

ROOTS AND ROUTES: THE TEACHING AND RESEARCH NEXUS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION FROM AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: The teaching-research nexus (TRN) not only empowers teachers to bridge theory and practice but also challenges the traditional hierarchy between teachers and researchers, making TRN important for more research-informed teaching. This study explores the concept of TRN from the perspective of English language education (ELE) graduate students in the Philippines, an under-researched area in the TRN literature. Adopting an ecological perspective, the study employs an open-ended survey (n = 17) and follow-up individual interviews (n = 5) to explore how Filipino ELE graduate students perceive TRN within their studies and how it shapes their roles as researchers and educators. The findings reveal that TRN, embedded in the curriculum as both a requirement and instructional material, is viewed positively for its significant contribution to professional growth, research knowledge, and teaching skills. The findings not only highlight the participants' role in TRN as active agents in their graduate courses but also empower them to integrate research into teaching, refining teaching methods through research insights and fostering an understanding of theoretical concepts, thus shaping their roles as educators and researchers. The study underscores the complexity and dynamism of TRN at macro, meso, and micro levels within the context of Philippine ELE graduate studies, indicating its vital role in personal and professional development, and pedagogical advancement.

Keywords: ecological perspective, English language education, graduate students, Philippine HEIs, teaching-research nexus

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In higher education institutions (HEIs), academics bear a triad of important responsibilities, which include classroom teaching, research and academic publishing, and community engagement (Tayeb, 2016; Ulla & Tarrayo, 2021). Among these, teaching and research have long been the main focus of extensive study, exploring their relationship and mutual influence, especially in the fields of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), language education, and English language teaching (ELT) (Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021; McKinley, 2019; Sato & Loewen, 2022). However, although research engagement among language teachers is widely promoted to enhance pedagogical understanding and professional growth, McKinley (2019) argues that the TESOL research community continues to privilege studies conducted by non-teaching researchers over those carried out by practitioner-researchers in classrooms. This hierarchy reinforces a persistent divide between teaching and research. One possible reason is the common belief that classroom teachers may not necessarily benefit from or need to engage with researchers, as these “researchers report conflicting findings and provide inconsistent pedagogical suggestions that sometimes change over time” (Sato & Loewen, 2019, p. 2).

Furthermore, although classroom teachers are encouraged to engage in research not only to inform their pedagogical practices but also to contribute to their professional development, scholars (see Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021; Ulla & Tarrayo, 2021; Ulla et al., 2021) have acknowledged that some classroom teachers prefer to remain on a full-time teaching track, while others prefer doing research and publishing, widening the gap in the TRN in the field of language education. As a result, only a few TESOL researchers may conduct research to inform classroom practices, and few classroom teachers engage in research to improve their teaching. Rose (2019) called this phenomenon the “ivory tower,” where TESOL researchers are “above” while most teachers are “below” in the academic community (p. 895), disconnected from research activities and lacking influence over shaping the research agenda. Therefore, to break down the ‘ivory tower,’ McKinley (2019) and Rose (2019) urged for more teaching-informed research and exploration of TESOL research within TRN.

In the Philippines, despite strong government and HEI commitment to research policies, these efforts mainly emphasize a top-down view of understanding TRN's macro, meso, and micro levels. In contrast, the bottom-up approach lacks clarity on how these policies are implemented and how researchers and practitioners exercise their agency in integrating TRN as a key component of English language education (ELE). Studies in the literature (see Barrot et al., 2022; Tarrayo et al., 2020; Tarrayo et al., 2021) indicate that, despite significant progress in language education and ELT research—particularly with postgraduate programs in HEIs becoming major sources of scientific inquiry aimed at improving classroom practices—many language teachers still do not participate in research. This limited involvement is attributed to restricted access to resources, inadequate research expertise, and a preference for focusing on full-time teaching.

Despite the increasing amount of research on TRN in TESOL and teacher education worldwide (e.g., Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021; Duff et al., 2023; Ni & Wu, 2023; Sato & Loewen, 2022; Wang et al., 2023), most of these studies have mainly examined TRN from institutional or teacher-level perspectives, often concentrating on policy, productivity, or attitudes toward research. Few have explored how the connections among macro-level structures (e.g., national research policies and institutional priorities), meso-level processes (e.g., program design,

departmental culture), and micro-level practices (e.g., teachers' classroom and research activities) dynamically influence TRN in context. This is especially true in underrepresented settings such as the Philippines, where top-down research policies may not always match teachers' agentic practices and lived experiences in integrating research into teaching.

