

# Exploring EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Action Research in Two Public Universities in Saudi Arabia

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Received: April 20, 2024

Accepted: May 3, 2024

Published: May 6, 2024

doi:10.5296/ijele.v12i2.21886

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijele.v12i2.21886>

## Abstract

This study aimed to examine the knowledge, practice, and obstacles of action research (AR) among English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers at two public universities in Saudi Arabia. To achieve this aim, the study employed a quantitative research design using an online questionnaire. The data was collected from 96 EFL teachers working at English language institutes of two public universities in Saudi Arabia. The findings of the study revealed that most EFL teachers were familiar with AR, and the knowledge of AR was widespread among the participants. On the other hand, the findings showed deficiency in the practice of AR among EFL teachers. The findings also revealed that time and lack of training in AR were the most significant obstacles that hindered EFL teachers from conducting AR. Based on these findings, the study offered practical implications and recommendations for promoting the practice of AR among EFL teachers.

**Keywords:** action research, EFL teachers, Saudi EFL context, teachers' perceptions

## 1. Introduction

Information in the field of teaching and learning EFL is constantly changing (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Therefore, EFL teachers are advised to revise and renew their professional knowledge to improve their teaching practice and learning outcomes. This ongoing process of education that is designed to develop teachers' skills and knowledge is referred to as Teacher Professional Development (TPD). In this sense, resourceful teachers always seek opportunities to enhance their skills by employing various tools. One of these efficient tools is AR. Action Research is defined as a systematic approach conducted by teachers to improve their teaching practices, develop an awareness of their practice, and enrich the overall teaching and learning situations (Carr & Kemmis, 2004). It provides teachers with possibilities to narrow the gap between practice and theories and construct their own theories according to their situations (Burns, 2005; Darwin & Barahona, 2018; Finch, 2005).

### *1.1 Statement of the Research Problem*

There has been a growing interest in AR among EFL educators worldwide (Burns & Rochsantiningsih, 2006) since it was proven to be a vital tool for improving teaching practice. In contrast, less attention was given to investigating teachers' knowledge and practice of AR and the challenges of conducting AR among teachers in the Saudi EFL context. Indeed, Rainey's study (2000) appeared to be the sole investigation into Saudi EFL teachers' knowledge and practice of AR. However, the two-decade gap since this study necessitates a renewed examination of this topic to understand the current role of AR among EFL teachers in Saudi EFL context.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap in the literature and explore the knowledge and the practice of AR among practitioner teachers in two public universities in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, it investigates EFL teachers' perceptions of the challenges that prevented them from practicing AR to provide possible solutions for EFL educators who wish to practice this type of research.

### *1.2 Research Aims and Questions*

The primary aim of this study is to examine teachers' perceptions of the knowledge and practice of AR among EFL teachers in two public universities in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, it aims to identify EFL teachers' perceptions of the challenges of practicing AR in the two universities. To fulfill these aims, the current study sought to answer the following specific research questions:

RQ1: How widespread is the knowledge of AR among EFL teachers in the two public Saudi universities?

RQ2: How often do EFL teachers in the two public Saudi universities practice AR?

RQ3: What challenges hinder the practice of AR among EFL teachers in the two public Saudi universities?

### *1.3 Significance of the Study*

The literature (Davidson, 2009; Dehghan & Sahragard, 2015; Negi, 2016; Paradede, 2019;

Shuttleworth, 2017) revealed that AR is one of the vital tools for developing teachers' skills and knowledge. On the other hand, previous studies (Bashir, 2011; Rainey, 2000) investigating AR in the EFL context documented that AR is not receiving the same weight and value among EFL educators compared to the other research paradigms or professional development tools due to various challenges. Therefore, the importance of this study stems from its contribution to increasing the knowledge of AR among EFL educators and providing a better understanding of the role of AR in two Saudi universities. Furthermore, the results of the prospective study are hoped to shed light on the challenges encountered in conducting AR and offer practical solutions for educators to encourage the effective implementation of AR among EFL teachers in the two universities. Consequently, EFL teachers would be empowered to conduct their own investigation and bridge the gap between theories and practice to improve their teaching continuously.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Origin of Action Research*

While many authors believed that AR originated in the work of the psychologist Kurt Lewin, others stated that AR was found in the work of many social researchers prior to Lewin (Masters, 1995). Nevertheless, Kurt Lewin was always referred to in the literature as the father of AR and the inventor of the term AR because he constructed the theory of AR in the 1940s (Burns, 2005; Kemmis et al., 2014; Masters, 1995). Action Research was also influenced by John Dewey's theory of learning by doing (Masters, 1995; Pardede, 2019). Dewey was a philosopher who applied the inductive scientific approach to resolve problems in the educational field (Masters, 1995; Rainey, 2000). In addition, the teacher-researcher movement that emerged in 1975 by Stenhouse greatly influenced AR. Even though AR has a long history in education and social sciences, it only started to become popular in English language teaching in the 1980s (Burns, 2005). Since that time, AR has gained rapid interest from teacher educators, training organizations, and even teachers themselves (Burns & Rochsantiningsih, 2006).

