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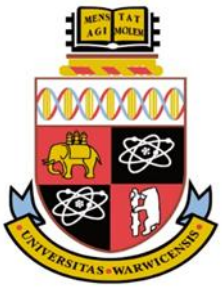

Building the Bridge of Affordances:

Exploring Teacher Research Support in a University Language Centre

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language Teaching

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my brother and friend **Mohammad Al Hadhrami** who passed away from cancer last year.

"Though lovers be lost, love shall not." - Dylan Thomas

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Finally, I would like to thank every single person (friends, acquaintances, librarians, and administrators) who has contributed directly or indirectly to the completion of my work.

DECLARATION

I declare that the present thesis has been researched and composed by myself and has not been submitted elsewhere for any other degree or professional qualification.

ABSTRACT

Supporting teacher research has gained increasing attention recently in many English language teaching contexts around the world. It can be divided, based on its context, into two forms: external (often short-term) support, happening in research programmes and schemes outside language teachers' working contexts, and internal institutional support, happening within teachers' contexts. This study explores the latter. Unlike previous research that has primarily focused on what individual aspects of institutional teacher research support need to be available, this study, drawing upon the concept of *affordances*, was conducted to fill a gap in understanding how support needs to be made available as a structure in order to help teacher research become a prevalent and sustained activity among language teachers. To this end, a qualitative case study approach was adopted to explore in depth what influences (i.e., facilitates or impedes) the support of teacher research in a university language centre in Oman. To address this research question, ten teacher-research facilitators and eleven language teachers were selected, and data were mainly generated through semi-structured interviews, reflective dairies, and repertory-grid interviews. The thematic analysis of the data revealed five main factors that seemed to influence the institutional support of teacher research in the case studied. The first three factors were related to the organization of the support, concerning its clarity (being clear about the *whats*, *hows* and *whys* of providing the support), congruence (alignment between expectations and practice), and commitment (dedication to the support of teacher research). The other two factors were related to the provision of the support and the teachers' experiences of using it, concerning its accessibility (how easy it was for the teachers to make use of it) and utility (how useful it was for the teachers). Regarding

practice, the study has many important implications for how the support of teacher research should be organized and provided within institutional settings. The study also contributes significantly to theory by shedding light on the virtually neglected area of institutional teacher research support and providing an evidence-based model that could serve as a conceptual framework for further research in this and other areas where *affordances* are under investigation. In addition, it highlights the methodological potential and implications of using a combination of repertory-grid and follow-up interviews to explore teachers' perspectives on teacher research support in their contexts.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EAR	Exploratory Action Research
ELT	English Language Teaching
EP	Exploratory Practice
GFP	General Foundation Programme
ITRS	Institutional teacher research support
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
PCT	Personal Construct Theory
RC	Research Committee

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces my thesis. It starts with defining teacher research, explains the theoretical and contextual need for the study and gives some details about its purpose, approach, and significance. In the first section (1.2) after this introduction, I focus on the definition of teacher research. As the term teacher research engagement has been used more frequently in ELT, I start by clarifying why I prefer not to use it. I clarify the origin of this term and point out the confusion it might cause about what side of engagement it focuses on: reading or doing research. This clarification is followed by justifying and clarifying an inclusive definition of teacher research despite its different conceptions. Section 1.3 specifies the need for the study. It starts with the theoretical gap that this study tried to fill in our understanding of supporting teacher research in language teaching contexts. It specifically argues for the need to examine *how* rather than *what* support needs to be available for teacher research within institutional settings. It then states the contextual problem that motivated this study. It first gives a general background about English Language Teaching in Oman, telling the story behind teacher research in tertiary language teaching in the country. It then describes the context and states the problem of supporting teacher research in the language centre where this study took place. The penultimate section (1.4) in this chapter sets the scene for the thesis. It gives an overview of the study's main elements, including its purpose, question, approach, and significance. The chapter ends (section 1.5) with an outline of the whole thesis.

1.2 Defining teacher research

I will start by defining teacher research. However, as I will show in the next chapter, the theoretical arguments for teacher research and its support vary, and so do its conceptions. While this, as will be discussed in the next chapter (section 2.5), has had important implications for perspectives on how to support teacher research, my focus in this section is to present my definition of teacher research based on how it is defined in the literature and my perspective as a teacher-researcher interested in its institutional support.

1.2.1 Why not teacher research engagement?

Before defining teacher research, it is essential to clarify why I am not using the term *teacher research engagement*. Although this term has been used more frequently in ELT recently, it is somehow confusing due to its origin. Partly influenced by earlier studies of evidence-based practice (EPB) in education (Everton et al., 2002; McNamara, 2003; Shkedi, 1998), Borg (2009) has introduced the term teacher research engagement to ELT to mean both engagement *in doing* and *with reading* research. However, this term in EBP has its unique entailments. Davies (1999) explained that EBP works at two levels, the first of which is to encourage teachers to base their practice on evidence from published research; however, when evidence is found inadequate, teachers are encouraged to do their own research. Thus, adopting this term from EBP requires clarity regarding which side of engagement (in or with) is emphasized. Kirkwood and Christie (2006) expressed the same concern arguing that "the term 'evidence-based profession' does not make clear whether teachers should make use of existing research knowledge or whether they are able to become researchers themselves" (p. 132). Therefore, to avoid confusion, I will use teacher

research to refer to engagement in doing research that builds on and extends teachers' expertise and recognizes its importance in dealing with either individual or broader practice-related issues. This might involve other related research activities, including the possibility of engagement with reading research as part of the research process.

1.2.2 An inclusive definition of teacher research

There are many teacher-research forms (e.g., *action research, participatory action research, collaborative action research, exploratory practice,* and *exploratory action research*) associated with teachers investigating their classroom and school issues. Each of these forms has its conception of the goals and expected impact of teacher research. Despite the different conceptions of it, there have been attempts to give clear and inclusive definitions of teacher research, focusing on three definitional aspects: the purposes of teacher research (whether it focuses on individual classroom issues or aims to address wider issues related to teaching), its agents (whether it is done individually or in collaboration with other teachers or external researchers), and its dissemination possibilities (whether and how it needs to be made public).

One of the inclusive definitions is the one given by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999). They used teacher research to refer to any form of teacher inquiry done in an educational setting if it is "systematic, intentional and self-critical" (p. 22). Similarly, Lankshear and Knobel (2004) defined teacher research as the type of research done by "classroom practitioners at any level, from preschool to tertiary, who are involved individually or collaboratively in self-motivated and self-generated systematic and informed inquiry undertaken with a view to enhancing their vocation as professional educators" (p. 9). They also clarified that the "bottom line requirement" for teacher

research is being systematic, starting with research questions that inform the research design, data gathering and data analysis, and ending with a report that shows this coherence (p. 20).

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), Borg (2010) gave a broad definition of teacher research, trying to be inclusive of its different forms and possibilities:

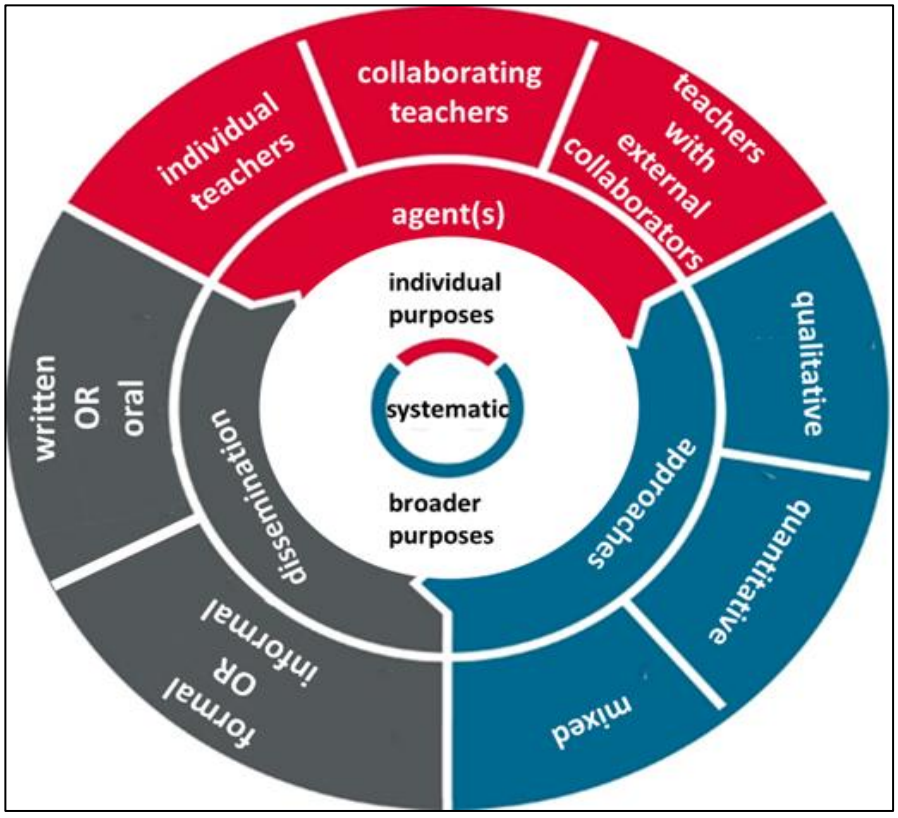
> [Teacher research is] systematic inquiry, qualitative and/or quantitative, conducted by teachers in their own professional contexts, individually or collaboratively (with other teachers and/or external collaborators), which aims to enhance teachers' understandings of some aspect of their work, is made public, has the potential to contribute to better quality teaching and learning in individual classrooms, and which may also inform institutional improvement and educational policy more broadly. (p. 395)

Similar to Lankshear and Knobel (2004), Borg emphasized the element of systematicity in defining teacher research. He (2017b) clarified that being systematic means being principled, involving "careful planning, execution and the sharing of results" (p. 166). Borg (2010) also accepted promoting "a broad view of dissemination which directs teachers to the many varied formats, oral and written, formal and less formal" (p. 395).

Based on the above three definitions, I represent my definition of teacher research in **Figure 1.1**. As a teacher interested in supporting teacher research and based on the three definitions delineated above, I think of teacher research as inclusive of all forms of systematic teacher inquiry that are planned and executed by teachers individually or in collaboration with colleagues or external researchers to build on and extend the teachers' expertise for addressing practice-related issues related to their individual classrooms or to

broader issues in their professional contexts, using a variety of appropriate qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods and disseminating results through a broad range of feasible options. I think such an inclusive definition is essential for what Vu (2020) calls the "demystification, and reimagination, of research, [which] could be the starting point in helping different types of research be recognized and supported by management" (p. 12).

Figure 1. 1 *Defining teacher research*



1.3 The need for the study

After defining teacher research, I will now move to justifying the need for this study, clarifying the theoretical and contextual needs that motivated the study.

1.3.1 The theoretical need for the study

Early attempts to promote and support teacher research started in the early 1950s, particularly by Stephen Corey who encouraged teachers to research their practices instead of merely being passive receivers of what outside researchers produce (Corey, 1953, 1954). In ELT, in which teacher research "is still something of a 'work in progress'" (Dikilitaş et al., 2019, p. xvi), there has been a recent international move towards making teachers more research engaged (Békés, 2020; Borg, 2009) and "increasing evidence worldwide of initiatives that are seeking to promote it in systematic ways" (Borg & Sanchez, 2015, p. 6) mainly because of the "extensively documented" benefits of teacher research and for being "a theoretically sound approach to professional learning" (Borg, 2017b, p. 172). This move has motivated a line of inquiry into the general individual and institutional conditions conducive to teacher research (e.g., Allison & Carey, 2007; Barkhuizen, 2009; Borg, 2013; Borg & Liu, 2013; Xu, 2014). With a primary focus on teachers' research attitudes, skills and perceptions necessary for doing research –and with the confusion that the term teacher research engagement brought regarding whether the focus is on teachers doing research or reading it (see Smith (2015) for a discussion of this issue)–, one overall finding has been that "institutional support for language teacher research is essential if teachers are to make the successful transition to research" (Burns & Westmacott, 2018, p. 18). However, many studies have shown that teachers as researchers are constrained by "inadequate institutional support" (Yuan & Burns, 2017, p. 744) and that "the conditions in many language teaching contexts are not conducive to this approach to professional learning" (Borg, 2017b, p. 180). In contexts where institutions are pressured to make language teachers do research, they tend to convert such

pressure "into policies that encourage teachers to actively engage in research, but are often unprepared to provide the support and resources that teachers need, such as reduced teaching load, training workshops for publishing, and mentoring from senior researchers" (Xu, 2014, p. 254). Using the ecological concept of *affordances* to refer to the "opportunities that the environment presents", Edwards and Burns (2016c) recommended that for language teachers to become researchers, institutions need "to maximize professional affordances within the bounds of political and economic constraints" of institutional settings (p. 736-743). Edwards (2020) also emphasized that for teacher research to have an impact, it is critical for institutions "to provide sufficient and timely support for teachers … through the creation of affordances such as resources and funding" (p. 16).

In a recent article, Hanks (2018) presented a different and important opinion about what I refer to here as *institutional teacher research support* (ITRS), i.e., the role of institutions in creating and maximizing opportunities for supporting teacher research. She raised the concern that ITRS that can come in the form of "incorporating research (or scholarship) into teachers' contracts, giving time off from teaching, providing research methods training, and the like" often comes as "fragile measures" and might potentially turn into "another weapon with which to beat teachers" (p. 52). This concern is valid considering the reported tensions and bad feelings among language teachers in contexts pushing towards more doing of research (e.g., Liu & Borg, 2014; Tran et al., 2017; Xu, 2014) and the general "lack of resources on how to support teacher research" (Smith, 2020a, p. 2). In their "feasibility audit" checklist of teacher research, Borg and Sanchez (2015), for example, did refer to the need for having access to "appropriate resources" (p.

3). They, however, did not make it clear what they mean by *appropriate*. Noting this, the area of "institutional support [that] relates to educational managers' roles, responsibilities, and awareness of how to encourage research by teachers" remains "neglected" (Burns, 2018, p. 58). Motivated by this gap in the literature and mainly by the contextual problem delineated in this chapter, this case study, through the conceptual lens of the term affordances, tried to shed light on *how* rather than *what* ITRS needs to be available for supporting teacher research among language teachers. By doing so, the study brings a new perspective and thus a new dimension to conceptualizing, examining and understanding adequacy in "inadequate institutional support" (Yuan & Burns, 2017, p. 744), preparedness in "unprepared [institutions] to provide the support and resources" (Xu, 2014, p. 254), appropriateness in giving access to "appropriate resources" (Borg & Sanchez, 2015, p. 3), and most importantly affordances in the need "to maximize professional affordances within the bounds of political and economic constraints" (Edwards & Burns, 2016c, p. 743).

1.3.2 The contextual need for the study

This study took place in the Sultanate of Oman (see **Figure 1.2**), which is a Middle Eastern developing thinly populated (4.5 million people in a land area of 309,980 km2) country in which the phenomenon of nationwide formal education is relatively new (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). It was only in the 1970s that a nationwide education system was started. In this section, I delineate the need for this study in this context. I start with the general contextual need for the study in Oman. I then clarify why the study was specifically needed in my context, the language centre where I work as a language teacher.

Figure 1. 2 *The Context of the Study (the Sultanate of Oman)*

1.3.2.1 The general contextual need for the study

To start with, ELT and its importance have been gradually increasing in Oman. Although the nationwide teaching of English did not start until the 1970s, the first recorded formal teaching of and in English in Oman occurred in Peter Zwemer Memorial School established in 1896 by Peter Zwemer, the founder of the Arabian Mission's station in Muscat (al-Hajri, 2011; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). This school was followed by the three Al Saeediya schools that introduced English as a subject in Muscat and Salalah between 1940 and 1970 (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). After 1970 and the start of new Oman by the former Sultan, English has received "political, economic, and legislative support" (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012, p. 142). Since then, English has become a main subject in over one thousand public schools and a medium of instruction in most private schools (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). As a result, ELT has received more attention

and significance in Oman, and its "reform has been a major concern for the Omani government" (Al-Issa, 2015, p. 583).

ELT has even received more attention after the establishment of 60 tertiary institutions in which English is the main medium of instruction for all science majors (Al-Issa, 2006). In addition to its recognized significance for "the acquisition of science and technology" (Al-Issa, 2007, p. 200), being in a developing country that still depends on foreign expertise in its big projects, Omani graduates are often expected to work in multinational work environments where English is the lingua franca (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014). For them, English has become "the gatekeeper to technology, white-collar jobs, and modernity" (Al Riyami & Al-Issa, 2018, p. 40) and thus very important for enhancing their employability (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018).

This significance to English has placed tertiary ELT in a critical position, bearing the responsibility for ensuring that its graduates have the necessary level of English proficiency expected for the nation's development plans. Such expectations from tertiary ELT were the focus of criticisms of inadequate English proficiency levels of school graduates for studying in English-medium tertiary education (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2015; Al-Mahrooqi & Asante, 2010) and of college graduates to meet the workforce demands (Al-Issa, 2014). As a result, the General Foundation Programme (GFP) standards published by Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) were introduced in 2008, aiming to ensure the quality of around one-year English-proficiency programmes for college students (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018).

Interestingly, although teacher research "is not yet given adequate attention in Oman" (Al-Husseini et al., 2018, p. 265), one of the considerations listed by the GFP

standards to ensure "that the quality of teaching on GFP is effective in facilitating student learning" is "incorporating staff research and scholarly activities in enhancing teaching quality" (OAAA, 2017, p. 26). Under the professional development of teachers and to ensure "that GFP staff are up to date with the professional, teaching and skills-based requirements", the manual again suggests the "support for classroom-based research" (OAAA, 2017, p. 32).

However, early interest in teacher research at both school and tertiary ELT has been there before the OAAA and GFP standards. It has been part of the above-mentioned international move to encourage research among teachers as part of the Ministry of Education's scheme to promote "a culture of inquiry" among school language teachers (Borg, 2006b, p. xii). This interest in teacher research has also been more evident in some tertiary ELT contexts not only because they are thought of as the "ELT think tank" in Oman, but also because they are attached to larger research cultures of Omani colleges and universities that "stress the importance of conducting research, and allocate budget-based funding and support" (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2011, pp. 3–4). The initiatives for supporting and promoting research among language teachers in such contexts is often underpinned with the general rationale that "it is through research that educational institutions can come to an understanding of the various phenomena or situations that could emerge in language teaching contexts, and the factors that shape them" (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2010, p. 391).

Despite this seemingly increasing interest, there has been very little research on teacher research and supporting it in tertiary ELT contexts in the Sultanate of Oman. Similar to the already mentioned line of inquiry (e.g., Allison & Carey, 2007; Barkhuizen,

2009; Borg, 2013; Borg & Liu, 2013; Xu, 2014) mainly started by Borg (2009), the limited available research on supporting teacher research in tertiary ELT contexts in Oman has focused primarily on individual and institutional facilitative conditions of doing research among language teachers. Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2011) examined the reasons behind what they described as "the paucity of publishing in ELT" in a tertiary language centre (p. 2). The results of their study confirmed that such a paucity could be attributed to heavy workloads and inaccurate conceptions of research. In their exploration of the needed mechanisms for establishing a research culture in their tertiary language institution, Al-Mahrooqi and Tuzlukova (2010) agreed with Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2011) that teachers' main reasons for refraining from doing research are "the time-consuming nature of research (workload, job responsibilities, very little time left for conducting research or documenting it) and the complexity of research" (p. 394). The study provided a list of the types of support language teachers might need to be more involved in research. Nevertheless, successful initiatives in supporting teacher research in such contexts remain generally challenged with "unyielding" contextual constraints (Al-Maamari et al., 2017, p. 1). In their narratives of their experiences of supporting teacher research in their tertiary language centre, Al Aamri and Wahaibi (2018) pointed out how their initial "hopeful expectations" of and from supporting teacher research in their context was challenged not only by lacking the needed time and skills to support teachers but also because of having no clear vision and mission statements about ITRS in their context.

However, amidst this focus on what types of ITRS language teachers might need to be more research active and some indications of challenges to ITRS in some contexts, there is still, up to my knowledge, no research that has examined what might facilitate or

hinder ITRS in supporting teacher research among tertiary language teachers in Oman. This overlooked topic is particularly important in tertiary language centres often attached to larger higher education institutions. In such contexts, teacher research and its support are likely to happen in what Alison and Carey (2007) referred to as a "bipolar" system in which language teachers take a "subordinate position" (p. 73) and doing research "may be particularly difficult because although they are officially part of a higher education institution, their status is often clearly distinct from that of academic staff" (Borg, 2013, p. 152). This situation could potentially complicate initiatives to support teacher research as they have to find and create congruence between the support, expectations, and conceptions of research at the larger higher education institution and the language teaching context. Therefore, this study was needed to address this important issue about supporting teacher research in tertiary ELT contexts in Oman. It focused on a case of a tertiary language teaching context. More about this context in the next section.

1.3.2.2 The specific contextual need for the study

This study took place in a university language centre where I work as a language teacher. The language centre (henceforth the Centre) is responsible for offering foundation and credit English language courses to students in a higher education institution (henceforth the University) in Oman. The centre has two departments: English for humanities and English for sciences. The departments offer English courses for students from the nine colleges in the university. It has over 190 local and international ELT teachers who should have a minimum qualification of M.A. in ELT to teach in the two English departments. The teachers are expected to teach eighteen hours a week, dedicate eight office hours a week for meeting students and discussing issues related to their learning, and assign four

hours to cover other teachers' unexpected absences. They are also expected to be ready to teach in and move regularly between the English language courses in the two departments.

Regarding research, teachers, while not being pushed to do research, are expected to demonstrate scholarly achievement through their research publications, awards and conference presentations when applying for promotion, especially those applying for more senior positions. To support teachers as researchers, different support opportunities are available to increase the chances of teachers starting, conducting, funding, and disseminating their research. The centre's stated aim in this regard is to encourage and support research projects that reflect the teachers' activities and interests and help improve the curriculum, evaluation, and instruction in the centre. Based on the definition of teacher research delineated in section 1.2, the centre aims to support teacher research.

The support presented as opportunities available for supporting teacher research in the centre includes having free access to thousands of journals and books, getting funds and release time to present at two international conferences each year, getting funds for collaborative research projects, and getting release time for selected research proposals. For facilitating and supporting research and establishing a research culture, the centre has also three research committees (one committee for each department and one central committee that is supposed to coordinate the work of the two departmental committees). While there is nothing stated about how their members are selected, the research committees (RCs) have eleven teachers usually directly assigned as committee members by the centre's administration for their expected research interest and background: the members do not personally apply based on their interest. The main aims of the committees are:

- Providing guidance and mentorship to teacher-initiated research projects.
- Enhancing teachers' research skills through organizing workshops.
- Raising teachers' awareness of the potential support available.
- Facilitating communication and networking among teachers interested in research.
- Supporting teachers in the dissemination of their research through conferences and publications.

Besides the mentoring support provided by the RC members to teacher-initiated research projects, the central RC has also recently accepted the proposal of supporting the introduction of an Exploratory Action Research (EAR) Workshop. The workshop, which took place from February to May 2019, was mainly conceived and facilitated by the researcher of this study after being a participant and then a mentor in the Classroom-based EVO 2017–18 (see http://classroombasedresearch.weebly.com/evo2018.html). The general aim of the workshop was to supplement the existing support by introducing interested teachers "to the personal and professional benefits of researching their own classrooms, and to show how this can be feasible as well as useful" (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018, p. 3). To ensure their voluntary participation in the workshop, all the English language teachers were invited to attend an introductory session based on which seventeen from the thirty-five teachers who attended registered their participation. The workshop was structured to include five face-to-face sessions every other week about the different stages of doing an EAR project (see **Appendix 1** for the whole workshop plan). During the workshop, the participants were also guided by three mentors (including the researcher in this study) to conduct their own projects on topics of their choice but with no release time. The teachers were mentored to explore different puzzles in their classrooms. Of the

seventeen teachers, nine teachers continued until the end of the workshop, and six of them succeeded in finishing the exploratory phase of their projects. The main topics that the EAR projects focused on were students' motivation and engagement, students' use of L1 in the classroom, students' perceptions of using mobile phones for learning, students' perceptions of teachers' feedback on their writings and students' participation in speaking classes.

Before conducting the EAR workshop and thinking of conducting this study, I shared the concern of some RC members and teachers about the limited incidence of teacher research in the centre despite the available support. This paradox motivated me to start reading about teacher research and its support. In 2015, I adapted Borg's (2009) questionnaire to examine tertiary language teachers' perceptions of research (AL-Rawahi & Alhadhrami, 2015). While it was not surprising to me that the findings of my study, similar to Borg's (2008), showed that the teachers' conceptions of research resonated with traditional notions of scientific research, the study drew my attention, especially after presenting the findings at an ELT international conference in Oman, to the complex reality of trying to support teacher research in my context. My discussions with my colleagues and other teachers from other tertiary ELT contexts inside and outside the country after my conference presentation as well as my informal communications with RC members in the centre revealed and highlighted two main concerns about how research support is made available to teachers and the extent to which it is active in helping teachers do research that informs and improves their practice. The two concerns are as follows:

1. Because of the different motivations behind research in the centre, the purpose of and expectations from supporting research that reflects the teachers' activities and interests

and helps improve the curriculum, evaluation, and instruction in the centre are complicated and unclear. Because of the centre being attached to a university that aims to have a recognized regional and international research status and due to its history of having once been a department expected to conduct research in ELT besides providing English language courses within the school of education, the aim of supporting teacher research that reflects teachers' interests and activities and informs practice is likely to compete with the often-reported product-oriented agendas of promoting research for theoretical publications and academic reputation (see e.g., Liu & Borg, 2014; Tran et al., 2017). Such a situation, in which there is no clear articulation of the purposes and expectations behind doing and supporting research, could potentially result in "tensions in the teachers' perspectives between doing research for publication and for pedagogical growth, between conducting theoretical research and practical research, between quantitative and qualitative perspectives, and between personal and external motivations for doing research" (Liu & Borg, 2014, p. 273). However, it is not yet clear how this situation might influence supporting teacher research in the context.

2. The potential ITRS opportunities available are complicated at many levels. First, while some of them are provided locally (within the centre), many of them (including having free access to thousands of journals and books, getting funds to present at two international conferences each year and getting funds for collaborative research projects) are available as part of the university's support structure for research. The impact of this on supporting teacher research in the centre needs to be explored. Second, as I mention above, there are three committees entrusted with supporting and

promoting teacher research in the centre. While the committees are assigned very big research-related responsibilities (see **Table 1.1**), the extent to which such responsibilities are feasible to coordinate and fulfil remains unclear. What complicates the situation more is that the central RC has the responsibility of organizing the centre's annual ELT conference and the departmental RCs are also assigned the responsibilities of supervising and monitoring material-writing projects in the two departments.

Table 1. 1 *The Responsibilities of the RCs as Stated in the Staff Handbook*

Responsibilities of the central committee	**Responsibilities of the departmental committees**
- Promote collaborative research. - Develop research policy guidelines. - Develop standardized procedures for research - Stimulate research and facilitate the exchange of ideas through research symposiums, conferences, workshops and networking events. - Provide consultations and guidance for the faculty working on research. - Stimulate and initiate internal and external research projects and activities needed for the centre and community. - Develop, advise on and evaluate research and project proposals. - Disseminate the outcomes of the centre-based research to the community. - Evaluate annual research progress reports of each department research committee - Communicate research-related needs to the Director. - Collect, edit and publish basic and applied research articles.	- Liaise with the central committee. - Provide advice, support and expertise to department faculty engaged in research. - Provide support for approved research projects from within the department. - Initiate and promote research projects in the department. - Provide opportunities for the dissemination of research findings in the department. - Organize presentations and workshops on research-related matters for the department. - Assist in developing mechanisms to ensure the protection of the centre's data required for research projects - Prepare an annual research and projects' progress report of the department

- Raise awareness of ethical issues related to research among faculty and staff. - Archive important records and correspondence and prepare an annual research report. - Arrange and follow up conference events in the centre.	

While there are some successful examples (as was the case with the EAR projects and some other examples I show in the findings) of teachers making use of the available support to facilitate teacher-research projects, evidence about the extent to which the available ITRS opportunities work as a structure to enhance the feasibility of teacher research is required. This study was therefore needed to explore what influences (i.e., facilitates or impedes) the ITRS in my context, in order to shed light on the neglected topic of how ITRS needs to be made available so that it serves its purpose of enhancing the feasibility and hopefully the sustainability and prevalence of teacher research.

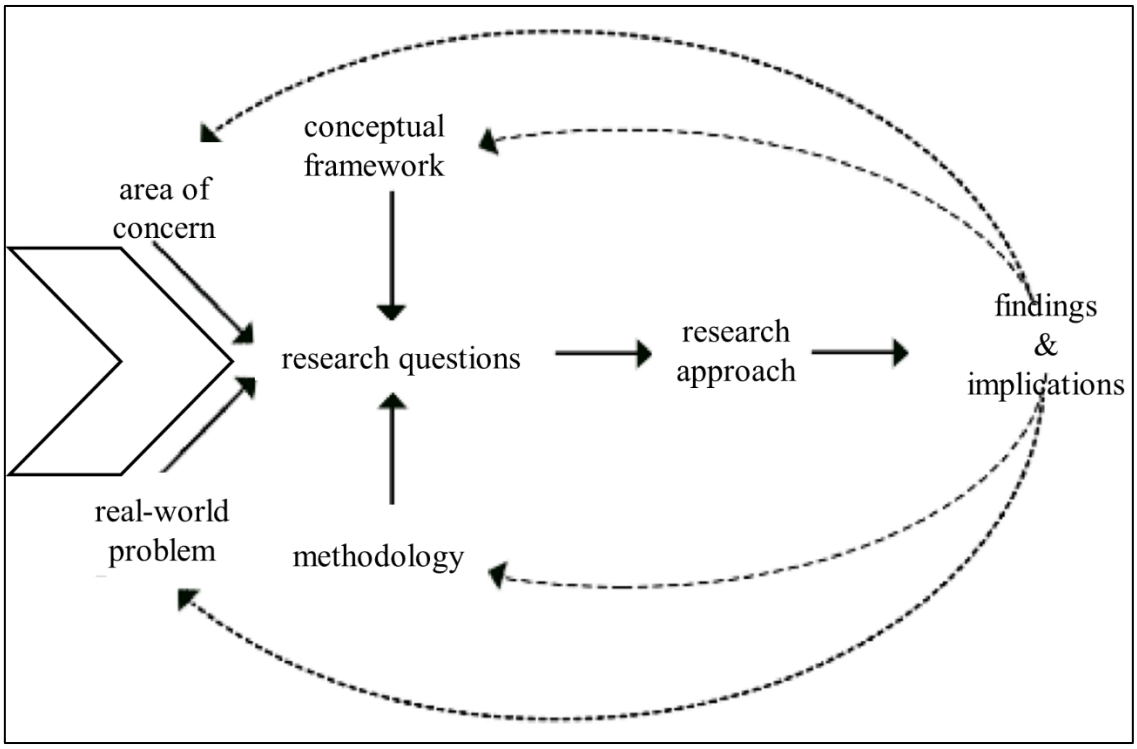
1.4 Research elements and significance

After delineating this study's theoretical and contextual needs, I will now highlight the study's main elements and significance, which I will return to in the conclusion of my thesis. **Figure 1.3** illustrates the elements of what I call my *Research Fish* adapted from Presthus and Munkvold's (2016) illustration of research elements and contributions based on Mathiassen et al. (2012). As the figure shows, my study's central element is the research question: What influences (i.e., facilitates or impedes) the institutional support of teacher research in a tertiary ELT context? This question was informed and addressed by the following elements:

1. *Research approach*: I adopted a qualitative case study approach to explore the research problem in the language institution where I work as a language teacher.
2. *Area of concern*: In supporting teacher research, Edwards (2020) distinguished between the kind of support that happens within institutions and in "programs that are external to an institution" (p. 14). As I clarified in section 1.2, this study focused on the former, the neglected area of ITRS, aiming to contribute to our understanding of how it needs to be made available to teachers.
3. *Real-world problem*: This study took place in the Sultanate of Oman. As I delineated in section 1.3, the study responded to a recent contextual need to understand how it needs to be made available to teachers due to a recent growing interest in promoting research among language teachers in tertiary language contexts and emerging calls and initiatives for providing the needed ITRS to enhance its feasibility. The real-world problem was in my context, a university language centre. As a language teacher interested in supporting teacher research in my context, this study was motivated by the puzzling situation in the centre in which teacher research is still a limited activity despite the many available forms of ITRS.
4. *Conceptual framework*: Based on a thorough review of the literature and the conceptual lens of affordances introduced to the area of ITRS by Edwards and Burns (2016) (see section 2.7), the study argues that ITRS goes beyond making it available so that research-active teachers seek it out, how it needs to be made available and thus what might influence (facilitate or impede) it in playing its role needs attention.
5. *Methodology*: The study adopted an interpretivist constructivist perspective in examining the research problem. Guided by the axiological question "Of all the

knowledge available to me, which is the most valuable, which is the most truthful, which is the most beautiful, which is the most life-enhancing?" (Guba & Lincoln, 2013, p. 37), answering the research question focused on data generated from semi-structured interviews, repertory-grid interviews, and reflective dairies with ten teacher-research facilitators and eleven teachers who participated in this study.

Figure 1. 3 *Research Fish (the Elements of my Research)*



Note. Adapted from Presthus and Munkvold's (2016, p. 6)

The dotted arrows in **Figure 1.3** show the potential contributions and implications the findings of this study have. Being, up to my knowledge, the first study that has focused solely on what might influence ITRS within an ELT institutional setting, the significance of this study is in the following:

1. The study highlights many potentially important practical implications for organizing and providing ITRS within language teaching contexts.
2. The literature review of this study can be helpful for researchers interested in the neglected area of ITRS. The review draws upon a large body of the literature to provide the topography of the area, giving an original presentation and organization of the relevant topics. It delineates the theoretical arguments and practical reasons behind the need to support teacher research and identifies the two main perspectives on supporting teacher research among language teachers. It also provides a potentially helpful conceptual framework for understanding and examining ITRS.
3. Informed by a clear conception of the two terms, the study makes a helpful conceptual distinction between ITRS opportunities and their affordances. In trying to conceptualize and understand the role of ITRS and its possible facilitators and hindrances, the distinction highlights that exploring how ITRS is made available to teachers is as important as examining teachers' activity and interest in teacher research. Based on its findings grounded on its data, the study provides a conceptual model to illustrate this distinction. The model can serve as a conceptual framework for future studies into ITRS.
4. The study brings insights about using repertory-grid interviews for examining language teachers' perceptions of their experiences of ITRS. It shows the potential of this method not only in generating in-depth data but also in dealing with the quality issues in insider research. The study also gives some practical advice about conducting and analysing repertory-grid interviews.

1.5 The structure of the thesis

The rest of this thesis is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 gives an overview of what the literature suggests about supporting teacher research in general and ITRS in particular. It starts with a historical overview of the main arguments behind movements to support teacher research in education and ELT. This overview is followed by discussing the practical reasons that make supporting research a need to consider and the two main perspectives on how to do it, highlighting their positions of ITRS. The chapter then highlights the main insights and gaps in our understanding of ITRS and how this study aims to contribute to this area. The chapter ends by providing a conceptual framework of ITRS and its affordances.

Chapters 3 and 4 are the methodology chapters. **Chapter 3** is the first methodology chapter of the thesis. It articulates the research paradigm of the study, clarifies the features of the qualitative case study approach adopted, discusses the selection and sampling issues of and within the case and delineates the methods used for generating data. **Chapter 4** is the second methodology chapter. It starts with elucidating the thematic analysis model used for analysing the data generated. It gives a detailed account of how the different data sets were analysed and what rationales justify the analysis decisions. The chapter then moves to the ethical measures followed to gain access and generate data, highlighting insiderness as a potential ethical issue. The chapter ends by discussing the main quality threats that the researcher, as an insider, tried to deal with to ensure that a sophisticated understanding of the issue studied is reached.

Chapters 5 and 6 are the findings chapters. **Chapter 5** focuses on the teacher-research facilitators' (RC members and EAR mentors) concerns regarding the available ITRS and its facilitators and hindrances. **Chapter 6** presents the results relevant to answering the research question from the teachers' perspective (with some references to some of the teacher-research facilitators' relevant responses).

The last two chapters are the discussion and conclusion chapters. **Chapter 7**, in light of the available literature, discusses the meaning, significance and relevance of each of the main findings of this study. Using the metaphor of a bridge, the factors that the results showed to influence the ITRS in the Centre are grouped under two: the factors of ITRS clarity, congruence and commitment related to building the bridge of support (i.e., influencing the organization of the ITRS) and the factors of ITRS accessibility and utility related to crossing the bridge support (i.e., influencing its provision). **Chapter 8** summarizes the study and its findings; states its conclusions, implications, contributions and limitations; and lay out ideas for research and practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews what the literature suggests about supporting teacher research in general and ITRS in particular. As there is very little written specifically about this topic, it took a lot of time to synthesize the relevant information and produce the chapter in its final structure. The chapter has five main sections that provide insights into the relevant literature about supporting teacher research, gradually building the ground for a conceptual framework for this study.

Section 2.2 gives a historical view of supporting teacher research. Here, I trace back some of the theoretical arguments behind supporting teacher research in mainstream education and ELT. I start with the very early philosophical arguments behind teacher research and its support. This is followed by presenting the first calls for supporting teacher research among teachers in mainstream education in the 1950s in the works of Stephen Corey and Kenneth Wann. I then show how supporting teacher research in education has been driven by different theoretical arguments that have a primary focus on the role of teachers in producing knowledge and making changes. I also clarify how the start of teacher research arguments for its support in ELT was linked to increasing attention on classroom-based research, student-centred curriculum, and teacher autonomy.

In section 2.4, I discuss the three practical reasons for the need to support teacher research. I start with the reported benefits of teacher research as a powerful tool to empower teachers, make teaching a less isolated profession, and improve practice and professional judgement. The second reason I discuss is related to the paradox "between

the potential value and the actual uptake of teacher research in language teaching" (Borg, 2013, p. 2). Here, I highlight the concern among the supporters of teacher research about the lack of its prevalence and sustainability among language teachers. The section ends with language teachers' restrictive beliefs and conceptions of teacher research, including their reluctance to do teacher research due to lack of confidence in their research skills and positivistic and scientific conception of research.

In section 2.5, I clarify how the conceived nature and goals of teacher research can influence perspectives on how to support it and enhance its feasibility. I distinguish between and show the significance and limitations of two main perspectives on supporting teacher research. One perspective sees value in ITRS, and another perspective sees more value in introducing a research tool that does not place much demand on teachers. The following section (2.6) discusses what the literature suggests about ITRS in its different forms (financial resources, time, recognition, mentoring and collegial support). It shows what evidence from available studies suggests about the importance of each form. However, it, more importantly, highlights gaps in and need for understanding what might facilitate or limit the role of ITRS in enhancing not only the feasibility but also the desirability and capability of doing teacher research.

The last section (2.7) gives the conceptual framework that informed this study. It starts with defining ITRS as a two-way relationship between teachers of different levels of interest in teacher research and ITRS that is expected to start and sustain their interest. It shows the importance of the term affordances, introduced to the area by Edwards and Burns (2016c), in highlighting the complementarity between teachers and the ITRS available to them. Unlike Edwards and Burns, however, the study provides a clear

conception of the term affordances based on how it is defined by James Gibson, the person who coined the word. The section ends with the conceptual framework that informed this study, serving as "a point of departure" to give it coherence and clarity (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 17).

2.2 A historical overview of supporting teacher research

This section will give a historical overview of supporting teacher research both in mainstream education and ELT. This overview is important to understand some of the theoretical arguments behind supporting teacher research.

2.2.1 A historical overview of supporting teacher research in education

The origins of teacher research have been traced back to the 1940s and the start of its "ancestor" action research (AR) accredited to Kurt Lewin (Borg, 2013, p. 10) who asserted that there could be "no action without research" and "no research without action" (Adelman, 1993, p. 8). These assertions, however, had earlier seeds in the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato and the concepts of *praxis* (activity) and *theoria* (contemplation) (Hammersley, 2004, p. 167). In educational philosophy, Harkavy and Puckett (2014) pointed out that Dewey's theory of participatory democracy "logically incorporates action research as a core method for realizing his goal of a Great Community" (p. 255). Similarly, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) clarified that AR had its early conception in Dewey's emphasis on "the importance of teachers' reflecting on their practices and integrating their observations into their emerging theories of teaching and learning" (p. 4).

In the 1950s, during the early "brief heyday" period of AR (Noffke, 1997, p. 321), Stephen Corey advocated the prevalence of teacher research in the form of AR among

teachers in the US, arguing that its benefits could not be reaped "unless thousands of teachers, administrators, supervisors and school patrons make more frequent use of the methods of science as they cope with their own practical problems" (Corey, 1954, p. 379). Wann (1953) indicated some suggestions for facilitating AR in schools, including "the need for a climate in the schools favorable to study and experimentation, for ways to provide time for teachers to work, and for leadership and consultative help for participants in action research" (p. 342). However, by the end of the 1950s and during the 1960s, this teacher research movement witnessed a period of virtual disappearance (Borg, 2013) "or at least had become more dispersed and diverse in orientation" (Hammersley, 2004, p. 166).

In the 1970s, a teacher research movement emerged in the UK, influenced by calls against bureaucratic curriculum decisions, particularly in the works of Elliot and Stenhouse (Hammersley, 1993). A parallel teacher research movement was also revived in the US largely due to Schön's idea of reflective practice that supported the re-emergence of teacher research as a tool with an embedded reflective element (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). In addition to this, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) mentioned four groups of works that were the impetus behind the renewed "wave of interest" in teacher research and that had varied arguments for its support (p. 15) (see **Table 2.1)**. What united the different arguments was their focus on empowering teachers as professionals and producers of knowledge.

Table 2. 1: *The Four Groups of Writings Behind the Teacher Research Movement*

	Central argument	**Example(s)**
Group 1	Teachers can produce practice-based theories without external support from academic researchers.	Berthoff (1987) and other articles in Goswami and Stillman's 1987 collection *Reclaiming the*

		Classroom: Teacher Research as an Agency for Change
Group 2	Involving teachers in research is a way to professionalize and democratize teaching and to bring about bottom-up changes.	Kemmis & McTaggart (1988); McNiff (1986); and Stenhouse (1983).
Group 3	There is a need for school-university research teams dedicated to progressive education and solving educational issues.	(Duckworth, 1987; Goodman, 1985; Perrone, 1989)
Group 4	Knowledge about teaching is not the exclusive job of university-based researchers.	Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1987; Erickson, 1986

Note. This is adapted from Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999, pp. 15–16)

2.2.2 A historical overview of supporting teacher research in ELT

In ELT, Burns (2005) indicated that suggestions for promoting and supporting teacher research among language teachers started seriously from the late 1980s, linked with increasing attention on classroom-based research, student-centred curriculum, and bottom-up professional development. Allwright (2015) clarified that classroom-based research was basically a shift of focus on classroom interactions after failing to produce globally applicable methods and techniques. Borg (2013) added that although most of the early classroom-based research in ELT was not conducted by teachers, it provided "the basis for the next logical step in the evolution of language teaching research – that classroom studies would start to be conducted by teachers themselves" (p. 11). Now, "the world has gone well beyond simply expecting teachers and learners to allow researchers into their classroom" to expecting them "to learn how to engage in productive research that contributes to classroom life, rather than constitutes a burden on it" (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019, p. vi).

In curriculum, another shift of focus on students' curriculum and communicative needs occurred and switched the teacher's role from a manager of centralized curriculum to a "principal agent of curriculum development" (Nunan, 1988, p. 151). Based on this switch of role, Nunan (1990) stressed that "teachers can and should be involved in researching their own professional practices in their own classrooms, and that this implies extending the concepts of both professional practice and professional development" (p. 16). With calls to prepare teachers as "independent learners— learners who can learn to adapt to any situation because they will seek the knowledge and skills they need" (Larsen-Freeman, 1983, p. 273) and "a widespread view that it is healthy for professionals to have an active role in their own development processes" (Mann, 2005, p. 104), teacher research, particularly in the form of AR, has thus been "portrayed predominantly as a means of enhancing teacher professional development" (Burns, 2005, p. 63). This interest in teacher research has led to an increase in the scope of the literature on research methods, aiming to introduce teachers to the concepts and processes involved in conducting research (see e.g., Allwright & Bailey, 1991; McDonough & McDonough, 1997; Nunan, 1989; Wallace, 1998). While such an increase is seen as healthy (Burns, 2005), it is criticized for assuming "rather unproblematically" that introducing teachers to research would allow them to do it (Burns & Westmacott, 2018, p. 17). In this regard, Burns and Westmacott (2018) highlighted the significance of other factors, including institutional support, "for effectively supporting teacher research" (Burns & Westmacott, 2018, p. 17).

2.3 Practical reasons for supporting teacher research

The historical overview of supporting teacher research shows some theoretical arguments for its importance. There are also many practical reasons that highlight the need for supporting teacher research. The first practical reason is its extensive list of reported and potential benefits. The second reason is that teacher research remains an uncommon and unsustainable activity among language teachers. The third reason is related to the need to help teachers change some of their reported restrictive beliefs and conceptions of teacher research.

2.3.1 Benefits of teacher research

The first practical reason for supporting teacher research is its many documented benefits that "have received extensive coverage in the literature" (Borg & Sanchez, 2015, p. 7). Generally, teacher research has been described to have a "powerful transformative impact" on language teachers (Borg, 2017b, p. 180) and contribute to better teaching and learning (Kiely, 2020). Drawing upon a large body of the related literature in education and ELT, Burns (1999, pp. 14–17), Borg (2010, pp. 402–403), and Edwards (2020) provided long lists of the benefits of teacher research. As illustrated in **Figure 2.1**, I group the benefits of teacher research, which are viewed as "multifaceted, interconnected, and are evident at micro and macro levels" (Edwards & Burns, 2016a, p. 13), under three main categories:

1. Teacher research can empower teachers by helping them:

- have a broader influence at school or state levels (Banegas et al., 2013; Edwards, 2019; Edwards & Burns, 2016a, 2016b; Wang & Zhang, 2013);

- become more autonomous and confident (Banegas et al., 2013; Edwards & Burns, 2016c; Mehrani, 2017; Yuan & Burns, 2017);
- be less vulnerable and submissive to top-down decisions (Burns, 1999; Yuan & Burns, 2017); and
- have a better professional status (Edwards & Burns, 2016a, 2016c; Mehrani, 2017).

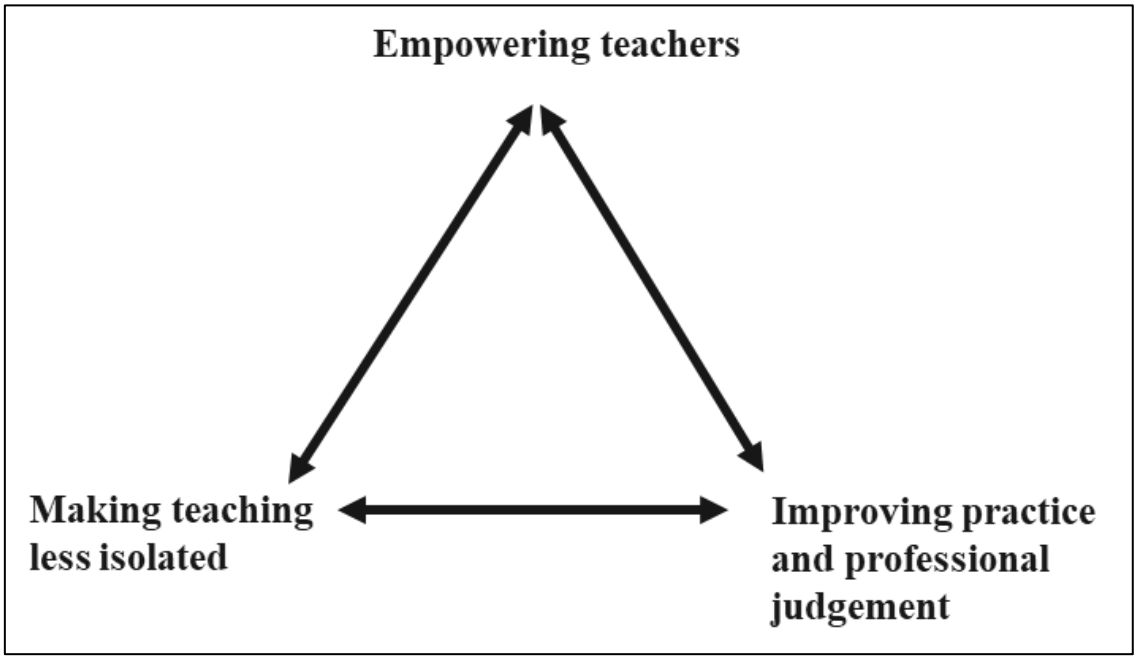
2. Teacher research can improve teachers' practice and professional judgement by helping them:

- become more critical and reflective of classroom practice (Atay, 2008; Banegas et al., 2013; Edwards & Burns, 2016a; Yuan & Burns, 2017); and
- take better decisions concerning students' learning (Atay, 2008; Banegas et al., 2013; Mehrani, 2017; Smith et al., 2014; Yuan & Burns, 2017).