Adopting an ecological perspective enables the current study to move beyond the simple, input-output view of TRN seen in earlier research. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1993) systems framework and Edwards' (2021) application to language teacher research, this approach emphasizes how interactions across macro, meso, and micro systems create opportunities or limitations for teachers' engagement with research. It therefore captures the relational, context-dependent, and emerging aspects of TRN, which are still under-theorized in current TESOL scholarship. Consequently, the study aims not only to add to the existing literature but also to foster a thorough understanding of the complex factors shaping the academic experiences and views of ELE graduate students in the Philippines regarding TRN.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Teaching-Research Nexus (TRN): Significance and Complexities

While previous research has provided a diverse range of perspectives and findings on TRN in higher education, highlighting the importance and complexities of integrating teaching and research in academic contexts (e.g., Duff et al., 2023; Tarrayo et al., 2021; Ulla & Tarrayo, 2021), some studies have also recognized the balance between teaching and research as a critical mission of HEIs (Bai et al., 2012; Ni & Wu, 2023; Tarrayo et al., 2021; Tight, 2016). Tight (2016), for example, investigated the evolving notion of TRN through a systematic literature review, underscoring its growing importance in higher education over the last three decades. The article defines the nexus as a close, necessary link between the two core functions of higher education: teaching and research. The concept is that these roles should be or are inextricably linked, forming a foundation for future endeavors in higher education. Nevertheless, there often exists an imbalance when either teaching or research is given more attention at the expense of the other (Ulla & Tarrayo, 2021; Weenink et al., 2023).

Studies have also identified practical challenges teachers encounter in integrating teaching and research. These challenges encompass heavy teaching workloads, limited time and resources for research, and institutional pressures prioritizing either teaching or research (Bai et al., 2012; Tarrayo et al., 2020). For example, Bai et al.'s (2012) study demonstrates the strong institutional pressure on academics to undertake research, primarily due to policies emphasizing the importance of research productivity for career advancement. Academics often feel that teaching is being devalued in the promotion criteria and that the systems of recognition and promotion strongly prioritize research over teaching. Given these conditions, there is a clear requirement for improved institutional support and acknowledgment of the dual responsibility of educators as both teachers and researchers. Despite these challenges, recent research has indicated that TRN has a positive impact in terms of the synergies and mutual benefits it brings. When integrated well, research can improve the quality of instruction by introducing students to cutting-edge information (Tarrayo et al., 2021), encouraging critical thinking (Nhem, 2023), and

preparing them for further study and professional careers (Clark & Hordosy, 2019; Wang et al., 2023). Teaching can also influence and generate ideas for research questions and approaches (McKinley, 2019).

Furthermore, research has shown that the notion of TRN varies significantly across disciplines, institutions, and countries (Duff et al., 2023; Weenink et al., 2023). While some fields and academic cultures have established the merging of teaching and research, others may regard them as distinct. For example, Weenick et al.'s (2023) study investigated the dynamics of TRN within academic environments, concentrating on how academics at various hierarchical levels (i.e., assistant, associate, and full professors) in the Netherlands experience and manage this interplay. According to the study, TRN is dynamic and situational, based on individual circumstances and academic hierarchies. While there are initiatives to modify this nexus, academics' actual play-out and coping strategies vary significantly among positions. In a comprehensive analysis of TRN in accounting education across three international regions: the UK and Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, and South Africa, Duff et al. (2023) found positive views on TRN among accounting educators in all regions but noted that these are largely ignored by academic institutions and professional accounting bodies, leading to accounting becoming more of a teaching-led rather than research-informed discipline. The above findings emphasize the need to better understand the distinctions between teaching and research and develop strategies suited to specific contexts.

Teachers' Engagement with Research

Teachers are pivotal in shaping the teaching profession, conducting research, and leading community engagement (Cao et al., 2023; McKinley, 2019; Ulla & Tarrayo, 2021). Recent studies on language teachers' perceptions of research have revealed that teachers view research as contributing to their personal and professional development and that teaching and research are interconnected (McKinley, 2019; Tarrayo et al., 2020; Ulla et al., 2021; Ulla & Tarrayo, 2021). Tarrayo et al. (2021) argued that language teachers who undertake research have the potential to innovate their teaching practices, creating an engaging environment for teaching and learning.

However, many language teachers express that research is their least prioritized activity due to time constraints, stressful working conditions, and inflexibility in the workplace (Arayssi et al., 2020; Ulla et al., 2021; Ulla & Tarrayo, 2021). Other hindrances include a lack of funding support, heavy workloads, difficulties understanding published articles, and challenges contextualizing research results in classroom practice (Tarrayo et al., 2020). Moreover, teachers perceive themselves more as instructors than researchers (Ulla & Tarrayo, 2021). For instance, Arayssi et al. (2020) investigated 50 language teachers' perceptions of practitioner research in various schools in Lebanon using a qualitative research design. The findings from the questionnaire and in-depth, semi-structured interviews revealed that conducting research is not a common practice among these teachers, primarily due to time constraints, challenging work conditions, and limited flexibility in their professional environment. In addition, the findings indicated that teachers often experience a sense of disconnection when engaging in research, as

their practices are shaped by the institution's vision and policies, leaving little room for autonomous exploration.

