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Differences in Reading Beliefs/Practices of L2 Teachers: Undergraduate versus Graduate Degree Holders

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Abstract

In their attempt to shed light on the factors contributing to the incongruity between L2 reading teachers' beliefs and practices, most of the researchers have resorted to teachers' personal perspectives. As a partial replication of the research carried out by Karimi and Dehghani (2016), the current study sought to broaden this restricted scope by examining the role of teacher education in shaping L2 reading teachers' beliefs/practices. Data were collected from 84 L2 reading teachers through a survey and follow-up classroom observations. Overall, both undergraduate and graduate teachers had an equally heightened tendency toward competence-based theoretical orientation. However, both groups substantially utilized instructional moves conforming to text-based orientation. There were also significant frequency differences between undergraduate and graduate teachers in their recourse to competence-based pedagogical moves. It is concluded that while the inclusion of a finite number of theoretical coursework may sway L2 teachers to sanction competence-based theoretical orientation, a more clinical approach to teacher education should be embraced to promote the symbiotic belief-practice relationship among L2 reading teachers.

Keywords: Competence-based orientation; Text-based orientation; L2 teachers; Teacher education

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1. Introduction

Circa the 1980s, the dominant behavioristic approaches to teacher education – which viewed pre-service teachers as tabula rasa expecting to be imparted with teaching wisdom (Freeman, 2002) – came under attack with the rise of cognitive/social views toward teacher education (Johnson, 2006). As a result of this paradigm shift, teachers came to be regarded as "active, thinking decision makers whose actions are influenced by the unobservable cognitive (and affective) dimension of teaching" (Borg, 2011, p. 218). Interest in teachers' beliefs, thereafter, began to grow on the grounds that this construct may function as a mirror reflecting the rationales behind teachers' instructional decisions (Skott, 2015) and predict their successful classroom performance and students' learning outcomes (Burns, Freeman, & Edwards, 2015; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Freeman, 2016; Gitomer & Zisk, 2015).

In second/foreign language (L2) teacher education, a major line of inquiry burgeoned examining the correspondence between teachers' stated beliefs and classroom practices. A multitude of researchers have been pursuing this research agenda exploring the resemblance (or lack thereof) between L2 teachers' beliefs and pedagogical performance in various areas including (though not limited to) teaching language skills and components (Buss, 2016; Karimi & Nazari, 2017; McGee, 2017; Sanchez & Borg, 2014), providing corrective feedback (Kamiya, 2016; Karimi & Asadnia, 2015), implementing teaching methods/techniques (Chen & Wright, 2017; Kim, 2014; Li, 2013; Woods & Çakir, 2011), and fostering learner autonomy (Borg & Alshumaimeri, in press). Although findings from some of these research projects have revealed correspondence between teachers' beliefs and practices, the majority of the studies have showed partial congruity (Basturkmen, 2012).

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In their attempts to shed light on the reasons behind the limited correspondence between educators' beliefs and practices, many of the researchers have resorted to teachers' personal perspectives (e.g. Lau, 2007; Lü & Lavadenz, 2014). In other words, participating teachers have been requested via various data collection procedures to articulate why they actualize their professed beliefs in different ways, hence shedding light on the reasons behind partial congruity between their thoughts and class actions. Notwithstanding their promising findings, these studies have stopped short of pinpointing all the influential variables that undermine the correspondence between teachers' perceptions and practices. This is due, in part, to teachers' lack of capability to bring their tacitly held beliefs to the level of awareness, meaning that there might be some reasons for low association between beliefs and practices that cannot be verbalized by teachers. Additionally, variations in different educational settings and the way teachers are trained show that factors which may underlie the lack of complete correspondence between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices in a particular context may not be influential in another one.

