-the-moment instructional flexibility rather than with broader professional decision-making. Pearson and Moomaw (2006) similarly observed that teachers often overestimate autonomy when reflecting on daily teaching as opposed to structural responsibilities.

Interview findings further confirm that language teachers perceive themselves as having a considerable degree of autonomy with decisions about their classrooms, particularly with problem-solving, materials used, and delivery of these materials. Intimating that teachers show a strong awareness of adopting student-centred practices.

Another aspect of teachers' practices that suggests a substantial degree of autonomy is interviewees' perspective of how much creativity they perceived (97.6%, n=45), and they further acknowledged autonomy over student learning activities (84.5%, n=39). A personal capacity for self-direction and having the autonomy to make professional decisions about language teachers' classrooms somewhat reflects the perspective of Jiménez Raya et al. (2024). Additionally, they frame this autonomy as a professional right for tutors to have the autonomy to make critical decisions within the classroom. The freedom to make curricular decisions and use their professional judgement (discretion) further reflects that language teachers in this study perceive they have a substantial degree of autonomy (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005).

Language teachers in my research further reported a certain degree of autonomy over the control of their classroom space, time use, and alternative procedures. However, this study did not explore in greater depth exactly what was meant by 'alternative procedures'. These are all GA aligned domains, and the lower CA scores confirm that teachers do not feel equally empowered to shape content, assessment or curriculum frameworks. This structural constraint is a critical limitation and reflects a wider trend in language education, where instructional autonomy is permitted, but curriculum autonomy is tightly regulated. This is most likely as in many language-teaching contexts, like my own, institutional policies regulate curriculum content but routinely allow teachers discretion over instructional methods, thereby reinforcing a structural imbalance between GA and CA. Conversely, a significant proportion of respondents to the questionnaire expressed disagreement that they follow their own guidelines, reflecting variability in independence and freedom to choose, thus limiting their autonomy at the classroom level. When teachers perceive themselves as the origin of their own actions, their motivation and professional satisfaction are enhanced (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The interview data show that language teachers feel autonomous in diagnosing classroom problems, experimenting with solutions to these problems, and sometimes reviewing literature to guide

decisions. Yet the limited engagement with research-based literature suggests a barrier in transitioning from autonomous decision-making to systematic enquiry. This resonates with broader findings in language education, where reflective practice is emphasised, but research engagement is less consistently supported. In such contexts, autonomy can also be weakened by external pressures and institutional constraints that lie beyond the teacher's control, as noted by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000). These constraints vary across institutions and cultural settings, shaping how autonomy is experienced.

5.5.2. Instructional Freedom and Structural Constraint

Whilst teachers in this study reported they had autonomy with adapting materials, method of delivery, and the ability to problem-solve, there appears to be a limit to the extent to which this autonomy can be exercised. The lower CA results strongly endorse this point, demonstrating that institutional structures significantly shape teachers' curricular and assessment-related decisions. This confirms that autonomy is unevenly distributed across domains: teachers enjoy considerable individual autonomy but limited institutional autonomy. Although not as pronounced in Pearson and Moomaw's study (2006), they noted a similar pattern, though the disparity appears more pronounced in my study. Strategies employed by teachers in this study, such as reflecting on their own practice, deciding how to deliver curriculum aims, and consulting colleagues, all demonstrate a degree of autonomy and a level of professional judgement to make decisions regarding teachers' own practices. This degree of autonomy appears to be informed and reflective and suggests a deliberate action allowing teachers to be open to professional learning and development, but this empowerment is mainly demonstrated at the classroom level.

The results of this study show that autonomy was more limited in areas such as assessment and major problems, and there was only limited latitude on how these problems

were addressed (76% stating assessment was selected by others). Although this might suggest limited autonomy, it is not entirely surprising and needs to be examined more deeply, as often assessments are dictated not only by management but by agreements within education ministries, partnerships with progression universities, and expected that decisions on assessment types would be more top-down. This could be seen as tension between curriculum control and autonomy at the classroom level, which has been highlighted in Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) and Barfield and Brown (2007). This structural limitation aligns with global trends in language teaching, where high-stakes assessment frameworks often reduce teachers' curricular influence.

Interview data discussed in my thesis provides some insight into how language teachers balance individual autonomy with that of institutional constraints, and the findings from my research concur with those of Kimura et al. (2022), who argue that teacher autonomy can co-exist with structured curricular expectations. Therefore, suggesting that teachers expect this level of institutional autonomy and that they would be expected to operate within these boundaries. For example, interviewees articulate this balance by noting *"There's always a guide...but I have been able to make my own decisions and to what to present to students"* and *"As long as I complete a unit per week...it's me who has to think what my students need."* Strategies employed by teachers often suggest that teachers themselves place a high value on selecting their own teaching goals (*"My teaching focuses on those goals and objectives I set myself"*), which reflects individual autonomy and being able to make decisions within given constraints. Callan (1988) and McGrath (2000) stress that this is less about freedom from constraints and more about making meaningful pedagogical decisions with them. Conversely, Applebee (1996, p.141) argues that this could be viewed as an illusion of autonomy and that these situations enable teachers to feel empowered in the "how" of teaching but have very little influence over the "what" and "why" of curriculum design and assessment. As previously

noted, EFL/ESL and EAP teachers might often face more standardised curricula imposed on them, which would limit their flexibility to be autonomous, and this is undoubtedly the case for participants in this research.

5.5.3 Autonomy in Practice: Reflection and Problem-Solving

Autonomy, Reflection, and Classroom Action Research are interconnected as reflective practice allows teachers to critically examine their classrooms and foster greater awareness when making decisions (Farrell, 2015). Reflective practice is essential for autonomy, and the findings from this research confirm that teachers adopt reflection as part of their teaching and learning strategies and evaluation of their own successes and potential problems within the classroom context. Teachers in this study reported that they modified their practices based on reflection and perceived classroom needs, which mirrors Schön's (1983) reflection-in-action. These behaviours align closely with GA, which captures autonomy in areas such as alternative procedures, creativity and on-the-spot decision-making. Problem-solving strategies used by teachers (reflection, adaptation and occasional collaboration) reflect GA more strongly than CA, which corresponds to the TAS subscale results. This demonstrates that teachers are using reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) and the ability of language teachers to adapt when faced with real-time difficulties. This aligns with Little's (1995) definition of teacher autonomy when responding to classroom challenges as demonstrating the capacity to make pedagogical decisions. Further to this, some interviewees also noted that they would seek collaboration with others when aiming to problem-solve (P103, P104, P109, and P112). This portrays autonomy as a collective process rather than a solitary action.

Autonomy and collaborative problem-solving are central in EFL/ESL and EAP settings, and collaboration actually enhances autonomy by providing opportunities for reflective dialogue (Benson, 2013). Although not all interviewees stated they would seek

collaborative assistance when faced with a specific classroom problem, those who did demonstrate the ability to foster professional dialogue, according to Edwards and Burns (2016), develop a stronger sense of autonomy. Although language teachers report that there are curriculum constraints, collaboration allows for the opportunity to be creative, as previously discussed, thus reinforcing autonomy.

The above points reflect a positive approach to problem-solving through reflection and peer collaboration. When responses to problem-solving are closely analysed, there are clear indications that some language tutors do not seek support from others. Here, there appears to be a high degree of self-criticality amongst language teachers. This could lead to internalised pressure and relates to the scenario outlined in the rationale for this research (see section 1.3). This reluctance to seek support from others aligns with Farrell (2015), and using reflection to modify materials, research answers based on personal reflection. This raises a wider implication that autonomy can become internalised and individualised, reinforcing the belief that problems should be solved alone, and teachers might be discouraged from seeking assistance for fear of judgment from others (Borg, 2006; Smith, 2000). Such autonomy, while well-intentioned, may inadvertently limit opportunities for shared inquiry, collegial learning and evidence-informed practice.

Responses to problem-solving that emerged from the data, such as “*Perhaps it’s something to do with the way the teacher is delivering it*” or “*Solving the problem myself*”, and some tutors also stated they would “*look through some books*” or “*Go back to Google Scholar*”, highlight that teachers are questioning their practices and doing some form of research to find answers. A few language teachers stated they would seek the assistance of their colleagues. These responses reflect some elements of CAR (reflection, collaboration, and investigation). Although participants did not specifically state they would adopt a CAR approach to problem-solving, their answers to problem-solving did include elements of CAR.

5.5.4 Supporting the Transition from Autonomy to Classroom Action Research

Findings from this research indicate that language teachers perceive they have autonomy over the classrooms and classroom-based decisions. Strategies employed by teachers, such as seeking collaborative assistance, researching answers, and adapting practices, further support the concept of an autonomous teacher. Importantly, these responses reflect some principles related to CAR. Whilst this form of practice is indicative of parts of the CAR cycle, evidence shows that language teachers do not typically engage in a systematic process of CAR, which includes planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

The data presented in this thesis revealed that there is limited evidence of the latter stages of CAR and informed practice leading to further cycles of action (systematic observation and evidence-based evaluation). Although some teachers indicated trying out new strategies, there was little indication that language teachers were collecting data in a structured, meaningful way and linking this to planning, acting, and observing as a continuous cycle of improvement. While this might indicate autonomy, in this context, it appears to relate more to problem-solving at that moment in time rather than reflect the cyclical nature of CAR (Altrichter, 2008). Despite these conclusions, English language teachers generally intimate that they have a sufficient degree of autonomy over their own classrooms, and examples given in the findings could lead to the conclusion that teachers have sufficient autonomy to conduct CAR. Interestingly, teachers do collaborate and have some reliance on professional dialogue with colleagues when faced with a problem, and this was mentioned in both the questionnaire and interview findings. This further suggests the conditions are appropriate for CAR, which aligns with Sachs (2001), where teachers not only exercise their autonomy in the form of acting purposefully and constructively to address identified classroom issues. In some cases, teachers

seek wider support through information seeking via academic sources and professional resources, but fewer teachers delve into research-based articles as part of the problem-solving process.

When considering autonomy and other elements of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), English language teachers are also highly intrinsically motivated and, in most cases, as reported in this research, feel they are competent (Deci & Ryan, 1985). A limitation of this study is that, although autonomy is explored in depth, the other components, particularly relatedness, are not examined directly, even though the findings show that relatedness and institutional connectedness are crucial for enabling CAR. To be fully equipped to conduct CAR, relatedness through institutional support and close connections with others needs to be addressed. Institutional constraints on the curriculum could be expected to ensure continuity between stages of students' education. Institutional support within these constraints would paint a more positive picture in breeding a culture in which teachers can explore their practices. There does not seem to be exposure to CAR in training or professional development programmes, but there is a strong emphasis on reflective practice, which concurs with Amini and Kruger's (2022) systematic review on Iranian EFL teachers' autonomy and self-directed learning. Although not directly tied to CAR, Kong (2020) offers an insight into how Chinese secondary school English teachers perceive and negotiate autonomy. Kong's study, like the findings for this research, highlights how teachers create and apply autonomy through adapting lesson plans, classroom activities, and, in some cases, collaborating, which suggests a step towards classroom action research despite the restrictions imposed at the institutional level. Therefore, given the results from this study, it is possible to suggest that the step from autonomy to CAR is not such a large one. Moving from autonomy to CAR is not a sudden methodological shift, but with scaffolding, teachers can move along a continuum using their existing autonomy as an entry point rather than a precursor to CAR. Highlighting elements of CAR, such as using

data which teachers already generate (students' writing, lesson evaluations), preserves and scaffolds teachers' autonomy but also strengthens the rigour expected of CAR rather than reflection alone. In this respect, it is understood that teachers gradually move along a continuum whilst maintaining control over the focus of CAR, the pace at which it is conducted. This builds on existing autonomy but makes it less internalised by asking research questions, using evidence, and making their research known to others. This transparency does not mean CAR is subject to standardised processes, but it gradually develops a more systematic form of professional learning, encouraging professional dialogue and transforming individual autonomy into a more shared learning within a wider professional community.

Thus far, the discussion has revolved around primary research on teachers' understanding and perspectives of CAR, what CAR has been and is currently being performed by English language teachers, and autonomy in relation to CAR. The discussion will now turn to Research Question Five and explore teachers' perceptions of CAR prior to professional development on CAR, and perceptions of CAR after language teachers have conducted their own Classroom Action Research.

5.6 Research Question Five: What are teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research after participating in Continuing Professional Development and conducting CAR in their own classrooms?

To further ascertain English language teachers' perceptions of CAR, the final part of this study involved. Four participants completed training for CAR, identifying an area for CAR, and kept a reflective diary to record their thoughts and feelings about the process. Two focus group meetings were held, during which experiences were shared with other tutors. A final exit interview was conducted to consolidate their experiences and final perceptions after completing the CAR. All teaching occurred online via Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was likely to have influenced teachers' performance. Whilst this research does not focus on the

mode of teaching online, it needs to be kept in mind that, as well as conducting their own CAR, tutors were still navigating online classrooms and adapting their teaching accordingly. This is likely to have heightened teachers' stress, increased preparation time and reduced opportunities to meet informally. My dual role as a line manager and researcher might have impacted the interpretations of the findings for this section, as some reactions that I might have attributed to CAR might have partly reflected the pressures and uncertainty of teaching during COVID rather than the CAR process itself. Another consideration is that the rapid move to online teaching may have affected how teachers experienced and perceived CAR. These conditions might have intensified the perceived value of CAR and stress associated with additional research, which might not have been the case had teaching remained face-to-face. As the researcher, it is also important to acknowledge that these contextual pressures may have amplified particular themes in the data. This raises wider questions about how CAR may operate differently in more stable face-to-face teaching environments, suggesting that further research is needed beyond this immediate institutional context and one that is not driven by the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.6.1. Teachers' perceptions of CAR compared to traditional research

During the exit interview, Demi, Zoe, Ken, and Emma were asked to reflect on their perspectives on CAR compared to engagement with traditional research.¹³ Perceptions across participants were that CAR was most commonly understood as structured reflection, which aimed to improve practice through flexibility and attention to their local context. In practice, they tended to prioritise immediate, often small actions based on student feedback, which would be expected in CAR, especially in EAP settings. Teaching online might have posed

¹³ Traditional research here refers to investigating a phenomenon using methods to produce results that are generalisable to a wider population rather than CAR as teachers investigating their own classrooms using adopting the CAR cycle (plan, act, observe, reflect). All participants had conducted some form of research previously.

challenges not previously faced, such as the nature of feedback, troubleshooting technology, cameras off, and trouble interpreting students' reactions, which could have led to more immediate decision-making. Whereas in a face-to-face classroom, teachers might have had more time to consider students' reactions, allowing them to gauge the impact of their interventions more deliberately. Kohnke and Jarvis's (2021) qualitative, small-scale study of 17 EAP teachers at an English-medium university in Hong Kong found that monitoring progress in online EAP classrooms was particularly challenging, and that it took longer than in face-to-face classrooms. After outlining the broader aspects, the focus will now turn to individual teacher-researchers' perspectives, beginning with Demi.

