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**Research Engagement and Professional Development:
English Language Teachers' Perspectives**

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Research is the lifeblood of education development and in the Myanmar tertiary education sector, it is more urgent than ever for teachers to engage in extensive research activities. An understanding of ELT teachers' views on research is an initial step in the effort to promote their research engagement. With an aim to investigate Myanmar ELT teachers' perspectives on research, a questionnaire survey was conducted with the format developed on an international baseline proposed by Borg (2009). The questionnaire comprising 10 scenarioswas administered to 146 ELT teachers serving at universities in Upper Myanmar. Each situation in the questionnaire was to be identified as belonging to a research scenario or not on a Likert-like scale of definitely research, probably research, definitely not research and probably not research. Participant teachers were also asked to respond how often they were research-engaged and state the reasons for their research engagement or non-engagement. The result revealed that most ELT teachers considered a large-scale survey and statistical data as research. Not having sufficient time and unfamiliarity with research principles and methods were common issues for their lack of engagement in research. Appropriate measures should be taken to address these issues with a view to promoting ELT teachers' research engagement for their professional development and overall development of ELT in Myanmar.

1. **Introduction**

The importance of English has been increasingly recognised in Myanmar where unprecedented progress is being witnessed in teaching/learning activities both in the state and private sectors. In particular, the expansion of the private sector with the addition of numerous international schools and private schools has propelled an unprecedented growth of the sector. At present, Myanmar is implementing reforms in education and its growing contact with the world in social, economic, political and educational fields allows English to become popular as well as important in Myanmar as a medium of instruction as well as international communication. The growing importance of English in society, economy and education has provided extensive research topics for TEFL professionals and researchers. In response to challenges in various issues on a global scale, the primary focus and interest of the research areas which is of immediate relevance to the current trends in education are on English language teaching in Myanmar and applied linguistics. With latest developments on the education scene, there arises a perception that Myanmar teachers of English at the tertiary level should be engaging more in research activities which are of immediate relevance to education. Research has always been an important aspect of academic life and education research and teaching are inseparable. There is, therefore, a need to explore attitudes of ELT teachers towards research projects, the values they place on the activities and their conceptual assumptions on the role of research projects.

With emerging trends in education where educators now have more voice and their recommendations carry considerable weight, focus on research as the central issue and identifying ELT teachers' conceptions of research as an integral part of education have become crucial. In conducting this research project, it is expected that requirements in raising awareness of ELT teachers on the importance of research can be highlighted and teachers' engagement in research promoted thus making research activities the core of ELT development.

2. **Research Engagement of English Language Teachers**

According to Borg (2009), the term 'research engagement' covers both engagement in research(i.e. by doing it) as well as engagement with research (i.e. by reading and using it). This study focuses on the first aspect: engagement in research.Compared with volumes of empirical work which has been conducted into teachers' research engagement in education, relatively few studies have been done on teachers' conception of research in the field of English language teaching (ELT). Borg's (2009) study is particularly relevant to investigating English teachers conceptions of research and engagement with research. It investigated conceptions of research held by more than 1350 teachers of English from 13 countries (but not including Myanmar), and used a set of questionnaire instrument to collect a wide range of data followed up with a sample of individual responses by participants in interviews. The study found a number of attitudinal, conceptual, procedural and institutional barriers to teacher research engagement and argues that understanding what research means is an essential part of the broader process of trying to

address them and thus makes teacher research engagement a more feasible activity. The present study seeks to extrapolate Borg's research to the English language teaching context in Myanmar in order to provide some empirical evidence about ELT research culture in Myanmar.

Borg (2009) states that research is increasingly being promoted as a central strategy in the development and career advancement of language teaching professionals. Research, according to Borg (2007, 2009), enables TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) academics to reflect and improve on teaching. Reflections of teaching approaches, methods and procedures done in language classrooms are expected to enable teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses of their teaching styles and methods and find better ways and means to bring about more effective language teaching. Moreover, research gives information to teachers on the most current TEFL theories and practices. Within the framework of evidence-based practice (EBP), one strand of inquiry has focused on examining what teachers actually think about research. The rationale for such inquiry has been that initiatives to promote EBP are more likely to have an impact if they are based on an understanding of teachers' conceptions of research and of the role research plays in their work. There have been a number of researches which focus on the correlation between research engagement and teaching quality in the global context. In Myanmar, there has been a growing interest in recent years not only in the nature of teacher's engagement in research but also in the role the respective universities play in implementing this engagement and the inclusion of the stakeholders since the doctoral research programme was implemented in two main universities, namely Yangon University and Mandalay University.