3. Teacher research has the potential to making teaching less isolated by helping teachers:

- build networks with researchers (Yuan & Burns, 2017); and
- feel less frustration and isolation (Atay, 2008; Banegas et al., 2013; Yuan & Burns, 2017).

Figure 2. 1 *Benefits of Teacher Research*



2.3.2 Limited prevalence and sustainability of teacher research

The second practical reason for the need to support teacher research is its limited prevalence and sustainability among language teachers. Because of its benefits, teacher research is promoted and supported to be a common and sustained practice among language teachers. However, this goal is still far from being achieved. One main concern about teacher research has been its "limited prevalence" among language teachers (Borg, 2013, p. 30). It has been puzzling to many supporters of teacher research that despite the widespread encouragement and the perceived benefits of it, teachers' involvement in teacher research remains limited (Burns, 2005; Wyatt, 2011, 2016). Teacher research has been described as "a minority activity" (Borg, 2010, p. 391), "a foreign concept" (Borg, 2013, p. 1) and "not a common activity" (Borg & Sanchez, 2015, p. 6) among language teachers who have a "limited uptake" of it (Borg, 2017a, p. 127). Borg's (2013) large-

scale survey, which involved 1,349 ELT teachers from fourteen countries worldwide, concluded the limited incidence of teacher research among language teachers. Other studies in different contexts also confirmed this finding (e.g., Borg & Liu, 2013; Kutlay, 2013; Mehrani, 2016; Xiaohui, 2016; Xu, 2014).

Related to the prevalence of teacher research is the issue of its sustainability. In her reflection upon the identity of teacher researchers, Burns (2017) also listed sustainability of a researcher identity as one area that requires more empirical attention, stating that the question "what facilitates and what impedes sustainability?" needs further inquiry (p. 138). This issue has been particularly highlighted after research programmes that aim to involve teachers in teacher research projects and give them structured support to improve their research skills and knowledge so that they might sustain their teacher research activities within their contexts. Allwright (1997) pointed out that participants in such programmes, whether they ended up with successful or less successful research projects, would likely "soon abandon the research enterprise altogether" (p. 368). Yuan and Mak (2016) clarified that because of the support they receive during research programmes, teachers manage "to get around different contextual problems (for example heavy workload and limited institutional support)," but the concern is "that such challenges might discourage the teachers from engaging in future action research" (p. 388).

Similarly, Wyatt (2011) noted that although the four teachers in one of his research programmes finished their teacher research projects successfully, there was "no suggestion that such growth can always be sustained once the support provided by the teacher education programme is withdrawn upon course completion" (p. 9). This

conclusion was confirmed by Edwards and Burns (2016a), who investigated the sustainability of teacher research after an AR programme and found out that none of the teachers reported any formal doing of AR after the project despite some perceived sustained benefits. Barkhuizen et al. (2018) attributed the lack of sustained research among language teachers to the unconducive conditions and the lack of support in their contexts; they argued that "what makes teacher-research difficult to sustain is when teachers must conduct it in isolation with little or no support, or as a mandated addition to their already heavy teaching loads" (p. 7).

2.3.3 Teachers' restrictive beliefs and conceptions of teacher research

Another practical reason for the need to support teacher research is to help teachers change some of their commonly reported restrictive beliefs and conceptions of teacher research. Many studies have highlighted the negative view language teachers generally have of their research competence. Even teachers who have finished their MAs have expressed doubts about their skills to embark on their teacher research without advice or training (Allison & Carey, 2007; Hiep, 2006). In Allison and Carey (2007), although the teachers felt capable of reviewing the literature, they were less confident about their research abilities. In his study of Chinese language teachers, Barkhuizen (2009) found that because of feeling unconfident about their research skills and knowledge, the teachers could not give credence to their level of research expertise to start their research. Barkhuizen (2009), however, remarked that these self-efficacy beliefs about their ability to do research "may say something about the teachers' conceptions of what research is" (p. 122).

Teachers' conceptions of teacher research have received prominent empirical attention after Borg's (2009) call for more studies on language teachers' research

engagement. Similar to earlier studies in mainstream education (Everton et al., 2002; McNamara, 2003; Shkedi, 1998), this strand of inquiry has been mainly driven by the rationale that proposals to encourage research engagement among teachers will have more chances to succeed when there is a clearer picture of how teachers conceive the nature and function of research (Borg, 2009).

Borg (2009) reached the general conclusion that teachers' conceptions of research resonated with traditional notions of scientific research, including "statistics, objectivity, hypotheses, large samples and variables" (Borg, 2009, p. 374). Gao et al. (2011) found out that teachers' conceptions of research were more inclined to experimental pre- and post-testing of teaching methods. The authors reasoned that this inclination could be the result of the conventional positivistic implication of experimental designs. Other studies have confirmed this (e.g., Banegas, 2018; Borg & Liu, 2013; Kutlay, 2013; Mehrani, 2016; Tabatabaei & Nazem, 2013). The overall finding of all these studies has confirmed that the positivistic view of research is widespread among language teachers.

2.4 Conceptions of teacher research and perspectives on its support

The previous section discussed the three main reasons that highlight the need to support teacher research. This section will point out two different perspectives on how teacher research needs to be supported. In this regard, it should be noted that it is not only teachers' conceptions of teacher research that might influence the status of teacher research and its support among teachers; how scholars and its proponents conceive it also matters. According to Borg (2013), teacher research has three main conceptions based on its conceived nature and expected goals: personal, emancipatory, and collaborative. The first

conception of teacher research is more individually oriented, aiming to solve or deal with practical issues concerning individual teachers (Burns, 2005), so they can "act more wisely and prudently, in order that the outcomes and longer-term consequences of the practice will be for the best" (Kemmis et al., 2013, p. 15). It is the kind of research that enable teachers "to ameliorate or eliminate the practical difficulties of their day by day work" (Corey, 1954, p. 375). In other words, it is "research *by* and *for* teachers" (Smith & Bullock, 2015, p. 13). The other two conceptions are similar in emphasizing broader impacts and contributions. The first one, as mentioned by Borg (2013), has a social emancipatory purpose, i.e. being "committed to emancipating individuals from the domination of unexamined assumptions embodied in the status quo" (Crookes, 1993, p. 131). This view is characterized by a critical epistemological stance of "socially constructed formations that may need to be transformed if their work and its consequences are irrational, unsustainable or unjust" (Kemmis et al., 2013, p. 16). The other conception advocates wider school improvements through collaborative research (e.g., Burns, 1999; Crookes, 1993; Roberts, 1993) that can aim for "broad curriculum change and professional renewal processes within particular educational institutions, systems or programs" (Burns, 2005, p. 65).

However, the different conceptions of teacher research have implications on how demanding it is made for teachers. Fishman and McCarthy (2000) distinguished two general conceptions of teacher research based on its conceived nature and expected goals and how demanding they are for teachers to do. They identified the two conceptions to two of the very early advocates of teacher research: Lawrence Stenhouse and Ann Berthoff. Fishman and McCarthy (2000) considered Stenhouse and Berthoff's conceptions

of teacher research in education as "charter conceptions" because their "efforts to develop a new category of classroom studies have helped chart the course of this emerging field" (p. 26). **Table 2.2** summarizes their discussion of these distinct perspectives in terms of methodology and dissemination. According to Fishman and McCarthy's (2000, pp. 14–17), Stenhouse advocated a type of teacher research in which teachers were engaged in rigorous case studies involving systematic data collection and analysis to inform significant curriculum development. Berthoff, on the other hand, supported a less demanding approach in which teachers created knowledge and theories in the form of deep personal reflective stories based on the systematic analysis and interpretation of personal classroom experiences.

Table 2. 2: *Stenhouse and Berthoff's Views about Teacher Research*

	Stenhouse	**Berthoff**
Methodological approach	Systematic case studies and well-established methods	Experiences and personal stories
Dissemination	Peer-reviewed publications adding to knowledge	Dialogues among teacher-researchers; no need for research written by academic researchers

What is important of these conceptions of teacher research is how demanding conducting teacher research is made for teachers. Fishman and McCarthy (2000) highlighted the implications of the two conceptions and clarified that considering them, the choice for the proponents of teacher research is not easy: "If they lean toward Stenhouse, they risk making practitioner inquiry seem time-consuming and difficult. But if they incline toward Berthoff, they risk stretching the concept of practitioner inquiry so that it seems unrealistically easy" (p. 36). The choice of which conception to adopt should

also have potential implications on the type and amount of support teacher research requires.

In ELT, I have identified two general conceptions of teacher research similar to that of Stenhouse and Berthoff— I refer to these as the *Stenhousian* and the *Berthoffian* perspectives. The two conceptions have generally resulted in two positions about how to support teacher research. The Stenhousian perspective is evident in the works of Simon Borg. While suggesting that the form of teacher research adopted by teachers needs to "be integrated as much as possible into their existing classroom practices" (Borg, 2017b, p. 176), Borg tends to place more emphasis on the need for institutional support that could contribute to improved research attitudes, knowledge and skills among teachers and thus more incidence and sustainability of good quality teacher research. The Berthoffian perspective, on the other hand, is clear in Dick Allwright's Exploratory Practice (EP) that stresses the need for a more feasible inquiry tool to achieve sustained teacher research away from dependence on external institutional support. The following is a delineation of these two perspectives.

2.4.1 The Stenhousian perspective on supporting teacher research

Stenhouse (1975) emphasized that "if the majority of teachers – rather than only the enthusiastic few – are to possess this field of research, that the teacher's professional self-image and conditions of work will have to change" (p. 142). Similar to this, Borg (2009) stated that

> productive teacher research engagement, then, is unlikely to occur without the organizational, collegial, emotional, intellectual, and practical support structures which

> are needed not only to initiate it but also more importantly to sustain it and enhance its quality. (p. 377)

Borg (2009) also called for more studies to examine individual and institutional facilitative conditions of teacher research in ELT. Many studies (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2009; Borg & Liu, 2013; Kutlay, 2013; Mehrani, 2016, 2017; Vu, 2020; Xu, 2014) have to different degrees shed light on the many forms of institutional support needed to make teacher research more feasible and thus more prevalent and sustainable among ELT teachers. This has resulted in suggested checklists for institutions to check teacher research feasibility in their contexts (e.g., Borg, 2013; Borg & Sanchez, 2015). Borg and Sanchez (2015) suggested that if the answer is 'no' to most of the questions in their "feasibility audit" checklist, "then teacher research is not an appropriate option to pursue and other forms of professional development should be considered" (Borg & Sanchez, 2015, p. 3).

This perspective on supporting teacher research has primarily focused on institutional limitations on the forms and amount of support available for teachers. However, the limitations of available ITRS (i.e., what might limit ITRS from playing its role in supporting teacher research) remains unclear. As I indicated in Chapter 1, in their "feasibility audit" checklist, Borg and Sanchez (2015), for example, did refer to the need for having access to "appropriate advice or mentoring" and "appropriate resources" (p. 3). However, there is virtually no evidence of what teachers see as appropriate in supporting research. This perspective seems to be driven by an assumption similar to what I mentioned earlier about how "some of the early 'how-to' literature on language teacher classroom action research appeared to assume, rather unproblematically, that if teachers were introduced to concepts, processes, and methods of doing research … they would be

able to conduct it" (Burns & Westmacott, 2018, p. 17). Likewise, the Stenhousian perspective on ITRS appears to assume that if the different forms of ITRS were made available to teachers, they would be more research active. The potential opposite of this assumption is what the Berthoffian perspective on supporting teacher research highlights.

2.4.2 The Berthoffian perspective on supporting teacher research

The Berthoffian perspective on supporting teacher research, on the other hand, sees that the feasibility of teacher research lies in the introduction of a feasible form of teacher research rather than in the availability of the usually recommended forms of institutional support. This perspective was started by Dick Allwright and his Berthoffian idea of EP. Allwright, who is one of the early supporters of teacher research among language teachers, noticed that during research initiatives when teachers were trained to be researchers of their contexts, they were put between "at least two potentially crushing burdens": learning research skills and conducting it within their demanding contexts (Allwright, 1997, p. 368). After years of trying to promote teacher research, Allwright regretted that he "had unintentionally made classroom research so demanding that teachers would not be able to do it unless they had extra time and extra support (as on an MA course?), both for learning how to, and also for fitting it into their classroom lives" (Allwright, 2003, p. 116). To help teachers continue the research enterprise, he inclined to a more Berthoffian orientation and suggested the need for a new investigative tool that could work as "a research perspective rather than research in its usual sense" (Allwright, 1997, p. 369). Thus, EP has been presented as a new form of inquiry – "a less daunting proposition than research" (Mann, 2005, p. 108) – with a particular emphasis on "its assimilation into the normal working and professional development practice" of teachers (Allwright &

Lenzuen, 1997, p. 73). Related to his concern about sustainability, Allwright (2003) clearly stated that one principle of EP was to make it "a continuous enterprise" (p. 130) because he thought that "without sustainability nothing of value is going to be happening in the long term" (Allwright, 1997, p. 368). Similar to Berthoff's(1987) argument that "the new kind of REsearch would not be going after 'data,' but rather REconsidering what is at hand" (p. 30), Allwright (2003) stressed the need for EP to be teacher friendly in terms of its integrity into teachers' classroom practices. Also, similar to Berthoff (1987) who found more value in "the kind of theory that is generated in dialogue among teachers" (p. 29), Allwright (2003) argued against papers for the dissemination of teacher research "as papers seem to work better for 'showing off' than for recruiting colleagues", and he instead saw more potential in sharing personal stories through poster presentations and workshops (p. 126).

This perspective that emphasizes introducing an integrative research approach rather than counting on the usually recommended forms of institutional support is also evident in EAR. EAR has been developed in recognition of teachers' busy schedules and general doubts "expressed about the feasibility of teacher-research forming part of ordinary teachers' lives" (Smith et al., 2014, p. 116). This form of teacher research was then promoted in different contexts around the world to show that doing teacher research "can be feasible as well as useful, even for teachers in very difficult circumstances" (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018, p. 5). In his review of Borg's book *Teacher Research in Language Teaching: A Critical Analysis*, Smith (2015) argued that "a prescriptive insistence on academic-seeming requirements or conditions will militate against the adoption of teacher research", considering Borg's reported limitations in teachers' research knowledge, skills

and attitudes (p. 206–207). He also highlighted the need "to explore the 'third space' nature of teacher research (between academic research and professional development)" and "on ways in which research can become part of teaching" (Smith, 2015, p. 207).

While the Stenhousian perspective is important in highlighting the real need for and the different forms of ITRS, the Berthoffian perspective is significant in directing our attention to what might limit ITRS from playing its role in supporting teacher research. It is sceptic about the potential of ITRS in affording the appropriate support teachers need to start and sustain their research. It highlights that ITRS is often made available in a way that might be either unsustainable or unsuitable for supporting teacher research. Regarding the sustainability of ITRS, Allwright (2003), for example, objected to the idea of funding which he finds time-limited and could therefore work against the whole idea of a sustainable enterprise. Hanks (2018) agreed with this, arguing that "reduced teaching timetable, institutional funding for research projects or a series of professional development workshops, are fragile measures, subject to economic or managerial changes" (p. 53). Regarding the suitability of ITRS, Hanks (2018) suggested that asking institutions to support teacher research through affording different opportunities "such as incorporating research (or scholarship) into teachers' contracts, giving time off from teaching, providing research methods training, and the like … provides the institution with another weapon with which to beat teachers" (p. 53). She added that "at best, the provision of time/money for research can position teachers as the recipients of kindnesses from the powerful – a sort of patronage" (p. 53).

Rather than ignoring its importance altogether, these identified potential limitations of institutional support need to be the starting point for further research into

this area to understand how it needs to be made available to language teachers. It will be ideal to see EP and EAR prevalent among language teachers. However, the reality is that "research possibilities for English language teachers can be seen on a broad spectrum" (McDonough & McDonough, 1997, p. 7), and that initiatives to support and promote teacher research are undeniably "informed by a range of purposes, contexts, epistemologies, methods, resources, and consequences" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 8). ITRS is to different degrees made available to language teachers, particularly in tertiary language institutions similar to this study's context. I think such a reality requires more attention than further overlooking this already "neglected area" (Burns, 2018, p. 58), and this is what this study tries to do. In the next section, I discuss what the literature suggests (insights and gaps) about the different ITRS forms and opportunities.

2.5 Insights and gaps in understanding ITRS

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the international move towards promoting teacher research among language teachers has motivated much research on the individual and institutional conditions conducive to teacher research. As I show in this section, this line of inquiry has pointed out the importance of different ITRS forms and opportunities (see **Table 2.3**) needed mainly for the role of "improving the feasibility of teacher research" (Borg, 2018, p. 19) and thus its prevalence and sustainability. However, for the sake of conceptual clarity, I distinguish the role of ITRS in enhancing three aspects of doing teacher research (see **Figure 2.2**): feasibility (facilitating the research process and its completion), capability (improving research skills, knowledge and understanding), and desirability (enhancing research interest and motivation). This distinction is important to recognize

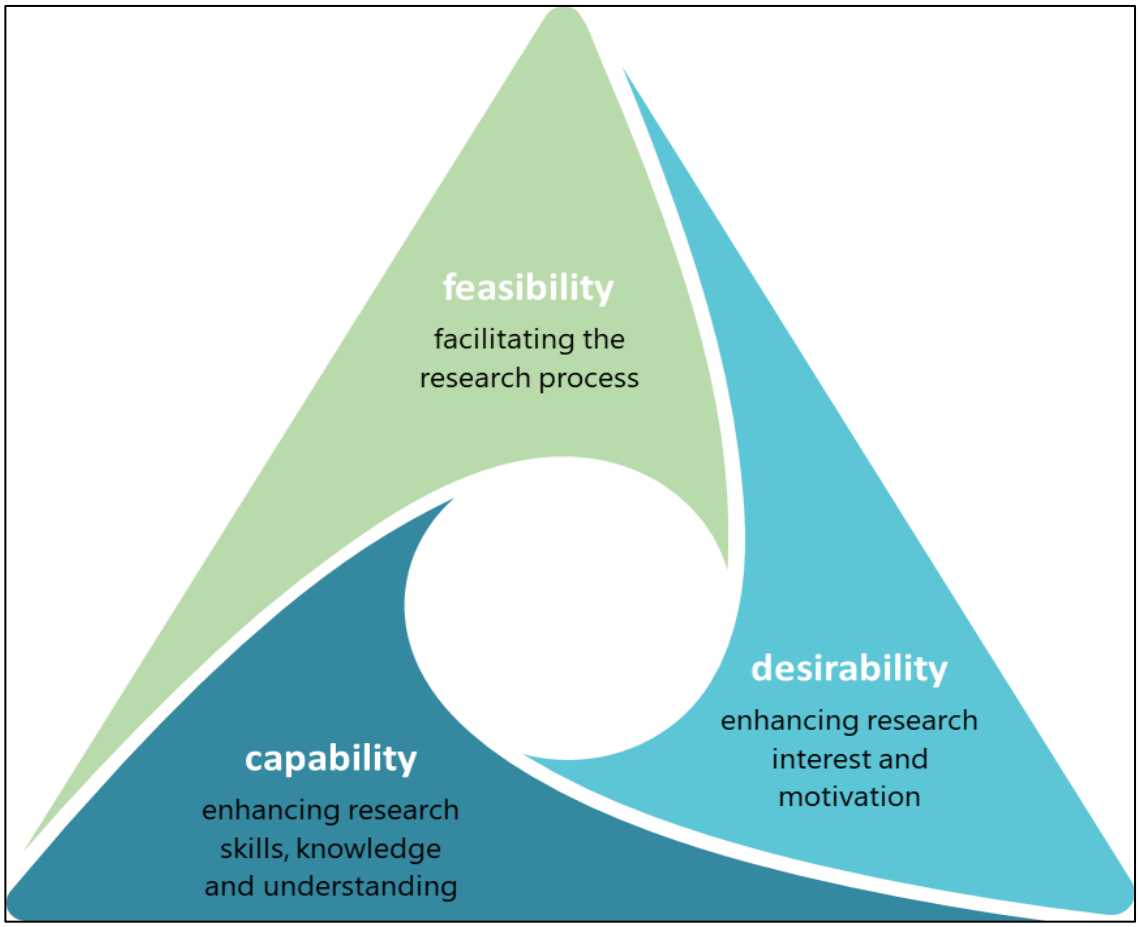
that supporting teacher research is not only about making it more feasible; its role in enhancing the capability and desirability of doing teacher research needs to be highlighted. The distinction is also helpful in examining how ITRS opportunities, either individually or in relation to each other, contribute to enhancing the three aspects of supporting teacher research.

Table 2. 3: *ITRS Forms and Opportunities*

ITRS forms	**ITRS opportunities**
Financial resources	Having access to journals and books
	Having funds to present and attend conferences
	Having funds to conduct research
Time	Giving release time for doing research
	Having a workload that allows some time for research
Recognition	Publicizing or applying teacher-research results
	Acknowledging the professional status of research through research policies
	Recognizing teacher-researchers' efforts through rewards
Mentoring	Having experienced mentors to guide teachers
Collegial support	Collaborating in research activities
	Assisting and encouraging each other's research engagement
	Sharing the value of research

This section also shows that what is already known about ITRS is mainly the result of examining its different forms and opportunities separately, focusing mainly on what support is needed. There is, however, limited evidence of how ITRS in its varied forms needs to be available either individually or as a structure in relation to each other to achieve its role of enhancing the feasibility, capability, and desirability of doing teacher research.

Figure 2. 2 *Aspects of the ITRS Role in Supporting Teacher Research*



2.5.1 Financial resources

Providing the needed financial resources is one form of ITRS. It can come in different ways. One way of financially supporting teacher research is by ensuring that teachers have access to published research. As this form of support is needed to learn about research (enhancing research capability) or review the literature in a researched topic (enhancing research feasibility), many studies have listed having no access to published research as one of the challenges to doing teacher research among language teachers in different contexts (Borg, 2013; Hiep, 2006; Mehrani, 2017; Ubaque & Castañeda-Peña, 2017; Xu,

2014). Lacking access to published research was also reported to have a negative impact on the desirability of doing research as it could be seen as a "sort of disempowerment" and a deterrent that might change their desire and "investment to do research" (Ubaque & Castañeda-Peña, 2017, p. 39). However, when they have access to published research, teachers might find it inaccessible because of lacking the skills to make them capable, the time to make research feasible, or the interest to make it desirable (Borg, 2013). Therefore, access to this ITRS opportunity needs to be considered in relation to other opportunities that might influence the feasibility, capability and desirability of doing teacher research. Recognizing this directs our attention to the unexplored question of what might facilitate or hinder the role of access to books and journals in serving its purpose within a structure of ITRS.

Other ways to support teacher research financially are funding teachers to attend conferences and conduct research. In addition to its significance in enhancing teachers' research capability by helping them learn about research, assisting teachers to attend conferences has been shown to influence their desire to do research. Edwards and Burns (2016a) indicated that funding teacher-researchers to attend conferences could contribute to their professional status satisfaction and motivate them to pursue further opportunities for more teacher research activities. On the other hand, the lack of such support was found to evoke "a sense of discontent" and "feelings of loss of institutional identity" (Tran et al., 2017, p. 72). In addition to attending conferences, some teachers have indicated the need for financial support to conduct research (Barkhuizen, 2009). Interestingly, even when funds for conducting research are available, a teacher might avoid getting funds when long

bureaucratic processes are involved (Aga, 2017; Hiep, 2006). This finding highlights the need to explore how this ITRS is made available to teachers.

2.5.2 Time

Time is one of the often indicated and highly emphasized resources for supporting teacher research. Borg (2006a) argued that "good teacher research can be conducted at minimal expense and with limited technology. Financial and physical resources, while certainly facilitative, are not necessary conditions for teacher research to take place. Time, however, is" (p. 24). In many studies, time has been considered "critical to efforts to promote research cultures" (Borg, 2013, p. 180). It has been described as a "predominant" (Borg, 2009, p. 70) and "major" factor (Barkhuizen, 2009, p. 121) and "one of the most recurring themes" (Mehrani, 2017, p. 103) cited by language teachers when asked about doing teacher research. However, from the 1700 ELT professionals (managers and teachers) working in private and public language teaching institutions in fourteen countries, Borg (2013) found out that time allocation for conducting teacher research is not a possibility in many contexts.

As having release time to conduct research is not often possible, teachers are thus left with the need to find time within their schedules. Many studies, however, have shown that finding time for doing teacher research is often not feasible due to teachers' professional and personal responsibilities. Mehrani (2017) indicated that the majority of the research engaged participants (68 ELT Iranian teachers) in his study viewed their "uncompromizing" and busy schedules as obstacles to being active teacher-researchers. In China, Barkhuizen (2009) reported that for some EFL teachers finding time for doing research could be problematic when feeling "under constant pressure to complete

examination and test-oriented syllabus" (p. 121). In the same context, Liu and Borg (2014) described this pressure as a tension between not doing teacher research and feeling guilty to sacrifice classroom time for research. In such tensions, teachers tend to make practical judgments of their priorities. In a language centre in Canada, Allison and Carey (2007) mentioned that for many language teachers, "the first priority was to meet the students' immediate classroom needs, and any research yearnings had to give way to the teaching imperative" (p. 86). Even with EP that is meant to be less demanding, the lack of time was cited as a challenge (Hanks, 2015).

What adds to this challenge is trying to juggle professional demands with personal responsibilities. While some teachers might go the extra mile to work at home, many others might not find the time because of childcare and housework responsibilities (Xu, 2014) or for being "strictly against allocating time for teacher research outside school" (Eryılmaz & Dikilitas, 2016, p. 23). This attitude could be attributed to personal motivation to do research; however, even in situations where teachers are reported to be highly motivated, the issue of time persists. In her pilot report of embedding teacher research into a national language program in Australia, Burns (2011) explained that "finding time to do research in addition to teaching and the demands of personal lives was also a continuing problem" for teachers who participated voluntarily and who "willingly devoted the extra time required to research" (p. 5).

As a teacher-researcher and teacher-research supporter, considering such findings of the constraint of time in isolation from other available institutional support within a context provokes the negative feeling that attempts to support teacher research are at a dead end. Interestingly, there is evidence that when considered within a context in relation

to other available support, finding time to do research or get involved in research activities is an investment that teachers weigh against expected gains. Edwards and Burns (2016c) concluded that one reason that stopped teachers in English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students in Australia from doing research or even benefiting from other teachers' research was expecting no recognition of their efforts (one aspect of recognizing teacher research I discuss next) because of their casual contracts. According to the authors, this situation made them "hesitant about investing time and energy in additional activities without promise of any kind of reward" (Edwards & Burns, 2016c, p. 742). However, expected recognition is not only restricted to part-time teachers. Full-time language teachers could also be pragmatically evaluative in investing time in research. In a study of the motivating and demotivating factors behind ELT Ethiopian university language teachers doing of AR, Aga (2017) indicated that teachers felt a mismatch between the time they invested in research and their gains after being promoted. This link between teachers' willingness to invest in doing research and their expectations of potential gains needs to shift our attention from whether time is available for doing teacher research to how time as one form of support works within a structure of ITRS.

2.5.3 Recognition

Another form of ITRS is recognition that has been emphasized as one main goal of teacher inquiry since the early days of its promotion. It is the recognition that the generation of knowledge "is not the exclusive property of universities and research and development centers, a recognition that practitioners have theories too, that can contribute to the knowledge that informs the work of practitioner communities" (Zeichner, 1993, p. 204). The support needed to achieve this goal has received a lot of theoretical and empirical

attention. Borg (2006) listed recognition as one of the main conditions for supporting the prevalence of teacher research. He reasoned that for more teacher research to take place, the knowledge originating from it needs to be acknowledged and valued. Burns (2005) stated that wider recognition and participation are among the goals that teachers desire to achieve as a result of doing teacher research. She also asserted the significance of recognition and its potential to mediate teachers' negotiation of their teacher-researcher identity and "to give considerable positive or negative valence to their image as researchers" (Burns, 2017, p. 69). In addition to this theoretical support about the role of recognition as one form of ITRS, many studies have highlighted its significance in enhancing the desirability of doing teacher research. After examining the main studies that have discussed this form of support, I have produced three main dimensions of recognition: recognition of results, recognition of status and recognition of efforts.

The recognition of teacher-research results could be considered the heart of recognition as it aligns with two of the early mentioned benefits of teacher research: empowering teachers and making teaching a less isolated profession. Institutionally, the results of teacher research might be recognized through either publicizing or applying them. In their study of a group of tertiary language teachers' research perceptions and activities, Allison and Carey (2007) referred to "a hidden vein of research," pointing to their finding that almost all the teachers whom they interviewed showed a strong desire to publicize their research, using "words like visible, sharing, or making it public" (p. 69). Edwards and Burns (2016a) recommended that to sustain the impact of teacher research after introducing teachers to research in AR programmes, institutional support is needed to encourage broader contributions of teacher research and to facilitate its publication and

dissemination. In addition to publicizing them, the results of teacher research could also be recognized by supporting their application. Edwards and Burns (2016b) indicated that recognizing the findings of teacher research through their integration into school curriculum gives voice to teacher-researchers and could make them feel more professionally empowered and credible. They (2016a) also pointed out the importance of facilitating the schoolwide application of teacher research's findings for sustaining teachers' enthusiasm and motivation after AR programmes. However, how this support is provided could determine how teachers respond to it. It has been reported that teachers might find publishing their research an undesirable added burden if the necessary support of time and mentoring are not considered (Burns & Westmacott, 2018; Smith et al., 2014).

The other dimension of recognition is acknowledging the professional status of research through research policies. Borg (2013) remarked that some teachers highlighted the professional value of referring to research responsibilities in their job descriptions. He also pointed out that some teachers argued that having no reference to research in their job description implied that their research was "almost above and beyond the call of duty" (p. 154). This confirms what Allison and Carey (2007) found out earlier. In the language centre they studied, teachers felt the need to have research as one of their job mandates. The researchers interpreted this desire for the institutional pressure to be research engaged as a sign of feeling insecure and unconfident without an institutional responsibility that could work as "an incentive and a stamp of approval" (p. 69). In this regard, Aga (2017) pointed out two issues. The first issue was related to the clarity of research policies. Although his study indicated the availability of research policies, the teachers regretted having no clear research policies that "would show specific roles and responsibilities" (p.

211). The other issue that the study raised was the teachers' concern about whom should own the authority and responsibility to develop these policies.

Whereas there seems to be a broad desire among language teachers to have clear research policies to recognize its professional status and give it a stamp of approval, in some contexts where institutional policies have been modified to make research an employment mandate, studies have reported negative responses from teachers. Tran et al. (2017) described the transformation of the research policy in a tertiary institution in Vietnam and its new orientation to be research-focused. The new research policies did achieve the kind of institutional pressure that the teachers in Allison and Carey (2007) asked for. In the new policies, teachers were required to have a certain number of publications as well as national and international presentations to be the main indicators of their academic performance. Because the study focused on the teachers' emotional responses and professional identities, teachers were generally categorized as "pressured supporters, a losing heart follower and the discontented performers" (p. 65). It was only one group that showed positive attitudes towards the new research policies. Borg and Liu (2013) did shed light on a similar situation among college English teachers in China. The study showed that the increasing significance given to research in the form of policies linking research with career mobility and job promotion did not increase the prevalence of teacher research. This study and Xu (2014) reported moderate levels of teacher research among college English teachers in China. In another related study, Liu and Borg (2014) demonstrated that the teachers who participated in the study showed a range of conceptual tensions experienced mainly as a result of the research requirements. Based on 20 semi-structured interviews, the authors concluded that the participants were in dilemmas and

uncertainties about the nature and purposes of research. Teachers' responses revealed that their institutional research policies had put them in dichotomous positions, disturbing their conceptions of research value in addressing pedagogic issues.

The third dimension of recognition that many studies have put forward is recognizing teacher-researchers' efforts through rewards. In their discussion of the teacher-research divide, Gore and Gitlin (2004) recommend instituting new reward structures that could establish a new positive vision of research among teachers. This is echoed by the findings of many studies in ELT. In Allison and Carey (2007), a teacher referring to the significance of rewards said: "there is no reason to do it [research] because it's not going to bring anything to us at all– there will be no reward whatsoever—probably no recognition" (p. 69). Mehrani (2016), who studied the conception of research among EFL Iranian teachers, indicated that for teachers to be more research active, rewards in the form of financial reinforcements are essential. However, in contexts where "most of the policies seemed more rewarding than punishing", and teachers' research efforts were recognized "with bonus payment, honorary titles, and acknowledgements from university leaders", teachers reported low levels of teacher research (Xu, 2017, p. 247).

2.5.4 Mentoring

Teacher-research mentoring is one form of ITRS that has received increasing but not yet enough attention in our field. Mentoring is generally defined as a "nurturing process aimed at the personal and professional growth of the mentee" (Halai, 2006, p. 702). Teacher-research mentoring is defined as "the process of mentoring teacher-researchers throughout their experience of working on research projects" (Dikilitaş & Wyatt, 2018, p. 539). Because of this, such a process is seen as a crucial form of support without which "many

teachers will not engage in or sustain research" (Borg, 2006a, p. 24), and thus it is deemed essential "in the numerous local contexts in which teacher research takes place" (Dikilitaş & Wyatt, 2018, p. 538).

The many reports of teacher-research programmes (e.g., Borg, 2013; Burns & Westmacott, 2018; Dikilitaş & Mumford, 2016; Smith et al., 2014) have described the technical roles of mentors to enhance teachers' research capabilities. These roles involve providing teachers with a broad framework for carrying out their project, assisting them in narrowing down their topics, remarking on their data collection and analysis, and assisting them in publicizing their research. Besides their technical roles, many mentors' stories (see Burns et al., 2017) confirm what came in Dikilitaş and Wyatt's (2018) study that mentors are also consciously involved in enhancing the desirability of doing teacher research, "providing psychological support" to motivate their mentees (p. 584).

Borg (2006) recommends that such an essential form of support is provided by local colleagues rather than academics because "the availability of a mentor who teachers know will value and support their attempts to be teacher researchers can encourage more teachers to assume this role" (p. 24). This, however, "requires experienced teachers to grow into and indeed embrace research-mentor roles in their local contexts" (Dikilitaş and Wyatt, 2018, p. 538). In order to embrace such roles, teacher-research mentors are expected to develop general mentoring qualities and skills (Békés, 2020; Smith, 2020b) necessary not only for providing feedback and developing mentees' research capabilities but also for inspiring and encouraging them to have the required self-efficacy beliefs (Dikilitaş & Wyatt, 2018; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2016). While the careful selection of committed and interested mentors is recommended (Smith et al., 2014) so that they have

what Dikilitaş and Wyatt (2018) describe as the "positive attitudes, perseverance and commitment in face of stress and uncertainty" (p. 550), mentoring and the development of local mentors requires support, particularly in the form of training (mentoring mentors) and released teaching loads (Békés, 2020; Dikilitaş & Wyatt, 2018). Thus, this form of support needs to be examined with other available ITRS in local contexts.

2.5.5 Collegial support

Collegial support is another form of supporting teacher research within institutions. Borg (2006) stressed the significant potential impact of collegial support on sustained teacher research. Without this support, he argued that doing teacher research might be less desirable, requiring high motivation on the part of teachers. He further explained that this type of support should not be restricted to face-to-face interactions in teachers' own schools, but it can extend to include national and international associations providing virtual opportunities to engage in research-supporting forums. According to Borg (2006), collegial support can enhance the capability and desirability to do teacher research by collaborating in collective research activities, sharing the value of research, encouraging each other's research engagement, and participating in research related discussions. However, this form of support remains generally random and limited.

Banegas et al. (2013) reported how collaborative teacher research could help language teachers sustain and move forward their research engagement. However, they admitted that their collaboration required additional time and efforts as well as strong professional relationships. Many studies have generally shown the reluctance among language teachers to collaborate in doing research. In Borg and Liu (2013), teachers perceived their schools to be individualistic and competitive in nature, lacking the research

culture and ethos to work collaboratively. Mehrani (2017) also reported that teacher collaboration was among the major challenges that some Iranian language teachers found impacting their research engagement. The teachers complained about their colleagues' negative or careless responses to their collaborative research attempts. The participants mainly focused on the impracticality of collaboration using negative phrases such as "deadlock", "further work", and "unhelpful" (p. 104). Edwards and Burns (2016c) reported the case of Danni, who failed to encourage other teachers to take part in research projects after she participated in an AR program. Danni explained that her colleagues lacked the motivation and interest to do research. Even during research training programs within the same institutions, some teachers might find it hard to work collaboratively either for personal reasons related to differing points of view (Atay, 2008) or logistical reasons related to timetables (Burns & Westmacott, 2018).

Another aspect of collegial support is collegial cooperation that refers to the assistance teachers need and get from other colleagues to conduct research. In her narrative study, Xu (2017) shed light on four teacher' stories in becoming researchers. The study showed how some teachers were lucky to get the collegial help they needed to find themselves as researchers. Their colleagues gave them helpful advice and were ready to discuss with them to feel more affirmative about their research trajectories. Xu (2017), however, concluded that "no matter how powerful this impact might be, such support seems to be irregular and random. Only teachers who took the initiative benefited" (p. 255). In other contexts, teachers might be less lucky to have cooperative colleagues. In Mehrani (2017), a teacher felt that cooperation from other teachers to conduct research was characterized by "inertia" and "envy" (p. 103).

The last aspect of collegial support that could be identified from the empirical studies is teachers' discussion and recognition of the value of teacher research. Unfortunately, evidence from many studies has shown that this form of collegial assistance is usually inadequate. In Vietnam, Hiep (2006) showed that from the seven language teachers he interviewed, some felt disappointed when there was no collegial recognition of their published work. In his examination of teacher's perceptions of the research cultures in their institutions, Borg (2013) found that teachers had strong practical orientations in their professional discussions. They declared that even when time and space were available, discussions centred around pedagogical issues. However, to some participants in the study, this lack of research related discussions and activities evoked "a sense of relief . . . from the obligation to be research engaged" (p. 116). Borg and Liu (2013) also remarked that Chinese teachers in college English departments were not clear about each other's research activities, a phenomenon that the authors attributed to the lack of "collaborative collegial discussions about research" (p. 290). Edwards and Burns (2016c) showed that some enthusiastic teachers' efforts to discuss their research with others could be one-sided in unfavourable socio-economic situations and unstable work status. Thus, their recommendations might be dismissed as complex or insignificant.

2.6 Conceptualizing ITRS and its affordances

As I showed in the last section, many studies have highlighted the importance of different ITRS forms that are expected to enhance the feasibility, capability and desirability of doing teacher research. They have also shown that even when teachers have access to them, how the different ITRS forms are made available either individually or in relation

to each other might limit the extent to which teachers utilize them as opportunities to support their research. Thus, understanding what might influence ITRS within an institutional setting is necessary to understand how it needs to be made available so that it serves its purpose of supporting teacher research. However, our understanding of this issue is still minimal. This area, therefore, requires more research that is guided by a clear conception of ITRS. In this section, I will try to clarify and illustrate my conception of ITRS.

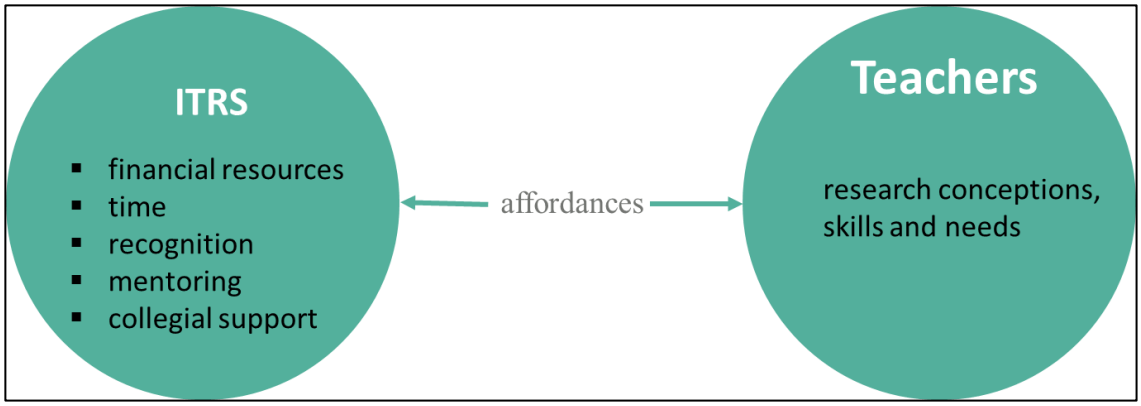
2.6.1 Towards a clear conceptualization of ITRS

The meaning and forms of ITRS are found in discussions of different related topics such as "conditions for teacher research" (Borg, 2006a, p. 23), "research cultures" (Borg, 2013, p. 151), "motivating and demotivating factors" of teacher research (Aga, 2017, p. 203), "potential constraints on research activity" (Barkhuizen, 2009, p. 121) and "the institutional feasibility conditions for supporting teacher research" (Burns & Westmacott, 2018, p. 16). They also come in the form of recommendations of what support teachers need to facilitate their research activities during external or internal research programmes for preparing teacher-researchers (e.g., Atay, 2008; Borg, 2013; Burns, 2011; Burns & Westmacott, 2018; Eryılmaz & Dikilitas, 2016; Yuan & Burns, 2017). Such discussions and recommendations have highlighted the above-discussed different forms of ITRS (including financial resources, time, recognition, mentoring and collegial support) alongside teachers' individual conditions (including research conceptions, skills and needs) as factors for facilitating more and sustained teacher research among language teachers.

As it is needed to enhance the feasibility, capability and desirability of doing teacher research, ITRS in relation to teachers' individual conditions can be conceptualized as a two-way relationship in which not only interested teachers with the right research conceptions, skills and needs utilize the support to carry out and sustain their research activities, but also ITRS starts and sustains their interest in research (see **Figure 2.3)**. It supports them in their different "trajectories" of "becoming" teacher-researchers (Burns, 2017, p.136), i.e., the "developmental process through which teachers grow into teacher-researchers" (Dikilitaş & Wyatt, 2018, p. 538). In supporting teacher research, ITRS is essential "not only to initiate it but also more importantly to sustain it and enhance its quality" (Borg, 2009, p. 377). It is needed to provide language teachers with opportunities "in order for them to become research literate, be able to engage in research, as well as share research" (Xerri & Pioquinto, 2018, p. vii).

The term that best captures the two-way relationship between ITRS and teachers' individual conditions, as illustrated in **Figure 2.3,** is the ecological concept of *affordances*, introduced to the area of ITRS by Edwards and Burns (2016c). In their study exploring how two language teachers negotiated their teacher-researcher identities after being involved in an AR programme, the researchers concluded that what helped the two language teachers continue as teacher researchers was their success to "perceive and (eventually) optimize affordances in their environments" (Edwards & Burns, 2016c, p. 743). Based on this, the study ended with recommending that institutions need "to maximize professional affordances within the bounds of political and economic constraints" of institutional settings (Edwards and Burns, 2016c, p. 743).

Figure 2. 3 *ITRS and its Affordances*



However, the researchers did not give a clear definition of affordances. Drawing from van Lier's ecological perspective of it, Edwards and Burns (2016c) define affordances as "opportunities that the environment presents, which may or may not be acted on" (p. 736). The study only shed light on the importance of the teachers' interest in research and activity in seeking out and utilizing them. They described how "both teachers acted to some extent as resisters, to perceive and (eventually) optimize affordances in their environments" (p. 743). This, however, does not capture the central meaning of affordances as "those relationships that provide a 'match'" between something in the environment and an agent (van Lier, 2004, p. 96). The term was coined by the psychologist James Gibson to emphasize a special meaning, highlighting the "complementarity" between agents and the properties of environmental opportunities (Gibson, 2014, p. 119). As described by Gibson (2014), "an affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer" (p. 121). It is mainly about how opportunities are available in relation to agents.

Thus, because of its special meaning, the conception of affordances, I would argue, could bring a new dimension and more clarity to our conception of ITRS. The following is a detailed discussion of the term affordance and its conceptualization.

2.6.2 Background of affordances

The term affordance was coined by the American psychologist James Gibson who promoted and advocated the idea of direct visual perception. Gibson (2014) theorized that

> [t]he affordances of environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, but the noun affordances is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment. (p. 119)

Perhaps having no dictionary meaning have caused much confusion about the delineations of affordances. Even attempts to formalize it as a concept within ecological psychology (Stoffregen, 2003; Turvey, 1992) have shown "a considerable divergence of opinion on what kind of thing an affordance is" (Michaels, 2003, p. 135). My personal experience in trying to understand this term was very similar to the following description:

> The affordance concept, from its beginnings, has been a hazy one. Despite the existence of a large body of literature on the concept, upon reviewing the literature, one encounters different façades of this term, sometimes contradictory, rather like the description of an elephant by the six blind men in the famous Indian tale. (Şahin et al., 2007, p. 447)

Although Michaels (2003) attributed the misunderstanding and confusion of the term to how "it has been conscripted by other members of the scientific community to

mean something else" (p. 136), I tend to agree with other scholars (e.g., van Lier, 2004) who value the extension of its reach. Albrechtsen et al. (2001) suggest that

> [i]t is likely that one important background for the recent openings to new understandings and extensions of Gibson's original affordance concept within the community of ecological psychology is connected with the increasing cross-disciplinary applications of Gibson's theory (p. 14).

One shared aspect of the fields (e.g., instructional design, human-computer interaction, language learning, communication studies) to which the concept has been extended and used is their focus on the relationship and interaction between an agent and something in their environments. This justifies extending it to the area of ITRS as it focuses on the relationship between teachers and the support available to them.

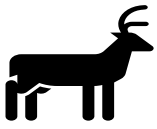
2.6.3 Conceptualizing affordances

To avoid the confusion of the many available conceptions, I return mainly to Gibson's original conception of affordances. From ELT, similar to Edwards and Burns (2016c), I also draw on van Lier's (2004) conception and discussion of what affordances are. What distinguishes van Lier's discussion of this term is his argument that although it is "valuable to extend the reach of the concept of affordance into the realm of language learning, we must continually bear in mind the defining features of the concept" (p. 94). This position, I think, has contributed to his clear discussion of the defining aspects of this concept and its potential extension to the area of teacher research.

In Gibson's definition of affordances, the key term that he used to show the unique meaning of his coined word was "complementarity", which indicates the relationship between an agent with particular needs and abilities and something with certain properties

in the environment (Gibson, 2014, p. 119). In other words, complementarity is to consider properties of something in the environment with reference to an agent's needs and abilities. Gibson used adjectives to describe the properties that qualify something to be an affordance for a particular agent. To use Gibson's example, for a surface to afford support for an animal, it needs to have the affordances of being "stand-on-able", "walk-on-able", and "run-on-able" and thus has to be "nearly horizontal (instead of slanted), nearly flat (instead of convex or concave), and sufficiently extended (relative to the size of the animal) and if its substance is rigid (relative to the weight of the animal)" (p. 119). I illustrate this example in **Figure 2.5**. As I illustrate, the example gives a clear distinction between the properties of the surface (nearly horizontal, nearly flat, sufficiently extended and rigid) with regard to the animal's abilities to stand, walk and run and main need for a supporting surface, and its properties of being *stand-on-able*, *walk-on-able* and *run-on-able*, the affordances that constitute the overall affordance of a supporting surface relative to an animal.

Figure 2. 4 *What Affordances are*

Animal's abilities	**Animal's need and purpose**	**Surface's properties** (surfaces' properties relative to the animal)	**Affordances**	**Overall affordance**
 can walk, stand and run	supporting surface to cross the river	nearly horizontal, nearly flat, sufficiently extended and rigid	stand-on-able, walk-on-able and run-on-able	supporting surface to cross the river

A close examination of Gibson's conception of affordances reveals three characteristics that Gibson focused on in defining any potential affordances: being *visible*, *relative,* and *relevant*. These characteristics ensure the complementarity implied by the word affordances in its denotation of the relationship between an agent and something in its environment. The first characteristic (visibility) is related to the central role of information for perceiving affordances. Gibson (2014) stated that "the central question for the theory of affordances is not whether they exist and are real but whether information is available in ambient light for perceiving them" (Gibson, 2014, p. 132). In relation to the role of information in making visible potential affordances, Gibson also referred to "misinformation for affordances", explaining that affordances could be misperceived if "misinformation is picked up" (p. 133). That is, their relevance "hinges upon their perceivability" (Scarantino, 2003, p. 954) as it is information that "shows the agent the available possibilities for action" (Heras-Escribano, 2019, p. 49). To use the animal-surface example above, the animal needs information to perceive that the surface is hard and see its potential affordance of being *stand-on-able*, *walk-on-able* and *run-on-able*. The second defining characteristic of potential affordances is being relative to the agent's abilities. Gibson (2014) highlighted in his theory that "affordances are properties taken with reference to the observer" (p. 113), and they can thus be thought of as "relative to the capacities of the organisms that perceive them" (Heras-Escribano, 2019, p. 53). This defining characteristic of potential affordances is also clear in Gibson's above example of the supporting surface being "sufficiently extended (relative to the size of the animal) and if its substance is rigid (relative to the weight of the animal)" (Gibson, 2014, p. 119). The third property for potential affordances is simply being relevant to the agent's needs and

purposes which can "control the perception of affordances (selective attention) and also initiate acts" (Gibson, 1982, p. 411).