Demi's perception of CAR revolved around reflective teaching, and she asserts that reflection is embedded in her approach to teaching, but she also acknowledges she can be "*over-reflective*" and scrutinises her own actions closely; what went well, what she could have done better and how students react to classroom situations. Demi's view is aligned with Schön's (1983) idea of reflection-in-action, as she engages in real-time decision-making processes. Her understanding of reflection in the CAR process tentatively suggests some alignment with CAR being a deliberate, conscious act. This reflection is the basis on which to build plans, possibly suggesting some semblance of a research methodology but not necessarily CAR (Burns, 2010). Demi further adds to her understanding of CAR in relation to cultural constraints. She noted that in her own country, Argentina, there were contextual limitations to exploring her own work, which was explored by Borg (2009), who noted that institutional norms were factors in shaping teachers' engagement in research. Demi's international experience has allowed her to develop a wider epistemological understanding, and that critical reflection has become a mechanism through which she can explore solutions. This critical reflection could challenge the dominant norms that Demi is referring to (Kemmis et al., 2013). At this point, a limitation of this study is that interpretations of Demi's reflections rely heavily

on my reading of her diary and interview data. As a researcher-manager, my interpretation may carry assumptions about what constitutes effective reflection. This highlights a methodological risk in practitioner research that would warrant further exploration across contexts.

Zoe, on the other hand, perceived conducting CAR as possibly time-consuming and repeatedly raised concerns about feeling pressured to write a reflective diary. This part of the study fell during assessment time in the research location, and this involved a significant increase in marking loads. Zoe could have felt a little overwhelmed with the prospect of further expectations imposed on her by me, her Line Manager, as highlighted by Hancock (1997). I became quite concerned about Zoe's reaction to writing a reflective diary. I was under the preconceived idea that it would be a productive way to collate tutors' thoughts and feelings on the process and had not anticipated the heightened anxiety it might bring. Despite repeatedly highlighting that notes in the reflective diary could be as simple phrases, short or long notes, and not placing any restriction on how these needed to be presented. It took some time for me to realise that this could have been a barrier to Zoe being more engaged in CAR. Borg and Liu (2013) highlight the use of reflective diaries and the findings that teachers find some discomfort with writing thoughts and feelings when they are being reviewed by others. Further to this, Zoe's understanding of the purpose of using a reflective diary highlights a misalignment between the processes involved in CAR, and I could have communicated this more clearly in the initial stages of the CAR training (Burns & Edwards, 2014). Zoe further views CAR as being subjective and that any findings might not be generalisable, which denotes a positivist perspective of research, which, in the view of McDonough and McDonough (1997), reflects an epistemological stance possibly internalised through her own academic experience. It could be seen as clashing with her own qualitative research experience when completing her doctorate. Zoe states that CAR outcomes will vary '*because we are dealing with humans*' which might suggest she has not made connections with her own qualitative PhD research

experience and interpretivism (Dörnyei, 2007). Offering a more structured approach to reflective writing or using an audio recording might have assisted Zoe in reducing her anxieties. Donyaie and Ashfar (2019, p.83) researched the extent to which Iranian EFL teachers were familiar with reflective journal writing and noted that there was a “lack of sufficient knowledge and familiarity with the concept”.¹⁴ They further identified other “inhibitors” to reflective writing, such as “lack of confidence” and time. This leads me to consider whether the training for the teacher-researchers should have also included more on reflective writing, especially in Zoe’s case; understanding reflection is somewhat different to putting it into practice. This raises a wider implication for CAR training programmes beyond this institution, as reflective writing is often assumed rather than taught, but the emotional labour involved can hinder teacher engagement. Future CAR initiatives across different EAP/ESL contexts may need to incorporate explicit scaffolding for reflective literacy.

Ken’s perspective of CAR was formed through experience with his CELTA qualification and appears rather pragmatic. At the time of this study, Ken, from the U.K., had 3.5 years of teaching experience and as well as EAP, he teaches research skills to foundation students. He conceptualises CAR as a systematic process starting with identifying problems, researching solutions and implementing some form of change through a ‘*trial and error*’ process. This shows a broad understanding of CAR, and his view somewhat aligns with the CAR processes and their cyclical nature (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). As the researcher, I must recognise that Ken’s interpretation of CAR as ‘trial and error’ risks oversimplifying the methodological rigour of CAR. This reflects a broader issue in international EAP settings, where CAR is often viewed pragmatically rather than as a structured research methodology. Ken further perceives CAR as ‘*hugely qualitative*’ and ‘*human-centred*’ and states it is

¹⁴ The concept being reflective writing

‘virtually nigh on impossible to measure.’ This possibly suggests some understanding that there are some limits to the generalisability of CAR. Unlike Zoe, Ken expresses the view that the interpretation of the data, which ‘can change depending on who looks at it,’ is part of the nature of this type of research (CAR) as opposed to Zoe possibly viewing this as a limitation. At this stage, Ken accepts data collection as part of the process, and it could be Ken’s view of CAR being both a systematic process and an interpretivist, which supports Burns’ (2009) position that CAR can be somewhat rigorous without being positivist.

When expressing perceptions of CAR, Emma, the fourth participant in this part of the study, stated CAR was not necessarily a term she had been exposed to and that her understanding of CAR was derivative of the term itself, ‘classroom,’ ‘action’, and ‘research.’ When explaining in more detail, Emma came to view CAR as a more formalised version of what teachers do *‘in the back of our heads.’* Emma further clarifies her understanding of CAR in relation to what she perceives as traditional research and states that it is personal and allows for flexibility. She appreciates the adaptive nature of CAR as it allows teachers to *‘change questions’* and to personalise the research to her own classroom. Her insights into CAR reflect the process as less rigid and that it does not adhere to predefined protocols in some ways, which aligns with Edge’s (2011) view of CAR to focus on research as a process that is conducted with teachers rather than a focus on teachers. Her view also prompts reflection on how CAR is conceptualised across diverse teaching contexts. If teachers primarily understand CAR as a flexible alternative to traditional research, this may influence how accurately or consistently the CAR process is implemented in EAP and similar international programmes. These perceptions do not acknowledge CAR’s systematicity and stages. Despite this, Emma’s acknowledgement of CAR’s flexibility correlates with Cain’s (2011) view that CAR reflects responsiveness and allows for deviation from the original aims, which in other traditional paradigms could be perceived as a threat to validity.

Demi, Zoe, Ken and Emma all viewed CAR as more subjective and flexible and in some cases, their points reflected some of the debates surrounding the validity and robustness of CAR (Borg, 2006; Dörnyei, 2007). Demi and Emma also highlighted the importance of institutional support, as workplace culture provides opportunities to conduct innovative practices (Leitch & Day, 2000). Finally, time constraints were briefly mentioned, and keeping a reflective diary could pose a barrier to engagement with CAR, and Zoe's view aligns somewhat with findings on the practical barriers to CAR from Burns and Edwards (2014).

5.6.2. Perceptions of focus group meetings and collaboration

All teacher-researchers expressed the value of the focus group meetings, as they provided them with a dedicated space to discuss and share ideas. There were no fixed protocols as the aim of these sessions was to be teacher-led, as noted by Anderson (1990). Having a fixed protocol might stifle their willingness to share their thoughts and feelings. This being said, Focus Group One revolved around the early stages of CAR and was loosely directed to help participants vocalise and discuss their chosen research focus and research question. Focus Group two provided the opportunity to give updates on the CAR process, reflect on challenges (such as online teaching and student engagement), and consider how their research evolved across the cycles.

The environment created during the focus group meetings was intentionally a supportive one, and it was aimed to provide a relaxing environment without the teacher-researchers feeling judged. I also invited other members of the department to take part, and these members could act as facilitators who also serve to provide an objective view, but contribute to the reflective process. These contributors also serve as critical friends and act to support whilst the teacher-researchers make sense of their experiences (Kember et al., 1997). As this took place during COVID, it was a conscious decision to be inclusive and to maintain

a sense of departmental cohesion at a time when tutors needed a source of professional connection and emotional support. As both facilitator and line manager, I need to consider how my positionality might have influenced these interactions. Conducting research in my own institution inevitably involves tensions, especially where established professional relationships and hierarchies intersect with the research process (Mercer, 2007). While the intention was to create a teacher-led space, insider research has a risk of positive bias. This acknowledgement is important, as my dual role may have inadvertently shaped group dynamics. A wider implication is that CAR initiatives in small departments, especially language sections, must account for power relations to ensure authentic collaboration rather than compliance. I framed questions and extended participants' reflections, which might have directed or reinforced consensus, shaped responses which could have "affect[ed] information that participants are willing to share" (Berger, 2015, p.220).

Participants also emphasised that focus group meetings not only supported their professional development but also their emotional well-being. Zoe particularly noted that the Zoom meetings "*make you feel like you are part of a team*", reflecting professional belonging. This was particularly important during this time as spontaneous staffroom exchanges no longer occurred, mitigating feelings of isolation. Demi made a clear distinction between the focus group meetings concerning CAR and the usual departmental meetings. CAR-based focus group meetings were specifically designed to focus on the teacher-researchers rather than top-down issues that are often administratively focused. Findings from Andrews-Larson et al. (2017) argue that intentional collaboration supports richer conversations and promotes teacher learning as conversations are generally more insightful, in greater depth, rather than ploughing through an agenda with fewer personal items that might not specifically relate to teachers' own practices.

Demi further valued the opportunity to focus on student issues, and it was evident that they were sharing similar experiences, which was deemed very helpful. Zoe also valued the opportunity to use the focus group meetings to share experiences, and the CAR process prompted her to assess her teaching strategies critically, and like Demi, this promoted personal and professional growth. Zoe also felt that these reflections were deeply personal and noted she was often very judgmental of herself. These thoughts and feelings could provoke discomfort, and Burns (2009) highlights that teachers can often struggle with the concept of themselves as teacher-researchers, especially when they lack confidence. Despite Zoe's anxieties about writing a reflective diary, she was very keen to share her positive view of the focus group meetings as she realised that the other teacher-researchers were echoing the same experiences. Burns (2009) stresses the importance of creating a psychologically safe environment, as without this collaboration during CAR can deter involvement, as teachers can internalise professional expectations of their own competence, and this might make them wary of displaying any vulnerabilities.

Ken also freely expressed his emotional relief and the validation he gained through this collaborative aspect of CAR. He fully recognised that others shared his own challenges, and this alleviated his feelings of isolation. Deci and Ryan (2000) and Ryan and Deci (2017) advocate the need for *relatedness*, and this is without any hidden agenda. Ken's views reflect this concept, as he valued the opportunity to share ideas honestly, and the group dynamics here were conducive to fostering openness. Both Burns (2009) and Edwards and Burns (2016) stress that this trust is essential but often not considered in implementation. Teachers like Ken appear to benefit when collaboration is inclusive and non-judgmental. These conditions require conscious facilitation and support, a clear aim of the focus group meetings at this stage of the research. Emma's view of focus group meetings echoed those of the other teacher-researchers. At the time, Emma was located in London but teaching online for the same organisation as the

other teacher-researchers. She appeared to feel a little distanced from the others, and she expressed the need to have more meetings that are less agenda-driven. She also suggested that CAR should be embedded into existing meetings, but acknowledged the possible constraints of this.

5.6.3 Teacher-researchers' Perspectives of Reflective Diaries

Reflective diaries act as a method to record events, express thoughts and feelings, and generally make observations about classroom practices. This method of recording allows for reflection-on-action and can inform future practice and decisions (Schön, 1983; Rodgers, 2002). This process aligns quite closely with the nature of CAR and can drive ongoing classroom improvements (Burns, 2010). Reflective diaries are often personal records that teachers make, and they are most likely not shared. Reflective diaries can often be descriptive, as discussed in section 2.5.2. Given that these diaries will be shared as part of the data gathering process, there is a danger that they might not be genuinely reflective (Watts & Lawson, 2009). This also highlights a possible limitation; an assumption I made was that diaries would produce authentic data, but I overlooked how institutional hierarchies shape what teachers feel they can record. Authenticity here is not dependent on writing entries in the moment or after the fact, but on whether participants feel able to record their experiences honestly. In this study, institutional roles may have constrained what teachers felt comfortable documenting, which has implications for CAR research in other international programmes where teacher vulnerability may be heightened.

Before embarking on CAR, Demi, Zoe, Ken and Emma were given very loose instructions on what the diary entries should look like. The aim of this was not to put constraints on the process or to put undue pressure on them to produce entries that were prescriptive or organised in a certain way. Therefore, the instruction was to make entries in any form they

preferred. These could be notes, keywords, or more substantial entries, but the aim was to capture their thoughts and feelings during the process in order to gain an authentic record whilst conducting CAR.

Demi

Demi approached the reflective diary with some enthusiasm. She noted that reflective writing came naturally to her and she embraced the process. She was also very aware of the value of reflective writing and encouraged her students to engage in this, and this view aligns with Farrell's (2015) perspective on the value of reflective writing. Demi also stated that *'It's something that I always do anyway. Writing is always helpful from every perspective... It wasn't a burden.....I always do it.'* Demi therefore reflected a positive attitude to reflective writing, but her entries tended to reflect perfectionism. Demi had the habit of editing and *'cleaned'* her notes before submission. The extent to which this was done cannot be ascertained; possibly her true thoughts and feelings were muted before submitting them. Therefore, Demi's diary might not have fully captured authentic thoughts and feelings during the CAR process. Often, when teachers censor their own notes, they have preconceived ideas of whether these notes are academically sound for submission (Hanks, 2022). An example given was Demi's anxieties about being a non-native English-speaking teacher teaching EAP. She questioned her role as a language model and her need to be *"absolutely perfect."* This reflected her internal struggles with reflective writing rather than focusing on the CAR process and its impact on students' learning. Here, the extent to which the instructions on the diary entries were sufficient to counteract these anxieties. Demi's diary also revealed her concerns about not following the suggested model for conducting CAR. She felt there was some internal pressure to "do it right," and this might have inhibited her performance. There were intimations that Demi viewed CAR as a process that solves a problem in one cycle, which is a common misconception when teacher-researchers conduct CAR (Burns, 2010). On reflection, this raises

a methodological concern relevant to wider CAR literature, as reflective diaries might disadvantage teachers who are less comfortable with written self-expression.

Overall, Demi found writing a reflective diary a rewarding experience and one that she is used to doing. Whilst reflective writing promotes metacognitive awareness, it could lead to teacher identity issues and, in Demi's case, authentic entries could be hindered due to perfectionism.

Zoe

Zoe's experience with reflective writing was a strong contrast to Demi's. Even before conducting CAR, Zoe expressed her emotional challenges and anxieties with producing a reflective diary. She particularly highlighted anxieties revolving around me as the researcher and her Line Manager, reading the diary. Zoe very much struggled with the vulnerability of having the diary read and found submitting it *"extremely stressful."* Despite constant reassurance that there were no expectations in terms of quality, length of entries or format of the entries, Zoe felt extremely vulnerable exposing her reflections. This is highlighted thus: *"I wasn't feeling very comfortable....even for me, sometimes when you write something negative down, and it is there looking at you, screaming at you."* This resulted in Zoe's entries being very descriptive and tended to focus on one-to-one tutorials rather than her inner reflections on her engagement in CAR. Watts and Lawson (2009) noted that these types of entries are a result of teachers feeling anxious when they are going to be judged. Zoe solidified this point through the following entry: *"I want my students to enjoy the lesson..... That note was screaming at me, telling me... You are not such a good teacher."*

She also stated, *"I knew that I was writing knowing that someone else will use this for their PhD, then I was worried, you know what you have to do a good job otherwise, someone*

will struggle. Possibly because I have been there, I can relate. By the end of the first month, I am sorry to say, but I completely forgot your PhD.”