3. The Study

Context and participants

This research attempts to identify and quantify English language teachers' perspectives on research in Upper Myanmar. In particular, it focuses on the perceptions of Myanmar teachers who teach English at the tertiary level. The questionnaire proposed by Borg (2009) was used as a research instrument to conduct a survey on research participants' views on what counts as teacher research of Myanmar ELT academicians. A total of 146 English language teachers serving at universities and degree colleges of Upper Myanmar were involved in this research. A set of questionnaire comprising six sections was created to elicit background information of the respondents and their opinions on research. The questionnaire constructed with reference to Borg's(2009) format was distributed to 146 English language teachers from 20 universities and degree colleges.Borg's questionnaire comprised six sections but it was reduced and adapted in the present study to only three sections:(1) personal information of the respondents, (2) research scenarios and (3) doing research.

The following table summarised years of teaching experiences of the respondents.

Table 1: Teaching Experience

Sr. No	Years	Number	Percentage
1	0-4	36	25%
2	5-9	43	29%
3	10-14	29	20%
4	15-19	30	21%
5	20-24	5	3%
6	25-29	1	1%
7	30+	2	1%
Total		146	100

As shown in Table 1, the teachers varied in terms of years of teaching experience in the context of Myanmar ELT, with the nearly equal number of teachers in the less experienced groups (less than 10 years) and those in the more experienced groups (more than 10 years).

The following table indicates educational background of the respondents.

Table 2 : Academic Qualifications

Sr.No	Qualification	Number	Percentage
1	Doctorate	3	3%
2	Master	143	97%
	Bachelor	-	-
4	Diploma	-	-
5	Certificate	-	-
Total		146	100

As seen in the table above, almost all the respondents held Masters' degrees.

Participant teachers were required to respond to ten scenarios (Borg, 2009) which can possibly serve as research areas. All the scenarios are all specific to ELT contexts and the questionnaire instrument stressed that there were no right or wrong answers.

Table 3: Responses to Ten Scenarios

Scenario	Definitely not research		Probably not research		Probably research		Definitely research	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
(i)	5	3%	25	17%	87	60%	29	20%
(ii)	7	5%	13	9%	78	53%	48	33%
(iii)	14	10%	20	13%	50	34%	62	43%
(iv)	2	1%	15	10%	72	49%	57	39%
(v)	21	14%	36	25%	63	43%	26	18%
(vi)	12	8%	8	6%	70	48%	56	38%
(vii)	39	27%	40	27%	54	37%	13	9%
(viii)	37	25%	34	23%	53	37%	22	15%
(ix)	28	19%	24	16%	62	43%	32	22%
(x)	15	10%	31	21%	70	48%	30	21%

With an aim to investigate the participant teachers' views on what research is, a questionnaire survey was administered in which the teachers were required to indicate to what extent they felt activities described in the ten scenarios were or were not research.

Figure 1 shows the teachers' rating of each scenario into two categories – 'Not research' and 'Research'. The former is subdivided into two more options '*definitely not research*' and '*probably not research*' and the latter subdivided into '*probably research*' and '*definitely research*'.
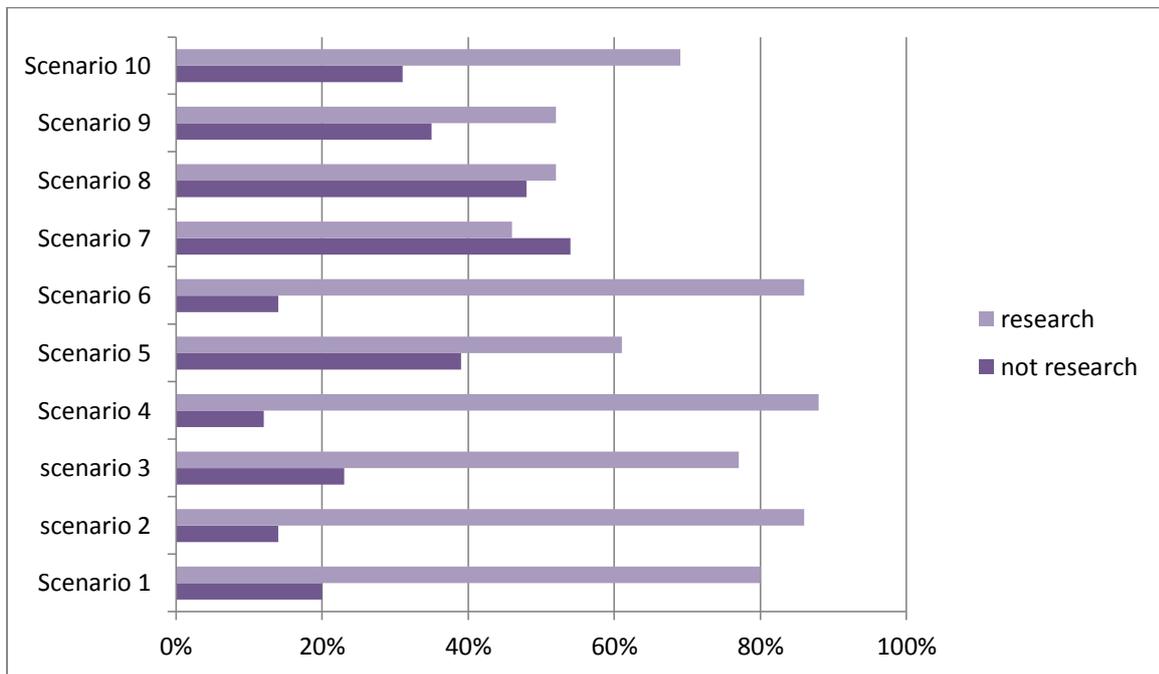
Figure 1: Teachers' responses to ten scenarios