In ELT, van Lier (2004), similar to Gibson, defined affordances as "relationships that provide a match" between something in the environment and an agent (p. 96). However, he made a clearer explanation of the role of affordances. He explained that "the affordances picked up serve the agent – depending on his or her abilities – to promote further action" (p. 95). They do this by (1) "fuel[ling] perception and activity" and (2) bringing about "further affordances and signs, and further higher-level activity as well as more differentiated perception" (p. 96).

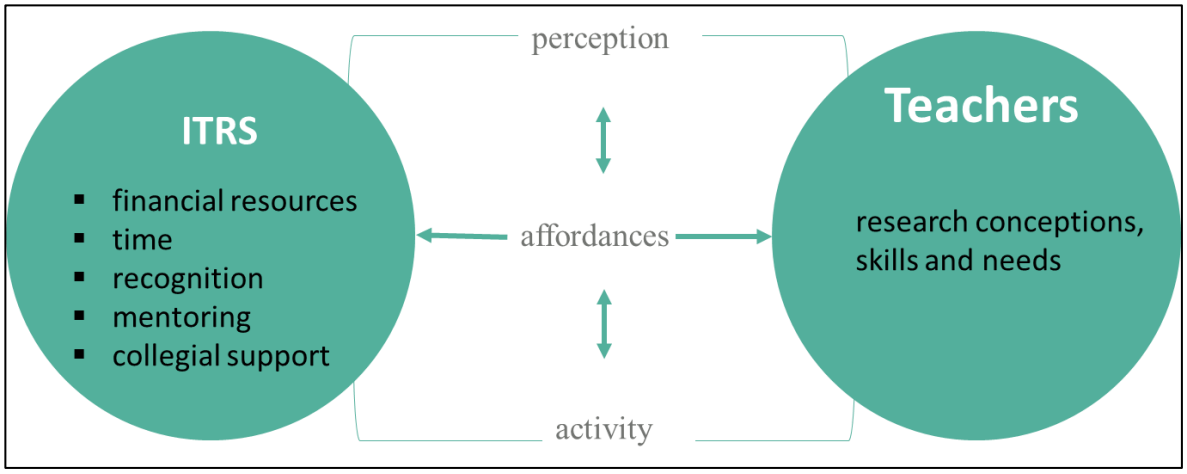
To illustrate the conception of affordances based on Gibson and van Lier's definition of them, let us use the animal-surface example again. An animal that could stand, run and walk (abilities) needed a supporting surface to cross a river (need/purpose). A nearby wooded bridge (something in the environment) whose properties of being nearly horizontal, nearly flat, sufficiently extended and rigid were visible, relative and relevant to the animal had the properties of being stand-on-able, walk-on-able and run-on-able (affordances). Therefore, the bridge could offer the animal the overall affordance of a supporting surface that could fuel its perception and activity to cross the river. This affordance could bring further affordances and activity in the forest across the river and a differentiated perception of future possibilities.

2.6.4 Conceptualizing ITRS affordances

After having a clear conceptual picture of affordances, I here go back to the conception of ITRS illustrated and explained at the beginning of this section (see **Figure 2.3**) in order to clarify the meaning of affordances and illustrate the conceptual framework that guided

this study. **Figure 2.5** below depicts the rudimentary conceptual framework that served as "a point of departure", allowing me to make justifiable, logical and coherent empirical decisions (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 17). It illustrates that ITRS, in its different forms, is supposed to provide teachers with varied affordances (such as *start-research-able, do-research-able, fund-research-able,* and *disseminate-research-able*) "not only to initiate it but also more importantly to sustain it and enhance its quality" (Borg, 2009, p. 377). While, as noted by Edwards and Burns (2016c), "perception of these affordances is guided by activity" (p. 736) that can potentially help teachers "perceive and (eventually) optimize affordances in their environments" (p. 743), the affordances of ITRS is supposed to "fuel perception and activity", bringing about "further affordances and signs, and further higher-level activity as well as more differentiated perception" (van Lier, 2004, p. 96). This role of ITRS in fuelling perception and activity is evident in Borg's (2013) recommendations that the support of teacher research needs to "create an awareness of the value of research to teachers", "encourage staff to be proactive in being research engaged", and "find out which teachers are interested in research and what support they need" (p. 221). However, it is still not adequately understood how ITRS needs to be made available to teachers so that it appropriately services its purpose of supporting TR, and this is what this study tried to examine.

Figure 2. 5 *The Conceptual Framework of ITRS and its Affordances*



2.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed what the available literature suggests about supporting teacher research in general and ITRS in particular. Because this area has not received enough specific research-based attention, this literature review contributes to the neglected area of ITRS. In this review, I first started with trying to establish the theoretical arguments for ITRS, presenting the historical emergence and development of teacher research and the drivers behind its support both in education and ELT. The chapter then narrowed down to the practical arguments for the need to support teacher research in ELT, including the benefits of teacher research, its central issues of prevalence and sustainability and teachers' restrictive beliefs and conceptions. Related to this, I also identified two main perspectives on how to support teacher research in ELT. I called the first one the Stenhousian perspective as it shared many similarities with Stenhouse's view of teacher research and its goal. This perspective is generally with the need for the different ITRS opportunities to enhance the feasibility and thus the prevalence and sustainability of

teacher research among language teachers. The second perspective is more Berthoffian in nature, sharing many similarities with Ann Berthoff's view of teacher research. This Berthoffian perspective is generally cautious of ITRS as it views it as mostly fragile and at best disempowering to teachers, and it thus focuses on optimizing the available resources for a feasible form of teacher research. I have clarified how this study took a middle position that saw the value of ITRS and recognized the need to examine what might facilitate or hinder its role. I then discussed the different ITRS forms and their roles in enhancing the feasibility, desirability, and capability to do teacher research. I also showed how their significance and limitations have been mostly discussed in isolation from each other and how their often-limited availability has been highlighted. I then delineated the conceptual framework that guided this study. In the next chapter, I will start with the study' aim and question based on the conceptual framework presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY I

3.1 Introduction

As clarified in Chapter 1, this study was mainly motivated by a contextual need in the Sultanate of Oman. Amidst a recent growing interest in promoting research among language teachers in tertiary language institutions in the Sultanate and emerging calls and initiatives for providing the needed ITRS, there is still limited evidence of its facilitators and impediments. As a teacher interested in supporting teacher research in my context, this study was motivated by the puzzling situation in my language institution in which teacher research is still a limited activity despite the potential available forms of ITRS. This study, therefore, tried to address one main question: **What influences (i.e., facilitates or impedes) the institutional support of teacher research in a tertiary ELT context?** Exploring the facilitators and impediments of ITRS is important to understand how it needs to be made available to teachers so that it plays its expected role (see section 2.6) of enhancing the feasibility, capability, and desirability of doing teacher research.

I have delineated the methodology of this study in two chapters to make it easier for the reader to follow. Excluding this section and the summary section, this chapter has four main sections. In the first two sections, I highlighted some important theoretical background about the research paradigm and approach adopted in this study. Section 3.2 sets the research paradigm that underpins the study. After defining the meaning of a research paradigm and its main components, I display my assumptions as a constructivist and the basic set of (ontological, epistemological, axiological and ethical) beliefs and values behind how this study was conducted. The second section (3.3) is meant to be a

link in the logical sequence of this study's design, connecting the previous sections that presented the research questions and paradigm of the study and the following sections that detail the decisions taken regarding sampling and data generation. Since this study adopted a qualitative case study approach, and in order to set the rationale for what follows, in this section, I highlight some of the features, which also constitute the strengths of a qualitative approach and a case study design.

The other two sections of the chapter discuss my sampling and data generation decisions in this study. Section 3.4 focuses on the rationale for the selection of the case and sampling within it. In this section, I start with why I chose my context as a case and what are its boundaries. I then delineate and justify my sampling decisions from the teacher-research facilitators and language teachers within the case. Section 3.5 is the main section in this chapter. It details how data was generated through different methods, including semi-structured interviews, reflective diaries, repertory-grid interviews, document review and field notes.

3.2 The adopted research paradigm

Cohen et al. (2017) state that:

> Researchers need to consider not only the nature of the phenomenon under study, but also what are or are not the ontological premises that underpin it, the epistemological bases for investigating it and conducting the research into it. These are points of reflection and decision, turning the planning of research from being solely a mechanistic or practical exercise into a reflection on the nature of knowledge and the nature of being. (p.175)

In this section, I consider some of the main philosophical (ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical) underpinnings adhered to in this study. Before that, I start with a brief definition of a research paradigm, clarifying the relationships among its main constituents.

3.2.1 Defining a research paradigm

According to Kuhn (1970), a paradigm, in its clearest sense, is "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community" (p. 175). It is used to refer to the "basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17) "not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105). It is the "net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 19). Guba and Lincoln (1994) point to the order of these three categories of assumptions, ontological (nature of reality), epistemological (nature of knowing) and methodological (nature of inquiry), placing ontology as the basis of epistemological beliefs that in turn guide methodological choices and have an impact on adopted research values (axiology) as well as ethical considerations.

3.2.2 Clarifying the adopted research paradigm

This study adopts a constructivist research paradigm which is one of the interpretivist and anti-positivist approaches to research. Similar to other interpretive orientations to research, constructivism came as a response to positivist claims of the external objective and rule-governed existence of social reality. As noted by Schwandt (1994), the different concepts and descriptions related to constructivism and interpretivism are best seen as sensitizing

concepts and “general descriptors for a loosely coupled family of methodological and philosophical persuasions” (p. 221). Here, I state the constructivist ontological and epistemological assumptions and point to some key methodological and axiological considerations adhered to in this study.

As a constructivist, I adopt the relative ontological position that does not view social reality as having an external, objective and rule-governed existence but sees it as internal, subjective, multiple and alterable constructions that have a social and experiential basis (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I see that although constructions of reality might be shared among people across cultures, these constructions are historically and culturally specific, created and maintained through interaction among a group of people (Burr, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I, therefore, see that contexts “cannot be separated from reality because it is the meaning attached to the experience that shapes what is true” (Killam, 2013, p. 190). However, “constructions are not more or less "true," in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111).

Because of my ontological position, I see that “detachment and author objectivity are barriers to quality, not insurance of having achieved it” (Lincoln, 1995, p. 280) and thus while taking all measures to ensure the quality of my research (see Chapter 4, section 4.4), I admit and value my subjectivity and my relationship with my participants. I see this relationship as interactive in which the “inquirer and inquired are fused into one (monistic) entity” (Guba, 1990, p. 27), and democratic, arguing, as a constructivist, that my interpretations and “the accounts of research participants themselves, must be equally valid in principle” (Burr, 2015, p. 174). In this subjective, interactive and democratic relationship between the researcher and the participants and similar to critical theorists

and participatory research, I see that findings are co-produced during the research process. Thus, the contrast between ontology and epistemology vanishes (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Because of its subjectivist epistemological position, Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe the methodological orientation of constructivism to be dialectical and hermeneutical and argue that since knowledge constructions are mental, mutable and personal, the interaction between the inquirer and the respondents is the proper way for eliciting and refining the respondents' constructions of meaning. Thus, in this study, the contextual, historical and cultural specificity of knowledge, as well as its social and experiential base, entailed seeking "to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally" (Creswell, 2014, p. 9). Hermeneutical techniques were then used to inductively interpret, compare and contrast responses in order to reach a consensus about the different participants' constructions of the investigated phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This interpretive approach is referred to as "the hermeneutical circle [that] is a methodological device in which one considers the whole in relation to its parts and vice versa" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 227). Lincoln and Guba (2013) clarify that the hermeneutic circles take the form of a sequence of encounters between the researcher and the participants. During these democratic encounters, the inquirer tries to examine and compare the participants' different constructions, "focusing on their initial constructions and aimed at developing reconstructions by a process in which all share equally" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 65). This focus on the reconstruction of reality and the democratic process in which this occurs is very related to the axiological and ethical considerations of constructivism.

Axiology is related to the place of values and the ethics associated with them. Considering my subjectivist, transactional and interpretivist epistemological position, I see that "values inhere in every human project; objectivity is a chimera" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 41). Lincoln and Guba (2013) summarize the axiological influence on research in one question: "Of all the knowledge available to me, which is the most valuable, which is the most truthful, which is the most beautiful, which is the most life-enhancing?" (p. 37). In response to this question, I give primary significance to representing the voices of the different stakeholders in the study context, emphasizing the basic ethical principles of beneficence and fairness (Killam, 2013). In their shared co-construction and reconstruction of reality, "the values of the inquirer, the various value systems of research participants, the values which inhere in the context all must be uncovered and made transparent" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 41). It is this transparent co-construction and reconstruction of reality that helps constructivism play an emancipatory role in the life of participants.

3.3 The research approach of the study

This section is meant to be a link in the logical sequence of this study's design, connecting the previous sections that presented the research questions and paradigm of the study and the following sections that detail the decisions taken regarding sampling, data generation and data analysis. Since this study adopts a qualitative case study approach, and in order to set the rationale for what follows, I here highlight some of the features, which also constitute the strengths, of a qualitative case study approach.

3.3.1 Features of a case study

The choice of a case study design is justified by the very nature of this practitioner study as there is a common suggestion among researchers that practitioner research, which usually tends to focus on one entity such as a child, a class or a school within the researcher's context, "could be defined as case study" (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p. 129). However, the particular characteristics of a case study design are also in line with my purpose as a constructivist who has intrinsic as well as instrumental interest in an in-depth understanding of a puzzle within my context.

The first feature is being particularistic; that is, the focus is on a specific case, and this, according to Merriam (1998), is especially useful to investigate puzzling issues and practices. Related to this feature, Cohen et al. (2017) refer to the strength of case studies in capturing the distinguishing qualities of a situation (p. 378). Similarly, Bryman (2016) highlights that "with a case study, the case is an object of interest in its own right, and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth analysis of it" (p. 61). The second feature of case studies is that the focus on a particular case is accompanied by a thick description (Merriam, 1998, p. 29) of "the particular perceptions of the actors" rather than the objective description of the case's complexities (Stake, 1995, p. 42). The particular and thick description of certain cases could explain why Merriam (1998) lists heuristic as another feature of case studies, explaining that case studies are illuminating because they shed light on new meanings and add to what is already known. Similarly, Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) argue that in relation to practitioner research in educational settings, case study research can potentially "help shape individual and group efforts in a

way that encourages in-depth understanding of problems, concerns or puzzles" (p. 129), and this is what this study aims to achieve.

3.4 Selection and sampling Issues

As noted by Patton (1990), "perhaps nothing captures the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods more than the different logics that undergird sampling approaches" (p. 169). In qualitative case studies, sampling goes through two stages: selecting the case to be studied and then sampling from the teachers, documents, and activities within the case (Merriam, 1998). In this section, I focus on the rationale for selecting the case and sampling within it.

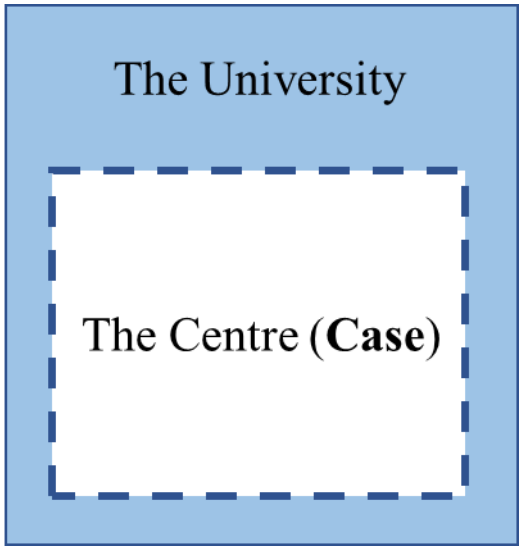
3.4.1 Selecting and bounding the case

For the selection rationale of cases, Stake's (1995) distinction between intrinsic and instrumental cases is widely cited. Stake uses the former to refer to case studies in which the studying of a case is obligatory or given, using the example of teachers who have an intrinsic interest in their students, classes or schools; while he uses the latter to refer to studies that select single or collective cases to illuminate an issue or understand a puzzle (p. 3). Such a distinction, however, should not be presented to imply exclusive categorization. Stake (1995) clarifies that this distinction could often be difficult to draw and that he only makes it to point out how having a strong intrinsic motivation in the case could limit the researcher's curiosities about the phenomenon in favour of issues critical to the case. This issue is commonly raised about insider research (see section 4.4.2), but it does not mean that the two rationales for selecting a case do not coexist. According to Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013), case studies conducted by practitioners could

highlight "the importance of rich, in-depth knowledge (intrinsic or instrumental)" (p. 129). In this study, although my choice of the institution is intrinsic given my position as a practitioner, it is also instrumental as I am equally interested in getting insight into the question of what facilitates or hinders ITRS within a language institution.

Related to the selection of the case is deciding its boundary, the importance of which comes in defining "the edge of the case: what will not be studied" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25). According to Merriam (2010), what makes a case study is the ability of the researcher to decide the boundary of the entity to focus on. She defines a case as "a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 27). To decide the boundary of a case, a researcher needs to consider "the defining question of all case study research: what is this a case of?" (Gerring, 2007, p. 13). As an answer to this question, this study focused on the case of ITRS within a language institution, the Centre. The boundary of a case, however, cannot be seen as rigid (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2014), and thus accounting for its embeddedness within a context constitutes "one of the strengths of case study research" (Merriam, 2010, p. 456). Based on this, **Figure 3.1** illustrates the boundary of the case, the Centre, within a larger context, the University. The dotted line shows that understanding some aspects of the larger context of the University, to which the Centre is attached, is important in reaching a clearer picture of the phenomenon investigated.

Figure 3. 1 The *Boundary of the Case*



3.4.2 Sampling within the case

For sampling within case studies, Merriam (2010) recommends considering a "set of criteria … to purposefully select whom to interview, what to observe and which documents to analyze" (p. 459). This section presents some details about the targeted groups within the Centre (the English language teachers and the teacher-research facilitators) and the sampling criteria used to select from them.

3.4.2.1 Sampling from the teacher-research facilitators

As I indicate in the introduction, the centre's stated aim for supporting research is to encourage and support research projects that reflect the teachers' activities and interests and help improve the curriculum, evaluation, and instruction in the centre. The potential ITRS available for the teachers in the centre covers all ITRS forms and opportunities discussed in section 2.5 of the literature review (see **Table 3.1**). I use teacher-research facilitators to refer to the people involved in supporting teacher research in the centre.

This, as I delineate in the introduction (section 1.3.2.2), includes the RC members and the EAR mentors.

Table 3. 1: *The Potential ITRS Opportunities Available for the Teachers in the Centre*

ITRS forms	ITRS opportunities
Funding	The university's library provides access to thousands of journals and books.
	Teachers can get funds to present at two international conferences each year.
	Teachers working in collaborative research can apply for funds to conduct research.
Release time	Teachers can either be granted release time for research projects necessary for their courses or selected in the best proposal competition.
Recognition	Teachers can share their teacher research in: – the Centre's annual international conference – two fully-funded international conferences outside Oman – the different relevant conferences in Oman (teachers get two days off for presenting) – the weekly professional development (PD) sessions organized in the centre could be a venue for disseminating teacher research.
	– As part of the new GFP recommendations, teachers are expected to integrate teaching and research. – Being promoted to senior positions require evidence of being scholarly active in doing and publishing research
	– The best researcher award is given each year for teachers with noticeable doing of research. – Doing research helps teachers get promoted.
Mentoring	RC members provide mentoring to teacher-initiated teacher research projects.
Collegial support	There are over 190 teachers who have a minimum of MA in ELT.

As mentioned in the introduction, the centre has three RCs (one central and two departmental). The RCs are assigned a list of responsibilities for promoting and supporting research in each department (see **Table 1.1**). While there is nothing stated about the criteria for choosing an RC member, the members of the committees are selected full-time

teachers who often get chosen because of their degrees (having a PhD) or expected experience and interest in doing and mentoring research projects. Two members from the departmental RCs are representatives in the central RC, the main body for supporting research in the Centre. The total number of members in the different RCs is eleven, five in each departmental committee, plus the head of the central committee.

Of the targeted teacher-research facilitators were also the two EAR mentors who assisted me in mentoring EAR projects from February to May 2019 (see section 1.3.2.2). As the facilitator of the EAR workshop, I selected the two mentors because of their long former experience of being RC members involved in supporting research in their context and their over ten years of experience in the centre. The chosen mentors were also known by other teachers for their interest in supporting teacher research and their wiliness to provide research consultation and guidance to their colleagues. However, the EAR approach and the experience of mentoring teacher-research projects from beginning to end were new to the mentors, so I had to introduce them to the approach and assist them throughout when needed. The five face-to-face sessions every other week (see **Table 3.2**) about the different stages of doing an EAR project were also helpful for introducing both the teachers and mentors to the approach.

Table 3. 2: *The EAR Workshop Plan*

Main topic	Objectives	Focus
Identifying a focus, and research questions	Identify a research focus Write research questions	The focus of this week is on identifying a main research focus, which could be, for example, to understand a successful experience, a problem, a point that is worrying or intriguing you, or any kind of question in your mind.
Using practical tools for exploratory research	Gain an overview of different possible sources of evidence in classroom-based research Make some decisions about how to gather information to answer research questions Consider the ethical dimensions of your research	The focus of this week is on how to gather evidence to answer your research questions.
Analyzing and interpreting data	Develop an understanding of how to sort out, categorize and classify data	The focus of this week is on some basic procedures for analyzing different kinds of data and on how to decide on which analysis procedure(s) will be

		best for your own study.
Planning and implementing change	Plan for change Implement the change you plan Reflect on the action's impact	Now we have been through the process of exploring, we come to the 'action' part of 'Exploratory Action Research'. It is time to see if you want to change anything. If you do, this session will help you plan for change and implement the changes you plan. It will also focus on observing the effects and reflecting on what impact the action had.
Presenting findings	Know about different possible ways for disseminating results	The focus of this week is on innovative, teacher-friendly ideas for sharing your research.

For the selection of participants from the teacher-research facilitators, I had two main criteria for my purposeful sampling the rationale and potential of which "lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 1990, p. 169) and "in seeking depth, you explore alternatives" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 131). Considering their varied years of experiences in the RCs, one selection criterion was to choose members with longer experiences in the committees. The aim here was to get participants who were more aware of the nature of the available ITRS in the Centre. The other selection criterion was trying to have participants from each committee to capture the possible differences of experiences. To ensure the satisfaction of my sampling criteria and considering the small

number of the targeted population, I invited all the teacher-research facilitators to take part in my study. From the thirteen facilitators mentioned above, eight of the RC members and the two EAR mentors accepted to participate (see **Table 3.3**).

Table 3. 3: *Information about the Participant Teacher-Research Facilitators*

Number	**Range of experience in the Centre**	**Range of experience as teacher-research facilitators**	**Qualifications**	
			PhD	MA
10	5 to 20 years	1 to 7 years	7	3

Note. The specific details of each participant are not given to ensure confidentiality.

3.4.2.2 Sampling from the English language teachers

My target population of the English language teachers in the Centre was over 190 local and international teachers who differed in their years of experience in the Centre, qualifications (mostly MAs, but some PhDs), and level of teacher-research activities. Therefore, I used a purposive maximum variation sampling strategy that could assist in "capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects" of the population (Patton, 1990, p. 172). As shown in **Table 3.4**, the selected sample included eleven local and international teachers with different qualifications. Based on the recommendations of the RCs and my familiarity as an insider, I first approached three teachers who were active in doing research and thus were more likely to be more aware of the ITRS available. The other eight teachers were purposefully selected to include local and international teachers with varied qualifications and years of experience in the Centre. This, however, does not mean that these eight participants (of which three participated in the EAR Workshop) had

not done any research or sought out or utilized any of the ITRS available, but it only means, as confirmed by them during the interviews, that they vary in this area.

Table 3. 4: *Information about the Participant English Language Teachers*

Number	**Range of experience in the Centre**	**Nationality**		**Qualifications**	
		Local	International	PhD	MA
11	3 to 17 years	4	7	3	8

Note. The specific details of each participant are not given to ensure confidentiality.

For deciding the adequacy of the sample size, I had several considerations not for seeking statistical significance but for making sure that a more sophisticated understanding is reached. One of them was saturation, in which sampling is stopped when information is redundant, and no new information emerges (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202). However, Braun and Clarke (2019) argue that claiming saturation during data generation can "rely on potentially superficial impressions" (p. 581). While this is plausibly true, my impression of saturation in this study was facilitated by the use of repertory-grid interviews that elicit participant-generated themes (referred to as constructs) in the form of bi-polar adjectives and phrases (see section 3.5.3). Because the themes elicited from each teacher were initially grouped into larger categories validated by the participants (see section 4.2.2), my decision to stop sampling was aided by the noticeable repetition in the participants' responses. This study, therefore, could cautiously claim what Saunders et al. (2018) called "inductive thematic saturation", in which sampling is stopped when no new initial themes are emerging from the data (p. 1896).

Although saturation *per se* is often considered the golden rule for stopping sampling in qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1894), my decision to stop

sampling was mainly based on other recommended contextual and pragmatic considerations, including the purpose of the study, the nature of data collection and analysis and the resources available to support the study (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Merriam, 1998). For this qualitative study that aims for depth of understanding, I considered the "breadth-depth trade-off" of sampling in case studies; that is, depth might be lost when the sample size increases (M. Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2010, p. 838). As stated by Braun and Clarke (2016), "bigger isn't necessarily better. The bigger the sample, the greater the risk of failing to do justice to the complexity and nuance contained within the data" (p. 4). It is also recommended that researchers consider the feasibility of their projects in terms of the time and resources available (Cohen et al., 2017). Thus, considering the time frame and resources I have and the often-reported and personally experienced time-consuming limitation of repertory-grid interviews (see e.g., Nespor, 1987; Pill, 2005), twenty one interviews, considered in addition to the data collected from the other sources, are justifiably adequate for in-depth analysis and fairly sophisticated understanding for a study of this size.

3.4.3 Features of a qualitative approach

Before I delineate the features of a qualitative approach, I find it necessary to point out a common misconception that qualitative research is inherently anti-positivist approach because of its common comparison with positivist quantitative research. Pointing out this misconception explains why I did not refer to qualitative research under my research paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that the term qualitative is not "an umbrella term superior to the term paradigm … it is a term that ought to be reserved for a description of types of methods" (p. 105). This perspective is supported by Denzin and Lincoln's

(2005) suggestion of eight historical moments of qualitative research progress of which the traditional period and the modernist phase were more positivist in nature. However, Bryman (2016) clarifies that "work that could be depicted in terms very similar to the first phases continues to be conducted" (p. 376). After thirteen years of their first mention of this issue, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) also state that "our present history of the field locates seven, eight moments—and a ninth—the future. These moments all circulate in the present, competing with and defining one another" (p. xiv).

For this study, I found that a qualitative approach has a number of characteristics that could potentially bring me closer to the participants' daily complex lives and respond to emerging issues rather than a tightly defined plan. One of the main characteristics of qualitative research is that it takes place in the participants' natural settings. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) point out that one defining characteristic of qualitative research is that it "involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 10). This, I think, can help researchers capture some of the complexities of a social phenomenon in its context. Comparing it with quantitative research, Richards (2003) argues that qualitative research illuminates and helps "explore the complexities and conundrums of the immensely complicated social world that we inhabit" (p. 8), adding that "as practicing teachers, we operate in a professional context which is at best loosely predictable" (p. 9). Related to this, Creswell (2014) highlights that by inquiring into the natural settings of participants, qualitative researchers can have insight of the field where their participants experience the issue being studied and can interact directly with them to get in-depth information.

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research has an emergent flexible approach because its key idea is "to learn about a problem or issue from participants and engage in the best practices to obtain that information" (p. 47). Willis (2007) also clarifies that "in a qualitative study the process of making meaning is emergent. That is, what you are studying, the data you are collecting, and how those data are to be handled, change and emerge across the life of the study" (p. 202). Related to its emergent approach, qualitative research usually has a bottom-up iterative orientation. Because a primary focus is often given to the participants' perspectives and experiences, the qualitative researcher engages in a complex process of inductive and deductive reasoning to interpret and represent the participants' worldview (Creswell, 2014). This process entails adhering to a non-linear and recursive process "in which data collection, data analysis, and interpretation occur throughout the study and influence each other" (Willis, 2007, p. 202). It also entails employing multiple methods and data forms that are reviewed, interpreted and organized into "categories or themes that cut across all of the data sources" (Creswell, 2014, p. 45) that "turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 10). This is done "in order to establish different perspectives on the relevant issues" (Richards, 2003, p. 10).

3.5 Data-generation methods

After the above discussion of the sampling issues, this section focuses on the methods used to generate data (**Table 3.5**). I here use data *generation* rather than *collection*

because, as argued by Dey (2003), "the idea that we 'collect' data is a bit misleading. Data are not 'out there' waiting collection, like so many rubbish bags on the pavement" (p. 16).

Table 3. 5: An *Overview of the Data Generated*

Participants		**Main data generation methods**	**Amount of data generated**	**Supporting data generation methods**
10 teacher-research facilitators	8 RC members	Semi-structured interviews	45,852 words	Document review Field notes
	2 EAR mentors	Reflective diaries	3568 words	
		Follow-up interviews	16,413 words	
11 English language teachers		Repertory-grid interviews		
		Follow-up interviews	111,209 words	
		Total word count	177,098 words	

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

Research interviews are mainly differentiated in their degree of structure, ranging within a continuum from structured to unstructured interviews. Mann (2016) points out that the extreme ends of this continuum do not exist, and thus all qualitative interviews could be possibly classified as semi-structured, falling between the two extremes. Kvale (2007) states that qualitative interviews are usually semi-structured, using a number of themes and related questions open to changes of order and form in response to the participants' answers. However, the degree of structure is usually guided by "fitness for purpose" (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 509).

This study used semi-structured interviews with the members of the RCs to understand what they saw as facilitative or impeding of the ITRS in the centre. The interview guide used for the interviews was divided into three sections:

- **The initial questions** (How long have you been a member of the committee? What is the nature of your role as a member?) were general in nature about the interviews' role as members in the RCs. I thought of such questions as "icebreakers" "to get the ball rolling" (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012, p. 104), but they ended up yielding "spontaneous, rich descriptions where the subjects themselves provide what they experience as the main aspects of the phenomenon investigated" (Kvale, 2007, p. 61).
- **The main questions** tried to "address the heart or essence of the research question" (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012, p. 106). They were organized under three main areas related to the topic of the study: (1) the kinds of ITRS available for the teachers in the centre (What kinds of support are available for supporting research in the centre? Why are they needed?), (2) the effectiveness of the available support in promoting teacher research (How helpful is the available support for promoting research in the centre? Why?), and (3) the extent to which the teachers make use of the available support (To what extent do teacher utilize the available support? Why?). The main questions were also combined with probes and follow-up questions in order to "elicit depth, detail, vividness, nuance, and richness" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 134).
- **The ending question** (I have no further questions. Is there anything else you would like to bring up, or ask about, before we finish the interview?) was included not only to avoid the abrupt ending of an in-depth interview (Hennink et al., 2010, p. 113) but

also to give "the subject an additional opportunity to deal with issues he or she has been thinking or worrying about during the interview" (Kvale, 2007, p. 57).

3.5.2 Reflective diaries with follow-up interviews

Being former members with long experiences in the RCs and mentors of the EAR's participants, the two EAR mentors' perspectives were very valuable in examining the facilitators and inhibitors of ITRS opportunities in the Centre. To capture a sophisticated understanding of their views, I used reflective diaries followed by semi-structured interviews.

As a research tool, reflective diaries engage the participants in recording and reflecting upon their experiences for a long period of time, and thus it is recommended as "a useful tool to gather participant perspectives" (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 622). Because the two mentors were involved in supporting the EAR's participants carry out their research projects for almost nine weeks, asking them to keep reflective diaries could potentially "permit the examination of reported events and experiences in their natural, spontaneous context" (Bolger et al., 2003, p. 580). For the efficient use of this tool, the three following areas were carefully considered:

- **Level of structure:**

Similar to interviews, reflective diaries differ in their level of structure (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015). For this study, the diaries completed and submitted by the two mentors were almost unstructured. In a face-to-face meeting about the EAR Workshop and a follow-up email, the participants were asked to record and reflect upon their experience of supporting teachers to do teacher research during the workshop, focusing primarily on what seemed to facilitate or impede it. However, I made it clear to the mentors that they

should feel free to reflect upon any issue they found important and relevant during (1) their one-to-one mentoring sessions or informal communications with their mentees, (2) their attendance of the five sessions of the workshop and (3) their overall observation of the potential integration of the workshop as one opportunity for supporting teacher research in the centre.

The use of less structured diaries in this study is justifiable. Such less structured diaries with a frame of a guiding statement are recommended to "provide a starting point for the diarist or journalist without sacrificing autonomy" (Kitchenham, 2010, p. 300). Besides my constructivist perspective as a researcher who values my participants' views, ensuring that the mentors felt free to reflect on what they found important was significant for two practical reasons. Although "in a pure sense, all research is exploratory" (Jupp, 2006, p. 110), the first practical reason for using less structured diaries was that this study is exploratory, examining a topic that has not been adequately addressed. I found this, similar to what is mentioned about less structured interviews (see Cohen et al., 2017; Mann, 2016), helpful in increasing the relevance and salience of the reflected-upon topics. The second practical reason for using less structured diaries was considering the experience of the two participant mentors. The two mentors, who were very interested in doing and supporting teacher research in their context, had more than ten years of experience in the centre. They had also had significant positions and different formal and informal initiatives in supporting and promoting teacher research among language teachers.

- **Frequency and time span:**

Considering the issues of dropout and recall failure, Bartlett and Milligan (2015) emphasize that "whatever the design or structure of the solicited diary, careful thought needs to be given to the frequency and time span over which diary completion should take place"(p. 37). I, thus, asked the two mentors to write weekly diaries over eight weeks. Weekly entries were not only more suitable considering the varied frequency of mentoring sessions between mentors and over the workshop period but also more feasible, bearing in mind the mentors' busy schedules.

- **Completion and submission:**

Completing and submitting the diaries was expected to be an additional burden to the two mentors who have full load teaching. There are a number of noted issues relevant to the successful completion and submission of diaries, including the participants' basic skills in keeping diaries, their understanding of the purpose of diaries and their overall motivation and interest in the topic they write about (Vannini, 2008, p. 765). The two mentors were competent researchers familiar with diaries as a research tool and highly interested in the research topic. To ensure that they were on track, I also asked the participants to submit their entries every other week. This was done not only to ensure the completion and submission of entries but also to prepare for the follow-up interviews. Although one mentor completed two extended entries only (see **Table 3.7**), both of them reflected upon and indicated very important events to be extended upon in the follow-up interviews (see sample **Table 3.6**).

Table 3. 6: *A Sample Entry of the Reflective Dairies*

Participant	**EAR mentor 1**
Source	Reflective diary (25/02/2019)
Content	Just before the meeting, the facilitator sent an email explaining that the teacher researchers needed to complete an ethics form during the conduct of the EAR project. To be honest, I was not happy with the email or the requirements. It was OK to give support to participants and introduce them to the ethics. However, I was not happy because of several reasons. First of all, that email was not timely. This means that while at that point in time I was concerned that almost none of the mentees got in touch with me about the research project the form was not timely. Secondly, that form was overwhelmingly long. It was not suitable for the EAR project the 'teacher researchers' are engaged in. I also thought that there was a problem and tension between the existing support and the intended support in the EAR project. I was worried the EAR project may be hijacked by the existing system. I thought I would raise this point in the meeting, and I did, but I was extremely careful. I was happy that a meeting would take place for the mentors. I was happy because that way I can evaluate myself as mentor well, as I will know what progress they have been making with their mentees. We had the meeting, and I learned a lot. The facilitator asked about our progress. I had already sent the facilitator an email about this. I mentioned the same information again, reiterating that nearly all the mentees did not get in touch. The facilitator stated that the Omani mentee assigned to me would get in touch soon; he said that he had his grandmother passed away. I was still not convinced but said nothing. I still believed that no matter support was available to mentees, they themselves… To my surprise, I learned that the other mentors had mentees come to them. For me, even the new mentee did not make contact with me. There was never an email from her acknowledging my emails or happiness that she would get support. From the meeting, the mentors discussed the ethics form, and it was agreed that although the ethics was not taken favourably it was decided to use it. The facilitator reminded us to write our diaries.

Table 3. 7 *Information about Completed Reflective Diaries*

Mentor	Number of entries	Number of words	Topics
EAR mentor 1	6	2510	- After session 1 - Before session 2 - Mentors' meeting - Meeting my mentee for the first time - After my first meeting with my mentee - After the session on data analysis
EAR mentor 2	2	1058	- Mentoring the EAR projects - The EAR Workshop in the centre

The diaries were combined with semi-structured follow-up interviews that, according to Bartlett and Milligan (2015), could provide complementary rich information for a fuller picture of the investigated phenomenon. As presented in **Table 3.8**, the follow-up interview was divided into five parts: (1) questions about the mentors' overall experiences of the workshop, (2) questions about the specific potential of the Workshop as one ITRS opportunity in the Centre (3) questions about specific issues mentioned in their diaries, (4) ending questions about their overall opinion about the facilitators and inhibitors of ITRS opportunities in the centre.

Table 3. 8: *Follow-up Interview Guide with the EAR Mentors*

Sections	EAR mentor 1	EAR mentor 2
Overall experiences of the workshop	- How was your overall experience of being a mentor in this Workshop? - How do you compare it to your previous experiences of supporting research in the centre?	
Specific questions about the Workshop	- How did your mentees benefit from this experience? - How did you benefit from this experience? - How can this initiative be improved in the future?	
Main issues mentioned in the dairies	- The role of the RCs during the Workshop - The reluctance of some participants to seek support - The ethical approval form - The potential sustainability of the Workshop	- The role of the RCs during the Workshop - Proactivity in supporting mentees - The ethical approval form - The role of administration in the success or otherwise of supporting research
ITRS in the Centre	- What do you see as the main strengths and weaknesses of the available research support in our centre?	
Ending question	- I have no further questions. Is there anything else you would like to bring up or ask about before we finish the interview?	

3.5.3 Repertory grids with follow-up interviews

With the participant teachers, I used a combination of repertory-grid and follow-up interviews. Repertory-grid interviews were originally devised in the fifties of the past century by the American psychologist George Kelly as a technique for understanding how people construe their experiences. Since then, it has been widely used by researchers "for studying personal and interpersonal systems of meaning" (Neimeyer, 2010, p. 1453) and have been used "in a wide range of educational and workplace settings" (Mann, 2016, p. 107). What distinguishes this method is that it

> has a solid conceptual basis for its structure; it provides a succinct representation of the way a person construes his world or some aspect of it; it is flexible in allowing for both individualized and normative kinds of assessment; it can be applied in an almost limitless range of contexts, and it can be used to provide many different kinds of information. (Bell, 2003, p. 103)

Fransella et al. (2004) describe repertory-grid interviews as "an attempt to stand in others' shoes, to see their world as they see it, and to understand their situation and their concerns" (p. 6). The method, however, is underpinned by Kelly's *Personal Construct Theory* (PCT), which, as noted by Bell (2017), "can be used to understand what is happening in the grid, but of course it is not essential to its use" (p. 604). In this study, it was used as an interview tool, similar to the use of photographs, illustrations, videos and vignettes (see Mann, 2016), without strict adherence to its theoretical underpinnings. That is, I used it as a research method for mainly practical rather than theoretical reasons. Because it helped teachers compare and contrast different ITRS opportunities and express their opinions in succinct phrases and words (e.g., secure vs threatening), I found it very suitable to explore what the participants thought of as facilitators and hindrances of the potential ITRS in their context. As I explain in the next chapter, I also invested in the repertory-grid interview's strength as a research method for generating in-depth data to deal with the quality threats of respondents and research's biases in insider research (see section 4.4). I will, however, give a brief theoretical background to the method to facilitate understanding of the some of the terms I will use later.

3.5.3.1 Theoretical background to repertory-grid interviews

PCT is a psychology theory developed by George Kelly, who delineated it in his two-volume book *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. Kelly based his theoretical assumptions of PCT on his philosophical position of *constructive alternativism,* which basically and reasonably claims that "all our present perceptions are open to question and reconsideration" (Kelly, 2003, p. 3) and that "there are always some alternative constructions available to choose among in dealing with the world" (Fransella & Neimeyer, 2003, p. 24). Kelly argued that humans are scientists who, based on their experiences, have their unique and sometimes contradictory theories and hypotheses of the world and are "actively engaged in making sense of and extending their experience of [it]" (Bell, 2017, p. 593). Thus, in these active meaning-making experiences, we constantly test and re-test our hypotheses in terms of their validity in predicting the future, and "we look to events to confirm our predictions and to encourage our venturesome constructions" (Kelly, 2003, p. 5).

Kelly's PCT is built upon a Fundamental Postulate extended by eleven corollaries. According to Kelly (2002, pp. 32–72), the way we act is directed by our future anticipations (*Fundamental Postulate*) that are based on our interpretations of recurrent themes and patterns of daily events (*Construction Corollary*) manifested in bipolar personal constructs (*Dichotomy Corollary*) (e.g., good vs bad). Although our interpretations and personal constructs are mainly individual constructions (*Individuality Corollary*), we can have similar interpretations as a result of shared experiences (*Commonality Corollary*) and reach interpersonal understanding through trying to construe each other's interpretations (*Sociality Corollary*). Of our finite bipolar constructs

(e.g., good vs bad), which apply to a limited range of situations (*Range Corollary*), we tend to choose the side that expands the scope of our choices (*Choice Corollary*). Our personal constructs are also organized in a hierarchical order of *superordinate* and *subordinate* constructs (*Organization Corollary*) that, despite being constant in their validation and revision (*Experience Corollary*) and tolerant in accepting new constructs not directly derived from old ones (*Fragmentation Corollary*), could resist changes beyond their convenient range of application (*Modulation Corollary*).

Central to Kelly's PCT and the repertory grid technique is *personal constructs* which he described as "ways of construing the world" formulated in "transparent patterns or templets" to facilitate the prediction of events (Kelly, 2002, p. 7). One aspect essential to comprehending constructs is their bipolarity which means that "all personal constructs have opposites" (Fransella & Neimeyer, 2003, p. 24). That is, a person makes sense of an event by contrasting its related meanings in the form of bipolar constructs (e.g., good vs bad). In an attempt to make sense of events, a person "creates and re-creates an implicit theoretical framework" of bipolar constructs (Fransella et al., 2004, p. 5) that represent "the dimensions used by a person in conceptualizing aspects of his or her world" (Bell, 2017, p. 594). Another important aspect about understanding constructs and construing their relationship with the events they distinguish is that "constructs do not represent or symbolize events" (Kelly, 2003, p. 10). Fransella et al. (2004) explain that when a person arranges events into different sets based on a bipolar construct, the bipolarity is in the construct, not in the events discriminated by the construct. To illustrate, a teacher might describe **A** and **B** of the ITRS opportunities as *secure* in contrast to **C,** which s/he found *threatening*, but **C** could also be *secure* compared to other ITRS opportunities. Therefore,

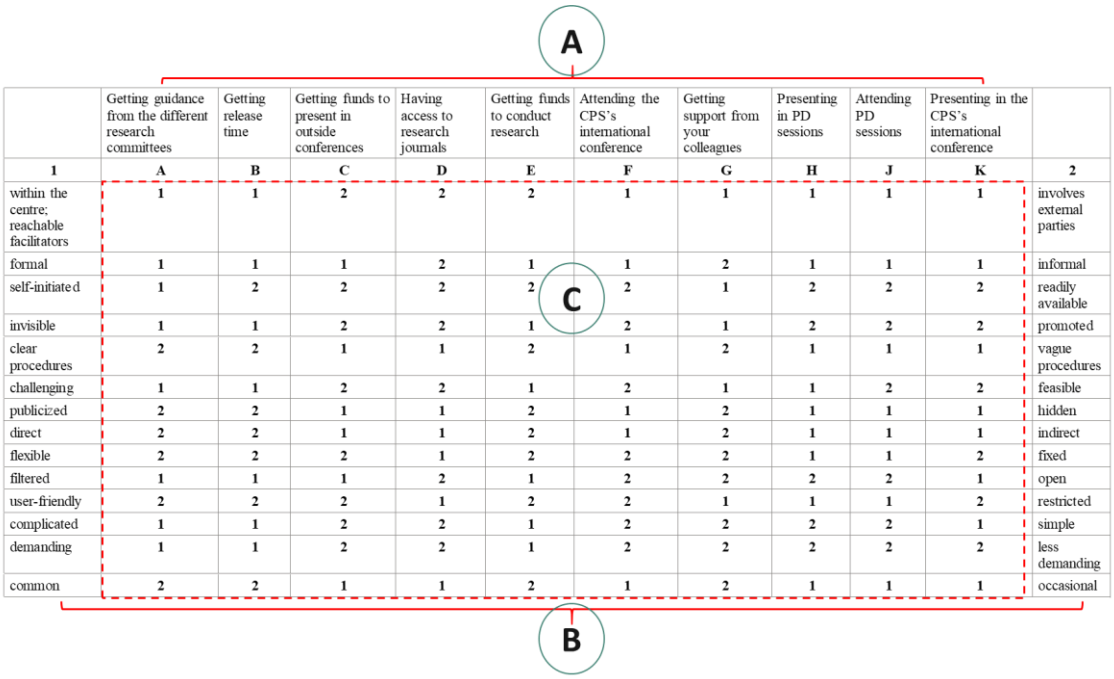
although a construct such as *secure vs threatening* could enable a person to arrange different opportunities of ITRS into groups and scales, it "refers to the nature of the distinction one attempts to make between events, not to the array in which his events appear to stand when he gets through applying the distinction between each of them and all the others" (Kelly, 2003, p. 10).

3.5.3.2 The use of repertory-grid interviews in this study

Based on Kelly's (2002) definition of a construct as "a way of seeing some things as being alike and, by the same token, as being different from other things" (p. 59), constructs are elicited in repertory-grid interviews by asking participants' to compare how two things are alike and different from a third one. There are a number of recommendations for the effective use of repertory-grid interviews (see e.g., Fransella et al., 2004; Jankowicz, 2004). Because they are different from the usual research interviews, the use of repertory-grid interviews requires more practice. Thus, once I decided to use this method, I consulted Jankowicz's (2004) *Easy Guide to Repertory Grids* to understand the basics of this type of interviews. Based on the guidance and recommendations in the book, I thought it would be helpful to practice conducting repertory-grid interviews, even about topics not necessarily related to the study. I thus started with my wife because it was convenient to get her feedback. I also conducted another repertory grid interview with another PhD student about the research support opportunities he got as a research student. When I went back to my country to do my field work, I conducted two repertory-grid interviews with two teachers about promoting speaking in English classes. While the four practice interviews were valuable in helping me reflect upon the basic skills and issues to consider when doing repertory-grid interviews, each of the main interviews conducted with the

eleven participants was a learning experience of reflection for more refined skills. These considerations are related to the main constituents of repertory-grid interviews, particularly elements (A), constructs (B) and rating (C) (see **Figure 3.2**). The definitions of these constituents and my choices and rationale regarding them are listed below.

Figure 3. 2 *A Sample of a Completed Repertory Grid*



	Getting guidance from the different research committees	Getting release time	Getting funds to present in outside conferences	Having access to research journals	Getting funds to conduct research	Attending the CPS's international conference	Getting support from your colleagues	Presenting in PD sessions	Attending PD sessions	Presenting in the CPS's international conference	
1	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	K	2
within the centre; reachable facilitators	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	involves external parties
formal	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	informal
self-initiated	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	readily available
invisible	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	promoted
clear procedures	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	vague procedures
challenging	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	feasible
publicized	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	hidden
direct	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	indirect
flexible	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	fixed
filtered	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	open
user-friendly	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	restricted
complicated	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	simple
demanding	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	less demanding
common	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	occasional

A. **Elements***:* These are topic-related examples that the researcher uses to elicit how the participants construe the topic. One common point that researchers are recommended to consider, based on their purpose, is whether to provide the elements for the elicitation of constructs or request interviewees to provide them (Jankowicz, 2004, p. 29). In this study, I tried to strike a balance between the two options. Being an insider familiar with some of the ITRS opportunities available and after my interviews with the RC members, I listed eleven elements, representing almost all the available ITRS opportunities. Thus, the choice of the elements satisfies the often-suggested criterion of being representative of all the

possible elements related to the area investigated (Fransella et al., 2004; Wright & Lam, 2002). Before each rep-grid interview, participants were also given a chance to check their familiarity with the chosen elements and add any ITRS opportunity. Fransella et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of choosing elements that are within the participant's range of convenience (see the meaning of 'range corollary' section 3.5.3.1), and this, they highlight, cannot be only determined by choosing elements related to the area investigated but also by giving the interviewee the chance to decide the applicable elements. Besides, giving the participants a chance to provide their own examples could potentially allow them to be more expressive of their perceptions (Jankowicz, 2004).

