

Initial English language teacher education: the effects of a module on teacher research

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ABSTRACT

Framed in action research, the authors investigated the perceptions and experiences of a cohort of student-teachers as they learned about and explored for the first time teacher research in a self-contained module as part of a four-year pre-service or initial English language teacher education (IELTE) programme in southern Argentina. The module, 'Research in English Language Teaching', ran from March–November 2018. It was led by a teacher educator based in Argentina and a UK-based colleague who acted as an external academic advisor. Drawing on qualitative research, data collection strategies included: the tutor's journal; student-teachers' journals; assignments; research proposals; report drafts; presentations; group discussions; interactions between the tutors; and end-of-course interviews. The findings show that the module had a positive effect on student-teachers' identity, their English language proficiency, and the role of reflection in feedback processes. The student-teachers appreciated teacher research as reflective practice and as a source of professional development.

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Introduction

Current teacher education rhetoric emphasises the empowering nature of teacher research (TR) among pre-service teachers (van Katwijk, Berry, Jansen, & van Veen, 2019), teachers, teacher educators and educational institutions (Carvajal Tapia, 2017). TR can be conceptualised as research carried out by teachers for teachers and learners to understand and transform their situated practices. Toom et al. (2010) advocate a research-based approach to teacher education 'to educate autonomous and reflective teachers who are capable of using research in their teaching' (p. 333) and recommend engaging student-teachers in TR from the beginning of their teacher education programme. In this sustained call for educational teacher research, educational researchers and teacher educators are reminded to engage in research which informs educational policy, curriculum innovation, practice and teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2016; Sleeter, 2014).

In the field of second language education, teacher research has been documented in several recent publications (e.g. Borg & Sanchez, 2015; Burns, Dikilitaş, Smith, & Wyatt,

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2017; Dikilitaş & Bostancıoğlu, 2020; Mackay, Birelli, & Xerri, 2018), and conceived through various forms such as Action Research (AR) (e.g. San Martín, 2018; Wyatt & Pasamar Márquez, 2016), Exploratory Practice (e.g. Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019) or Exploratory Action Research (e.g. Rebolledo, Smith, & Bullock, 2016).

A review of the literature reveals that studies about TR in English language teacher education tend to be carried out as part of master's and PhD programmes. Furthermore, while there are studies on the effects of TR on student-teachers in mainstream education (e.g. Phillips & Carr, 2009; Sanches Sampaio, Ribeiro, & Santiago, 2017), there is a lacuna in investigations about the effects of doing TR on student-teachers in initial English language teacher education (IELTE). In this study IELTE refers to pre-service English language teacher education programmes at undergraduate level taken by people without teaching experience or degree.

Framed in action research (Kemmis, 2009; Norton, 2019) as a form of teacher research, we investigated the perceptions and experiences of learning about and doing TR at a tertiary institution in southern Argentina of a group of IELTE student-teachers. For reasons of space, we concentrate on the overall effects and benefits without elaborating on issues such as teacher-researcher identity, because discussing these in depth falls outside the scope of this paper.

Teacher research in language teacher education

Hanks (2019) suggests that TR literacy development can help not only educators examine puzzles about their own practices, but also position student-teachers as co-researchers, thereby opening up epistemological and pedagogical spaces for identity formation and (re)negotiation. In the context of this paper, identity broadly refers to how student-teachers see themselves as English teachers and how they wish to be perceived by others (Trent, 2013).

Teacher research is often embedded in language teacher education to help (future) teachers develop higher levels of reflection, situated pedagogies, autonomy and teacher-researcher identity. Hence, many studies have examined TR invigorated by the synergy between research that informs practice and practice that informs research (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Mackay et al., 2018). For example, Kasula (2015) reflects on his own journey in a master's programme which combined AR with practicum experience at a Thai university. The author developed an AR project triggered by a critical incident he recorded as a teacher educator and found that AR transformed his teaching because he developed new levels of confidence in managing, preparing and teaching a specific class.

Similarly, Gilliland (2018) oversaw a practicum experience with eight MA students and involved them with TR to help 'systematically observe, document, and reflect on their practices' (p. 260). Data were collected through multiple sources (e.g. observations, interviews, students' coursework). The author found that the research-informed practicum experience provided teachers with a framework to make sense of 'personal, cultural, and institutional challenges and refine their individual theories of practice' (p. 272).

Teacher autonomy is another crucial outcome of TR. This has been the focus of a recent qualitative study by Dikilitaş and Mumford (2018), who investigated the impact of reading TR in relation to teacher autonomy. They employed think-aloud protocols and focus group discussions with teachers on an MA course in language education research at

a Turkish university. Findings showed that, through critical reading, the student-teachers developed autonomy, motivation and notions of democratic research practices alongside agency, i.e. an individual's sense of progression towards a goal and the capacity to plan and direct change through regulated actions (Pantić, 2015).