The most significant responses were to Scenario 4(see Appendix) which was rated as research by the largest number of teachers (88%); this is followed by responses to Scenarios 6 and 2 which were also rated as research by 86% of the respondents. Scenario 7 was least recognized as suitable for research by the smallest number of teachers (54%) who assigned it to the 'not research' category. This is followed by responses to Scenario 8 which were made by 71 teachers (48%).Large samples, statistics and academic outputs possibly led the teachers into assuming that Scenario 4 is suited for research. In this scenario, a university lecturer conducts a large-scale survey and analyses the data statistically. Scenario 6 was also rated by the second largest number of respondents as the 'definitely research' category. The inclusion of pre- and post-tests could have influenced the teachers in considering it definitely as a feasible research area. The third largest proportion of participants' responses assigned Scenario 2 to the 'definitely research' category which involves trying a new approach to teaching, collecting samples and reporting the main points.

Responses to Scenario 4 are particularly indicative of the diversity which exists among the ELT teachers in terms of their understandings of what counts as research. Therefore, teachers' notions of research included large samples, statistics and academic outputs which are central to teacher's conception of the kind of activity that the research involves. This has implication for the extent to which teachers may feel research is an activity they can productively engage in.

Doing Research

Section 2 of the questionnaire focused on teachers' engagement in research. The teachers were asked how often they did research on a scale of 'sometimes' to 'never'. The teachers were also required to provide reasons for doing or not doing research. In this section, the teachers fell into two groups: the first group included 104 teachers who did research sometimes or often and the second group consisted of 42 teachers who did not engage in research (never and rarely).

The following table summarises the frequency of research activities by the respondents.