With particular interest to this study was Wright and Lam's (2002) study about wording elements. Wright and Lam (2002) significantly indicate that when repertory-grid interviews are used for the study of a system of something that might necessitate the use of heterogeneous but representative elements (including people, activities and events), the researcher might end up asking his participants to compare "apples with oranges" (p. 113). In their study of the appraisal system in organizations, they concluded that their participants found it easier and more convenient to discriminate element worded with -ing verbs than without (e.g., *attending the annual interview* instead of *the annual interview*). In this study, I had a similar case presenting heterogeneous elements in my early practice repertory-grid interviews. I, therefore, decided to reword all elements to start with -ing verbs to ensure "comparing like with like" (Wright & Lam, 2002, p. 109) (see **Table 3.9**).

Table 3. 9: *The Original Elements Reworded with -ing for the Easier Elicitation of Constructs*

Original elements	**Reworded elements**
Release time	Getting release time
Funds to attend outside conferences	Getting funds to present in outside conferences
Research journals	Having access to research journals
Funds to conduct research	Getting funds to conduct research
Support from colleagues	Getting support from your colleagues
The Centre's international conference	Presenting at the Centre's international conference Attending the Centre's international conference
The professional development (PD) sessions	Presenting in PD sessions Attending PD sessions
Guidance from the RCs	Getting guidance from the RCs
The EAR Workshop*	Participating in the EAR Workshop

Note. This element was only added to the grids of the three teachers who participated in the EAR Workshop.

B. **Constructs**: These are the basic descriptions participants provide when asked to compare the different elements of a particular topic (see **Appendix 2** for the participants' completed repertory grids). They "are essentially bipolar, that is, capable of being defined in terms

of polar adjectives (good-bad) or polar phrases (makes me feel happy–makes me feel sad)" (Bell, 2017, p. 593). The left end of the constructs is called the *emergent pole,* and the right end is called the *implicit pole*. Constructs are usually elicited through triadic elicitation in which three elements are chosen, and the participants are asked to contrast two to one. Although the guide presented in **Table 3.10** seems mechanical, it was not followed strictly to avoid obsession with eliciting constructs at the expense of generating data. Priority was given to generating constructs in a friendly environment that encouraged nuance, vividness and exemplifications (see **Appendix 3** for an extract of a repertory-grid interview transcript). I did also shift to dyadic elicitation when participants got stuck or chose to as "there is nothing sacrosanct about the triad. It is equally reasonable to use two elements for elicitation" (Fransella et al, 2004, p. 28). As I clarify later, the repertory-grid interviews were also followed by semi-structured interviews that gave more room for expanding upon and clarifying what the participants mentioned in their repertory-grid interviews.

Table 3. 10: *The Repertory Grid Guide*

Stages	Steps
Pre-elicitation	Reminder! Thank the participant and give the consent form) 1. Explain the topic and the overall purpose of the interview. 2. Start with general questions about the participant's research activities, including their past experiences and future goals. 3. Give a brief description of the grid as follows: ✓ Show how similar and different a repertory grid is from usual interviews. ✓ Show a sample repertory grid about speaking teaching tasks and demonstrate the elicitation procedure to the participants. ✓ Highlight that the purpose is not to get correct answers but to express his/her ideas in his/her own terms.

	4. Show the grid for the interview to the participant and ask him/her to take a look at the elements. 5. Make sure that the elements are clear to the participant and ask him/her to add any other type of support.
Elicitation	1. Request the participant to select three of the elements written in index cards and ask the participant: 2. Which two of these three are similar? 3. What makes them similar or different from the third one? (Reassure the participant that I am not looking for the correct answer.) 4. Write the shared aspect about the two similar elements (emergent pole) on the left side of the grid and the different one (implicit pole) on the right side of the grid. 5. Present the two phrases of the construct I have written for the first triad and check with the participant that they capture what s/he wants to say. 6. Tell the participant that the phrase on the left define the 1 of a two-point scale and the two define the other end of the scale. Then, request the participant to assign 1 to all the elements s/he thinks are closest to the left-side phrase and 2 to all the elements s/he thinks are closest to the right-side phrase. 7. Repeat steps 1-7 until no more constructs are elicited
Ending interview	Thank the participant and arrange for the follow-up semi-structured interview

Note. This guide is adapted from Jankowicz (2004, pp. 23–25)

I also noticed from the practice and main repertory-grid interviews that participants might give some vague or general adjectives or phrases to contrast the elements. For example, some teachers responded that they were both *fine*, *OK*, or *support*. When I was given similar repeated responses in practice repertory-grid interviews, I was unsure what to do, and I even doubted the method's suitability. This issue, however, was discussed by Kelly (2002), who clarified, citing Hunt (1951), that there are situations in which the interviewees might give a construct that the interviewer finds "difficult to handle systematically" (p. 155). In such cases, Kelly recommended that the interviewer records the constructs and then say: "That is one way in which they are alike. Can you tell me how

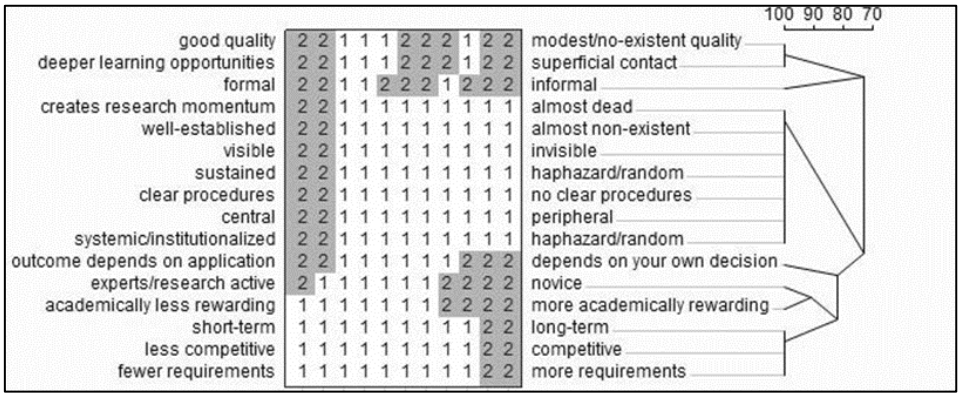
their being xxx makes them alike, or can you tell me any other way in which they are alike? or 'Is there something about them being xxx which seems to be alike?" (p. 155). This is referred to as laddering down, which is recommended when interviewees give "cliched terms" and for eliciting rich qualitative data (Jankowicz, 2004, p. 65). However, when resorting to this technique, I always had in mind what Fransella et al. (2004) justifiably emphasize:

> it must always be borne in mind that what seems superficial or vague to you as the examiner may be neither superficial nor vague to your interviewee. An easy relationship and a free flow of discussion between examiner and interviewee is the best basis for construct elicitation. (p. 25)

C. **Linking elements and constructs**: This involves asking the interviewee to link elements to the two poles of each construct. To do this, researchers usually ask interviewees to either dichotomize the elements, deciding which pole of constructs each element is close to or rate them choosing from a scale of 5 or 7 (Curtis et al., 2008, p. 2004). For this qualitative study that focuses on the participants' constructs, dichotomizing was used in which participants assign **1** to all the elements s/he thought were closer to the emergent pole and **2** to all the elements closer to the implicit pole. Asking the participants to dichotomize the different elements was done for two main related reasons that adhere to my constructivist paradigm: (1) helping them to reflect upon their use of the different ITRS opportunities and (2) thus providing a basis for further richer discussions in the follow-up interviews. Eden and Jones (1984) argue that being tempted to use the various available computer programmes for the statistical analysis of ratings in repertory grids is "antitheoretical" as it implies that an element is two-thirds of one pole of the construct and one-third of the

other (p. 783). My only use of computer programmes (namely *Rep Plus V1.1*) was for the grids cluster analysis (see **Figure 3.3**), which I only used peripherally to facilitate my initial descriptive analysis to see how constructs are grouped and thus prepare for the follow-up interviews.

Figure 3. 3 A *Sample Cluster Analysis*



To elaborate on the main points mentioned in their repertory-grid interviews, each repertory grid interview was followed by a related semi-structured interview mainly based on a basic descriptive analysis recommended by Jankowicz's (2004) to examine "the immediately obvious relationship within the grid" (p. 77). The areas I considered and the guiding questions I asked in this initial analysis are summarized in **Table 3.11** below.

Table 3. 11: *Guiding Questions for the Descriptive Analysis of Repertory grids*

Areas	Questions
Elements	**1.** How did the interviewee respond to the provided elements? **2.** What other elements did s/he provide? **3.** How are they related to the constructs? **4.** Which elements did s/he find irrelevant?
Constructs	**1.** What are the constructs elicited? **2.** How many are they? **3.** How could they be grouped?

	4. What do they say about the participant's perspective of the topic?

Note. The questions are adapted from Jankowicz (2004, pp. 77–78)

In the follow-up interview, I added *Getting ideal research support* as another element and asked the participants to dichotomize it based on the constructs generated in the first interview. Adding an ideal element is recommended to establish comparisons between the elements and generated constructs (Hunter, 1994). However, I added this element to encourage the participants to carefully review their constructs and break the ice for richer discussions. After this, the participants were asked several follow-up questions, focusing on their experiences in using some of the ITRS in the Centre (see **Table 3.12**).

Table 3. 12: *Repertory-grid Follow-up Interview Guide*

Sections	**Questions**
Introducing the interview	- Ask the participant to review the completed rep-grid to confirm that it matches what s/he wanted to say. - Ask the participant to dichotomize the additional ideal element.
Main questions	- Which of the ITRS opportunities seem to be closer to your ideal support? Why? - Which of the ITRS opportunities seem to be distant from your ideal support? Why? - What other ITRS opportunities have you used? How was your experience? - What support do you think is important to you at this stage? How easy is it to get it? Why? - How satisfied are you with the available ITRS? Why? - How satisfied are you with your use of the available ITRS? Why? - What could impact your use of the available ITRS?
Ending the interview	- I have no further questions. Is there anything else you would like to bring up or ask about before we finish the interview?

3.5.4 Document review

In research, documents, as data sources, refer to physical, visual and textual materials that exist independent of the research and might assist researchers in understanding a certain issue (Bryman, 2016, p. 553). Yin (2014) states that "documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case study research," adding that considering the convenience of obtaining them as well as their potential value, "there is little excuse omitting a thorough review of documentary evidence" (p. 107). Bryman (2016) refers to many types of documents, including official documents produced by institutions and organizations, highlighting that information obtained from such documents are "very important for researchers conducting case studies of organizations" (p. 553).

In this study, I reviewed almost all the ITRS-related documents, including:

1. The Centre's staff handbook that describes the structure and roles of the different committees and their members. It also contains the job description of teachers.
2. The University's annual report of the research support provided to the different colleges and centres.
3. The available forms and criteria for getting the ITRS available.

I used these documents for two main purposes. Yin (2014) points out that "for case study research, the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (p. 107). Thus, one primary purpose of using the ITRS-related documents was to support my understanding of the participants' perspectives during the interviews. Because documents can "provide authentic records that shed light on multiple facets of the case and can provide clues that may be useful in framing interview questions" (Olson, 2010, p. 319), the collection and review of the ITRS-related documents

were also done for the aim of asking more specific questions during the interviews. In other words, they assisted my progressive focusing of the interview questions with both the English language teachers and teacher-research facilitators.

3.5.5 Field notes

Field notes are defined as descriptive and reflective records grounded on immediate observations of contextual incidents and encounters (Ravitch, 2018, p. 677). It is considered an integral method essential for garnering contextually rich data and ensuring rigorous data analysis (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018, p. 1). It is even argued that "without proper field notes, the translation of field work into a case study cannot be successful" (Gambold, 2010, p. 397).

For data generation and analysis, field notes require "the same level of professionalism as face-to-face interactions," and this entails deciding their purpose and structure (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018, p. 6). In this case study, field notes were mainly used to triangulate self-reported data generated from interviews (Ravitch, 2018, p. 677). Guided by the purpose of my study, my field notes were based on:

- informal chats with the teachers and the teacher-research facilitators
- mentoring session of the EAR's participants
- meetings with the central RC regarding the EAR workshop
- meetings with the EAR's mentors
- events and announcements related to the ITRS in the Centre

For deciding their structure, Gambold (2010) indicates that "there is an air of mystery surrounding field notes and what they should contain," but she explains that "the successful method for each individual will come only through individual experience.

Through trial and error, a system is born" (p. 398). In this study, I tried to follow a simple and easy way to maintain the structure of my field notes, including two main elements: a descriptive account followed by comments about what was observed (see **Table 3.13**). Similar to my reflective diary, I found recording my field notes before writing them more practical. I often recorded them immediately in my car and wrote them at a convenient time later.

Table 3. 13: *Sample of Field Notes*

Event	Visibility Forum
Date	06/12/2018
Description	Today was the Visibility Forum in which members of the Centre's different committees, including one of the research committees, came in one place to display their roles and responsibilities. The invitation poster for the Forum showed a different name than the one sent in the email. In the poster, the name of the forum was VAST (visibility, accessibility, support and transparency). I knew about this event from my interviews with the RC members two months in advance. I also had the details of how and why it was planned. Before going to the event, I didn't expect many teachers to be there as it was 1.00 pm on Thursday (the last day of the week). Teachers usually leave early on Thursdays as there are no classes after 12. To my surprise, there were around 40 teachers, including the committees' members. There were big posters on the walls of the hall showing the roles and responsibilities of each committee. I immediately went to one of the RC members and started chatting with him. X explained that the Forum would start with a presentation about the philosophy of the Forum given by one of the members. As I was told earlier, X confirmed that the whole idea of the Forum came from one RC, aiming to make itself visible to teachers in the Centre. The administration, however, thought that it would be a good idea to involve other committees. X also told me that some members were not satisfied with involving other committees as it would be distracting for the teachers. X added that it was unfair as some of the participating committees were well-known to teachers, and it was their committee that needed more promotion. The presentation started, and the presenter (the RC member) did state who conceived the idea of the Forum and why it was initially planned. The presenter went on explaining what each letter of the word VAST stood for. She then presented the history of the RC in the Centre, acknowledging former efforts.

	After the presentation, we were invited to go around and see what each committee had. I went to stand with the RC members. About five teachers approached the committee, almost all of them were not sure of the structure and the particular role of the RCs in the centre. The members' repeated answer was they were supposed to complement each other. One member mentioned that the departmental research committees were currently inactive in the research part, and they had been busy with the other projects related to supervising material writing. The member added that the Forum was one step to activate this part of their responsibilities. Towards the end of the Forum, one member approached me, asking for my opinion of what they did. I praised their efforts, but I asked about the role of the two other RCs in organizing the event. X answered that two of them were representatives in the central committee, but the other departmental committee didn't participate. Another member joined the conversation and said that the forum was a bottom-up initiative, and they even paid for the poster. X added that their role was to make themselves visible, and they couldn't make more than that. Our conversation was interrupted and shifted to a different topic by another teacher. Then we left the room.
Comments	• This event was very important to me because it was repeatedly referred to during my interviews with the RC members. • The name of the forum represented some of the main concerns the members had about their role in the Centre, and visibility seems to be a central issue. From my discussions with the members and their responses to the teachers' questions today, I can see that they seem to be confused about their roles and responsibilities. • The absence of the other departmental research committee raises questions about the cooperation between the two committees and the role of the central RC in this. This issue has been raised during my interviews with the RC members.

3.6 Summary

This chapter shed light on four main areas of the methodology of this study: the research paradigm adopted in this study, the research approach used, the case and samples selected, and the data generation methods applied. In the first section, I tried to elucidate my position as a constructivist researcher regarding the nature of reality, the nature of

knowledge, the nature of inquiry, the place of values and the considerations of ethics. The second section introduced my research design of this qualitative case study, focusing on the specific features and strengths of a qualitative case study approach to exploring the facilitators and impediments of ITRS in my context. The third section detailed the methods used to generate data, including the reasons for choosing each method and the specific steps followed in the use of each method. In the next chapter, I will continue discussing and clarifying my methodology, particularly the data analysis approach, the ethical considerations, and the research quality measures.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY II

4.1 Introduction

This is the second chapter delineating my methodology. The chapter has three main sections. The first section (4.2) focuses on the data analysis approach adopted in the study. I first start with presenting and justifying the general thematic analysis model used before detailing the specific steps followed for analyzing the data. The section ends with clarifying the role of writing the report of the findings in contributing towards a more refined analysis and interpretation of data. The second section (4.3) states the ethical considerations taken in this study. Here, I start with the general measures taken for gaining access and ensuring that the study was carried out in an ethical way. As research quality is considered one dimension of ethics in doing research, the second part of the ethics section discusses some of the strengths and potential threats of my position as an insider. The last section (4.4) continues the discussion of my position as an insider, its potential threats to quality and the measures taken to address them.

4.2 Data analysis

Wolcott (1994) highlights that "the real mystique of qualitative inquiry lies in the processes of using data rather than in the processes of gathering data" (p. 1). Qualitative researchers have a wide array of data analysis approaches to choose from. However, fitness for purpose is the usual advice given (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 643). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) succeeded to capture this advice in their often-cited quotation:

> Analysis is not about adhering to any one correct approach or set of right techniques; it is imaginative, artful, flexible, and reflexive. It should also be methodical, scholarly, and intellectually rigorous. (p.10)

4.2.1 The general model for the thematic analysis of data

For analyzing data, I chose the method of inductive thematic analysis for two main reasons. First, it is suitable with the case study design of this research that aims to understand the patterns in what the language teachers and the teacher-research facilitators see facilitating or hindering the ITRS in the centre. Lapadat (2010) explains that through thematic analysis's inductive cyclical process of coding and identifying themes, a case study researcher can build "a complex exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory case analysis grounded in the particulars of the case" (p. 926). Second, for new qualitative researchers, Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend starting with thematic analysis because it is a flexible "foundational method" that involves many of the core techniques and skills used in other approaches to qualitative analysis (p. 78).

There are many available descriptions of how to go about coding and theming qualitative data (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2019; Bryman, 2016; Dey, 2003; Saldaña, 2016). However, I found Friese's (2014) NCT (*noticing*, *collecting* and *thinking*) model for analyzing qualitative data most suitable in providing the general thematic analysis framework for this study. This is because it provides a flexible guide particularly developed, based on Seidel's (1998) basic process of qualitative data analysis, for analyzing qualitative data with ATLAS ti., the computer programme I used to facilitate and manage the analysis of my data. The model lists three iterative stages within two phases of analysis that capture the usually described stages of thematic analysis (see **Table**

4.1). First comes the *descriptive level* of analysis, in which the researcher reads through and listens to the data, takes notes, marks interesting segments and attaches "preliminary codes," followed by process of coding and recoding that depends "on the underlying research questions, research aim and overall methodology" (Friese, 2014, p. 13). Then comes the *conceptual level* of analysis in which the researcher asks two questions: "How do the various parts of the puzzle fit together? How can we integrate the various aspects of the findings in order to develop a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon studied?" (Friese, 2014, p. 14). The conceptual level of analysis is about abstracting from data while keeping in mind what Noam Chomsky emphasized about abstracting from data in one of his recent YouTube interviews:

> You have to be careful about abstraction. It's fine. It brings out crucial elements that you can use as a way of more intricate studies of complex phenomena. That's all a contribution. But it has to be done with a kind of humility, an awareness that you're studying something special and that there's much more happening. (Chomsky, 2020, 2:10)

As shown in **Figure 4.1**, these NCT steps are not linear but rather recursive, "moving back and forth between noticing, collecting and thinking" within and across the different data sets and extending to writing the report (Friese, 2014, p. 12).

Figure 4. 1 *The NCT Analysis Model for Thematic Analysis*

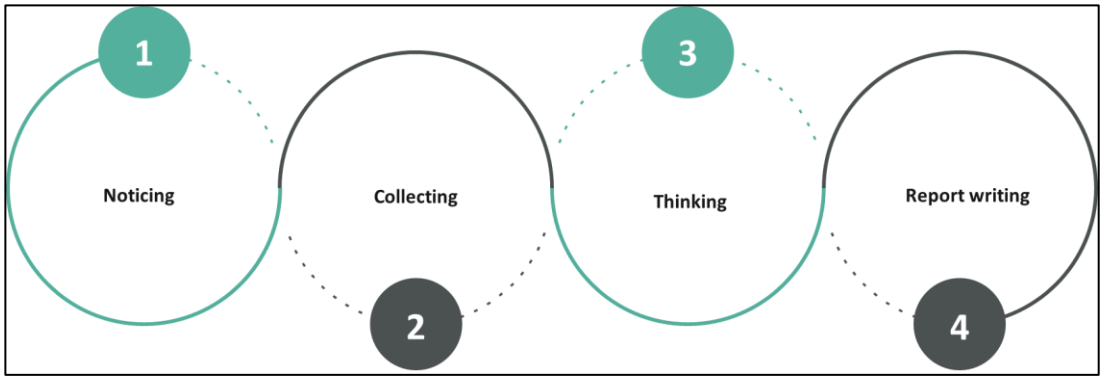


Table 4. 1**:** *The NCT Analysis Model for Thematic Analysis*

Phases	**Steps**
Descriptive level analysis	*Noticing:* reading through or listening to the data, taking notes and marking interesting data *Collecting*: reading further to code and recode the data
Conceptual level analysis	*Thinking:* elaborating codes into themes and finding patterns or relations among them, using different ATLAS.ti tools (e.g., network view)

4.2.2 Analysis of data from teacher-research facilitators

The data from the teacher-research facilitators included semi-structured interviews with the RC members and reflective diaries, and follow-up interviews with the EAR mentors. Following the above-described NCT model, the thematic analysis of the interviews with the teacher-research facilitators went through the following steps:

Noticing:

As indicated earlier, as a qualitative researcher, I adhered to a non-linear and recursive inductive process of data analysis and interpretation which started alongside the data generation stage of this study (Willis, 2007). I started my thematic analysis with what can be referred to as the process of "noticing" (Friese, 2014, p. 131) or "familiarization" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 852). After finishing the first interview with the first RC member, I was very eager to return home and start listening to the recorded audio. There were three purposes for my listening: (1) reflecting upon how I conducted the interview and what I need to improve in my following interview, (2) taking notes of interesting data guided by my research question and (3) refining the focus of my interview questions for the coming interviews.

After listening many times to the recorded interview, I decided to start transcribing it immediately not only to save time later but also to facilitate my initial analysis of the data. This process was repeated with the other interviews with the RC members as well as the EAR mentors' reflective diaries and follow-up interviews. It was an opportunity for "becoming 'immersed' in the data and connecting with them in different ways" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 852) and "to 'pre-code' by circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich or significant participant quotes or passages that strike you – those 'codable moments' worthy of attention" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 19). There were initially four prominent topics about ITRS in the Centre evident in the responses of RC members and the EAR mentors alike: clarity, coordination, sustainability, and commitment.

Collecting:

After transcribing all my interviews with the teacher-research facilitators, my field notes, the important ITRS-relevant documents, the transcripts of my interviews with the RC members and the EAR mentors' dairies and transcripts of follow-up interviews were uploaded to ATLAS ti. for the inductive coding and recoding of data. I divided the files uploaded to ATLAS ti. into four groups: RC Members, EAR mentors, Field Notes and Documents. This was done to "contribute to the clear organization of the data material" and compare and contrast the data from the four groups (Friese, 2014, p. 118).

To develop a coding system, I started with coding and recoding five of the interviews with the RC's members. This step was necessary to save time by limiting the possibility of having to "go through all documents again to apply newly developed subcategories and recheck all other codings" (Friese, 2014, p. 128). In this first cycle of coding, I tried to keep to the participants' own words using In Vivo coding, which "has also been labeled 'literal coding,' 'verbatim coding,' 'inductive coding,' 'indigenous coding,' 'natural coding,' and 'emic coding'" to refer to codes taken from the participants' words and phrases (Saldaña, 2016, p. 105). Some of the early In Vivo codes I used were *no rationale for change*, *feeling restricted*, *do things to a minimum*, and *not consultative*. Using such a coding method was done to "prioritize and honour the participant's voice" and bring me closer to the participants' views (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106). Saldaña (2016) also recommends In Vivo coding "for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data" (p. 106). The first cycle of coding was stopped when reaching the "first saturation point," which is technically recognized "when no new codes are being added and you only use drag and drop coding" in ATALS ti. (Friese, 2014, p. 128). Before

starting the second cycle of coding, the codes from the initial list were merged, renamed or subsumed. The initial list of codes produced was used to code the rest of the interviews with the RC members.

The same steps were followed with the dairy entries and the follow-up interviews of the EAR mentors. This step was accompanied by writing memos (notes) about the created codes while reading and making links between the coded data and both the ITRS-documents and my field notes. In writing memos, it is recommended that the researcher jot down quickly any ideas about their analysis of the data "to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 6). Charmaz (2006) regards this step of writing analytic notes as a "pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing" (p.72). Although it was hard to commit my ideas to writing, I found this step very helpful in engaging in a self-dialogue about my data and facilitating a deeper and more reflective analysis. **Table 4.2** shows two samples of my edited memos.

Table 4. 2: *Sample Edited Memos*

Name	**Content**
More communication	There is a general feeling of limited communication and bottom-up decision making. The participants highlighted the need for enough communication among the people involved in ITRS in the centre. Most of the participants, however, were not very satisfied with the amount of communication happening. Their responses indicated a general feeling of a lack of communication flow that was usually happening at the top (e.g., "There is no clarity about things. Although there is communication, the communication usually is happening between heads or officers" [RCM7]). This was also evident during the EAR Workshop. As mentors, we felt the need for more communication between the RCs and us. As mentors, we expected more consultative meetings with the RCs to discuss how best to embed the Workshop as a new sustainable ITRS

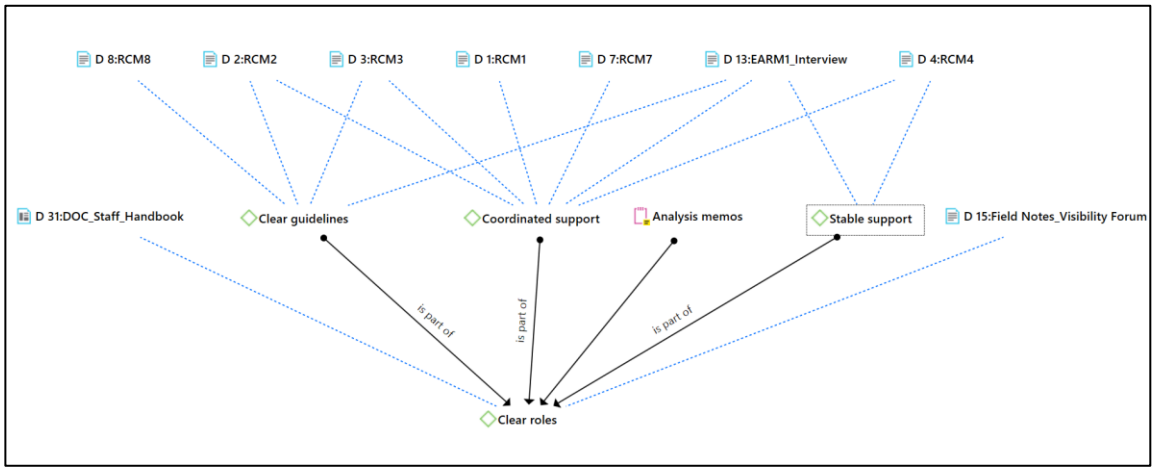
	opportunity and deal with the hurdle of ethical approvals. The RC members also stressed the need for more bottom-up communication and thus more influence and a better understanding of the occurring changes and taken decisions. Many participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the top-down decision-making regarding the ITRS in the centre.
Clear roles	There is a shared concern among the RC members of the overlapping and uncoordinated duties among them. This was repeatedly highlighted. Many participants repeated words such as "overlapping", "clashes", "confusing", and "restrict". Overall their responses do not show that they are clear about what they are supposed to do. [My field notes about the VAST forum is an example]. This was linked with some members feelings of confusion and helplessness. I consider the EAR ethical incident a clear example of this. The mentors clearly felt that it was their role to ensure the ethical part of their mentees' projects. There was clearly a general feeling among us, as mentors, of this overlapping. What could have made this step more coordinated with what was happening in the EAR workshops? The teachers did not see the step as appropriate either. They thought of it as a hurdle. The question here is, why was the ethical form made tormenting to teachers?! Another question is what do they focus on when reviewing these ethical applications?! The process of the ethical approval took almost two months! This could be linked to another code, clear guidelines.

Thinking:

After coding the data came the process of thinking more deeply about how the coded data fitted together and consolidated each other (Friese, 2014, p. 100). This was the stage when the researcher, as described by Saldaña (2016), starts to "progress toward the thematic, conceptual, and theoretical" (p. 12). However, this did not mean that some theming was not started earlier as I was coding my data and writing my memos. After all, "qualitative researchers are not algorithmic automatons" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 14), and qualitative analysis is not a linear process. What distinguished this stage from the earlier stage was moving from codes that tried to capture explicit meanings close to the participants' language to "latent codes [that] focus on a deeper, more implicit or conceptual level of

meaning, sometimes quite abstracted from the explicit content of the data" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 853). Here, I used the network function in ATLAS ti. to facilitate the process of "thematic mapping – a process of visually exploring potential themes and subthemes, and connections between them" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 855) (see **Figure 4.2**).

Figure 4. 2 *Network of Themes and Subthemes*



4.2.3 Analysis of interviews with teachers

Of particular significance in applying the above-described NCT model is considering the coding procedure and eventually theming the constructs of repertory-grid interviews. Because repertory grids can be used to examine "how individuals in the group share meaning in some domain" based on the *commonality corollary* of PCT (Shaw, 1994, p. 35) (see section 3.5.3), one analysis option is to categorize constructs based on their expressed meanings, "by looking at them systematically and identifying the various themes they express" (Jankowicz, 2004, p. 148). For this purpose, "each and every construct is regarded as expressing a single unit of meaning" (Jankowicz, 2004, p. 149), and thus multiple grids are "analyzed by performing a content analysis on each and identifying or interpreting common emergent themes" (Curtis et al., 2008, p. 50). For

example, in their attempt to find how university lecturers and students perceive good teaching, Reid and Johnston (1999) started with coding the 211 constructs into 22 categories grouped under six main dimensions. Williams et al. (2019) used repertory grids to explore how some UK employers and educators perceived employability. Their repertory grids with the 36 participants resulted in 717 constructs grouped into four main categories based on their meanings. Outside education, Hair et al. (2009) indicated that "the quantity and range of constructs proved an encouraging basis" for the thematic analysis of their data (p. 59).

The above examples and many others show that grouping and analyzing constructs is not unexplored territory. However, doing this either within or across cases is not without disputes (Green, 2004). One source of these disputes is mainly theoretical related to what Bell (2017) referred to as "the tension between individuality and commonality" and how cross-case analysis of constructs ignores their representation of individual unique constructions (p. 604). While I agree with the principles of PCT, I think that the purposes and context of using repertory grids as a research method are different from its original use in psychology, and thus there needs to be room for its creative use provided being adherent to its constructivist orientation. After all, as I clarified earlier, "the theory can be used to understand what is happening in the grid, but of course it is not essential to its use" (Bell, 2017, p. 604).

The disputes of coding constructs also stem from valid fears of wrong or shallow interpretations of the participants' intended meanings. Based on by review of the relevant literature and my practical experience of analyzing and coding constructs, I found out that this could occur for two related reasons:

1. *Context-devoid abstractions*: This occurs when constructs are grouped without considering the context in which they are mentioned, and this could result in a shallow interpretation of them. Yorke (1989) warns that the "construing of events is clearly an activity-rich in its variety of texture and colour", and thus pooling constructs devoid of context could result in "something analogous to a Mondrian canvas-a rectilinear abstraction devoid of other than primary colours" (p. 75). Yorke (1989) calls for a freer approach for the elicitation and analysis of grids in which there is no "tendency to concentrate on grid data and statistical analysis at the expense of any "untidier" information that has been proffered" (p. 72). To achieve this, participants, according to him, should be "encouraged to give expanded construals" (Yorke, 1989, p. 74).
2. *Meaning-mixed abstractions*: This occurs when the researcher groups constructs, either within or across cases, based on their dictionary meanings rather than the participants' intended meanings. As noted by Kelly (2002) in his warning to psychologists applying grids, being "literalistically minded" in the interpretation of constructs might result in the misinterpretation of the respondent's meanings (p. 253). Relevant to this, Shaw (1994) describes four possible relationships when comparing constructs across cases: (1) *consensus* (similar words are used to express similar meanings), (2) *correspondence* (different words are used to express the same meaning), (3) *conflict* (the same word is used to express different meanings) and (4) *contrast* (different words are used to express different meanings) (p. 36). Based on this, grouping constructs with the second or third relationship devoid of their original content means imposing new meanings upon them.

To deal with these issues, it is recommended that researchers consider the context in which the constructs are mentioned (Green, 2004; Yorke, 1989), and to achieve this, I took the following measures:

1. To ensure the often recommended "easy relationship and a free flow of discussion" during the rep-grid interviews (Fransella et al., 2004, p. 25), the constructs were generated in a friendly environment that encouraged nuance, vividness and exemplifications rather than being mechanically obsessed with the technical aspects of construct elicitation (see **Appendix 3** for an extract of a repertory-grid interview transcript). As a constructivist qualitative researcher, I valued the potential of repertory grids in generating rich qualitative data that could facilitate the construction of a clearer picture of the investigated topic.
2. To avoid the meaning-mixed abstractions of cross-case constructs and to be faithful to the intended meanings of the individual participants, I grouped each participant's constructs into initial categories using what Bazeley and Jackson (2013) call "broad-brush coding", which is helpful for grouping data "into broad topic areas, as a first step to seeing what is there, or to identify just those passages that will be relevant to your investigation – or indeed, those that aren't immediately relevant but which could become so later" (p.71). The initial categorization was based on careful listening to how each participant clarified each side of their construct (see **Table 4.3**). This step generated vibrant discussions in the follow-up interviews and helped me check my initial analysis thoughts with my participants.

Table 4. 3: *Sample of Initial Categories of Construct**s***

1	2	Initial categories
local	external	how reachable the support is
formal	informal	how clear the support is
self-initiated	readily available	how clear the support is
invisible	promoted	how clear the support is
clear procedures	vague procedures	how clear the support is
challenging	feasible	how reachable the support is
publicized	hidden	how clear the support is
direct	indirect	how reachable the support is
flexible	fixed	how reachable the support is

3. Each rep-grid was followed by a semi-structured interview during which participants had the chance to clarify and extend upon their generated constructs. I showed the participants their completed grids with the additional comments and my initial analysis of their label constructs. Here, I was open to the participants' suggestions and justifications of any change to the labels of their intended constructs and the potential categories under which they might be grouped. I found this very useful in generating rich discussions important for gaining depth to deal with respondent bias in insider research (Teusner, 2016) (see section 3.9).

4. The coding of the constructs happened within a rigorous process of an NCT model of thematic analysis (see **Table 4.4**).

Table 4. 4*: The phases and steps for the thematic analysis of the interviews with the teachers*

Phases	Steps
Noticing	**1.** Listen carefully to each rep-grid interview before its follow-up in order to add any extra clarification about the meaning of each construct. **2.** Group constructs into initial categories and validate them with the participants (see **Table 4.3**) **3.** Transcribe the repertory-grid and follow-up interviews, and take early notes.

Collecting	**1.** Import the transcripts of the repertory-grids and follow-up interviews to ATLAS.ti for analysis. **2.** Code the repertory-grid and follow-up interviews of four teachers (first cycle coding). Use each construct as a code. (e.g., Code: FAMILIAR vs UNFAMILIAR Code: FLEXIABLE vs FIXED Code: LOCAL vs EXTERNAL) **3.** Merge, rename or subsume codes from the first cycle of coding. (e.g., Code: PROACTIVE SUPPORT Subcode: PUBLICIZED vs HIDDEN Subcode: PROMOTED vs INVISIBLE Subcode: PROACTIVE vs INACTIVE Code: INSTITUTIONALLY ORGANIZED SUPPORT Subcode: INSTITUTIONALIZED vs RANDOM Subcode: SYSTEMATIC vs RANDOM Subcode: FORMAL vs INFORMAL) **4.** Use the refined codes to start a second cycle of coding of all the interviews. **5.** Continue coding and refining codes until no new codes are being added.
Thinking	**1.** Sort and collate codes into overarching themes. (e.g., Theme: **Visibility of the support** Code: WELL-PROMOTED Subcode: PROACTIVE SUPPORT Subcode: BALANCED PROMOTION Code: COMMONLY USED SUPPORT Subcode: INDIVIDUDAUL GUIDANCE Subcode: COLLECTIVE ENCOURAGEMENT Theme: **Relativeness of the support** Code: USER-FRIENDLY ACCESS Subcode: CLEAR PROCDURES Subcode: ONE-STOP ACCESS Code: INCLUSIVE SUPPORT Subcode: CONSIDERING TIME Subcode: CONSIDERING R. SKILS **2.** Review and refine the coherence of themes with the coded extracts. **3.** Consider the relationships among the created themes. (e.g., Main Theme: *Accessibility of the support* Subtheme 1: **Visibility of the support** Code: WELL-PROMOTED Subcode: PROACTIVE SUPPORT Subcode: BALANCED PROMOTION Code: COMMONLY USED SUPPORT Subcode: INDIVIDUDAUL GUIDANCE

Subcode: COLLECTIVE ENCOURAGEMENT
Subtheme 2: **Relativeness of the support**
Code: USER-FRIENDLY ACCESS
Subcode: CLEAR PROCDURES
Subcode: ONE-STOP ACCESS
Code: INCLUSIVE SUPPORT
Subcode: CONSIDERING TIME
Subcode: CONSIDERING R. SKILs

4.2.4 Method of reporting and presenting data

As rightly stated by Dey (1993), "producing an account is not just a question of reporting results; it is also another method of producing these results" (p. 245). The whole analysis process was therefore accompanied by writing the report of the findings. I found this very helpful and important as

> writing is thinking. It is natural to believe that you need to be clear in your mind what you are trying to express first before you can write it down. However, most of the time, the opposite is true. You may think you have a clear idea, but it is only when you write it down that you can be certain that you do (or sadly, sometimes, that you do not). (Gibbs, 2008, p. 25)

Thus, although writing the final report served "as a final test of how well the themes work, individually in relation to the dataset, and overall" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 857), "interim accounts" were used as another analytic tool whose "value lies in the obligation it imposes upon us to produce an accessible and acceptable report of our analysis" (Dey, 1993, p. 245).

For producing an accessible and acceptable report, the writing and rewriting of the results were constantly checked against Rubin and Rubin's (2005, p. 259) useful checklist of guiding questions:

1. Will the meanings of the presented themes be clear to the readers?
2. Are the findings presented in a clear, logical way?
3. Are the selected quotations illustrative of each point?
4. Do major points receive roughly equal amounts of presentation and discussion?

Based on this, I decided to organize and present the findings in the coming two chapters by groups (Chapter 5: teacher-research facilitators/ Chapter 6: teachers) and by themes (Chapter 5: themes constructed from the teacher-research facilitators' accounts/ Chapter 6: themes constructed from the teachers' accounts).

4.3 Ethical Considerations

As stated by Cohen et al. (2017), "the planning of educational research is not an arbitrary matter; the research itself is an inescapably ethical enterprise" (p. 109). In this section, I highlight some of the main ethical issues relevant to this study.

4.3.1 Ethical measures and gaining access

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) distinguish between two dimensions of ethics: "procedural ethics" and "ethics in practice", using the former to refer to obtaining ethical approval from a research committee and the latter to refer to ethical issues during the research process (p. 262). For me, the two dimensions were significant, and I, therefore, tried to understand and comply with the ethical standards and guidelines delineated in the Centre for Applied Linguistics Research Students' Handbook as well as the literature (e.g., Lewis et al., 2014; Rallis & Rossman, 2009). The ethical measures for ethical approval and gaining access to the research site taken were as follows:

1. The ethical compliance and the potential ethical issues were discussed with my supervisor before being officially assessed and approved by the research ethics officer of the Centre of Applied Linguistics at my university.
2. In my negotiation to gain access to the research site, I followed the regular ethical procedure in the study context, the Centre. The procedure involved emailing the person in charge to get a clearer picture of what is expected for having my research approved. I then followed the official procedure by filling an online form, clearly stating the purpose of my study and the ethical measures I would take. My application was then reviewed and approved by a committee of five members (see **Appendix 4**).
3. Considering the possibility that "access might also be denied by the potential sample participants themselves" (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 213) and honouring the right for voluntary participation in my study, all potential participants were sent a clear information sheet detailing the aim of the study and all the likely benefits, rights and risks of their participation. In addition, all the participants were asked if they needed any clarification concerning their participation before filling and signing the consent forms.
4. Being rigorous and systematic in carrying out the research process does not only contribute to how trustworthy its results are but also to how ethically it was conducted (Teusner, 2016). Thus, with my supervisor's consistent consultation, I made sure that my research was carried out systematically and rigorously.

4.3.2 Being an insider

One of the ethical issues that deserve attention is my position as a researcher with regard to the research site. As a practitioner researching my own context, I was an insider doing

"endogenous research" (Trowler, 2011, p. 1) that, despite its advantages, often "raises complex ethical and methodological issues" (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p. 48).

There are many pragmatic and quality advantages associated with being an insider. The most prominent of which are:

1. *Insider research can be time-saving*. Being an insider can potentially facilitate the researcher's access to the research site and the sample participants and thus bypass the time-consuming process of negotiating access and building rapports (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p. 48). Because of their expected relationships with their colleagues, insiders usually enjoy the privilege of flexible times for meeting participants in an easily reached site (Teusner, 2016, p. 85).
2. *Insider research can yield richer data and a deeper understanding*. The pre-existing trust and rapport between an insider and his participants might offer "the potential for gathering different, perhaps more illuminative, data which can tell a more informed story" (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p. 48) and "emic accounts (ones meaningful to actors)" (Trowler, 2011, p. 2). What can add to this is what Teusner (2016) describes as the "intimate knowledge of the context", i.e. an insider might not only be familiar with the context's history and present but can also be more aware of the discrepancy or otherwise between its formally stated life in its documents and informally lived experiences in practice (p.85).

However, although being an insider might give the researcher the "distinct advantage" of willingly cooperated colleagues or the assumption of "automatically granted" access to a familiar context (Burton et al., 2014, p. 57), this does not exempt insiders from negotiating their "unusual" access of their "additional role" as researchers

(Menter et al., 2011, p. 57). For me, I felt privileged as an insider who knew the gatekeepers to the research site, but I also felt worried not only because the new structure of the three committees was confusing but also because the gatekeepers are the very same members of the central research committee I am focusing on in my research. Therefore, it is reasonably argued that *insiderness*, including its usually associated advantages, is better viewed as a continuum rather than "a fixed value" (Trowler, 2011, p. 1). Taylor et al. (2016) point out that the process of gaining access could be the starting point for knowing the hierarchy and structure of the research site (p.51), and so was the case with me. Despite its awkwardness, the process of gaining access was the start of getting a better insight into the structure and hierarchy of the RCs.

In spite of its often-cited quality advantage of producing richer data and deeper understanding, "insider research has been under scrutiny for the very fact that the insider is an actor within the setting" (Teusner, 2016, p. 86), and insider researchers are advised to consider "the double sword inherent in the situation" of insiderness (Berger, 2015, p. 230). Trowler (2011) mentions the following critiques concerning the quality of insider research:

1. Failing to construct unbiased reports
2. Being insensitive to some contextual aspects due to familiarity
3. Handling possibly incompatible roles as a researcher, professional and student
4. Getting altered responses from participants aware of the researcher's position and prejudices

Although "these same issues – albeit from a different perspective – also present challenges in outsider research" (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p. 51), they are important issues that could

affect the quality of the research results, and thus considerations for addressing them are delineated in the next section.

4.4 Research Quality

The above-mentioned quality concerns of insider research are common threats of quality in qualitative research, including outsider research. However, the historical shifts of qualitative research from modernist to post-modernist philosophical positions (see section 3.4) and the perceived incommensurability between the two positions in judging research quality has resulted, as described by Seale (1999), in the "conceptual proliferation" of quality standards in qualitative research (p. 467). Searching for the meaning of validity in qualitative research, a researcher is "treated to a confusing array of terms" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124). Seale (1999) warns that engaging intensely with such discussions of methodological rules of quality could deter the researcher's progress unless "taken in small doses … to guard against more obvious errors" (p. 475). In relation to insider research, Teusner (2016) rightly suggests that amidst the proliferation of terms related to quality in qualitative research, interest needs to be directed to the ongoing scrutiny of the research process by being aware of some threats to the quality of research, their potential causes and the measures needed to address them. By doing so, "rather than being distracted by the trinity of validity, generalizability and reliability", the focus is "realigned to examine the quality of work by the researcher throughout the research period" (Teusner, 2016, p. 87).

As I clarified in the previous section, the possible threats to quality in insider research are many, but they can generally be grouped under two main categories:

respondent-related and researcher-related quality issues. Regarding the former, respondent bias is one known threat to quality in qualitative research, and it is used to refer "to whether the subjects of the study had certain biases that may have affected the method or findings of the study" (Holosko, 2010, p. 350). In insider research specifically, as I indicated in the previous section, a researcher's pre-existing relationships with their participants are likely to grant them the advantage of already established trust and rapport and thus potentially rich emic accounts. However, Teusner (2016) highlights that an insider needs to be alert to the possibility that the respondents might either give responses in the researcher's favour or withhold important information from them. The second category of threats to quality in insider research is related to researchers whose familiarity with the context might result in assumptions and biases about the phenomenon studied, and thus they may unintentionally misinterpret data or miss important information (Teusner, 2016). In other words, quality in insider research requires reflexivity, i.e., the "conscious process of thought and articulation centred on the dynamics of subjectivities in relation to the interviewer, the interviewee(s), and the research focus and methodology" (Mann, 2016, p. 15). **Table 4.5** summarizes these, providing the specific steps taken in this study to carry out the following measures.

Table 4. 5: *Research Quality: Threats, Causes and Measures*

Category	**Possible quality threats**	**Possible causes of quality threats**	**Measures taken to ensure quality**	**Details**
respondent-related	- giving favourable answers to please the researcher - withholding information	relationship with participants (colleagues)	providing reassurances	- Making clear the purpose of the study - Assuring participants of confidentiality
			seeking depth during interviews	- Focusing on probing and follow-up questions - Using repertory grids that brought depth to interviews
researcher-related	- misinterpreting data - missing important information	assumptions and biases due to former knowledge of context	triangulation	- Corroborating evidence from different participants and data generation methods
			researcher diaries	- Focusing on what and how data was generated, particularly during my interviews
			prolonged engagement	- Staying in the field for eight months has resulted in rich field notes and better understanding of the investigated topic

4.4.1 Dealing with respondent-related quality issues

One dimension of reflexivity in research interviews, as clarified by Mann (2016), is "understanding of the impact of identities and interpersonal relationships in the field" (p. 17). Powney and Watts (1987) note that "known or expected alignments or loyalties are crucial to the way in which an interviewer is perceived" (p. 40). That is, "people's willingness to talk to you, and what people say to you, is influenced by who they think you are" (Drever, 2003, p. 50). Although I had a good rapport with my participants, as an insider, I did have in mind the prospect that they might either refrain from expressing their opinions or give responses to satisfy me as a colleague.

In the case of the participant teachers particularly, I was alert that "preconceptions may colour accounts, because so much more is already known (or thought to be known) about the interviewer's opinions" (Mercer, 2007, p. 8). In other words, it was likely that they would give responses that would match my position and opinions about ITRS in the Centre. I still remember the case of a colleague whose PhD study was about formative assessment, and she requested to observe some of my classes. Before observing one of my classes, another participant teacher, whose class she observed before me, told me that he prepared formative assessment tasks to show her that he was doing them. I thus expected such a thing to happen in my interviews with the teachers. To deal with this potential threat to quality, the use of repertory-grid interviews was to a great extent successful in helping me stand in the teachers' shoes "to see their world as they see it, and to understand their situation and their concerns" (Fransella et al., 2004, p. 6). The repertory-grid interviews enabled me to start with the participants' constructs rather than my questions and generate rich accounts of their main perspectives and concerns about the ITRS in the Centre (see

Appendix 3 for an extract of a repertory-grid interview transcript). The follow-up semi-structured interviews were also opportunities for bringing more nuance and clarity to what the participants mentioned in their repertory-grid interviews.