Helping Zoe manage her vulnerability and internal conflict was an essential factor, and I met with her at least once a week to have catch-ups about general things in her teaching week. These meetings were not necessarily about the reflective diary, but to support her and build self-confidence and for her to feel in control of her teaching. At one particular point, Zoe questioned her teaching, and I assisted with some possible ideas to promote speaking with a Chinese student, and she found this successful. Ensuring her emotional safety and trust in me as her Line Manager was first and foremost essential. Several times, I reassured her that she did not have to submit her reflective diary and that I would leave the decision to her. Helping teachers manage their vulnerability and build confidence was highlighted by McNiff (2002), and Zoe’s fear of appearing inadequate echoed findings from Tajik and Ranjbar (2018). The data from the reflective diary in Zoe’s case were of secondary importance; her mental welfare and confidence came first. This emphasises that emotional safety is not only an ethical concern but a necessary condition for teachers to engage meaningfully in CAR, and it could also suggest that emotional safety can shape how comfortable teachers feel engaging in deeper levels of reflection, which may influence the kinds of insights that emerge through CAR.

Ken

Ken found reflective diary writing valuable and viewed the process as a positive one. However, Ken struggled with time constraints and noted this accordingly: *“Getting down to write notes properly was a little bit tricky.....I would take 5 or 10 minutes and do some cursory notes and come back and build upon it.”* This approach aligns with reflective practice when there are time constraints (Farrell, 2015) and finding time to write meaningful notes when teachers are extremely busy is a factor highlighted by Burns (2009).

Ken also shared experiences with Demi and Zoe in terms of the quality of writing in his reflective diary. Ken was highly critical of himself and the quality of entries “*I feel like I completed most of the content... but not completely and not to a standard where I would feel completely satisfied.*” Ken’s entries were quite systematic, and he aimed to reflect thoughts and feelings at each stage of the CAR process. For the most part, Ken’s entries focused on describing student behaviour and classroom processes rather than his feelings about conducting CAR, which is a common finding in teacher reflective diaries (Farrell, 2019; Mann & Walsh, 2021). Ken valued reflective diary writing, and despite the challenges of time and quality of entries, he was able to balance any internal struggles with writing a reflective diary, and he expressed a willingness to continue using reflective practices in the future.

Emma

Out of all four teacher-researchers, Zoe’s experience with reflective diary writing was the most positive one. She viewed this as a valuable, natural process and a logical extension of reflection: “*When you write it down, it just becomes a bit more organised.....you can track your progress.*” This view helped her make sense of her thoughts and actions and served to track her progress. Emma also perceived diary writing as less burdensome than other forms of formal lesson evaluation. Her entries suggest fewer anxieties than those of the other teacher-researchers, and she possibly had greater engagement with the process because of this (Farrell, 2022).

Emma’s diary entries also reflected a shift in her teaching approach as she was struggling to engage her students in the EAP lessons. Emma had targeted a group who had already met the progression requirements for EAP, and it could be that they were not as invested in the lessons. Her diary demonstrated how she explored new strategies and enabled her to reconsider her approach. She further incorporated students’ preferences into her future

lesson planning, which Burns (2009) and Tseng (2020) note is an element in effective CAR. Emma appeared not to follow the clear steps of CAR, but she did demonstrate effective reflection as noted by Watts and Lawson (2009), where multiple perspectives are considered to inform practice and foster a collaborative attitude. Unlike Demi, Zoe and Ken, Emma chose to disclose her CAR to her students, and this might have contributed to their fatigue and engagement issues as they were participating in activities that were new to them. Acknowledging this shift is an important point to highlight, as Burns and Edwards (2014) note that sustaining motivation in a naturalistic setting could be challenging.

In summary, experiences of writing reflective diaries were regarded as being quite valuable, but these experiences varied. Teachers often struggle with sharing thoughts and perceptions when their writing is going to be read by another party. This generally leads to more descriptive rather than reflective writing, which reflects authentic thoughts and feelings (Watts & Lawson, 2009; Farrell, 2019). It could be that the format or purpose of the reflective diary was not disseminated clearly enough, and possibly using writing rubrics, audio entries or scaffolding through sentence starters might have helped and made reflections more manageable. Adapting how entries are made would address time constraint issues as experienced by Ken. Teacher-researchers in this study were very emotionally invested in their CAR, and the impact this would have on them was underestimated. Those with perfectionist tendencies expressed anxiety, and in Zoe's case, this was challenging to manage and was viewed as failing (Akbari, 2007).

Reflective diaries, as discussed above, are at best multifaceted tools that can be used effectively to support teaching, learning, and collaboration during CAR, but could also create extreme anxiety. I had assumed that tutors, as reflective practitioners, would feel confident writing reflectively, but this assumption may have underestimated the emotional labour involved in formalising personal reflections, especially during a time of heightened anxiety

(COVID-19). In hindsight, this aspect of the study could have been scaffolded more effectively to reduce any unintended negative impact on teachers' overall well-being.

5.6.3 Perceptions after conducting Classroom Action Research

Empowering teachers to investigate their own work through CAR systematically aims to improve their pedagogical practices and enhance teaching quality. All four teacher-researchers reported that CAR was a positive experience and one that enhanced their professional development. Burns (1999, 2005, 2015) and Kemmis et al. (2014) advocate that CAR has established itself as an important approach to professional development and reflective practice for English language teachers. Therefore, this final section draws on Demi's, Zoe's, Ken's and Emma's final thoughts and perceptions after conducting CAR. It needs to be noted here that the focus is on teacher-researchers' perspectives and not an evaluation of how closely aligned their methodological implementation was with the CAR process. Discussion of the findings for teacher-researchers' perspectives has been organised accordingly:

- Classroom Action Research as a reflective and empowering process
- Challenges to conducting CAR, time constraints, and workload
- Promoting collaboration and relatedness
- Motivation and autonomy

5.6.4 Classroom Action Research as a reflective and empowering process

The potential of CAR was reflected in the teacher-researchers' final voices on their perceptions of CAR in this study. Despite Zoe's anxieties surrounding reflective writing, her experience and approach to CAR demonstrated a strong awareness of the benefits of the reflective processes associated with CAR. Zoe described her experiences as "*putting together a puzzle*," and she highlighted the value of CAR, especially when experimenting with reviewing video recordings of herself teaching, immediate reflections, and acknowledging that

she thought her teaching had improved. Zoe's increased pedagogical understanding and involvement of students in her decision-making align with Cain's (2011) argument that CAR supports heightened responsiveness to students' needs and, through reflection, fosters development and teacher-learning.

Similar to Zoe's reflection on the CAR process, Emma's engagement with CAR led her to adopt a more student-centred approach. Initially, Emma focused on trialling teaching techniques, and she gradually made the shift towards tailoring her activities to her learners. She notes "*there were more important discoveries while trialing these strategies in that listening to students before selecting activities to ensure that they are relevant in purpose, timeliness and content.*" This approach reflects Kemmis et al. (2014), who emphasise participatory, dialogic learning over a prescriptive approach. Empowerment through reflection has allowed Emma to critically examine and improve her classroom practice contextually to ensure meaningful conscious responses that have a positive impact on her students. Emma's reflections on the CAR process somewhat echo the findings by Burns and Khalifa (2017) that CAR fosters greater professional satisfaction as well as pedagogical innovation.

Further to Zoe and Emma's views that CAR enabled them to reflect effectively, Demi's perspective on CAR demonstrated a strong orientation towards reflective practice, but she also highlights some of the challenges when transitioning from her natural reflective processes towards reflection as part of a more systematic methodological process (CAR). This perspective has been reported in other studies as providing teachers with the capacity to support reflection and empower teachers (Allwright, 1988; Bailey et al., 1991; Burns, 2019; Edwards & Burns, 2015; Kuang & David, 2017).

Demi's previous experience with research was for her current PhD, and she admitted she had a few struggles with following the steps of CAR "*I tried to be a little more formal....so*

in a way I followed all the steps and stages of traditional research, so...I kind of had a blended approach". Demi was very conscious of the CAR process and research she had previously conducted, but was less familiar with the cyclical nature of CAR as highlighted by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and Burns (2019). Demi shows a conscious awareness of CAR and how she could adapt elements of CAR to suit her teaching context, and I acknowledge that Demi's 'blended approach' could complicate the interpretation of her CAR cycle. This highlights a broader challenge where teachers' prior academic research experience may conflict with the ethos of CAR, raising the need for clearer epistemological framing in future studies. Demi's reflections did reveal that CAR empowered her to evaluate her own teaching critically and to consider directions for future CAR. Although Demi is very aware of her own reflective practice, there are clear undertones of very critical self-reflection, which might inhibit the extent to which Demi is empowered in conducting CAR. Being so critical of one's own practices is generally expected, but being overly critical might inhibit the CAR process, and this might have been the case with Demi, resulting in her questioning herself, which will be discussed later in this section. Crookes (1993) argues that even partial engagement in CAR can contribute to professional growth and the transformative potential, which in turn empowers teachers, and this reflects Demi's positive engagement and subsequent heightened awareness of CAR.

In relation to reflection and empowerment, Ken's approach to CAR was somewhat different to the other teacher-researchers. He was open and honest in acknowledging that at times his teaching had been somewhat improvised, and that his teaching is more fluid and adaptive. He describes his teaching as *"always adapting and changing, but instead of doing more things off the cuff or less formally, I suppose, I might try this system where I can."* Participation and engagement with CAR have prompted him to consider a more structured and systematic approach. This reflects teacher empowerment and a shift from intuitive to evidence-

based informed practice (Bailey et al., 1991; Burns & Khalifa, 2017). Ken further recognised CAR's potential to enhance collaborative reflection both with colleagues teaching the same group and across modules. This dynamic is very much supported by Edwards and Burns (2015) and Somekh (1989) as crucial for sustaining CAR and building a research community. Ken's positive reflections of CAR as "*insightful*" suggest he found CAR empowering, as he indicated that he would apply CAR in the future to address "*large or challenging classes.*" This view aligns with previous research findings from Kuang and David (2017), which suggest that CAR can reform teaching techniques and enhance the quality of teaching by making reflection a more intentional, deliberate, and collaborative practice.

Finally, all teacher-researchers recognised the value of reflection in CAR and the capacity of CAR to enhance self-awareness, develop teacher empowerment, and the importance of collaboration. However, challenges to conducting CAR were evident, and teacher-research perspectives also highlighted time constraints and workload pressures as possible limitations to engaging in CAR, which is discussed further in the following section.

5.6.5 Challenges with CAR, time constraints, and workload

Despite the potential of CAR to empower, it is frequently constrained by practical barriers, such as time and workload pressures (Wang & Zhang, 2023). Although I attribute much of the constraint to the 'normal' workload for teachers, I now recognise that COVID might have had a greater impact on teachers in terms of added labour, such as troubleshooting technology issues, adapting materials and techniques and increased wellbeing concerns. Demi's experience exemplifies this as she notes that as a PhD candidate, she balances multiple roles. As a consequence, she found it challenging to adhere to the methodological expectations of CAR. She noted that she adopted a more "*hybrid*" approach, which blended CAR-inspired reflection and what she viewed as traditional research methods. Demi also perceived CAR as

being more feasible in secondary or primary settings, where teaching loads and having more contact with students would better support sustained inquiry, as the time allocation for the class she selected was only four hours a week. Cain (2011) points out that the dynamic and fragmented nature of higher education teaching could be an impeding factor for deep engagement with CAR. This challenge is not unique to my own institution and reflects conditions in many global language contexts, where time, assessment-driven environments reduce teachers' capacity to sustain iterative CAR cycles. Burns (2005) offers a cautionary note that without institutional support, CAR could be perceived as an added burden rather than a genuine opportunity for professional growth. Heavy workloads and associated administrative tasks were also reported by Puspitasari (2022) and Edwards and Burns (2015) as challenges to successful CAR.

Teachers often report challenges in sustaining meaningful CAR (Borg, 2013), but Zoe's perspective did not align with Borg, and she stated that time was not an inhibiting factor. Zoe did not highlight too many challenges with CAR; she noted that areas of her practice were *"close to impossible to improve. Because sometimes, I have noticed that we tend to do the same thing, slightly changing the wording, and think that we have used another technique, but in reality, it is the same technique just done differently."* Although this could be perceived as a challenge in understanding the true nature of CAR. Zoe notes that making superficial changes is not really making an impact. In essence, it might feel like an innovative technique, but the 'change' here has not really embraced the true nature of the principles of CAR, which also explains Zoe's other comment that *"every day you test another technique and some of them are a complete failure and some of them are really working."*

Zoe's experience with CAR aligns with Burns and Edwards' (2024) view that meaningful CAR might be inhibited as teachers could revert to familiar, superficial practices. Zoe might not be making a specific link with the theoretical and practical expectations of CAR

and has reverted to making small changes, believing she has implemented CAR, as noted by Burns (2009). This might be why she experienced “*complete failure[s]*”. Reviewing Zoe’s responses in the final interview highlights the need for closer mentorship and scaffolding, which, according to Burns (2024), is vital to help teachers transition from informal problem-solving to sustained, impactful research.

Further to Zoe’s perspective on the challenges when conducting CAR, Ken noted that the challenges he had revolved around student engagement and the class he had selected. “*One of the biggest challenges was that I, I, very often overestimated the students. I don’t say that in a very negative way. There are some days when they perform brilliantly, and it will go so smoothly, and there are some days when half the class won’t even turn their cameras or microphones on, and they won’t be remotely engaged.*” Ken questioned the inconsistency of his data, which aligns with Hancock’s (1997) observation that teachers might question the value of their findings. This might lead Ken to have a negative perception of himself and whether what he is doing is of value. This inconsistency in learner behaviour was typical of online teaching during COVID-19, and limited visibility and difficulty in reading the extent of students’ engagement would have complicated Ken’s action research. If Ken had been face-to-face, the results might have been different, as classroom dynamics would have been more interpretable, resulting in more immediate intervention with these students.

Ken highlights his “*own mental health*” as a challenge, which might lead to questions concerning the support Ken was receiving from me. This emotional strain might have impacted his successful engagement in CAR and aligns with Borg and Liu’s (2013) claim that research is often perceived as ‘another level of work’ (p. 292), especially as Ken admitted he had imposed a high standard on himself. Although not prominent in the findings for this research, Ken did note time and workload as a constraint. The timing of this part of the study was delayed a little and pushed into the examination season, which naturally brings an increased workload,

and Borg (2009) notes that lack of time is often a prominent reason for not engaging in CAR. This is important to consider more deeply, as I was directly involved in implementing new examination systems to safeguard assessment integrity. This responsibility was likely to have reduced my sensitivity to the day-to-day pressures while attempting CAR. Also, whilst I felt supportive, I was also accountable for deadlines, procedures, and moderation processes, which in turn impacted my workload and could have influenced my interpretation of time as a barrier.