### *2.2 Definition and Importance of Action Research*

In social sciences, AR is usually associated with making an adjustment in a social setting (Kemmis et al., 2014). From this perspective, Burns (2005) defined AR as a method of analyzing problems in social settings with the aim of developing the quality of human practices and interactions in those settings. On the other hand, looking at the nature of AR in education and language teaching, Dehghan and Sahragard (2015) described it as a "principled way of observing one's own teaching, reflecting upon it, and trying to diagnose its weaknesses and enhance its strengths" (p. 41). Moreover, Atay (2008) described AR as an inquiry conducted by teachers through questioning their own beliefs and assumptions in order to investigate, improve, or examine changes in classroom practice. At the same time, Finch (2005) looked at AR as a process of analyzing a problematic situation in the classroom and then collecting data about this problem and trying to interpret that data.

Furthermore, AR is considered one of the ultimate tools for improving teaching practice for

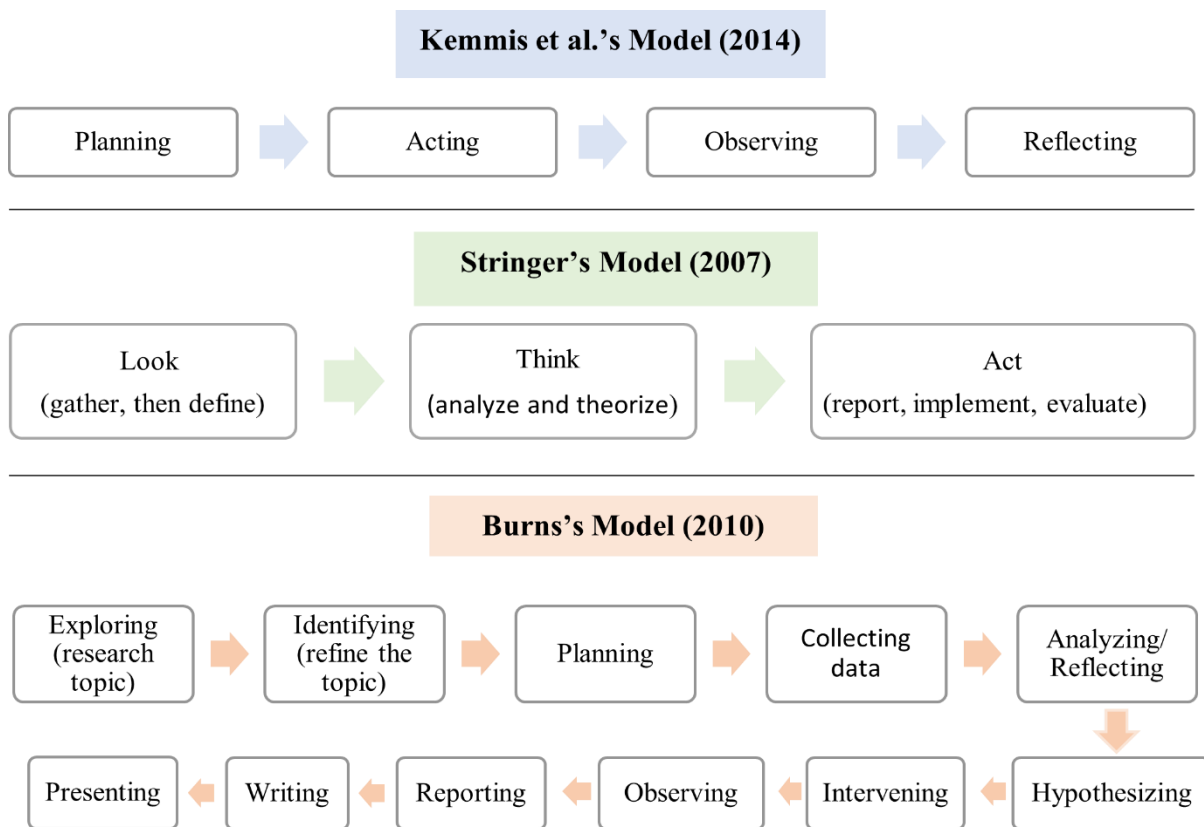
several reasons. First, AR encourages teachers to be active by enabling them to take control of their professional development (Norton, 2009). In other words, in many teachers' professional development tools, teachers take the role of the passive receptionist of knowledge. They are expected to develop their skills based on the findings of others who are not necessarily classroom-based teachers. On the other hand, AR allows teachers to engage with their classroom practice and reflect on their own practices (Atay, 2006). Moreover, AR provides teachers with opportunities to observe the changes in their classrooms. Additionally, AR focuses on developing teachers' understanding of their practices and helps them relate their practices to educational theories and develop their own theorizing.