Teusner (2016) points out two other measures to avoid the possibility of participants giving responses agreeable with the colleague researcher's point of view. The first measure is to try to take "great care to avoid discussions about the research topic with potential participants so as to avoid contaminating their perspective" (Teusner, 2016, p. 90). However, as a constructivist who values the interactive and democratic relationship between the researcher and the participants, I found the informal encounters with my colleagues and the mentoring sessions with the EAR participants very rich opportunities for reaching a sophisticated and multidimensional understanding of the examined topic. Rather than avoiding discussions with my potential participants altogether, I made use of my informal encounters with them as opportunities for meaning-making and co-constructing data, starting from and focusing on their concerns and eliciting their views about ITRS in the Centre. The second measure suggested by Teusner (2016) is to give respondents the "time to answer questions without interruption and scrutiny" (p. 90). Mann (2016) cautions that insiders "have the most problem hearing the interviewee's response and resisting the urge to share their perspective" (p. 118). This problem, I think, is very much related not only to the researcher's interviewing skills but also to his ability to be reflexive and reflective during and after interviews. As a novice researcher, I paid particular attention to how I conducted my interviews, and I viewed every interview as a learning experience for improvement. I tried to remind myself that "listening is more important than your next interview question", and it is "key to successful qualitative

interviewing" (Mann, 2016, p. 118). During the repertory-grid interviews, instead of sticking to the technicalities of eliciting constructs, I used the grid as a tool to generate meaning in "an easy relationship and a free flow of discussion" (Fransella et al., 2004, p. 25).

Although giving responses that match my known (or thought to be known) views of ITRS was expected from my interviews with the teacher-research facilitators, there was more potential that they would be more reluctant to express their opinions. My research topic could be seen as an evaluation of their roles in supporting and promoting teacher research in the Centre. In this regard, Teusner (2016) highlights that "the insider researcher must be willing to provide any explanations and reassurances in order to allay unwarranted fears that participants may have" (p. 90). In this study, I made the purpose of my research clear to my participants and gave reassurances of the confidentiality of their participation. They were all sent information sheets that delineated the purpose of the research, the nature of their participation and the measures taken to protect their confidentiality. The same issues were also made clear before each interview. However, regarding reassurances of confidentiality, despite acknowledging that an insider researcher needs to be very careful with protecting the confidentiality of their participants (Toy-Cronin, 2018), I was also aware that "extensive assurances of confidentiality accompanying nonsensitive research actually raise suspicion and diminish willingness to participate" (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004, p. 862).

4.4.2 Dealing with researcher-related quality issues

Another source of threats to quality in insider research is the researcher. While the insider status "brings with it a high degree of knowledge of the research topic or context under

investigation" (Mann, 2016, p. 73), Berger (2015) cautions that an insider needs to "remain constantly alert to avoid projecting own experience and using it as the lens to view and understand participants' experience" (p. 230). In addition to considering the questions listed in **Table 4.6**, adapted mainly from Ahern (1999), as enhancers of reflexivity to identify and eventually address my personal biases, I took three measures to enhance the quality of this study: triangulation, researcher diaries, and prolonged engagement.

Table 4. 6: *Questions to Consider as an Insider*

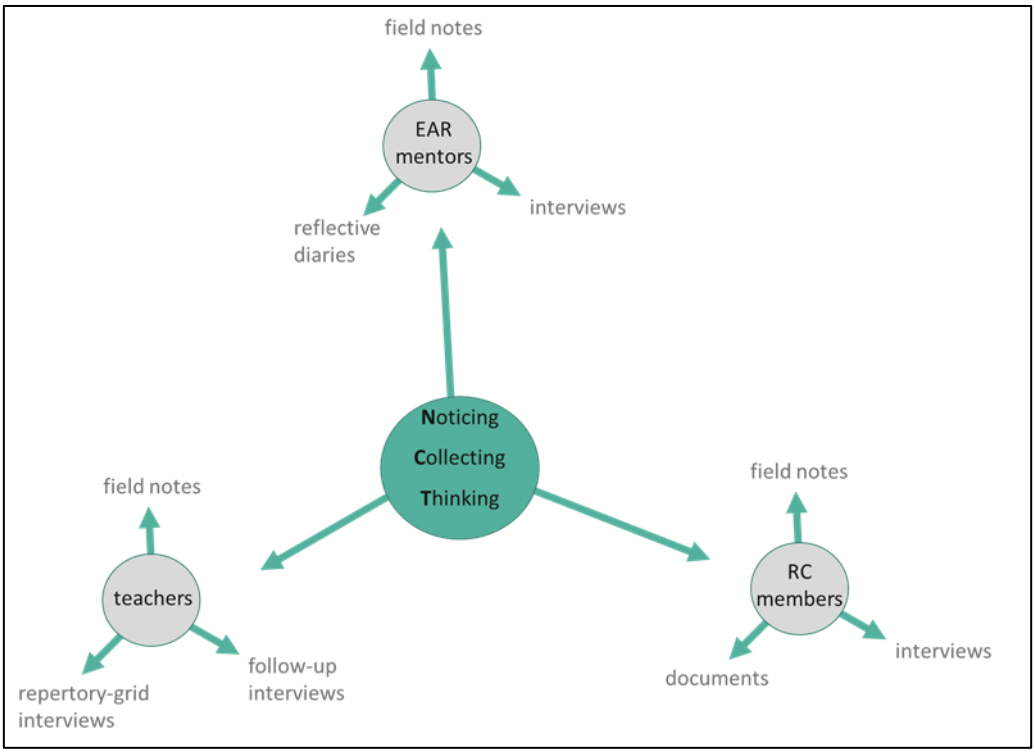
Areas to consider	**Questions**
Taken-for-granted assumptions	- What is it that I take for granted as an insider researcher? - What taken-for-granted personal assumptions do I have about my position as a male, Omani PhD student who examines a topic within his context?
Potential conflicts, roles and power relations	- Where do I belong in the power hierarchy as an insider? - To what extent are people in my context in favour of my project? How does this affect my research? - Are there potential conflicts between my roles as a researcher, professional and student?
Potential biases about the topic	- What are my possible biases about the topic examined, and how can they affect the data generation and interpretation?

Note. The questions are adapted from Ahern (1999).

Triangulation was one of the measures taken in this study to address the potential researcher biases that might either lead to biased representation or interpretation of data. Triangulation is defined as "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126) that can "increases scope, depth and consistency" (Flick, 2009, p. 445). To me, as a

constructivist insider, "triangulation offers the opportunity to deepen the understanding of the research question and to explore multiple realities" (Salkind, 2010, p. 1538). Citing Denzin (1978), Creswell and Miller (2000) mention that triangulation can be achieved either by having different participants or different data generation methods. As I show in **Figure 4.3**, I examined the topic from different participants' perspective, using different data generation methods.

Figure 4. 3 *The Triangulation of Data Sources and Data-generation Methods*



The two other measures taken to address the potential researcher biases are keeping a diary and prolonged engagement. Keeping a diary "is desirable if not essential in qualitative research" (Mann, 2016, p. 19). It is a practice that is "grounded in the epistemological position of social constructionism and the need for reflexivity in research" (Nadin & Cassell, 2006, p. 216), and that "helps build greater sensitivity to bias" (Mann, 2016, p. 20). In my diary, I focused on what and how data was generated, particularly

during my interviews. I focused primarily on my questioning and listening skills and how they might have influenced my respondents' answers. Like my field notes, I tried to keep my diary as focused and as practical as possible. Thus, all entries were first recorded before being written at a convenient time. In addition to keeping a diary, I found that my prolonged engagement in situ for about eight month and my persistent observation of issues and details related to ITRS in my context was very helpful in providing depth to my understanding of the examined topic. Although being an insider did give me the advantage of having some background about the examined topic in my context, examining the topic for a period of time with persistent observation of relevant issues helped me identify and challenge my taken-for-granted assumptions and biases about the researched topic. My field notes, especially of my role as a mentor in the EAR Workshop, were very useful not only to "explore multiple constructions of reality and become familiar with the variety of ways that respondents interpret experiences" (Lundy, 2008, p. 690), but also to check out my hunches, "and compare interview data with observational data" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). As put by Lincoln and Guba (1985), "if prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth" (p. 304).

4.5 Summary

In this second methodology chapter, I clarified and justified the important decisions and steps taken in relation to analyzing the data, taking the needed ethical considerations, and ensuring the quality of the findings. I clarified the general NCT thematic analysis model used to analyze the data in ATALS ti. I explained and illustrated the steps for how the analysis moved in iterative cycles of noticing, collecting and thinking, moving from the

descriptive to the conceptual level of analysis. In addition to detailing the specific steps used in analyzing the data from the teacher-research facilitators, the chapter gave a potentially useful detailed justification and illustration of how the repertory-grid and follow-up interviews with the language teachers were analyzed. I also clarified my choices for presenting the data in the next chapters and how the writing of the report was used as a final test for checking the plausibility of my analysis. The chapter also indicated the ethical measures followed in the study, with a particular focus on my position as an insider. As an insider, I foresaw some of the threats my familiarity with the context could have on the data collection and analysis. The chapter, therefore, ended with how I tried to address some of the potential threats to research quality. In the following two chapters, I present the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS I

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the teacher-research facilitators' (RC members and EAR mentors) concerns regarding the available ITRS and its facilitators and hindrances. The participants' responses centred around three major themes (see **Table 5.1**). The first theme was *clarity*, i.e., being clear about the *whats* and *hows* and *whys* of providing the support. Under this theme, the responses highlighted the need for coordinated and stable support of teacher research as well as clear guidelines for having clear support roles. In this regard, the responses also highlighted the need for supportive communication, happening more frequently and ensuring that there was respected bottom-up decision making regarding the support available. The second theme evident in the participants' responses was the *congruence* of the support, focusing on being balanced about expectations of supporting teacher research in the centre and the weight given to it in reality, and the expectations from the people involved in coordinating and providing the support and the amount of support they received. The former was highlighted in relation to giving adequate emphasis to mentoring and encouraging teacher research, while the latter was indicated with regard to providing enough support to the teacher-research facilitators in terms of time and training. The third theme that resulted from analyzing the data was *commitment* to supporting teacher research. The responses showed two aspects of this theme: individual commitment manifested in individual people interested in teacher research and its support, and institutional commitment manifested in a recognized status of teacher research both at the centre and university levels.

Table 5. 1: *The Themes and Subthemes from the Interviews with the Teacher-research Facilitators*

Main themes	Clarity	Congruence	Commitment
Subthemes	**Clear support roles** Coordinated and stable support, and clear guidelines for providing it	**Expectations-reality congruence** Congruence between expectations of the support and its reality	**Individual commitment** Individuals interested in research and its support
	Supportive communication Enough and consultative communication among people involved in ITRS	**Expectations-support congruence** Congruence between expectations from people involved in the support and the support given to them	**Institutional commitment** Internal recognition of and commitment to teacher research External recognition of and commitment to teacher research

In what follows, I present the participants' responses about the themes and subthemes grounded on the participants' responses and kept close to their own words. As I mentioned earlier, the participant teacher-research facilitators included eight RC members and the EAR's mentors. In order to anonymize the participants' identities, codes were given to each participant. The RC members were given the code RCM, preceded by a number (from 1 to 8) ascribed randomly to each of them. The two EAR's mentors were given the code EARM distinguished by the numbers 1 or 2. As the data from the EAR's mentors came from either reflective diaries or follow-up interviews, the words Interview or Diary were added to indicate the data source from which the selected quotation was taken. The code *Field notes* is also added to extracts from my field notes.

5.2 Clarity

One of the major themes evident in the teacher-research facilitators' responses regarding the nature of the available ITRS was being clear about what support to provide and how and why to provide it. Under this theme, they pointed out the significance of clear support roles and supportive communication. Regarding the former, they expressed how having coordinated and stable support, as well as clear guidelines, could contribute to clear support roles and eventually more clarity of the ITRS in the centre. Regarding the latter, they highlighted the significance of supportive communication, particularly realized through more communication and bottom-up decision making. In this section, I present the findings relevant to this theme.

5.2.1 Clear support roles

The first area that the teacher-research facilitators focused on concerning the clarity of the ITRS was the clarity of its relevant roles. Many of the teacher-research facilitators indicated that supporting teacher research needed more coordination to enhance its clarity. Apart from realizing the general aims for supporting research in the Centre and their general responsibilities as teacher-research facilitators, most RC members felt that the specific roles for supporting teacher research in the Centre were ambiguous. Their responses expressed their concerns about the overlapping and uncoordinated support in the centre. One evident example was a forum organized by one of the RCs to make clear what they could do to support teacher research. Interestingly, there was no presence of the other RCs. This incident was something that I found interesting and recorded in my field notes:

> Towards the end of the Forum, one member approached me, asking for my opinion of what they did. I praised their efforts, but I asked about the role of the two other RCs in organizing the event. X answered that two of them were representatives in the central committee, but the other departmental committees did not participate. [Field notes]

As liaising with each other was stated in the document delineating the responsibilities of the RCs, I asked the participants about the extent to which they coordinated their efforts to promote and support teacher research in the centre. In the following extracts, three members commented on this:

> I could say it's kind of overlapping duties between the two committees. It's not quite clear what the departmental committee is doing in this respect. Because actually what we get is … when we receive proposals …in fact, the central committee receives the proposals, and it's over there that this is discussed and decisions are made not at departmental level. [RCM2]

> If you just sit down and read, maybe you'll find some other clashes between us and the central one. They had things. In reality, you see, there is no clash. I mean, when you read the papers, everything is fine. No discrepancy, nothing. But in reality, what happens is all the work is done by them. We do things just to a minimum. [RCM7]

> I don't know what they are doing. Are they doing projects? Are they promoting research in the department? So what's our job then? Our job is to promote research in the centre as a whole. What are people in those departmental committees doing? If they are promoting research, why don't they join us? [RCM3]

This point of view recurred during the interviews with the members, and some of them highlighted how the overlapping roles had resulted in less activity in mentoring and encouraging teacher research. RCM2 felt that the RCs needed distinct identities by serving clearer support roles: "If you have established them, give them identity. Where is their identity?" RCM1 agreed with this and thought it would be better to combine them in order to avoid this confusion.

> The other thing is that the committees and subcommittees within their departments. We ended up having three now … I came up with the

> recommendation that we combine all these departmental meetings into one. And we had members from different departments, so representatives from different departments. We get together. We form a committee, and then we report to the central committee. [RCM1]

Because of this felt overlapping and uncoordinated roles, some members expressed a sense of confusion and helplessness about supporting teacher research in the centre. RCM7, for example, complained that much of his time was spent in trying to clear up the confusion of the clashes among the different RCs' committees and their roles in the centre: "It was kind of confusing. It took us a long time to understand what I'm supposed to do. And what we did, it was on paper; somehow also it clashes with the other committee as I said." RCM4 also expressed his negative feeling of helplessness because of the overlapping and uncoordinated support of teacher research that he viewed as a restriction against his personal efforts.

> I'm not able to do anything because I feel that once I want to go further, I'm bumped, you know? It's like a wall. They restrict us. "Oh, no. It's not our job; it's the other committee's work. It's the other committee's thing." [RCM4]

This feeling of confusion and helplessness was also shared by the EAR mentors when they felt their role in facilitating their mentees' projects clashed with the RCs' ethical approval procedure. When all EAR mentees were mandated to fill a long ethical form before proceeding with their small research projects, the three mentors, including myself, met to discuss how to make this step less off-putting to our mentees. Knowing that it would take weeks for the approvals to be given, the two mentors felt that this step was unnecessary as it did not only overlap with their roles as mentors, but it also clashed with their aim to introduce their mentees to a user-friendly form of teacher research. In the following excerpt from my field notes, I captured our feelings and perspectives in our meeting to discuss the implications of the ethical form on our mentees and their progress:

> There was an atmosphere of irritation, discontentment and worry during the meeting. The other two mentors saw that the ethical approval form would be off-putting to our mentees. X seemed very irritated with the decision, and he told me that the timing of the email was not appropriate. He told me that I should have waited and tried to negotiate with the RCs. He was very worried that this would cause his mentees to drop. He said that one of his mentees had already dropped. Y agreed with this and commented that we should be trusted as experienced mentors to supervise our mentees' projects and make sure that what they do is ethical. [Field notes]

In his weekly reflections, EARM2 wrote:

> Another impediment was the bureaucratic and lengthy process of getting approvals for these small-scale research projects … Some mentees were put off by such a process. I think we as mentors should be trusted as experienced researchers and given the flexibility of granting approvals to our mentees' projects without having to go through the same lengthy process of approving other larger-scale research. [EARM2/Dairy]

EARM1 also pointed out what he saw as a "tension" between what EAR Workshop was aiming to achieve and how the already existing ITRS worked. He wrote in his diary, "I also thought that there was a problem and tension between the existing support and the intended support in the project. I was worried that the project might be hijacked by the existing system." When I asked him to expand upon this in the follow-up interview, he saw no justification for imposing the existing ethical procedure on the EAR participants.

> The EAR program did not require all these technicalities of ethics. And so what they made us do, and you remember the email that came from them, or that came from you, that asked you that every person needs to fill out that ethics form. Why is that? Why did they ask us to do that? Why did they interfere with that project? [EARM1/Interview]

This response from EARM1 shows that the lack of coordinated support of teacher research did not only result in clashes and tensions but also in feelings of confusion and helplessness about what support to provide and how and why to provide it. This takes us to another related issue: the importance of clear guidelines, which was evident in the RC members' responses. They, for example, complained about how the lack of clear

guidelines for reviewing the teachers' applications for guidance and ethical approvals had resulted in being unsure of what to focus on.

> I don't know what I should focus on. It's just the application. The application has lots and lots and lots and lots of questions. There's lots, you know, lots of texts, you know. I don't have time to read everything. [RCM3]
>
> I'm really picky on that [grammar mistakes]. I just look at that. But this is not my job as a committee member. To sit down and be the supervisor. This becomes the supervisor's job. I can't dot their i's and cross their t's. [RCM2]

RCM8 pointed out that this was something they felt the need for to understand what they had to do to support teachers: "they started now maybe to be aware that people need to have some criteria or guidelines to understand what their responsibilities are". RCM3 expressed his dissatisfaction with ending up with "trivial comments" on teachers' research ideas and "clashes" among the members of what to focus on. This participant stressed the need for written instructions to give focus to the support.

> There isn't anything written about what you need to focus on. It's just like trying to give ourselves another job which is not our main job here. Sometimes when we discuss the style of writing. Sometimes one member will say, "Well, I disagree with the structure of the document or the style, or I don't know the abstract." It's not our job to do this. [RCM3]

RCM8 agreed with this and pointed out how the lack of focus could waste time on things that were not at the core of what they needed to do to support teacher research in the centre. She gave the example of spending much time reviewing the ethical applications of external PhD and MA researchers who wanted to have access to the centre, and she found that this added unnecessary pressure to their already busy schedules.

> Sometimes they would discuss the ethical issues of a PhD student studying outside the country, and we know that student, of course, had got the approval from their supervisors, from the university, which supposedly is a prestigious university in the world. Why should we discuss the ethical issues? [RCM8]

Besides the importance of clear guidelines to give focus and avoid confusion, clashes and triviality in supporting teacher research, other members –particularly the experienced ones– associated the felt ambiguity that surrounds ITRS in the centre with the constant changes in the types and structure of the support available, the responsibilities assigned to teacher-research facilitators and the people involved in supporting research. They highlighted the need for stable support in making it clearer. This theme was particularly evident in the experienced members' responses. RCM6, for example, expressed her despair regarding the changes that had happened to her role: "I felt somehow limited and restricted. I couldn't do whatever I wanted. Or I didn't do the work I used to do." This feeling was reiterated by RCM4, who found that the instability made the issue of uncoordinated and overlapping roles even worse.

> Now they are totally revising everything this year. If you ask other members, they are not really aware of their responsibilities because they're overlapping responsibilities …We received information as a staff handbook, and they were supposed to change, and they'll change many times. And they'll also again revise this year. So what we had last year, I think, is totally different than what we're going to have this year in terms of written information and structure. [RCM4]

This participant explained that this had become a fact that they needed to cope with, and he attributed it to the continuously changing members and structure of the Centre.

> To tell the truth, this's a fact we have to live with or cope with. I don't know. No other choice. What could I do as a member? I know I'm leaving this committee, maybe next semester or next year. And this's part of it, by the way. Members are changing. The centre keeps changing. This all adds up, I think. [RCM4]

EARM1 also commented on this topic. In the following excerpt, he refers to how he thought that the constant changes in supporting teacher research in the centre had rendered it unclear and inactive.

> There is a system [for supporting teacher research]. I mean I'm not saying there isn't one. It's there. It was there. But if you look at it with all these changes, you feel you know it's kind of dead. Perhaps not functioning well or not as it's supposed to be. [EARM1/Interview]

To sum up, the importance of stable and coordinated support was highlighted in addition to clear guidelines for having clear support roles and thus enhancing the overall clarity of supporting teacher research in the centre.

5.2.2 Supportive Communication

The second theme evident in the participant's responses regarding the overall ITRS clarity in the centre was supportive communication. Here, their responses centred around the amount and direction of communication. The data analysis showed a general feeling of limited communication and the lack of bottom-up decision-making regarding ITRS in the centre.

For having supportive communication that could eventually contribute to the overall ITRS clarity, the participants highlighted the need for enough communication among the people involved in supporting teacher research in the centre. Most of the participants, however, were not very satisfied with the amount of communication happening. Their responses indicated a general feeling of a lack of communication flow that was usually happening at the top (e.g., "There is no clarity about things. Although there is communication, the communication usually is happening between heads or officers" [RCM7]). The following extracts express two of the RC members' dissatisfaction with the flow of communication and show how it could result in less involvement in decisions about the available support.

> There's communication: limited one, minimal communication between us. If there's any communication, it'd be happening between heads. We're not aware. It's not CC'd to us. We're not involved in that. So there's less involvement of us in what's happening. [RCM7]

> Sometimes they have their own meetings, and apart from the meetings that we have, they have their own meetings. What happens in those meetings? I don't know as a member. Yeah. I don't know. We never discussed that. And we never discuss what happens in the meetings of those departmental committees. [RCM8]

The second of the above participants also pointed out a very interesting point. She expressed her dissatisfaction with separating the activities carried out for the general PD in the centre from the ITRS activities and decisions. She thought that there needed to be more communication between the teacher-research facilitators and the PD committee, which she found very related to supporting teacher research in the centre. When I asked her whether there was any communication between them and the PD committee, she replied:

> No communication. We don't know. As a member, I don't know. We never discuss. In the meetings, we never discuss what's happening in the professional development committee. And I believe, from my humble point of view, they should come with us, or they should communicate with us. There should be more dialogue. [RCM8]

In preparation for the EAR workshop, I did arrange a meeting between the heads of the PD and the RCs to discuss the arrangement of the workshop. During the meeting, it was clear that there had not been much communication between the committees regarding the support of teacher research in the centre. There was, however, an agreement that more communication and coordination is needed between the committees.

> I noticed that there had not been adequate communication or coordination between the two committees in the meeting. The head of the PD committee told me that it was not their responsibility to arrange events related to supporting teacher research in the centre. However, she agreed that there needs

> to be more communication and coordination between them and the RCs to arrange events similar to the EAR workshop. [Field notes]

Regarding the EAR Workshop, The EAR mentors also expressed the need for more communication between them and the RC members. EARM1, for example, wrote in his reflection:

> On the first day of the programme, I expected the presence of the central committee. I was actually focusing on this. They could have shared their ideas with us. They might have a better picture of the nature of this workshop. [EARM1/Dairy]

When I asked him why he felt their presence would be useful, he answered:

> … perhaps we could have shared some opinions about what to do. You know the ethical approval issue. They can see where you're coming from. I mean it's not the kind of PhD applications they get from outside. They didn't need to impose it on this supposed to be a user-friendly model. [EARM1/Interview]

In addition to highlighting the need for more communication to better understand what support to provide and how to provide it, the above quote shows how the issue of limited communication seems to be closely related to bottom-up consultative communication. For the communication to be supportive in clarifying the *whats, hows* and *whys* of providing the support, the participants also stressed the need for more bottom-up communication and thus more influence and a better understanding of the occurring changes and taken decisions. Many participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the top-down decision-making regarding the ITRS in the centre. In describing the direction of communication, RCM2 stressed: "It is top-down. It is top-down, it's not consultative". Apparently, many participants were not happy with what they saw as "constant checking" for approvals to initiate activities for supporting teacher research in the centre. RCM2, for example, related an incident in which her endeavours to organize an event for promoting TRS opportunities were initially delayed by what she called "bureaucratic measures." Two

other members related two cases in which they failed to have a say about the revival of the best research proposal competition.

> I proposed this through so many meetings we had with our head, and I asked them, “Why don't we revive it” … But again, they couldn’t bring it back. I don’t know again when I communicate this; our head says, “I have to check with X”. [RCM6]

> That’s what I was fighting for. And I said, okay, don’t stop this because you know, we want teachers even to engage in research activities or various research activities, and this is only a minor [opportunity]. This is a tiny part of it. We don’t want to withdraw some teachers. So, let it be there. Let it continue. [RCM1]

RCM2 felt that they were in an awkward position because of the hierarchical passing down of information and decision: “It was very awkward for X. He was told to do something by A. A is told to do something by B.” Because of this, RCM1 found it hard to figure out the rationale and reasons behind some changes to ITRS in the centre: “I don’t know why. You need to ask them. Although many things were functioning efficiently.” EARM2 also emphasized the need for integrated top-down and bottom-up efforts in order for the support to succeed and indicated that the current approach would result in a communication problem: “it should be top-down, bottom-up, integrated. If they don't work together, there’ll be a problem” [EARM2/Interview]. This focus on integration and working together takes us to the theme of congruence evident in the participants’ responses for what they viewed as necessary for ITRS in the centre.

5.3 Congruence

Congruence was the second major theme the facilitators stressed in relation to supporting teacher research in the Centre. Under this theme, the participants focused on the need to have expectations-reality congruence in terms of what support was expected to occur and

what happened in reality. They also focused on expectations-support congruence regarding what was expected of the people involved in the support and how much they were supported.

5.3.1 Expectations-reality congruence

The expectations-reality congruence of the support was evident in the teacher-research facilitators responses. In this regard, the participants highlighted how expectations of the support to facilitate and encourage teacher research was, in reality, taking a peripheral position to other relevant administrative tasks. Besides being responsible for supporting teacher research in the Centre, the RCs are also responsible for the relevant tasks of organizing the Centre's international conference and supervising material-development projects. However, there was almost a consensus among the participants that such tasks were receiving a primary focus at the expense of supporting teacher research. Organizing the conference, for example, was described to receive "top priority". In the following quote, one member points out how more focus was given to the conference at the expense of supporting teacher research which he found more reactive to teacher-initiated requests.

> Things went down on the research side. And it stayed the same level I think on the conference. The research side, I think nobody is concerned about research side a lot. So, they'll only meet when a request for research is being presented to the committee. [RCM1]

RCM2 expressed a similar concern. After she stated some criteria they considered for giving release time to material-development projects, I asked her if the same applied to research.

> **Interviewer:** And the criteria. Sorry, the criteria for projects or for research?
> **RCM2:** This is no. I'm talking about the course materials.

Interviewer: The course materials?

RCM2: Yes.

Interviewer: About research. Does this apply to research?

RCM2: No. Nothing. Nothing to research. This is just course materials.

The participants highlighted this incongruence not only with regard to the criteria for getting release time but also to the kind and amount of support given to teacher research compared to projects. In the following quote, the participant compares teacher research projects and material-development projects. He admitted that there was no follow-up of the teacher-research projects initiated by teachers.

> In projects, we do the follow-up to see the progress of the project. Those who are involved in projects they have to report in weeks, once in week eight to nine and once in week 16 of their progress. And then they have to, in PD sessions, they have to have presentations and disseminated information, among others. This is what happens in projects. But in research so far, as far as I know, we haven't had this … We don't do follow-up. [RCM4]

This member suggested that the same should be done with supporting teacher research:

> We need to do more follow-up with the research applicants, with the researchers in what stage they are and what they're doing. And then ask them or require them to, you know, present their research in a PD session. [RCM4]

Although raising teachers' awareness of ethical issues in doing research was one listed responsibility of the RCs, there was clear concern in some of the teacher-research facilitators' responses about the overemphasis given to the ethical approval part at the expense of guiding and helping teachers. As mentioned above, this overemphasis was very evident during the EAR workshop in which all the participants were required to go through the usual official procedure for getting ethical approvals. Both of the EAR mentors were unhappy about this step and found it off-putting to their mentees. The following quote expresses what one of the mentors felt about this emphasis on the ethical approval procedure.

> They think they are supporting teachers with that form, but in my opinion, they are not. They are also stopping on their way and saying you have to complete that form. They are not supporting the teachers. They just want to complete this part of bureaucracy. That doesn't mean that people shouldn't be filling out forms. No. We need to fill out forms. Everybody fills out forms. But that form in the existing form is really out of line with what we have been doing. Yes, you want to raise awareness about ethics and all these things, raising their awareness but not have to go there and complete about every single thing, because most of these things did not apply. [EARM1/Interview]

This felt overemphasis on the ethical approval procedure was also shared by other participants. RCM1, for example, thought that this approach was "not supportive in terms of being of, you know, helping people. Not just do research but also think of conducting research." He added that "the only guidance that was given was the written comments that the members contributed to the proposal," but he found it better to meet with the teachers and discuss with them: "It would be better to spend time with researchers in my office, and we discuss. It is the responsibility of the committee to make him or her aware of what could be improved." RCM3 also thought that overemphasizing the technicalities of ethics was "hampering" rather than facilitating teacher research in the centre.

> But if we just give access or deny access, I think that's not promoting research. Sometimes we are hampering research … Personally, I would give access. If we want to promote research, why do we want to create that headache of bureaucracy with lots of procedures to follow? And we actually haven't done any presentation to promote research in the centre. If we want to promote research, why don't we do presentations maybe, send emails to people? [RCM3]

This excerpt as well as the other two examples above highlight a very important point about the issue of access and ethical approvals of teacher research in the Centre. Their responses not only point out the overemphasis giving to this area over other important roles of supporting and encouraging teachers, but they also indicate how ethics was turned into an off-putting technical hurdle rather than an integral part of research.

5.2.3 Expectations-support congruence

The participants also highlighted another type of congruence between the support of teacher research expected to take place and the resources devoted to preparing people who could make it happen. Almost all the members felt a need for more support in terms of time and training to carry out their expected role of mentoring and supporting teacher research in the centre.

First, the participants highlighted the lack of time as one of the main inhibitors of mentoring and supporting teachers to do research and do the different relevant tasks expected to promote teacher research in the Centre. In the following quote, one member points out the felt need for release time to do the expected work.

> Two members asked for some release time, at least two hours, because sometimes in a meeting we would spend two hours on Thursday at the end of the day to discuss, for example, the conference themes or the organization of the conference. Lots of things. Or to look at some applications, data collection applications. And we did this because we had been assigned only. No release time was given to us, and it's a lot of work. [RCM7]

Another member, who felt overwhelmed by the amount of workload, expressed his response to the tasks expected from him as follows:

> To tell the truth, when I receive an email, I sometimes get appalled; I don't want to respond because I have a lot of things. I have three courses, and there is nothing I get out of this involvement in this committee –nothing, no release time, nothing. [RCM3]

This participant indicated that having release time could add a sense of duty to what he was expected to do. In the following quote, he considers release time as recognition of his role and a motive for his commitment.

> If I had been given some release time, I would have been more committed … because there it becomes a job, a duty; I'm getting a salary for it. Now I'm not getting anything. I'm not getting anything. Of course, I get a certificate which is useless to me in my opinion. [RCM3]

The issue of time was also linked with the lack of clear focus and guidelines. RCM8 indicated that they could save time by knowing their priorities. She gave the example of spending a lot of time discussing the ethical issues of postgraduate students' applications to access the Centre to do their research. She found that this was unnecessary.

> Sometimes they would discuss the ethical issues of a PhD student studying outside the country … Our job, I would say, is to give access or deny access. So why should we discuss their ethical issues? It's not our job. I mean, there is no point. At least I would … I would rather save that time for myself. [RCM8]

Other members felt that much time was given to the other RCs' responsibilities. RCM2 described this as a "catch-22" situation: "We kept on thinking, how do we promote research? Because we have worked on the projects side of our committee for the whole time. It's kind of catch-22."

In addition to time, other members emphasized the importance of training in carrying out their expected mentoring and supporting roles. After highlighting the importance of time, RCM6 indicated training as another type of support to research in the Centre.

> Well, first I think, number one, we need to have more time to sit and to have more meetings and to make more decisions. But as I said, when you're teaching 18 hours, it's not easy for everybody in the same committee to have meetings and to ask them to sit down and think about what they need to do. Number one is we need to have some kind of release time if we're going to be involved in this. And number two, we need to have some training, I could say maybe a workshop or training sessions to help us know how and in what ways we can much better serve our friends here, our colleagues, and promote research. So, I think for research, we need training and more release time. [RCM6]

RCM3 agreed with this and suggested the need for training given either by experienced teachers from the centre or experts from outside.

> We do not get any training. If we are not qualified enough as a committee, why don't we liaise with people from outside the university, experts, and we have some experts in the centre in research. We haven't asked anyone of them to have, to organize sort of training. [RCM3]

Related to this, RCM1 emphasized that training is necessary not only for them to be confident and productive but also to be capable of offering some general workshops on research skills to the teachers in the Centre.

> So not only discussing the requests that we receive, research requests and we check those. That's why I say, a usual part of it, we do that as a routine. But we need to go a step further with offering some kind of training to the members first. So then the members can also offer the training to others within the centre and become more productive and confident. [RCM1]

This need for training was echoed by EARM2, who felt that training was necessary not only to help the people involved in supporting teacher research do their work but also to give them confidence and gain their commitment in providing the support.

> And if you look at what's happening now, we ended up with allocated committees. They didn't volunteer or come forward or apply. They were in that sent list from admin. So, if you are serious about your goals, I mean research goals, give them some training so that you feel there's a mission and there's commitment. The members feel, you know, confident of their skills. [EARM2/Interview]

The issue of commitment to supporting teacher research was also one central theme in the participants' responses. The following section presents the findings related to this theme.

5.4 Commitment

Commitment to supporting teacher research was the third major theme evident in the participants' responses. Here they focused on two forms of commitment linked to the overall commitment to supporting teacher research. The first was individual, related to having interested teacher-research facilitators selected carefully based on interest, willingness, and research background to contribute actively to supporting teacher research

in the centre. The second form of commitment to supporting teacher research was institutional, related to the supportive recognition of teacher research both locally, at the centre's level, and externally, from the university.

5.4.1 Individual Commitment

The first form of commitment to supporting teacher research in the Centre was having ideologically interested and committed teacher-research facilitators. In relation to this, the participants stressed the significance of the careful recruitment of the teacher-research facilitators who could participate positively and actively in providing the support. Almost all the participants disagreed with the top-down allocation of the RC members. One experienced RC members stressed that selection should be based on application rather than direct allocation. In the following quote, he points out three criteria that need to be considered for accepting people involved in supporting teacher research: interest, research background and willingness to contribute.

> I think applications need to be reviewed for those who want to apply. The applications reviewed, see the CVs, their letter of interest, and a short interview might be necessary. And then, we select people based on their interest, background, willingness to contribute and other kinds of criteria but not a direct appointment. I'm against direct appointment or allocation of members in a unit like this or a committee like this. [RCM1]

Because of the direct allocation of the members, some of them were struggling to accept this responsibility. RCM3, for example, felt that the role was superimposed on him: "It was superimposed on us. We had no freedom. I wouldn't have chosen to be on this committee". This member found this as an inhibitor of his as well as the other similar members' active and positive participation in carrying out their roles.

> I don't have the goodwill here. The goodwill is imposed on me by somebody, and it affects even the feelings of the teachers, the members. Sometimes they

> go to the meetings irritated, angry. I don't want to be there. I don't want to be there. I have my own classes, my own marking, my own students, my own family problems, so I don't want – I want to spare myself the hassle. That's why sometimes I just keep silent. [RCM3]

Another member shared the same feeling:

> I was just assigned. It's not my interest. We were just sent a list, and we were assigned out of our choice. Some people didn't want to, and we had some private discussions. Some of them were not interested. Some of them said if we had been given a choice, we would have chosen something else. [RCM6]

A third member commented on how the top-down allocation of the members affected their positive and active participation:

> We have some members who have no background in research, but they just found out themselves within the research committee overnight. But this is okay. I mean, my philosophy, okay, we could have people on board who are ready to get some training, but I feel that some of the new members aren't that ready to listen to my views. [RCM5]

The importance of selecting the type of teacher-research facilitators interested in research and its support was also evident in the EAR Workshop. Because of their interest in research, the two mentors were active in supporting their mentees and positive during challenges. In his reflective dairy, EARM2, for example, wrote:

> Saying so, however, it was not all plain sailing. Although I maintained a flexible approach to mentoring, there had been some administrative and other personal impediments to the mentees' full access to, and utilization of the support offered to them during the EAR project. [EARM2/Dairy]

In the follow-up interview, he commented that difficult times and challenges were expected as part of the process of supporting teacher research.

> The whole experience has been positive so far, even at times of challenges, because that is part of the experience. As a researcher, I know that things can go through some difficulties, challenges, ups and downs … Sometimes you come to difficult times, you have challenges, tight deadlines that you have to meet and so on, but it is part of it. We are not working in an ideal situation. [EARM2/Interview]

The above quote shows that recruiting teacher-research facilitators who recognize the importance of teacher research and see its priority not only contributes to their positive and active support of teacher research but also helps them cope with existing and emerging challenges. This observation, however, seemed to be realized in the recruitment of other important committees in the Centre. Interestingly, one of the participants compared the direct application of the RC members with the careful recruitment of interested and qualified members for another committee, the accreditation committee responsible for ensuring that the centre complies with the GFP standards.

> Everybody is chosen. There's no application. The only members I remember who applied is for accreditation … They had to go for interviews. They were interviewed, and they applied. I guess again there … it's linked to that as well. I mean, now I'm talking professionally here, but the appointment to this position kind of again suggests what our priorities are. [RCM2]

Here, the participant read in the RC members' direct appointment a suggestion of the Centre's priorities and the position of teacher research among them. This takes us to the second form of commitment the participants indicated in their responses.

5.4.2 Institutional Commitment

The second form of commitment to supporting teacher research is the institutional commitment to teacher research and its value. In relation to this, the teacher-research facilitators highlighted that the recognition of and commitment to teacher research should not only be internal (within the Centre) but should also be external (at the university level).

As presented above, the recruitment of the teacher-research facilitators who were passionate about research and its value seemed to show more signs of dedication and activism in carrying out their roles. Similarly, some of the teacher-research facilitators highlighted that commitment to the support could be enhanced or hampered by the overall

value and recognition given to teacher research in the Centre. One of the EAR mentors considered recognizing the value of teacher research as a prerequisite for providing the needed support. In the following quote, he sees a link between the appreciation of teacher research and the quality of the support provided in terms of time and expert guidance.

> I think if we appreciate the value of research, then other things will follow, amongst which the support provided. Because I appreciate the value, I'll try to facilitate research in terms of how long it takes to provide support and to provide an expert judgment. [EARM1/Interview]

In a similar vein, EARM2 clarified that the dedication and obligation to research support could take a back seat when there was no felt passion for research.

> I say it's all about mindsets. You know, when you believe in something, then you always have the passion for that. You try different ways to push your idea forward. But the thing is that people come with different mentalities, with different mindsets, not necessarily for research. When you find yourself in a situation like this, then you know there are other things like admin stuff and other work that over-dominate. [EARM2/Interview]

RCM1 also highlighted that being in such a situation of felt limited research status, proposals to go the extra mile to support research were not always successful.

> I'm a research-oriented person. I produced some forms for validation, for suggestions, for sort of proposal discussions, and I tried to explain to them that we are trying to promote our centre as a research centre to the university. But of course, they said, "No, it's just we can't do this. It's a lot of work". [RCM1]

In addition to stressing the need for recognized teacher research status in the centre, the above quote touches upon the need for wider recognition of and commitment to teacher research from the university. For having supportive recognition of teacher research within the centre, some participants indicated the critical role of the recognized value of teacher research by the university to which the centre is attached. RCM5, for instance, clearly

stated that the university's underestimation of teacher research in the centre hinders their commitment to its support.

> Whenever we try to give much importance to research, we're reminded that we're not a research centre. I'm talking about reminded by the university that "you're not really a research centre. You're not a college. Your research is not probably serious research." Which isn't true. [RCM5]

This feeling of the university's underestimation of teacher research in the centre was echoed by RCM1, who viewed this lack of recognition of the value of teacher research in the centre as a wall that the centre needs to bring down.

> That's a wall that we have to probably somehow bring down, even administration wise. We're probably not teaching sciences or core subjects, but there's a lot of research that's done in the language teaching area, language teaching materials development assessment, student needs, etc. I mean, the list is non-exhaustive. It's so long. [RCM1]

RCM3 also pointed out that this could make it challenging to coordinate the ITRS provided by the university with that provided within the centre.

> Regarding us and the university's administration, there is no link, and I believe we can't … we can't make a link here because it all comes down to how we are viewed by the administration of the university. We are not viewed as a research centre. People who are researchers in the centre, I believe they are not viewed as researchers. [RCM3]

Here, he highlights a very important area that I will present in the next results chapter and that the teachers found important for the ITRS in the Centre: the concordance between the support afforded in the Centre and that afforded by the university (see section 6.3.1).

5.3 Summary

In this chapter, I presented three major themes (clarity, congruence and commitment) highlighted by the teacher-research facilitators in relation to the available ITRS and its facilitators and hindrances. The first theme was the clarity of the support. In relation to this, the participants pointed out the need for clear support roles, realized through

coordinated and sustained support as well as clear guidelines. They also emphasized the need for supportive communication, manifested in more communication and bottom-up decision making. The second theme was the congruence of the support in terms of giving enough emphasis to translating the expectations of supporting and encouraging teacher research into reality and balancing the expectations from the support with the support (time and training) given to facilitate and provide it. Commitment to supporting teacher research was the third major theme evident in the participants' responses. Under this theme, the need for the careful recruitment of interested teacher-research facilitators who could participate actively and positively in providing the support was emphasized. Besides the need for interested teacher-research facilitators, the local and external recognition of the value of teacher research was also cited for influencing the commitment to supporting teacher research.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS II

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the results relevant to answering the research question of this study (**What influences (i.e., facilitates or impedes) the institutional support of teacher research in a tertiary ELT context?**) from the teacher-research facilitators' perspective. I showed how the teacher-research facilitators' accounts highlighted the themes of clarity, congruence and commitment. This chapter will present the results relevant to answering the research question from the teachers' perspective (with some references to some of the teacher-research facilitators' relevant responses).

The analysis of the teachers' responses resulted in two major themes. The first theme was *accessibility*. Here, the teachers focused on how easy it was for them to make use of an ITRS opportunity. Under this theme, they highlighted two main themes: *visibility* (how identifiable the ITRS opportunity and its potential were) and *relativeness* (how considerate the ITRS opportunity was of the teachers' abilities and needs). Regarding the visibility of the ITRS, the participants focused on the significance of the support being well-promoted (involving proactive and balanced promotion), commonly utilized (frequently utilized by other teachers), and well-established (institutionally organized and sustained) for raising their awareness of the ITRS and its potential. The ITRS opportunities that lacked these aspects of visibility were likely to be viewed as not available. Regarding the relativeness of the ITRS, the teachers highlighted two other aspects: the user-friendliness of the support available (having clear procedures and one-stop access) and its inclusiveness (considering the teachers' diverse conditions and needs).

The second central theme evident in the teachers' responses was the *utility* of the ITRS opportunities, i.e., how useful they were to them. This theme was relevant to what the teachers' judged as potential support, and it was linked to two other themes: the *concordance* and *quality* of the support. Concordance, an interesting term used by one of the participants, refers to the participants' concern regarding the relevance of an ITRS opportunity not only to personal and institutional research goals but also to the other available support. Quality, on the other hand, refers to the suitability of an ITRS opportunity for its intended purposes. The responses of the participants under this theme focused on the extent to which the experience of getting the support was (1) secure (happening in a collegial and supportive environment that encourages autonomy) and (2) enriching (having a positive impact on teachers' research activities and thus encouraging sustained doing of teacher research and further use of other forms of support). **Table 6.1** below presents the themes and the subthemes generated from the analysis of the data.

This chapter is divided into two main sections, each of which presents one of the main themes highlighted by the teachers. The subsections will present the findings relevant to the sub-themes, including tables of the teachers' personal constructs grouped under each theme and followed with clarifying examples from the participants' responses. In order to anonymize the participants' identities, codes were given to each participant. Each teacher was given the code T preceded by a number (from 1 to 11) ascribed randomly to each one of them.

Table 6. 1: *The Themes and Subthemes from the Interviews with the Participant Teachers*

Major themes	**Main themes**	**Subthemes**
Accessibility (possibility to get)	Visibility (how recognizable an ITRS opportunity and its potential are)	• Well-promoted (proactive and balanced promotion) • Commonly used (frequent utilization by other teachers) • Well-established (institutionally organized and sustained)
	Relativeness (how considerate an ITRS opportunity is of the teachers' abilities and needs)	• User-friendly access (clear procedures and one-stop access) • Inclusive (considering the teachers' diverse conditions and needs)
Utility (usefulness)	Concordance (how relevant an ITRS opportunity is)	• Concordant with research goals (aligned with personal and institutional research goals) • Concordant with the available support (aligned with the other types of ITRS provided locally, within the centre, and externally, by the university)
	Quality (how suitable an ITRS opportunity is)	• Secure (happening in a collegial and supportive environment that encourages autonomy) • Enriching (opening the door to different support opportunities and encouraging further research engagement and utilization of support opportunities)

6.2 Accessibility

Regarding what might encourage their use of the available ITRS opportunities, the teachers' responses pointed out the possibility to obtain them, i.e., their accessibility. I got this theme from the VAST (visibility, accessibility, support and transparency) forum organized by one of the RCs in the Centre to make visible their roles in supporting teacher research in the Centre (see sample field notes section 3.5.5) and because it was repeated in many of the teachers' interviews. Under this main theme, I placed two other related themes: the noticeable availability and potential of the support (visibility) and the extent to which it is considerate of teachers' abilities (relativeness).

6.2.1 Visibility

The visibility of the ITRS opportunities was one of the most recurrent themes during the interviews with the teachers. In my interview with one of the RC members, I asked about why they chose to call their forum VAST (visibility, accessibility, support and transparency); the reply was:

> If you're visible, they will come to you. For example, I'll give the example of xx. I went to see her officemate about something, and while talking to the officemate, she heard that I'm in the research committee, in the central committee. She said, "Can I come and talk to you? I want to do research on something." I said, "Okay." She said, "This is what I'm going to do." So, I said, "Do semi-structured interviews and do it like this, and how would you like to do that?" And then I said, "Now, you apply for a proposal through the central committee." Then, her proposal came to us, and we looked at it. This is how she found out. She did not know she could get any support. So how are we accessible to people? [RCM2]

The analysis of data showed that visibility of the ITRS opportunities was associated with how well-promoted they were, particularly through proactive and balanced promotion. Awareness of the support and its potential was also linked to how commonly used it was among other teachers who could individually or collectively encourage each other to notice what opportunities could be of use to them. Visibility of the support opportunities was also related to whether they were well-established: institutionally organized and sustained. As I will present in this section, the teachers were likely to view the ITRS opportunities as unavailable when they lacked visibility through proactive and balanced promotion, individual and collective guidance or organized and sustained availability.

6.2.1.1 Well-promoted support

One area that was associated with the visibility of the ITRS opportunities in the centre was how well-promoted they were. Analysis of the data showed that the teachers were likely to view the ITRS opportunities as not available when they were not well-promoted. From the construct labels (see **Table 6.2**) and the open discussions with the participants, I teased out two interrelated aspects of what makes well-promoted support: proactivity and balance.

Table 6. 2: *The Constructs Related to Well-promoted support*

Constructs			Participants
+	-		
publicized promoted	hidden invisible		T1
-	excessively promoted	promoted/scantily	T3

visible	invisible	T4
familiar proactive well-promoted inviting	unfamiliar inactive; dormant poorly promoted not inviting	T8
involves different channels of communication balanced	involves restricted channels of communication overly done	T10
well-promoted	closed	T11

Regarding proactivity, T8 pointed out that "well-promoted support" needs to be "proactive" to be "familiar" and "inviting" to the teachers. However, there was a general feeling among the teachers and the teacher-research facilitators of the lack of proactivity in promoting the available ITRS opportunities. In relation to this, RCM1 said, describing the current status of supporting teacher research in the centre: "It is more reactive because I think it only reacts to the requests." However, he mentioned that this was not the original aim. He stated that the original aim of supporting teacher research in the centre was to be "proactive" in approaching teachers who might be hesitant to start researching their own practices.

> And actually, the aim was not just that we provide the service when it is being asked for, but we try to be proactive by encouraging people who are a bit hesitant, maybe you know, on doing research. So we try to help them, you know, think of some topics that can be useful for good research, starting from their own practices, the classroom research. [RCM1]

The importance of the proactive promotion of the available support was also emphasized by one of the EAR mentors. In the following excerpt, he clarifies that if the support is not promoted, it will only be approached and used by the very few active teachers in the centre. For the majority, however, the support will remain invisible.

> Because how will people approach you for support if you don't identify yourself as available for it? People don't know –only very few people who

> were there before and who were active and who'd really make that move without any support. They would go and find out. Other teachers need to be pushed, and this is the majority of teachers, probably 90, not all, probably 90% of the teachers are just staying because they don't know what's happening. [EARM1/Interview]

He, therefore, suggested the critical need for what he referred to as the "the spheres or the venues" for making visible what was available. He proposed having a forum to promote the different ITRS opportunities, adding that teachers would think there was no support without chances to expose it.

