

Camtree Digital Library



Enhancing Teacher Engagement in School Research

Author	Akhmetzhanova, Dinara
Title	Enhancing Teacher Engagement in School Research
Publisher	Camtree: the Cambridge Teacher Research Exchange
Publication date	2026
Download date	2026-03-05 10:54:01
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/1203



RESEARCH REPORT

Enhancing Teacher Engagement in School Research

Dinara Akhmetzhanova

School-Gymnasium N° 75, Astana City, Kazakhstan

Abstract

Context: Teacher engagement in research is identified as a critical yet often low-involvement area within educational practices. Many educators perceive participation in research as time-consuming and complex, leading to reluctance in engaging with action research despite its potential benefits for pedagogical practice. The SHARE project in Kazakhstan seeks to enhance this engagement by exploring the integration of collaborative research and reflective practices.

Aims: The primary aim of the study is to identify measures that can increase teacher engagement within the SHARE project. By examining teachers' experiences and motivations, the research attempts to understand how to facilitate deeper involvement in the action research process.

Methods: A qualitative case study approach was employed to collect data from ten teachers involved in the SHARE project. Data collection methods included surveys, lesson observations, and focus group discussions. Participants were encouraged to choose their research topics, which allowed for a personalized investigation into their teaching practices and professional development.

Findings: The findings indicate that while teachers could choose their topics, various external factors such as time constraints and lack of experience still hindered full engagement. The study highlighted the importance of collaboration among teachers, positive feedback from peers, and support from school leadership in fostering confidence and motivation. Participants reported improvements in their teaching practices and student engagement as they embraced a culture of reflective learning and collaborative inquiry.

Implications: The study suggests that enhancing teacher engagement in research involves fostering a supportive culture that promotes continuous reflection, collaborative problem-solving, and the autonomy to pursue individual research topics. Insights gained from this research can inform future initiatives aimed at embedding action research into daily pedagogical practices, thus contributing to sustained professional development and improved teaching outcomes within broader educational contexts.

Keywords: teacher engagement, teacher research, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, critical friendship

Literature Review

The literature identifies several reasons for the low level of teacher engagement in academic research. As noted by McBee (2004), teachers often perceive action research as an activity that diverts time and energy away from teaching. According to Du (2019), teachers frequently experience uncertainty and refrain from participation due to a limited understanding of the research process. Hines and Conner-Zachocki (2017) emphasize the importance of providing teachers with both opportunities and sufficient time to engage in practice-oriented research.

According to the concept of collaborative pedagogy (Prozumentova, 2002, pp. 4-16), an individual's involvement in joint work implies not only participation but also influence over the content and organization of the process. Engagement in an activity means that "the action belongs to the subject: its content, sequence, and process are internally determined by the subject" (Prozumentova, 2002, p. 12). Engagement differs from mere activity in that it is more persistent and goal-directed: an individual is either engaged or not engaged; there is no intermediate state.

Therefore, two dimensions of engagement can be identified: the level of participation and the level of influence (Cousins & Walker, 2000). A teacher's ability to independently select a research area, define a topic, identify relevant problems, choose appropriate methods and research design, and determine suitable research objects is considered a key component of meaningful participation in research (Ekiz, 2006, p. 395). However, as noted by Pozdeeva (2017), not all individuals possess a high degree of responsibility and self-organization. As an alternative, the research process may be guided by an academic supervisor who directs the trajectory of scholarly inquiry (Pozdeeva, 2017, p. 52).

Many teachers in general education systems still do not fully perceive research participation as a practical tool for addressing professional challenges. Even in educational contexts characterized by relatively high levels of research activity, a gap between research and practice often persists. Some educators may not consider research to be directly relevant to their everyday classroom challenges or may question its capacity to provide applicable solutions (Byman, Krokfors, & Toom, 2009).

Cochran-Smith (2005) argues that variations in teacher engagement in research reflect different models of professional practice. Within the instructional-methodological model, teachers do not engage in research but focus on methodological work and the development of teaching materials. In the scientific-descriptive model, teachers participate passively by studying and applying findings from external research to their practice. In contrast, the scientific-pedagogical model involves teachers as active participants who influence research processes and engage students in inquiry. Teachers operating within this model apply internally developed standards of teaching and function as autonomous agents (Cochran-Smith, 2009, p. 205).

Overall, the reviewed literature contributes not only to the theoretical understanding of educational issues but also has direct implications for teaching practice.

Methodology

Since 2020, the international project SHARE – School-based Teacher Action Research – has been implemented in Kazakhstani schools. Its goal is to explore teaching practice through four key concepts: the use of action research to improve teaching and learning; a vision of teaching and learning as a foundation for meaningful and sustainable change; creating enabling conditions within schools; and leadership and management that support change processes led by school leadership (Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, 2024).

The SHARE project focuses on developing teachers' skills in conducting practical, school-based research. It is a continuation of a successful initiative carried out in Astana schools from 2019 to 2022, supported by the city government and the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. Each year, an increasing number of schools joined the project as participants.

The new phase of the project, from 2022 to 2024, expanded its scope beyond general education schools to include the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS). Ten general education schools in Astana participated in the project. The program provided training and online support from leading international experts, such as Colleen McLaughlin and Kate Evans. Schools sought to integrate the SHARE approach into their daily practices, creating the necessary conditions for its successful implementation. School leadership actively supported the development of a culture of collaborative research both within their own institutions and across the network of participating schools.