Like Ken, Emma noted student engagement as a challenge when conducting CAR. Emma chose to inform her students that she was going to be adopting new teaching methods and felt this had an impact on student engagement. She noted that students became fatigued and needed more consistency. *“They kind of wanted to turn up and wanted to know that they had some consistency and they had something they wanted to do as opposed to coming into class and having to adjust overall again. So, I think them just knowing there were going to be changes contributed to that kind of fatigue.”* From the students’ perspective, this could be perceived as disruptive and, according to Tabatabaei and Nazem (2013), would not be sustainable.

One revealing insight into the challenges that Emma faced is that knowing they were going to be doing something different impacted the emotional climate of the classroom and could have caused a disconnect. This confirms Borg’s observation that this lack of consistency and unpredictability would impact successful action research. Whilst Borg’s comment was related to teachers, it could be interpreted in the same way for learners. Emma started to question her own practices and the value of introducing so much variation in her lessons. Emma’s explicit awareness of engaging in research, combined with her limited understanding of CAR as a rigorous methodological process, appeared to disrupt the usual classroom dynamics. This created a misalignment between her intended aims in conducting CAR (possibly a hidden agenda) and students’ expectations. This tension echoes Medgyes’ (2017)

observation that language teachers are “people of action” prioritising immediate pedagogical concerns over engagement with research agendas (p.492).

5.6.6 Promoting collaboration and relatedness

Collaboration is recognised as a strength of CAR, and all the teacher-researchers in this study echoed this. This aligns with the work of Burns and Khalifa (2017) and Kemmis et al (2014). Ken stated he valued CAR for fostering collaboration and dialogue with the other teacher-researchers, and this perception reduces any feelings of isolation and can enhance methodological rigour. Often, personal reflections can lead to negativity, but the focus group meetings in this study served to confirm that all teacher-researchers shared similar feelings and experiences. Ken’s experience aligns with Burns and Khalifa’s (2017) point that CAR can be a vehicle for building professional learning communities. Kelley et al. (2022, p.1) also group reflective practice as serving to strengthen teachers’ practice through ‘critical friends’ as it provides the chance to share experiences and for these critical friends to support each other’s professional growth.

Emma also emphasised the value of collaborative spaces to share CAR experiences and found that structured CAR discussions led to more focused and solution-oriented conversations rather than the agenda-based departmental meetings. This concurs with Burns (2019), who argued that CAR provides a structured yet flexible framework for bridging the research-practice gap in collaborative settings. Ensuring focus group meetings were not structured was a conscious decision; despite this, Emma viewed the meetings as structured, but Emma might have meant the meetings were structured to focus on CAR. This point was not confirmed with Emma. Emma also noted that these discussions supported both pedagogical innovations, as they involved the sharing of ideas and activities, and enhanced trust and professional

satisfaction. Building confidence through this form of professional dialogue was also highlighted by Demi.

Demi's experience of CAR highlights its role as a social and empowering process. She describes how the collaborative element through the focus group meetings helped to develop a shared understanding. Demi noted, "*When you see that others feel the same as you...then, this, this is taken to a different level and it's much more helpful.*" Being more connected to others aligns with Edge's (2001) emphasis on the importance of quality interaction. By fostering an environment where collaborative dialogue was valued over individual performance, it links to Deci and Ryan's (2000) psychological need for *relatedness*, which drives intrinsic motivation, professional well-being, and autonomy. Although the original focus of this study was autonomy, it became clear during the CAR process that relatedness emerged as an equally powerful dimension of teacher experience. The value placed on connection, shared understanding, and emotional support suggests that relatedness was not simply an incidental finding but a central mechanism through which teachers engaged meaningfully with CAR.

Zoe further reinforces her agreement with the other teacher-researchers by stating, "*I completely agree with [Emma], it would be amazing if, actually, in our meetings, our weekly meetings, we devote 10-20 minutes on CAR to discuss about things that are going on in our classes because even though I didn't directly research feedback, listening to [Demi] and to her actual outcome, it was very helpful. I could learn something.*" While CAR is a systematic and structured process, its relational and conversational dimensions are not, and this is what teachers find most beneficial, as supported by Cain (2011) and Burns (2019). Zoe's comments also support Edwards and Burns' (2015) argument concerning sustainable CAR, which is rooted in collaborative networks. These reflections illustrate that, although autonomy was the conceptual centre of this research, the prominence of relatedness in teachers' accounts indicates that autonomy does not operate in isolation. Instead, teachers' capacity to enact

autonomy in CAR was strengthened, if not enabled, by a strong sense of relatedness. This is a critical insight, as it suggests that autonomy, reflection, and relatedness work interactively rather than independently within the CAR process.

Reflections from these teacher-researchers strongly highlight that collaboration and relatedness are not peripheral to CAR but are central to its impact on teacher learning. This study focuses primarily on autonomy, and therefore, the full significance of relatedness within SDT is not systematically examined. This represents a conceptual limitation, as CAR relies heavily on relational support, which warrants deeper investigation in future research. Open, reflective conversations enhance relatedness and the sense of connection and belonging. Creating spaces for these conversations is as important, if not more important, than the outcomes of CAR, as they build and nurture professional relationships. After discussing this element of the study, it supports the need to reinforce the importance of collaboration and relatedness as a central core aim of CAR initiatives, a move strongly supported by Edwards and Burns (2019). When comparing these findings to the varying models of CAR highlighted in Chapter Two (section 2.4), teacher-researchers' perceived benefits of collaboration in the CAR process are consistent with the participatory strand of CAR noted by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), where inquiry is explicitly collective. Also, McNiff and Whitehead's emphasis on critical friendship and group participation aids in strengthening the credibility and transparency of CAR. In contrast, other models, which appear more technical (Altrichter et al., 2008; Elliott, 1991; Ebbutt, 1985), advocate that collaboration has an impact, but do not stress that it is mandatory, which highlights why intentionally designing this research to include collaborative spaces mattered so much to the teacher-researchers. This does raise an important point, that collaboration in CAR and relatedness may need to be re-conceptualised not as optional features of CAR but as essential conditions that sustain motivation, mitigate self-doubt, and enhance professional growth. In this study, collaboration was more about collective

meaning-making and less about collective decision-making, which possibly challenges traditional models of CAR and possibly extends these models.

5.6.7 Motivation and autonomy

Motivation and autonomy are closely interconnected and play a role in shaping teachers' professional development and effectiveness. Teacher-researchers' experiences reveal insights about motivation and autonomy throughout the CAR process. Puspitasari (2022) and Wang and Zhang (2023) noted that when CAR is required for institutional purposes, such as career advancement, it often leads to superficial engagement. When teacher motivation is high, CAR is able to foster deeper reflection and more meaningful professional growth. This ideal is also highlighted by Burns (2019), Burns and Edwards (2015), and Deci and Ryan (2000).

Although this discussion has not highlighted the extent to which the methodological expectations of CAR have been followed, perspectives from Demi, Zoe, Ken and Emma do highlight that CAR supports teacher motivation and promotes professional autonomy. A wider implication here is that CAR may impact motivation differently depending on institutional structures. In highly assessment-driven EAP/ESL settings, autonomy may flourish, but relatedness and competence-building may require more explicit institutional support. Demi's final thoughts appeared to be somewhat critical of the CAR process, and although she did not explicitly state she had developed professionally, she does show heightened motivation through her drive to improve her teaching and students' learning experience. She comments, "*writing is always helpful from every perspective,*" which is a comment in relation to her reflective diary. She also demonstrates autonomy by being aware of her positioning in the CAR process: "*I tried to be a little more formal on these occasions,*" although this comment was in relation to more traditional research, her awareness of the need to make her approach formalised. Ryan and Deci (2000) identify this autonomy as acting within Demi's own values, which is a key

force in intrinsic motivation and professional well-being. Although the success of her engagement with CAR can be questioned, Demi's motivation and sense of professional identity throughout the process were very evident. Demi questions her cultural background in terms of how far she can be autonomous: *"If I had continued and developed my career only in Argentina, I would have been so tied to procedures."* This further reflects that this opportunity to engage in CAR enabled the promotion of professional autonomy.

Zoe's experience also highlights teacher motivation and autonomy. She highlighted her enthusiasm for the collaborative meetings and, like Ken, she reinforced how much she learned from other teacher-researchers and gaining ideas from others highlighted the personal relevance of the process, which helps to sustain motivation when conducting CAR. This teacher-driven approach is a strength of CAR and allows teachers to select personally meaningful issues, and echoes Burn and Edwards' (2014) perspective. Zoe further iterates that CAR was helpful as she *"could see the effect on [her] students and for [her] that's the most important thing."* This illustrates how CAR can drive Zoe's self-improvement as she was able to see tangible benefits in her students' performance. Zoe's sense of empowerment was evident as improvement in her teaching and mental health could be attributed to Zoe's professional growth and ability to make informed decisions. Zoe also acknowledged her engagement with research literature, trying out new techniques and reflecting on successes and failures, which reflected autonomous decision-making to drive her professional learning, which aligns with Cain (2011) and fosters ownership in Zoe's professional decisions.

Further to Zoe, Ken's reflections highlight the challenges faced in maintaining motivation, but CAR did support his purpose as a teacher, yet he displayed a high level of intrinsic motivation throughout the CAR process and despite challenges, he demonstrated a strong internal drive to engage in CAR. According to Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985, 2000), intrinsic motivation is enhanced when teachers experience autonomy,

competence, and relatedness. Ken's self-reflection serves to reaffirm his professionalism and core values that he holds as a teacher, which links with Edge (2001) and Burns (2019). Ken exhibits a strong sense of teacher autonomy by taking control over his actions. He acknowledges that he *"is always adapting and always changing"*, and conducting CAR has heightened his reflective skills and had a positive impact on the way he approaches his lessons. He notes, *"instead of doing more things off the cuff or less formally, I suppose, I might try this system when I can."* By shifting from informal actions to a more systematic approach, Ken is taking ownership of his actions, which fosters professional growth, but he does express the difficulty of balancing autonomy with time, which highlights the challenge he faces with his current workload and conducting CAR.

Ken does highlight that there might be constraints which might impact sustained engagement, as he implies that CAR might only be useful for *"as large as that language class."* Ken engaged in reflective dialogue during the focus group meetings, and other teacher-researchers noted how useful his ideas were. For example, Zoe stated that Ken's idea of playing music was valuable. Ken clearly felt comfortable enough to vocalise his ideas and was willing to learn from others, which further shapes his and others' teaching approach and fosters responsibility for their professional growth.

The final teacher-researcher in this part of the study was Emma. Despite Emma's struggles with keeping her class motivated, she acknowledges that CAR did not feel a burden, but she highlights her potential motivation to conduct CAR, unlike Ken, as she states, *'It is really effective without feeling like you are doing a lot of extra work'*. This could be an indication of how CAR could be integrated into teachers' regular practices without feeling overwhelmed. Emma's final thoughts on CAR indicate a shift in her teaching approach, particularly with giving her students more autonomy over their own learning. This reflects Deci

and Ryan's (2000) position, which emphasises the role of autonomy in fostering motivation. She states, *"It's also pushed me to trust students more - in many cases, they have proven themselves when given flexibility and some autonomy over their time."* Edwards and Burns (2016) highlight the role of collaborative learning in shaping teachers' professional identities. Like the other teacher-researchers, Emma values the focus group meetings as a means of engaging in professional learning. This collaborative experience, as noted by Burns (2019), can help teachers to assert their professional expertise and reinforce their autonomy through the CAR experience. It does need to be noted that in this study, there was no evaluation of how close Emma followed the principles of CAR, but her final comments on the value of participating in this study were clear *"Overall, CAR has been a positive experience and it's something that I feel would be a really valuable addition to dept meetings to help prevent ourselves from becoming complacent in our practices."*

Overall, Demi, Zoe, Ken and Emma's experience with CAR highlights its potential in fostering reflection, collaboration and autonomy, but their reflections also reveal challenges related to time, workload and student engagement. All teachers valued CAR as a method for promoting critical reflection and improving their teaching. In particular, Zoe and Emma noted they adopted a more student-centred approach to their teaching and, despite Demi's struggles with the methodological rigours of CAR, recognised its value. Ken found that it helped him transition from an improvised to a more structured approach. While all teacher-researchers found challenges related to time, or rather timing of CAR, workload and student engagement, their reflections indicate that CAR is valuable for improving teaching practices, fostering autonomy and professional growth. These experiences highlight the importance of providing teachers with the necessary support and collaborative environments for fully engaging in CAR to ensure that it leads to sustainable, meaningful professional development.

5.7. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter critically examined the findings of this study in relation to previous literature on language teachers' understanding, perceptions and practices concerning CAR and highlighted language teachers' perceived autonomy and their perceptions after conducting their own CAR.

The findings indicate that language teachers have a varying degree of understanding of CAR, and while most recognise CAR as a reflective, context-specific process aimed at improving teaching and learning, their understanding of the cyclical and systematic nature of CAR is somewhat limited.

As a whole, many respondents in this study view CAR as an informal, instinctive practice linked to everyday reflective actions rather than a structured research process. Language teachers' understanding of the term 'Classroom Action research' appeared to be derivative of the key words within the term: 'classroom', 'action', and 'research'. This somewhat superficial understanding of CAR highlights a gap between theory and practice. Despite teachers acknowledging the value of CAR, the results show that a majority of language teachers have never been exposed to it as a robust methodological process, and even fewer language teachers have engaged in it. This gap could be explained by a lack of exposure to CAR in teacher training and professional development programmes, which was echoed by Borg (2009) and Burns (2009).

Reflection was highlighted as an essential process for a majority of language teachers in this study, and while language teachers recognised that CAR incorporates reflective processes, they tended to regard reflection as a natural and informal part of teaching and somewhat instinctual. Both questionnaire respondents and interviewees expressed this finding, and this study highlighted that language teachers claimed to practice some form of reflection.

They do so without conscious awareness of the CAR cycles. This informal engagement tends to take the form of ad-hoc problem-solving or reviewing teaching strategies without formal data collection of subsequent cycles of action. Therefore, it is true to state that language teachers' engagement in CAR is somewhat fragmented and suggests a missed opportunity for more structured professional growth through CAR. As Burns (2005) notes, CAR is most effective when it involves structured cycles of reflection and action. The findings noted in this research reflected a general lack of understanding of the cyclical nature of CAR.

When examining the autonomy that language teachers perceive they have in their classrooms, the findings suggest that teachers generally feel empowered to make decisions about the delivery of the curriculum, teaching materials and classroom management. However, this autonomy is often constrained by institutional policies, curriculum guidelines, assessment requirements and administrative expectations. To some degree, this might be expected; there needs to be some continuity across the curriculum, especially if students are expected to perform exit examinations. The data reflected that language teachers possess autonomy and many are inquisitive about their classrooms and demonstrate this through research and trying out new ideas to address problems. Smith and Erdoğan (2008) argue that autonomy involves both individual freedom and institutional support, which shape teachers' practices, and in some cases, a lack of institutional autonomy could have a negative impact on teachers' willingness and ability to engage in CAR. The findings tended to concur that a lack of institutional support could impact teachers' engagement in CAR.