Table 4: Frequency of Research Activities

No.	Frequency	Number	Percentage
(i)	Sometimes	82	56%
(ii)	Often	22	15%

(iii)	Rarely	19	13%
(iv)	Never	23	16%
	Total	146	100%

As shown in Table 4, most respondents do research 'sometimes' (56%) followed by never (16%), 'often' (15%) and 'rarely' (13%). It was found that some of the surveyed teachers have never done research before (16%). It can be concluded that research is not a frequent activity for most of the respondents.
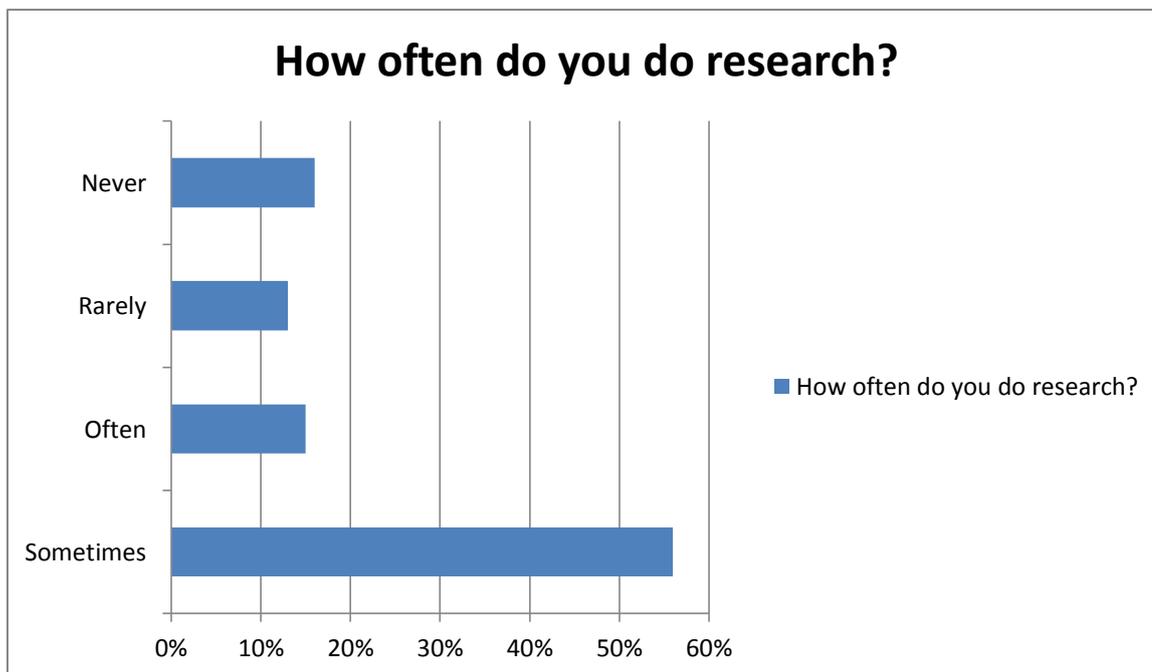
Figure 2: Frequency of Research Activities

Reasons for Doing Research

All the respondents were required to give reasons for doing or not doing research. Ten reasons for doing research were provided in the questionnaire with reference to Borg's (2007) format. The respondents chose items corresponding to their views on reasons for doing research.

Table 5: Reasons for Doing Research

No	Question Item	Number
(g)	To contribute to the improvement of ELT in Myanmar	65
(c)	Because it is good for my professional development	59
(h)	To find better ways of teaching	58
(a)	As part of a course I'm studying	44
(i)	To solve problems in my teaching	36
(b)	Because I enjoy it	33
(f)	Because other teachers can learn from findings of my work	32
(d)	Because it will help me get promotion	26
(e)	Because my employer expects me to	12

(j)	Other reasons. Please specify.	2

As shown in the table above, three reasons for doing research cited most commonly were 'to contribute to the improvement of ELT in Myanmar', 'to find better ways of teaching' and 'it is good for my professional development'. These motives suggest that the teachers' reasons for doing research are pedagogical and practical. They apparently see a correlation between research engagement and improvement in teaching quality.

Reasons for not doing research

The forty-two teachers (29%) selected the options 'rarely' and 'never' in their responses on the reasons for their non-engagement in research. A total of eleven reasons for not doing research were provided in the questionnaire. The following table summarises their answers.

Table 6: Reasons for Not Doing Research

No	Question Item	Number
(a)	I do not know enough about research methods	19
(c)	I do not have time to do research	19
(h)	I do not have access to the books and journals	9
(f)	I need I need someone to advise me but no one is available	7
(g)	Most of my colleagues do not do research	6
(j)	Other teachers would not co-operate if I asked for their help	3
(b)	My job is to teach not to do research	2
(i)	The learners would not co-operate if I asked for their help	2
(e)	I am not interested in doing research	1
(i)	My head of department discourages it	1
(k)	Other reasons. Please specify.	1

Table 6 shows ignorance of relevant research methods and time constraints to be most often cited for teachers' non-engagement in research. It is interesting to find respondents also citing external factors such as unavailability of advice and the prevalent trend in departments of not doing research. It is also found that 2 ELT teachers assume that doing research has nothing to do with their teaching.

3. Findings and Discussion

Teachers of English serving at universities of Upper Myanmar have diverse experiences and qualifications which were found to have influence to different extents on the surveyed teachers' perceptions as to what research is. Responses by the participants to the 10 given scenarios indicated that their view of research was from the scientific perspective: they perceive large samples, statistics and objectivity to be features of an ideal research. In the face of little institutional support and inadequate facilities, this perception can possibly become a barrier to teachers' involvement in research. The need for involving a large number of participants in some researches as well as the use of statistics among other techniques can be daunting for those with little or no previous experience in doing research. To promote research activity among teachers, it is necessary to encourage them to think more broadly about different kinds of activity constituting research. Focusing on small-scale studies which are more feasible for teachers can improve teachers' motivation for research engagement. According to Borg (2007), good research does not necessarily have to be large-scale focusing on a vast quantity of data obtained from a large target population.