### *2.3 Characteristics of Action Research*

There are some features that discriminate AR from the traditional notion of research or other approaches. The first and foremost characteristic is its aim. The main aim of AR is to improve the teaching practice (Burns, 1999; Finch, 2005; Kember, 2005; Norton, 2009; Pardede, 2019; Wallace, 1998). In AR, the procedure of gathering data and the subsequent analysis of it is driven by the purpose of improving the learning process. Second, AR is determined and conducted by practitioners rather than outside researchers (Finch, 2005; Norton, 2009). In addition, AR is viewed as a social practice since it is concerned with teaching and learning and entails an explicit interaction between teachers and students (Burns, 1999; Kember, 2005; Norton, 2009). Among other characteristics of AR is the systematic aspect. AR has a cyclical nature which includes four steps: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Burns, 1999; Kember, 2005; Norton, 2009). In one AR project, two or more cycles might be repeated, as improving the teaching practice might need more than one cycle (Kember, 2005). However, this spiral process is not a fixed-sequenced procedure as it does not always take the same orderly and neat path (Burns, 2010; Kember, 2005; Norton, 2009). Burns (1999) and Kember (2005) affirmed that flexibility is essential in this dynamic process, and overlapping between fundamental steps can occur when unforeseen topics emerge. In this regard, it should be noted that reflection is a vital feature of AR (Kember, 2005; Norton, 2009; Wallace, 1998).

### *2.4 Process of Action Research*

One of the distinguishing characteristics of AR is its systematic aspect. Action Research is a spiral cycle with four major phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting on practical issues. These are the main steps of AR; however, more steps might occur, and they could take different orders. In some studies, two or more cycles are conducted. By synthesizing the literature, this study realizes that no one solid model of AR exists. Experts in the AR field designed different models of AR that included varied stages using varied terminologies. Since this study does not focus on guiding teachers in conducting AR, only a summary of the different models is presented. Figure 1 summarizes the most common models of AR.



**Figure 1.** Models of Action Research

Kemmis et al. (2014) designed a model of four steps: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Moreover, Stringer's model (2007) consists of three steps: look, think, and act. On the other hand, Burns (2010) proposed a detailed model that includes 11 steps and starts with exploring and identifying the problem and ends with writing and presenting the results. In summary, it should be noted that regardless of the different models of AR and the use of different terminologies, all models of AR are systematically aimed at developing the teaching practice (Paraded, 2019).

### 2.5 Action Research in the EFL Context

Even though AR has existed in education for an extended period, its presence in language education evolved only in the late 1980s (Burns, 2005). While exploring its impact on language teaching and learning has just become popular in the last 15 years (Edwards, 2020). Rainey's study (2000) was one of the earliest studies that investigated the spread of AR among EFL teachers. Rainey (2000) examined the knowledge and practice of AR among an international sample of EFL teachers in nine countries, including Saudi Arabia. The study revealed that 75.5% of the participants had not heard of AR. Regarding the practice of AR, Rainey (2000) stated that among EFL teachers who had knowledge of AR, around 42% conducted AR regularly, while 58% were not active researchers.

After almost a decade, investigating AR in the EFL context started to spread out in many parts of the world. In 2008, Atay investigated the knowledge of AR among experienced EFL teachers

prior to implementing the research-oriented program. Atay's study (2008) showed that teachers were unaware of AR's aim and process, and none of the 18 participants had ever conducted AR in their classes. Two years later, Bashir (2011) investigated the concept of AR among Sudanese EFL teachers and reported that they lacked the fundamental knowledge of AR. Additionally, Dehghan and Sahragard (2015) revealed that most EFL teachers had previous knowledge of the principles of AR via in-service workshops and courses. Yet, they had never practiced AR as a form of professional development. In a later study, Negi (2016) reported that most of the EFL teachers in Nepal had a basic knowledge of AR. Nevertheless, almost 73% of the teachers had never practiced AR. In other words, even though most EFL teachers understood AR's main aim, nearly 64% of the participants were not acquainted with the principles and process of AR (Negi, 2016). Furthermore, Puspitasari et al. (2021) investigated the practice of AR among Indonesian EFL teachers, and they revealed that 35 out of 138 teachers reported practicing AR. However, the sustainability of AR practice among those EFL teachers was affected by several factors, including institutional support, inner motivation, and self-confidence (Puspitasari et al., 2021).