While the aforementioned studies are embedded within MA programmes, TR is also present in continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives, i.e. activities offered to in-service teachers for their on-going professional growth. For example, Edwards (2017) investigated the sustainability of the impact of AR as a CPD tool with a group of English language teachers in Australia. A further example is found in Oman by Al-Maamari, Al-Aamri, Khammash, and Al-Wahaibi (2017), who examined the perceptions and experiences of 24 EFL teachers after completing a research support programme. Drawing on data gathered through an online questionnaire and a follow-up interview, the authors concluded that the participants identified benefits such as reflection driven by data collection and feedback from experts.

It is unsurprising that TR is included in postgraduate courses as these students usually have teaching experience or may be interested in pursuing research at higher degree level. However, TR may also be incorporated in pre-service teacher education. Ross (1987) discussed the role that TR may have in pre-service teacher education to develop critical and reflective practitioners. Similarly, Phillips and Carr (2009) assert that, through TR, student-teachers 'are given space to tell their own stories and create their own meaning, in their own voice' (p. 208). Darwin and Barahona (2018) add that TR may allow student-teachers to bridge the gap between theory and practice and 'experience a heightened sense of legitimacy as a teacher (rather than merely as a student)' (p. 3). However, the authors admit that student-teachers may have limited knowledge of educational research methods and, as such, TR could become a challenge when embedded in the school-based practicum experience. On this issue, Perines (2018) observes that prospective teachers receive little research preparation and therefore IELTE programmes should provide student-teachers with research resources connected to their contexts. The author highlights that TR should enable student-teachers to carry out investigations in which they are actively invested.

The benefits and positive effects of promoting teacher research in IELTE have already been documented. In an interview-based study conducted in Hong Kong with a group of pre-service EFL teachers, Trent (2013) examined the relationship between teacher education, AR and identity construction as English language teachers. The student-teachers experienced a shift from initially dismissing research and theory to negotiating their professional identity by valuing AR as a means to address the tensions of becoming a teacher. Darwin and Barahona (2018) explored the perceptions of a group of pre-service teachers and their teacher-educators at two Chilean universities which embedded TR projects in their practicum. While the participants construed the opportunity to do AR or exploratory research as positive to reflect on their own practices and develop a sense of professional legitimacy, they 'reported they had not – and did not – intend to use action research as a means of responding to educational questions or problems emerging in their practice' (p. 10). This was due to their workload and the unsupportive educational settings where those AR projects were developed.

The literature thus reveals a need for studies which examine the effects of mandatory modules on research in initial (language) teacher education programmes by employing

AR as a methodology that enables teacher educators to examine their own practices. Therefore, this study focused on pre-service student-teachers who learned about and explored TR through a mandatory module as part of their IELTE in southern Argentina. Against this background, the following research question guided our study:

- What are the effects of a module on teacher research in initial EFL student-teachers' education?

Methodology

Action Research (AR) informs the research design of this study. AR can be minimally defined as a self-reflective, critical and systematic research approach carried out by practitioners to understand, examine and improve their practices (Banegas & Consoli, 2020; Kemmis, 2009; Noffke & Somekh, 2009; Norton, 2019). In this article we specifically adopted practical AR (Burns, 2005; Stenhouse, 1975), as in this type of AR the nature of the problem is context-bound and within a structure (e.g. an institution), and its purpose is to describe participants' understanding of their actions. This study was carried out by a teacher educator (Darío Luis Banegas, Author 1) and a colleague (Sal Consoli, Author 2) who acted as external academic advisor for a cohort of student-teachers on a four-year IELTE programme in Argentina. We were interested to explore the student-teachers' experiences of doing research in language education as part of a module on educational research.

In line with Hanks (2019), we took an exploratory and collaborative approach to practical AR in that we involved the student-teachers as researchers of their own practices, thereby encouraging them to take control of their pedagogical trajectories. We intentionally gave the student-teachers a high degree of agency by allowing them to set their research projects and goals, as well as to plan and implement regulated actions which would allow them to achieve their goals. In so doing, we sought to help them discover that TR literacy may indeed support the development of pedagogic ideas alongside reflective practices (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Mann & Walsh, 2017).

Therefore, our approach to research within this experience was not solely to fulfil the requirements of an IELTE module, but to encourage these student-teachers to unearth and explore their own understandings of teaching and learning through first-hand experience and their sense-making of the complexities involved in such practices within their specific contexts (Phillips & Carr, 2009). The student-teachers freely chose topics which were meaningful and relevant to them. We, the authors, presented to them a variety of TR approaches (e.g. AR, Exploratory Practice) and they were invited to adopt the research instruments with which they felt most comfortable (see later in this article for further details).