In terms of doing research, teachers fell into two groups: those who said they did research sometimes or often and those who said they did research rarely or never. Those in the former group gave practical or professional reasons for doing research. However, there is a need for a closer study of teachers claiming to do research and what they actually do. Looking at reasons given by the surveyed ELT teachers for their research engagement or non-engagement, the stated opinions reflect the perceived advantages of doing research and their understanding of research as a tool for attaining professional development and developing more effective teaching. As for non-engagement in research, it is likely that they encountered personal and institutional constraints e.g. unfamiliarity with research methods and unavailability of effective, systematic supervision. Moreover, a lack of time was a major factor for non-engagement in research.

The findings of the present study have possible implications for ELT teachers in developing research-oriented attitudes towards education and enhancing research productivity. Five elements from the findings need highlighting: awareness, motivation, research competence, time and research environments.

The surveyed teachers mostly consider research as a quantitative tool comprising hypotheses and such qualities as representativeness, and generalisability and objectivity. It is advisable for teachers to be aware of their own role and have a clear understanding of what research is. Otherwise, it will be extremely challenging for them to go beyond traditional

notions which run counter to the principles of research and productive research activities would be out of their reach. However, awareness alone is not a sufficient condition to get teachers involved in research because many teachers are aware through reading or professional development initiatives of the potential benefits of research. Teachers must have a reason for wanting to engage in teacher research. Thus a second condition is motivation. Obtaining a qualification, for example, motivates many teachers to engage in research. Another factor is research competence of teachers. If the inquiry is conducted and the findings are shared, the teachers need to possess relevant research-related knowledge and skills. They need to be aware of different methodological options available and select the best approach for their studies. The next factor is time. One of the keyreasons given by respondents for not doing research was a lack oftime for research activities. No matter how well research is integrated into the teaching process, planning, conducting, and sharing the outcomes of the research requires a certain amount of time and effort from teachers. Teachers may still not feel they are able to engage in research because they do not have enough time. The last factor is research environment. By the working context support, there should be prospects for collaboration with other teacher researcher, opportunities to discuss the research with others and encouragement from colleagues. Therefore, such academic activities as seminars, workshop and conferences can provide supportive forum for promoting and supporting teachers in engaging research.

Without positive perceptions of research, these ELT teachers would be unmotivated to engage in research and publishing. To increase research engagement, it might be advisable to provide assistance in the form of research training workshops, reduced workloads, improved research facilities and systematic supervision by qualified academics which will hopefully lead to the nurturing of a new generation of productive, motivated researchers.

5. Conclusion

This study has shed light on the conceptions of university teachers on research engagement in the ELT context. Out of a number of factors that limit the extent to which research engagement can happen, some are internal to the teachers themselves (the restricted view of what counts as research, unfamiliarity of research methods) and others are related to their institutions (lack of time, lack of resources, and encouragement). Understanding these factors is the first step in any initiative which aims to promote research engagement.

Teacher research is a process that provides teachers with opportunities to construct knowledge based on the understanding of their classroom behaviours. Teachers participate in a variety of classroom-based tasks as a part of investigations to assess and measure their capacities as teachers. A majority of the surveyed teachers apparently assumed that principal features of research include the use of statistics, studies of large samples and subsequent academic outputs. The use of statistics and questionnaires as well as objectivity in observation was also perceived to be related to quality research.

The relative infrequency of research activities by a majority of surveyed teachers inevitably results in a moderate effect of research on their classroom teaching. Such limitations as time constraints, lacking access to up-to-date research materials and not having access to a substantial body of quality research also restricts the teachers' ability to engage in research. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to learn that the respondents were enthusiastic to achieve and maintain progress at the personal and professional levels by means of constant research engagement.

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE

English Language teachers' view of research

What does 'research' mean to you and what role does it play in your life as a professional English language teacher? These are important questions in the field–especially at a time when in many countries teachers are being encouraged to do research as a form of professional development. This Survey of English Language Teachers asks you for your views on these issues and will take 15-20 minutes to complete. Participation in this study is voluntary.

Thank you for your interest in contributing.

SECTION 1: ABOUT YOURSELF

Please tell us about your background.