> If we don't have that forum, people will just kind of think there's nothing. It's just that I need to create the spheres or the venues where people who are interested or people who can have, think about it, may find something when they need it. They can find something. Now that is not there. That's what I'm worried about. There's no opportunity. [EARM1/Interview]

T10 referred to such spheres or venues for promoting the support as "different channels of communication." Similar to EARM1, this teacher was not very satisfied with the promotion of the ITRS opportunities in the centre. In the following excerpt, he links his awareness of the available ITRS opportunities with them being more communicated through different venues.

> I don't think the communication is there. I mean, communication would be that I would think of different channels through which I would become more aware that these things are there. Have I become more aware? No. I mean, is it something that has been communicated to me more or less? I think less. [T10]

This concern of lacked proactive promotion was evident in many of the teachers' responses. One teacher, who is an active teacher-researcher in the centre, remarked that despite his constant checking for any announcement of support opportunities, there was limited communication about the different forms of available support or teacher research in general.

> There's very little communication. I mean I'm a researcher, and I check my email hundreds of times every day. I'm worried I miss something. That's the kind of person I am. Nothing about research or research support. [T4]

He added that information about ITRS opportunities was limited to general announcements coming from the university but not the centre. He gave an interesting example of one financial reward opportunity for any researcher in the university based on their publications. To this teacher, this was a very important opportunity that he did not want to miss, but he was not satisfied that such an opportunity was not promoted in the Centre.

> I can't see anything it's only waiting for information from the university. Like recently, I applied for the Journal Publication Award, and this is administered by the university centrally. But the centre here has not spoken a word about this. I applied on my own because I accidentally came across it in one of the emails. [T4]

He also commented on receiving no information about the help he could get through the RCs within the Centre: "If it's is not visible, that means you don't even have the basic minimum for research, I don't see it." When I asked what made him make this conclusion despite the list of the ITRS opportunities he saw during the first repertory-grid interview, he linked his awareness of them with the amount of activity that could promote their visibility to him and other teachers. He made it clear that he saw no support when there was no visibility through activities that promote what was available.

> The existence of something doesn't mean that. It means there's work or there's quality or the people who are there are doing something. It doesn't mean that. Now people think they exist, but you don't see the outcome of that existence. [T4]

Similarly, another teacher, who focused on "well-communicated" ITRS opportunities, clearly categorized the opportunities that he had no information about as "not existent".

> We are colleagues, but we don't know. We don't know because we feel that there is nothing. Because if there's something allocated specifically for us, it should be well communicated to all people. I think it's not well communicated. Sometimes we say the absence of something if there is no information about it. It means it's not existent, right? [T6]

A third teacher (T2) expressed the same concern of what he felt generally missing regarding the available support for teacher research in the centre: "It's probably a communication issue, awareness-raising. You're destined for oblivion if you don't ask." This teacher, however, highlighted the importance of institutional activities in promoting the different forms of ITRS opportunities. He clarified that while teacher-initiated efforts to support their activities were important, information through proactive promotion was necessary for making teachers aware of the availability and potential of the support in the centre. To this teacher, such reciprocal activities from individual teachers and the centre were complementary.

> But if you're not aware that something is going on, that's not to say that the guidance isn't available. It's available. But in terms of, it's something that has to be proactive. It's something that in order to promote research, there need to be proactive attempts both on the self-driven initiation but also institutionally driven initiatives. We try to meet somewhere in the middle. [T2]

Despite this, there were many reported incidents of proactive promotion of the available ITRS opportunities, particularly regarding presenting in and attending the centre's international conference and PD sessions. Such incidents confirm the importance of proactive promotion in bringing to light the potential of the available ITRS to teachers. For example, one teacher clarified that the information she received about the centre's conference through different channels of communication (including text messages, emails and face-to-face meetings) was the main reason she found the centre's conference very inviting for her and other teachers.

> There is a lot of communication, and there's a lot of interest in us joining it. So there are many different requests from different emails and text messages, and sometimes people even approach us, knocking on the door, "Could you help with this? Could you join that?" I've experienced that personally. [T8]

Another teacher confirmed the importance of this approach in making him aware of the centre's conference and its potential. He reported an incident in which he was approached and encouraged personally to present his teacher research about using L1 in the classroom at the conference.

> They'll usually send emails encouraging teachers here to participate in this conference. Actually, sometimes they approach you personally. Like what happened to me last time, this last year. One of the teachers saw what I had done with my students. She suggested that I present at the conference. [T1]

He also commented on his noticeable attendance of the PD sessions[1]: "Yes, I can show you a bunch of certificates. It's done here within the centre, and it's announced, they send you like 3 or 4 emails before the session takes place". However, while he seemed to appreciate this, this teacher felt that more communication was needed regarding the other potential ITRS opportunities, particularly how he could be supported throughout his teacher-research projects. This participant was one of the teachers who joined the EAR workshop and did an EAR project on students' participation in speaking classes, but he was not sure if the RCs could provide mentoring throughout his project.

> Well, to be honest with you, we need something just for the teachers here. We need them one day to stand somewhere in this building and explain their role and what potentials they have for supporting research. Maybe, of course, they are part and parcel of the international conference, but again our focus is the conference itself but not actually how to do research for whatever purpose. [T1]

[1] As I mentioned in section 3.4.2.1, the PD sessions are considered another venue for disseminating teacher research, but this does not mean that all the sessions presented are based on teacher research.

This points to another perceived need for balanced promotion that makes clear the different ITRS opportunities available for supporting teacher research in the centre. One participant emphasized that the promotion of the potential support needs to be "balanced", i.e., not "excessively" or "scantily" promoted (T3). This teacher was critical about the emphasis given to PD sessions compared to the other opportunities to support teacher research. He thought that PD sessions could distract teachers from other potential support because of the excessive attention given to them.

> PD sessions stand out because they've been giving excessive attention at the expense of other opportunities. Other opportunities are available, but PD sessions are giving more weight and more marketing. They're well-marketed. They're well-promoted compared to the other opportunities, and this is not really a good thing because it distracts teachers from the other opportunities, making them focus on one opportunity at the centre. [T3]

Another teacher expressed a stronger opinion about the overemphasis on PD sessions, viewing them as a way to cover up for the lack of other possibilities to support research.

> There is this focus on PD. It's like we are covering up. Yeah, there is lots of PD and PD and activity, and it's all techniques and strategies. That's not always about research. So really, looking at research, they are covering up the idea of research in PD. No, PD is not always about research. [T4]

This section showed that although the participants felt the need for proactive communication to promote the visibility of the available support, some highlighted how imbalanced proactivity in promoting some types of support could result in not seeing the potential of other opportunities.

6.2.1.2 Commonly used support

In addition to well-promoted support, the second area that some teachers associated with the visibility of the different ITRS opportunities was how frequently they were used by

other teachers. The first four teachers of the eleven participants mentioned constructs in relation to this topic (see **Table 6.3**).

Table 6. 3: *The Constructs Related Commonly used Support*

Constructs		**Participants**
+	**-**	
common	occasional	T1
done by other teachers	not well understood	T2
best utilized	not fully used	T3
creates research momentum	almost dead	T4

Analysis of the participants' responses yielded two ways teachers perceived the relationship between the common use of the support and its visibility. The first one was individual guidance in which one teacher encouraged and assisted another to notice the potential of the available support they have themselves used before. The following excerpt shows how one teacher was encouraged to make use of the research funding by another active researcher who tried it to do a collaborative research on enhancing students' critical thinking skills. The interesting aspect of this example is that the teacher was aware of the availability of the funds, but she needed guidance to see its potential to her.

> **T5:** Our colleague, Dr X, has done three, four projects ever since she joined the school. She's conducted, and she's well versed, how to go and how to approach, and whatever feasibilities, etc. So she asked me if I'm interested in getting this.
>
> **Interviewer:** But were you clear about the procedure that you needed to go to that place?
>
> **T5:** No, it wasn't clear. The procedure was … to be very honest, I didn't try. But I knew that there's a facility for funding internal research projects. I was more into attending conferences, presenting, and building up networks and getting feedback kind of thing. And this's my tenth year here. [T5]

Another example was a teacher who related a very interesting story about how he was being assisted by a former colleague who saw the value of his work on problem-based

learning and the ways to get it supported. After failing to see any potential in getting his teacher-research project funded and his findings disseminated, this teacher had almost given up when the availability and potential of different ITRS forms were made visible to him by his colleague.

> I mean, I was a lot more engaged on this end, and now it's like inertia. Where I just slow down to a snail pace. But now, Dr X, maybe a year ago, initiated that from the outside and said, "We really need to do something with this." Because he was overseeing the implementation of this way back. So he's probably seen it and see the kind of inroads are made into various things. Now I'd try it through him. I think he's better positioned. We're doing research together on this. That feels that's a good thing. Because maybe I don't see that there was anything in what I was doing because it's never been picked up. [T2]

The second way the common use of the available support was linked with its visibility was through collective encouragement. This encouragement could happen because teachers notice that many other teachers do teacher research and presumably make use of the available support. In the following excerpt, T4 points out how such an environment is important for bringing out the discussion and momentum necessary for facilitating teachers' awareness of what ITRS opportunities are available.

> And so, if these are visible, more people will be conducting research. There'll be more discussion. There'll be more sharing. There'll be some kind of activity, some kind of momentum, energy in the institution. Everybody hears about it. There is some kind of movement, and that is very important for research to kind of really create that momentum and energy and people talking. [T4]

Other teachers highlighted how this momentum and people's talking could either encourage or discourage other teachers' recognition of the available ITRS and its potential use. T1 stated that "when you just hear incidents, individual incidents of teachers getting for example funds for research, that's when you start thinking this is maybe not for everyone." The teacher here points out how the limited noticed incidents of other teachers'

use of the support could discourage other teachers from seeing its potential. Two other teachers gave positive examples of participating in the centre and external international conferences. They indicated how them being common among the teachers had encouraged more people to participate. In the following quotes, they are referring to their general positive experience of the two support opportunities.

> One reason was teachers sharing with each other their experiences of presenting outside. I still remember I myself was encouraged to go to present by one of my colleagues. When I did, I talked to others as well, and I still remember other thought it was terribly difficult. It wasn't easy to use with all of the workloads, but we encouraged each other. And they did it. I know that they've been doing it, conducting research and presenting, for the last 10 or 15 years. [T3]

> I'm speaking in the plural, but I can think of many people that ... I don't mean all of the department, but I would think that a great many people are involved in this because we have committees working on it. We have volunteers. So there's a lot of buy-in for the whole process. [T8]

EARM1 referred to this as the "ripple effect" that he thought could facilitate the visibility of the provided support. In the following excerpt, he is referring to how teachers' talk about the EAR Workshop will possibly increase the number of participants in the coming years.

> There's the ripple effect. Those people who attended, this is the first time it's done. I'm sure, wait, people will be talking about it. "I attended, I benefited. I used this." People who will be talking more about that. And the more they talk about it, the more people know about its usefulness. The teachers benefited, and now they are really spreading the word for the other teachers to join. When it is made consistent thought, it becomes support. [EARM1/Interview]

Overall, it seems that some teachers' use of some of the TRS opportunities could facilitate its visibility to other teachers either individually through one-to-one guidance to what is available and how to make use of it, or collectively through group encouragement to notice and utilize what is useful to them.

6.2.1.3 Well-established support

The third theme relevant to the visibility of the available ITRS opportunities was how well-established they were. During the repertory-grid interviews, some participants used adjectives such as “formal”, “systematic”, “systemic”, “institutionalized”, and “sustained” to express their preference for institutionally organized and sustained support (see **Table 6.4**). From these adjectives, I have chosen well-established as it was recurrent during the interviews, and it is better in capturing the intended meaning conveyed by the participants.

Table 6. 4: *The Constructs Related to Well-established Support*

Constructs		**Participants**
+	**-**	
formal readily available	informal self-initiated	T1
only requires self-initiation	unfamiliar; not well-established	T2
mostly available	dependant on institutional conditions	T3
systemic; institutionalized central well-established sustained	haphazard; random peripheral almost non-existent haphazard; random	T4
Sustained	broken & collapsible	T5
systematic	random	T6
organized	not professional	T11

The bipolar adjectives and phrases above give an overview about how some teachers perceived the types of research support that lacked well-established procedures as being “haphazard,” “peripheral” and thus their availability was described by some participants as “collapsible,” “not professional” and “almost non-existent.” The constructs were expanded upon either during the repertory grid or follow-up interviews. In relation

to this theme, I noted what one of my EAR mentees mentioned about why he had not researched his practice before the EAR project.

> In my 1st meeting with X, we discussed his potential topic about students' engagement. We also talked about his research activities. He emphasised his interest in being research active, but he didn't find his current position as a full-time teacher helpful in being so. … I asked him about whether he did research his practice before, and he replied that he hadn't have the time and support to do so. He described the different support opportunities available as "scattered over time and place". [Field notes]

The ideas expressed by this teacher and the participants seemed to highlight two aspects of well-established support: *organization* and *sustainability*.

Regarding organization, T4, for example, pointed out in relation to collegial support that the Centre was "not creating the mechanisms in the centre so that people work together, research together, share ideas together". T1, who used the word 'informal' to describe collegial support in the Centre, explained how this lack of organizing mechanisms for getting collegial support could limit teachers' awareness of its availability and potential.

> **T1:** I have friends whom I trust. I can approach them easily. I know they will cooperate with me, but when talking about all the teachers here, is this like the norm? Is this announced anywhere? Are there certain people whom you can approach for help? That's the question. Well, maybe it's true for some teachers, but not for everyone.
>
> **Interviewer:** Interesting! That's why you said informal?
>
> **T1:** It depends on you, how well you know the teacher and what's the nature of your relationship with him. Is it like just a colleague, or do you have something bigger than just being colleagues?
>
> **Interviewer:** Does this matter?
>
> **T1:** Yes. It's not organized.
>
> **Interviewer:** Not organized?

> **T1:** It's not organized by the administration, or it's not announced. It's not something people would normally go for unless they have their own connections.

T5 and T3 expressed the same concern about the same type of support. The first teacher (who, as I mention above, got guided by another teacher to work in a collaborative funded research project on enhancing students' critical thinking skills) indicated how she expected more collegial support considering the large number of teachers in the Centre. In the following excerpt, she clarifies that awareness of this type of support, when left unorganized, remains subject to personal connections.

> **T5:** So, considering the large number of teachers here, the collegiality is, I expect more. But it's not up to our expectations.
>
> **Interviewer:** Why is that?
>
> **T5:** It is important but practically looking at it, sometimes yes, we are successful. Sometimes, for various personal reasons, the support may not be there.

The second teacher had even a stronger view about the status of collegial support in the centre. The following excerpt shows his strong feelings towards the unorganized and unrecognized potential of collegial support as if it were not available.

> I mean, look at the support opportunities available for teachers and look at the kind of interaction in the centre. Then, you say what's going on here? Why is it self-centred? And I think this is a very important issue that should be addressed by the administration. I'd say it's an appalling situation with all of this amount of potential support. It's a bit strange! Some of these teachers have been working together for more than 10 years. You expect that teachers work with each other because there's a very rich environment in the centre. Because you are talking about a hundred teachers, the majority are PhD holders and MA holders, and they've been in the field for a long time with rich experiences working in different EFL contexts. [T3]

However, this concern of lacked organization was also expressed about the institutionally organized ITRS opportunities that were perceived to lack sustainability. Interestingly, two other teachers indicated clear examples of how the opportunities for

supporting teacher research that were not sustained were not seen as available. T4 described the kind of support that was not sustained over time as "almost nonexistent." Referring to having access to research journals, he clarified that what qualified it as support was that it had been established and sustained, so it became "part and parcel of the culture".

> There's a clear procedure. It's part and parcel of the culture. It's there. It's been sustained for a long time. Sustainability is very important. It was there. It is here now. It will be there next year. That's the meaning of well-established. You don't question it. [T4]

T3 clarified what it meant for an ITRS opportunity to be part and parcel of the culture. He mentioned the following in his comparison of funds to present in outside conferences with release time and how he thought of funds to present in outside conferences as "mostly available" compared to release time which he described as "dependent on institutional conditions".

> The grants are always available. We have the centre's grants, small budget grants at the centre, and the ones also at the university. And in terms of it is there every year. It is there every year. It's not like release time. In a way, it's closer to the available kind of support. [T3]

Similarly, T7 commented on why many teachers take part in the centre's conference. She explained that the teachers' tended to be more aware of it and its potential because of sustainability.

> **T7:** I think because it has been since I don't know how many years already a very certain procedure. And people who work here, I think, they already know even about the timing. We all know that it's in spring. It means that somewhere in winter will be a call for participation. So, people, I think, know well enough about this.
>
> **Interviewer:** What has made this clear to people? Is it the time?
>
> **T7:** No, because it happens every year. Sort of the procedure is always the same.

EARM2 shared the same perspective about the importance of sustainability in increasing the teachers' awareness of the EAR Workshop.

> It's not just available one time, and then that's it. It stops. It should be constant. It should be there with you. It should be there when you really feel you want to join and at the right time, depending on your circumstances. So that is why consistency is important. [EARM2/Interview]

The above participants' responses in relation to well-established support indicate the need not only to create the institutional mechanisms for organizing the support opportunities but also to sustain them over time to increase their visibility.

6.2.2 Relativeness

In addition to the visibility of the available support, its relativeness (how considerate the ITRS opportunity was of the teachers' abilities and needs) was the second theme related to the accessibility of the ITRS opportunities. Under this theme, I grouped two themes relevant to how considerate the support is of the teachers' abilities: *user-friendly access* (obtainable through easy steps) and *inclusive support* (considering the diverse conditions of the teachers, particularly time and skills). The ITRS opportunities described as less considerate of teachers' abilities and needs, either because of lacking user-friendly access or being less inclusive, were still seen as potential support of limited accessibility.

6.2.2.1 User-friendly access

Concerning the relativeness of the available ITRS opportunities in the centre, almost all of the teachers focused on whether it was easy to access the ITRS opportunities. T1 referred to this as "user-friendly access". **Table 6.5** shows the constructs relevant to this theme.

Table 6. 5: *The Constructs Related to User-friendly Access*

Constructs		Participants
+	-	
clear procedures	vague procedures	T1
direct	indirect	
feasible	challenging	
user-friendly	restricted	
simple	complicated	
less demanding	demanding	
one-stop	multifaceted	T2
direct	indirect	
clear	complex	
clear	unclear	
fewer requirements	more requirements	T4
short-term	long-term	
clear procedures	no clear procedures	
no hurdles	involves administration bottlenecks	T5
requires less efforts	requires more efforts	T6
less complicated	more complicated	T7
less controlled access	more filtered	
one-stop access	multiple stages access	
decided internally	involves external approval	
facilitators recognize the relevance of research	facilitators might not be aware of research relevance	
facilitate initiation	hinder initiation	T8
clear	unclear	
transparent process	lacks transparency	
immediate	distant	
clear procedures	lack of transparency	T9
hustle free	involves lengthy procedures	T10
clear guidelines	oblique	T11
flexible expectations	high expectations	

From the analysis of the participants' constructs and extended responses, the user-friendly access of an ITRS opportunity was first linked with its clarity. During the repertory-grid interviews, the adjectives "clear" and "transparent" were repeated in relation to the clarity of procedures involved in getting the support. The following excerpt shows what T1 found restrictive of accessing guidance and approval for his teacher

research project. It was not clear to him who, when and how to make use of this type of support.

> To the best of my knowledge, there's no specific website or link or even a person whom you can approach at least to ask about the strategy to apply. There is nothing. It's a bit vague, and who should you approach? Is it the director? Is the research committee available here, or who exactly? I don't know. I mean, who, when and how? [T1]

The second topic associated with the user-friendliness of the ITRS opportunities was their complexity. From the constructs provided by the participants, a complex ITRS opportunity was viewed as more "filtered" (T7) and might involve "more requirements" (T4), "administration bottlenecks" (T5), and "lengthy procedures" (T10). T10, for example, pointed out how he viewed both clarity and complexity as "the defining features" of accessibility to the ITRS opportunities. He also linked this to the expected bureaucratic nature of institutions.

> Institutions can be very bureaucratic. There could be a lot of steps, procedures, rules, regulations, whether explicit or implicit … So, I think those two opposites, the clarity and complexity, for me I think that they would be the defining features of whether something was accessible. [T10]

The following excerpt from T2, who needed support with his problem-based learning research project, also indicates how both clarity and complexity can limit easy access to getting guidance from the RCs.

> You're replicating responsibilities, and you're making complicated systems. Here we have, for example, a research committee. We have people who are heading the research committee, but it's never quite clear what it requires. It's probably in some document somewhere. There's probably a document, and if I said, "Well, it's unclear to me." "Well, there is the document," but where is the document, and where is the layman's language to say, "This is what we do. Here I'm going to set out for you x y z. This is what we do. If you have a research idea, these are one, two, three, four what we can do for you". [T2]

This teacher added that when there was no clarity about how to get support within the centre, he had to seek access to help from outside where things might get more complex.

> You'd have to go outside to find out. There, you would be facing a whole different set of challenges which is firstly, finding the right people. Secondly, finding the right connections, the right network, taking the right steps, going through the right process. [T2]

T6 expressed a similar concern, pointing out how amidst this complexity to access the needed ITRS, the centre's priorities about supporting teacher research could be obscured.

> Sometimes it's about bureaucracies; then, it's about hierarchies. When you create too many systems, somewhere, there's a kind of loss of mission within those systems and structures. For example, you have so many rules, or regulations, or considerations, or bodies, or units. Everything is complicated, but somewhere in all that complication, you're losing the essential priorities. [T6]

To deal with this issue of complexity, one-stop access to ITRS opportunities was repeatedly indicated as a facilitator of accessing the needed support. Talking about getting funding to present in international conferences, T7, who was doing a teacher-research project about using Moodle in her classes, did not consider this easy to get and preferred a "one-stop access" to this type of support to make it more convenient, particularly when it is "decided internally" by "facilitators [who] recognize the relevance of [her] research". Another teacher who indicated his preference for one-stop access to ITRS opportunities in the centre was T2, who had been trying to get his research project funded, but he had not been successful because of its complex and usually unclear procedures to him. This teacher did see the potential of this opportunity to support his research, but it lacked user-friendly access that made it remain potential support that was hard to get despite expected usefulness. In the following excerpt, he also mentions how a "one point of access" would have made things easier for him.

> I have tried to find out about this, and it's like a mine field of different conflicting information. There're different bodies which are overseeing funding. There's external and internal funding, and there isn't one point of access. I'm not saying there isn't, but it's not well understood by me how that all works. [T2]

In the following two quotes, two other teachers also mentioned how the one-stop access to getting funds to attend outside conferences facilitated getting them.

> There is a lot of clarity around it through different channels. It's also fairly one stop. [T3]

> What facilitated it? Because it's all online. Clicking one button. We sent it, and then there were prompt answers that they have to forward it for review. And the reviewer also maybe committed, read, and sent back the reply immediately. So the commitment of the staff and because it's online, the communication was quick. [T5]

Overall, the teachers indicated how the available ITRS opportunities could be less considerate of the teachers' abilities and needs when their access was made complex and vague. They also highlighted the importance of one-stop access to facilitate the teachers' use of the available support within reasonable time and efforts.

6.2.2.2 Inclusive support

Besides the indicated need for user-friendly access, another area related to the relativeness of the available ITRS opportunities was their inclusiveness. I have chosen the word *inclusive* to convey the meaning of the participants' used words such as "open", "flexible", and "highly available" (see **Table 6.6**).

Table 6. 6: *The Constructs Related to Inclusive Support*

Constructs		**Participants**
+	**-**	
flexible	fixed	T1

open	filtered	
highly available	least available	T5
fair	bureaucratic	
open	competitive	T6
less competitive	more competitive	T7
flexible	constrained	T9
open	restricted	T10
flexible	rigid	T11

The adjectives above and the participants' responses express a need for more inclusive ITRS opportunities that considers the teachers' diverse conditions and caters to their different needs. Many of the participants remarked that to ensure their fair share of the support, its facilitators needed to consider how many of them were disadvantaged with time and research skills. Regarding the former condition, almost all participants pointed to time as an important condition that could either limit or facilitate their use of the support. The following two teachers mentioned how they had been very willing and successful in using the ITRS opportunities that considered their busy schedules. The first teacher refers to PD sessions, and the second refers to the EAR workshop.

> Its timing is chosen carefully where teachers have no teaching. Sometimes it's done when classes are cancelled. There're many things that make it very accessible to teachers. Actually I don't see why teachers don't attend these sessions. [T1]

> I found this workshop very convenient. I mean, its time is Thursday when there're no classes after 12. There're also those YouTube videos for people who can't attend and emails and handouts. [T9]

On the other hand, there were examples of teachers who were stopped from seeking out and making use of their needed support because of time. One ironic example was the opportunity to get release time to do research. Most of the teachers I asked about why they did not apply found the time of the announcement for getting release time inappropriate as it was the end of the semester, and they were all busy with marking and

evaluation. This lack of inclusiveness was linked to the lack of concordance among the different ITRS opportunities (see section 6.3.1). Some of the participants were critical of the inadequate coordinated ITRS opportunities between the centre and the university. T4, for example, stated that "the university works as if the centre doesn't exist". This participant pointed out how this has resulted in some ITRS opportunities being provided to all university staff, ignoring the fact that the teachers in the Centre are not equal when it comes to workload.

> They encourage people to do research. You can go and do a conference, attend and participate in conferences. That's all equal for everybody, and that's the coherence part of things. But the no coherence is that they restrict you because a very important condition is time. And if you are really pressed for time, you don't have much time … you're always teaching 18 hours, that affects your productivity from the beginning. So not many people are going to conferences, not many people here are publishing papers. Not many people are applying for awards like the Journal Publication Award. Not many people are doing that. [T4]

In addition to time, another teacher, who participated in the EAR project and did his project on students' perceptions of using mobile phones for learning, pointed to research skills as another condition that could limit seeking out and making use of the support provided by the university. In the following quote, he mentions how his lack of confidence of his research skills had made him feel less confident to make an approach to ask for funds to present in international conferences.

> Knowing that also it's quite competitive because it's applied to all people in colleges, academics who are already like in research and they're researchers. They're doctors, professors who make you sometimes feel that I can't be like them. But when it is competitive, you might be deprived from something that you really like. Because other people are stronger, that actually discourages. Sometimes it discourages. It really discourages your motives to go and even try it. [T6]

This perceived lack of research skills could be linked to another issue, highlighting the participants' concern of less inclusive ITRS. The issue is helping teachers to improve their research skills. After my introductory EAR session, I noted how many teachers came to express their appreciation of an opportunity where they could be mentored to do research.

> Many teachers came after the session. They were very interested in the rationale behind the EAR approach. They also commented on how important they felt such an initiative is needed in the Centre. They indicated that there isn't enough focus on how to conduct research. One teacher highlighted that not many teachers were confident about their skills to start researching their own practices. They also commented on the importance of having a mentor to guide less confident teachers in doing TR. [Field notes]

Other participants also highlighted how the current ITRS lacked enough opportunities for teachers who feel less confident about their research skills.

> But we want people to do research. How can they do research when they don't know how to do it? Or who to contact to do it, or how I can support you as an institution to link you with expert people or people who are interested in that? Are they conducting workshops? I haven't heard of anything you know. [T4]

> I think they care about the product more than the process, which shouldn't be the case. The case should be because we have so many teachers here, their knowledge is variable. Some teachers have very good experience about how to conduct research while others are beginners, just like myself, so I need more guidance than how to present. [T1]

Two RC members also recognized this perception. One member referred to it as a myth that the RCs need to break, and she expressed the readiness of the members to assist at any level.

> Maybe people in their minds think that only when they have a proper research proposal ready planned, then they can approach us. I think we need to break that myth and tell them that no, even if that you have a very faint idea, you can come forth and make use of the support available. [RCM5]

Another member also found it necessary to carry a “research needs analysis” to cater to the teachers' diverse needs.

> Maybe some kind of needs analysis to find out what the research needs are. I’m aware of professional needs, professional development needs, but I’m not always aware of what the research needs are. [RCM8]

To sum up, the inclusiveness of ITRS in the centre was associated with it being more accommodating and considerate of the teachers’ diverse research needs in order to break the barriers to encourage more use of the available ITRS opportunities.

6.3 Utility

In addition to their focus on the possibility to get support (accessibility), the teachers’ responses also centred around another central theme: the utility of the ITRS opportunities (i.e., their usefulness). Here, they pointed out many areas that I grouped under two main themes: the concordance and quality of the ITRS opportunities. While the former refers to the participants’ focus on the relevance of the support, the latter refers to their emphasis on its suitability in achieving their research purposes. As I will show from the teachers’ responses in this section, when either of these were limited, the support was mostly seen as having no potential.

6.3.1 Concordance

The first main theme I placed under the utility of the ITRS opportunities was concordance, a term I selected from one of the participants’ responses to refer to the participants’ concerns regarding the relevance of the available support. Analysis of the data showed that the relevance of an ITRS opportunity was recognized when it was seen to align with the institutional and/or personal goals as well as the other available support.

6.3.1.1 Concordance with research goals

In relation to the concordance of the ITRS opportunities in the centre, the participant teachers first highlighted the importance of its alignment with personal and institutional research goals. **Table 6.7** presents the related constructs that were grouped under this area.

Table 6. 7: *The Constructs Related to Concordance with Research Goals*

Constructs		Participants
+	-	
transparent concordant goals	deceptive	T2
purposeful	purposeless	
interest-driven	neutral	
externally driven	self-driven	
motivating	not motivating	
properly tailored	not properly tailored	T3
more meaningful	less meaningful	T6
worthwhile	less valuable	T7
aligned with current personal goals	doesn't reflect current research interest	
gives credibility	not transparent	T9
fundamental	peripheral	
valid; genuine	bureaucratic	

Regarding personal research goals, many participants expectedly stressed that their research goals and needs could determine their use of the available support. An example of this was during the EAR Workshop. Many of the teachers, particularly the PhD holders, who only attended the introductory session of the EAR Workshop, told me that they did not find it relevant to their current research goals. Another example was T4, an active teacher-researcher, who seemed very clear about his personal research goals and expressed his strong desire to start his own funded research project.

> I would really go for something practical, something relevant. I want to be involved in very serious research that would really promote my profile and say that I have conducted funded research. And I can publish from it as well

> because a funded research project is huge, and from it, you can publish several articles. [T4]

Similarly, another active teacher-researcher stated that she had never requested funds to present her research in conferences because she did not feel ready.

> And honestly, I've never requested funds to attend outside conferences, but I know that it was easy before. I don't know whether it's the rule now, but before that, you could have applied once a year. Honestly, I didn't choose it, not because or it's not possible. It's just I don't know. I was waiting for something. I was waiting to be ready to share. [T7]

Besides personal research goals, some participants judged the relevance of support by how well it concorded with and served the institutional research goals. T2, for example, pointed out the significance of personal goals in filtering what support he was ready to seek, but he added institutional research goals as part of his filtering process.

> I mean, all the different ways of accessing support could be there, but they're filtered through goals. So potentially I could apply to speak at a conference. I could attend a conference. I could get support for that. I could apply to the Deanship of Research for money. I could go to the Education & Innovation Center, and I could say to them, "I've got a project." I know all this is there, but it has to be filtered through what I think is going to enhance my personal goals and the goals of the centre. Do they concord in that way? [T2]

This teacher also added that it was the clear alignment between personal and institutional research goals that would hold things together and give direction to what he described as the "rudderless ship" of supporting and promoting teacher research:

> I think that we're a rudderless ship. What we're doing is very individually driven. So, or maybe the collective point is a course, doing something. There's nothing holding the whole thing together, which I would have seen as being driven by research. I mean it's that there's some kind of institutional individual goal set, which aligns with each other, and it's clear and transparent. [T2]

In relation to this concern about the alignment between personal and institutional research goals, I noted how the EAR participants, after the last EAR session, were not sure whether

their EAR projects would be considered research, and whether they aligned with what the centre viewed as research.

> The participants also talked about the conception of research in the Centre. They discussed how they might get recognized for their EAR projects, and whether they are considered research. There was a consensus among the participants that the conception of research in the centre is not clear and that without being clear about an agreed conception of what research is, any initiative to promote or support research would most likely be isolated and less effective. [Field notes]

The importance of seeing such alignment was clear T5's experience. After her successful funded collaborative research project, she seemed to have succeeded in seeing this concordance between the personal and institutional research goals and felt that it had positively affected her use of the provided support.

> I could see why they're promoting research itself in the centre. It's to improve the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes. Right, they're focused more on making students socially productive citizens, in addition to their academic careers. That's very important, that's what the aim of the teacher also. So in that area, to find out the loopholes, I'm to plug it through research and to be fully engaged with what's provided. [T5]

To see this general concordance of the personal and institutional research goals, many participants also emphasized the importance of the perceived concordance between the support available and the institutional research goals. It is this perceived concordance that T9 found necessary to give "credibility" to support and makes it "fundamental" to her research process. When such concordance is perceived missing, T2 saw it as "deceptive", and T3 described it as "not properly tailored." T11 viewed the ITRS opportunities that lacked this concordance as "a good word play, which doesn't reconcile, which would then demotivate, rather than motivate." T3 focused on the example of the RCs in the centre and expressed his concern about the discrepancy between what they were supposed to do for ITRS and what is happening in reality. In the following quote, he refers to what he sees

as the irreconcilable roles of the RCs in mentoring and encouraging teacher research and granting access and ethical approvals.

> I would say it says something, but in fact, in reality, it doesn't serve the purpose it was put for. How would I say this? You cannot be the judge and the psychological helper at the same time. It might not be the right analogy here, but you need to separate these two things. [T3]

T9, who stopped her EAR project after being asked to fill the ethical approval form, agreed with this and also pointed out that this incongruence between the supposed and the practised role of the RCs questioned their credibility in trying to pursue the centre's research goals and could make their role irrelevant and more of "going through the motion and ticking boxes."

Similar to T9, T2 felt that the general lack of concordance between the centre's research goals and some of the ITRS available could lead teachers to question the centre's seriousness for supporting teacher research. In the following excerpt, he expresses this feeling of mismatch and he thus indicates a need for a reconciliation between the institutional and personal not only in terms of research purposes but also in terms of research conception.

> Are we genuine in our pursuit of this goal of using research in order to somehow inform practice or improve or develop? Or are we doing research for research's sake just so that we can put a number somewhere in some order to say this is how much research is being done? I think that there has to be some reconciliation between institutional understanding of what research is and why it's being promoted. And that has to concord with individual and personal goals regarding research. [T2]

Interestingly, this felt lacked concordance between the personal and institutional research goals was also attributed by some participants to the already mentioned issue of lacking proactivity in communicating and promoting the centre's research goals and the available ITRS for facilitating their achievement. T1, for example, felt that the centre

wanted fewer teachers to make use of the available ITRS opportunities as there was very little attention directed to them.

> Maybe they want less of us to make use of this here at the centre. Of course, if something is encouraged, you will notice. When something is discouraged, there is not much attention that is given. I feel that teachers here just don't want them to … not everyone is encouraged to do research. They are not publicizing it, and because you know, they don't make things clear. Like they make clear about other things, like teaching and so on. But, they don't make things clear when it comes to research. [T1]

T4 agreed with this, although he admitted that the centre's research goals had been communicated to him. He, however, felt that the communication of research goals was insufficient, and it had been done to ensure teachers' familiarity with them during audits rather than to induct teachers to genuinely pursuit goals.

> They've been communicated. I have to be honest and fair. I mean they've sent us. But you see, the idea is, it's not just about communicating information, it's about living the information. And the sending of information about the vision that was not really for the purpose of inducting you into the culture of the place or making you there. No. They're preparing for a test. And it's like an instructor saying, "Okay, you know we have a test chapter 14 and here is the material." So they sent us in the form of, "Okay, there is an audit, you need to know these things, look at that. [T4]

Here, the teachers' responses indicated that the personal and institutional research goals and the perceived concordance between them were important in determining teachers' decisions of whether or not they make use of the available support opportunities. For achieving such concordance, the participants emphasized the need for well-promoted institutional research goals that are translated into relevant support.

6.3.1.2 Concordant with other types of support

The second theme evident in the teachers' responses concerning the concordance of support was the concordance among the different support opportunities. The local-external

dichotomy in comparing the support within the centre (local) to the support provided by the university (external) was interestingly repeated by four participants during the repertory-grid interviews (see **Table 6.8**).

Table 6. 8: *The Constructs Related to Concordance with other Support Opportunities*

Constructs		**Participants**
+	**-**	
within the centre; reachable facilitators	involves external parties	T1
local; near me	external; from outside	T8
loca**l**	outsider	T9
local	external	T10
local	external	T11

As I mentioned above, the ITRS opportunities were generally seen as less inclusive of the teachers' needs and conditions. The local-external dichotomy focused on comparisons about how internal opportunities were easier to get because of involving familiar people and producers, and external opportunities were generally difficult to get because of involving unfamiliar people and complex procedures. In relation to this local-external dichotomy, EARM2 wrote how he felt that teachers were appreciative of the fact that they were being supported by a colleague not only because he knew how to provide relevant support, but also because being local helped create a sense of understanding and collegial relationship between him and his mentees.

> They appreciated the fact that their projects were being mentored by a local and experienced researcher who could support them along the way and provide timely, informed and expert guidance on their work. In addition, the fact that both the mentees and their mentors belong to the same workplace had created a sense of understanding and collegial relationship between the mentees themselves and their mentors. [EARM2/Dairy]

This preference was repeated by four of the participant teachers. For example, T1, who participated in the EAR Workshop, commented why he preferred it to external support: "the people who run it, they are reachable, you know, they are teachers just like you. They understand you". The other three participants gave similar responses in their comparison of internal and external ITRS opportunities.

> Because it's something I know. It's something that I understand. I know about it. [T8]

> They're local, within the building. You know about them, but these two involve different people. [T10]

> Local is hassle-free as opposed to external that imposes lengthy procedures and a lengthy process. [T11]

While this local-external dichotomy shows the ease the teachers associated with getting the support, it reveals the little relevance the teachers saw in the ITRS opportunities provided by the university and their limited concordance with the support provided within the Centre. In the following quotes, the words used by the teachers are very expressive of this perceived problem.

> I don't see any coherence at all. I mean the university is working on their own as if the centre is not there. [T4]

> They don't seem to be working together, even from a distance. They don't seem to be under one umbrella. Some of them are done locally. Some are done within the university. I feel that every one of these is run by separate people, so I say they are not under one umbrella. You feel that every two or three people are responsible for something else. But, do they meet at a certain point? I don't see a clear coherence. [T1]

The teachers' responses regarding this issue showed that this lack of concordance manifested itself in less coordinated support hard for teachers to find relevant despite its availability. As expressed by T2 in the excerpt below, trying to find the most relevant support in this situation could be very hard.

> There's a central fund at the university. There's the Sultan's fund for research. There's a consultancy basis. There's an academic envision unit. There's this network of people already working on this. There're these publications and journals that you could be interested in. I feel like a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat. [T2]

This teacher referred to this as integrity, stressing its importance in seeing the clear link among the abundantly available ITRS opportunities so that teachers could recognize their relevance and value.

> Integrity is very important because the opportunities are there. And there is an abundance of opportunities, but how well integrated these opportunities are? Sometimes this abundance of opportunities might mean teachers not able to see the value of these opportunities or to link these opportunities together. And that's why it is very important to integrate these to clearly link them, clearly present them to the teachers and involve the teachers in this process. [T2]

With this perceived lack of concordant ITRS, T4 highlighted that a teacher might not only find it difficult to decide upon the relevant support, but they might question the relevance of the support provided by the university. He conveyed this in his remark about how difficult it was for a teacher in the centre to find relevant the university's support, considering their heavy workload.

> There is a research culture in the whole university, there're resources to support whether time or money, and there are people whom you can approach. And there're units working to promote research. So that's at the university side. That's extremely clear. But it's not supported in this context, for example. Because you are in a centre and you are really teaching a full load. So in that sense, the university hasn't taken that into account because, on the one hand, it wants to promote research. On the other hand, it insists that research is part of the promotion, but at the same time, you're not really given that much support in terms of time. You're a full-time teacher. [T4]

This local/external dichotomy was also echoed by EARM2, who remarked: "We've many things in place, but we don't know that much about. Because they're in the university but not within the centre …So we are segregated" (EARM2/Interview). EARM1 commented

on how teachers in the centre viewed the university-provided support: “Because there is no support here to make it accessible, teacher research wise, people are scared. They think, “No, this is not for me” (EARM1/Interview).

However, this perceived lack of concordance could also occur even within the local ITRS. This non-concordance was particularly clear during the EAR Workshop, which was meant to be a user-friendly opportunity for teachers to engage in small EAR projects. As mentioned earlier, after the first four weeks of the workshop, it was insisted that they had to fill an online ethical form for their projects to be approved. It was argued for as an opportunity to help the participants see the different dimensions of ethics in research. However, almost all the participants and mentors saw that this type of support did not concord with the nature of the EAR Workshop. As a result, many participants dropped. The following excerpt is an example of what the participants thought about this.

> If it’s just filling out a paper for the sake of another form that has to be filled in, that has very little relevance or very little to help the researcher themselves or to guide the researcher. Then it’s just a point of another committee going through the motions and ticking a box. I mean, what is the point? [T9]

Overall, the participants’ responses relevant to the issue of concordance among the different ITRS opportunities highlighted the significance of concordance among the provided support not only in identifying what is relevant but also in seeing its value.

6.3.2 Quality

The second theme that came under the utility of the ITRS opportunities was the quality of the teachers’ experiences in using them. Here, the participants focused on how good or bad their experiences of getting the support were, particularly in terms of security (happening in a collegial environment that encourages autonomy) and enrichment

(opening the door to different ITRS opportunities and thus encouraging further utilization of the available support and sustained engagement in teacher-research activities).

6.3.2.1 A secure support experience

Regarding the quality of their experiences in getting the support, the participants focused on how secure the experience of using it was. During the repertory-grid interviews, the participants used many adjectives and phrases relevant to this (see **Table 6.9**).

Table 6. 9: *The Constructs Related to a Secure Support Experience*

Constructs		**Participants**
+	**-**	
low risk	high risk	T3
outcome depends on your own decision	outcome depends on application; another party's decision	T4
informal	formal	
personal/controlled	external	T5
depends on self-motivation	depends on external factors	
maintain interest in and ownership of research	disrupt interest in and ownership of research	
free	restrictive	
getting acknowledged	lack of interest and acknowledgement	T6
feeling attached	feeling detached	
access depends on self-initiation	access depends on institutionalized procedures	T7
reciprocal benefit	top-down	T8
engaging	rejecting	T9
open; relaxed	formal; no collaboration	
supportive atmosphere	lack of collegiality	
self-regulated	control is imposed	
bottom-up	top-down	
autonomous	totally tied	
intrinsic	forced participation	T10
informal	formal	
individual	institutional	
mutual respect	having prejudices	T11
trustworthy	deceitful	

From their responses, it was evident that some participants associated a secure experience with a collegial environment. In relation to this, T9, for example, expressed her preference for the type of support occurring in a "supportive", "bottom-up", and "relaxed" environment that fosters "collegiality". This teacher indicated why she found it inviting to participate in the EAR Workshop, focusing on it being bottom-up and informal.

> It is bottom-up. The best part of that is I could speak with X (her mentor). He could explain things to me and guide me through the process. I think going to your session was accessible because of the time and I was free at that time and because of the informality of it. When the formality is being imposed, then I find it off-putting. [T9]

EARM2 also stressed this need for a supportive and secure environment. In the following excerpt, he highlights the need for an environment in which the mentees feel supported and appreciated to feel secure.

> Mentors need to understand this. Your job is to encourage people and to let them feel secure. That they feel that they are much appreciated. We don't want them to stop here. We want them to continue because the findings will be useful to them, to everybody, which can be shared later on. [EARM2/Dairy]

In a secure environment, others referred to the need for "mutual respect" (T11), "reciprocal benefit" (T6) and "low risk" of being judged or accountable (T3). T3, for example, highlighted the benefits of presenting in conferences, but he pointed out the fear of being judged by some attendants who might have critical decisions on his job.

> You are always expected to do really well because see who attends your sessions are the very same people who sit in a committee to decide whether you will be promoted or not. It could be the same people who would go through your application for a certain position. So the politics are always there. If you are perceived in the wrong way, it might affect your chances in other areas. [T3]

This same teacher interestingly shared that he, like some other teachers, preferred to present in outside conferences because of their fear of being judged.

> Other teachers shared this with me. They say that it's much easier to present abroad than in the centre because sometimes you find attendants who like to bully the presenters. So, if, in a way, you're criticized for one mistake, it would affect you. It would be a good story for gossip. [T3]

This fear of being judged was also expressed by T11, referring to getting guidance from colleagues. This teacher indicated being cautious in approaching her colleagues for help, and she justified her fear as follows:

> I choose who I want to talk to. I wouldn't talk to anybody anywhere simply because one, I want a feeling of security when I talk that is important for me … It could be slightly deceitful. People can be deceitful. They might give you an impression of being concerned about you, elicit information from you and use that information against you. In such a distorted way that you wonder where the hell did this come from. [T11]

In relation to this fear of being judged, three teachers referred to their experience of getting funds as highly accountable, a feature one teacher found to "disrupt interest in and ownership of research" (T5). Another teacher said in describing her experience of getting funds to do a collaborative research with a group of other teachers about learning skills: "It was like push push push. I did give a few presentations about it. But I don't think anything was well-planned. It's rushed through rather than thought through" (T9). Because of this, she reported how this had made her feel "totally tied" and did not encourage "self-regulated" and "autonomous" research.

From the above examples, the secure experience of getting the needed support seems to influence its perceived quality. Overall, for the support to be secure, the participants highlighted the significance of a collegial environment where there are low chances of being judged and accountable and less control over the teacher's research.

6.3.2.2 An enriching support experience

The second theme associated with the quality of an ITRS opportunity was how enriching the experience of getting it was. Although this seems very much related to the concordance of the support with personal goals, the participants mainly focus on the quality of getting the support rather than its relevance to them (see **Table 6.10**).

Table 6. 10: *The Constructs Related to an Enriching Support Experience*

Constructs		**Participants**
+	**-**	
facilitating	inhibiting	T2
very motivating	not always motivating	T3
rewarding	less rewarding	
gives access to multiple support	gives access to limited support	
experts; research active	novice	T4
good quality	modest; no-existent quality	
deeper learning opportunities	superficial contact	
more academically rewarding	academically less rewarding	
involves more support	limited support	T5
large scale impact	small scale impact	
gives access to various support	gives access to limited support	
more quality	less quality	T6
has more impact	less significant impact	T7
facilitates progress	doesn't help me to move forward	
encouraging	dissuading	T8
quality results	invalid findings	
sustains research engagement	disrupts research engagement	
supports PD	hinders PD	
facilitating	obstructing	T9
proud	frustrating	
quality product	disappointing outcome	
useful results	no direct implications	T11
enriching	irrelevant	

From their responses, most participants seemed to associate an enriching experience of getting the support with its positive impact upon them and their research.

One form of this impact was opening the door for more support opportunities. T3, for example, described the types of support that give "access to multiple types of support" as "rewarding" and "very motivating". He gave the example of presenting in outside conferences and why he found it rewarding. To this teacher, presenting in conferences has "a huge package of incentives".

> I think when you go out or travel to conduct research, it's not only you disseminate your research, you also meet other researchers, you expand your network, and you learn about the country you visit. There's a huge package of incentives in this one incentive. [T3]

T5 also felt the same about her experience of getting funds to conduct research with two of her colleagues. She mentioned how it gave "access to various support" and helped her research have a "large scale impact". When I asked her why she thought of it as involving more support, she replied:

> Because I visited at least five colleges. Two new cities. So I came to know how the GFP programs are conducted there. What are the strengths of their programs, what are the weaknesses in their program? So because of this participation in this research, now I can see our strengths and weaknesses. [T5]

When I asked her how this positive experience had influenced her perception of other support opportunities, she replied:

> It has to a great extent made me more confident. I know the reasons, means now, and what avenues are open. Right now, we received an e-mail from our director, I think yesterday or the day before, to submit research projects for the coming spring season. And I'm planning to do my individual action research project. [T5]

Thus, her enriching experience did not only make her more aware of what support was available and how to get it, but it also made her more motivated to continue doing teacher research.

The motivation to sustain doing teacher research and looking for further support opportunities was the second form of impact an enriching experience of getting the support was perceived to have. This point was evident among many other participants. T8, for example, associated an "encouraging" experience of getting the support with "quality results" and "sustain[ed] research engagement". This was also true about one of the EAR participants who found the experience of being mentored to explore her students' perceptions about her feedback on their writings very useful and encouraging and thus decided to carry on with finding a way to disseminate the findings of her exploratory phase and exploring this issue further in the future.