By the end of the project, participants were expected to be able to conduct practical research independently and take part in both local and international academic events, such as the AOO International Research-to-Practice Conference (Action-Oriented Outcomes), the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), and the World Association of Lesson Studies (WALS) (Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, 2024).

No. 75 School joined the SHARE project in 2022. As part of the initiative, we conducted a research project on the topic of "Teacher Engagement." The project included several stages: data collection through surveys, lesson observations, video recordings of lessons, and focus group discussions with students and teachers. I was one of the teachers involved in implementing the initiative at our school. I encouraged my colleagues to take an active part in the work while observing and recording my own reflections as I engaged directly in the research activities. This experience inspired me to present my findings in the form of a report and allowed me to demonstrate my leadership skills.

Some challenges arose during the implementation phase, particularly in selecting teachers to deliver lessons in the targeted classes for training purposes. Not all teachers were open to participating in focus group discussions, and some were reluctant to deliver demonstration lessons or engage more broadly in the research process. These difficulties were linked to several factors identified through observations, interviews, meetings, and discussions. Among the key factors were fear of criticism from colleagues and administrators, as well as teachers' self-doubt and lack of confidence.

Thus, teaching practices that involve teachers in research processes can be interpreted as having a real impact both on the individuals themselves and on the professional community. They contribute to the realization of personal research initiatives and enrich the educational environment with new knowledge derived from practice-based inquiry.

This mini-study explores ways to increase teacher engagement in the research process, aiming to answer our guiding research question: What measures are needed to enhance teacher engagement within the SHARE project?

Research Design

This section describes the research design applied in this study and justifies the choice of design. To collect data relevant to the research topic and adequately respond to the research questions, a qualitative research approach was adopted. This approach was chosen because it enables the effective accumulation of an extensive textual description of a small number of participant experiences (Bui, 2014) and facilitates the understanding and interpretation of phenomena with social characteristics (Creswell, 2014).

Within this approach, a case study research design was applied, as it allows for the perception of "a real-world case" (Yin, 2014, p. 16) and "retains the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events ... and explains how or why some social phenomenon works" (Yin, 2004, p. 4). Moreover, it is suitable for working with groups of people and seeks a vivid and detailed description of events (Cohen, Mannion, & Morrison, 2007). Therefore, the present study examined the case of teachers working in a school.

Research site

This study was conducted in a school in Astana. This city was chosen for several reasons. Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, is relatively multilingual and multicultural, attracting both local and foreign workers, and its population consists of people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This, in turn, may highlight the need for multilingual education. Therefore, studying how educators in the city address this societal need was a legitimate undertaking, making it suitable for the purposes of this study.

Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants, which helped us collect relevant data to answer the research questions and understand the central phenomena (Creswell, 2014).

Within the framework of the "Teacher Engagement" project, two classes were selected as the focal disciplines. Subject teachers of English and Russian, teaching in these classes, were invited to participate. To determine how many teachers were willing to take part, a questionnaire was administered as one of the data-collection methods. The survey included two questions: "Would you like to participate in the research?" and, if yes, "Why?" In total, 28 respondents were selected, 10 of whom agreed to participate in the field study (Appendix A).

To engage teachers in the research process, a sequence of steps was designed. The initial stage included familiarization with and review of literature on conducting educational research, as well as clarification of the teachers' role in the research process. This was supplemented with training and workshops aimed at raising teachers' awareness and demonstrating their readiness to conduct their own research.

Following this initial stage, the project aimed to enable teachers to apply theoretical approaches in practice through individual research. Within the SHARE project, teachers developed individual plans to improve their professional practice by conducting action research. The main areas of focus included increasing student motivation, developing critical thinking, improving formative assessment, implementing differentiated instruction, and enhancing speaking skills during lessons. The choice of these topics was based on real challenges teachers face in their daily practice, as well as analysis of student feedback and school development priorities.

Each teacher was given the autonomy to select a research topic based on the specifics of their subject, the level of student preparation, their professional interests, and the needs of the school community. Consequently, the teachers' plans and the rationale behind their choices provided an important source of data for analyzing changes occurring in the educational environment. These research projects aimed not only to address current pedagogical challenges but also to foster sustainable professional development and improve the quality of teaching and learning at both the school and systemic levels.

Moreover, after each lesson, teachers held focus groups where they discussed what needed to be changed in the teaching process, whether the set goals had been achieved, and proposed ideas for planning subsequent lessons. This regular exchange of opinions allowed educators to systematically analyze and adjust their practice based on real observations and collaborative discussions. Through action research activities, students also actively participated in the feedback process, leaving sticky notes on boards and writing their impressions and suggestions. By using feedback from both colleagues and students, teachers were able to promptly adapt their approaches, demonstrating a continuous process of professional development and refinement of methods. This approach contributed to the development of a culture of cooperation and ongoing professional growth among teachers, providing practical insights for others seeking to implement similar initiatives in their contexts.