Context

Argentinian initial teacher education programmes are often four years long and include compulsory modules on general education, specialised subject matter (e.g. English) and subject-specific teaching methodologies. How these areas are specifically addressed depends on each Argentinian province. In Chubut, the geographical context of this

paper, IELTE programmes offer teacher education for kindergarten, primary and secondary levels, and consist of 34 compulsory modules such as ‘Sociology of Education’, ‘English Syntax’ and ‘Professional Practice’. Two of these modules concern research practice.

In Year 3, the student-teachers must complete a module called ‘Educational Research’, delivered in Spanish, L1 in this context, which offers an introduction to epistemological traditions and research paradigms. Year 4 includes an English-medium module called ‘Research in English Language Teaching (ELT)’; this module is the object of our study. The core aim of the module is to help student-teachers develop a research-reflective attitude. Secondary aims include helping them: (1) appreciate language-teaching research; (2) establish connections across modules in the programme; and (3) develop academic literacy. [Table 1](#) shows the content structure around four units of work. In the context of this programme and region, this module is vital since it may be the only opportunity for prospective teachers to engage in educational research. This is because doing postgraduate courses is almost impossible due to several contextual constraints, such as a lack of local initiatives, distance from universities and a lack of appropriate resources.

The ‘Research in ELT’ module is built upon the notion of TR as an umbrella term and practice that includes AR (Banegas & Consoli, 2020) and exploratory practice (Hanks, 2019), so that student-teachers can learn about and engage in language teaching research that offers them tools to explore, understand, reflect upon and transform (if necessary) their situated practices.

Participants

In 2018, there were 14 student-teachers, 13 females and 1 male, enrolled on ‘Research in ELT’, with an age range between 21 and 52. Only four had between 2–5 years of teaching experience in local schools. Due to the scarcity of qualified teachers, student-teachers are employed as practising teachers by the Ministry of Education. The remainder did not work or worked in the private sector. Their level of English was B2–C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which

Table 1. Module content.

<p>Unit 1: Introduction to research (March–May) Teacher research and identity. Ecological research. Quantitative and qualitative methods. Longitudinal and cross-sectional studies. Action research. Exploratory practice. Reflection. Ethnography in education. Case studies. Replication studies. Comparative studies. ELT Research in Argentina and Latin America. Drafting a research proposal. Research design and implementation.</p>	<p>Unit 4 (developed across topics): Oral and written practices in research. Academic speaking and writing. Language awareness. Discussing content and language in publications. Keeping a journal.</p>
<p>Unit 2: Research processes (June–September) Literature review. Data collection and analysis. Context. Fieldwork. Discussion of articles. Implementation.</p>	
<p>Unit 3: Researching for transformation (October–November) Limitations, resonances and implications of teacher research. Research report. Writing for publication. Sharing our findings.</p>	

helped them understand the module reading list and engage critically with class activities and coursework. Their participation in this study was voluntary, and consent obtained in writing. They were reassured that their withdrawal would not affect their grades. We also promised that their data would remain anonymous (pseudonyms are used in this article) and confidential.

Data collection

Drawing on AR, we collected data throughout the entire academic year to understand the effects of the module and its research elements on the student-teachers. To this end, we selected data sources that captured the teaching and learning processes and products in the context of the classroom:

- Author 1's journal: The journal consisted of post-lesson entries about perceptions, ideas, student-teachers' comments and questions to be discussed with Author 2. The journal contained 40 entries and Author 2 had access to it through Dropbox.
- Student-teachers' journals: Each student-teacher kept a journal in Spanish (students' L1) and/or English. At the end of every lesson, the last 10 minutes were devoted to journal writing guided by these questions: What did I learn today? Will this help me as a teacher? Have I developed as an L2 user?
- Student-teachers' assignments, research proposals, report drafts and presentations. In total, we collected 21 learning artefacts.
- End-of-unit class discussions with Author 1. These took place in the last session at the end of each unit (Table 1). In each discussion Author 1 asked the student-teachers to work in pairs to discuss the effects that each unit had on them with an eye to unpacking their views of research. The student-teachers could select reflections from their journals to illustrate their insights. Then, Author 1 invited them to share their views with the whole class.
- Authors' interactions. We held regular Skype meetings to discuss our experiences with the module. These were carried out in English and Spanish and audio-recorded.
- End-of-course class discussion with Author 2. At the end of the academic year, Author 2 travelled from the UK to southern Argentina to meet the student-teachers to discuss their overall evaluation of the module and their experiences conducting research. Author 1 was not involved to allow the student-teachers to share their insights of Author 1's practice.