The current study builds on the argument that the domain of research on teachers' belief-practice association should be expanded by examining the role of factors that evade teachers' conscious thoughts, yet are possibly influential in shaping L2 instructors' beliefs and molding the relationship between their beliefs and practices. Such factors should be identified and their power ought to be investigated by domain experts. In line with this premise, the primary goal of the present study is to explore the role of formal teacher education programs in shaping L2 reading teachers' theoretical beliefs, defined as "the philosophical principles, or belief systems, that guide teachers' expectations about students' behavior and the decisions they make during reading lessons" (Johnson, 1992, p. 84). The study also set out to explore the extent to which teachers act out their

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theoretical beliefs in reading classrooms. Investigating L2 teachers' beliefs/practices in reading instruction is of particular importance. Although research in this domain has resulted in significant contributions to our understanding of belief-practice interaction in first language (L1) teaching (Fang, 1996), it has remained an under-researched area in L2 setting (Karimi & Dehghani, 2016). The insights gained through the current study may enable teacher educators develop a better understanding of the degree to which L2 reading teachers' beliefs and practices are informed by their experiences of attending teacher preparation programs. This will, in turn, present an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of such programs and make required amendments in their curriculum or content.

2. Review of the Literature

In contrast to the context of L1 literacy instruction, which contains a considerable research repertoire studying the interaction between teachers' theoretical orientations toward reading and their classroom performance (e.g. Deford, 1985; Grisham, 2000; Scales, et al., 2018), only a handful of studies have pursued this line of inquiry in L2 reading classes (e.g. Farrell & Ives, 2015; Garden, 1996; Johnson, 1992; Karimi, Abdullahi, & Haghighi, 2016; Karimi & Dehghani, 2016; Lau, 2007; Lü & Lavadenz, 2014). The history of L2 teaching research in this area can be traced back to the study carried out by Johnson (1992), who identified three methodologically diverse approaches to reading instruction (i.e. skill-based, rule-based, and function-based) and measured a group of L2 teachers' beliefs about them using various instruments. She then selected three participating teachers whose ideas were clearly in agreement with one of the abovementioned reading approaches and observed eight sessions of each teachers' reading class, declaring outright correspondence between teachers' beliefs and classroom performance. This strong belief-practice association was

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nonetheless detected among teachers who clearly subscribed to one of the three reading approaches, an issue prompting Johnson to suggest that future studies should investigate the degree of belief-practice correspondence among L2 teachers with less clearly defined theoretical beliefs about literacy instruction.

Following in Johnson's footsteps, a number of researchers examined the correlation between L2 teachers' beliefs about and practices in reading instruction by adopting qualitative and/or quantitative approaches to data collection and analysis. Garden (1996), for example, utilized interviews to tap into six French and Spanish language teachers' reading beliefs. She further observed and audio-recorded several reading sessions taught by each participant, followed by identifying the recurring themes and categories in the instructors' classroom performance. The results revealed that each teacher pursued a clearly traceable teaching pattern in their performance which did not completely align with their theoretical orientation to reading instruction. In post-observation interviews, the teachers admitted that, during their teaching, they had to modify their lesson plans due to students' poor performance, hence deviating from their professed beliefs.

Farrell and Ives (2015), studying reading beliefs/practices of a novice L2 teacher of English, concluded that the participant's complex beliefs to a great extent reflected his classroom practices. The researchers pointed out that the areas of divergence could substantially be attributed to the teacher's incapability to verbalize all his beliefs since they might not be completely developed. They also acknowledged that some of the teacher's beliefs might not have been translated to classroom actions simply because of the limited number of observed lessons.

Lü and Lavadenz (2014) undertook a mixed-methods study assessing the beliefs and practices of a group of L2 teachers of Chinese on various issues including reading instruction. They developed a questionnaire to

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evaluate teacher participants' beliefs and used class observations as well as a series of interviews to appraise their teaching. The findings suggested that the teachers strongly supported the bottom-up approach to teaching reading (including the development of word recognition and decoding skills) in both their beliefs and practices.