The next stage involved implementing the principle of distributed leadership. Bruce, Jarvis, Flynn, and Brock (2011) distinguish four roles: as leaders, teachers assist with the development of plans, monitoring, and reporting the progress of research; as motivators, they foster trust and encourage and engage team teachers; as role models, they exemplify high-quality research and pedagogical practice; and as facilitators, they act as a bridge between the team and external stakeholders, as well as among team members. Based on this principle, teachers participated in the research process in various roles: as observers, by video-recording lessons, and by conducting focus-group interviews with students. Throughout the study, teachers kept reflective journals.

Drawing on the theory of interpersonal needs at work (Wicks & Reason, 2009), the study focused on the concepts of engagement, control, and stages of closeness. Each of these aspects encompassed emotional, work-related, and organizational issues.

A key task for pedagogical leaders was to cultivate trust within their teams. In this context, the inclusion of a critical friend in the process of involving teachers in research was emphasized for its many benefits. A critical friend is a colleague invested in the research who can advise and collaborate during the actual research process (McNiff, 2002).

Both subject teachers and class leadership served as important critical friends to better understand the target class. Together with the class teacher, subject teachers visited museums and theaters with the students to study them in an out-of-class context. This helped increase teachers' self-esteem and self-efficacy, develop reflective skills, assist in decision-making and problem-solving, and promote leadership qualities and the use of new teaching methods. Furthermore, it fostered equality, mutual support, and collaboration. Thus, the primary focus was on teaching practices: what approaches work, how student behavior changes in response to new methods, and how to improve the instructional process. Since these changes directly affected student learning, it can be said that, through research activity, the dynamics of student achievement, motivation, and engagement were also studied as outcomes of changes in teacher practice.

In other words, the investigation of pedagogical practice was conducted by assessing its influence on the process and quality of student learning. This is a two-way relationship: better teaching leads to better learning, and by observing changes in student learning, teachers adjust their practice.

Research Methodology

Questionnaire

Data was collected using a questionnaire. Furthermore, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) highlighted several features of this survey instrument that made the questionnaire itself useful for the current study. The authors noted the following strengths: a) questionnaires provide standardized information, as all participants answer the same questions; b) questionnaires allow for the identification of frequently occurring phenomena through data manipulation; c) since data are collected only once, it is cost-effective and efficient; d) this instrument can ensure anonymity and confidentiality for participants. However, using a questionnaire in empirical research has its limitations.

Focus Group

In addition to the questionnaire, a focus group was conducted with teachers to gain a better understanding of their experiences and impressions of the project. This method allowed participants to openly share their opinions, discuss ideas, challenges, and outcomes together. The focus group provided valuable qualitative data that helped to deepen and complement the survey results. As Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) note, focus groups allow participants to explore their views

collectively, often leading to more honest and detailed responses than individual surveys. The discussion was audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

This section describes the procedures used to interpret and analyze this data. While there is no fixed way to analyze and present qualitative data, the information obtained in this study can be interpreted and subsequently presented as a narrative. The recommended method of data analysis is to use one of five ways of organizing and presenting data analysis, which involves interpreting data by (1) groups, (2) individuals, (3) issues, (4) research questions, or (5) instruments (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The first option was chosen in this study because it helped identify general trends and patterns in participants' behavior and attitudes, not just individual responses; understand the dynamics of interactions between participants, how they influence each other, and how collective decisions or opinions are formed; systematize and structure the data into thematic clusters, which facilitates the interpretation and presentation of results; focus on group experiences, which is particularly important in research on teacher engagement, where collaborative action, exchange of practices, and collective development are significant.

Upon completion of the focus group discussions and teacher reflections, the audio and written notes were transferred from the researcher's devices to a secure laptop. To ensure confidentiality and data safety, all files were stored in a backup folder. Each discussion and reflection transcript was saved as a separate Word document and printed out for detailed analysis.

Before coding, the transcripts were read several times to gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' experiences, perceptions, and engagement in the research process. The coding process revealed both challenges and insights, as similarities and patterns in teachers' responses became apparent after multiple readings. In the initial coding draft, over eighty codes were identified, which were subsequently refined and grouped into fifteen key codes.

According to the research questions, the codes were categorized under three main topics: teachers' motivations for participating in action research; teachers' experiences and practices in conducting research; and the impact of participation in research on teaching practices and professional development. The first category helped explain why teachers chose to engage in research, the second highlighted the ways in which they applied research methods and collaborated, and the third illustrated how their engagement influenced both classroom practice and broader professional growth.

The next stage involved interpreting the data according to these categories, using insights from the reviewed literature as well as the researcher's reflective perspective. Since this was the researcher's first study, guidance from a supervisor ensured accurate interpretation of the data and adherence to methodological rigor throughout the analysis process.

In conclusion, this section outlines the procedures used for analyzing and interpreting the data, demonstrating how the study systematically explored teacher engagement in action research and the effects of such involvement on professional practice.

We also identified the reasons why teachers wanted to participate in the project: participating in an international study (20 %), contributing to improving quality of classroom learning (25 %), professional development (15 %), opportunity to gain practical experience from international research (10 %), and chance to exchange experiences with foreign colleagues (30 %). Thus, this sampling was sufficient for shedding light on the beliefs and practices of teachers working at that level of school education (Appendix B).

Ethical Considerations

This section, in turn, illustrates the ethical issues that could arise during the study and explains the proposed measures to address them if they occur. The recruitment process was conducted in alignment with the principles outlined in the relevant ethical codes.