(End-of-course) class discussions and authors' interactions were carried out in English, audio-recorded and transcribed for the purposes of data analysis.

Data analysis

We analysed the data through thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2016; Saldaña, 2016) to capture the processes of teaching and learning which the student-teachers highlighted as critical experiences throughout the module. Data analysis was on-going and conducted alongside data collection, thereby including initial coding, axial coding and unifying themes. Author 1 and Author 2 analysed the data separately and then shared their ideas

through online and face-to-face interactions. As such, decisions about final themes were made when both authors were in full agreement.

The quality of AR as qualitative research is measured against the notion of trustworthiness. To operationalise this concept, we drew on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) dimensions of credibility, dependability and confirmability. We ensured credibility by drawing on several datasets from each participant. Furthermore, we shared our emerging understandings of the data with the student-teachers throughout the year. As such, they were given opportunities to agree or disagree with our 'findings' and enrich these with their own views.

In order to ensure dependability, we kept researcher journals from the very beginning of the programme. These, alongside our numerous interactions, helped us understand the impact of unanticipated issues (e.g. school strikes) and, as shown later in this article, illustrate the trajectory of the whole experience. Confirmability refers to the influence of the researcher's subjectivity over the research and consists in privileging the participants' meanings. While it was impossible to eliminate the impact of our presence throughout the research process, we made important reflexive efforts in bracketing our assumptions and beliefs before designing the study and throughout.

With the aim of reflecting the natural history (Silverman, 2010) of module implementation and the teacher research underlying it, findings are organised around two phases: (1) navigating the module; and (2) wrapping up the module. The latter draws on student-teachers' report writing-up.

Navigating the module

The process of navigating the module consists of three phases: (1) understanding student-teachers' prior experiences; (2) attending the lessons; and (3) doing the research.

Understanding student-teachers' prior experiences

Author 1 sought to understand student-teachers' perceptions and experiences in relation to the 'Educational Research' module (Year 3). Therefore, in the first lesson of the module under investigation ('Research in ELT – Year 4'), the student-teachers answered a set of questions. Table 2 illustrates the questions and some sample answers.

While the answers to the second question illustrated standard views, the answers to the third question were a warning. The student-teachers did not wish to waste their time; they wanted to experience research as a meaningful part of teacher education. Therefore, Author 1 adjusted the Year 4 module 'Research in ELT' and sought to examine the effects of the module, particularly in relation to the student-teachers' small-scale research projects. Given the shared interest in TR, Author 1 invited Author 2 to act as an external adviser for the student-teachers. Table 3 outlines our roles.

Attending the lessons

Attendance in the module could be understood through the following two themes: (1) the pedagogical value of research; and (2) feedback as a catalyst for reflection.

Only two student-teachers questioned the benefits of this module, and Extract 1 illustrates such a view:

Table 2. Student-teachers' expectations.

Question	Most recurrent answers
1. Write 5–10 key words that you link with research.	Questionnaire, theory, students, schools, surveys, qualitative, quantitative, problem, reflection, society, aims.
2. I define educational research as ...	A process to answer an educational question by collecting and analysing data, having a theoretical framework and awareness of previous studies. A process to investigate and discover new approaches and challenge theories.
3 From this new module ('Research in ELT'), I'd like to ..., but I wouldn't like to ...	From this module I'd like to become a modest teacher researcher of my own teaching practice and to be able to benefit from other teachers' research, but I wouldn't like to delve too much into deadening research theory. From this module I'd like to improve my teaching and learn more about teaching through researching my own classrooms, but I wouldn't like to waste time on theories or reading about research. From this module I'd like to learn how to conduct useful research to improve my teaching. I wouldn't like to waste time on technicalities or writing hard-to-digest papers.

Table 3. Tutors' roles.

Author	Roles
Darío Luis Banegas	Module leader and tutor in charge of delivering the core content and assessing student-teachers' work.
Sal Consoli	Advised student-teachers on their research proposals. Arranged Skype meetings with each research group to provide feedback. Read their final reports and provided feedback.

I'd rather have more opportunities for learning pedagogical strategies and tips without going through the research part. I don't consider it a priority at this stage of my initial preparation. (Almudena, Extract 1)

Almudena's view seems to position pedagogical practice and TR practice as disjointed, with pre-service teachers having a preference for teaching strategies which are immediately relevant to their professional context as opposed to research engagement.

