

Editorial: Envisioning Practitioner Inquiry in Language Teacher Education Research: Practice in the Spotlight

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Abstract

This editorial introduces the Practitioner Inquiry section of Language Teacher Education Research (LTER), positioning it as a space where research, practice, and professional development intersect in the field of language teacher education. We briefly trace the historical roots of practitioner inquiry and highlight its role in challenging the theory-practice divide through reflective, classroom-embedded research. The editorial outlines key thematic priorities for future submissions, including, inter alia, teacher professional development and research literacy, classroom practices and assessment, teacher identity and emotions, digital and AI-mediated pedagogies, equity and social justice, and policy. We also emphasize the importance of teacher voice, school-community partnerships, and collaborative, locally grounded knowledge-building. We conclude with an invitation to practitioners, teacher educators, and educational leaders to contribute inquiries that foreground context-sensitive practice while speaking to global conversations in language teacher education.

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Introduction

Practitioner Inquiry, a section in the Language Teacher Education Research (LTER) journal, stands at the intersection of research, practice, and transformative

professional development in language teacher education. This kind of inquiry refers to the systematic reflective exploration of one's teaching, informed by both existing theoretical frameworks and the realities of the classroom. Rather than just a methodology, it is devoted to disseminating a standpoint, an attempt to showcase the practitioners' commitment to inquiry as a never-ending process of professional development and identity. In the LTER journal, practitioners refer to but are not limited to the following groups: first, in-service language teachers at all levels – primary, secondary, tertiary, adult education, and private language schools, as well as refugee or migrant programs. They can be full-time or part-time language teachers, teaching online or face-to-face, university or college instructors, or private tutors. Second, language teacher educators/trainers and mentors who train pre-service and in-service language teachers and are directly involved in supervising the trainees' teaching practice. The next includes all the school administrators, program coordinators, and directors of studies who are involved in policy development or teacher education and development in any capacity. *Practitioner Inquiry*, then, offers a dedicated space for all the aforementioned stakeholders to share their research-driven practices or innovative practice-driven reports, reflect on their practice, and contribute to scholarship that is both locally meaningful and globally relevant.

Practitioner Inquiry: A Historical Overview

The term “practitioner inquiry” is linked to broader trends in educational research and dates back to the early 20th century. Scholars like John Dewey posited that inquiry is the core of any development and reform. He argued that practical reflection fosters both teachers' learning and preparation (Schmidt & Allsup, 2019) as well as collaborative transformation (Burhan-Horasanli & Hart, 2024). Kurt Lewin's development of action research, in the mid-20th century, further established the principle that practitioners should play a central role in generating and applying knowledge, making research a means of empowerment and agency.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, practitioner inquiry gained momentum to be a response to the perceived division between theory and practice. Research in teacher education was conducted to address the roots of long-standing challenges between research and practice, as well as the misunderstandings that arise among researchers and practitioners. For Sato et al. (2024), it is postulated to be either their “limited time and space” to engage with each other or the “negative beliefs of each other's profession” (p. 1). For others, it is connected to the unrealistic applicability of the research results to the classroom ecosystem (Barkhuizen, 2021), unfamiliarity with non-technical language (Merga & Mason, 2021), or even the blame that some researchers have a “top-down attitude” (Sato & Loewen, 2022, p. 512). McKinley (2019) even warns against a detachment between research and the reality within the

classrooms, which was described as “bifurcation” (p. 875). The development of the concept of the “reflective practitioner” (Schön, 1983), exploratory practice (Allwright, 2003), and practitioner research (Burns, 2010) were a few attempts to effectively bridge the gap between research and classroom realities. Other significant developments have also taken place in the field of language teacher education:

- Methodological expansion: Practitioner inquiry now adopts a variety of research methodologies (i.e., qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods including action research, case study, exploratory practice, and narrative inquiry).
- Professionalization: Practitioner research has influenced internationally recognized certification and accreditation, like in Cambridge CELTA and Trinity CertTESOL modules, requiring reflective and research-driven components.
- Institutionalization: Schools and universities in diverse contexts have adopted a research-driven approach for school-wide change, mentorship, and curricular reform.
- Internationalization: Practitioner inquiry increasingly shapes professional networks across borders, generating dialogue at local, national, and international levels.

Most teacher education programs value this form of inquiry in their curriculum. For example, TESOL, CELTA, and CertTESOL programs, which are pillars of global English¹ language teacher education, incorporate practitioner inquiry (synonymous with teacher research) into their training models. The TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) Advanced Practitioner Certificate program includes practitioner research, reflective reporting, and the use of context-sensitive interventions. The CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) syllabus incorporates reflection, lesson evaluation, and peer observation as tools for inquiry and professional development. The CertTESOL focuses on reflective practice, data collection (e.g., surveys, interviews, observation), ethical considerations, and actionable research findings.

Future Vision and Potential Topics

These developments address the gap between researchers and practitioners, but can be seen as only the initial steps to establish a dialogue between research and practice. However, thanks to recent developments in the field, several future vision priorities

¹ Although this section invites practitioner inquiry from all language-teaching contexts, the example of courses provided are drawn from English language teaching (ELT), reflecting our own professional backgrounds and ELT’s prominent role in research and practice.

and potential topics can be identified for the prospective contributors to this section in the LTER journal.