Moreover, by reviewing studies on the perception of AR among EFL teachers worldwide and over varied periods, the current research finds that, in general, EFL teachers held a positive perception of AR. A holistic review conducted by Edwards (2020) revealed that in 21 empirical studies on AR published as journal articles, AR had benefited language teachers in various ways. In another study, Rainey (2000) noticed that most of the EFL teachers had positive perspectives, including the ones who did not practice AR. They also believed in its relevance and usefulness for them as EFL classroom teachers. Even though most of the studies showed a deficiency in the practice of AR among EFL teachers, they all agreed on its effectiveness.

In conclusion, previous studies about AR in the EFL context proved that most EFL teachers had no experience conducting AR (Pardede, 2019). Additionally, the practice of AR within the EFL fields worldwide was limited due to the absence of the necessary factors that encourage the practice of AR. These factors included motivation, research knowledge and skill, institutional support, and interest in disseminating the results (Burns, 2005). To sum up, analyzing the results of the previous studies from a chronological perspective manifested signs of a wider spread of AR knowledge among EFL teachers in recent years. Nonetheless, the practice of AR in the EFL context is still a minority activity (Bashir, 2011).

### *2.6 Challenges of Conducting Action Research*

Despite the positive views of AR, EFL teachers usually find themselves under working conditions that hold them back from practicing AR. Analyzing the constraints that prevent EFL teachers from conducting AR is crucial in order to obtain a more transparent comprehension of the role of AR among EFL teachers.

Many studies reported time as the most common reason that hindered EFL teachers from doing AR (Atay, 2008; Auger & Wideman, 2000; Bashir, 2011; Black, 2021; Burns & Rochsantiningasih, 2006; Negi, 2016; Rainey, 2000; Pardede, 2019). Another challenge cited in several studies was the lack of research skills needed to conduct AR (Atay, 2008; Bashir, 2011; Burns & Rochsantiningasih, 2006; Negi, 2016; Rainey, 2000; Pardede, 2019). EFL teachers



displayed a need for more training in conducting AR (Rainey, 2000), and some reported being lost through the research process (Atay, 2008). Among other factors was the workload. Teachers indicated they were overwhelmed with the teaching loads (Auger & Wideman, 2000; Bashir, 2011) and had no energy left to conduct AR (Atay, 2008).

Moreover, another obstacle was the misleading belief that EFL teachers form about AR as the job of a professional academic researcher rather than a practitioner teacher (Auger & Wideman, 2000; Negi, 2016; Dehghan & Sahragard, 2015). Consequently, this false conception prevented EFL teachers from seeing AR as a tool to improve the learning and teaching process. In addition, the unsupportive environment within the teacher's workplace might heavily affect the teacher's desire and willingness to practice AR (Bashir, 2011; Negi, 2016). Furthermore, Bashir (2011) reported that EFL teachers felt that having a limited audience represented in their own school was frustrating and obstructed them from doing AR. Therefore, Bashir (2011) stated that more efforts are needed to expand the teacher researchers' voices past their schools and motivate teachers to conduct AR.

In conclusion, considering all the challenges EFL teachers reported, there is no doubt that facilitating the practice of AR and maximizing its positive impact requires collaborative efforts from administrators, educators in the EFL field, and teachers themselves.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1 Research Design*

This research aims to examine the knowledge and practice of AR among EFL teachers. In addition, the study aims to explore the challenges that hinder EFL teachers from practicing AR. To fulfill the purpose of the prospective study, a quantitative research design was employed to collect data and provide a deep understanding of the research problem and questions.

#### *3.2 Context*

The context of this research is two public universities in Saudi Arabia. Specifically, the study was carried out at two English language institutes of two public universities located in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The primary program of the two English language institutes at both universities is to provide intensive instruction of English as a foreign language to university students delivered by qualified EFL instructors.

#### *3.3 Population*

The population of the current research represents EFL teachers working at English language institutes of two public universities located in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The population consists of male and female teachers from different nationalities.

