



# Demotivating Factors of Engagement in Action Research: A Case of EFL Teachers in Central Sulawesi

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**Abstract.** Although many studies have documented EFL teachers' engagement in research as a part of professional learning mode, very few of them explore factors that demotivate teachers' engagement in classroom action research (CAR), which is a type of teacher research form promoted among Indonesian teachers by the government. To address this gap, this current study aims to reveal demotivating factors that undermine secondary school EFL teachers' motivation to engage in CAR in the city of Palu, Central Sulawesi province of Indonesia. This study adopts a qualitative case study design. Ten veteran EFL government teachers were purposively selected as participants in this study, comprising four junior secondary teachers and six senior secondary teachers. Data were collected using in-depth interview with the participants and were then analyzed adopting a thematic analysis. The results of the study suggest that intrinsic and extrinsic aspects become the demotivating factors in CAR engagements. The former one is related to individual factors, such as laziness and ignorance of CAR engagement. Meanwhile, the latter one is linked with the contextual factors, such as (1) heavy workload, (2) limited CAR training and workshops available, (3) lack of colleague support (e.g. no collaborators), (4) existing of CAR reports purchasing practice, and (4) ineffective system of teachers' CAR documents for promotion requirement. The study implies that in order to motivate teachers' engagement in CAR, the related stakeholders need to resolve the aforementioned contextual issues experienced by teachers.

**Keywords:** CAR engagement · demotivating factors · EFL teachers

## 1 Introduction

Teacher engagement in action research (AR) has been acknowledged as one of the promising forms of professional development (PD) tool. Through engaging in AR, teachers become being more reflective in their teaching practices [1], and gain autonomy to accommodate their learning needs [2]. In addition, research findings have also documented the virtues of AR engagement for EFL teachers, such as: helping teachers to deal with their pedagogical practices [3–5] and developing their professional competence [6].

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Action research for Indonesian teachers is not a new thing since it has been introduced for years, either in pre-service or in-service teacher education. To date, AR is deemed as a path of career enhancement and must be fulfilled by teachers, particularly for government-teachers, for gaining a higher career. Thus, it might be understood that vast majority of teachers engaged in AR for the sake of career path, instead of voluntarily endeavors [7, 8]. It may be implied that upgrading to higher career becomes an external motive for teachers to conducting AR.

Regarding motivation in AR engagement, it is one of the prominent ingredients for teachers to be able to partake in AR practice successfully [9, 10]. In addition to external driven, as mentioned above, intrinsic motivation from teachers themselves has been recognized as the crucial element and main condition for teachers in AR engagement [9]. A qualitative study conducted by Puspitasari et al. [6] to 5 EFL teachers in Jombang, East Java, suggest that having a strong intrinsic motivation, teachers are able to sustain their AR practices. In contrast, teachers who have diminished motivation cannot continue doing AR after their first effort [11, 12]. This issue could be associated with the prevalent challenges encountered by teachers such as: lack of time, limited knowledge and skills of AR, and limited school support are the main challenges for teachers in AR engagements [7, 11].

Despite its importance in AR literature, what motivates or demotivates teachers to engage, disengage, or discontinue their AR practice is still under explored among EFL teachers, particularly in Indonesian contexts. Addressing this gap, the current study aims to explore and understand what factors demotivate secondary EFL teachers in Palu, Central Sulawesi. This study is expected to provide inputs for relevant stakeholders on how to support and motivate teachers in AR engagement for the sake of professional growth and improving teaching practices. Thus, this study is guided a research question:

*What factors demotivate secondary EFL teachers to engage in CAR?*

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 CAR as a Form of Teacher Professional Development (TPD)

There has been a consensus among TPD experts that effective professional development programs, such as classroom action research (CAR), could provide ample opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective activities, promote collaboration, and yield considerable impacts on teachers' teaching practice [13–15]. Through engaging in CAR, teachers can examine their practice individually or collectively and attempt to solve issues encountered in their classroom for the sake of improving the teaching and learning process, and for the betterment of students learning achievement [14, 16].

Literature in action research has recognized ample benefits for teachers when engaging in CAR. Regarding benefits of AR engagement, language teachers have experienced different positive gains during their engagement in classroom inquiry, such as:

- gaining personal insight and self-awareness to teachers' practices [3, 13],
- becoming critical and reflective to their practice [7],
- gaining knowledge in both research and teaching skills, and classroom management [13, 18],

- gaining venue for discussing and solving problems [19],
- an increase on teachers' autonomy [20] and,
- sense of collaboration increased [21].