However, 12 students noted that they enjoyed the lectures and reading materials, notably Rebolledo et al. (2016), as they could 'see' the pedagogical implications of doing and reading about research:

I liked reading and commenting [on] one of the stories in the Rebolledo book because the author-teacher focused on a real problem she had in the classroom and what she did to change that. The teaching strategies she used can be useful for my own teaching. (Mariana, Extract 2)

In a similar vein, Author 1 noted in his journal:

They [the student-teachers] are a lot more engaged and motivated when I explain a concept, for example, ecological research. They came up with lots of ideas around designing learning tasks that can also help them collect data, or how they can correct exercises and note down the type of feedback provided, or how to keep a record of recurrent mistakes students make. They are also more engaged when we read articles from Chile, or Argentina, thanks [to] FAAPI conferences! (Author 1, Extract 3)

Such perceptions about the pedagogical value of research resonate with the student-teachers' insights about the pedagogical benefits of research engagement. Arguably, the

Table 4. Sample of a student-teacher research proposal.

Project title	PPD (Práctica Profesional Docente; in English Professional Practice) in real life
Area/Topic	Influence of PPD in teaching practices
Research question(s)	What is the impact of the subject PPD on student teachers' practicum and/or professional practice?
Aims of your project	To reflect on how PPD is taught and the impact that it has got on the students.
Where will the project be carried out? (Context)	The project will be carried out at the English teaching trainee course. The project will involve students from first, second, third and fourth year attending the subject Práctica Profesional Docente.
What's your research methodology?	Mixed methods: Our research methodology will be quantitative and qualitative. Triangulation.
Data collection instruments	Online questionnaire and interviews to some advanced students.
How long will the project take?	Four months.
How are you going to work as a research team? Will you have different roles?	To begin, the team will create the questions for the online survey and for the interviews. Marina is going to be in charge of the digital part. Each one of us will interview two students of each year (Paula first year, Pamela second year, Liliana third year and Marina fourth year) and will analyse and transcribe the most relevant information. Then, the whole team will classify the data. The written part will be done by the four of us.

student-teachers saw themselves as teachers, not researchers, and even if they envisioned themselves as teacher-researchers, priority was given to their development as practitioners.

The second theme, feedback as a catalyst for reflection, emerged from Author 2's feedback on student-teachers' research proposals. For example, a group submitted a research proposal (Table 4) aiming to investigate the impact of the Professional Practice module.

'After receiving written feedback and doing follow-up Skype meetings with Author 2, a student-teacher noted:

Author 2's feedback helped us reflect on what we wanted to do and our own trajectories as student-teachers. His comments initially seemed confusing but then I realised that his questions and comments helped us narrow down the scope of our study, or think about other instruments for data collection. As we had to explain to him our context, that also helped us reflect on how we wanted to organise our ideas and what we wanted to achieve. (Carla, Extract 4)

Feedback on research activities (e.g. proposal draft writing) is therefore certainly conducive to the refinement of student-teachers' ideas. Admittedly, given their lack of research experience at this early stage of their professional trajectories, the input from an external advisor, who offers their expertise without judgement or impact on their performance, seems particularly helpful. As a result, student-teachers may identify benefits in this kind of exchange with external experts (Al-Maamari et al., 2017), and therefore teacher educators are encouraged to promote exchanges of ideas between student-teachers and other colleagues.

Doing the research

The student-teachers completed their research projects (Table 5) between June and September 2018. Due to major teachers' strikes, they had to reassess their research

Table 5. Summary of student-teachers' research projects.

Group	Title	Aim	Details
1	What do speaking activities offer EFL learners? An analysis of a course book series used in Argentina	To analyse the type of activities to develop speaking skills in one course book series used in a state secondary school in a city in southern Argentina.	Content analysis. With the results of the study, the student-teachers would develop new activities to compensate for differences between the coursebook series and the school curriculum.
2	The effects professional practices (PP) have on student-teachers regarding their sense of self efficacy on giving feedback	To determine whether the PP modules influence student-teachers' professional practices beyond the theory given in class and, if so, in which ways they apply the acquired knowledge in their professional practices.	They adopted an exploratory-descriptive research framework to investigate their peers' trajectories in the same IELTE programme they were doing. They surveyed and interviewed student-teachers already working as teachers.
3	Professional practice in real contexts: Student-teachers' perspective	To examine the impact that the subject PP has on the professional practice of the student-teachers in the IELTE programme.	They adopted a descriptive-exploratory framework. This study was similar to Group 3's but their focus was broader.
4	Towards understanding students' motivation: findings from a secondary public school in southern Argentina	To explore participants' attitudes towards English and the motivating and demotivating factors underlying such attitudes.	They adopted a qualitative framework and used classroom observation, student-researchers' journals, group interviews and individual follow-up interviews.

designs to avoid delays and deal with potential issues to access the chosen classrooms and participants. For example, one group initially wished to do AR to improve learners' speaking skills at a school in difficult socioeconomic circumstances, but they eventually undertook coursebook analysis because this seemed more feasible in light of the strikes.