#### *3.4 Participants and Sampling Procedures*

A sample of 96 EFL teachers participated in the study. With respect to the sampling strategy, nonprobability sampling strategies were employed. First, a convenience sample technique was

used in which participants were chosen based on their convenience and availability (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, members of the target population were selected based on the criteria of being EFL teachers working at the two public Saudi universities. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed whereby a few participants who met the criteria were asked to distribute the questionnaire to appropriate members of the population (Dornyei, 2007). This form of sampling helps to collect data from large numbers of participants (Creswell, 2012). Table 1 below illustrates the distribution of the participants regarding gender, age, educational level, teaching experience, and frequency of attending professional development events in one year.

**Table 1.** Demographic Information of the Participants

Demographics	Groups	N	%
Gender	Male	24	25
	Female	72	75
Age	Less than 30	3	3.1
	30 – less than 40	53	55.2
	40 – less than 50	17	17.7
	50 and above	23	24
Educational level	BA	15	15.6
	MA	62	64.6
	Ph.D.	19	19.8
Teaching experience	1 - 3 years	5	5.2
	4 - 6 years	19	19.8
	7 -18 years	38	39.6
	Above 18 years	34	35.4
Frequency of attending professional development events in one year	Often (more than 8 times)	50	52.1
	Occasionally (around 5 times)	32	33.3
	Rarely (3 times or less)	14	14.6

Table 1 shows that majority of the participants are female EFL teachers, with a percentage of 75%. Regarding the participants' age of, most of them are between 30 and 40 years old. Moreover, the results indicate that most of the participants are master's degree holders, with a percentage of 64.6%. In addition, Table 1 demonstrates that most participants have seven to 18 years of teaching experience, with a percentage of 39.6%. Finally, the results state that most participants attend more than eight professional development events in one year.

### 3.5 Research Instrument

The data was collected through a questionnaire adapted from Rainey (2000) and modified to suit the current study. The content of the questionnaire consisted of four sections and included closed-ended questions. The language of it was English. The first section of the questionnaire was designed to collect demographic information from the participants. Then, the second section examined the knowledge of AR among EFL teachers. Additionally, the third section



was dedicated to defining the term AR to guarantee the participants' understanding of AR before providing their answers. Moreover, the fourth section of the questionnaire analyzed the actual practice of AR and the challenges of practicing it among EFL teachers.

### *3.6 Procedures*

The questionnaire was designed electronically using Google Forms. Then, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in the EFL field to validate the content and the clarity of the questions. The questionnaire was amended based on their minor comments. After that, a pilot study was carried out with 10 participants similar to the target population of the research. The pilot study provided valuable feedback, and the questionnaire was adjusted accordingly. Then, after obtaining the consent forms from the two universities, the questionnaire was sent in the second semester of the academic year 2022-2023 via email and WhatsApp to male and female EFL teachers working at the English language institutes of the two Saudi universities.

### *3.7 Data Analysis Tools*

The responses to the closed-ended questions of the questionnaire were processed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software version 29. First, the responses were downloaded as an Excel sheet and then transferred to SPSS to be coded and analyzed. Various statistical techniques were used to interpret the data, including frequencies and percentages. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the participants of the study according to their demographic information. In addition, frequencies and percentages were also calculated to interpret the participant's responses to each questionnaire item.

### *3.8 Ethical Considerations*

Initially, ethical approval was obtained from the Deanship of Graduate Studies at both universities to collect data from the sample. Then, consent forms for the online questionnaire were sent to the participants to provide clear information about the purpose and objectives of the study. Also, participants were permitted to withdraw at any stage of the study without further consequences. Additionally, participants' real names and affiliations were confidential. Finally, universities' anonymity was ensured throughout the study to keep their confidentiality, and the results were reported objectively without bias.

## **4. Results**

The quantitative data was collected and statistically analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were calculated to signify frequencies and percentages of the participants' responses. This section presents the analysis and the results of the quantitative data obtained from the participants' responses (n=96) to the questionnaire according to three categories: knowledge of AR, practice of AR, and challenges in practicing AR.

### *4.1 Knowledge of Action Research Among EFL Teachers*

The study examines EFL teachers' knowledge of AR and the source of this knowledge. The participants were asked if they had ever heard of AR before, and the results of their answers

are shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2.** EFL Teachers' Knowledge of AR

<b>EFL Teachers' Knowledge of AR</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	79	82.3
No	17	17.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 shows the results of examining the participants' knowledge of AR. The result states that out of 96 responses, only 17 teachers had not heard of AR before the study. On the other hand, 79 respondents had previous knowledge of AR. This result indicates that the majority of the participants were acquainted with AR. Moreover, the study examines EFL teachers' source of knowledge of AR. Hence, the participants were asked about how they learned about AR for the first time. Table 3 below states the results.