In the context of ELE in the Philippines, Tarrayo et al. (2020) conducted a mixed-method study utilizing a modified online survey questionnaire derived from previous research and interviews to explore the research practices of 49 Filipino English teachers. The investigation examined teachers' perspectives on their university's own research practices, attitudes toward reading research and its applicability to ELT, and perceived obstacles to accessing and utilizing research within a Philippine academic setting. The findings showed that English language teachers recognized the interconnection between their research habits, institutional research protocols, and teaching methodologies. Nonetheless, they encountered various challenges, including congested teaching schedules, insufficient funding, and difficulties understanding published research materials.

In a follow-up study, Tarrayo et al. (2021) employed a qualitative research approach to explore English language teachers' research engagement at a Philippine university. The findings revealed that teachers equipped themselves for research by immersing themselves in research articles, with some dedicating specific time for reading and engaging with research, as reading research was seen as beneficial for enhancing teaching practices. However, the study also identified the challenges that hindered research involvement, including heavy workloads and competing demands in their teaching roles.

An Ecological Perspective of TRN

In educational research, the term 'ecology' refers to the physical, temporal, and virtual learning environment (Chong et al., 2023), emphasizing interconnectedness, interdependence, and interaction as central concepts (Mohammadabadi et al., 2019). As a theory, Brofenbrenner's (1993) ecological perspective offers a holistic approach for investigating linguistic phenomena, language learning, and language education issues, and it can also be used to conceptualize TRN.

Founded on ecological systems theory, ecological perspectives focus on different milieus, such as social, cultural, political, and institutional (Edwards, 2021), and their interconnectedness, interdependence, and interaction with language teachers (Mercer, 2023; Mohammadabadi et al., 2019). When applied to education, this theory incorporates various elements, including the classroom, home, neighborhood, school, parent workplace, and a government's public-policy formulation, examining the relationships between these contexts at all stages (Mohammadabadi et al., 2019).

In language teacher research, ecological perspectives consist of three levels: microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem (Edwards, 2021; see Figure 1). The microsystem pertains to the individual language teacher who directly engages with students and their immediate surroundings (Edwards, 2021) or the context where the language teacher has direct contact, such as the classroom, family, syllabus, students, etc. (Liu & Buckingham, 2022). In contrast, the mesosystem encompasses the institutional environment (Edwards, 2021) or the interactions among elements within the microsystem, such as the relationship between the language teacher and the classroom or work environment (Liu & Buckingham, 2022). Meanwhile, the macrosystem includes educational, social, and political systems and values (Edwards, 2021).

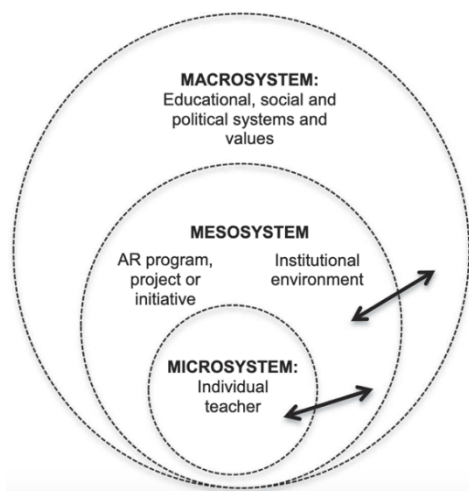


Figure 1. Edwards' (2021) Ecological Framework for Teacher Research

In the current study, we adopted the ecological perspective framework developed by Edwards (2021) since it captures the direction of the research by examining the interplay between the immediate facets (microsystem) and the broader context (macrosystem), with the mesosystem knitting the different microsystems. The above discussion elucidates that while TRN is foundational to the mission of HEIs, significant challenges persist, which may be in the micro or macrosystems. Furthermore, the literature underscores an evolving landscape where institutional policies often hinder the potential for mutual enrichment between teaching and research, resulting in a division of labor that can devalue the teaching aspect. Despite these complexities, the positive impact of a well-integrated TRN, ranging from enhancing instructional quality to stimulating novel research inquiries, is undeniable.

Moreover, different views on TRN across disciplines, institutions, and countries further necessitate context-sensitive strategies that recognize the unique dynamics of each academic setting. Thus, it is crucial for educational policies and institutional frameworks to evolve, acknowledging the symbiotic relationship between teaching and research and fostering an environment where both can thrive in balance.

While existing literature (see Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021; McKinley, 2019; Ulla & Tarrayo, 2021; Tarrayo et al., 2021) has delved into TRN from various global contexts, research specifically addressing the Philippines is scarce. Therefore, it is imperative to address this gap by investigating how ELE graduate students perceive TRN within their graduate studies. Furthermore, understanding the challenges and opportunities they encounter in integrating research into their academic endeavors is crucial for fostering effective implementation. Additionally, exploring how TRN shapes graduate students' roles as researchers and language teachers can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of research integration into ELE. Guided by the ecological framework for TRN, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do ELE graduate students perceive TRN in their graduate studies?
2. How does such a TRN shape their roles as researchers and English language teachers?

The findings aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of TRN in ELE, specifically in the Philippines, an understudied context in the literature. Lastly, the findings may have implications for developing research-informed teaching practices and advancing ELE in the Philippines.

