

○ **S. BORG, *TEACHER RESEARCH IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS***

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Simon Borg's thought-provoking book, *Teacher research in language teaching: A critical analysis*, is helpful in illuminating the current development of teacher research in the language teaching context. The book is concerned with language teachers', English language teaching (ELT) program directors' and managers' conceptions of research and other related issues. ELT directors, managers and teachers can use this information to develop and promote teacher research and its practice within their own language school or ELT institutional environment. This book, building on Borg's empirical research studies and teacher research projects in this area, is outlined in nine chapters.

The concept of teacher research was established in the 1960s and has since mushroomed within the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, Canada, and many other countries (Hopkins, 2008). Teacher research in language teaching has developed since the 1980s and has rapidly grown within the past decade (see Burns & Burton, 2008). The rapid growth of language teacher research has contributed to different conceptions of teacher research in language teaching. It is important, therefore, to realistically conceptualise teacher research in the language teaching context. This current book achieves this aim, and Borg is arguably the leading ELT authority on the subject.

In Chapter 1, Borg provides a clear theoretical overview of the important issues relating to teacher research in language teaching, drawing from relevant literature in this field. This overview includes defining teacher research, and discussing the origins, conceptions, benefits, barriers, and critiques of teacher research. These critical issues form the theoretical background of the book, and the basis on which Borg's empirical research studies were developed.

Chapter 2 of the book details the studies which provide empirical data to be used as fundamental and evidential information for most subsequent chapters (3 to 7). To summarise, Chapter 2 describes Borg's research program, involving 1700 ELT professionals working in several countries around the world. This program comprises four individual empirical studies, the data of which were collected through large-scale questionnaires, written follow-up and interviews. The questionnaires are included in this book as part of the appendices. This chapter also briefly summarises Borg's two teacher research projects in the Middle East and in Southeast Asia.

Borg (2010) argues strongly that if one is interested in promoting teacher research in language schools, and ELT institutions more widely, it is essential to understand language teachers' conceptions of research and engagement with and in research. Given this proposition, Chapter 3 provides insightful information about what language teachers, and ELT directors and managers really conceive of as research. The chapter highlights fundamental characteristics of research, as perceived by these teachers, directors, and managers.

Chapters 4 and 5 reveal teachers', directors', and managers' conceptions of teacher engagement with research and engagement in research respectively. In these chapters, Borg defines engagement with research and engagement in research clearly in theoretical terms. The former focuses on teachers' 'practice in engaging with research – if they read research, what they read, why they read, how they read, what use they make of this reading, and how their engagement with research can be facilitated' (p. 98). The latter focuses on what teachers actually do when they say they are engaged in (doing) research. This chapter reveals that the most common characteristics of activities teachers perceived as engagement in research are 'predominantly private, reflective, pedagogical, evaluative, informal and internal' (p.123). The information gained from these two chapters concerning teacher engagement with and in research, as Borg (2009, p. 358) argues, is 'central to the development of informed policies for promoting teacher research engagement.'

Chapter 6 further discusses the relationship between research engagement and teaching quality as perceived by teachers, directors and managers. Based on the analysis of the empirical data gained from Borg's research studies, teacher research engagement falls into two different categories, namely teachers' activities to improve teaching quality and a more academic research-like activity for pursuing higher educational qualifications. This chapter also reports on positive, less positive, negative, and uncertain views of the relationship between teacher research engagement and teaching quality. Drawing from this information, Borg argues that teachers', and ELT directors' and managers' conceptions of research play a very important role in determining teacher research engagement.

In Chapter 7, Borg discusses research cultures in language teaching. First, he considers the importance of research cultures posited within language schools which are believed to enhance language teacher research and its practice. Second, drawn from the empirical data of his studies, Borg discusses such institutional research cultures which are critically bound with several factors such as career progression, teaching loads, access to resources, and institutional tendency, especially institutional cultures excluding research as a part of the culture. Third, this chapter reveals that language teachers and ELT directors and managers have different views of research cultures, which, as Borg argues, is a barrier for developing language teacher research. Borg then discusses factors contributing to positive and negative research cultures and the interest and viability for developing and enhancing language teacher research.

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Chapter 8 presents Borg's analyses of two teacher research projects. The analyses also include an extensive list of 'facilitative conditions' (pp.196-197) for improving teacher research engagement. According to Borg, most of these facilitative conditions do not exist in language schools (or ELT institutions), which results in the unproductive promotion of language teacher research engagement.

The book concludes with Chapter 9, which readers will find provides a clear synopsis of the whole book. In addition, this chapter sets out an inclusive list of 'basic principles' (p.219), which, if attentively practiced, can help promote teachers' active engagement with and in research. This last chapter also provides a comprehensive list of recommendations for further research on issues related to teacher research in the language teaching context.

Following Chapter 9 is a set of appendices, comprising teachers' and directors' questionnaires, written follow-up questions, and director interview prompts, which Borg used for the empirical studies mentioned in this book. These questionnaires can be used as baseline research instruments to further examine and expand our understanding of language teachers' and ELT directors' and managers' conceptions of teacher research more broadly.

This book makes a significant contribution to research on language teachers', and ELT directors' and managers' conceptions of teacher research, teacher research engagement, and institutional research cultures. This book is a reader-friendly and thought-provoking volume useful for establishing and sustaining teacher research projects in the language teaching context. In particular, this book prompts applied linguists to revisit their own beliefs about teacher research in language teaching following clear theoretical frameworks. In this regard, ELT teachers, directors and managers will find this book a useful resource for further exploration, development and sustainability of teacher research and its practice.

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