Several procedures were followed to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. To maintain confidentiality during recruitment, each participant was contacted individually via email and treated confidentially. Respondents' personal information and consent to participate in the study remained anonymous (Appendix C). Furthermore, pseudonyms were used to ensure that participants' names would not be disclosed. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were assured that the data they provided would remain secure and would not be used against them or shared with other teachers, school administration, or the general public. They were also informed that their responses would not be used for the benefit of other research projects and would be kept confidential for three years, after which the data would be deleted from the researcher's computer and securely destroyed.

The potential risks to participants in this study were minimal. To avoid any psychological discomfort (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012, cited in Punch & Oancea, 2014) and to establish trusting relationships, teachers were engaged in relaxed and open conversations.

Interim summary

The methodology emphasized the use of multiple strategies to engage teachers, including workshops, training sessions, lesson observations, video recordings, and focus group discussions. The application of distributed leadership and the inclusion of critical friends supported the development of trust, reflective practice, and collaborative research skills among participants. This approach facilitated both teacher participation and influence in the research process, aligning with the study's objectives.

The section also describes the research instruments, particularly the questionnaire, which was used to collect standardized data on teacher participation and motivations. The sampling strategy, based on purposive selection, ensured that the study targeted relevant participants who could

provide meaningful insights into teacher engagement. Ethical considerations were rigorously addressed, with confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and data security carefully maintained throughout the study.

Overall, the methodology section demonstrates that the research design was well-structured to answer the study's guiding question regarding how teacher engagement can be enhanced in school-based action research. The combination of qualitative methods, ethical safeguards, and structured engagement strategies created a robust framework for capturing rich, context-specific data on teacher practices, motivations, and experiences.

Findings

The purpose of this section is to report the main findings as revealed through an analysis of the collected data. The aim of the study was to examine teachers' engagement in research activities. Research question guided this study: What measures are needed to enhance teacher engagement within the SHARE project?

Thus, engaging teachers in the research process presupposes deep immersion in an activity in which teachers not only participate but also design and implement their own practice. There are two levels of engagement: participation and influence. The degree of engagement can be affected by both extrinsic (e.g., incentives, institutional support) and intrinsic (e.g., professional growth, personal interest) motivation. Teachers participate voluntarily, with freedom to choose their research topic, identify problems, and select methods.

However, despite this autonomy, the majority of teachers are not fully engaged in the research process for various reasons, which were identified in this study. We found that the reasons for low engagement relate to a lack of time, insufficient experience in conducting research, and the absence of a sustainable research culture in schools.

We took steps to gradually expand the circle of participants: we established collaboration with other schools, organized joint meetings and discussions for experience sharing. This allowed for the phased engagement of more teachers.

The 10 teachers who participated went through the stages of planning, conducting, and analyzing small-scale pedagogical research in their own schools. They used reflective methods, engaged in discussions with colleagues, and received feedback from students the results were assessed through discussions in focus groups. Teachers reported increased confidence in their professional competence, development of analytical and decision-making skills, and improved interactions with students and colleagues. The same teachers met separately to discuss together what had worked best in their work and which aspects needed improvement. It was important for us to understand what factors contributed to the successful implementation of the project and what challenges had previously arisen.

During the focus group, the coordinator asked the following question: “Dear colleagues, what helps you stay active and engaged in the research process?”

Respondent A: “For me, it is important that I can choose the topic of my own research. I am studying how to motivate students in English lessons. When I see that my ideas actually have an impact on the lesson, I feel inspired to work even more actively.” Before participating in the project, Respondent A had difficulties implementing personal ideas into lessons and often followed the standard curriculum. The opportunity to choose a research topic independently increased their engagement, demonstrating that autonomy and a sense of meaningful contribution stimulate active participation in the research process.

Respondent B: “Yes, I agree. What also helps is that we discuss lessons with colleagues. After observing my class, a colleague gave me recommendations, and I changed the structure of group work. The result was immediate students became more active.” Previously, Respondent B did not receive systematic feedback from colleagues and rarely analyzed lessons collaboratively. Collaboration and discussion of outcomes allowed them to adapt methods and increase engagement through visible improvements in classroom practice.

Respondent C: “For me, the most valuable experience was participating in a focus group with students. They left notes and shared their impressions of the lessons. Seeing their feedback motivates me to continue researching and trying new methods.” Before the project, Respondent C rarely considered student feedback and lacked a structured mechanism for collecting it. Participation in focus groups strengthened motivation and supported a practice-oriented approach, revealing the real impact of teaching methods on learning outcomes.

Respondent D: “I’ve noticed that keeping a reflective journal is also very helpful. I record what worked and what didn’t, and then I try to improve the following week. It gives a sense that research is a process, not a one-time task.” Before participation, Respondent D did not systematize observations or draw conclusions after lessons. Reflective practice helped to document results, adjust approaches, and maintain continuous engagement in the research process.

Respondent E: “And, of course, support from the school leadership matters a lot. When a teacher leader or critical friend comes and discusses your lesson results, it gives you confidence and a desire to engage more deeply.” Previously, Respondent E lacked sufficient support and feedback, which reduced motivation for pedagogical experimentation. Support from leadership and the presence of a critical friend increased confidence and encouraged deeper involvement in research activities.

Moderator: “What changes have you made in your teaching practice after receiving feedback?”