**Table 3.** Source of AR knowledge

<b>EFL Teachers' Source of Knowledge</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
While studying for a degree	43	44.8
At a conference	4	4.2
At a professional development workshop	20	20.8
From a journal article/ chapter in a book	11	11.5
Other	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3 shows the results of the different sources of knowledge of AR. The total sample size is 96, but 17 participants had no previous knowledge of AR before the study. Hence, these 17 participants were excluded from this question as it does not apply to them. The result shows that most EFL teachers learned about AR while studying for their degrees, with a percentage of 44.8%. Moreover, learning about AR at a professional development workshop came in second place with a percentage of 20.8%. Eleven participants, representing a percentage of 11.5%, stated that they learned about AR from an article or chapter in a book. However, a minority of the participants learned about AR at a conference with a percentage of 4.2%.

#### *4.2. Practice of Action Research Among EFL Teachers*

In this section, the study analyzes the results of investigating the practice of AR among EFL teachers and its factors. First, the study examines the practice of AR among the participants, and the result is stated in Table 4 below.

**Table 4.** EFL Teachers' Practice of AR

<b>EFL Teachers' Practice of AR</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	30	31.3
No	66	68.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4 demonstrates the result of EFL teachers' practice of AR. The result specifies that 30 out of 96 participants, with a percentage of 31.3%, had conducted AR projects before the study. On the other hand, 66 out of 96 participants, with a percentage of 68.8%, had never conducted AR. This result indicates that most participants had not practiced AR before. Furthermore, the prospective study investigates the number of AR projects completed by EFL teachers who confirmed conducting AR prior to the study (n=30). Table 5 below displays the results.

**Table 5.** Number of the Conducted AR Projects

<b>Number of the Conducted AR Projects</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
1	12	40
2 - 4	13	43.3
5 - 8	3	10
When teaching a new group of students	1	3.3
Each semester	1	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

The result states that among the 30 participants who conducted AR, 12 participants, with a percentage of 40%, conducted only one AR project. On the other hand, around 43% of the participants conducted between two to four AR projects, and 10% conducted between five to eight AR projects. Moreover, two participants reported conducting AR projects every semester and every time teaching a new group of students. This result indicates that most participants conducted less than five AR projects. Additionally, the study investigates the publishing practice of AR among EFL teachers. Therefore, the 30 participants were asked if they had ever published AR before. The result is stated in Table 6 below.

**Table 6.** Publishing AR Among EFL Teachers

<b>Publishing AR</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	14	46.7
No	16	53.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 6 shows that among the participants who conducted AR (n=30), 14 EFL teachers, with a percentage of 46.7%, stated that they had published AR. On the other hand, 16 participants said that although they conducted AR projects before, they had never published them.

#### *4.3 Challenges of Conducting Action Research*

The study analyzes the reasons that hindered the participants from practicing AR. Table 7 below shows the results of analyzing the challenges that hindered the participants from conducting AR. Responses were collected from teachers who never conducted AR (n=66). In other words, participants (n=30) who conducted AR before the study were excluded from this question.

**Table 7.** Challenges of Conducting AR

Challenges of Conducting AR	F	%
Time	47	71.2
Lack of AR knowledge	17	25.8
Lack of research skills	8	12.1
Lack of training in AR	30	45.5
Others	6	9

Table 7 illustrates that time was the most significant reason that hindered the teachers from conducting AR. The result indicates that out of 66 participants who never conducted AR, 47 participants, with a percentage of 71.2%, listed time as an obstacle. In addition, 45.5% of the participants indicated that lack of training in AR was one of the reasons that held them back from practicing AR. Among other reasons, lack of AR knowledge and lack of research skills were reported as challenges that hindered EFL teachers from conducting AR, with a percentage of 25.8% and 12.1%, respectively.

## 5. Discussion

The study discusses the results of the data and relates the significant findings of the current research to previous studies in the literature. The discussion is presented in a sequential order according to the research questions. First, the knowledge and practice of AR among EFL teachers are discussed. Then, the challenges of conducting AR are discussed in relation to the relevant literature.