Examining the correspondence between L2 teachers' beliefs and practices in Hong Kong, Lau (2007) proposed a new dichotomy for reading instructional approaches, namely text-based versus competence-based orientations. Accordingly, teachers who subscribe to text-based orientation place emphasis on textual elements (e.g. vocabulary, content, and rhetorical structure) on the assumption that students tend to develop their reading skills indirectly by intensive coverage of specific texts. A regular text-based oriented reading class is teacher-directed, while students are relatively passive recipients of knowledge. Reading instructors who follow competence-based orientation, on the other hand, concentrate on developing students' reading strategies/skills beyond the covered passage with the ultimate goal of preparing independent readers. In addition to teacher led activities, several pair and group work tasks are assigned to students in a typical competence-based reading class. Lau (2007) developed a questionnaire to investigate the teacher respondents' theoretical beliefs about this dichotomy and a self-report survey to examine their pedagogical practices. The results of data analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between participants' theoretical orientations and class performance.

In another study, Karimi et al. (2016) used stimulated recall interviews to probe teachers' reading practices. The findings suggested that higher consistency between theoretical orientations and instructional practices was observed among teachers who were more self-efficacious (i.e. teachers who strongly believed they could enhance students' achievement).

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The most relevant study was done by Karimi and Dehghani (2016) who compared English language teachers with and without Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certifications in terms of their theoretical orientations to and practices in reading instruction. The results demonstrated that teachers with TEFL certificates scored higher in competence-based orientation to reading instruction as measured by Lau's (2007) questionnaire. The difference between the two groups, however, was not statistically significant. Analyzing class observation data, on the other hand, revealed that teachers with TEFL credentials subscribed more to competence-based reading instructional practices, whereas their counterparts who were not certified in TEFL had stronger proclivity toward text-based orientation. Correlational analysis further disclosed a strong association between theoretical orientations and teaching practices of instructors with TEFL certifications. No consistent pattern was however observed between reading instructional beliefs and practices of educators without TEFL degrees.

As this brief literature review shows, the studies on the correspondence between teachers' beliefs and practices in reading instruction are clouded with contradictory findings highlighting the context-specific nature of the relationship and the influence of data collection procedures. Furthermore, the majority of these studies have probed the reasons for incongruity between beliefs and practices from teachers' viewpoint. In an attempt to broaden this restricted scope, the current study sought to examine the impact of teacher education, embodied in teachers' highest academic degree, on L2 teachers' theoretical orientations toward reading instruction, their actual reading practices, and the alignment between these two. In particular, following Karimi and Dehghani's (2016) lead, the study was intended to compare undergraduate and graduate L2 teachers' theoretical orientations

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and practices toward teaching reading. As such, the following research questions were proposed:

1. Is there any significant difference between theoretical orientations to reading instruction of L2 teachers with and without graduate teacher education credentials?

2. Is there any significant difference between L2 teachers with and without graduate teacher education credentials with respect to the correspondence between their theoretical orientations to and practices in reading instruction?

3. Method

3.1. L2 teacher education in Iran

Given the study was conducted among Iranian L2 teachers of English, some description of the status quo of L2 teacher education programs in this setting is warranted. Academic teacher preparation programs are offered by universities based on a nation-wide curriculum designed and implemented by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology, the organization overseeing academic education across the country. The programs are presented at two levels: at the bachelor of art (B.A.), students commonly major in English Literature or English Translation. The researchers' personal experience of attending and/or teaching in such programs shows that, irrespective of their major, most of the B.A. students will become L2 teachers upon graduation. Under such circumstances, B.A. curriculum contains about 12 credits focusing on specialized courses in teaching, which can be generally categorized under three headings of Teaching Methodology, Language Testing, and Linguistics. In Teaching Methodology, students get familiar with the history of language teaching, with special emphasis on the most famous L2 teaching methods like

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audiolingualism, suggestopedia, communicative language teaching (CLT), etc. Language Testing is also intended to introduce the main trends in test development and the rudimentary descriptive and inferential statistics used to make interpretations based on a set of test scores. Finally, courses in Linguistics aim at promoting students' knowledge of the English language by presenting the basic tenets of well-known linguistic theories and technical jargons.