Respondent A: “I started using interactive tasks and short written reflections after each lesson. Students became more engaged, and I can now observe the effectiveness of my methods.” Respondent A’s shift toward interactive activities and written reflections highlights an increased focus on student engagement and formative assessment.

Respondent B: “My colleagues and I organized regular mini-discussions after lessons to share what worked and what didn’t. This also increased engagement because we learn from each other and see immediate results.” Respondent B’s organization of post-lesson discussions with colleagues illustrates the development of a collaborative learning culture, where shared reflection enhances both confidence and pedagogical innovation.

Respondent C: “I added differentiated activities to my lessons based on colleagues’ advice and student feedback. It allows me to experiment and see the practical effects.” Respondent C’s integration of differentiated tasks shows how feedback encouraged experimentation and responsiveness to diverse learner needs.

Respondent D: “For me, it’s important that every step of the research is discussed and analyzed collectively. It creates a sense of shared responsibility and motivation to stay active.” Respondent D emphasized the value of collective reflection, reinforcing the idea that collaborative analysis fosters accountability and sustained engagement in research.

Respondent E: “And most importantly, we can see that our research genuinely improves the quality of our lessons. That’s a strong motivator to continue and involve others.” Respondent E’s statement underscores the motivational power of visible, positive outcomes - when teachers perceive tangible improvements in lesson quality, their intrinsic motivation and commitment to the research process strengthen.

Before participating in the project, many teachers experienced difficulties in implementing new methods, lacked systematic feedback, and had limited opportunities for reflection. After engaging in the research process, they not only adapted and improved their lessons but also developed skills of independent analysis, collaboration, and professional growth.

Thus, despite persistent challenges, participants’ experience showed that research activity indeed supports professional growth and improvement in teaching. We now see a need for a more sustainable support system to involve more teachers in research.

After reviewing and analyzing relevant literature, we concluded, in agreement with Cochran-Smith (2005) that there are different models of professional pedagogical practice associated with research engagement. In the first model, teachers do not participate in academic research and focus exclusively on methodological work and the development of instructional materials. In the second model, teachers participate passively by studying and transferring findings from others’ research into their own practice. In the third model, teachers actively engage in the research process, contributing to its development and applying it in their classrooms.

Here, the distinction between “involvement” and “engagement” is critical. Whereas involvement implies more superficial participation, engagement suggests deeper, sustained participation and accountability for the research process itself. The level of teacher engagement in research is determined not only by their participation in the activity but also by their active contribution to shaping the research and applying its results to improve their teaching practice.

In this study, we identified 28 teachers, of whom 18 declined participation and 10 agreed. While we know these participation numbers, it is important to provide more specific information about the level of engagement of the 10 teachers who volunteered. These teachers were involved not only in completing surveys, but also in actively participating in discussions focused on the practical application of theoretical concepts, critically reflecting on literature, comparing with their own pedagogical experience, planning research activities, and applying results in their classrooms. Their engagement was deeper: they participated in continuous reflection sessions and discussions with colleagues, sharing perspectives and refining their teaching approaches. Application in classrooms manifested through the implementation of new teaching methods, such as active group work, interactive assignments, and integration of digital learning tools. Teachers reported that such changes boosted student motivation, increased student engagement, and led to deeper content mastery. Moreover, they used feedback from colleagues and students to adjust their approaches, demonstrating a continuous process of professional development and adaptation of methods.

It should be noted that an important stage was the practical application of the strategies and research-derived approaches that teachers had learned. Teachers integrated elements discussed in meetings into their lessons and collected data on outcomes. For instance, one teacher introduced a weekly written self-assessment by students and noted an increase in metacognitive awareness. Another participant revised the structure of feedback, making it more targeted and developmental, which she observed led to more active student involvement in revising their own work. In several classes, regular “mini-reflection” sessions were introduced after group work, and teachers observed improvements in cooperation and student self-esteem.

As noted earlier, these levels of teacher engagement appear to align closely with Cochran-Smith’s model of teacher involvement, particularly her distinction between passive and active forms of engagement. In our research, we rely on Cochran Smith’s framework, providing evidence of teachers’ active participation in the research process through self-analysis, feedback with colleagues, and adapting new teaching methods. This adds a layer of understanding to how teachers not only take part in research but use it as a tool for professional development: the teacher actively participates and influences the research by organizing and conducting their own studies. These models concern the relationship between teaching and research in teacher professional activity: in the first model, the teacher does not engage in research and relies on personal experience to shape practice; in the second model, teachers incorporate research findings of others into their teaching; and in the third model, the teacher actively participates in research and views it as a means of professional growth.

With the goal of answering our research question: What measures are needed to increase teacher engagement in the SHARE project? We developed a series of interventions. According to our findings, 10 teachers initially conformed to the first model, relying on their own experience. Our goal was to move these teachers toward the second or third model, where they would become more involved in the research process. In the second model, teachers first studied relevant literature on student engagement practices from schools in different countries and participated in webinars and trainings conducted by Professor. Colleen McLaughlin, Kate Evans, and Dr. Nazipa Ayubayeva. In the third model, where each participant's viewpoint was considered, teachers themselves actively engaged in research, assuming various roles under the principle of distributed leadership. Of the 10 teachers, two taught lessons in the research classes, seven served as observers, and one handled video recording. All 10 teachers participated in lesson discussions and focus groups with students and other teachers. Teacher-leaders and class leaders acted as critical friends, supporting their colleagues. The research process was overseen by a school coordinator.