METHOD

Design

The present study followed the qualitative-descriptive (Kim et al., 2017) research design, exploring the concept and practice of TRN from an ecological perspective among ELE graduate students in Philippine universities. Such a research design is recognized as crucial and suitable for inquiries aimed at uncovering and describing “the who, what, and where of events or experiences and gaining insights from informants regarding a poorly understood phenomenon” (Kim et al., 2017, p. 23-24). In the context of Philippine ELE, we contend that TRN remains insufficiently explored, particularly concerning the perspectives of graduate students. This assertion warrants a more in-depth exploration to enhance our understanding of this phenomenon in the context of the Philippines.

Context and Participants

The research was conducted in the Philippines, where the researchers are English language teachers in both private and public universities. The Philippines has nearly 2000 institutions, including local colleges and universities (LCUs), state colleges and universities (SUCs), other government schools (OGH, special HEIs), and private HEIs, excluding SUCs’ satellite campuses (CHED, 2020). However, purposive sampling was employed because of the geographical spread, availability, and voluntary participation of the respondents. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) currently enrolled in a graduate program in English language education, English teaching, or English studies; (b) actively teaching English at the time of the study; and (c) having integrated research into their teaching practice for at least three years.

Among the 29 respondents to the open-ended survey questionnaire, only 17 (15 females and two males) met the sampling criteria (see Table 1). These participants, aged between 26 and 41, had teaching experience ranging from three to 16 years. In addition, four were finishing their doctorate degrees, while 13 were completing their MA degrees. However, of these 17, only five participated in the follow-up individual online interviews due to time constraints and availability. The participants were informed about the study’s purpose and assured that their involvement was voluntary, with a commitment to treating their data confidentially.

Table 1. A Summary of the Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Graduate Program	Teaching Experience (Years)
P1	Female	38	Ph.D.	14
P2	Female	33	Ph.D.	12
P3	Male	39	MA/MS	3
P4	Female	35	MA/MS	6
P5	Female	31	MA/MS	7
P6	Female	38	MA/MS	5
P7	Female	30	MA/MS	5
P8	Female	31	Ph.D.	10
P9	Male	33	MA/MS	5
P10	Female	30	Ph.D.	5
P11	Female	26	MA/MS	6
P12	Female	38	MA/MS	10
P13	Female	29	MA/MS	8
P14	Female	26	MA/MS	4
P15	Female	30	MA/MS	8
P16	Female	28	MA/MS	8
P17	Female	26	MA/MS	3

Tools and Data-Gathering Procedure

This study used two data collection tools: an open-ended questionnaire and a qualitative survey (QS), followed by semi-structured individual online interviews. The QS allowed participants to address the study's concerns at their own pace. Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2013) argue that QS effectively gathers detailed participant accounts and experiences.

A call for participants was posted on Facebook groups and institutional online communities of English language teachers and graduate students throughout February 2024. The post included the study description, researcher contact information, and a Google Form link to the open-ended qualitative survey, consisting of six open-ended survey questions. These questions revolve around the teaching–research nexus in language education graduate studies, exploring how graduate students in language education experience, negotiate, and make sense of the relationship between doing research and teaching (see Appendix A). Interested individuals could access the link and were directed to the consent section before answering the questions. The consent form explained the study's objectives, confidentiality and anonymity measures, voluntary nature of participation, right to withdraw at any stage, and data storage procedures. Only those who provided digital consent by ticking the “I agree to participate” box were able to proceed with the questionnaire. On average, participants could complete the survey within 30 to 40 minutes, although the survey was designed to allow them to respond at their own pace. The turnaround time for the survey was 45 days.

At the end of the survey, participants could indicate their willingness to join the follow-up online interviews by providing an email address. The researchers then contacted these volunteers individually to schedule interviews and gather additional data. Prior to each interview, the consent information was reiterated verbally, and participants were reminded that the sessions would be recorded only for transcription and analysis purposes. The online interview, conducted via Zoom, was recorded and lasted between 35 and 60 minutes, using either English or Tagalog. The guide questions used in the follow-up interviews were identical to those asked in the open-ended survey questions in the Google form.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the survey and the interview were thoroughly examined using a Microsoft Excel sheet to gain a deeper understanding of the information. Both datasets were combined for analysis, enabling a detailed exploration of ELE graduate students’ perspectives on the TRN. The process was iterative and reflective. We manually coded the data using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic-analysis framework and identified and highlighted recurring themes and ideas. These data were color-coded, highlighted, and organized to uncover potential themes.

Table 2. A Sample of Data Coding

Raw data excerpt	Initial code	Developed themes
“Balancing teaching responsibilities with research activities gave me a deeper understanding of theoretical concepts and their practical applications in class.” (P7)	Integrating theory into practice	TRN for research-informed teaching
“The challenge would mainly focus on problems with time management since striking a balance between my MA studies and my responsibilities as a teacher seems an impossible feat.” (P5)	Difficulty balancing roles	TRN-associated issues

To ensure credibility and accuracy, we subjected the data to member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) by returning them to the participants twice over a 20-day period. The first instance involved participants receiving individual copies of their survey responses, allowing them to modify, edit, and include only the relevant details. The second instance occurred after data analysis, where the participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of the qualitative data analysis.