> I received an email from XX today. She wrote about her positive experience of participating in the EAR Workshop and being mentored to explore an issue related to her classroom. XX sent me a draft of her report of the exploratory phase's findings, and she expressed her interest to find a way to get it published. She also mentioned that she would continue exploring this issue further with her future students. [Field notes]

T4, who had been involved in a funded research project with external researchers and other teachers about effective teaching from the perspectives of students, also reported how it had a positive impact on him and ultimately how he perceived this support opportunity. He felt that being involved with "research active" teachers provided him with "deeper learning opportunities". He, therefore, expressed his strong desire to engage in the same or similar enriching experiences.

> As I said for me right now, I'm looking for some real guidance. I'm looking for some kind of rewards. Rewards into my research, which is strong research that I can do. I don't just want to do any kind of research; I want to do something that will have an impact on me as a person learning and resolving issues that are important for the country or the context, but also on things that will impact my CV. I can increase my profile; I can get published. So consequences are extremely important for me. I don't just want to do research for the sake of research, but for the sake of finding solutions to existing problems and my CV. I want to promote my profile. [T4]

On the other hand, T9 had an entirely opposite view of getting funds to do her research. She strongly expressed her negative feeling about the whole experience, and it had resulted in a research project she was not proud of.

> It became something that I wasn't proud of at all. It turned on a lot of stuff that I wished my name wasn't on. Because it went in a way I didn't think was valuable or positive. I just thought, what a waste of incredible energy, incredible stress and money. [T9]

Because of feeling restricted by the regulations of the funding, the teacher described her experience as "frustrating" and "obstructing", and she felt it has resulted in "disappointing outcomes" and her sad decision to quit doing research.

6.4 Summary

This chapter presented two major themes (the accessibility and utility of the ITRS opportunities in the centre) generated mainly from my interviews with the eleven participant teachers. Regarding the accessibility of the ITRS opportunities, the focus was on the possibility to get them, highlighting first the importance of visible availability and the potential of what was there to support their research. In this regard, I presented how the teachers' constructs and extended responses pointed out the need for well-promoted (proactively and equally encouraged), commonly-used (frequently utilized by teachers who encourage and guide each other) and well-established (institutionally organized and sustained) ITRS opportunities to make them visible to teachers. Accessibility was also related to the relativeness of the ITRS opportunities: their consideration of the teachers' abilities through user-friendly access (clear procedures and one-stop access) and inclusiveness (considering the teachers' diverse conditions and needs).

The second major theme generated from the interviews with the teachers was the utility (usefulness) of the ITRS opportunities. The utility of the ITRS opportunities was judged by their relevance and quality. Their relevance was judged in terms of their concordance with each other in serving both personal and institutional research goals, and their quality was evaluated in terms of their potential in being secure (happening in a collegial and supportive environment that encourages autonomy) and enriching (opening the door to other support and encouraging its utilization for further research engagement).

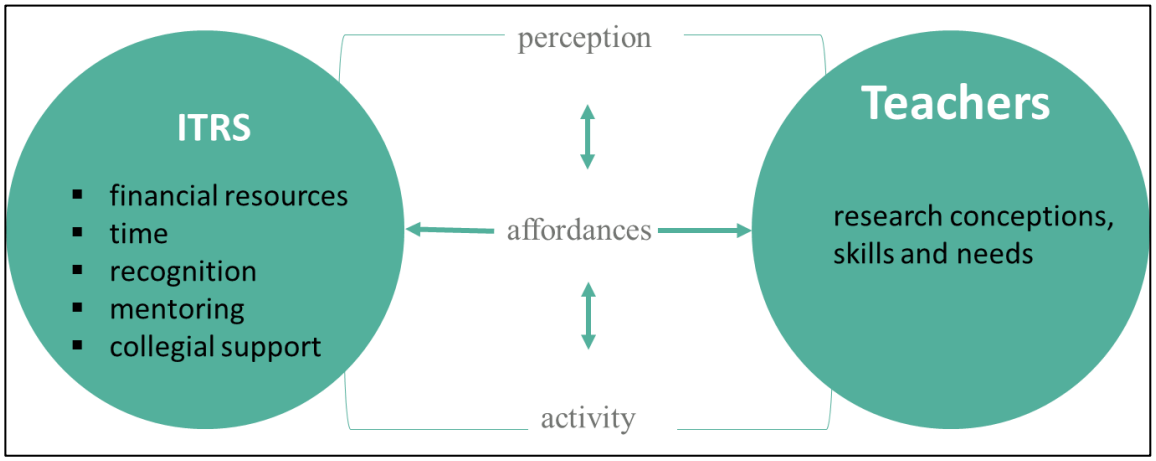
CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

This study was mainly motivated by a contextual paradox between the relative abundance of ITRS opportunities available for the language teachers in the tertiary language institution where I work and the limited incidence of teacher research. Amidst calls for maximizing the affordances of ITRS (Edwards & Burns, 2016c) and doubts about its potential (Hanks, 2018), the study was also motivated by an inadequate understanding of how ITRS needs to be made available to teachers. It was informed by a clear conceptual framework. Based on a thorough review of the literature in supporting teacher research and a close examination of the conception of affordances, the framework directs our attention to the complementarity between ITRS and teachers' research conceptions, needs and skills (see **Figure 7.1**). It distinguishes between ITRS in its different forms (time, funds, recognition, mentoring and collegial support) and its many affordances such as *start-research-able, do-research-able, fund-research-able, disseminate-research-able* and *sustain-research-able.* From this perspective, the affordances of ITRS are not only opportunities that interested teachers need to optimize through activity and institutions need to maximize in quantity (Edwards & Burns, 2016c), they are relationships pointing both ways: to the role of teachers' research conceptions, needs and skills in seeking out and utilizing support opportunities to sustain their research, and the role of ITRS in starting teachers' interest in research and sustaining their research activities. Informed by this conception, the study focused on what might influence ITRS in playing its expected role of enhancing the feasibility, capability and desirability of doing teacher research. To this

end, the study addressed one research question: **What influences (i.e., facilitates or impedes) the institutional support of teacher research in a tertiary ELT context?**

Figure 7. 1 *The Conceptual Framework of ITRS and its Affordances*



In addressing this research question, the analysis of the data resulted in identifying two groups of factors that seemed to influence the support of teacher research within my context:

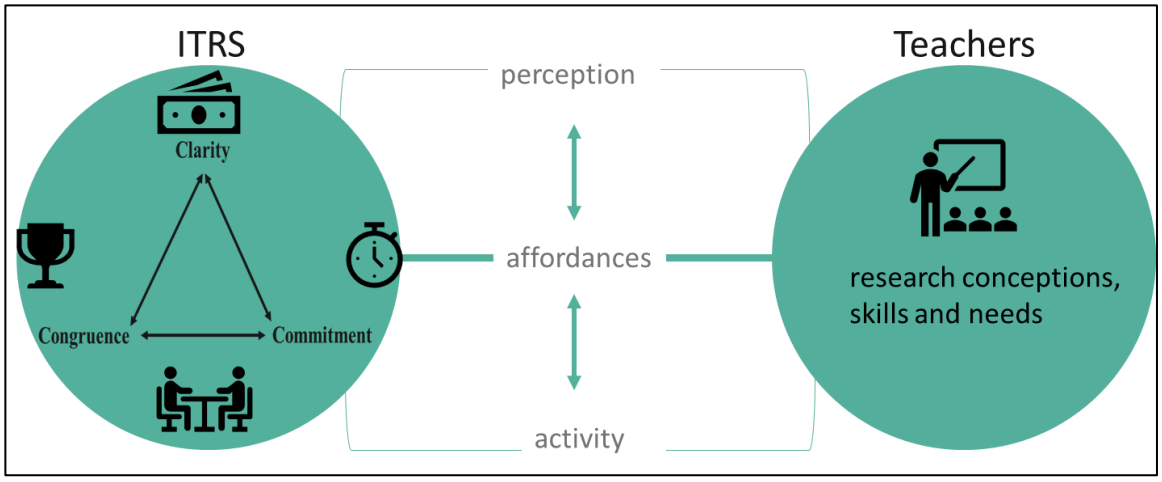
1. The first group was evident in the teacher-research facilitators' responses that focused on the factors related to organizing the support. It included commitment to the support, its clarity, and its congruence.
2. The second group was mainly evident in the teachers' responses that focused on the factors related to providing the support and how it was made available to teachers. This group included the extent to which the support was seen accessible or useful by the teachers.

This chapter will discuss the findings related to the two groups of factors (sections 7.2 and 7.3, respectively).

7.2 Building the bridge: Factors related to organizing the support

Considering their roles in supporting teacher research, the teacher-research facilitators' responses provided a holistic view of the overall interrelated factors that influenced the ITRS in the centre. As illustrated in **Figure 7.2**, these factors include the clarity, congruence and commitment needed to coordinate and organize the ITRS. To make this clearer, the bridge in the animal-bridge example cited in Chapter two to illustrate the meaning of affordances is a good metaphor (see section 2.7.3). The factors of clarity, congruence and commitment generated from the teacher-research facilitators' responses are needed at the stage of building the bridge of support. For building the bridge, there needs to be clarity about what to build and how and why it needs to be built. It also requires congruence between the expectations of the bridge and the significance giving to it as well as to the support (time-training) given to the people involved in building it. Commitment is also needed not only from the people involved in building and maintaining the bridge of support but also from the whole institution. In what follows, I will discuss the meaning, significance, and relevance of each of these factors.

Figure 7. 2 *The Factors Influencing the Organization of ITRS*



7.2.1 Clarity

Echoing many expressed concerns about the general lack of clarity in contexts pushing towards more doing of research among language teachers (e.g., Aga, 2017; Al Aamri & Wahaibi, 2018; Borg & Liu, 2013; Tran et al., 2017; Xu, 2014), lacking clarity was one of the main concerns of the teacher-research facilitators in this study. In their reflections on their experiences of supporting teacher research in their context, Al Aamri and Wahaibi (2018) indicated the lack of clarity as one challenge to supporting teachers, and they, therefore, recommended that "decision-makers should review their vision and mission statements and write a clear policy document including the duties" for the support of teacher research (p. 7). The results of this study highlighted that while helpful, a list of general aims and responsibilities for supporting teacher research might not be adequate for bringing clarity to supporting teacher research within an institutional setting; the specific clarity of what support to provide and how and why to provide it was shown to be more important. In the case examined, the teacher-research facilitators expressed their feelings of confusion regarding the ITRS in the Centre. Their confusion was not because

of lacking a list of aims and responsibilities. It was because there was much unclarity about what support the teachers in the centre needed to start and sustain their research projects and how and why the support needed to be provided.

In this regard, the findings first pointed out that the roles of supporting teacher research needed more clarity through coordination, stability, and clear guidelines. The lack of such clarity resulted in a type of support characterized with clashes, confusion, triviality and helplessness that made it even harder to carry out the multi-roles expected when mentoring and supporting teacher research (Békés, 2020; Dikilitaş & Wyatt, 2018; Fletcher, 2012; Smith, 2020b). The RC members did not seem to be clear about how to support individual teachers' research projects and what to do to carry out their list of responsibilities to promote research in the centre. The EAR mentors felt that their complex mentoring tasks were made even harder by the existing support system. The importance of coordinated and stable roles, as well as clear guidelines, is evident in many reports of teacher-research programmes in which teachers are mentored for a period of time to acquire the research skills needed to do research in their contexts (e.g., Atay, 2008; Borg, 2013; Burns, 2011; Burns & Westmacott, 2018; Smith et al., 2014). One shared aspect of these short-term (often external, not happening within one language institution) programmes and schemes is that they reported giving very structured support to language teachers, starting with a clear plan and focus and coordinated by main expert facilitators. With regard to ongoing ITRS, the need for such coordinated, stable and guided support is even more important, considering its potential complexity in being linked to long term aims for supporting and promoting teacher research among teachers with varied research skills, conception and needs. For tertiary language institutions attached to universities,

similar to this study's case, the task could even be more complex as it is likely to involve trying to coordinate and align the research aims, policies, conceptions, and support at the language institution level with that of the university.

In addition to this, the results also highlighted that supportive communication about the ITRS available was needed for achieving more clarity. In this regard, two aspects of supportive communication were focused on: amount and direction. In terms of the former, more opportunities for communication were found essential for more clarity. An obvious example of this need was during the EAR Workshop and the issue of ethical approvals that could have been dealt with more smoothly if there were more opportunities for serious and constructive communication before and during the Workshop. As illustrated in Chapter 5, the EAR mentors felt that such opportunities were crucial for mutual understanding needed for more clarity regarding the research support initiative. In their similar but external EAR programme, Smith et al. (2014) also reported that the lack of communication among mentors and coordinators during the early stages of their EAR programme was one serious issue they had to deal with for more sharing of experience and good practice in supporting the participant teachers. Although more communication should have more chances to occur in institutional settings (similar to the case of the current study) with the one-place advantage over large-scale external programmes, there still exists, as the findings showed, the issue of hierarchical authority structures. Such structures in educational institutions are often viewed to be behind the undeniable reality of bureaucracies, responsible for inadequate communication and stifled innovation (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). The same structures could possibly be the reason behind the lack of the second aspect of supportive communication presented in the results: consultative and

bottom-up decision making regarding the support provided. In relation to the ability of teacher research to initiate and make changes, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) similarly clarified that arrangements for supporting teacher research have little chances to succeed in systems that "constrain bottom-up, inside-out reform" (p. 9). This study adds that such systems are potentially unhelpful in enabling the needed communication for clearer and better ITRS. Besides the hierarchical authority structures, what seemed to increase the current top-down flow of communication was the quality auditing the Centre was undergoing for accreditation, which is one form of inspection and accountability procedures that usually justifies more bureaucratization in tertiary institutions (Murphy, 2009).

7.2.2 Congruence

In addition to clarity, congruence of the support was another factor highlighted in the findings to influence supporting teacher research in the Centre. The findings presented two forms of incongruence between expectations and practice that seemed to impact supporting teacher research. Similar to what Al Aamri and Wahaibi (2018) referred to as "a big gap" between the expectations and reality of supporting teacher research in their context (p. 7), one form of incongruence found in this study was between the expected role of the support in mentoring and encouraging teacher research in the Centre and what was happening in reality. Supporting teacher research was mostly overshadowed by administrative tasks and granting ethical and access approvals. The responses of the teacher-research facilitators strongly indicated how granting ethical, and access approvals were receiving top priority over mentoring and encouraging more incidence and sustainability of teacher research not only through assisting teachers in identifying a

research focus and carrying out a research project (Borg, 2006a) but also in providing the help necessary for maintaining teachers' motivation and sustaining their interest in research (Dikilitaş & Wyatt, 2018; Yuan & Burns, 2017). This happened not only because the process of granting ethical approvals was overemphasized (made to overshadow the core role of supporting teacher research) but also because it was technisized (turned into a technical procedure of ticking boxes and filling forms). This study, therefore, endorses calls for revisiting the issue of ethical and access approvals of teacher research in institutional settings. Instead of turning the issue of ethics into a bureaucratic hurdle (Zeni, 1998, 2001), it needs to be an integral part of teacher research. As put by Groundwater-Smith & Mockler (2007) regarding teacher research:

> Ethics is not merely a series of boxes to be ticked as a set of procedural conditions, usually demanded by university human research ethics committees and the like, but is an orientation to research practice that is deeply embedded in those working in the field in a substantive and engaged way. (p. 205)

With such a view, ethics are more likely to be understood as an intrinsic part of teacher research than an overemphasized hurdle. The role of supporting teacher research becomes that of trying to help teachers ask and answer the basic and genuine question of teacher research: "Is what I am doing ethical and, if not, what can I do about that?" (Ponte, 2002, p. 403). Adopting a similar perspective, Allwright (2005) highlighted the need for turning away from the confinement "to the classical issues of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and so on" to making the ethical dimension a priority in teacher research (p. 354). This, however, requires a shared and clear conception of teacher research (Pritchard, 2002), and this, in turn, emphasizes the importance of the above-

discussed factor of clarity regarding what support to provide and how and why to provide it.

Similar to the often-indicated topic of incongruence between high research expectations and low support of teacher research (e.g., Borg & Liu, 2013; Tran et al., 2017), another form of incongruence found in the results was that between what is expected from the support, and the resources devoted for preparing people to carry it out. The findings showed that lacking the needed time and training made lacking clarity about the support even worse. Echoing what came in other studies (Al Aamri & Wahaibi, 2018; Dikilitaş & Wyatt, 2018), the results highlighted the importance of release time for mentoring and supporting teacher research. This study adds that giving release time to the people responsible for mentoring and supporting teacher research might contribute to their commitment. The study also found that lacking time could result in a tension similar to that described by Liu and Borg (2014) among Chinese college English teachers who experienced a kind of incongruence between their institutions' research expectations and the support they received. As put by one of the participants, the lack of time could turn supporting teacher research into "a catch-22" situation in which it becomes difficult to decide what should receive priority. Because the RC members were expected to mentor and guide teachers doing research in the Centre, they expected to have the needed training to do the expected. The findings of this study indicated that mentoring skills were essential for the teacher-research facilitators to be confident in and committed to giving the necessary and appropriate support. As clarified by Dikilitaş and Wyatt (2018), being a complex process that requires the acquisition of different skills and knowledge to carry

out multiple roles, mentoring teacher research requires ongoing support not only to avoid frustration but also to ensure quality.

7.2.3 Commitment

Besides clarity and congruence, commitment to supporting teacher research was the third factor that was found to influence the ITRS in the Centre. The results showed how important this factor was in working towards achieving the centre's research goals. They also suggested that the overall commitment to supporting teacher research could be influenced by both individual and institutional commitment to teacher research status. First, the individual commitment of people involved in supporting teacher research appeared to influence how positive and active they were not only in carrying out their roles but also in going the extra mile when needed. Because the two EAR mentors were active teacher-researchers highly interested in promoting teacher research, they were proactively and collaboratively involved in mentoring teachers and dealing with emerging challenges.

On the other hand, some of the RC members attributed their lack of commitment partly to being neither qualified nor ideologically interested in research. This finding agrees with Dikilitaş and Wyatt (2018) that mentors who are "ideologically motivated" to supporting teacher research are likely to be more conscious of their roles and ready to devote the needed energy to support and motivate teacher-researchers. It is also consistent with what was highlighted by Smith et al. (2014) in their report of their EAR scheme. In their report, they indicated examples of how mentors' commitment could either hinder or facilitate the successful provision of the support. They mentioned the example of a less committed mentor who did not take the initiative of contacting his mentees and thus was one reason behind their drop-out. They also mentioned the opposite example of three

dedicated mentors who "settled into their role, developed good experience and appeared fully committed to the project" and who were ready in the case of reluctant teachers "to make a fresh start on the part of some teachers who had not yet been participating actively" (p. 119). Similar to Smith et al. (2014), this study recommends the careful selection of people involved in supporting teacher research based on their readiness to make the necessary commitment to provide the needed support.

However, the findings showed that commitment to supporting teacher research in the centre was not only a matter of selecting dedicated people. The interrelationships among the three factors identified in this study and thus the impact of the above-discussed clarity and congruence of the support on people's commitment should not be overlooked. Besides, the findings highlighted the link between commitment to supporting teacher research and the recognized status of teacher research and its value. As stated by Borg (2006), "if the knowledge that stems from teacher research is recognized as having value—by teachers themselves as well as by head teachers, local education authorities, and others—then teacher research is more likely to occur" (p. 25). This study adds that such recognition might also be essential for commitment to supporting teacher research. It agrees with Roberts (1993) that "commitment and support are likely to be the result of the research addressing a collectively perceived need" (p. 16). It suggests the potentially critical role of recognizing the status of teacher research in how efficient the ITRS might be and how open administrations could be to bottom-up proposals to improve it.

The findings also illustrated that this internal recognition of and commitment to teacher research were closely connected to how much value the university attached to research done in the Centre. Efforts to go the extra mile to support teacher research in the

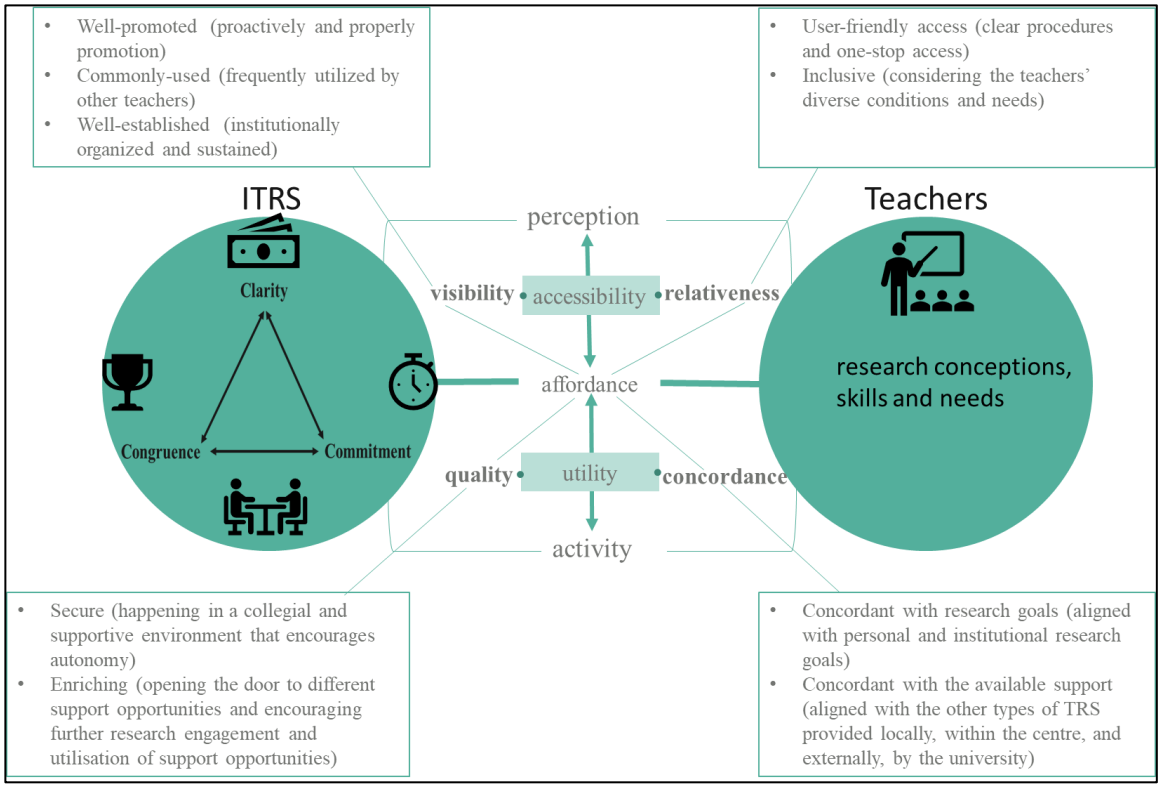
centre were undermined by the feeling that the university did not attach much value to it. As described by one of the RC members, teacher research done in the centre was not viewed as "serious research". This view, however, is not unexpected and could be attributed to two connected and common issues about teacher research in language institutions. The first issue is the unclear conception of research, reported to result in tensions of expectations and clashes of interests towards supporting teacher research (Borg, 2013; Liu & Borg, 2014). The second issue to which the underestimated status of research in the centre could be attributed is the common "unloved poor cousin" image of language centres within universities (Meyer, 1997, as cited in Ruane, 2003, p. 9). As mentioned by Borg (2013), the situation of teacher research in language centres is even more difficult than in schools as these centres are often considered service departments with distinct and mostly less recognized research expectations and status. This situation in language centres could enhance feelings of working within a "bipolar" hierarchical system that places less value on the role of teacher research (Alison & Carey, 2007, p. 73) and potentially less importance and commitment to ITRS.

7.3 Crossing the bridge: Factors related to providing the support

As mentioned earlier, Edwards and Burns (2016c) indicated the role of interest and activity in teachers' ability to "perceive and (eventually) optimize affordances in their environments" to support and sustain their research (p. 743). However, the findings of this study highlighted the support-related factors that could help teachers perceive and optimize the affordances of the support available to them. After discussing the importance of the three factors of clarity, congruence and commitment and their importance in

building the bridge of ITRS in the Centre (i.e., organizing it), I will now move to the second group of factors relevant to the teachers' experiences of and perspectives on crossing the bridge of support and optimizing its affordances (e.g., *start-research-able, do-research-able, fund-research-able, disseminate-research-able* and *sustain-research-able*). That is, how the support is provided and made available to the teachers. This group, illustrated in **Figure 7.3**, includes accessibility (visibility and relativeness) and utility (concordance and quality). It appeared, in line with James Gibson's defining characteristics of potential affordances, to influence the teachers' judgment of what qualifies as affordances that "fuel perception and activity" and bring about more affordances and thus "further higher-level activity as well as more differentiated perception." (van Lier, 2004, p. 96). In what follows, I will discuss each of the main factors.

Figure 7. 3 *The Factors Influencing ITRS*



7.3.1 Accessibility

The first factor that was found to influence teachers' optimization of the affordances of the available ITRS was the accessibility of the support opportunities (the possibility to use them). In their list of questions to audit the feasibility of teacher research, Borg and Sanchez (2015) suggested asking whether teachers "have access to appropriate advice or mentoring," "appropriate resources", and "a community of teacher researchers" (p. 3). They, however, did not clarify what having access means. This study brings insight into this area, shedding light, based on the teachers' responses, on what an accessible ITRS opportunity means to teachers. Under accessibility, the findings also indicated two main relevant factors: (1) the degree to which an ITRS opportunity's availability and potential is clear to teachers (visibility) and (2) the extent to which it is considerate of teachers'

abilities and needs (relativeness). The following discusses the findings about the visibility and relativeness of ITRS opportunities and how they might facilitate their accessibility.

7.3.1.1 Visibility

Agreeing with the Gibsonian conception of affordances, one of the main themes in the teachers' responses was the visibility of the ITRS opportunities. As clarified earlier (see section 2.7.3), visibility is a central defining characteristic of potential affordances. It is evident in Gibson's often-quoted statement: "the central question for the theory of affordances is not whether they exist and are real but whether information is available in ambient light for perceiving them" (Gibson, 2014, p. 132). The results of this study showed that for the teachers to perceive and optimize the affordances of the ITRS opportunities available, they needed to recognize their availability and potential. The teachers' responses indicated the importance of identifying what was available to support their research and how it could help them. The ITRS opportunities whose availability and potential were not clear were thus described as "hidden", "dormant", "closed", and "invisible". While teachers' agency is important for perceiving and optimizing ITRS affordances (Edwards & Burns, 2016c), the results of this study suggest that institutions need to provide "ambient light for perceiving them" (Gibson, 2014, p. 132).

First, this study indicated the importance of proactivity in making visible the ITRS opportunities available for helping teachers recognize and eventually optimize its affordances. It agrees with Xu's (2017) conclusion that "it is not enough to rely on teachers' initiatives to seek institutional and peer support" (p. 255). The teachers' constructs (e.g., "proactive/inactive," "publicized/hidden" and "well-promoted/closed") and the relevant responses of both the teachers and teacher-research facilitators suggested

the significance of people involved in supporting teacher research initiating efforts to highlight and make familiar what support was available and how it could help teachers. Proactive support was compared to reactive support that only responded to teachers' initiatives. As I clarified in Chapter 2, limiting ITRS to being merely reactive to interested teachers undermines its expected role in starting and sustaining teachers' interest in teacher research and assisting them in their different trajectories of becoming researchers (Burns, 2017; Dikilitaş & Wyatt, 2018).

However, the findings also pointed out that proactive efforts to enhance the visibility of the ITRS opportunities needed balance, i.e., not overemphasizing some opportunities over others. The results showed that such imbalance could result in inaccurate information about the ITRS available and thus distract teachers from other potential ITRS affordances. In Gibson's words about perceiving affordances, "if misinformation is picked up, misperception results" (Gibson, 2014, p. 133). This was true about the overemphasis given to ethical approvals that seemed to distract teachers from the potential of other opportunities for mentoring and encouraging teacher research through the RCs or during the EAR Workshop. The same was also mentioned about the overemphasis given to PD sessions, which worked as one informal channel for disseminating teacher research in the centre. While recognizing its potential and importance, it was described as "excessively promoted" and was thus seen as a distractor from other opportunities viewed as "scantily promoted".

Besides proactive and balanced promotion of the support available, the findings also showed that visibility of the ITRS opportunities could also be enhanced by encouraging other teachers to share their experiences of using the support. As mentioned

in Chapter 2, many studies have emphasized the importance of collegial support through collaborating as researchers in research projects (e.g., Banegas et al., 2013; Borg & Liu, 2013; Burns 1999; Mehrani, 2017), cooperating in others' research (e.g., Mehrani, 2017; Xu, 2014) and recognizing research significance (e.g., Borg, 2013; Edwards & Burns, 2016c). Similar to what came in Burns (2011) about the "ripple effect" of some teachers' research activities on their colleagues' interest in research (p. 5), the current study highlights another form of collegial support: enhancing the visibility of potential ITRS opportunities. The results distinguished two forms of collegial support in this regard: individual and collective. The former, similar to what is listed in Borg's (2013) questionnaire in relation to collegial support in institutional research cultures, involved direct guidance from some teachers to help others notice an ITRS opportunity, while the latter was mostly related to teachers' talk about their knowledge and experiences of getting it. They were both found to contribute to more visibility of what is available to support teacher research. However, if not organized and facilitated, such chances of sharing might be hard to occur among teachers "since classrooms are usually set up as isolated units, and there may be few opportunities offered for teacher interaction" (Burns et al., 2017).

For enhancing the visibility of the support available, the findings of this study also highlighted that the ITRS opportunities needed to be well-established: organized and sustained. That is, rather than coming in the form of "fragile measures, subject to economic or managerial changes" (Hanks, 2018, p. 53) and thus threatening the prospect of teacher research as "a continuous enterprise" (Allwright, 2003, p. 130), the ITRS opportunities are made into "a regular working mechanism" whose utilization is not subject to individual efforts and randomness and thus possibly resulting in powerlessness and confusion (Xu,

2017, p. 255). To put this in the teachers' words, for making visible the ITRS opportunities and their potential, they might need to be "institutionalized," "sustained", "systematic" and "systemic" rather than "collapsible," "random", "haphazard" and "almost non-existent".

Overall, being well promoted either through teacher-research facilitators and/or other teachers as well as being institutionally organized and sustained were perceived as necessary factors for facilitating access to ITRS opportunities. They were found essential for making visible the needed information to recognize the support and its potential and encourage teachers' activity to look for and utilize what is available. To put it in Gibson's (2014) words, "to perceive them is to perceive what they afford" (p. 119).

7.3.1.2 Relativeness

In the Gibsonian conception of affordances, the relativeness of affordances is central for defining them. It is what Gibson (2014) clarified in his statement that "affordances are properties taken with reference to the observer" (p. 135), and his example that "knee-high for a child is not the same as knee-high for an adult, so the affordance is relative to the size of the individual" (p. 120). The relativeness of affordances is, therefore, what essentially enables an agent to reach and utilize them. It is what this study found to contribute to the enhanced accessibility and the potential optimization of the ITRS affordances available. A clear example of this was what T3 expressed about his inability to make use of the potential ITRS opportunities provided by the university because he felt that he did not have the needed skills to reach them. To make this clearer, I will cite his words again.

> Knowing that also it's quite competitive because it's applied to all people in colleges, academics who are already like in research and they're researchers. They're doctors, professors who make you sometimes feel that I can't be like them. But when it is competitive, you might be deprived from something that you really like. Because other people are stronger, that actually discourages. Sometimes it discourages. It really discourages your motives to go and even try it. [T6]

The example of this teacher is similar to that of a person who needed to use one of his computer's functions whose availability and potential was known to him, but reaching it required higher technical skills that the person lacks or was complicated through different access and authentication steps. Despite its potential, the accessibility of this function would remain limited. The findings showed that the ITRS opportunities similar to the unreachable computer's function remained inaccessible potential support.

Concerning the relativeness of the ITRS opportunities, the findings first pointed out that complex and ambiguous procedures for reaching an ITRS opportunity could make it less user-friendly for some teachers and potentially less accessible. As presented in Chapter 6, the teachers' constructs were evidently distinguishing two categories of ITRS opportunities. One category was found to "hinder initiation" because of involving "administration bottlenecks," and "lengthy procedures" and being "complicated," "demanding", and "oblique," while the other one was found to "facilitate initiation" because of involving "no hurdles" and being "clear" and "less demanding". Considering their busy schedules and how the lack of time is usually indicated as the most cited factor behind less teacher research among language teachers (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2009; Borg, 2013), the first category of ITRS opportunities is unlikely to serve its purpose. Generally, the teachers in this study, similar to what came in Aga (2017), complained about the role of lengthy and complex systems and structures in inhibiting the utilization of some of the

needed ITRS and, as put by one of the teachers, resulting in “a kind of loss of mission within those systems and structures”.

The findings also showed a clear distinction between making the ITRS opportunities available and ensuring all interested teachers’ fair share of them, i.e., being inclusive. The teachers’ responses showed how they felt excluded by some of the ITRS that did not consider their varied research skills and teaching workloads. This finding agrees with Bai et al. (2013) that ITRS opportunities that are “more generic than tailored to individual needs” might not be very helpful in encouraging and facilitating teacher research (p. 119). Because he could not see the available support considerate of his research needs, T1, for example, saw the Centre “care[s] about the product more than the process” of supporting teacher research. This reality, I think, ignores the fact that teachers are at different levels of “becoming” researchers (Burns, 2017, p.135), and it can result in a “product-oriented research evaluation procedures” that could be a source of worry and pressure for teacher researchers (Tran et al., 2017, p. 9).

7.3.2 Utility

Agreeing with the Gibsonian conception of affordances as being relevant to an individual’s needs because “needs control the perception of affordances (selective attention) and also initiate acts” (Gibson, 1982, p. 411), the second major factor that this study found influencing the teachers’ ability to optimize the ITRS affordances was its utility (usefulness). The findings showed two sub-factors related to the perceived utility of the ITRS opportunities: concordance (how congruent an ITRS opportunity is with the other available opportunities and with both institutional and individual research goals) and

quality (how secure and enriching the experience of making use of an ITRS opportunity is). The findings also showed that the ITRS opportunities lacking either concordance or quality or both were likely to be seen as not potential support. In what follows, I will discuss what concordance and quality are and how they might facilitate the perceived utility of an ITRS opportunity.

7.3.2.1 Concordance

The findings of this study showed that the teachers seemed to perceive and judge the relevance and, therefore, the potential of an ITRS opportunity based on its concordance not only with the institutional and personal research goals but also with the other available opportunities. In other words, when the different opportunities of the available ITRS were seen in a state of usually working together towards achieving concordant research goals, the teachers seemed to see more relevance in what was available to support their teacher research.

One form of concordance evident in the teachers' responses was the concordance between research goals and the ITRS opportunities. The teachers in this study highlighted how seeing that there was an alignment between their personal and institutional research goals and that the available ITRS opportunities were working towards achieving these goals was likely to make them more relevant and useful. Such an alignment was described as "valid" and "worthwhile". The opposite was viewed as "deceptive" and "a good wordplay, which doesn't reconcile [and thus] demotivate, rather than motivate". This resonates with Tran et al.'s (2017) finding that teachers who found congruence between their research goals and their institution's research agenda tended to be more positive towards calls for more research engagement. What can contribute to this congruence is a

shared research conceptualization which, as I indicated earlier, is often lacked in many contexts that try to promote research (e.g., Borg & Liu, 2013; Tran et al., 2017; Xu, 2017). This study, therefore, accords with Xu's (2017) argument that

> only when meaning [of research] is negotiated among the various parties involved, accompanied by the empowerment of teachers, can teachers achieve professional excellence through effective research efforts. (p. 256)

Through such negotiations of research meaning and research goals, more concordance between personal and institutional research goals could be potentially expected and that the support turns into achieving a collective mission found to encourage more interest in doing research (Gao et al., 2011, p. 74). They can also contribute to the "demystification, and reimagination, of research" Vu (2020) highlighted as the "starting point in helping different types of research be recognized and supported by management, and make ELT lecturers feel more related and engaged" (p. 12). In this regard, language institutions might need to consider what Hopkins (2008) highlights:

> It is no longer sufficient for teachers to do research in their own classrooms, without relating their enquiries to the work of their colleagues and the aims and direction of the school and the system as a whole. We need to strive consciously for a synthesis between teacher research, school development and system reform. (p. 2)

The findings also highlighted another aspect of concordance relevant to the Gibsonian central idea that the complementarity of affordances underscores how "multiple parts of an environment might be important to performing a given action" (Nye & Silverman, 2012, p. 180). In this regard, the results pointed out the need for the ITRS opportunities to be concordant, i.e., how it can form a whole to work more effectively.

Concordance was pointed out in relation to the ITRS opportunities provided by the university and their incongruence with the support opportunities within the centre. There was a lack of concordance that could be attributed to the position of the Centre in the university. In this regard, Dijk et al. (2014) point out that because of its position in the higher education institution to which it is attached, a language centre can be "often insufficiently visible to other faculties and services within the institution" (p. 358).

While some participants highlighted that such incongruence could result in finding it difficult to benefit from the support provided by the university, this incongruence could possibly be behind the lack of clarity of not only what research the teachers in the centre aim to do but also what research support to provide in the centre and how and why to provide it. In a centre where the aim is to support teacher-initiated research projects that reflect the teachers' activities and interests and help improve the curriculum, evaluation, and instruction in the centre, presenting funding to either conduct research or present in international conferences and having access to thousands of academic journals as potential support is likely to contribute to favouring the conduction and support of big research projects that not many (perhaps the majority of) teachers are capable of doing and see as desirable or feasible. This was noticeably clear during the EAR workshop and its alignment with the available support in the centre. The workshop was meant to satisfy Allwright's integration characteristic that EP has as a principle for "integrating the work for understanding fully into existing curricular practices [as] a way of minimizing the burden and maximizing sustainability" (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 154). Of the over 190 teachers in the centre, only thirty-five teachers attended the introductory session of the workshop, seventeen were interested to participate and nine teachers continued. For

the teachers who did not participate, some of them, especially PhD holders, did not see value in learning EAR that involve small teacher-research projects. In addition, the workshop did not seem to fit with the already existing demanding requirements of ethical approvals. This lack of concordance resulted in many teachers dropping off the workshop and seeing no potential in continuing with their research projects. They justified their decision with seeing no congruence between the nature of their projects and the workshop and the often-perceived long procedure of obtaining an ethical approval. This implies that considering the integration (Allwright, 2005) and feasibility (Smith et al., 2014) of the form of teacher research introduced might not be in itself enough for optimizing its affordances if its concordance with the available ITRS within a language institution is not considered.

7.3.2.2 Quality

In addition to concordance, the findings also showed that the teachers linked the utility of the ITRS opportunities and the likelihood of any future intentions to use them or use other opportunities to their feelings of how secure and enriching they were, i.e. their quality, which I regard as the core of what counts as an affordance. From the participants' constructs categorized under quality (e.g., more meaningful/less meaningful; gives access to multiple support/gives access to limited support; sustains research engagement/disrupts research engagement), it is this factor that seems to be relevant to turning the support into a meaningful affordance-agent relationship (Gibson, 2014), and making it satisfy the important function of affordances not only in fuelling perception and action but also in being the bases for further activity and "differentiated perception" (van Lier, 2004, p. 96).

First, the findings showed that a secure experience was associated with having a collegial environment in which there were fewer chances of risk and negative judgments and more chances of autonomy and ownership. This finding agrees with Hanks (2018) that "'support' actually means: respect and encouragement from others, and enough autonomy and empowerment for teachers to undertake research that is deeply relevant to learning and teaching" (pp. 53–54). In the literature, these topics are clearly highlighted when it comes to teacher-research mentoring. It also agrees with what Smith (2020b) clarifies about mentoring teacher research and how it "entails establishing a relatively equal relationship with a teacher or group of teachers and does not involve providing judgmental advice", and how it needs to be a process that enhances their autonomy, "increasing their ability and willingness to take control" (p. 14). The teachers in this study agreed with this. They showed their preference of the ITRS opportunities fostering a sense of trust and collegiality, approving Allwright's ethical perspective of teacher research as requiring "a relationship of trust between practitioners, and a relationship of collegiality and mutuality" (Allwright, 2005, p. 357).

The current study also showed that to create a sense of security, the ITRS opportunities needed to assure teachers of their autonomy and ownership of their research. Vu (2020) found out that teachers needed different types of support to enhance their research interests and motivation and to give them "a sense of ownership" (p. 12). However, many teachers in this study related experiences where they felt that their autonomy and ownership of their research were undermined by administrative pressures and measures involved in supporting their research. As put by one teacher who narrated her experience of getting funds to do her collaborative research, under such conditions, a

teacher could feel "totally tied", a state that she found disruptive of "interest and ownership of research". This agrees with the note of many authors who stressed the importance of ensuring teachers' voluntary choices in taking part in research programmes, choosing their research topics and having enough timeframe to finish their research projects (Burns, 2011; Burns & Westmacott, 2018; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2016). For example, Wyatt and Dikilitaş (2016) found out that through mentoring, motivating and encouraging their autonomy, teachers were able to develop as teacher researchers.

In relation to the quality of the support, the findings also suggested the importance of how enriching the support opportunity is in influencing teachers' future decisions about using it or continuing the research enterprise. The results showed that teachers judged how enriching the experience of getting the support was based on its impact upon their research journeys, particularly in opening the door for more opportunities of ITRS and sustaining their motivation for future utilization of further support and subsequently more doing of research. Although all the above factors could be thought of to influence teachers' overall motivation to engage with the support available, this particular one seemed to mark the final judgment of the impact of the support in terms of, as described by the participant teachers, how "rewarding" and "motivating" the experience of getting the support might be. Generally, the teachers here judged whether or not the support "facilitates progress" and "sustains research engagement." As such, it seems very much related to the issue of teacher research sustainability among language teachers and to how "likely that they will soon abandon the research enterprise" (Allwright, 1997, p. 368). Many reports of teacher research programmes indicated how enriching and motivating experiences of support during these programmes could be the shifting point in teachers' perspective of research

and their sustained research activities (e.g., Edwards & Burns, 2016a; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2016; Yuan et al., 2016; Yuan & Burns, 2017).

This study, therefore, points out that the "irreconcilable conflict between the demands of quality and sustainability" (Allwright, 1997, p. 368) could potentially be resolved by shifting the focus from the quality of research and its demands to the quality of research support and its enrichment. As implied by the teachers' responses, shifting to the latter should logically lead to achieving the former through enriching support that involves "deeper learning opportunities", "gives access to multiple support", and produces "quality results". The teachers also described this to contribute to higher motivation, an essential condition for more teacher research incidence (Borg, 2006). This finding brings a new perspective to answering the important question asked by Dikilitaş et al. (2019) "how can we continue to show evidence that teacher research energizes teachers and under what conditions?" (p. xvi). The finding of this study showed that this could happen by going beyond making available the different recommended forms of support to ensuring both the accessibility and utility of the support available to be optimized as affordances that can enhance the feasibility, capability and desirability of doing teacher research.

7.4 Summary

This chapter discussed, in light of the available literature, the main findings of this study. Using the metaphor of a bridge, the factors that were found to influence (facilitate or impede) the ITRS in the Centre were categorized under two groups: the factors of ITRS clarity, congruence and commitment related to building the bridge of support (i.e., influencing the organization of the ITRS) and the factors of ITRS accessibility and utility

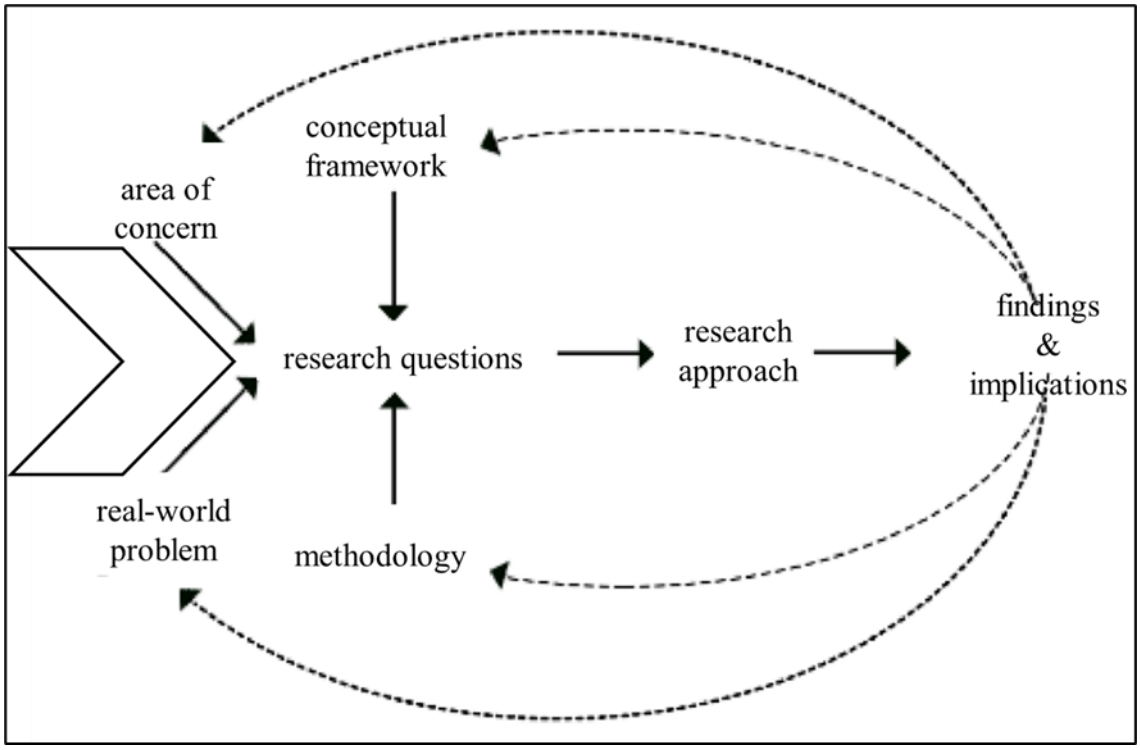
related to crossing the bridge support (i.e., influencing its provision). To avoid repetition, the next chapter summarizes the findings of the study and foregrounds its significance and implications.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes this research and its findings, explain its implications, contributions and limitations, and lay out ideas for further research and practice. For the organization of this chapter, I return to my *Research Fish* (see **Figure 8.1**) presented in the introduction of this thesis to introduce and illustrate the main elements, contributions, and significance of this study. I will start with summarizing the study (section 8.2), including its purpose and the process followed to answer the research question, and its findings (section 8.3), answering the research question. I will then (section 8.4) highlight the main contributions and implications of the findings of the study for theory and practice. In section 8.5, I point out the limitations of the study and list some ideas for relevant future research. In the penultimate section (8.6), I give some concluding remarks about the findings of this study and the area of ITRS. The last section of the chapter (section 8.7) is the epilogue of the study.

Figure 8. 1 *Research Fish (the Elements and Contributions of my Research)*



Note. Adapted from Presthus and Munkvold's (2016, p. 6)

8.2 Summary of the study

This qualitative case study addressed one research question: What influences (i.e., facilitates or impedes) the institutional support of teacher research in a tertiary ELT context? It was mainly motivated by a contextual puzzle about supporting teacher research in a language centre in the Sultanate of Oman. The puzzle was a paradox between the amount of support that seemed to be available to the language teachers in the Centre and the limited number of teachers who were active in doing research. The Centre has a wide range of ITRS opportunities, including funding to conduct research and disseminate its findings, release time to some research projects, venues for disseminating research, awards for active researchers, policies that legitimize and encourage doing research, teacher-

research facilitators to mentor and facilitate research and more than 200 MA and PhD holders.

Theoretically, the study also came to fill an important gap in our understanding of how ITRS needs to be available to language teachers so that it plays its role in initiating and sustaining their interest in research. The study also attributed this gap and the more focus given to what rather than how ITRS needs to be available to the lack of a clear conceptual framework of ITRS and its roles. Using the conceptual lens of affordances, the study was informed by the conception of ITRS being more than a number of separate support opportunities that active and interested teachers utilize to do and sustain their research; they form a structure of support for helping teachers with various conceptions, skills and needs initiate and sustain their research.

To address its research question, the study focused on the case of the ITRS in my context. Over a period of about eight months, different viewpoints were explored, and many methods were used to generate in-depth data about the case studied. To get the views of the people close to organizing and providing the ITRS in the Centre, semi-structure interviews were used to explore the perspectives of eight teacher-research facilitators from the different RCs, and reflective dairies as well as follow-up semi-structured interviews were used with two mentors involved in providing the needed support to 17 teachers during the EAR Workshop. To understand the teachers' perspectives and experiences of the ITRS in the Centre, a total of 21 repertory-grid and follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 teachers from the Centre. The data generated from the different methods used were supported by field notes and a review of the research-related documents. They were then analyzed thematically with the assistance of the computer

programme ATLAS ti., following Friese's (2014) NCT (noticing, collecting and thinking) model based on Seidel's (1998) basic process of qualitative data analysis.