As a result of the study, some teachers volunteered to present at conferences and seminars within the SHARE project. Two of the 10 teachers were able to present their lessons in the study classes, thereby actively participating in the research process. During the work, teachers learned to provide objective evaluation during lesson observations and to master skills of critical analysis of peer practices by acting as a "critical friend." This fostered more constructive feedback and improved pedagogical practice quality.

Teachers concluded that the organizational form of class activities-whether group, pair, or individual work-should be chosen according to learning objectives and students' readiness. For example, in some cases, group work supports the development of communication skills and collaborative problem-solving, while in other situations, pair or individual work is more effective, enabling better differentiation. Special attention was given to the pedagogy of reflective writing, which helps students make sense of their own learning processes and develop metacognitive skills.

In summary, teachers noted that integrating research-based methods into everyday practice not only enriches their pedagogical tools but also fosters students' critical thinking and autonomy in learning. They expressed readiness to continue applying the knowledge gained and sharing their experiences further, thereby expanding the community of practitioner-researchers. However, not all subject teachers in the targeted classes were able to participate in the research process. In the future, efforts will be made to further involve teachers in investigating their own practice, which requires high levels of responsibility and self-organization skills. The research findings can be formulated as recommendations for teachers engaged in school-based research.

The findings of this study demonstrate that teacher engagement in research is a complex, multifaceted process influenced by both individual and systemic factors. The literature shows that low engagement often results from time constraints, uncertainty about research processes, lack of experience, and limited institutional support. Engagement, as distinguished from mere involvement, encompasses not only participation but also influence over the research process, including the ability to define problems, select methods, and implement findings in practice.

Implications for Teaching Practice

This study has important implications for teaching practice as well as for the broader SHARE project. Actively engaging teachers in action research has demonstrated that professional development is most effective when it is practice-based, collaborative, and reflective. By participating in the planning, conducting, and analysis of research, I gained a deeper understanding of my teaching methods and strategies to enhance student motivation, critical thinking, and formative assessment practices.

For practice, this experience highlighted the value of continuous reflection on lesson effectiveness and student outcomes; adaptation of teaching strategies based on direct feedback from students and colleagues; integration of research-based methods into daily teaching routines, such as differentiated instruction and interactive learning activities; and engagement in collaborative problem-solving with colleagues, sharing best practices and lessons learned.

At the wider project level, the study highlighted that teacher engagement in research contributes to sustainable improvements in school practice. Participating colleagues reported increased confidence in experimenting with new teaching methods, a stronger sense of ownership over their professional development, and enhanced collaboration across departments. Consequently, the project can support future cohorts by: providing structured guidance for teachers to design and implement individual research projects; encouraging peer observation and feedback systems to foster reflective practices; creating opportunities for teachers to share findings through workshops, seminars, or conferences; and promoting a culture of distributed leadership in which teachers take active roles in shaping school-wide practices. Overall, the study demonstrates that action research serves both as a professional development tool and as a mechanism for systemic improvement. By embedding research into everyday teaching, educators not only enhance their own practice but also contribute to a broader culture of evidence-based pedagogical innovation.

Implication for School Practice and Educational Leadership

The findings of this study suggest that, for school principals aiming to involve teachers in research activities, it is crucial to cultivate a supportive and trust-based environment. Teachers are more inclined to participate in research when they feel confident, receive constructive feedback, and perceive that school leadership genuinely values their efforts. Providing teachers with autonomy to select research topics, identify challenges, and develop solutions is particularly important. Such empowerment fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, making research participation meaningful and directly relevant to everyday teaching practice.

Equally significant for teacher engagement is the organization of collaborative work and opportunities for sharing experiences among colleagues. Participants in the study emphasized the importance of peer support, describing colleagues as “critical friends” who offer guidance and feedback at various stages of the research process. In this context, the principal plays a crucial role by facilitating joint discussions, mutual classroom observations, and professional dialogue. These practices enhance teachers’ motivation and strengthen their accountability for research outcomes.

At the same time, the study reveals certain challenges. Not all teachers are able to engage equally actively in research; some experience self-doubt or fear criticism, which necessitates additional support from school leadership. Teacher engagement increases when research is integrated into daily teaching practice rather than perceived as an isolated task or an externally imposed requirement. Teachers are particularly motivated when research outcomes lead to tangible improvements in lesson quality, increased student engagement, and the development of learner independence.

The findings also highlight the importance of systematic professional development. Participation in training sessions, workshops, and expert consultations supports teachers in acquiring research skills, developing reflective practices, and confidently implementing innovative approaches in their classrooms. Furthermore, recognizing teachers' achievements and providing opportunities to share research findings with colleagues through school-based events or academic conferences significantly enhances motivation and reinforces the value of research within the school community.

Overall, the study suggests that principals aiming to promote teacher engagement in research should establish conditions that support collaboration, professional growth, and autonomy. By integrating research into everyday practice and acknowledging teachers' contributions, school leaders can foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation, ultimately improving the quality of the educational process as a whole.