In addition, data triangulation was ensured by combining two sources of data: survey and interview data for trustworthiness, where we then formulated, discussed, and finalized the generated themes based on their relevance to the coded data and the research questions posed in this study (see Table 2). After finalizing the generated themes, we presented and discussed them, emphasizing the *macro*, *meso*, and *micro* factors that shaped the participants’ perceptions of TRN.

In the Findings section, we present the excerpts with the participants' assigned codes (P1, P2, and so forth) to maintain anonymity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings were categorized based on the six themes that surfaced in the analysis. RQ1 is answered in Themes 1, 2, and 3, with the challenges included in Theme 4, while RQ2 is presented in Themes 5 and 6.

TRN as a Course Material and a Requirement (Theme 1)

The participants reported the prevalence of TRN in their graduate school curriculum, appearing as a course requirement and course material. On the one hand, as course material, TRN was used as a framework to apply research strategies to explore and teach various topics related to language education. As mentioned by P5:

As a language student, normally we encountered that research was incorporated in language vocabulary language acquisition techniques in study routine.

This statement shows that research was not treated as a separate academic exercise but as an embedded element of their learning process. P5's description suggests that TRN is operationalized through everyday coursework, reinforcing an environment where research knowledge informs pedagogical understanding, a clear indication of how the mesosystem (institutional context) promotes the interconnection between research and teaching.

On the other hand, research assignments, such as research articles or systematic reviews, were frequently included in various courses and capstone projects. P7 disclosed this, stating that a research paper is a crucial requirement for their academic degrees at their university.

In my university, a research paper is always a part of our academic requirements. In fact, a research paper is always a capstone requirement in almost all of my courses in the program. (P7)

This excerpt emphasizes that institutional structures support TRN through curriculum design. Including research as a fundamental requirement demonstrates how the macrosystem (educational policy and institutional goals) influences student engagement with research, ensuring that teaching and learning are rooted in inquiry and evidence-based practices.

TRN as a Professional Development (Theme 2)

The participants perceived TRN in their graduate studies positively, emphasizing its role in fostering professional growth and development. For example, P1 noted that their engagement in teaching and research within the context of ELE significantly contributed to their professional advancement, highlighting a specific case study conducted during their Reading and Writing

course at the graduate school. For P1, such a TRN was particularly beneficial as they also teach reading and writing skills at the senior high school level.

Both my teaching and research in language education helped me in my professional development. If I can cite one particular case study I did in my Reading and Writing course at the Graduate School, I can say that this one best helped me since I am also a teacher of Reading and Writing Skills at the Senior High School. (P1)

P1's reflection reveals how TRN bridges theoretical learning with classroom practice. This direct application of research to teaching exemplifies ecological interdependence between the microsystem (the teacher's classroom) and mesosystem (the graduate school context). It shows how TRN not only enriches academic competence but also strengthens professional identity as a reflective practitioner.

Moreover, P2 maintained that TRN not only significantly influenced their professional development but also allowed them to deepen their understanding of research and equipped them with skills to advance as English language teachers.

Reflecting on my graduate studies journey, the teaching and research nexus in my language education program has significantly influenced my professional development. I've learned to craft research questions aligned with the study's title and develop suitable methodologies. Unexpectedly, this process deepened my understanding of research design. Balancing teaching and research was challenging, but overall, this nexus enriched my professional journey, equipping me with valuable skills and insights that continue to shape my career in language education. (P2)

P2's narrative illustrates the transformative effect of TRN on teachers' self-efficacy and research skills. Their account confirms that participating in TRN encourages reflective, evidence-based teaching, a crucial process for developing adaptive expertise and ongoing professional growth, aligned with ecological perspectives that stress interaction across multiple contexts.

TRN for Critical Thinking (Theme 3)

TRN was also perceived positively for its role in strengthening critical thinking abilities. Emphasizing this point, one participant shared how TRN promotes critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and innovation. P3 said:

For me, the teaching and research nexus encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation. I develop analytical skills through research inquiry and reflective practices through teaching experiences. These skills are transferable and contribute to professional growth, enabling me to adapt to diverse educational settings and evolving language teaching trends. (P3)

This response highlights the cognitive benefits of engaging with TRN. P3's description indicates that research inquiry acts as a stimulus for metacognition, while teaching provides the context for applying analytical and reflective skills. From an ecological perspective, this

interplay between cognition and context underscores how personal development (micro level) and professional environments (meso level) interact to support teacher growth.

Thus, by immersing themselves in research inquiries and reflective teaching practices, the participants not only cultivate analytical skills but also nurture a mindset that supports critical thinking and creative problem-solving. P4 also shared such a perception.