The most recurring topic in contemporary teacher education research is teacher professional development, which underlines professional learning processes and practitioner enquiry as a path to continuous development and sustainable transformation. Contributions can be on practitioner inquiry as professional learning to generate local knowledge and enhance agency (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Godfrey, 2016; Kamali et al., 2024b) and on collaborative, school-based action research and lesson study models that align with evidence on effective professional development (Sims et al., 2025). Other related themes include teachers' research literacy and engagement with reading, doing, and using research (Hosseini et al., 2024; Kostoulas et al., 2025; Xerri & Block, 2024), or as a vehicle for building inquiry as a stance and critical professionalism (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014).

Another core theme for inquiry is classroom practices, pedagogy, and innovative curriculum. Practitioners can conduct research on locally appropriate combinations of task-based, communicative, genre-based, or CLIL approaches (Ellis, 2009; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Also, projects informed by exploratory practices can integrate pedagogy and research, with teachers and learners co-investigating the questions in the classroom environment (Hanks, 2019). Furthermore, teacher-led evaluation and adaptation of language curricula and syllabuses in response to high-stakes reforms and standards (Fullan, 2016) can also be a line of research.

Besides classroom practices, we also aim to explore teacher assessment and evaluation, which have received comparatively less attention, particularly among practitioners interested in assessment literacy, formative assessment, and corrective-feedback literacy (Hosseinpour et al., 2025). This strand includes classroom-based assessment inquiries that investigate peer and self-assessment practices – especially in writing and speaking (Lee, 2017) – teacher assessment literacy as a focus of practitioner inquiry (Khojaste Mehr et al., 2024), dynamic assessment (Herazo et al., 2019), and studies addressing perceived fairness, washback, and equity in school- and test-based assessment settings (Shohamy, 2016).

Practitioners can also investigate teacher identity, beliefs, emotions, and well-being as prominent topics. Practitioner narrative and qualitative works to examine teacher identity within the teachers' professional context of the class (Barkhuizen, 2016), identity transition during intensive qualifications classroom-based inquiries into teacher emotions, attitudes, stress, and coping strategies, especially in challenging contexts (Li, 2025), practitioner-designed interventions (peer mentoring, communities

of practice) supporting resilience and wellbeing (Kelchtermans, 2018) are a list of the related subtopics.

By the turn of the century and during the post-COVID era, research on digital, multimodal, and online pedagogies has rapidly emerged in language teacher education. A significant potential for research has been expanded to include practitioner research on synchronous and asynchronous online teaching, learner engagement, and interaction patterns in virtual EFL/ESL classrooms, school- or program-based studies on how teachers develop online teaching competencies within teacher education programs (Moorhouse & Wong, 2022). Other related fields of inquiry include classroom inquiries into digital multimodal composing tasks and their impact on learner identity, investment, and language development (Jiang et al., 2021) and practitioner research on critical digital literacies, including evaluation of online information and multimodal texts (Jones & Hafner, 2021).

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a further rapidly expanding field of inquiry, with recent work documenting how generative AI tools such as ChatGPT are reshaping language teachers' pedagogical reasoning, assessment and feedback practices, and initial teacher education curricula (Moorhouse, 2024; Lee et al., 2025). Emerging studies foreground AI and critical AI literacy as core competencies for language teachers, examining how they learn to "talk to" generative AI, evaluate its output, and integrate it ethically and transparently into planning, instruction, and assessment (Javahery et al., 2025; Kamali et al., 2024a; Pérez-Paredes, 2025).

Another avenue for research is the trend that increasingly calls for work addressing equity, social justice (Banegas & Sanchez, 2024), and sustainable futures in education. Inquiries into differentiation and support for learners with diverse linguistic and learning needs, school-based action research on co-teaching (Forsman, 2025), critical language pedagogy, and social justice-oriented EFL/ESL curricula, as well as translanguaging and multilingual pedagogies (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020) are some cases in point.

Education policy, curriculum design, and systemic reform are also under-researched in teacher education. The major lines of research can be practitioner evaluation of pre- and in-service programs as research sites (Smith & Flores, 2019), school-university collaborations that position teachers as co-researchers in redesigning practicum, mentoring, or CPD structures, and studies on the interpretation and enactment of the upstream documents and policies within language classrooms.

These are only a few out of tens of avenues for inquiry which can (re)shape the territory of practitioner inquiry, aiming to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This list hopefully triggers more innovative research ideas and urges more researcher-practitioner collaboration to generate knowledge and promote education for excellence from within their classrooms, schools, and institutions.

Conclusion: Invitation for Submissions

As the editorial board members of the LTER journal, it is a privilege to invite teacher researchers, trainers, and educators to contribute to LTER's *Practitioner Inquiry* section. The field demands research that is reflective and deeply rooted in the local realities of language teaching, the one that can be made possible only by practitioner-led inquiry. Each submission will enrich the dialogue, foster a community of inquiry, and inform future directions for the profession. The future of language teacher education, and practitioner inquiry in specific, depends on our ability to ask brave questions, experiment thoughtfully, and share findings boldly, while collaboratively shaping progressive, inclusive, and effective learning environments.

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