Conclusion

The SHARE project provided a structured framework for enhancing teacher engagement through practical, school-based action research. By combining workshops, training sessions, lesson observations, video recordings, and focus group discussions, the project created opportunities for teachers to develop research skills, reflective practices, and collaborative capacities. The inclusion of distributed leadership and critical friends fostered trust, motivation, and accountability, enabling teachers to actively contribute to the research process rather than merely participate passively.

The study showed that teachers' engagement varied according to different professional practice models. Some teachers initially relied solely on personal experience, while others actively embraced research as a tool for professional development. Through targeted interventions, teachers moved toward more active participation, applying research findings in their classrooms, adopting new pedagogical strategies, and refining practices based on feedback and observation. These experiences led to improvements in teacher confidence, analytical skills, and instructional quality, as well as positive outcomes for student learning, engagement, and autonomy.

To sum up, teacher engagement in research can be strengthened through intentional support structures, practical training, collaborative practices, and opportunities for professional autonomy. While challenges remain, such as uneven participation and the need for higher levels of self-organization, the study confirms that structured, school-based research initiatives like SHARE have the potential to promote meaningful professional growth, improve teaching practices, and cultivate a sustainable culture of evidence-based education. Future efforts should aim to expand teacher

participation, enhance institutional support, and ensure that research activities are fully integrated into everyday teaching practice.

References

- Bruce, C. D., Jarvis, D. H., Flynn, T., & Brock, E. (2011). Lead teachers in collaborative action research. *Canadian Journal of Action Research*, 12(3), 29–46.
- Byman, S., Krokfors, L., & Toom, A. (2009). Educating inquiry-oriented teachers: Students' attitudes and experiences towards research-based teacher education. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 15, 79–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803610802591808>
- Cochran-Smith, M. (2005). Teacher educators as researchers: Multiple perspectives. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(2), 219–225. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2004.12.005>
- Cochran-Smith, M. (2009). Teacher educators as researchers: Multiple perspectives. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 205–206. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2004.12.003>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). Routledge.
- Cousins, J. B., & Walker, C. (2000). Predictors of educators' valuing of systematic inquiry in schools. *The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 37, 25–52.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Du, F. (2009). Building action research teams: A case of struggles and successes. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 12(2), 8–18.
- Ebbeck, M., Chan, Y., & Yim, H. (2011). Encouraging a culture of research in practicing teachers in Singapore. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39, 355–364.
- Ekiz, D. (2006). Primary school teachers' attitudes towards educational research. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 6, 395–402.
- Furtado, L., & Anderson, D. (2012). The reflective teacher leader: An action research model. *Journal of School Leadership*, 22(3), 531–568.
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106–116.
- Hammersley, M., & Traianou, A. (2012). *Ethics in qualitative research: Controversies and contexts*. SAGE.
- Hines, M. B., & Conner-Zachocki, J. (2015). Using practitioner inquiry within and against large-scale educational reform. *Teacher Development*, 19(3), 344–364.
- McBee, M. T. (2004). The classroom as laboratory: An exploration of teacher research. *Roeper Review*, 27(1), 52–58.
- McNiff, J. (2017). *All you need to know about action research*. London: Sage.
- Maths in Education and Industry (2023). MEI website. <https://mei.org.uk/>
- Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (2024, October 3). NIS implements the NIS/SHARE project. <https://www.nis.edu.kz/ru/news/ziiatkerlik-mektepter-nisshare-zobasyn-zuzege>
- Pozdeeva, S. I. (2017). Inquiry teaching. *Teacher Development*, 16(3), 52.
- Prozumentova, G. N. (2002). Pedagogy of joint activities: Semantic contexts and educational reality. *Educational Leadership*, 4–16.

Wicks, P. G., & Reason, P. (2009). Initiating action research: Challenges and paradoxes of opening communicative space. *Action Research*, 7(3), 243–262.

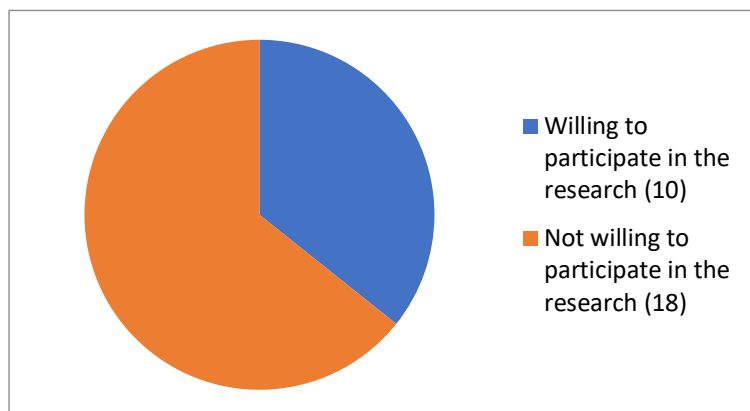
Yin, R. K. (2004). *Case study research: design and methods* (4th ed., pp. 4–16). SAGE Publications.

About Camtree

Camtree: the Cambridge Teacher Research Exchange is a global platform for close-to-practice research in education. Based at Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge, Camtree draws on high-quality research from around the world to support educators to reflect on their practice and carry out inquiries to improve learning in their own classrooms and organisations. The outcomes of these inquiries, once peer reviewed, can be published within the Camtree digital library under a Creative Commons Licence (CC-BY 4.0). You can find out more about Camtree and its digital library at <https://www.camtree.org/>.