Students who like to receive a more advanced training should apply for master of art (M.A.) programs in TEFL. Building upon students' prior knowledge, such programs offer a wider array of L2 teaching-related subjects like Teaching Language Skills, Teaching Methodology, Applied Linguistics, Curriculum Design, Foreign Language Testing, and Practicum. Participants in these programs are usually exposed to highly sophisticated, state-of-the-art theoretical discussions related to L2 teaching and their mastery of various areas is assessed via paper-and-pencil tests. Students are also required to do a research project under the supervision of a faculty member and submit it to the corresponding department in the form of a thesis as a partial fulfilment of their M.A. degree. Given the inclusion of more specialized and sophisticated L2 teaching subjects in M.A. TEFL programs, it is hypothesized that students who graduate from such programs will have developed a richer belief system about L2 teaching/learning which will, in turn, inform their classroom practices. Furthermore, since considerable emphasis is laid on up-to-date approaches to L2 teaching and learning in graduate teacher preparation programs, it is speculated that M.A. teachers will have a stronger inclination toward competence-based approaches to L2 reading instruction in comparison with their B.A. counterparts.

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3.2. Participants

The participants were selected through convenience and snowball sampling techniques. They included 84 L2 teachers (47 females and 37 males) teaching general English in different language institutes of Kermanshah or Khuzestan, two major provinces respectively located in western and southwestern Iran. Similar to many other Iranian language institutes (Zhang & Rahimi, 2014), CLT was the prescribed teaching method in the language institutes where the participants worked. Half of the sample (42 teachers) had B.A. in English Literature or English Translation, while the rest held M.A. in TEFL. Their age ranged from 22 to 35 years (M = 26.37, *SD* = 5.77). Assuming that teaching experience may be a confounding variable obscuring the effect of formal teacher education, care was taken to control it by selecting teachers who had less than 3 years of pedagogical experience, a cut-off point previously adopted in some other studies (e.g. Chan, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007) to make a distinction between novice and seasoned teachers. The respondents were informed that one of the researchers might randomly observe some of their classes as a follow-up activity. They were also assured that the collected data would remain strictly confidential and they could withdraw from the study at any stage with no repercussions. Participants' background information divided by the highest formal teacher education certificate they held is summarized in Table 1.

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Table 1
Background information of B.A. and M.A. teachers

	Gender		Age		Experience	
	Females	Males	M	SD	M	SD
B.A. teachers	26	16	24.33	4.13	2.21	1.26
M.A. teachers	21	21	28.42	6.51	2.78	1.04

3.3. Instrument

Given that a mixed-methods design was adopted in this study, both quantitative and qualitative data collection/analysis procedures were used. In the quantitative stage, participating teachers' background data were gleaned through a specifically designed form. Further, to explore the participants' theoretical orientations to reading instruction, Teachers' Orientation to Reading Instruction (TORI) questionnaire was administered. The instrument, which was developed by Lau (2007) to study L2 teachers' reading beliefs, examines teachers' opinions about the objectives of reading instruction, appropriate techniques for teaching reading, and proper procedures for assessing students' reading abilities. The questionnaire items present these elements within two general orientations to reading instruction, namely text-based and competence-based (explicated in section 2), with 13 items measuring teachers' beliefs on each type of orientation. The participants should indicate the degree of their agreement with each item on a 4-point likert scale ranging from *1-strongly disagree* to *4-strongly agree*. Higher scores in each orientation type are indicative of teachers' stronger inclination toward that orientation. Lau (2007) reported high reliability coefficients for the two orientation types (.78 and .84 for text-based and competence-based orientations, respectively) and, through conducting exploratory factor analysis, demonstrated that the two factor

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solution logically represents the underlying constructs of the questionnaire items.

A total of 500 TORI copies were administered among L2 teachers via personal communication or online resources (e.g. email, Telegram, and Google Docs). Around 200 completed questionnaires were returned (a return rate of 40%), which were further reduced to 84 copies as a result of discarding the questionnaires that were carelessly filled out or were completed by teachers with over 3 years of teaching experience. The remaining data were fed into SPSS 21 for subsequent analysis.