1.   Institution: ....

2.   Years of experience as an English language teacher (Tick ONE):

0-4 ☐   5-9 ☐   10-14 ☐   15-19 ☐   20-24 ☐   25-29 ☐   30+ ☐

3.   Qualification:

Certificate ☐ ☐Diploma ☐ ☐Bachelor's ☐ ☐Master's ☐ ☐Doctorate ☐ ☐Other ☐

SECTION 2: SCENARIOS

The purpose of this section is to elicit your views on the kinds of activities which can be called research. There are no right or wrong answers. Read each description below and choose one answer to say to what extent you feel the activity described in an example of research.

(i) A teacher noticed that an activity she used in class did not work well. She thought about this after the lesson and made some notes in her diary. She tried something different in her next lesson. This time the activity was more successful.

Definitely not research		Probably not research		Probably research		Definitely research	

(ii) A teacher read about a new approach to teaching writing and decided to try it out in his/her class over a period of two weeks. He/she video recorded some of his/her lessons and collected samples of learners' written work. He/she analyzed this information then presented the results to his/her colleagues at a staff meeting.

Definitely not research		Probably not research		Probably research		Definitely research	

(iii) A teacher was doing a PhD course. She read several books and articles about grammar teaching then wrote a research report in which she discussed the main points in those readings.

Definitely not research		Probably not research		Probably research		Definitely research	

(iv) A university lecturer gave a questionnaire about the use of computers in language teaching to 500 teachers. Statistics were used to analyze the questionnaires. The lecturer wrote an article about the work in an academic journal.

Definitely not research		Probably not research		Probably research		Definitely research	

(v) Two teachers were both interested in discipline. They observed each other's lessons once a week for three months and made notes about how they controlled their classes. They discussed their notes and wrote a short article about what they learned for the newsletter of the national language teacher's association.

Definitely not research		Probably not research		Probably research		Definitely research	

(vi) To find out which of two methods for teaching vocabulary was more effective, a teacher first tested two classes. Then for four weeks she taught vocabulary to each class using a different method. After that she tested both groups again and compared the results to the first test. She decided to use the method which worked best in her own teaching.

Definitely not research		Probably not research		Probably research		Definitely research	

(vii) A head of the department met every teacher individually and asked them about their working conditions. The head made notes about the teachers' answers. He/She used his/her notes to write a report which he submitted to the Ministry of Education.

Definitely not research		Probably not research		Probably research		Definitely research	

(viii) Mid-way through a course, a teacher gave a class of 30 students a feedback from. The next day, five students handed in their completed forms. The teacher read these and used the information to decide what to do in the second part of the course.

Definitely not research		Probably not research		Probably research		Definitely research	

(ix) A teacher trainer asked his/her trainees to write an essay about ways of motivating teenage learners of English. After reading the assignments the trainer decided to write an article on the trainees' ideas about motivation. He/She submitted his/her article to a university journal.

Definitely not research		Probably not research		Probably research		Definitely research	

(x) The Head of the English department wanted to know what teachers thought of the new course book. She gave all teachers a questionnaire to complete, studied their responses, then presented the results at a staff meeting.

Definitely not research		Probably not research		Probably research		Definitely research	

SECTION 2: DOING RESEARCH

1.   How frequency to do you do research yourself? (Tick ONE)

Never	☐	Rarely	☐	Sometimes	☐	Often	☐

2.   You said you do research often or sometimes. Below are a number of possible reasons for doing research. Tick those which are true for you.

'I do research ...
a.   As part of a course I'm studying.   ☐
b.   Because I enjoy it.   ☐
c.   Because it is good for my professional development.   ☐
d.   Because it will help me get promotion.   ☐
e.   Because my employer expects me to.   ☐
f.   Because other teachers can learn from findings of my work.   ☐
g.   To contribute to the improvement of ELT in Myanmar.   ☐
h.   To find better ways of teaching.   ☐
i.   To solve problems in my teaching.   ☐
j.   Other reasons. Please specify.   ☐

3.   You said that you do research rarely or never. Below are a number of possible reasons for not doing research. Tick those which are true for you.

'I don't do research because ...
a.   I do not know enough about research methods.   ☐
b.   My job is to teach not to do research.   ☐
c.   I do not have time to do research.   ☐
d.   My head of department discourages it.   ☐
e.   I am not interested in doing research.   ☐
f.   I need someone to advise me but no one is available.   ☐
g.   Most of my colleagues do not do research.   ☐
h.   I do not have access to the books and journals I need.   ☐
i.   The learners would not co-operate if I did research in class.   ☐
j.   Other teachers would not co-operate if I asked for their help.   ☐
k.   Other reasons. Please specify.

Thank you for your cooperation!