My understanding of pedagogical approaches influenced my professional development. Engaging in research has actually enhanced my critical and analytical thinking skills. (P4)

P4's statement emphasizes the connection between research engagement and intellectual growth. It shows how TRN functions as a mediating factor that influences teachers' ability to evaluate pedagogical approaches critically, reflecting the integration of inquiry and practice outlined in ecological models of teacher learning.

TRN and Its Associated Issues (Theme 4)

Despite the participants' positive reception of TRN in their graduate studies, they also acknowledged some issues that hindered them from maximizing the potential of TRN, especially since they were also teaching while pursuing their graduate degrees. One prevalent issue they faced was time management. P5 mentioned:

The challenge would mainly focus on problems with time management since striking a balance between my MA studies and my responsibilities as a teacher seems an impossible feat. (P5)

This reflects the tension between personal (micro) and institutional (meso) systems that shape teachers' ability to sustain research engagement. P5's account shows that while TRN is enriching, it also demands considerable cognitive and temporal resources, implying that institutional flexibility and workload management are crucial to maintaining the balance between research and teaching.

Another issue that graduate students encounter when integrating research into their ELE coursework is the lack of skills and knowledge. P6, for instance, reflects on their initial struggles as newcomers to graduate school, particularly in navigating the complexities of research methods (e.g., quantitative research design).

As a freshman in graduate school, I found difficulty in deciding on the research methods of my proposal, especially the quantitative type. I could not figure out which certain statistical tools to use. Some words in quantitative are not familiar. Even though definitions of words are available, I still cannot understand how they are used practically in research. (P6)

This statement reveals the cognitive barriers faced by novice researchers. P6's struggle illustrates the developmental aspect of TRN where students transition from knowledge consumers to producers. The comment suggests that institutional support and methodological mentoring are vital for scaffolding research competence, echoing the importance of mesosystemic interactions within an ecological framework.

TRN for Research-Informed Teaching (Theme 5)

The survey findings also shed light on how TRN shapes participants' roles as English language teachers, influencing their teaching practices and fostering a deeper understanding of theoretical concepts. The participants recognize that TRN enables them to refine their teaching methodologies by integrating research insights into their pedagogical approaches. For instance, P7 said:

I feel the need to inform other teaching implementers of effective teaching or maybe classroom practices found through research. Balancing teaching responsibilities with research activities gave me a deeper understanding of theoretical concepts and their practical applications in educational settings. (P7)

This statement highlights how TRN turns teachers into mediators of research knowledge. P7's effort to share research-informed practices shows agency and collaboration, two key parts of ecological interdependence where individual growth benefits the larger teaching community.

Similarly, P8 reiterated the practical implications of engaging in research within the teaching context. Through a case study, P8 not only acquired valuable insights but also applied them effectively to address the needs of students facing challenges in reading. They mentioned:

I did this case study, and from that I could apply what I have learned especially with students who are struggling to read. The different prompts from that study were used as my tools in the teaching-learning activities in class at SHS. Moreover, conducting research on materials evaluation and preparation has also helped me teach my students how to write an argumentative essay following the principles of SLA and Corpus Linguistics. Lastly, my research study in Theories of Learning and Instruction has helped me develop learning activities to benefit my students' learning. (P8)

P8's statement emphasizes how TRN closes the gap between theory and classroom practice. Using research-based tools to address students' needs exemplifies the ecological concept of reciprocity, where research informs teaching methods and classroom experiences, which in turn inspire new research ideas.

TRN for Keeping Abreast of Research Trends (Theme 6)

The participants also recognized how TRN shapes their role as researchers in ELE. They believed that by actively engaging with trends and innovations in teaching through scholarly journals, they could demonstrate a commitment to staying informed and up-to-date with advancements in the ELE field. For instance, P9's adoption of AI strategies in writing instruction exemplifies how they leverage research insights to enhance their teaching methodologies.

I try to be informed about current trends in teaching by reading journals. I subscribe to their newsletters. Then, I try to apply the latest findings/innovations that I can contextualize in my teaching. For example, I found some interesting strategies in using AI in writing. So, I try to copy the strategies in my own teaching of writing. I model to the students how we can use the AI and then later on, I ask them to use it in their own individual writing activities.

P9's reflection exemplifies how TRN nurtures adaptive expertise. Their engagement with current research and technological innovations shows that teachers act as both learners and knowledge translators, key roles in sustaining innovation within the microsystem of the classroom and the mesosystem of professional practice.

Furthermore, the participants underscored that reading research helped them understand the theories behind teaching practices. For instance, P10 said that by actively observing colleagues' teaching practices and subsequently delving into relevant research literature, they gain insights into the underlying theories that inform effective pedagogy.

I usually check the ongoing teaching practices of my colleagues. From that, I read studies that may at least explain how this could potentially improve the class conditions. As these strategies are from them, I must adopt and practice them to see them myself. Once proven, it is now time to write a proposal to formally investigate how effective these practices. One specific methodology is Schema Activation strategy. When learners are familiar with some aspects of the topic, it will not be hard for them to learn the new lesson. That is why, I always start my lesson by having them reflect on their experiences and weave these experiences to understand the new lesson.