While Groups 1 and 4 examined their own teaching materials and/or practices, Groups 2 and 3 set their research in their own IELTE programme to maximise their opportunities to access participants and capitalise on their familiarity with the educational setting itself. An overview of each group's research project is given in Table 5.

Drawing on the student-teachers' journals, the class discussions throughout the research, and Author 1's journal, the following themes were identified in relation to the experience of *doing* TR: (1) research as a context-bound dynamic activity; and (2) reflection through data collection.

The first theme conflates student-teachers' concerns and understandings of how TR projects can evolve and undergo unexpected shifts due to the dynamic and, often, unpredictable nature of the educational context. The extracts given here illustrate this:

We thought everything was going to be straightforward and easy. Wrong! First, the strikes. Then, teachers were absent or it was difficult to agree on a time to meet so we had to be open to change. (Liliana, Extract 6)

It's crazy to see how we've changed the aims, the questions, the number of people we were planning to interview and how. As we plan and listen to the participants, we go back and forth and change the questions or what we want to find out. (Carla, Extract 7)

The second theme, reflection through data collection, refers to the student-teachers' realisations that as they collected data, the emerging insights motivated them to transcribe and analyse the data promptly because such knowledge could shed light on pedagogical concerns. For example, one of the student-teachers noted:

Today we conducted the interviews and I couldn't wait to go back home and transcribe and analyse them. There's so much to think about. Not just about our research questions, but about other aspects. This is what I like now about research; it helps me think about my own studying and own teaching. (Denise, Extract 8)

Wrapping up the module

Student-teachers' perceptions and final evaluations of the module came from three sources: (1) a written task where they had to compare their expectations (Table 2); (2) a class discussion with Author 1 after submitting the final report and presenting the study to their peers; and (3) a class discussion with Author 2 once classes had finished. At the end of the module, Author 1 invited the student-teachers to look back at their answers to the questionnaire completed at the beginning of the module (Table 2). They were asked to reflect on the whole experience and compare their initial expectations with their experiences.

The following extracts illustrate the change in attitude towards educational research. Extract 9 shows that although the groups were unable to conduct AR for practical reasons, AR seemed to be the most attractive concept to them as it involved transformation.

Now I know that educational research is not just methods of collecting information, it's more than that, and that action research is the best for transforming institutions, and my own practices. Teacher research is very important and useful for doing systematic self-study, and we can make a change through action research. (Agus, Extract 9)

Extracts 10 and 11 also appear to emphasise the benefits of language teaching research at both the pedagogical and professional development levels. However, both student-teachers acknowledged a degree of frustration about what research involves, not only in relation to doing research itself, but in light of questions, processes and dilemmas, such as writing for publication.

I know now that language teaching research involves a steep learning curve which requires lots of reading and delving into apparently simple matters. I feel attracted to research because it can help pedagogically and with my own professional development, but I still see it as a bit uptight with all that jargon and publishing demands and the danger of overthinking stuff and killing the teacher for becoming an academic. (Fer, Extract 10)

I found that language teaching research is more complex and unstable than I thought. It's also a process that requires narrowing down your questions and aims, and everything! In the end it is extremely helpful to understand and improve our teaching. (Liliana, Extract 11)

The retrospective view on the student-teachers' expectations shows that the module was, despite some reservations (Extract 1), a successful experience, overall. One recurrent area of discussion was the place of theory in the module. By 'theory' the student-teachers

meant books on research methodology and articles in international journals which would help them develop the theoretical foundations of their projects. Extracts 12 and 13 highlight the instrumental value of such articles in their teaching practices and their research projects within a collaborative environment. However, as reflected in Extract 12, some student-teachers did not feel 'connected' to some research articles as they found them long and above their level of professional knowledge.

I liked it because the process of learning about and doing research was scaffolded step by step without delving too much into deadening theory. Sometimes I didn't feel connected to the articles we read, but I must say that some of the implications included by the authors have been very helpful for my own teaching. (Fer, Extract 12)

Expectations met! The module helped us draw on our previous knowledge and we could design our research project around a topic that we were interested in. Also, we could focus on theories and articles that were necessary to our study so we saw the practical value of theory. Also, the practice of reading and discussing collaboratively different articles gave us clues on how to organise and do our study and then on how to write our reports. (Tamara, Extract 13)

Another recurrent theme concerned the feedback provided throughout the module. As Extract 15 illustrates, feedback became a source of reflection and scaffolding which led to the student-teachers developing autonomy.