The final part of this study explored teachers' perceptions after they conducted their own CAR. Four EAP tutors attended professional development on CAR, participated in two focus group interviews and a final exit interview. They demonstrated a shift in their understanding and application of CAR. After engaging in the CAR process, they expressed a greater understanding of it as a structured, reflective process that can lead to meaningful

improvements in teaching and learning, but engaging in CAR resulted in some challenges. Time constraints, workload and emotional vulnerability were highlighted; in particular, keeping a reflective diary was a source of anxiety for some teachers. Even though the instructions on keeping a reflective diary were very loose, they feared their reflections might be judged or that their entries might not meet the expected standard. This anxiety highlighted the need for a supportive environment where teachers feel safe to reflect openly without the pressure of academic perfection. One key insight from my research is that teachers' perceptions of CAR evolve from it being an instinctive process to understanding the potential of CAR as a structured method for improving teaching and learning, as highlighted through teacher-researcher engagement. My study also discovered that lack of engagement in CAR is often based on misconceptions about its complexity, and providing the opportunity to engage in it and integrate it into their regular teaching practices helped to foster a deeper, more systematic engagement. McNiff (2002) acknowledges this as facilitating the transition from informal reflective practice to a more structured research-based approach to teaching. The teacher-researchers in this study mostly valued the opportunity to collaborate with others and expressed a strong positive perspective of the focus group meetings and the opportunity to express their views without judgment. These meetings were mostly teacher-led and put the teachers, their students and CAR plans at the forefront. The importance of these meetings was reaffirmed by all four teacher-researchers in the final part of my research, as they noted having the time to focus on their classroom and their issues meant they understood they were not alone and there were commonalities with the problems they faced.

Some of the barriers to conducting CAR throughout all stages of this study have been acknowledged, for example, time and workload. These were noted as barriers, and CAR required a time commitment that was not always feasible within their demanding work schedule. Whilst this perspective was not held by a majority of language teachers this view

does align with earlier studies that time factor and workload is a major obstacle to CAR as noted by Hancock (1987). Teachers expressed that CAR might be more feasible if they had more time within their schedules, as well as a clear support structure from their institutions. This was not a view held by teacher-researchers in the final stage of this research. This finding reinforces the idea that CAR is more likely to thrive where teachers are supported by their colleagues and institutions, as collaboration and support networks are a vital key to sustaining the longevity of CAR, as noted by Borg (2009). Findings suggest that while language teachers generally perceive CAR as a positive reflective process, their understanding remains superficial, and their engagement with CAR is fragmented and informal. The findings generally align with the work of Burns (2015) and Allwright (1988), who emphasise that CAR can significantly enhance teaching and learning when teachers are given support and time to engage with CAR as a systematic process.

In framing these conclusions, I am very mindful that my enthusiasm for CAR might predispose me to interpret findings in a more positive light, which could reflect positive bias. This might lead me to give more attention to particular signs of growth and increased self-awareness of the teacher-researchers. I include these reflections to make my position transparent and acknowledge that this reflexivity is not only ethically important but also aligns with an interpretivist orientation. Interpretivism acknowledges that as an insider researcher, I cannot fully separate myself from the context I seek to understand; meaning is shaped through interaction, dialogue and the perspectives of all involved in this research. From this viewpoint, my own experiences, values and commitments could shape the process of co-constructing meaning through lived experiences with teacher-researchers rather than evaluation through an unattainable objective stance; rather, this reflects the nature of collaborative inquiry in which meanings are negotiated rather than discovered.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: contributions and future directions

The conclusion to my study begins with a summary of the research findings and the contributions these findings make to the existing body of knowledge on CAR. The study's limitations will be discussed, along with the identification of future directions for the research topic. Finally, this section will close with final reflections on the research process and outcomes.

6.1 Concluding Remarks

My research investigated language teachers' perspectives on CAR, specifically their understanding of the concept, perceptions of CAR, and prior engagement in it. Furthermore, the perceptions of language teachers regarding their own autonomy were explored, and a more in-depth understanding of these perceptions was gained after they had conducted their own CAR. This study was conducted with EFL, EAP, and ESOL teachers and employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting data through questionnaires ($n = 46$), interviews ($n = 15$), and feedback from language teachers after they received professional development on CAR ($n = 4$). Participants from the latter stage of the research, all EAP tutors in a college setting, also completed a reflective diary, participated in focus group meetings, and had a one-to-one interview after conducting CAR. This stage provided a valuable opportunity for teachers to be guided through the CAR process, enabling them to make a positive impact on their teaching and students' learning. Similarly, it examined teachers' perceptions of CAR in situ, yielding rich data that contribute to the current body of knowledge on CAR. The following research questions (RQs) provide the foundation on which this research is based:

RQ1. What do English language teachers understand by the term 'Classroom Action Research'?

RQ2. What are English language teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research?

RQ3. What Classroom Action Research has been or is currently being conducted by teachers?

RQ4. To what extent do language teachers perceive they have autonomy over their own classroom?

RQ5. What are English language teachers' perceptions of Classroom Action Research after participating in Continuing Professional Development and conducting Classroom Action Research in their own classrooms?

The first research question aimed to establish what language teachers understood by the term 'Classroom Action Research'. Although language teachers in this study did not demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of CAR as a research methodology, there was evidence of awareness of CAR's elements, and many teachers highlighted important aspects of the CAR cycle, such as the roles of acting and reflecting. Through the questionnaire and interview findings, CAR was identified as an active process to improve an element of teaching and learning from both the questionnaire and interview findings. This awareness aligns with the argument Burns (2010) makes that teachers engage in aspects of CAR informally, even though they might not have had any formal training. Some participants in Stage One and Stage Two demonstrated awareness of CAR as a systematic, cyclical process involving planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and gathering evidence, which indicates some positive engagement with the concept, albeit limited. This provides an opportunity for educational and training institutions to build a deeper understanding and knowledge of CAR, as urged by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005). Despite many participants being postgraduates and holding teaching qualifications, it is evident that there is greater potential to enhance the understanding of CAR for practitioners to investigate their teaching practices and learning outcomes. This

would enable teacher to make evidence-based decisions which would improve their classroom practices as well as enhance their professional autonomy.

After ascertaining what language teachers understood by CAR, RQ2 explored participants' perceptions of CAR. Despite some unfamiliarity with CAR, language teachers viewed CAR positively as a tool that promotes positive change in teaching and learning. Although teachers perceived CAR positively, the findings revealed gaps between ideological endorsement and practical readiness, suggesting that favourable attitudes alone do not translate into methodological competence or sustained engagement in CAR. This echoes recent studies showing that teachers often value inquiry conceptually but rarely engage in systematic action research processes without institutional scaffolding (Li et al., 2024; Puspitasari, 2022). An important aspect highlighted was the collaborative nature of CAR, which is also recognised as a strength by Borg (2013), as it builds confidence and encourages research engagement. Although not prominent in the results, data collection was not viewed as a barrier to conducting CAR; however, time constraints were acknowledged by approximately a third of participants. This challenge was noted by Edge (2011) and highlights the importance of institutional support for teachers to be successful when engaging in CAR. Another important outcome of this part of the research was how institutional and cultural norms might shape perceptions of CAR. For example, Demi, who conducted CAR in Stage Three of the study, noted that teachers in Argentina would be constrained by fixed schedules, which aligns with Crookes (1991), who posited that barriers to involvement in practitioner inquiry could be due to organisational and institutional constraints.

When examining language teachers' engagement in CAR, the findings for RQ3 revealed that there was limited engagement in formal CAR, but there was a strong interest in engaging in elements of CAR, such as planning and reflecting. These findings reinforce the implicit CAR data, which showed frequent reflection, lesson evaluation and adaptation, but

limited systematic inquiry. This distinction between implicit and formal engagement mirrors Burns and Edwards (2024), showing that many ELT teachers reflect regularly, but only a minority progress to structured CAR cycles. There was some acknowledgement that CAR was taking place in some organisations, but this was not frequently highlighted. Therefore, the gap between the value of CAR as expressed in the results from RQ1, 2, and 3, and its systematic integration in classroom practices highlights the opportunity for institutions to provide support to bridge the gap in this interest and what is actually taking place in education organisations. This gap also indicates that individual enthusiasm cannot compensate for structural and cultural barriers, raising the question of whether CAR can realistically take root without explicit institutional commitment.

The main findings for RQ 4 reveal that language teachers perceive a moderate degree of autonomy, with clearer freedom in day-to-day instructional decisions than in curriculum and assessment matters. Despite moderate autonomy in classroom decision-making, teachers did not necessarily use this autonomy to initiate formal CAR, suggesting that autonomy alone is insufficient unless accompanied by methodological understanding, time and institutional support. TAS results show that General Autonomy (GA), particularly creativity in teaching methods, adapting materials, and decision-making in lessons, was more strongly endorsed. Whereas, Curriculum Autonomy (CA) was weaker, reflecting limited influence over goals, content and assessment procedures. These patterns are echoed in the interview data, where teachers described flexibility in how they teach but emphasised institutional expectations that shape what must be taught and how learning is assessed, which could be expected as these elements are largely non-negotiable in most institutions. Although this could be expected, the extent to which institutional autonomy impacts language teachers' autonomy to engage in CAR within these constraints is debatable. Kimura et al. (2022) note that individual autonomy can coexist with institutional expectations. One example that exemplifies institutional constraints

on individual autonomy was reported by a participant who stated that she could conduct CAR on dyslexia, as long as it was not within her own institution. realistic prospect. While autonomy alone does not guarantee engagement in CAR, the presence of instructional autonomy and habitual reflection suggests a strong foundation from which CAR could be developed. Increasing teachers' methodological understanding of CAR, alongside institutional encouragement, would make the transition from individual autonomy to systematic, evidence-informed inquiry more feasible.

RQ5 involved exploring the perspectives of language teachers after they received professional development and conducted their own CAR. The experiences of the teacher-researchers in this part of the study were multifaceted, highlighting the potential of CAR to foster reflection, autonomy, and professional growth. CAR enabled teacher-researchers to follow a systematic structure that allowed them to investigate their own teaching. All four of the participants in this stage of the research valued the opportunity to conduct CAR, and importantly, teacher-researchers highly valued collaborative inquiry in the form of focus group meetings, which aided motivation, stronger collaboration, and relatedness throughout the process. Whilst the actual process teacher-researchers adopted was not evaluated, teachers were empowered to be more autonomous in selecting various activities and refining their teaching approaches. Teacher-researcher reflections revealed that CAR promoted a shift towards more student-centred approaches and fostered creativity to meet the needs of the students. However, all teacher-researchers were quite self-critical during the reflective process and frustrated with the unpredictability of student engagement; the emotional toll of balancing workload, time, and CAR was also evident, but this was possibly due to the timing of the study; originally scheduled to take place at the start of an academic term and not leading up to assessments. One particular finding that may have impacted the success of CAR was the expectation to complete a reflective diary; for one teacher-researcher (Zoe), this caused

significant emotional stress and raised methodological concerns, as the requirement may have shaped diary entries, which potentially influence the interpretation of teacher-research experiences.

The results of this part of the study would have been somewhat different if a reflective diary had not been included. Despite this, language teachers' experiences demonstrate the significant potential of CAR to promote autonomy, individual and collaborative reflection to achieve sustained professional growth. The findings from my research have enabled me to find out that language teachers value CAR, and teachers generally showed a growing awareness of CAR and the value of reflection. I was able to discover the extent to which teachers perceived autonomy and were able to make informed decisions on their own classroom practices. Additionally, collaboration was particularly valued. Despite some challenges mentioned in terms of time and workload, I have found that engagement in CAR is a very realistic possibility for teachers, but guidance from managers is essential for its sustainability. In practice, as a line manager, the value of CAR is not necessarily in the number of completed cycles but in supporting meaningful and manageable CAR that considers teachers' capabilities and contextual realities. However, I had not anticipated that the full extent of the emotional well-being of my tutors in Part Three would influence my role as an insider researcher. This was an area for which I was unprepared, and I may be that my dual role as line manager and researcher affected teachers' willingness to complete this part of the study despite the anxieties it created. Thus, highlighting the complexity of insider-research dynamics.

6.2 Limitations

This study provides an insightful analysis of English language teachers' perceptions of CAR, exploring teachers' understanding of CAR, levels of engagement, and the relationship between autonomy and CAR. Stage Three of this study provided rich data through the practical

application of CAR by language teachers, which enabled a deeper understanding of their perceptions. Although this study provided breadth and depth of understanding, limitations must be acknowledged. Practitioner research will always face some limitations as it is context-specific and not generalisable. However, small-scale inquiries, such as CAR, remain very relevant and authentic (Burns, 2010; Borg, 2013). A further limitation relates to the small sample of teachers conducting CAR ($n=4$), which restricts transferability and may overrepresent motivated practitioners.

As an insider in this research, I was able to gain access to participants and gain valuable insights, which enabled a deeper understanding of language teachers' experiences while conducting CAR. I was also able to gain a deeper contextual understanding that an external researcher might not have been able to do. Despite the potential influence on the data collected, participants trusted me as a researcher and Line Manager. Brannick and Coghlan (2007, p.7) challenged the notion that insider research does not 'conform to standards of intellectual rigour' and reinforced that this mode of research provides greater insights into the setting of the research that other approaches are not able to ascertain. Part Three of the study involved teacher-researchers keeping reflective diaries while conducting CAR. Although they amended their entries to impose a certain standard of writing, this, in hindsight, does not necessarily equate to a limitation as suggested by Borg and Liu (2013). Qualitative data collected through reflective diaries is inherently biased and subjective, which is expected given the nature of this research, which is to investigate perceptions. To address this potential limitation, data triangulation was employed using data from diaries, focus groups, and exit interviews.

Stage Three of this study involved teachers conducting their own CAR projects, and I provided ongoing support throughout, but not close monitoring of participants' research. After evaluating the findings for this part of the study, some participants deviated from the core principles of CAR. For example, Demi noted that she adopted a somewhat blended approach

and did not follow the steps of CAR. Despite this, valuable insights into how participants interpreted and adapted CAR were gleaned, which is an aspect of action research discussed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005).

Further to the qualitative data collected through reflective diaries, data collated from interviews provided rich data that adds to the body of knowledge on language teachers' perceptions of CAR, a method recommended by Borg (2010). As the data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted via telephone, which could have affected how open or detailed responses were. Interviewees could have modified their answers to present themselves more favourably, as was the case with one interviewee who admitted to looking up information on CAR as we were speaking on the phone. Dörnyei (2007) notes that it is common for participants to shape their responses in order to be viewed favourably, a feature that is also common in self-reported data. Interviewees who had completed the questionnaire would have had prior exposure to the research topic. Additionally, the qualitative data collected from interviews may have been subject to desirability bias. Conversely, drawing attention to CAR had a positive effect, creating a more informed and curious participant who took an interest (Burns, 2010).

6.3 Contributions of this study to the English language teaching community

This study has yielded significant contributions to the English language teaching community. Despite the limitations highlighted in Section 6.2 above, investigating CAR and its application to language teachers has provided valuable insights into understanding CAR, perceptions, engagement, and the link with autonomy. More importantly, I provided a unique opportunity for English language teachers to engage in CAR. This section will now highlight the contributions this thesis has made to understanding teachers' perspectives on CAR.