### *5.1 First Research Question: How widespread is the knowledge of AR among EFL teachers in the two public Saudi universities?*

The first research question attempts to examine the knowledge of AR among EFL teachers and to analyze the source of this knowledge. In other words, the question tackles whether EFL teachers had heard of AR before and how they learned about AR for the first time. The findings of this question were generated from the quantitative data collected through the questionnaire. Interestingly, the result shows that around 82% of the participants had previous knowledge of AR. This result indicates that most EFL teachers were familiar with AR. It also suggests that the knowledge of AR was fairly widespread among EFL teachers in the two Saudi universities. This finding reflects the findings of Dehghan and Sahragard (2015) and Negi (2016), who investigated EFL teachers' knowledge of AR and found that most of them had previous knowledge about the principles of AR.

On the other hand, the presented findings are contrary to those of Rainey (2000) and Bashir (2011), who reported a lack of AR knowledge among EFL teachers. For instance, Rainey (2000) collected data from an international sample of EFL teachers, including Saudi Arabia, and indicated that most participants did not have sufficient knowledge of AR, while none of the participants from Saudi knew about AR. This contradiction might be explained by the fact that Rainey's study (2000) was conducted 23 years ago, and with the many advancements and

progress taking place in Saudi Arabia, including Vision 2030, the teachers are now more knowledgeable and updated.

Moreover, with respect to EFL teachers' source of AR knowledge, it was found that nearly half of the participants learned about AR while studying for a degree. At the same time, fewer teachers reported professional workshops as their source of AR knowledge. However, only a minority of teachers listed reading or attending a conference as their source of AR knowledge. These findings propose that the first-ranked source of AR knowledge is a university teacher through one of the courses in EFL teachers' studies, followed by a professional workshop as a second-ranked source of AR knowledge. The first part of this finding is consistent with the outcomes of Rainey (2000), who listed learning about AR while studying for a degree as the most common source of AR knowledge among EFL teachers. However, another study by Dehghan and Sahragard (2015) reported a contradictory result, indicating that in-service workshops were the first-ranked source of AR knowledge among EFL teachers. A possible explanation for this contradiction might be related to the fact that AR is usually introduced to EFL teachers in their postgraduate studies. While the participants of Dehghan and Sahragard's study (2015) were mainly BA holders teaching at elementary and secondary schools, most of the current study's participants were MA and Ph.D. holders. Another possible alternative explanation may be due to the fact that EFL teachers in Dehghan and Sahragard's study (2015) took part in workshops because these workshops had some merits for their professional careers.

### *5.2 Second Research Question: How often do EFL teachers in the two public Saudi universities practice AR?*

The second research question sets out to explore the practice of AR among EFL teachers. Quantitative data was collected from the participants through the questionnaire and analyzed to answer this question. The result specifies that nearly 69% of the participants had not conducted AR before, which indicates that the practice of AR is not common among EFL teachers in the two Saudi universities. This finding confirms the scarcity of AR practice among EFL teachers reported by earlier studies (Atay, 2008; Bashir, 2011; Burn, 2005; Dehghan & Sahragard, 2015; Negi, 2016; Pardede, 2019; Puspitasari et al., 2021; Rainey, 2000) which all described the practice of AR in the EFL field as a minority activity.

In addition, further analysis was carried out to investigate the number of AR projects conducted and published by EFL teachers. The outcomes establish that among EFL teachers practicing AR (n=30), 12 teachers conducted only one AR project, while 13 teachers conducted two to four AR projects. However, only five teachers reported conducting more than five AR projects. With respect to publication, the current study detects evidence of deficiency in AR's publication practice. The result demonstrates that only half of the 30 participants practicing AR (n=14) published an AR project. Thus, it can be concluded that the overall practice of AR among EFL teachers was low, which again supports the previous findings (Atay, 2008; Bashir, 2011; Burn, 2005; Dehghan & Sahragard, 2015; Negi, 2016; Pardede, 2019; Puspitasari et al., 2021; Rainey, 2000) that implied the absence of the active practice of AR among teachers in the EFL context. These findings are rather disappointing because, despite the increasing knowledge of AR among EFL teachers, the actual practice of AR is notably limited.