Appendices

Appendix A



Appendix B

No.	Reasons	Percent (%)
1	Participation in an international research project	20
2	Improvement of academic performance in the classroom	25
3	For professional development of the teacher	15
4	Learning from international research experience	10
5	Opportunity to exchange experience with foreign colleagues	30

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS

You are invited to participate in a study aimed at exploring ways to enhance teacher engagement in the SHARE project through research activities. During the study, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences and observations related to your work. All information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your responses and any observations made during the study will be recorded and used solely for the purposes of this research. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the study, and your identity will never be disclosed. All collected data will be securely stored on the researcher's personal portable laptop, protected by a password accessible only to the researcher.

TIME INVOLVEMENT:

Each session of participation is expected to take approximately 30 minutes.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

The risks associated with this study are minimal. Anonymity is guaranteed. Personal identifiers will not appear in any documents or reports. Participant names will not be

disclosed; each participant will be assigned a letter. However, there may be minor risks related to the time spent on interviews. Therefore, the researcher will discuss with participants the most convenient time and place for the focus group.

Expected benefits: participants will gain experience in research, have the opportunity to express their opinions, and understand that their voice is important.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:

If you have read this form and decided to participate in the study, please note that your participation is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without losing the benefits to which you are entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question. The results of this study may be presented at scientific conferences and in reports.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions:

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints regarding this research, including its procedures, risks, or potential benefits, please contact the principal researcher via email _____ or by phone _____.

Independent Contact:

If you are not satisfied with the way this study is being conducted, or if you have concerns or complaints regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact the researcher at _____.

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study:

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the collected data will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers;
- With full knowledge of the above, I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS OR LEGAL GUARDIANS OF STUDENTS

Dear Parent/Legal Guardian,

Your child is invited to take part in the SHARE research project conducted at our school, in class _____. Please read the following information carefully and indicate your consent or non-consent for your child's participation in the project.

1. Project Information

- Project Title: SHARE Research Project
- Organizer: State Public Utility Enterprise on the Right of Economic Management "School-Gymnasium No. 75"
- Research Goal: To improve teaching and learning practices.
- Main Activities: Classroom observations by teachers, individual interviews with teachers, focus group interviews with teachers/students, video recording of selected classroom lessons, audio/video recording of students, photography, and other planned research-related activities.
- Nature of Data: The information collected will be analyzed and used to produce various outputs such as project reports for participating teachers and students, conference presentations, academic journal articles, and book chapters.

2. Consent Questions

1. Consent for Participation

I, the undersigned, give consent for my child, _____ (Full name of the child), a student of class _____, to participate in the SHARE research project.

- Yes, I give my consent
 No, I do not give my consent

2. Consent for Use of Data

I, the undersigned, give permission for anonymized data collected during my child's participation to be used for scientific and educational purposes.

- Yes, I give my consent
 No, I do not give my consent

3. Consent for Audio/Video/Photo Recording (if applicable)

I, the undersigned, give permission for my child to be audio/video recorded or photographed, if necessary for the research purposes. I understand that these materials will be used exclusively within the project.

- Yes, I give my consent
 No, I do not give my consent

3. Participant Rights

- Participation in the research project is voluntary. Parents/legal guardians may withdraw their child from the project at any time, without providing a reason.
- All data collected will be used strictly for academic purposes and will remain anonymous.
- Your child's privacy will be respected, and personal data will be protected in accordance with applicable laws.
- We assure you that the aim of this project is not to inspect, supervise, evaluate, judge, or criticize your child's learning.

- Your child has been invited to take part in this project to contribute their skills, knowledge, and experience to help improve the quality of teaching and learning.

3. Contact Information

If you have any questions, please contact us at:

- Project Coordinator: _____
- Phone: _____
- Email: _____

I hereby agree to the terms and conditions:

Parent/Legal Guardian Full Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian: _____

Thank you for your attention and cooperation!

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

DESCRIPTION:

We invite you to take part in a study aimed at exploring ways to increase teacher engagement in the SHARE project through research activities. Your lesson participation and responses during the lesson will be recorded.

- Your answers will be anonymous - your name will not be shown, and only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data.
- You can choose not to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with.
- You can stop participating at any time without giving a reason.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

The risks are minimal. The study does not evaluate students or the school; it only aims to understand how lessons are conducted. By participating, you will have a chance to express your opinion, reflect on your learning, and help teachers improve their practice.

TIME INVOLVEMENT:

Approximately 40 minutes.

RIGHTS:

If you have read this form and agree to participate in this study, please understand that your participation is voluntary. You have the right to stop participating at any time without giving a reason and without losing any benefits you are otherwise entitled to. You also have the right to skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. The results of this study may be

shared at scientific or professional meetings or published in academic journals, but your identity will remain anonymous.

CONTACTS:

If you have any questions:

- Supervisor: _____
- Independent Contact (for questions about participant rights): _____

CONSENT CONFIRMATION:

Please sign this form if you agree to participate in this study:

- I have read the information about the study.
- I understand what is expected of me and how the study will be conducted.
- I understand that my answers will be used only by the researchers and will remain confidential.
- I understand that I can stop participating at any time or skip questions without giving a reason.
- With full understanding of the above, I agree to participate in this study.

Student Signature