To explore the extent to which teachers' theoretical beliefs were reflected in their pedagogical practices, an entire session of 20 teachers (10 B.A. and 10 M.A. teachers comprising almost 25% of TORI respondents) was observed and audio-recorded by one of the researchers. To do so, the teachers were randomly selected from among those who had provided their contact information in the quantitative phase and taught students who were at the intermediate level of English proficiency (defined by corresponding institutes' standards). Our focus on intermediate students was an attempt to minimize the intervening effect of language proficiency on the account that it may influence L2 teachers' reading instructional practices. The participants in this phase came from three language institutes in Khuzestan.

The selected instructors were informed about the researchers' intention to observe a session of their teaching. Upon obtaining the teachers' informed consent, arrangements were made to observe a lesson in which all or a considerable proportion of the teaching time was allocated to reading instruction. Minor deviations from the focus on teaching reading in the observed classes majorly included checking students' prior homework. The observed sessions were audio-recorded. To have a more "elaborative description" (McDonough & McDonough, 1997, p. 112) of classroom events and to record visual aspects of teachers' and students' performance

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which were not amenable to audio-recording, the observer researcher also took field notes specifically focusing on teachers' utilized instructional techniques that could be regarded as examples of one of the orientation types to teaching reading. Following the observation sessions, the recorded data were transcribed and used for assessing observed teachers' practical orientation to text- and/or competence-based approaches.

3.4. Procedure

Cronbach's alpha and Shapiro-Wilk test were carried out on the data gathered through TORI to assess the reliability of responses and normality of data distribution, respectively. Then, two sets of paired samples t-test were conducted to gauge the difference between text-based and competence-based orientation scores within each group of teachers (B.A. and M.A.). Additionally, two independent samples t-tests were employed to examine the discrepancy between B.A. and M.A. teachers with regard to their theoretical orientations to reading.

On the other hand, the transcribed data obtained through observing and audio-recording reading classes were parsed into instructional moves, with each move clearly demonstrating a defining characteristic of text-based or competence-based orientation. The process of move identification was independently carried out by two of the researchers who had agreed on a set of rubrics operationally defining the two reading orientation types. The raters then categorized the identified moves under either of the two types of orientation. The process resulted in an agreement of almost 90% in both move identification and move categorization. In the case of discrepancies, field notes taken during classroom observations were consulted and the two raters discussed the issue until all the existing disagreements were resolved. The following two excerpts from the transcribed data respectively represent text-based and competence-based instructional moves.

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Excerpt 1:

Teacher: Ehsan (pseudonym for a student), please read the first two sentences of the paragraph again out loud.
Student 1: [Reading aloud] Bernadette was good at everything. She used to sing well in assembly.
Teacher: Ok, there is a special verb in the second sentence; *used to sing*. What does it mean based on what I told you [before]?
Student 2: *Used to* refer (sic) to an activity that we did regularly in the past.
Teacher: So, does Bernadette still sing in groups?
Student2: No, she did it in the past, but not now.
Teacher: Exactly.

Excerpt 2:

Teacher: [After pairing students and boarding a number of inferential questions, e.g. why Victor Lustig rented a limousine?] Alright, you have 10 minutes to read the passage silently and try to find the answer to the questions with your partner's help. Go ahead. [Students start working in pairs trying to guess the answers]
Teacher: [when students are done] Ok, now let's check your responses. Who wants to answer the first question?
Student 1: [Answering the question] He wanted to impress the businessmen. He wanted to show that he was rich and he owned the Eiffel tower.
Teacher: What do you think? [Encouraging other students to share their ideas about their classmate's answer]

The categorized moves were subsequently tabulated and frequency counts were obtained for both text-based and competence-based orientations. The frequency data were regarded as a yardstick to compare

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B.A. and M.A. teachers' recourse to these two orientations to reading instruction. To make statistical claims on the tabulated frequencies, both within and across group comparisons were conducted using a set of chi-square test. The obtained results were later checked against teachers' theoretical orientations (gauged through their responses to TORI) to examine (mis)alignment between their beliefs and practices.