### *5.3 What challenges hinder the practice of AR among EFL teachers in the two public Saudi universities?*

The third question was designed to investigate the challenges and obstacles that hindered EFL teachers from conducting AR. Quantitative data was gathered from EFL teachers who had never practiced AR (n=66) to inspect the obstacles that prevented them from practicing AR. The results of the quantitative data show that time was the most significant obstacle that hindered EFL teachers from practicing AR, as most participants listed time as an obstacle. This finding mirrors those of (Atay, 2008; Auger & Wideman, 2000; Bashir, 2011; Black, 2021; Burns & Rochsantiningasih, 2006; Negi, 2016; Pardede, 2019; Rainey, 2000) which all listed time and workload as major challenges that hindered EFL teachers from conducting AR. In addition, nearly half of the participants stated that the lack of training in AR was a major issue that prevented them from practicing AR. This outcome suggests that EFL teachers had some basic knowledge of AR, yet they lacked the sufficient skills required to conduct a complete AR project and needed training in this matter. Then, the third-ranked obstacle was the lack of AR knowledge among EFL teachers. In particular, one-third of the participants revealed that the lack of fundamental knowledge of AR was a hindrance that prevented them from practicing AR. These findings are in agreement with those obtained by (Atay, 2008; Bashir, 2011; Burns & Rochsantiningasih, 2006; Dehghan & Sahragard, 2015; Negi, 2016; Pardede, 2019; Rainey, 2000), who all reported a lack of knowledge and skills needed to conduct AR among EFL teachers. For instance, Atay (2008) revealed that EFL teachers felt confused through the process of AR due to insufficient AR knowledge and skills. Similarly, a minority of the teachers reported the lack of research skills as a difficulty that obstructed them from practicing AR.

## **6. Conclusion**

The prospective study was designed to explore the knowledge and the practice of AR among EFL teachers in two public universities in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, it aimed to analyze the challenges that hinder EFL teachers from practicing AR. To fulfil the purpose of the study, quantitative data was collected from 96 EFL teachers working at two English language institutes of two public universities located in Saudi Arabia. An online questionnaire was administered to collect data from the participants. Based on the quantitative data analysis, it was found that most EFL teachers were familiar with AR, and the knowledge of AR was fairly widespread among teachers in the two Saudi universities. On the other hand, the findings revealed that the overall practice and publication of AR among EFL teachers in the two Saudi universities was low. The outcomes showed a deficiency in AR practice among EFL teachers in the two Saudi universities, as only 31% of participants reported practicing AR. Moreover, the results noticed scarcity in AR's publication practice, as only 14 out of 96 EFL teachers published AR articles. Regarding the challenges of AR, the findings showed that time was the most significant obstacle that hindered EFL teachers from practicing AR. Furthermore, the lack of AR training and knowledge were major issues that prevented EFL teachers from conducting AR.



### *6.1 Implications*

The study offers some practical implications for educators in the EFL field to spread AR knowledge and encourage its practice among practitioners in the two Saudi universities. First, the findings of the study indicate a scarcity of AR practice among EFL teachers. Therefore, great efforts are needed to promote the practice of AR among EFL teachers in the two universities. Moreover, institutions must build a supportive environment for EFL teachers to encourage the practice and publication of AR. In addition, the outcomes of the study reveal a lack of AR knowledge and skills among EFL teachers. Hence, the implementation of workshops and training programs should be arranged to equip EFL teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills required to conduct AR. Furthermore, the findings of the study suggest that time was the most significant obstacle that hindered EFL teachers from practicing AR. Thus, administrations might consider flexible scheduling and workload adjustments for EFL teachers actively incorporating AR in their teaching practices and showing dedication and enthusiasm for AR.

### *6.2 Limitations*

A number of limitations need to be noted regarding the present study. First, the study sample was limited to EFL teachers working at two public Saudi universities, and the study did not explore the perceptions of EFL teachers in other Saudi contexts. Regarding the research method, the study employed solely a questionnaire for data collection, which might restrict the scope of the study. Moreover, since the study was limited to quantitative data, it was not possible to examine all the factors that might hinder EFL teachers from conducting AR. In spite of its limitations, this study offers valuable insight into the role of AR and delivers some practical implications for educators in the EFL field.

### *6.3 Recommendation for Future Research*

The prospective study explored the knowledge, practice, and challenges of AR among practitioner teachers in two public universities in Saudi Arabia. It highlights several areas that call for future investigations. More broadly, research is needed to analyze the impact of practicing AR on the teaching practice and teachers' professional development. Additionally, further research should be carried out to address other challenges of conducting AR and explore possible solutions. Moreover, it would be interesting to compare the practice of AR among teachers with potential variations in experience levels and educational backgrounds to find out whether there are differences in their AR engagement.

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**Acknowledgments**

The authors would like to thank the participants of the study for their time and participation.

**Funding**

Not Applicable.

**Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

**Informed consent**

Obtained.

**Ethics approval**

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Macrothink Institute.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

**Provenance and peer review**

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

**Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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