Given the above facts about CAR, it might be understood if the proponents of teacher research propose teachers to engage in classroom research [1, 14]. In promoting teachers to engage in research, some scholars have attempted to report how they facilitate language teachers to engage in CAR through in-service program [21], mentoring [22], and research partnership [23], and a research support program [24]. In Indonesian contexts, particularly, Burns and Rochsantiningsih [3] reported how they promoted 10 EFL teachers in Surakarta to engage in CAR through intensive in-service teacher program. Using collaborative action research framework, Mukrim [4] facilitated four EFL teachers in Palu, eastern Indonesia, to do their CAR projects for one semester. Hajar [25] also introduced CAR for EFL teachers to engage in research in East Nusa Tenggara, despite the challenge she encountered as a facilitator. Although CAR involvement benefits teachers, these three studies also highlighted that the teachers experienced considerable challenges, such as time constraints, family commitment, and lack of school support.

## 2.2 Teacher Motivation in Research Engagement

Literature has acknowledged the importance of motivation by teachers as the condition in research engagement successfully [9, 10]. Deci and Ryan [26] divide motivation into two: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Teachers who have intrinsic motivation will do CAR voluntarily for the sake of personal growth, solving instructional issues, accommodating students' need, having passionate about research [5, 6]. By contrast, driven by extrinsic factors, such as career promotion and incentives, teachers feel encouraged in research engagement [5, 7]. In the Indonesian context, for instance, Utami [7] found that EFL teachers in Bali admitted that their engagement in CAR was ignited by upgrading to higher career level, instead of self-initiated endeavor.

Another construct of motivation is *amotivation*, identified with a person who does not have any intention to act [26]. In CAR context, for instance, teachers have no interest to partake in. Additionally, contextual factors can also be linked with the demotivation of teachers in CAR engagement, such as, heavy workload, limited knowledge of CAR, and no collaborators [11], and inconsistent practice of reviewing teachers' CAR reports and lack of school support [7]. While these demotivating factors might be similar experienced by Indonesian EFL teachers in different geographical areas, very few studies have uncovered factors that demotivate teachers to conduct CAR or to continue doing it after their first project. This current study elucidates this issue among the selected secondary EFL teachers in Palu, Central Sulawesi.

## 3 Methods

This study adopts a qualitative case study to understand factors that demotivate English teachers to engage in CAR project, or to continue practicing CAR after their first project

when doing it for the sake of completing their M.Ed program in a local university [27]. Ten English teachers, from secondary school in Palu, Central Sulawesi, were selected using a snowball technique to uncover this phenomenon. The teachers who met with the criteria were contacted first (two veteran one), and from their reference, other participants were invited to participate. These state-own teachers have length in-service from 10–17 years, with seven of whom hold M.Ed degree, and applying a CAR design for their M.Ed thesis. Two other teachers never practiced CAR, and one teacher had once engaged in CAR without any mentors or a collaborator.

Data were collected using in-depth face-to-face interview with all participants in order to find details and comprehensive information about the investigated issue. Using Indonesian, all interviews were lasted from 40–60 min, and conducted at their schools. Data were then analyzed using thematic analysis by finding similar themes, or categories [27]. Data analysis employed Brown's [28] procedures consisting of data transcription, data coding, verifying and concluding the themes. Following these procedures, all interviews' data were transcribed in verbatim form. Each transcript was read repeatedly in order to find theme or category that answered the research question. Manual coding then was done by highlighting the phrases or statements and they were then juxtaposed in one sub-theme. This process ended by grouping similar sub-themes in a main theme which concluded the answers of the investigation of this current study.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

Interview data from this study suggest that there are two main factors, which are *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* ones, that diminished the teachers' motivation engaging in CAR. We will firstly present the latter factors, which largely contribute to demotivating the teachers, and it will be followed by looking at the former one. External Factors are mostly linked with contextual conditions experienced by the teachers, from institutional and social aspects, such as heavy workload, limited CAR workshop of doing CAR and report making, absence of collaborators or mentors, purchasing CAR report practice, and lenient system review of teachers' CAR report. Additionally, the laziness feeling from teachers themselves was identified as the source of demotivating factor from the intrinsic perspective. These main findings are further elaborated and discussed with relevant references and previous studies.