I didn't expect to have a second tutor! Sal helped us so much. He made us take distance from our research questions and think about narrowing down our topic. (Agus, Extract 14)

Overall, the module did achieve my expectations. The way feedback was given by both Darío and Sal was helpful because it allowed me to reflect and think about how we wanted to go on with the project. It also helped me think about my own teaching and find ways of improving as a teacher. (Daniel, Extract 15)

In November 2018, each group submitted their research report after receiving feedback from both Author 1 and 2. They also gave short presentations on their studies. Immediately afterwards, a discussion was conducted by Author 1 to obtain their views on the experience of the module. In December 2018, Author 2 travelled from the UK to Argentina to meet the student-teachers and conduct a class discussion. Analysis of both discussions showed that the module had an effect on: (1) student-teachers' identity; (2) English language proficiency; and (3) the role of reflection in feedback processes.

All the student-teachers agreed that attending the module and doing research helped them reconfigure their identity as EFL teachers. They realised that research could transform them into reflective practitioners with tools to become critical, creative and ready to engage in educational research to improve their own teaching practices in a collaborative environment. For example, Tamara and Denise mentioned:

Teacher research can offer new perspectives for my classes. It can give me tools to improve my teaching and have clearer ideas and insights for myself and others. (Tamara, Extract 16)

Teacher research can help me expand and share, and engage in collaborative work. Becoming a teacher-researcher is now an option. (Denise, Extract 17)

Thus, the module allowed them to see themselves not only as reflective teachers, but also as teacher-researchers who could innovate and transform the language teaching and learning processes through their own situated research.

In terms of English language proficiency, the student-teachers noted a wider repertoire of lexicon because they learnt new specialised terms. They also commented on academic literacy and authenticity given the nature and potential readership of the research reports.

I think that apart from learning new words, specific words from the field and academic words, I learnt a lot about academic writing. Doing lots of awareness-raising activities has helped me with consistency and textual organisation. (Daniel, Extract 18)

I improved my English because we used the language with an authentic purpose, the write-up of our own study, but also because we had a real audience in mind. Having the possibility of sending our report for publication made me spend more time on accuracy. (Mariana, Extract 19)

Finally, the experience of receiving feedback from two tutors and peers became a positive feature of the module that exerted an encouraging influence over their becoming teachers. For instance, a student-teacher noted:

Having comments from an insider (Darío) and an outsider (Sal) helped me become more reflective about perspectives and how clear we need to be. And that is not about writing, but it's about teaching, learning to give and take feedback from others. (Carla, Extract 20).

In wrapping up the module, the 14 student-teachers agreed that time constraints and the difficult atmosphere created by the teachers' strikes, which lasted three months, had challenged their research plans. At times, they had to speed up certain processes, such as the final report write-up, because of the deadlines of the IELTE programme.

Discussion

The aim of this experience was to understand the effects of a teacher research module in IELTE with the conviction that teachers do not need to wait to complete postgraduate studies to engage in educational research. Despite concerns about academic research as opposed to teacher research (Extract 10), the overall perception was positive among the student-teachers as they felt motivated by the experience (Extracts 2–3). The effects of learning and doing TR in IELTE could be organised around three interrelated areas: (1) conceptualisation of TR; (2) TR as reflective practice; and (3) TR as professional development.

As suggested by Al-Maamari et al. (2017), being engaged in TR allowed the student-teachers to move from traditional views of research to notions of research which enabled them to bridge the gap between theory and practice and contribute to their TR literacy. In line with Darwin and Barahona (2018) and Gilliland (2018), the student-teachers valued TR and the theories which emerged from it because they could inform specific teaching practices (Extract 13). In other words, theory became meaningful when it was employed to illuminate situated practices and language teaching and learning issues. In sum, TR seems to have allowed the student-teachers to understand the dynamic and contradictory

tensions between theory, research and practice (Trent, 2010), as well as the complex relationship between research and context (Extracts 6–7).

Crucially, the student-teachers experienced and operationalised situated pedagogies, i.e. pedagogies that respond to learners' context, and local knowledge production. As these aspects contributed to their TR literacy, student-teachers found that teacher identity may also include teachers becoming knowledge creators in their own right and for their learners' contexts (Hanks, 2019). This effect may confirm Phillips and Carr's (2009) suggestion that, through TR literacy and an empowering sense of professional identity, student-teachers can theorise from practice. In this study, AR constituted a strong exemplar of what student-teachers expect from educational research: they wish for practice to precede and inform theory. While the participants in Darwin and Barahona's (2018) study seemed to stress institutional barriers for conducting AR, our student-teachers felt inclined to embed AR in their future professional practices given its transformative potential at institutional and professional levels (Extract 9). Our results may be different because in our context, teachers may be institutionally supported to carry out research despite having a similar workload to their Chilean counterparts.

Importantly, special attention was given to readings which contributed to TR literacy as they resonated with the geographical context of Chubut, as was the case for the book by Rebolledo et al. (2016) (Extract 3). This finding confirms that TR projects initiated by student-teachers need to acknowledge previous research carried out locally so that student-teachers' projects are based on contextually responsive studies (Perines, 2018).