6.3.1 Clarification of the concept of CAR

This research makes a significant contribution to the understanding of CAR by clarifying and connecting various concepts that are often discussed in isolation in the literature: CAR, teacher autonomy, and reflection. This directly links to the understanding of the findings for RQ1 and RQ2 by clarifying that while teachers recognise elements of CAR, full methodological understanding remains limited. This study aimed to conceptualise it as a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, and it is a systematic process rather than reflection in isolation. Burns (2005, 2010, 2019) notes that there are persistent gaps in teachers' understanding of how this systematicity works and how to conduct CAR. Findings in this research have contributed to the understanding of CAR by raising the profile of teacher-research. When considering the theoretical stance of CAR, I would like to argue that although it exists in terms of research versus non-research, I believe it exists on a continuum of formal reflective adaptation, where teachers respond and adjust in real-time on one side. Positioning CAR in this respect expands its theoretical scope to reflect that meaningful professional learning can occur at many points along this spectrum. Figure 22 below shows my perspective of where language teachers sit in relation to reflection vs the CAR continuum.

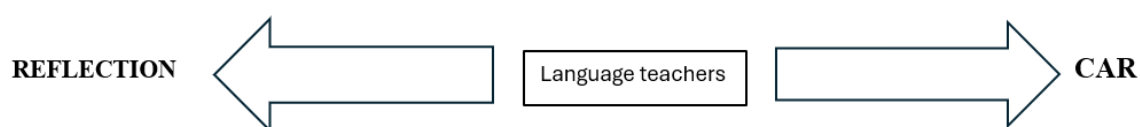


Figure 22. My perspective on the Reflection vs CAR Continuum

Expanding the theoretical scope of this study to include everyday reflection does not devalue CAR but clarifies why CAR adds something more. While teachers report they naturally reflect, these informal processes are often unrecorded, unsystematic, and rarely linked to

evidence-based cycles of action. CAR strengthens existing practice by requiring deliberate planning, purposeful data collection, evaluation and continuous refinement of practice, thus turning instinctive reflection into sustained professional inquiry. This also produces shared, transparent evidence that can inform colleagues and support collaborative learning, rather than remaining private and implied. More importantly, CAR enhances professional agency by allowing teachers to justify pedagogical decisions with evidence rather than intuition, which is especially valuable in contexts where autonomy is constrained. Recognising natural reflection provides a foundation, and CAR builds on it by adding structure, rigour and the potential for a collective and lasting impact.

Small-scale adaptations of CAR, as noted in this research, still provide valuable contributions and should not be dismissed as insignificant, as they validate teachers' current practices and broaden the concept of what counts as CAR. This study aids in further clarifying how CAR, autonomy (scope for teachers to act), and reflection (being able to engage critically) create the capacity to act purposefully, making informed decisions which shape their own practice. The contribution my study makes is to highlight the connections these elements make as a valuable process for developing awareness and understanding of CAR. Linking reflection and autonomy shows that teachers are capable of conducting CAR and improving their own practice, but CAR does not resolve the notion of institutional or specific political tensions and time pressures that teachers face.

6.3.2 Methodological Insights

Methodologically, this study builds on previous studies by demonstrating how a multi-method approach builds on a further understanding of language teachers' perspectives of CAR. The combination of questionnaires, interviews, and providing the opportunity for language teachers to conduct CAR provides a unique stance from which to gain deeper insights. Given

this, this study provides more than documenting attitudes; it demonstrates the visibility of the process and makes reflective activity more explicit, systematic and can be communicated as practitioner inquiry.

Although Rooney (2005) might argue the authenticity of data collected through insider research, the findings show that incorporating this method had a positive impact on raising awareness of CAR as a methodological framework for teacher-led inquiry, reflective practice, and the development of autonomy. Positioning myself as an insider researcher highlights the strengths and limitations of teacher research and that what might be considered ‘research’ might resemble teachers’ existing reflective practices. As to what constitutes formal CAR and how far teachers’ daily reflections constitute research has been debated (Burns, 2005, 2010). Whilst not all teachers in this study strictly adhered to the CAR process, my research did reveal that being consciously aware of the stages of CAR enabled teachers to adopt a position on the continuum between informal reflection and more formalised systematic CAR. But not applying the systematic expectations of CAR could blur the boundary between informal reflection and formalised inquiry. More importantly, the value of CAR here is that it culminated in a clearer focus for improvement, considering evidence in a more conscious manner, and documenting reasoning which can be shared. As a result, the benefit of conducting CAR is to transform implicit reflection to more explicit methods of inquiry through intention, structure and documentation. In essence, CAR worked well for my setting, which was small-scale, and I was well-positioned to exert some sense of control in terms of alignment to institutional expectations whilst encouraging autonomy, which might not be possible in other settings. However, should the theoretical scope be expanded to include what teachers are already doing through routine reflection, the benefit of participating in CAR might need to be framed more cautiously, with context in mind rather than guaranteed improvement. In this research, CAR

provided a more systematic structure but did not replace current reflective practices and as such, provided added value on how reflection was organised and communicated.

6.3.3 Contributions to pedagogy

This research has demonstrated that CAR has made a significant contribution pedagogically. CAR strengthens both reflective practice and fosters a collaborative culture among language teachers. Findings from both the questionnaire and interviews show that reflection is very much a valued practice. A unique contribution was demonstrated in the latter part of this study (Stage Three), and how language teachers, even during a very busy period, became confident and willing to share their thoughts and engage in critical dialogue with colleagues, which generated a stronger sense of professional identity. Ultimately, the pedagogical contribution this study makes is in illustrating how CAR can be embedded into language teachers' everyday practices. Interpreting constraints as parameters, fostering collaboration, and reframing reflection enabled teacher-researchers to assert themselves as autonomous professionals who are able to generate practical, evidence-based insights (Borg, 2009; Burns, 2019). At the time of this part of the study, I was not fully aware of the pedagogical implications of the findings. In retrospect, I need to acknowledge that what works for those motivated to do my study may not translate easily elsewhere, as engagement in CAR for this study was influenced by motivation, being on hand to instil confidence, and the contextual conditions for the teacher researchers. At times, I was unsure about how far I should follow a fixed model rather than be more aware of flexibility and factoring in greater awareness of teachers' workloads and understanding their reflective practices to ensure a meaningful experience. These findings have relevance not only for local EAP contexts such as my own but also for international settings where teachers face similar constraints, showing CAR can serve as a transformative tool when institutional structures support collaboration and inquiry.

6.4 Implications

6.4.1 Implications for English Language teachers

In addition to its contribution to the field of English language teaching, this study offers several implications for classroom practitioners, teacher training institutions, leadership, and the workplace. The findings are particularly very encouraging, as teachers demonstrated autonomy in their choice of materials, delivery, reflection, and awareness of problem-solving, highlighting how closely language teachers already operate in relation to the CAR process. Implicit CAR behaviours found in RQ3 indicate that teachers already possess the reflective foundation needed for CAR; the challenge lies in adding structure, evidence collection, and intentionality. Understanding the CAR can be achieved by posing a focused question, considering evidence, and planning a CAR cycle, which can transform everyday reflection into systematic inquiry (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Burns, 2010). This study also highlights the role of autonomy and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which were strengths of language teachers, and using these qualities helps to sustain motivation for the CAR process. Therefore, collaboration amongst language teachers provides an opportunity to share, discuss, and feel part of a teacher-researcher community. Language teachers who meet regularly to discuss their own classrooms benefit from having a critical friend (Stenhouse, 1975) or learning partner (McNiff, 2002), as this promotes confidence, enhances clarity on the methodological process, and reduces emotional anxiety (Edwards & Burns, 2016; Kember et al., 1997).

The findings from this study also highlight that perceived constraints (conducting CAR during an assessment period acts to define the parameters of the research, and designing a question that fits the current teaching context shapes the scope of their CAR rather than acting as a barrier. Rather than embarking on large-scale projects, language teachers can focus on specific aspects of their practice and tailor their research, making it more manageable and

highly relevant. This further supports CAR as being on a continuum and that, in this sense, CAR is the journey and not the destination. In this way, perceived barriers and institutional constraints can be used to scaffold the research design, which could encourage further autonomy and innovation rather than inhibit.

This study looked into the role of reflection in the CAR process as it remains a powerful tool for teacher development. Rather than focusing on reflective diaries as a formal academic document, encouraging teachers to record entries that are brief either during or after class ensures this process can be sustained and is a low-pressure activity. Having a more pragmatic approach enables language teachers to reflect and record evidence directly observed without the angst of achieving a self-imposed standard of reflective writing, which aligns with Schön's (1983) idea of reflection-in-action. This could help teachers direct their reflections on their classroom practice and emphasise reflection as a practical tool for professional growth. Reflection and reflective diaries can help to generate insights into classroom practices, helping teachers maintain focus on student learning and pedagogical decision-making, while supporting teachers' wellbeing and autonomy.

6.4.2 Implications for teacher training institutions

The results of this research highlight a role for teacher-training institutions in embedding CAR more systematically into professional guidance for English language teachers. At the same time, these implications extend beyond a local context as the patterns reported in this study mirror challenges documented internationally (time, assessment), which suggests these recommendations are transferable across diverse language teaching settings. The findings from this research highlight the need to reinforce exposure to CAR to reinforce that CAR could be normalised into everyday practices, which builds on Burns' (2010, 2019) suggestion that teacher-research provides a robust framework to enhance reflective practices. Critically,

recognising that many teachers already reflect informally, the added value of CAR lies in its systematic, documented cycles that generate shareable evidence and support accountability to learners and institutions in all contexts. Trainee teachers, who generally conduct CAR for a qualification, are guided to apply CAR to their own classrooms during teaching practice, and it could involve formulating one question and collecting evidence, such as baseline scores, or student questionnaires and then complete one cycle: plan, act, observe, reflect (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). This would be an achievable process and would aim to link teacher reflection with possible pedagogical change. Given the limited understanding of CAR found in RQ 1 and the limited engagement in RQ3, teacher education programmes should normalise CAR through scaffolded entry-level cycles. Framing these as small, workable cycles in standard professional practice, rather than a single assignment, enables sustainability with inquiry-based practice across institutions, local and international contexts, making impact more transferable and not unique to one setting.

Teacher training institutions provide the ideal context in which to bridge the gap between research and practice (Burns, 2019, and Borg, 2009). Results of this research highlight that teacher-researchers were able to share their experiences and reflections to build and develop trust among their colleagues, which reduced the feeling of isolation. Embedding the notion of critical friends (Stenhouse, 1975) creates a supportive culture and reinforces relatedness (Edwards & Burns, 2016). Graduating teachers would enter the workplace with the mindset that investigating their own classrooms and being a teacher-researcher is a part of their teacher identity. Finally, training institutions are well placed to use previous CAR research and case studies to highlight how connected CAR is to their daily practices and is part of sustainable professional growth rather than a standalone exercise.

6.4.3 Implications for the workplace

This research highlights the potential for CAR in the workplace as a natural extension of professional growth rather than institutional support for CAR in relation to a qualification (Tavakoli, 2015; Kantaridou & Katsiou, 2018). The focus group meetings utilised in this study showed that language teachers valued time for reflection and dedicated time given to discuss their own classrooms, rather than top-down meeting agendas. Workplaces could build in weekly or biweekly meetings to share reflections on progress, or classroom situations (Edwards & Burns, 2016). Workplaces, Line Managers, and other senior leaders could facilitate collaborative conversations to support relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which would further enhance motivation and break down barriers when communicating with other colleagues. Conducting CAR is often viewed as unrealistic (Borg, 2009), but educational leaders could encourage the development of a critical awareness of how CAR can be empowering, while providing guidance and support that aligns with teacher-training institutions, so that teachers see moving into the workplace from teacher training and continuing CAR as an embedded and sustainable practice that is valued within the workplace. This alignment enables a cumulative impact as training providers and employers use compatible inquiry routines, and teachers can maintain CAR as they change roles or contexts, supporting ongoing professional learning.

When considering the wider implications, embedding CAR at both entry into the teaching profession and employment stages positions institutions to cultivate evidence-informed cultures, reduces the research-practice gap and increases the capacity for pedagogical innovation beyond the immediate setting of this study.

6.5 Suggestions for Future Research

This study has examined the current position of CAR in relation to English language teachers and aimed to determine the extent to which language teachers understand and engage

in CAR. A unique feature of this research is linking autonomy and providing an opportunity for EAP teachers to conduct their own CAR. Future research could provide greater support with the methodological processes involved in CAR. Adopting a longitudinal approach would enable closer tracking of language teachers during the CAR process and assess the sustained impact of pedagogical interventions over time. Whilst teachers were monitored over a period of four to six months, providing mentors, closer monitoring of the CAR cycles, and guided reflection would provide an opportunity to embed CAR into teachers' practices rather than the short-term exposure provided in this study. Providing regular collaborative meetings and critical friends would benefit those conducting CAR. Additionally, research on the impact of written versus spoken reflection in relation to CAR would be a worthwhile area for exploration and making a comparison between the two would reveal valuable insights to evaluate and design CAR frameworks that could enhance teacher engagement.

This study explored the relationship between autonomy and CAR and future research on exploring existing levels of autonomy and willingness to conduct CAR and implementing CAR as a catalyst for autonomy. Researching the link between teachers' control over their own professional development and professional freedom, beliefs, identity, and collaboration could lead to developing a model or framework enabling conditions for autonomy through CAR. Future studies could also examine how different forms of autonomy within General Autonomy and Curricular autonomy interact with CAR engagement. Furthermore, building on the work of Pearson and Moomaw's (2006) Teacher Autonomy Scale by providing a 5- or 7-point scale specifically aligned with CAR-related practices and dispositions could offer a more nuanced instrument for measuring the types and degree of autonomy most relevant to practitioner inquiry. Such a scale could assess areas such as decision-making in classroom-based research, ownership of professional learning goals, perceived freedom to innovate and confidence in adapting pedagogical knowledge through CAR. Over time, this adapted scale could support

longitudinal research examining how participation in CAR shapes teachers' evolving sense of autonomy, particularly with comparative studies across different language institutions, which would provide insight into how institutional cultures mediate CAR uptake.

Another key area that would be of value for further research is to assess the extent to which insider research or outsider research impacts the authenticity of findings of Classroom Action Research. This would offer empirical insights into how researchers' positionality shapes the effectiveness of action research in language teaching contexts.

6.6 Final Reflections

This research was a labour of love, as it brought together my identities as a language teacher, line manager, and researcher, allowing me to explore a significant yet under-examined gap in the field of English language teaching, despite the strides made by other contributing members of the academic community. A unique feature of this research has been the opportunity for language teachers to conduct their own CAR, which has increased teachers' self-confidence and willingness to share their thoughts and feelings about their classroom practices. Watching my own colleagues take ownership of their own CAR, grow in self-confidence, and feel increasingly willing to share their thoughts and feelings about their own classrooms was a rewarding experience. Very few studies have explored the link between teacher autonomy and CAR, which is crucial for ongoing adaptation to balance curriculum demands, student needs, and linguistic diversity. Autonomous teachers are more capable of making on-the-spot decisions. At the same time, CAR provides the opportunity to be flexible, creative, and systematically investigate and improve their own classroom practices. Overall, the English language teachers in this study generally understood some elements of CAR, which is encouraging, but I believe there is still a significant gap. However, my involvement in this

research served to pique teachers' curiosity about CAR, and more teachers are aware of CAR now than before this research was conducted.