### 4.1 Heavy Workload

Interview data from the teachers reveal that heavy workload becomes the main contributor of demotivating source. As the state-own government teachers, they have to comply with working hour regulated by the central government, that is 24-h teaching load per week, compounded with administration task, such as preparing lesson plans, materials, being vice headmaster, etc. These workloads eventually made them have limited time to engage in CAR - in both doing the process of CAR and report writing. This issue was largely found to the teachers who serve as the vice principals. Due to this issue, most of the teachers did not continue practicing CAR after their first project when pursuing their M.Ed degree.

The lack of time issue due to heavy workload issue seems not an endemic contributing factor for the loss of motivation of doing classroom research by these teachers. Previous research from various geographical contexts reported that it is a ubiquitous issue encountered by language teachers which finally hampered them to continue practicing research [e.g., 12, 29, 30]. Another study conducted in Palu with 5 secondary teachers in Palu has also affirmed this phenomenon [11]. Hence, for Indonesian teachers, it might be understood that only those who have a strong personal motivation can perform CAR successfully and bring impacts on their self-growth and practices [6, 7].

#### **4.2 Limited CAR Workshop/Training**

Another factor that diminishes the teachers' motivation engaging in CAR, particularly voiced by 3 teachers with a bachelor's degree only, was the limited of CAR knowledge and skills. All teachers agreed that they never participate in any CAR training/workshop, conducted either by their own schools or from local educational office board. These teachers also emphasized that they had not learned about CAR concept during their pre-service education. The lack of CAR knowledge and skills apparently inhibited their motivation to conduct CAR.

A case of one veteran teacher may represent other teachers who have experienced this issue. Laura (pseudonym), posted since 2005 at the same secondary school located at the heart of Palu city, argued that she never had the training of CAR conducted by her school and she believed that other schools had similar condition. For the sake of upgrading her career level, she had to copy and modify the CAR report written by other teachers from internet. She had no choice to do this in order to avoiding the offer of her colleagues about purchasing the report, which was largely opted by them. Following this, she did not engage in CAR anymore.

The loss of motivation due to the limited knowledge or competence in CAR, as experienced the above teachers, may be linked with teachers' self-efficacy to conduct CAR. Following Bandura's self-efficacy theory [31] (1985), it may be assumed that the low sense of self-efficacy - the belief of successfully executing one activity or task - will impact on teachers' motivation to doing CAR project in their own class. In addition, viewed from the lens of self-determination theory [26], teachers' intrinsic motivation to do CAR is undermined by the lack of competence on performing it.

#### **4.3 Absence of Collaborators**

In addition to the above factors, two teachers in particular consider that the decrease of their motivation in CAR was due to the absence of a collaborator or a mentor, who can guide them or who can be a partner to discuss with about their projects. This case was especially experienced by those teachers who had insufficient knowledge of CAR, as discussed above. This condition can be understood since these teachers may be in puzzlement in the process of doing CAR. They need someone who becomes a critical friend that provides inputs, suggestions, or guidance for their CAR projects and the absence of these surely lowered their motivation or had no motivation (amotivation) to initiate or complete their projects. Ryan and Deci [32] postulate that amotivation may be caused of lack of competence of doing and devaluing the action. In the CAR context, the

aforementioned factor could engender the amotivation feeling from teachers to execute it.

The absence of collaborator in the teachers' school can also be linked with the lack of collegiality when discussing their classroom practice, as voiced by 5 English teachers in Palu in Mukrim's [4] study. Additionally, the teachers of this study affirm although they joined MGMP (support subject group teachers) meeting every month, rarely did teachers discuss their issues of teaching practices; instead, lesson plan design and assessment, following the new curriculum format, were constantly discussed and shared among members of this group.

Indeed, the presence of mentors/collaborator is inevitably crucial condition when expecting teachers to engage in research [9]. In CAR itself, the aspect of collaboration is an important tenet as teachers are encouraged to discuss, share, and learn together [33]. In addition, from the perspective of SDT theory, when teachers find someone who can support them with invaluable inputs and can value their work, their motivation is heightened to perform something, including engagement in CAR, and vice versa [32].

#### **4.4 Purchasing CAR Report Practice**

In the Indonesian context, it is regulated that for teachers who want to pursue a higher career level, the submission of CAR report or a published article journal is a must, and it is one of the documents for the promotion requirement. If they can fulfill it, a new career level will be obtained. This policy is seemingly expected to promote teachers to engage in CAR for developing teachers through the promotion mechanism. However, we found that there was a widespread practice of purchasing CAR report among teachers, and this indirectly evoked the teachers to take this path; thus, demotivating them from engaging in CAR.