8.3 Summary of the findings

In answering the research question (What influences (i.e., facilitates or impedes) the institutional support of teacher research in a tertiary ELT context?), the analysis of the data showed that there were a number of factors that seemed to influence the ITRS in the case studied. The factors can be classified into two categories:

1. *Factors related to organizing the support*

This category included three interrelated factors that were found to influence the support's organization and coordination necessary for providing the needed structure for supporting teacher research in the Centre. The first factor was the clarity of what support to provide and how and why to provide it. Under this factor, the findings highlighted the importance of having clear support roles that were coordinated, stable and guided, and supportive communication that could foster negotiated and bottom-up decision making about the support provided. The second factor that was found to influence organizing the support and building its structure was the congruence between the expectations of the support and what happens in practice. Under this factor, the findings pointed out the need for achieving congruence between the amount and type of ITRS expected to take place and the attention given to it and to supporting it in reality. In addition to clarity and congruence, commitment to supporting teacher research was another factor that was found to influence organizing the support and building its structure in the studied case. This factor not only included the individual commitment of the people involved in supporting teacher research, but it also involved a commitment to teacher research and its value at an institutional level.

2. Factors related to providing the support

This category included two main factors that were found to influence how the support was provided and thus how it was perceived and experienced by the teachers. From an affordance perspective, the factors were related to what qualifies as affordances for teachers. The first factor was the accessibility of the different available ITRS opportunities, i.e., how easy it was to use them. Under this factor, the findings highlighted the importance of the visibility of the support available (how recognizable an ITRS opportunity and its potential were), and the need for well-promoted (proactively and equally encouraged), commonly used (frequently utilized by teachers who encourage and guide each other) and well-established (institutionally organized and sustained) ITRS opportunities to make them visible to teachers. Under accessibility, the relativeness of the available ITRS opportunities in considering the teachers' varied abilities and needs through user-friendly access (clear procedures and one-stop access) and inclusiveness (considering the teachers' diverse conditions and needs) was also emphasized. The second main factor that was found to influence how the support was provided and thus how it was perceived and experienced by the teachers was its utility, i.e., its usefulness for supporting teacher research. What seemed to influence what the teachers saw as suitable support were its concordance and quality. The former refers to how relevant an ITRS opportunity was seen not only in its alignment with personal and institutional research goals but also with other ITRS opportunities as a concordant structure. The latter refers to how suitable an ITRS opportunity was seen in terms of how secure (happening in a collegial and supportive environment that encourages autonomy) and enriching (opening the door to more support and sustained doing of research) it was.

8.4 Contributions and implications of the study

In what follows, I have divided the contributions and implications of this study into two types: *scholarly*, including theoretical (to the area of the ITRS of language teachers and the used conceptual framework of affordances), methodological (to the use of repertory grids), and *practical* (to real-world contexts of ITRS), including implications to managers and policy makers.

8.4.1 Scholarly significance and implications

8.4.1.1 Theoretical significance and implications

The theoretical significance of the study is in its knowledge contribution to what is already known about ITRS and conceptual contributions to how ITRS is conceptualized and examined. In terms of the former, it is, up to my knowledge, the first study that has focused solely on ITRS and has shed light on what might influence (facilitate or impede) it within a language institution. Adding to what is already known about what ITRS is needed, the findings of this study highlighted the different factors that might influence organizing and providing it. Therefore, it has started a new line of inquiry that is very important for understanding how ITRS needs to be made available to teachers so that it serves its expected roles of enhancing the feasibility, capability, and desirability of doing teacher research. It can thus be the starting point for other studies into this area.

In addition to its significant knowledge contribution to the area of ITRS, the contributions of this study are mainly conceptual. Starting with the literature review, the study identified and acknowledged the importance of the conceptual distinction between two perspectives on supporting teacher research. The first is the Berthoffian perspective

that takes a cautious and rather doubtful position about the potential of ITRS in being sustainable and suitable in facilitating teacher research. The second perspective, on the other hand, is the Stenhousian perspective that places more emphasis on the importance of ITRS and has highlighted how limitations on their availability can reduce the likelihood of more quality teacher research among language teachers. Such a distinction is important for providing a clear conceptual basis for future theoretical reviews and empirical examinations of supporting teacher research. A systematic review of the literature is required to examine how pervasive the two perspectives in the literature of supporting teacher research are and what influence they might have on promoting and supporting teacher research around the world.

The study also generated a clear evidence-informed model of ITRS and its affordances that can provide a conceptual framework for further studies into this area. First, the framework articulates and calls for an important conceptual distinction between ITRS and its affordances. While ITRS refers to the different forms of support, including funding, time, recognition, mentoring and collegial support, that teachers might need to do research, its affordances (e.g., *start-research-able, do-research-able, fund-research-able, disseminate-research-able* and *sustain-research-able*) refer to the support in relation to the teachers who use it. Such a distinction is important for drawing more empirical attention to examining how ITRS needs to be made available to teachers so that it serves its intended purposes. Second, each of the ITRS-related concepts (clarity, congruence, commitment, accessibility and utility) generated from this exploratory study are potential lines of inquiry for future research.

8.4.1.2 Methodological significance and implications

In addition to its theoretical contributions and implications, the study has important methodological contributions and implications in its original use of repertory-grid and follow-up interviews in exploring language teachers' perceptions and experiences of the ITRS opportunities in their context.

First, the inductive thematic analysis of the constructs generated during the repertory-grid interviews shows a very interesting agreement between what the participant teachers found influencing their use of the ITRS opportunities and what James Gibson highlighted in his definition of affordances (see section 2.7.3). The study, therefore, shows the potential of using repertory-grid interviews in examining people's perceptions of affordances. This brings to attention the interesting synergies the two psychologists Shaw and Gaines (2003) highlighted between Kellyian constructs and Gibsonian affordances. Interestingly, Shaw and Gaines suggest that "Gibson's affordances may be modeled as Kellyan constructs embodied in the environment that support human interaction with that environment" (Gaines & Shaw, 2003, p. 21). They also pointed out the insightful possibility of developing "a synthesis of the two approaches in which constructs are modeled as affordances" (Gaines & Shaw, 2003, p. 15). What the current study did was close to this insightful possible synthesis. This potential synthesis deserves further discussions and exploration in our field or in other fields interested in exploring affordances and personal constructs.

Second, as an insider, I found the use of repertory-grid and the follow-up interviews very helpful in guarding against the often-highlighted threats to quality associated with insider research either because of respondents' biases in giving responses

to satisfy the colleague researcher or the researcher's biases in "projecting own experience and using it as the lens to view and understand participants' experience" (Berger, 2015, p. 230) (see section 4.4.2). Concerning respondents' biases, I found repertory-grid interviews a very helpful tool in helping my participants think about and start from their own perspectives and experiences of the ITRS. Regarding my own biases as an insider, I had also to be cautious and reflexive about what Mann (2006) called "understanding 'self' in relation to knowledge" (p. 17). That is, I had to be vigilant about the influence of my personal experiences as well as my biases and beliefs on my research. In this regard, I found repertory grids helpful in conducting engaging interviews and co-constructing rich data starting from and focusing on the concerns of my participants. They proved to be useful "to stand in others' shoes, to see their world as they see it, and to understand their situation and their concerns." (Fransella et al., 2004, p. 6). This contribution has implications for insider researchers not only by showing the potential of repertory-grid interviews in trying to deal with respondents and researcher's biases but also by pointing out that the choice of the research method can be one of the measures taken along with the often-recommended measures to deal with respondent-related and researcher-related quality issues (see section 4.4).

Third, the coding and thematic analysis of the constructs generated from the repertory-grid interviews brings insight into and has implications for not only coding constructs across cases but also thematic analysis. Based on the review of the related literature and the experience of coding constructs in this study, the study suggests two main practical issues (context-devoid abstractions and meaning-mixed abstractions) that might limit the validity of abstracting constructs in thematic analysis. The study also

delineates and adopts a possible approach for dealing with the suggested issues (see section 4.2.3). The approach can be helpful for future researchers who think of using thematic analysis to analyze data generated from repertory-grid interviews. The highlighted relationships between words and their meanings in relation to mixed-meaning abstraction (consensus, correspondence, conflict and contrast) might also be potentially applicable to thematic analysis in general. There are virtually no discussions of such relationships in explanations and accounts of thematic analysis.

Finally, the study agrees with Wright and Lam (2002) about the need to ensure the homogeneous wording of elements that might include a heterogeneous group of people, activities, and events. From my experience, I found rewording elements to start with -ing verbs (e.g., *presenting in the annual Conference* instead of *the annual Conference*) necessary for helping interviewees compare "like with like" rather than "apples with oranges" (Wright & Lam, 2002, p. 109 –113). The issue of wording elements, which has received very little attention in discussions about using repertory grids, requires more attention in the use of repertory-grid interviews.

8.4.2 Practical significance and implications

This study has highlighted many factors that seemed to influence organizing and providing support for teacher research in the chosen case. While not claiming the generalizability of the findings, they can be of potentially transferable practical use to other similar contexts. The model generated from this study can serve as a heuristic for administrations and people involved in supporting teacher research to help them think of how to build the bridge of ITRS for teachers to cross for more incidence and sustainability of teacher research. In the following sections, I will provide a list of potential practical implications

the findings of this study have for organizing and providing ITRS. The lists, however, are not for telling people what to do but for providing suggestions and insights, in the light of the findings, of what might be useful.

8.4.2.1 Implications for organizing ITRS

In the discussion of the results, I showed how they revealed three main factors that influenced organizing and coordinating the ITRS in my context: clarity, congruence and commitment. I also clarified, using the metaphor of a bridge, that these factors come at the stage of building the bridge of support, and they are thus important for how easy to use and useful the bridge might be. The possible implications of the findings for organizing ITRS are as follows:

1. The need to ensure that supporting teacher research is made clear

While research aims, mission statements and responsibility lists might be necessary for providing the general rationale for supporting teacher research within an institution, this study shows that they might not be enough for achieving its clarity. The specific clarity of what support to provide and how and why to provide it is needed. The results of this study pointed out some practical suggestions for achieving more clarity about supporting teacher research within an institutional setting.

First, supporting teacher research should have clear guidelines and needs to be coordinated and made stable. Information and instructions to guide what support to provide and how and why to provide it could be useful in giving a focus to supporting teacher research and may potentially help avoid confusion, clashes and wasting time in its provision. The different people, activities and efforts involved in supporting teacher research should also be coordinated to work effectively. This study showed that

uncoordinated and overlapping support activities and efforts might result in less activity and generate a sense of confusion and helplessness in supporting teacher research. Besides the importance of their coordination, the study suggested the importance of achieving some level of stability of what support to provide and how and why to provide it for enhancing the clarity of supporting teacher research. Support activities and efforts that come in the form of "fragile measures, subject to economic or managerial changes" (Hanks, 2018, p. 53) might undermine the support of teacher research and its clarity.

The second practical suggestion that this study points out for achieving more clarity in supporting teacher research is supportive communication. More communication needs to take place among people involved in supporting teacher research. As mentioned above, support activities and efforts require coordination, and without enough opportunities for communicating and discussing ideas, coordinated support might have fewer chances to occur. The introduction of the EAR Workshop in the context of the current study is a good example to show the importance of communication. Due to the limited opportunities for communication between the EAR mentors and the RC members, there was less coordination and understanding between them. The EAR mentors saw the RC's ethical approval requirement of the participants' EAR project as a form of hijacking their efforts and imposing a burden that did not reconcile with the intent of the EAR project. Had there been more chances for sharing and negotiating ideas, there would have been more chances of potential coordination and agreement. However, communication should also be bottom-up and consultative. People who are directly involved in supporting teachers do their teacher research projects should be involved in decisions about the nature of the support provided. This study showed that the top-down passing of instructions

regarding supporting teacher research might be detrimental to bottom-up insights about what support to provide and how and why to provide it.

2. The need to ensure that supporting teacher research is made congruent

This study shows that language institutions might also need to consider how congruent supporting teacher research is. That is, expectations of and from the support need to be consistent with its practice. First, the expected role of the support to encourage and help sustain teacher research should not be overshadowed by other administrative tasks that could hinder rather than facilitate ITRS. An important example of this is what this study highlighted in relation to granting ethical approvals of teacher research projects. Turning ethics into an administrative hurdle of approvals could potentially undermine efforts for supporting teacher research. As in the context of this study, overemphasizing ethical approvals did to a great degree shift attention from the role of ITRS in encouraging and supporting teacher research to the technical procedure of ticking boxes and granting or denying access. The true role of supporting teacher research should be that of helping teachers see ethics as an integral part of their research rather than confining them "to the classical issues of informed consent, anonymity, [and] confidentiality" (Allwright, 2005, p. 354).

Second, people involved in supporting teacher research might need to have the required support to carry out the roles expected from them. The two forms of such support that this study found important were time and training. Time was found important not only for carrying out the expected roles of encouraging and mentoring teacher research but also for increasing the likelihood of people's commitment to them. Mentoring and supporting teachers to carry out their teacher research projects is a big task with many expectations

requiring time and effort. Without release time, it would be very difficult for other teachers to do such a task and maintain their commitment to mentoring and supporting others on top of their busy schedules. Giving release time to a group of dedicated and interested teachers to mentor and support teacher research is logically more feasible than giving release time to all teachers to do research. By having the needed time, this group could go the extra mile in providing and facilitating the needed support to enhance the sustainability and incidence of teacher research. In addition to time, however, they would also need the necessary training in mentoring and supporting teacher research so that they might "grow into and indeed embrace research-mentor roles in their local contexts" (Dikilitaş and Wyatt, 2018, p. 538). This group could then train more teachers and could be changed after some time to allow new teachers to take part in mentoring and supporting teacher research. This approach could likely create a research culture needed to "provide an environment conducive to teacher research engagement" (Borg, 2013, p. 180). This environment in which teachers take turns in mentoring and supporting each other could potentially provide the conditions necessary for what Borg (2006) refers to as "community support" in which there would be more chances to discuss and collaborate in doing teacher research, and teachers are likely to understand the value of teacher research and to have "a sense of collective activity" with other teacher-researchers (p. 26).

3. The need to ensure commitment to supporting teacher research

Based on the findings of this study, contexts interested in having effective ITRS might need to consider the extent to which they are committed to teacher research and its value. They should ensure that they are ready to dedicate the time, resources and energy necessary for supporting teacher research. The individuals involved in the support should

be ideologically motivated and committed to face emerging challenges. However, this study showed that individual commitment could be linked to institutions' recognition of teacher research and its value.

In this regard, tertiary language institutions attached to universities might have to deal with a more complex situation. As they are often attached to universities that might not give much importance to research done by language teachers or care more about big research projects and publications for recognized academic status (Allison & Carey, 2007; Borg, 2013), tertiary language institutions might need not only to evaluate their commitment to teacher research and its support but also to deal with how teacher research is conceived by the larger institutions they are attached to. As I argued in the literature review, this situation requires institutions to have a more inclusive conception of research. Thus, this study endorses Borg and Liu's (2013) recommendation for "a clear statement of how research is being defined and a transparent analysis of the principles and criteria that institutions use in determining what will or will not "count" as research" (p. 296). However, this should not take a top-down prescriptive approach. It needs to happen in "a dynamic learning system" that facilitates regular negotiations and collaborations among teachers and managements (Xu, 2014, p. 256) for the "demystification, and reimagination, of research [which] could be the starting point in helping different types of research be recognized and supported by management, and make ELT lecturers feel more related and engaged." (Vu, 2020, p. 12).

To sum up, the following items drawn from the findings of this study might be a helpful checklist for institutions interested in supporting teacher research to consider the main areas they need for organizing ITRS.

- The support available is coordinated (There are no overlapping or clashing roles for supporting teacher research).
- The people involved in supporting teacher research are clear about what they need to do.
- There is enough stability in the types of support provided to the people involved in providing the support and the responsibilities assigned for supporting teacher research.
- There are adequate bottom-up opportunities for discussing and negotiating the decisions about what support to provide and how and why to provide it.
- The support of teacher research is not overshadowed by other administrative tasks.
- The ethical approvals of teacher research are not turned into an administrative hurdle.
- The people involved in supporting teacher research are given the necessary support (e.g., time and training).
- The people involved in supporting teacher research are interested in research and committed to its support.
- There is an institutional recognition of teacher research and its value.
- Teacher research has a clear inclusive conception that has resulted from regular negotiations and collaborations among teachers and management.

8.4.2.2 Implications for providing ITRS

The findings of the study could also have some practical implications for providing the support of teacher research. As discussed above, the findings pointed out that the accessibility and utility of the ITRS opportunities influenced how the ITRS in the Centre was made available to teachers and how teachers perceived and optimized its affordances. Therefore, there needs to be more focus on how ITRS is made available to language teachers so that it plays its role in enhancing the feasibility, desirability and capability of doing teacher research. The findings of the study should bring a new understanding to Edwards and Burns's (2016c) recommendation for institutions "to maximize professional affordances within the bounds of political and economic constraints" (p. 743). In the light of this study's findings, maximizing affordances should not only be understood as giving more time and funding to teachers; it means increasing the accessibility and the utility of the available support so that teachers can see and optimize its affordances. In this way, institutions could feasibly start from what is available and try to invest in it. In what follows, I will discuss some of the possible implications of the findings for providing and maximizing its affordances:

1. *The need to ensure that ITRS opportunities are accessible to teachers*

The findings of this study showed that having access to the ITRS opportunities meant more than making them available to the teachers. The responses of the participant teachers and teacher-research facilitators highlighted the importance of making the ITRS opportunities accessible to teachers. This study brings very important insights into this topic. Based on this study's findings, two areas might be important to consider concerning the accessibility of ITRS opportunities: how recognizable the ITRS opportunities and their

potential are (visibility), and how considerate they are of the teachers' abilities and needs (relativeness). The following are the findings related to these two areas, their implications and some relevant practical suggestions:

- **Finding:** The teachers linked their ability to recognize the potential of the ITRS opportunities with the proactive efforts made to promote their potential.

  Implication: Language institutions need to be proactive in communicating to teachers all potential opportunities that might support them in doing research.

  Practical suggestions:

  - ✓ Create a booklet or a webpage of the ITRS opportunities.
  - ✓ Send emails of any potential support.
  - ✓ Organize events to raise teachers' awareness of what is available.

- **Finding:** The findings indicated that collegial support, either through individual guidance to see and make use of the support or collective momentum to see the support and its potential, was helpful for some teachers to see the potential of the different opportunities to support their research.

  Implication: Language institutions need to create venues for teachers to share and discuss what research they have done or want to do, and what support they have used or need to have.

  Practical suggestions:

  - ✓ Organize face-to-face events where teachers meet and share about their research interests.
  - ✓ Ask teachers to write short reports of their research projects and what support opportunities they find useful.

- **Finding:** The teachers found the types of ITRS opportunities that were institutionally organized and sustained more visible.

  Implication: Language institutions need to ensure that ITRS opportunities are organized and sustained. Regarding the organization of the support, collegial support, for example, requires more efforts to organize it and create the opportunities and the mechanisms for teachers to help each other. The introduction of ITRS opportunities also needs to be studied to ensure their sustainability.

  Practical suggestions:

  - ✓ Have a webpage that has details of each teacher's research interest and specific research skills.
  - ✓ Plan, pilot and study the introduction of new support opportunities.

- **Finding:** The findings showed that the ITRS opportunities with clear procedures and one-stop access were perceived as more accessible.

  Implication: Language institutions need to ensure that the procedures for getting the support are clear for all and are not complicated through complex systems.

  Practical suggestions:

  - ✓ Create a booklet or a webpage of the ITRS opportunities and how to make use of them.
  - ✓ Have a team of teacher-research facilitators to guide and help teachers get the needed support.

- **Finding:** The teachers associated the accessibility of the ITRS opportunities with how inclusive they were of their diverse research skills and needs.

Implication: Language institutions need to consider their teachers' diverse conditions and their different research skills. It should not be assumed that all teachers are at an equal level of research skills, and thus the ITRS need to include opportunities for developing research skills, conducting research, and disseminating results. They need to be inclusive in considering teachers' various needs so that teachers with fewer research skills, high workloads, or even less interest in research are not excluded to find the suitable support to help them in their different research paths.

Practical suggestions:

- ✓ Survey what the teachers' research needs are.
- ✓ Assess the ITRS opportunities available and who can benefit from them.

2. The need to ensure that ITRS opportunities are useful to teachers

In addition to the accessibility of the ITRS opportunities, their utility (usefulness) also seemed to influence the teachers' ability to see and optimize their affordances. In light of this study's findings, language institutions might find it important to consider two areas that could influence what teachers perceive as useful support: how suitable and relevant the ITRS opportunities are. The following are the findings related to these two areas, their implications and some relevant practical suggestions:

- **Finding:** The findings indicated that the teachers saw more utility in the ITRS opportunities that aligned with both their personal and institutional research goals.

  Implication: Language institutions need to consider how harmonious the ITRS opportunities with both teachers as well as the institution's research goals.

  Practical suggestions:

  - ✓ Survey what the teachers' personal research goals are.

- ✓ Organize sessions in which the management and teachers come together to discuss and negotiate research goals.

- **Finding:** How the different ITRS opportunities concord with each other was also indicated by the teachers in this study as one factor influencing what they found useful.

  Implication: Language institutions need to consider how concordant are the ITRS opportunities they have and introduce.

  Practical suggestions:

  - ✓ Plan, pilot and study the introduction of new support opportunities.
  - ✓ Get the teachers' opinions about how concordant the different ITRS opportunities in your institutions are.

- **Finding:** The findings showed that a secure experience was associated with having a collegial environment in which there were fewer chances of risk and negative judgments and more chances of autonomy and ownership of research.

  Implication: Language institutions need to ensure that supporting teacher research happens in secure collegial environments that honour teachers' autonomy and encourages their ownership of their research projects.

  Practical suggestions:

  - ✓ Encourage the dissemination of research results in collegial friendly environments.
  - ✓ Train mentors capable of guiding and facilitating teacher research.

- **Finding:** The findings also suggested the importance of how enriching the support opportunities are in influencing teachers' future decisions about using them or sustaining their research activities.

Implication: Language institutions need to ensure that ITRS opportunities serve their purpose of starting and sustaining teachers' doing of research.

Practical suggestions:

- ✓ Evaluate the extent to which teachers find the ITRS useful in sustaining their research.

8.5 Limitation of the study and directions for future research

Despite its potential implications and significance, this study remains an exploratory case study in a virtually neglected topic. Thus, more future research is needed to continue this line of inquiry. The following are potential specific research topics:

1. This study focused on one case of ITRS. Future research could examine and compare the facilitators and impediments of cases of ITRS in different ELT contexts.
2. This study focused on exploring the overall case of ITRS in a tertiary language teaching context. It did not, however, aim to highlight the narratives of teachers' trying to get their teacher-research projects supported. A narrative study could reveal more interesting details about particular cases of supporting teacher research in a particular context. The study could use a combination of surveys of narrative frames and in-depth interviews (see e.g., Xu, 2014).
3. As mentioned above (section 8.4.1.1), each of the ITRS-related concepts can be a potential line of inquiry. One possibility is to use repertory-grid interviews to further examine how teachers conceptualize the accessibility and utility of ITRS opportunities.

4. This study showed that the way in which ITRS is organized might either facilitate or hinder its role in supporting teacher research. In this area, in-depth case studies are needed to examine how language institutions, especially the ones attached to larger tertiary institutions, decide upon and coordinate their research policies, aims and support.

5. In this study, how research is conceptualized in the language institution was found to influence how committed the institution might be in providing the needed support to teacher research and how useful teachers see the available support. The available research in this area, however, is still mainly limited to questionnaires in which teachers are asked to rate the criteria of good quality research and/or indicate the extent to which teachers think an inquiry scenario constitutes research (see, e.g., Banegas, 2018; Borg, 2009; Borg & Liu, 2013; Kutlay, 2013; Tabatabaei & Nazem, 2013). In his comment on the limitations of this method, Borg (2013) pointed out that

> [i]t could be argued that a tendency among respondents to value more scientific criteria was the product of a bias towards such criteria in the list they were asked to comment on. I accept this, although of course respondents had the freedom to say that particular criteria were not important. Nonetheless, designing a more effective way of eliciting teachers' views about what counts as good quality research is a methodological issue I continue to explore. (p. 71)

One possible method that has the potential to resolve this issue is repertory-grid interviews. They can be used to compare teachers and managers' conceptualization of good quality research. As elements for eliciting constructs, participants can be shown different inquiry scenarios similar to those used by Borg (2013, p. 53).

8.6 Concluding remarks

As I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, teacher research in ELT "is still something of a 'work in progress'" (Dikilitaş et al., 2019, p. xvi). This study tried to contribute to this work by focusing on the important topic of ITRS. By focusing on how rather than what ITRS needs to be made available, the study took one step in exploring this almost untread path of inquiry. One of the main features of this path seems to be the bridge of affordances. It brings a new conceptualization of ITRS at the theoretical and practical level. Theoretically, it should direct more empirical attention to the how rather than the what question of ITRS. Practically, it brings more focus to the quality of ITRS, and how it can function as a bridge for teachers with varied research conceptions, needs and skills to cross for more incidence and sustainability of teacher research. In building this bridge, it would be wise to avoid the mistakes of Italy's *Ponte della Costituzione* bridge that despite its cost and modern-looking design, has had lots of accessibility and utility problems.

8.7 Epilogue

To new PhDers, as you would imagine, finishing this work gives me a sense of achievement and relief. I have always dreamed of how my thesis would look and what it would require to produce it in its final structure. After I am done, I can confirm that doing a PhD is a journey of engagement to overcome obstacles. This engagement might not always be productive in measurable terms; it could manifest in days of thinking and times of confusion. Although many PhD students are not often tolerant of such a form of engagement, I should admit that the amount of time I spent on careful thinking and painful confusion was beneficial in completing this work.

Writing is another form of engagement that PhDers need to invest in. I have often thought of writing as the last step. It is also tempting to postpone writing to that moment when you are fully ready to put your ideas on paper. However, that moment might not come but very late. I have learnt that writing is thinking and that the more time you spend in writing, the better you become in judging and validating your ideas.

I should not also forget my engagement in relevant discussions that were useful and fruitful in refining my ideas and having new perspectives. It is true that we tend to look for reassuring reviews and feedback, especially at times of confusion, but being open to new and sometimes challenging ideas could take you out of your comfort zone to see new potential for more quality.

My advice to you is to enjoy your journey of engagement. If you have started, you will surely finish. Do not miss this chance of having the time to work on a research project that you have chosen. Enjoying the process with all its details will make you better prepared to learn from this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: EAR Workshop Schedule

Weeks/ Date	Main topic	Objectives	Focus	Assisting materials	Facilitation	Research plan
Week 2 **3-7Feb**	Identifying a focus, and research questions	Identify a research focus Write research questions	The focus of this week is on identifying a main research focus, which could be, for example, to understand a successful experience, a problem, a point that is worrying or intriguing you, or any kind of question in your mind.	PowerPoint presentation Video tutorial A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research (Chapter 4)	Emails, face-to-face meetings with the mentors or any other method agreed upon between mentor and mentees	Thinking of a topic and exploratory research questions (ERQs)
Week 3 **10-14Feb**					Emails, face-to-face meetings with the mentors or any other method agreed upon between mentor and mentees	Discussing and refining your ERQs with your mentor
Week 4 **17-21Feb**	Using practical tools for exploratory research	Gain an overview of different possible sources of evidence in classroom-based research	The focus of this week is on how to gather evidence to answer your research questions.	PowerPoint presentation Video tutorial	Emails, face-to-face meetings with the mentors or any other method	Discussing and refining your ERQs with your mentor

		Make some decisions about how to gather information to answer research questions Consider the ethical dimensions of your research		A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research (Chapter 5)	agreed upon between mentor and mentees	Thinking of the appropriate exploratory tools to answer your ERQs
Week 5 **24-28Feb**					Emails, face-to-face meetings with the mentors or any other method agreed upon between mentor and mentees	Discussing and refining your ERQs and your exploratory tools
Week 6 **3-7Mar**	Analyzing and interpreting data	Develop an understanding of how to sort out, categorize and classify data	The focus of this week is on some basic procedures for analyzing different kinds of data and on how to decide on which analysis procedure(s) will be best for your own study.	PowerPoint presentation Video tutorial A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research (Chapter 6)	Emails, face-to-face meetings with the mentors or any other method agreed upon between mentor and mentees	Finalized research questions and decided upon exploratory tools Starting data collection and analysis
Weeks 7 &8 **10-21Mar**					Emails, face-to-face meetings with the mentors or any other	Collecting and analyzing data

					method agreed upon between mentor and mentees	Discussing your data collection and analysis with your mentor
Week 9 **24-28Mar**	Planning and implementing change	Plan for change Implement the change you plan Reflect on the action's impact	Now we've been through the process of exploring, we come to the 'action' part of 'Exploratory Action Research'. It's time to see if you want to change anything. If you do, this session will help you both to plan for change and to implement the changes you plan. It will also focus on observing the effects and reflecting on what impact the action had.	PowerPoint presentation A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research (Chapter 7 & 8)	Emails, face-to-face meetings with the mentors or any other method agreed upon between mentor and mentees	Finalizing data analysis and interpretation Planning for change (if needed or possible)
Week 10 **31Mar-4Apr**					Emails, face-to-face meetings with the mentors or any other method agreed upon between mentor and mentees	Discussing your action plan with your mentor
Week 11	Presenting findings	Know about different possible ways for	The focus of this week is on innovative, teacher-	PowerPoint presentation	Emails, face-to-face meetings with	Applying change and reflecting

7-11Feb		disseminating results	friendly ideas for sharing your research.	A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research (Chapter 9)	the mentors or any other method agreed upon between mentor and mentees	upon its results
					Emails, face-to-face meetings with the mentors or any other method agreed upon between mentor and mentees	Applying change and reflecting upon its results
Week 12 **14-18Apr**					Emails, face-to-face meetings with the mentors or any other method agreed upon between mentor and mentees	Applying change and reflecting upon its results
Weeks 13 **25Ap**	Short presentations of the mini-projects					

Appendix 2: Repertory Grids

Repertory Grid T1

1	2
within the centre; reachable facilitators;	involves external parties
formal	informal
self-initiated	readily available
invisible	promoted
clear procedures	vague procedures
challenging	feasible
publicized	hidden
direct	indirect
flexible	fixed
filtered	open
user-friendly	restricted
complicated	simple
demanding	less demanding
common	occasional

Repertory Grid T2

1	2
clear	complex
done by other teachers	not well understood; not well-established
facilitating	inhibiting
only requires self-initiation	unfamiliar
self-driven	externally driven
not motivating	motivating
transparent	deceptive
multi-faceted	one-stop
direct	indirect
unclear	clear
purposeless	purposeful

interest-driven	neutral

Repertory Grid T3

1	2
mostly available	dependent on institutional conditions
not fully used	best utilized
excessively promoted	scantily promoted
very motivating	not always motivating
rewarding	less-rewarding
low risk	high risk
properly tailored	not properly tailored
gives access to multiple types of support	gives access to limited types of support

Repertory Grid T4

1	2
visible	invisible
clear procedures	no clear procedures
systemic/institutionalized	haphazard/random
central	peripheral
creates research momentum	almost dead
sustained	haphazard/random
less competitive	competitive
fewer requirements	more requirements
short-term	long-term
formal	informal
outcome depends on your own decision	outcome depends on application; another party's decision
well-established	almost non-existent
academically less rewarding	more academically rewarding

experts/research active	novice
deeper learning opportunities	superficial contact
good quality	modest/no-existent quality

Repertory Grid T5

1	2
involves more support	limited support
large scale impact	small scale impact
give access to various support	gives access to limited support
highly available	least available
open	filtered
no hurdles	involves administration bottlenecks
fair	bureaucratic
free	restrictive
sustained	broken/collapsible
personal	controlled/external
depends on self-motivation	depends on external factors
disrupt interest in and ownership of research	maintain interest in and ownership of research

Repertory Grid T6

1	2
random	systematic
open	competitive
requires more efforts	less efforts
requires more research interest	requires less research interest
more meaningful	less meaningful
less quality	more quality
getting acknowledged	lack of interest and acknowledgment
feeling attached	feeling detached

Repertory Grid T7

1	2
less complicated	more complicated
worthwhile	less valuable
has more impact	less significant impact
facilitates progress	doesn't help me to move forward
aligned with personal research goals	doesn't reflect my current research interests
access depends on self-initiation	access depends on institutionalized procedures
less controlled access	more filtered
one-stop access	multiple stages access
involves external approval	decided internally
facilitators recognize the relevance of research	facilitators might not be aware of research relevance
more competitive	less competitive

Repertory Grid T8

1	2
familiar	unfamiliar
unclear	Clear
hinders initiation	facilitates initiation
transparent processes	lack of transparency
proactive	inactive
well-promoted	poorly promoted
inviting	not inviting
local; near me	external; from outside
immediate	distant
encouraging	dissuading
quality results	invalid findings
reciprocal benefit	top-down
sustains research engagement	disrupts research engagement
supports PD	hinders PD

Repertory Grid T9

1	2
control is imposed	self-regulated
flexible	constrained
local	outsider
peripheral	fundamental
engaging	alienating / disconnecting
top down	bottom up
formal/ no collaboration	open/relaxed
gives credibility	not transparent
obstructing	facilitating
valid / genuine	bureaucratic
totally tied	autonomous
frustrating	proud
quality product	disappointed with outcome
clear procedures	lack of transparency
lack of collegiality	supportive atmosphere

Repertory Grid T10

1	2
hustle free	involves lengthy procedure
local	external
informal	formal
involves different channels of communication	involves restricted channels of communication
open	restricted
individual	institutional
overly done	balanced
intrinsic	forced participation

Repertory Grid T11

1	2
local	external
well-promoted	closed
useful results	no direct implications
flexible	rigid
mutual respect	having prejudices
organized	not professional
trustworthy	deceitful
enriching	irrelevant
high expectations	flexible expectations
clear guidelines	oblique

Appendix 3: Extract from a Repertory-grid Interview Transcript

Due to limitations of space here, I am including an extract of one of the repertory-grid transcripts. This extract of the transcript is included to illustrate:

1) how the dyadic elicitation of constructs was conducted, and
2) how I tried to generate the constructs in a friendly environment that encouraged nuance, vividness and exemplifications rather than being mechanically obsessed with the technical aspects of construct elicitation.

I: Okay. As I showed you in the sample repertory-grid, we'll be comparing two types of support to a third one.

P: Yes. I think it's clear now.

I: Excellent! Let's start. Could you please choose three of the index cards?

P: Okay. I'll choose this one. Presenting in the Centre's international conference. No, not this one. Getting release time and getting funds to present. Yes, these three.

I: Excellent! Which two of them are similar?

P: I think these two are similar (getting release time and getting funds to present in outside conferences).

I: Interesting! Now. What makes them similar and different from the third one (getting support from colleagues)?

P: I would say these two are similar. I think there're different committees involved. I think in terms of it's a very lengthy, complex process. There's a lot of control imposed.

I: Interesting! Now. What makes them different from getting support from your colleagues?

P: And I think the process here is very controlled and off putting. When it comes to getting support from my colleagues, it's more self-regulated. There isn't any control imposed.

I: Interesting. How would you describe these two?

P: I think for these two, control is imposed, while this one is more self-regulated or controlled.

I: Interesting! Let me write them down.

P: So, I think they're very different in terms of the level of how difficult the process is.

I: Interesting. Let's focus on this a bit. Why is it important for the support to be self-regulated?

P: I think it's about the process. Here the process is more flexible. There isn't a third party that controls it. You know your colleagues. You approach them, and they're often very flexible. These two, no. You're often controlled. There's a complex process that you need to go through.

I: So, what I understand from you self-regulated support is important to make it flexible?

P: Yes, that's true. Flexible and less controlled.

I: Interesting! What would be the opposite of that?

P: I think controlled or constrained. Constrained is a better word. I think constrained.

I: Very interesting! Let me write them down before we move to other elements.

P: Okay.

I: Now. Let's move to three other types of support.

P: Okay.

I: We'll follow the same process.

P: I'll choose these two, or this one. I'm a bit confused now. [Laugh]

I: Take your time.

P: Can I choose two?

I: You mean instead of three?

P: Yes. I don't know, but I feel it's difficult to compare three.

I: Yes, of course.

P: Why is it three? This method is kind of interesting but strange.

I: It's something related to its origin. We can talk about it later. But there's nothing wrong with using two. I mean comparing two.

P: That's good. I've learned something new today. Why don't you give a session about this method?

I: I'll in sha Allah.

P: I think many teachers here will find it interesting.

I: Indeed! It can be used as a reflection tool.

P: I'll be interested to know more about it.

I: Thank you! I'll try to present it in a PD session, but let's now move to the two elements you wanted to compare.

…

P: Umm. Not this. I've already chosen this one. Can I choose it again?

I: Yes, off course. But not the same two.

P: Okay. Let me see. These two.

I: Which ones?

P: Sorry! They're both new. Presenting in the Centre's international conference and getting funds to attend outside conferences.

I: Interesting! Are they similar or different?

P: They're different. This one (presenting in the Centre's international conference) is local. I mean it's here, in the centre. This one is provided by outsiders. You know what I mean?

I: So, local vs. outsider?

P: Yes. For this one, the funding or the support isn't from the centre. It belongs to the whole university.

I: Interesting! So, which one do you prefer?

P: Presenting in the Centre's conference.

I: So you prefer the local one?

P: Yes.

I: Why? I mean why do you prefer the local?

P: I think the support with funding is peripheral. I mean it's not core to doing research.

I: What would be the opposite of peripheral, do you think?

P: Central.

I: Central, interesting.

P: It's central to the process, to present research. Your research is fundamental. Maybe fundamental is a better word than central.

I: Yeah. Interesting. So, peripheral vs fundamental?

P: Yes.

I: What do you mean by fundamental?

P: I mean it's not only about the funding. It's about presenting your research. It's part of the process of research. Yes, funding might be important, but I don't always need funding to present my research. Do you see what I mean?

I: Yes, yes. But funding here is to help you present, isn't it?

P: Yes, but I don't think it's always important. And, in fact, the process can be very complicated, sometimes.

I: Interesting! Can you give me an example?

P: Example of what?

I: Of presenting in the Centre's conference or getting funding to present in outside conference?

P: Okay. Let me think. I remember when I applied to present in the centre's conference. It was Dr. X at that time, and he explained things to me. And he helped facilitate, helped me with what I had to do, his approval, in order to present.

I: Interesting!

P: On a personal level, he was very supportive and helpful. If he hadn't been, I don't know that I would have known the process or how to go about it.

I: Interesting! How was that helpful?

P: I think you can get reassurance that you're on the right track and you're doing the right things. I think silly little things like if the website is not clear, people don't know if they have uploaded their abstract, they get confused. If it's here, you can get things clarified. If the forms, the administrative parts aren't clear and functional, that puts people off, and that cuts the support, I think. I think the whole process should be engaging.

I: What do you mean by engaging?

P: I mean there're people who help you. Yeah, who can say, "oh that's okay, don't worry about it, I've made a note of it all. Yes, there is an error, we'll correct it, I'm sorry." Instead of you're sort of out there in the cold, and people sending it a couple of times because they don't know what's going on or it said 100 words and I write many more and now it's being rejected.

I: Interesting! What would be the opposite of that? I mean engaging?

P: I would say alienating.

I: Excellent! I'm trying to spell alienating.

P: Where you feel alienated from the process, you feel disconnected. Would you prefer disconnected? Disconnected, or alienating is a good one. You can put it in.

I: Thank you! I'll check it later. But how is this related to engaging?

P: Well, if you're feeling disconnected and alienated. So instead of engaging you, it's rejecting you.

I: Interesting. Let's move to other elements. (Participant is choosing elements from index cards). Which ones have you chosen?

P: Participating in the EAR workshop, and let's say getting guidance from the different research committees. This one.

I: Interesting! Are they similar or different?

P: Well, I find them very different. But I don't know. What are the different research committees? I only thought that they, do you mean the one for the conference plus the one for the department?

I: For the department, yes.

P: For the department?

I: Yes.

P: I haven't seen any activity from the department one. I only know about the conference one.

I: There're two departmental research committees.

P: Oh, really?! I haven't heard of them. So, should I choose other elements.

I: No, it's okay. Let's continue with these two.

P: Okay.

I: What do you know about the conference committee? Or how is it different from participating in …?

P: EAR workshop.

I: Yes, the EAR workshop.

P: I find this one (getting guidance from the RCS), I guess top down and this one (participant at the EAR workshop) is bottom up, in a way. I think this one (getting guidance from the RCs) … I see it like this entity that is very

bureaucratic and cumbersome and unwieldy and doesn't function very effectively. I haven't been involved with it very much, I did some, oh God when did I do research? Ages ago, with XX. I was involved in a funded research, and that's just a bureaucratic nightmare, and I think that leads to very poor research and very badly directed research. And a waste of money. It just seemed like this cumbersome process.

I: Interesting, we will come to that. That experience is very important to me.

P: The best part of this one (participant at the EAR workshop) was that I could speak with him (her mentor), and he could explain things to me and help me through the process. And I like going to your sessions because I like my brain to be stimulated, and I like to think of new ideas and new ways of seeing things, and it was accessible because of the time, and because I was free at that time, and I'm interested in exploring. So for me, it was much more accessible, because of the time, the informality of it. Once formality was being imposed, then I found it off-putting.

I: Interesting. You've mentioned actually a lot of interesting things here, like for the first two things you mentioned top down, as opposed to bottom up. Top down. Bottom up. And formal as opposite to?

P: Well, you could say informal, or you could say relaxed.

I: Relaxed?

P: Open, I think, is better. I feel it's an open forum where we can discuss things and have ideas and collaborate, whereas I think the formal, there's no collaboration, it's you enter it, our committee looks at it, two or three- or four-weeks' time we'll say yes or no. So, there's no collaboration there. And I think it should have collaboration. There should be someone that comes to you and sits with you, as XX did in the beginning when I first arrived here six years ago. Where he sat and he said, well this needs to be a bit clearer, and gave it credibility. Filling out a form and having people sit around and within the next month or two say yes or no, is very disconnected.

I: Interesting! You are coming back to the word disconnected, which is something that you mentioned before. It is interesting you mentioned credibility as well. Do you think … is credibility important?

P: Yes, because if it's just filling out a paper for the sake of another form that has to be filled in, that has very little relevance or very little to help the researchers themselves, or to guide the researcher, then it's just a point of another committee going through the motions and ticking a box. I mean, what is the point?!

I: Interesting. Can we say gives credibility? Or credible, it's up to you. Whatever you feel represents your thinking.

P: Credibility, well that's what I think about it, it's credible, gives credibility.

I: Gives credibility, and what does it mean?

P: It should be something that's relevant and necessary.

I: Interesting. So, what would be the opposite of that?

P: Something that's false, it's just going through the motions of filling out forms and having a committee, and it's like they're playing a role of, oh well no. It's not open, it's not transparent.

I: Interesting! We can write that down. Which adjective or phrase captures that? We can write more than one, like transparent. What I understood from you, it's not genuine, it's a wordplay. Is this right?

P: Yeah. It's going through the motions. But without, I think it's just become bureaucratic. It's not functional, it's not helping or supporting the researcher, it's “oh yes, we filled out all those forms for ethics, and we've done all that and we said no because of this”. Are you encouraging research, or are you discouraging research?

Was it last week, I had colleagues who came to me and say, "Could you answer this question for us, please? It's for our research." And I said, "Oh, we're not supposed to answer any or help you, you're supposed to go through a process." And I thought, they'll never get it done. They're going to be crushed. They're going to go to someone who says it's not my job and someone else who says oh I don't have time, come back tomorrow, and someone else who says oh that committee's not meeting for another three weeks.

I: Yeah.

P: So, as this is anonymous, I went against what the department says, and I gave them my response. And we're not supposed to.

I: You wanted to help.

P: Yeah. But that's the whole thing. It's all game playing, and I think for some pontificating on the importance of their role. And why are they in that role? What gives them the credential, that they can sit and judge other people's research projects? Are they trying to facilitate research, or are they saying, oh no this isn't good enough? Well, it's obstructing.

I: Obstructing? As opposite to?

P: I think facilitating.

I: Interesting. Let's write this down.

P: It's the way they judge.

I: Judge your research?

P: Yeah. But who are these people? What skills do they have that enable them? And how often do they meet? Do they meet twice a week? I wrote down a few notes before I came today, considering things about how I think research should be improved here, and one of the things was having a dedicated person who has release time, and they are the person, if when new people come, they explain the policy of research in the centre. They explain what ethical clearance. Some people coming in might not even know, or people who are older, from different cultures. Explain the process, explain how long it will take, what's required, show them the forms, and say, "If you're interested in research, come to me, I'm available on Sundays and Wednesdays from nine to eleven."

I: Clarify the procedure?

P: And that you have a point of reference, someone who will listen to you and explain things to you. If they really want research to be effective, you need to not have this, you know you have to fill out this and you have to do this, and this committee will decide, and four weeks later they'll tell you no because you didn't have the right punctuation and then you'll have to send it back. What is this? What's the point?

I: So, is it about the clarity of procedures?

P: There’re lots of procedures, but are they valid?

I: Interesting! Valid as opposite to?

P: Yes, valid and genuine. I think valid and genuine as opposite to bureaucratic.

I: I don't know how to spell bureaucratic. [laugh]

P: B-E-A-U.

I: Don't worry about that.

…

I: Now let's move to other types of support. You mentioned an experience with funding?

P: Yes.

I: You said it was a waste of money. Could you tell me more about that?

P: Yeah. The bureaucracy was so constricting that you had this amount of time to spend this much money, but only on these things. You had to have a full budget all set out, you couldn't move money from one section to the other, it had to be spent by this date, then when the economic crisis hit, they froze it all, and then someone must have found out what they were doing and yelled at them. Then they said, "You've got six weeks to spend the next year's budget."

…

So, you were totally tied, and money was wasted.

I: Interesting! Totally tied. Totally tied, as opposite to?

P: Autonomy, I think. And there's no autonomy in the system because non-academics are making the decisions about how and when money will be spent. Speaking of which, have you seen XX at all this semester?

I: No.

P: She's the one that led this research. She worked on like a Trojan.

I: I know her.

P: She went to them maybe 100 times over three years, tried to clear things up, tried to organize things. How she didn't go insane, I don't know, because of the lunacy of the bureaucracy. They're administrators who have no idea.

I: You mean the facilitators?

P: Are they facilitators, or are they just part of the process and they're just totally disengaged from what research should be?

They've got nothing to do and no understanding of research or how fluid things need to be. Having to write a strict budget before you've even started for a three-year project and know how much money you're going to be spending on things over those three years, and then being tied to that.

I: So how would you describe that experience?

P: Frustrating.

I: Frustrating, okay.

P: And sad, just a waste. And I felt ashamed to be associated with that research, because it wasn't what I would've wanted, in the end.

I: Interesting. So here you're talking about a real experience that you went through.

P: Frustrating.

I: The opposite of that would be what? The type of support that makes you feel?

P: Proud.

I: Of the product itself?

P: Yeah.

I: Interesting, interesting. Why is this important?

P: If you're pushed and shoved, you've got to publish, you've got to publish, try this, publish, try. They're not getting back to you. I must have written 10 emails to one journal because we had to publish within that timeframe. We had to have so many publications by the end of that academic year, and so many publications. And these are the journals, I mean they've got journal advocates coming from all over the world. But oh no, this is high profile. And I think they were ready to throw our article in the bin, because I'd harassed them for so long about when it is going to be published.

I: So, how is this related to the support you got?

P: Yes. I think we produced things I wasn't proud of. I was disappointed. I think funding should help produce quality work. Did it help me do that? I don't think so.

I: Very interesting. What's the opposite of the kind of support that helps you produce quality work?

P: As I mentioned, it makes me disappointed, disappointed with the outcome.

I: Interesting! How are we doing for time?

P: Quarter to two, plenty of time.

I: That's good. Alhamdullilah. I don't want to exceed one hour. I know you have a class. Please let me know if feel tired or you have to leave.

P: No, no. I'm fine. Don't worry.

I: Thank you! Let's move to other types of support. If you could please choose from the index cards.

Appendix 4: Access Approval

[redacted] [redacted]

Research Approval

Please read through and fill out this approval form carefully!

- The [redacted] Research Committee Hereby gives approval for the research detailed below to be conducted at [redacted]
- This approval must be presented to the [redacted] member(s) of staff who is/are facilitating access to the participants as well as to the participants themselves, when requested.
- Please note that this approval does not secure any form of consent for participation. Consent is to be obtained directly from participants separately and prior to the commencement of any data collection.

Researcher's name	**Abdullah Khalfan Nasser Al Rawahi**
Researcher's contact details:	**Email address:** [redacted] **Office phone number:** **Mobile phone number:** [redacted]
Institution / University / College / Department	[redacted]
Research level, e.g., Diploma/BA/MA/PhD	PhD
Research Topic / Title	ELT Teachers' Engagement with the Affordances for Teacher Research
Method(s) of data collection	1. semi-structured interviews 2. repertory grid interviews
Target course(s)	4 research committee members and from 4 to 6 teacher researchers
Name of person(s) facilitating access to participants, if known	
Date approval granted	25th September 2018
Date approval expires	9th May, 2019
Chair of Research and Conference Committee	[redacted] 25/9/2018
Researcher's Signature	
Comments, if any	1. Consent forms must be signed by participants 2. The findings should be disseminated at [redacted]

Last updated on 25 September 2018