The latter part of this study aimed to give language teachers support, training, and the opportunity to collaborate while conducting their own CAR. The most significant value was in how much teachers appreciated working in a collaborative environment. Their openness and willingness to share created a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere in which CAR was viewed as a professional opportunity and not a burden. While many colleagues started with the intention of supporting me with my PhD data collection, they finished with stronger collegial bonds, critical friends, and continued support from me, their line manager. Since completing the final phase of this research, our meetings continue to have an open agenda, and I have grown even more aware of the importance of listening to teachers' voices. Collaboration and sharing continue, and the essence of Classroom Action Research remains prominent in the workplace, which confirms to me that it is a strong catalyst for professional growth, autonomy, and creating a teacher-researcher community. This study has been the catalyst for future work; I remain inspired to further explore Classroom Action Research so that these insights can inform others and to contribute not only to the language teaching community but to the wider teaching profession.

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List of Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire used for Stage One Data Collection

Classroom Action Research

This questionnaire is being administered as part of my PhD research on Classroom Action Research (CAR). The information will be used to inform Continuing Professional Development and your responses will make a valuable contribution to the development of CAR in classroom teaching practices. The questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes. Thank you for taking part. Stephanie

stephaniephd192@gmail.com [Switch accounts](#)

Not shared

* Indicates required question

Consent - I confirm that I have read and understood the information above. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may be contacted to clarify points or participate in other elements of the research. I understand that identifiable data will be securely stored and accessible only to members of the research team involved in this study and that confidentiality will be maintained. I understand that the data in this project might be shared as appropriate and for publication of findings, in which case data will remain completely anonymous. *

☐ Please check this box to agree to take part in this research.

Part A
Please answer the following with a short response.

1. How long have you been teaching? (years/months) *

Your answer

2. How long have you been in your current post? (years/months) *

Your answer

3. What courses do you currently teach? *

Your answer

4. What is the nature of your current work? (sessional, pre-sessional, permanent, full-time, part-time, etc.) *

Your answer

5. What is your first language? *

Your answer

6. What language is the medium of instruction in your current position? *

Your answer

7. What is your age? *

Your answer

7. What is your age? *

Your answer _____

8. What is your gender? *

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

9. In your opinion, what is Classroom Action Research? *

Your answer _____

10. Are you aware of any Classroom Action Research taking place in your organisation? If yes, then please specify what. *

Your answer _____

11. Have you been involved in Classroom Action Research in your previous organisation? If yes, please specify how. *

Your answer _____

12. Are you currently actively involved in Classroom Action Research? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

13. If 'yes' to Question 12, describe what Classroom Action Research you currently involved in. *

Your answer _____

14. If you answered 'no' to Question 12, state the reasons why you are not actively involved in Classroom Action Research. *

Your answer _____

15. How frequently do you meet with other teachers to discuss Classroom Action Research? *

- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Once every two weeks
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Once a term
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other: _____

16. How frequently do you meet with other teachers to discuss general classroom issues? *

- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Once every two weeks
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Once a term
- ☐ Frequently on an informal basis
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other: _____

Part B - Classroom Action Research

Check the appropriate answer in relation to your opinion of Classroom Action Research.

17. I think Classroom Action Research (CAR) is time consuming. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

18. I have thought about CAR, but I do not know how to use it in my classroom. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

19. CAR involves lots of data from lots of participants. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

20. I have never tried to apply CAR in my own classroom practice. *

- ☒ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

21. CAR enhances the quality of teaching. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

22. CAR does not make any difference to the education performance of students.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

23. CAR promotes positive change. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

24. CAR encourages teachers to become effective teacher-learners. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

25. CAR should be included in Continuing Professional Development programmes *
in all schools.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

26. There is no time for me to perform any kind of CAR. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

27. CAR is the responsibility of individual teachers. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

28. CAR is not applicable to experienced teachers. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

29. All teachers are able to perform CAR. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

30. Only dynamic teachers can apply CAR to their classroom practice. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

31. CAR encourages collaboration and sharing ideas. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

32. I would be willing to attend CAR workshops as part of my professional development. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

33. CAR is performed independently and cannot be collaborative. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

34. Research publications on CAR are of no value for teachers. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

35. CAR encourages creativity and willingness to try new practices. *

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Part C - About your classroom

Check which applies to your classroom practice.

36. I talk about successful classroom strategies to other teachers. *

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

37. I share my lesson planning ideas with other teachers. *

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

38. I change my teaching methods to suit the students I teach. *

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

39. I evaluate my lessons after teaching them. *

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

40. I ask students what types of teaching strategies they prefer. *

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

41. I ask my students what their learning styles are. *

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

42. I reflect on lessons that were not successful. *

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

43. I read research on teaching methods and approaches. *

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

44. I discuss lessons that do not go well with other practitioners. *

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

45. I experiment with new activities in my classroom. *

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Part D - Teacher Autonomy

This section relates to how much autonomy you feel you have. Check the appropriate answer.

D1. In my teaching, I use my own guidelines and procedures. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D2. In my situation, I have little to say over the content and skills that are selected * for teaching.

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D3. My teaching focuses on those goals and objectives I select myself. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D4. What I teach in my class is determined for the most part by myself. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D5. The materials I use in my class are those I select. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D6. The content and skills taught in my class are those I select. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D7. I am free to be creative in my teaching approach. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D8. The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D9. Standards of behaviour in my classroom are set primarily by me. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D10. My job does not allow for much discretion on my part. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D11. The scheduling of use of time in my classroom is under my control. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D12. I seldom use alternative procedures in my teaching. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D13. I follow my own guidelines on instruction. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D14. In my situation, I have only limited latitude in how major problems are solved. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D15. In my class, I have little control over how classroom space is used. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D16. The evaluation and assessment activities used in my class are selected by others. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D17. I select the teaching methods and strategies I use with my students. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

D18. I have little say over the scheduling of use of time in my classroom. *

- ☐ Definitely false
- ☐ False
- ☐ True
- ☐ Definitely true

Thank you for your response!

This is the end of the questionnaire.

[Back](#)

[Submit](#)

[Clear form](#)

Appendix 2. Stage Two Interview Protocol

1. Thank you for agreeing to answer a few questions and for completing the consent. Please note that you have the right to withdraw at any time, and if you have any questions, then you have my contact details. Please ask, and if at any point in this interview there's something you want to know, please ask. So, may I kindly ask you to confirm that you understand you have the right to withdraw at any time?
2. Can you give me a brief description of your teaching background and your training?
3. What is your current role?
4. In your training or in your experience, have you come across classroom action research, and can you tell me what that means to you?
5. In any of your training, were any elements of classroom action research covered in any way?
6. What types of research have you done yourself? (How did you feel about doing that kind of research?)
7. What do you think are the barriers to teachers doing classroom action research? N.B. Change to the original question – why don't teachers do....
8. If you're faced with a problem in a classroom, let's say a student cannot understand a particular language concept or rule and you struggle, they have trouble, what do you do, where do you go next?
9. Do you purposely sort of research papers on problems you have in the classroom or to improve your performance, do you purposely research papers or you know look at maybe TED talks or do anything kind of like this?
10. What's your opinion of collaborative planning or working collaboratively?
11. Do you feel the same way about planning with other teachers? So, let's say you're sharing a group or you're teaching the same subject, do you feel the same way about collaborative planning with other teachers?
12. In your teaching roles, what opportunities have you had to discuss your lessons or do peer observations or anything like this related to your practice?
13. When you are in your teaching roles, how much autonomy do you think you have or feel you have when you are planning and delivering your lessons?
14. What about you as a teacher, though? Do you feel you are autonomous as a teacher, not just the learner?

15. When you're planning your lessons, do you ever ask your students what they like to do and what activities they like? If so, could you provide an example?
16. How would you describe your learning style?
17. How would you describe your teaching style, then, the kind of ways you teach?
18. How do you evaluate your lessons? Is there anything you do particularly to evaluate your teaching?
19. So, at the end of a lesson, what ways do you evaluate? Do you make notes, or do you just think about it, or do you record anything to evaluate how the lesson went?
20. If you could have any form of training to help your teaching, what kind of training would you like?
21. In your job as a sort of teaching, has your workplace or in previous roles ever encouraged you to look at research papers, or join webinars or anything like this to help you with your performance as a teacher?
22. Is there anything that you wish to add about your understanding or anything about classroom action research as a final question?

Appendix 3. Professional Development PowerPoint for Stage Three

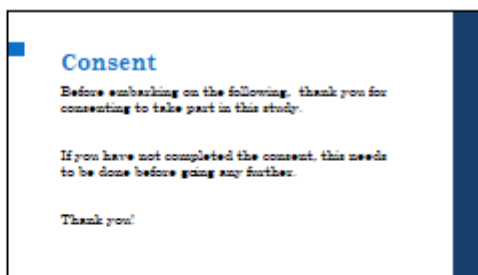


Classroom Action Research (CAR)

Continuing Professional Development

Stephanie King

1



Consent

Before embarking on the following, thank you for consenting to take part in this study.

If you have not completed the consent, this needs to be done before going any further.

Thank you!

2



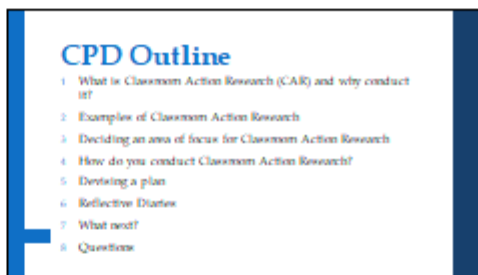
Research Aims

Stage three of data collection for my PhD.

It involves the following:

1. Attending CPD
2. Devising a CAR plan
3. Conducting CAR
4. Keeping a reflective diary
5. Attending individual and group interviews
6. Remuneration will be given on submission of the reflective diary
7. Time frame: approx. 8-10 weeks

3



CPD Outline

1. What is Classroom Action Research (CAR) and why conduct it?
2. Examples of Classroom Action Research
3. Deciding an area of focus for Classroom Action Research
4. How do you conduct Classroom Action Research?
5. Devising a plan
6. Reflective Diaries
7. What next?
8. Questions

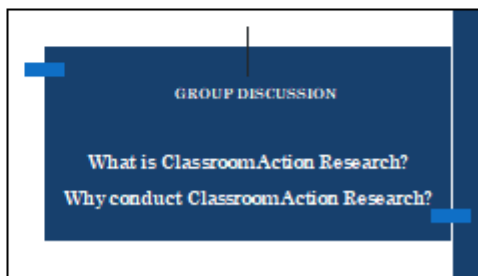
4



GROUP DISCUSSION

What is Classroom Action Research?

5



GROUP DISCUSSION

What is Classroom Action Research?

Why conduct Classroom Action Research?

6

WHAT IS CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH?

Classroom Action Research is:

'an active process which involves planning, action, evaluation either individually or collaboratively, and through reflection there is understanding and informed action to improve on an element of teaching and learning'

(Glickman 1990; Burns & Edwards 2016)

7

WHAT IS CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH?

Action – change
Research – increasing understanding

8

Why conduct Classroom Action Research?

- Improve, understand and increase knowledge about teaching and learning
- Allows teachers to make choices and decisions concerning their teaching styles
- Provide opportunity to try out different teaching approaches
- Develop collaborative groups/critical friends to share experiences
- To enable reflection

9

Why conduct Classroom Action Research?

Mertler (2013) identifies the value of action research in CPD as it allows the opportunity to focus on specific areas related to the teacher's own practice not discounting the opportunity to collaborate and work as a team.

10

Why conduct Classroom Action Research?

'the focus is on *your school, your classroom, your students, and their improved achievement* the process (or rather, the focus of the process) is customisable to meet *your specific needs*. One-size-fits-all professional development does not accomplish this'

(Mertler, 2013, p. 40)

11

Features of Classroom Action Research

- Practical - participatory
- Focuses on teacher's own practices
- Collaborative
- Dynamic
- A plan of action
- Sharing research
- Self-reflective

12

Features of Classroom Action Research

The focus is on a problem that will benefit:

- Students
- Teacher or teachers
- Organisation
- Wider educational community

13

Examples of Classroom Action Research

- Differentiation
- Raising engagement in an online lesson
- Enhancing a specific skill (reading, writing, speaking, listening)
- Using breakout rooms effectively
- Successful asynchronous lessons
- Why are my students not retaining the information taught?

14

Ethical Considerations

- In line with GDPR and Kaplan expectations
- Approval granted from University of Essex
- Approval granted from Kaplan

15



Where to start?

16

Selecting an area of focus

- An area that involves teaching and learning
- On one's own practice
- Something that is in your locus of control
- Something that you feel passionate or strongly about
- An area that you would like to change or improve

(Mills, 2003; Crowell, 2014; Elliott, 1991; Sagar, 2003)

17

Statements/questions

Once an area of focus has been identified, make a statement about the situation and then ask a question on how this situation can be improved

Example 1

- Statement: Students do not seem to be engaged in the breakout room
- Question: How can I improve student engagement in breakout rooms?

Example 2

- Statement: Students do not seem to be accessing the asynchronous materials
- Question: How can I improve student engagement with the asynchronous lessons?

(Elliott, 1991)

18

Reflection

Take a few minutes to consider your classes and possible areas that you might want to focus on.

You do not need to decide now!

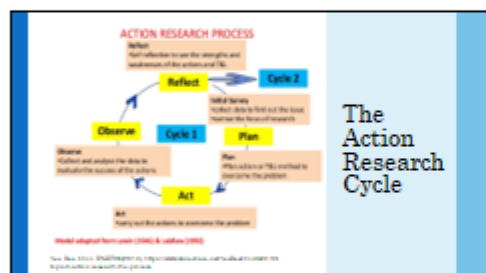
19



Levin (1996)

The Action Research Cycle

20



21

The Action Research Cycle Practical Stages

22

Starters

1. I would like to improve.....
2. I am not happy about.....
3. I would like to know more about.....
4. I would like to try.....
5. I would like to change.....
6. I am curious about.....
7. I am worried about.....

23

How to Conduct Action Research

When an issue has been identified.....

Compose a research question.....

-How can I?

-What is the best way to.....?

-Why do my class.....?

Make short notes on each step



24

Action Research Plan

REFLECT

On the problem

Share your thoughts and ideas with others

Narrow the focus for your GAR

25

Data Collection

- Observation
- Lesson evaluations
- Recordings
- Questionnaire
- Ask students
- Lesson notes
- Interviews

26

Action Research Plan

PLAN

Teaching and learning method to overcome the problem

27

Plan Teaching and Learning Teacher - Researcher

- Planning the best way to act on the problem
- Read/research ways to tackle the problem
- Create the best possible plan to address the problem
- How else can I approach this problem?
- What has been done by others?

28

ACT

Carry out the actions to overcome the problem

Action Research Plan

29

Act – teach to the new plan

- Carry out the plan
- Have awareness while teaching
- Reflect-in-Action

30

OBSERVE

Collect and analyse data to evaluate the success of the actions

Action Research Plan

31

Observe

- Observe your students
- Observe your own teaching
- Take notice of the details
- Record the details in situ – if possible

32

Action Research Plan

REFLECT

Self-reflection:
strengths and
weaknesses of the
teaching and
learning

33

Reflect

- What have I learned?
- What was successful?
- What did not work so well?
- What would I do differently if I was going to do this again?