P10's insight emphasizes the cyclical nature of TRN, where teaching observation informs research, and research, in turn, refines teaching. This reflective process demonstrates the dynamic interaction across ecological layers, showing how personal and institutional contexts co-evolve through ongoing engagement with research.

Discussion

The current study explores TRN from an ecological perspective, focusing on Filipino ELE graduate students as participants. The findings align with previous studies (Consoli & Dikilitaş, 2021; McKinley, 2019; Sato & Loewen, 2022; Tarrayo et al., 2021), indicating that participants not only held positive perceptions toward TRN but also recognized it as a vital aspect for their professional and personal growth, potentially influencing their pedagogical practices in the language classroom. Moreover, from an ecological perspective (macro, meso, and micro levels), the findings emphasize that TRN operates within a web of interrelated systems where institutional, personal, and interactional factors continuously shape and reinforce one another. Thus, participants' experiences as graduate students in ELE greatly shaped their perceptions and attitudes toward TRN and how they enacted it in their teaching and research practices.

At the macro level, the study reveals that TRN is deeply embedded in the structure of ELE graduate curricula. The participants viewed TRN as both a course material and a degree requirement, suggesting that institutions promote an environment where research and teaching are not isolated tasks but mutually reinforcing processes. This aligns with M. Abdel Latif's (2021) argument that integrating research into coursework can enhance students' engagement with inquiry and strengthen their capacity to apply theoretical understanding in real teaching contexts. The participants' experiences reflect how macrosystemic forces, such as curriculum design, research policies, and academic culture, support the development of teachers as research-informed professionals.

However, these institutional structures also create expectations that can inadvertently pressure students balancing teaching and research, echoing previous findings on workload and institutional demands (Bai et al., 2012; Tarrayo et al., 2020; Ulla et al., 2021). Although these studies have documented these issues, the current study provides new insights because its participants were simultaneously engaged in reading, conducting research, pursuing their graduate studies, and teaching English at their respective institutions. Managing these responsibilities, especially for those teaching English courses, adds another layer of complexity to the challenges faced by participants in this study.

At the meso level, TRN acts as a dynamic link connecting institutional structures with teachers' lived experiences. Participants' reflections show that TRN directly impacts their classroom practices, professional relationships, and teaching philosophies. For example, participant 7 emphasized the importance of sharing successful teaching practices based on research, while P8 illustrated how research influences their teaching methods, especially in helping students with reading challenges and enhancing writing skills.

Thus, the unique context of participants pursuing their ELE graduate courses while teaching in their own language classrooms empowered them to connect theory and practice, improving their teaching and learning practices. This finding challenges the idea presented by Sato and Loewen (2019) that classroom teachers may not need or benefit from interactions with researchers because of conflicting findings and changing pedagogical advice. As participants engage in TRN in their graduate courses and incorporate this engagement into their own classroom practices, they can use their own research to inform teaching instead of relying solely on findings and implications from other researchers that may not apply in their contexts. Having engaged in TRN during their graduate studies and applying theories and concepts in their own classrooms also addresses what Rose (2019) called the 'ivory tower.' In other words, these participants are in a position where they have the power to break down the 'ivory tower' that exists between TESOL researchers and TESOL teachers. Therefore, TRN is crucial for more teaching-informed research (McKinley, 2019; Rose, 2019), which places all TESOL researchers on equal footing with TESOL teachers (Sato & Loewen, 2022).

At the micro level, the participants' reflections illustrate how TRN promotes personal transformation. Engaging in research helped them develop critical thinking, self-reflection, and problem-solving skills, which they applied to teaching and professional development. Participants like P2 and P3 described how TRN deepened their understanding of pedagogical approaches, suggesting that inquiry and reflection are not peripheral but central to teacher identity formation. This reinforces ecological principles emphasizing the interaction between individuals and their immediate environments (Mercer, 2023; Edwards, 2021).

In this study, the micro-level experience of engaging with research nurtured agency and autonomy, qualities that enable teachers to act as change agents within their professional ecosystems. These experiences demonstrate how TRN encourages participants' personal and professional development (McKinley, 2019; Tarrayo et al., 2020) on language teachers' attitudes toward research. As Tarrayo et al. (2021) mentioned, language teachers who conduct research can reinvent their teaching approaches, creating a more engaging environment for teaching and learning. Consoli and Dikilitaş (2021) also acknowledged this, promoting research among language practitioners to help teachers enhance their understanding and methods.