Student-teachers' experiences of doing small-scale research exerted a powerful influence on the development of reflection as part of teacher identity. At different stages of the programme, reflection surfaced as a positive outcome of feedback from both tutors (Extracts 4, 15 and 20) and the student-teachers' data collection and analysis processes (Extract 8). Thus, research engagement may have triggered personal and collaborative reflection which shaped these student-teachers' trajectories as learners and teachers. We thus advance that TR literacy may promote teachers' identities as reflective and autonomous professionals (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Mann & Walsh, 2017).

The third major effect of the module concerns student-teachers' professional development. Under professional development we conflate student-teachers' identity as teacher-researchers (Extract 17), self-reported improvement in English language proficiency (Extracts 18–19), and their views of TR literacy as an opportunity for further pedagogic skills development (Extracts 2, 3, 10, 11 and 16). Despite some reservations (Extract 1), it seemed that the module provided opportunities to enhance teaching practices with new resources and strategies which, in turn, enriched the student-teachers as professionals. They were able to envision a future language teacher identity which incorporates English language proficiency as a feature of a 'good English language teacher' and values the role that TR can play within their professional practices, informed decisions and empowerment. Therefore, doing TR as part of an IELTE programme can generate instrumental and formative benefits for teachers' daily professional practices and their engagement in wider communities of practice. After all, doing TR, as shown in this experience, means sharing teaching practice ideas with others.

This study shows that there are a range of benefits in doing language teacher research as part of IELTE, which are worth disseminating among curriculum developers and teacher educators. In particular, the student-teachers benefitted from TR

literacy because they learnt to conceptualise TR through their own experiences and were able to operationalise reflective practice as an approach to teaching (Mann & Walsh, 2017) through the process of doing TR, which provided them with methodological tools to systematise reflection. We therefore suggest that cultivating a sustainable research culture amongst prospective teachers may support them in becoming autonomous reflective practitioners.

Finally, this experience was beneficial for us as authors and teacher educators because we were able to assess the effects of our pedagogical behaviours within this IELTE programme by engaging in AR to improve practice; consequently, we illustrated through our own practice what we lectured on for one academic year. A factor that contributed to AR in our study was our agency and interest in continuing professional development. Despite this positive experience, we must acknowledge that working under circumstances of strikes and a socioeconomic crisis in our context hindered some participants' ability to conduct AR themselves, and collect data about this specific form of doing TR.

When teacher educators engage in AR to enhance their own practice, they become models of teacher-researchers and TR that student-teachers may find inspiring, because through their congruent practice they make TR possible in their professional contexts (Hanks, 2019). In addition, teacher educators' lectures and seminars may localise the research-driven (Toom et al., 2010) orientation of teacher education programmes when they draw on TR carried out by colleagues within the same institutional or regional context. In the context of initial teacher education, TR can be conceptualised as a collective activity that brings together student-teachers and teacher educators to examine, act upon and discuss their own practices and personal theories, with the aim of offering situated pedagogies substantiated by individual experiences.

Conclusion

Albeit context-specific, this study emphasised the importance of TR with future teachers (van Katwijk et al., 2019). This work, however, is not free from limitations, such as its small-scale nature and the fact the experience was confined to IELTE. Whilst researching our own student-teachers was a privilege and led to insiders' perspectives, this may have prevented the student-teachers from being more vocal about negative aspects.

In terms of implications, our experience shows that teacher education programmes may need to incorporate a module on doing TR for student-teachers to develop research literacy, research-informed pedagogy and academic language. Furthermore, this study reveals the different roles that student-teachers and teacher educators may acquire whilst becoming active agents of change and creators of local knowledge. Such roles may include student-teachers as reflective practitioners, researchers, leaders in their own contexts and team players, and teacher educators as creators, facilitators, reflective and critical practitioners, as well as challengers of hegemonic and traditional curriculum views in (English language) teacher education.

It should be highlighted that a stronger presence of TR in teacher education not only entail offering TR modules; it also calls for teacher educators to engage in TR themselves by investigating their own practices, as we did. In so doing, TR will be conceptually framed, through first-hand experience, as a professional activity that any educator can embrace (Hanks, 2019).

Future studies may examine the extent to which student-teachers maintain an interest in reading and doing TR, i.e. teacher research engagement, beyond the teacher education programme. Such studies may also investigate the factors which influence perceptions and practices about the pedagogical value of TR. Finally, more language teacher educators could investigate their own practices whilst delivering similar modules. This would shed more light on what pedagogical decisions may become barriers or conduits for the development of student-teachers' understanding and explorations of TR.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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