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Classroom Action Research

Sample plan

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Reflective Diaries

Handwritten or typed – whatever is convenient
Reflection in and on action (Schön, 1987)
Keep notes on each stage of the process
Write as little or as much as you like. But date each entry.
Minimum of one entry per week.
Confidentiality – all identifying data will be coded.

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Week One Entry

CPD and finding a question

After the CPD, I understood a lot of what I need to do, but I'm confused about data collection – it seems to be a lot of work, but I will try.

Data collection seems an enormous task. Not looking forward to it.

– spoke with others – shared ideas – simple method – ask, observe

– think I will look at why students are on production in their writing

– will ask the class in an anonymous poll what they think about it

– found a paper on this, will use for key research talk in other lessons

Reflective Diaries – example entry

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Reflective Diaries – example entry

Reflective diaries can be:

– handwritten notes (researcher will provide a notebook)

– typed and submitted at the end

The aim is to write your feelings and thoughts of the process whether positive or negative.

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SUPPORT

The researcher will be on hand to assist with any part of the CAR.

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Interviews and Focus Groups

- One-to-one during the CAR process
- One-to-one at the end of the CAR process
- Two focus groups: week 6 and towards the end of the CAR process
- Meetings at any point in time to discuss/exchange ideas – if with other CAR practitioners, please make notes

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References:

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QUESTIONS?

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Appendix 4. Diary entry template

Plan	Act	Observe	Reflect

Additional Notes:

Appendix 5. Example Diary Entry

Week One Entry

CPD and finding a question

After the CPD, I understood most of what I need to do, but I'm confused about data collection – it seems like a lot of work, but I'll try.

Data collection seems an enormous task. Not looking forward to it.

- spoke with others

- shared ideas

- simple method – ask students

- think I will look at why students are not productive in their writing

- will ask the class in an anonymous poll what they think about it

- found a paper on this, will scan for key ideas and talk to other tutors

Appendix 6. Questionnaire Consent Form

Classroom Action Research

This questionnaire is being administered as part of my PhD research on Classroom Action Research (CAR). The information will be used to inform Continuing Professional Development and your responses will make a valuable contribution to the development of CAR in classroom teaching practices. The questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes. Thank you for taking part. Stephanie

Consent - I confirm that I have read and understood the information above. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may be contacted to clarify points or participate in other elements of the research. I understand that identifiable data will be securely stored and accessible only to members of the research team involved in this study and that confidentiality will be maintained. I understand that the data in this project might be shared as appropriate and for publication of findings, in which case data will remain completely anonymous. *

☐ Please check this box to agree to take part in this research.

Appendix 7. Interview Consent Form

Section 1 of 2

Classroom Action Research Consent Form

B I U ↺ ↻

Research Project: Classroom Action Research - teachers' perceptions and classroom practices.

What is the study about?
This study is part of my Applied Linguistics PhD. The study is researching current classroom practices adopted by language teachers, exploring Classroom Action Research and related professional development.

What does participating involve?
You will be asked questions concerning your opinions and experiences of classroom practices, training and challenges. The interview will last approximately 30-40 minutes.

Please note that this interview will be recorded.

Please read the statements below and check each box accordingly.
Thank you very much for taking part.

Question *

☐ 1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information above. I have had the opportunity to conside...

Question *

☐ 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research at anyt...

6. I agree to be contacted to clarify or provide further information. *

☐ I agree to be contacted in the future

☐ I do not agree to be contacted in the future

Please write your name and email contact if you are willing to be contacted in the future.

Short answer text

Section 2 of 2

Thank you!

Thank you for taking part in this study.
Should you require any further information or ask any questions then do not hesitate to contact me.

Stephanie King

Appendix 8. Workplace Consent Form

7.B3 - Participant Consent Form

PART A: TO BE COMPLETED BY THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT (INCLUDING UNDER 16s)

Study Title: Classroom Action Research: Teachers' Perceptions, Classroom Practices and impact of Continuing Profession Development

	Please tick each box
1 I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet version dated Click or tap to enter a date. for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalty.	☐
3 I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by authorised people outside the research team. I give permission for these individuals to access my data.	☐
4 I understand that I have the right to see the personal data that is held on me and how I may request to have these removed.	☐
5 I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	☐
6 I understand how this research will be written up and published.	☐
7 I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	☐
8 [If applicable] I consent to being audio recorded	☐
9 [If applicable] I consent to being video recorded	☐
10 [If applicable] I consent to having my photo taken	☐
11 [If applicable] I understand how audio recordings / videos / photos will be used in research outputs [please delete as appropriate]	☐
11a [if applicable] I give permission to be quoted directly in research outputs and for my name to accompany any quotation OR	☐
11 b [if applicable] I give permission to be quoted directly in research outputs against a pseudonym	☐
11 c [if applicable] I give permission to be quoted directly in research outputs but only fully anonymously	☐
11d [if applicable] I do not wish to be directly quoted	☐
12 I agree to take part in the study	☐
13 [if applicable] I agree for research data collected in this study to be used in other research studies. I understand that any data that leave the research group will be fully anonymised so that I cannot be identified.	☐
14 [if applicable] I agree that my personal contact details can be retained in a secure database so that the researchers can contact me about future studies.	☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Full Name Click or tap here to enter text. Full Name	Select Date Click or tap to enter a date. Select Date	Digital Signature Here Click or tap here to enter text. Digital Signature Here
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature
Full Name Click or tap here to enter text. Full Name	Select Date Click or tap to enter a date. Select Date	Digital Signature Here Click or tap here to enter text. Digital Signature Here

Appendix 9. Sample transcription of Focus group 1

Focus group One Transcription (N.B. SK = researcher)

SK: Let's have a few minutes each to say where we are at in the process, and some of the interesting things we have kind of discovered along the way. Then we can all join in, and if there are any notes for action, I'll just write some notes down. And, um, we'll take it from there. So, are you okay with that? Then we can see where we are moving forward with it. [XX] I really appreciate you being here, it's really great, and I want everyone to kind of join in with this. So, [Izzy], if you could tell what your focus is and where you are at in the stage and the things you have learnt so far (laughs).

I: Well, so okay. I started writing my diary a month ago. My main question was 'How can I encourage students to participate in class?' And, I wanted to focus on the various ways we can help quiet students find their voice in class, and in a minute, I will tell you my findings so far. However, during the Applied Learning week, I realised that there is also the issue of the dominant students. The ones that really want to participate. They certainly make our lives easier, but at the same time, we need to be careful coz we don't want them to dominate the lesson, and then the quiet students will stay quiet.

SK: Yeah, it's a good point.

I: So, these are the two main questions, and after I was writing my notes, as I was reflecting, another thing came up, and, in my case, I really need to improve the way I give instructions to students. So, actually, I have just told Stephanie that I rewatched all my video recordings. I don't know if you have done it in the past, but it is so weird, isn't it?

SK: (Laughs)

I: To watch yourself teaching. First of all, I realise I hate my voice, it's so weird.

(All laugh)

I: So, yes, these are the main ideas. And, these are the main research questions.

SK: And, I think we can all, sorry for interjecting, we can all, possibly relate to all of those things in our teaching, do you?

D: Exactly, yes, yes

SK: Absolutely

D: I think about the way I, I deliver my instructions all the time coz, because it's a cultural thing also., I belong in a culture where background and context are not so important, so we take a lot for granted.

I: Exactly

D: In English, I provide step-by-step instructions. I am aware of that, but sometimes I fail.

SK: Yes, I was made aware of it in my first few years of teaching, before I started investigating my own work, and I found I kept giving run-on instructions. I'd give an instruction, and then I would add to it, and then I would add to it. And, by the time I had added to it two or three times, the students had forgotten what I had said (laughs).

I: That's exactly what I am doing. I realise that.

D: I do that with questions in an attempt to help them. I ask so many questions, and they don't know what they are meant to answer.

Appendix 10. Practical example of CAR

EXAMPLE CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH

A Brief Description

Reflection Area of focus	Students' motivation to write
Statement	Students do not seem to be able to write for any length in lesson time.
Question	How can I improve students' motivation and engagement with writing activities?
Data Collection	Surveyed students – what are their opinions of writing tasks, how they feel. What are the barriers to writing in lessons? IELTS score and previous language writing scores Research – looking at successful writing techniques
Plan	What is the best way to tackling this problem based on the research and data collection? What have others done? Tutorial – identify individual student needs – result of data collection (some wanted to draft, some wanted to write up, some wanted to proofread and redraft, some read and note take) Plan a writing session based on Pomodoro technique Three-hour lesson, first hour preparation for writing and students setting individual targets. Hour 2 and 3 – writing using pomodoro Review progress – feedback to tutor or class on progress
Act	Plan was delivered – Hour 1 - was setting conditions, when writing: no media, music only, target setting, make the target public – to tutor or whole class depending on how comfortable students are. Hour 2 & 3 – decision made with class agreement 5 mins writing – 5 mins break 10 mins writing – 5 mins break 20 mins writing – 10 mins break 20 mins writing – 10 mins break 10 mins writing – feedback and progress check
Observe	Teacher controlled the situation – some students initially needed prompting about not checking phones Observe how engaged students are with writing – system of asking for help without disturbing rest of the class Be aware of any needs or problems students have in engaging.
Reflect	Student feedback on success of the session Progress was slow initially but better in the latter half of the session Student reviewed progress and some wrote more than they had done but students wanted to have more writing sessions and start with 10 minutes and not 5.
Plan	Based on the review from students plan the next session

Cycle 2 - Repeat the above process

Appendix 11. Example coding for RQ1: Questionnaire data

Questionnaire Data (item 9) – Coding for participants responses for RQ 1 ‘In your opinion, what is classroom action research?’

P. No.	Q9. In your opinion, what is Classroom Action Research?	Code
P001	Finding and examining the nature and more than what is going on, such as aspects, problems, and challenges in class, to clarify and in turn, help teachers	Exploring/researching Identify/solve problems/challenges Assist teachers
P002	Research teachers undertake in their own classrooms to improve their practices and enhance their students' learning process.	Exploring/researching Assist/improve teaching Improve learning
P003	Research carried by teacher to reflect on their instructional practices	Exploring/researching Reflection on practice
P004	Using real practice to help teachers make research into what can help achieve best practice	Exploring/researching Improve teaching/practices
P005	Research on what is needed in the future.	Research for future
P006	Continual reflection and feedback, an on-going collaborative dialogue with colleagues (and students) about teaching and the classroom environment. The aim is to identify areas that need improvement and to take positive action to improve the learning experience for the students and raise the standards of teaching and professional delivery. The overall intended outcome is to raise performance and achievement levels.	Process, systematic, method Analyse/evaluate/assess/observe Improve learning/performance/ student experience Collaboration with others- teachers/students Reflection and feedback Proactive/take action
P007	A diagnostic process designed to analyse current classroom performance in order to improve future performance	Method/process Analyse/evaluate/assess/observe Improve learning
P008	Inclusion of and reflection of classroom activities with subsequent research	Reflection on classroom Exploring/research after reflection Classroom practice/activities
P009	Assessing yourself through reflection and informal assessment	Analyse/evaluate/assess/observe Reflection
P010	It is a method of creating the most stimulating classroom environment for the students.	Method/process/Cycle Improve learning
P011	Using your teaching as a source of information to inform research. Action research is normally done to help solve a problem or make improvements to one's teaching.	Analyse/evaluate/assess/observe Exploring/researching Identify/solve problems/challenges Improve teaching/practices
P012	Research done in the classroom	Derivative from Q? Exploring/researching
P013	Unsure about the term. I would say it refers to reflection on teaching through identifying how effective different teaching strategies are.	Don't know/not sure but gave explanation Reflection Analyse/evaluate/assess/observe
P014	In my view, Classroom Action Research is the process of actively seeking improvements to teaching practice. This primarily involves reflecting on teacher and learner experiences, implementing changes based on this reflection and analysing the outcomes of these changes in order to improve teaching practice. This requires the practitioner to be proactive - the teacher leads the research into their own practice and experiments with variables related to their teaching. This is followed by close analysis and reflection on the outcomes of the changes, before the process can be repeated informed by the results. In this sense, Classroom Action Research is in some ways a reflective cycle of improving teaching practice.	Improve teaching/practices Proactive/take action Reflection Analyse/evaluate/assess/observe Exploring/researching Method/process/Cycle
P015	Where a teacher identifies an area he or she would like to improve in their class - for example an individual or group of students or in their own practice. They identify an issue, then gather baseline data/evidence and then research the topic - for example, improving writing - they may consult "experts", have someone observe them, observe others, do professional development, professional readings (some or all of these). The teacher then creates an action plan and implements the action plan. At the end the teacher then gathers more evidence and reflects and reports on the impact their action has had on learning (or whatever the focus was - it could also be behaviour or social emotional).	Method/process/Cycle Analyse/evaluate/assess/observe Improve teaching/practices Improve learning/student experience Identify/solve problems/challenges Gather data/evidence Exploring/researching Collaboration with others- teachers/students Planning after evaluating
P016	A method of finding out what works in my classroom. This can be achieved conversations with peers, empirical studies, self-reflection and numerous other means...	Analyse/evaluate/assess/observe Gather data/evidence Improve learning/student experience Collaboration with others- teachers/students Reflection

Appendix 12. Example coding for RQ 1: Interview data

P. No.	Interview response to what is classroom action research?	Code/Theme
P101	I: Yeah, yeah, can you just sort of recap what your understanding of classroom action research is. P101: Yes, certainly, so I need to look up a couple of things whilst you're on the phone. I: It's just your opinion, there's no right or wrong answer, just how you view it, and it would be better if you didn't look if you understand what I mean, just whatever comes up. P101: Okay, no problem at all. I: There's no right or wrong answer here. P101: My sort of understanding is looking into research practices at schools in connection with, say, student achievement, how the classroom climate can help students to attain their maximum level, etc. So, I only have a basic understanding of it, to be honest.	Exploring/researching Improve learning/ performance/ student experience
P102	I: Okay, good, thank you. Classroom action research is a term that you've heard of before, and what is your understanding of that? P102: Generally I think the first time I actually heard it referred to as that was when I came to the college in terms of classroom action research we often used to call it, I forget what we used to call it but we used to call it something different and what I understand from that is sort of doing research within the classroom and also I want to say experimental it is experimental but it's on a very practical level with the students that you have in the classroom, observing them looking at how they respond and also the feedback that you get from them in terms of how and reflecting on that and developing yourself, your students and also the process that you are using for teaching. It's like a combination of those things for me.	Exploring/researching Heard from a colleague Analyse/evaluate/assess/observe Experimental/practical/new things Reflection Assist/improve teaching practices Process, systematic, method
P103	I: You recently completed a questionnaire on classroom action research. Can you just kindly give me a recap of what your understanding of classroom action research is and what it might involve for you? P103: Okay so now from my understanding of this term there is either something you want to investigate or there is maybe a problem that you would like to fix with your teaching and what you do in order to solve this issue or investigate further is that you review what you do in class whilst you are doing it and also you put these other things into practice, the ideas that you have had or strategies that you can use. So that's what I understand it to be.	Exploring/researching Identify/solve problems/challenges Assist/improve teaching practices Reflection Experimental/practical/new things