Interview data reveal that this practice occurred among the teachers who do not have sufficient competence in doing CAR (including report writing), and those who lacked time. Regarding the first case, two teachers affirm that they paid others to make their CAR reports. What they did was just giving the students' name and all the data needed, and they did not do the process of CAR in the classroom. Even, one teacher admits that the report maker faked the data, such as the signature of participants who attending the project seminar at school, list of attendees of seminar, students' achievement data. She further states that the reviewer report did not check its quality carefully, and she could use it as the complementary document for obtaining her new career rank. Slightly different from the first case, although knowing CAR and its report writing, two teachers who served as the vice principal in their schools employed this report making service due to limited time.

The practice of purchasing CAR reports has been also reported by Mukrim et al. (in press) among EFL junior secondary English teachers in Palu, in which out of 54 teachers were surveyed; around 28% used this mode of producing CAR reports for the sake of promotion. This phenomenon has been highlighted by Apandi [34]. His anecdotal observation suggests that due to lack of teachers' competence in scientific writing, teachers follow unethical conduct of profession such as: purchasing the CAR reports, asking others to write for them, or collaborating with certain person who can help them gain the career promotion.

Based on the above fact, we would argue although the aforementioned policy, to some extent, may promote Indonesian teachers to engage in CAR as it facilitates teachers to pursue their career path, however it also can demotivate teachers who have contextual challenges to comply with the policy. As a consequence, teachers will engage in a cheating practice as described above.

#### **4.5 Ineffective Review of Teachers' CAR Report**

As explicated above, teachers need to include their CAR report or other types of publication as one of the requirements for gaining a higher rank. Three teachers in this study view that the system adopted by the reviewers to examine the CAR reports was very lenient in that the report submitted was not closely scrutinized, such as teachers were not asked whether they really did the CAR or not, and whether they did a copy-and-paste conduct from other sources. According to one of the teachers, what the reviewers only paid attention was that the title and the population must be different from other teachers' works. For some ideal teachers, like these teachers, this review system apparently undermined their intrinsic motivation to conduct CAR (including the report making).

The above finding corroborates with the study of Utami [7] who found that the stringent bureaucracy affected teachers to engage in CAR. Teachers became unmotivated when the reviewer returned their report back due to inconsistent feedback. Since this small-scale research does not want to generalize its finding, we argue that similar phenomena could happen and be experienced by other teachers throughout Indonesia. Thus, more studies need to be conducted to uncover this issue, and how it could impact on demotivating teachers to engage in CAR as a part of PD endeavor.

#### **4.6 Intrinsic Factor**

In addition to external factors, personal-related factor from the teachers themselves also occurred from the interview data. Two teachers admit that the reluctant feeling to do CAR was ignited by the laziness. One teacher, for instance, expresses that due to his ignorance about doing CAR, he gained his new higher rank for 8 years. He even did not continue doing CAR after his first project when pursuing M.Ed degree. This veteran teacher confidently claimed that vast majority of teachers only cared about CAR because it is included as the promotion mechanism, and from his observation many of colleagues purchased CAR reports for this purpose. He emphasizes that very few of teachers were intrinsically motivated to do CAR beyond this purpose, such as attempting to solve their students' English learning issues.

The above teacher's claim may be understood since doing CAR successfully needs several conditions such as having adequate research knowledge, presence of collaborators/mentors, school support, and motivation [9]. In the Indonesian context, Puspitasari [6] found that only teachers who have a strong intrinsic motivation and passion about research can sustain their CAR practice and its impact on their personal growth and their practices.

## 5 Conclusions and Implications

This research found that demotivating factors for the teachers of this current study in CAR engagement can be divided into extrinsic and intrinsic ones. External factors are mostly linked with contextual conditions experienced by the teachers, in particular from institutional and social aspects, such as heavy workload, limited CAR workshop of doing CAR and report making, absence of collaborators or mentors, purchasing CAR report practice, and lenient system review of teachers' CAR report. Additionally, the laziness feeling from teachers themselves was identified as the source of demotivating factor from the intrinsic perspective.

The study implies that in order to motivate teachers engaging in CAR, the related stakeholders need to resolve the contextual issues that experienced by teachers as aforementioned. We proposed some strategies that can be done, such as the provision of sufficient training/workshop, promoting collaborative CAR, providing tangible and intangible support, and reviewing the CAR reporting system for the sake of teachers' promotion.

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