However, the findings also highlight persistent challenges within these interconnected systems. Time constraints, limited methodological knowledge, and heavy workloads remain significant barriers to sustaining research engagement, especially among teachers pursuing graduate studies. P5's and P6's accounts illustrate how cognitive and temporal limitations hinder the full realization of TRN's potential. These challenges, observed across ecological layers, demonstrate that teacher-researcher development is shaped not only by personal motivation but also by institutional and systemic support structures. As Tarrayo et al. (2020) and Ulla et al. (2021) note, without adequate mentoring and manageable workloads, TRN may become an additional burden rather than a developmental opportunity. Thus, a stronger mesosystemic support, through mentorship, collaboration, and research communities, is essential to sustain teachers' engagement with research and to bridge institutional and individual efforts effectively.

Lastly, the findings of the current study indicate that TRN is a complex and dynamic construct that operates across macro, meso, and micro levels in the context of ELE graduate students in the Philippines. However, despite this complexity and dynamism, participants use TRN to bridge theory and practice, challenging the idea of the 'ivory tower' phenomenon in TESOL research, where researchers are seen as superior and teachers as inferior within the academic community. Additionally, TRN, serving as a material resource, empowered participants to improve not only their professional practice but also their personal growth.

CONCLUSION

This study explored ELE graduate students' perspectives on TRN in their graduate studies and how such a TRN shapes their roles as researchers and English language teachers in the Philippines from an ecological perspective. The findings, consistent with previous research, underscored participants' positive views of TRN and its significant impact on their personal and professional development. The participants develop as active agents rather than passive recipients in their graduate courses, with their perceptions shaped by their status as graduate students in ELE. In other words, TRN enables them to incorporate research into teaching and connect theory and practice, establishing them as proactive teachers in their language classrooms.

The TRN in ELE promotes professional growth by allowing participants to develop their critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovative approaches. These participants believed that integrating research into their graduate studies, alongside teaching language at their respective institutions, would enrich their grasp of theoretical concepts and enhance the application of pedagogical strategies in their language classrooms.

The findings also indicate that TRN in the ELE context functions simultaneously at macro, meso, and micro levels, contributing to its complex and dynamic nature. Nevertheless, TRN not only empowers teachers to bridge theory and practice by applying theoretical insights directly to their language teaching practices but also challenges the traditional hierarchy between teachers and researchers in TESOL, thereby supporting the development of more teaching-informed research.

While the study sheds light on TRN in ELE, it has limitations. First, the study was conducted in the Philippines with ELE graduate students as participants. Future studies

exploring TRN from different contexts and participants may present diverse perspectives and practices, representing a wide range of experiences and viewpoints within the field of education. Second, the study only employed an online questionnaire and interviews for data collection. Such research tools may restrict the depth of responses and overlook nuanced insights that could have been gained through using other qualitative methods. Employing other qualitative methods or triangulating the data sources may comprehensively capture the participants' experiences and perspectives toward TRN.

Despite these limitations, the study's implications may extend beyond the context of Philippine ELE. TRN impacts not just the participants' roles as teachers and researchers but also contributes to the broader field of ELE, promoting a collaborative and informed approach to language education by connecting research with practice. Therefore, TRN should be continuously observed and practiced not only in ELE but also in other educational fields. Graduate programs should consistently integrate TRN into their curriculum, allowing students to explore it from their own perspectives and practices.

The findings of this study suggest several implications for English language education. First, teacher education institutions should explicitly integrate TRN-focused modules and research-based classroom inquiry projects into their English language education programs to help preservice and in-service teachers systematically connect theory, research, and pedagogy. Second, English teachers must be supported through institutional mechanisms such as reduced teaching loads, mentoring, and funded research opportunities that enable them to conduct classroom-based research and disseminate their findings. Moreover, schools and universities can promote a collaborative research culture by partnering classroom teachers with academic researchers to co-design studies that address authentic pedagogical challenges. Language teachers should also be encouraged to adopt reflective inquiry cycles, using classroom evidence to refine their instructional approaches and to inform institutional policy and curriculum development. Finally, policymakers and educational leaders should establish recognition and reward systems, including incentives, awards, and promotion opportunities, to support teacher-researchers who effectively integrate TRN into their practice.

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APPENDIX

Open-ended interview questions

A. Profile

Email Address :
Years of teaching experience :
Age :
Gender :
What graduate degree are you pursuing now? :

B. Interview questions

1. Can you share specific instances where research was successfully integrated into your language education graduate studies? What challenges did you encounter, and how did you overcome them?
2. In your experience, how do you prioritize the balance between teaching and research responsibilities? Can you provide examples of effective strategies you have employed to manage this dual role?
3. Reflecting on your graduate studies journey, how has the teaching and research nexus in your language education graduate studies influenced your professional development? Are there any unexpected benefits or drawbacks you've encountered?
4. As a language education graduate student, how do you navigate the current trends and innovations in language teaching while incorporating research findings into your practical teaching approaches? Can you discuss any specific methodologies or techniques you find particularly effective?
5. In your opinion, what institutional support or resources would enhance the integration of research into language education graduate studies?
6. In your opinion, how can universities and departments better facilitate the development of research skills alongside teaching responsibilities for graduate students in language education?

C. Interview participation

Would you be interested in being contacted for a possible follow-up online interview?
If you answered YES, please write your email address below.