4. Results

4.1. Teachers' theoretical orientations to reading instruction

As illustrated in Table 2, the results of Cronbach's alpha yielded reliability indices ranging from 0.65 to 0.78 for text-based and competence-based orientations, indicating an acceptable internal consistency of participants' responses to TORI items. Further, the results of Shapiro-Wilk test, which is used to assess normality of distribution with sample sizes smaller than 120 (Larson-Hall, 2010), showed that all the *p*-values are greater than 0.05, meaning that the data come from a normal distribution.

Table 2
The reliability and normal distribution of responses to TORI items

	Text-based		Competence-based	
	Alpha	SP[a] Sig.	Alpha	SP Sig.
B.A. teachers	0.77	0.09	0.65	0.07
M.A. teachers	0.73	0.12	0.78	0.09

[a] SP = Shapiro-Wilk

Ensuring that all the pre-assumptions of conducting a parametric test were met, two paired samples t-tests were carried out to see whether the differences between text-based and competence-based orientation scores within each group were statistically measurable. As displayed in Table 3, the registered mean scores of competence-based orientation were

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significantly higher among both B.A. ($t(41) = 3.54$, $p = 0.00$) and M.A. teachers ($t(41) = 5.29$, $p = 0.00$) in comparison with mean scores obtained for text-based orientation. This considerable discrepancy indicates that, with respect to theoretical beliefs, both groups of L2 teachers preferred competence-based to text-based orientation. A comparison of mean score differences within each group further revealed that M.A. teachers had a stronger inclination toward competence-based orientation than their B.A. counterparts, a claim that is supported by the greater effect size obtained for this group ($d = 1.14$).

Table 3
Within group comparisons of teachers' beliefs about text-based versus competence-based orientations

	Text-based		Competence-based		*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	*d*
	M	SD	M	SD				
B.A.	3.09	0.4	3.47	0.50	-	41	0.00	0.81
M.A.	2.97	0.3	3.52	0.59	-	41	0.00	1.14

To see if the discrepancies between the two groups' mean scores were statistically significant, two independent samples t-tests were employed (one for each orientation type). The results (illustrated in Table 4) demonstrate that, in neither text-based nor competence-based orientations, were the differences between B.A. and M.A. teachers' overall scores statistically measurable. Thus, although B.A. teachers scored higher in text-based orientation and M.A. teachers self-reported stronger disposition toward competence-based orientation, the difference did not reach a significant level to make statistically supported, generalizable claims.

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Table 4
B.A. versus M.A. teachers' beliefs about text-based and competence-based orientations

	B.A. teachers		M.A. teachers		*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	*d*
	M	SD	M	SD				
Text-based	3.09	0.43	2.97	0.34	1.39	82	0.16	0.30
Competence-	3.47	0.50	3.52	0.59	-	82	0.69	0.09

4.2 Correspondence between teachers' theoretical beliefs and actual practices

The pedagogical move frequencies obtained from class observations (Table 5) indicate both B.A. and M.A. teachers' proclivity toward text-based reading instruction, a trend that is in sharp contrast with their positive attitude toward competence-based theoretical orientation. In fact, while analyzing the data gleaned through TORI demonstrated that both groups of teachers scored considerably higher in competence-based orientation, their actual classroom practices simply proved the opposite. In addition, the results of within-group chi-square tests showed that this difference in favor of text-based orientation in instructors' performance was statistically measurable in the case of B.A. teachers ($\chi^2 = 6.25$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$). Considering M.A. teachers, however, the higher disposition to text-based orientation failed to reach a significant level.

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Table 5
Frequency of text-based and competence-based orientated practices in B.A. and M.A. teachers' performance

	Text-based		Competence-based		Within-group chi-square
	f	%	f	%	
B.A. teachers	20	25.9	7	9.09	6.25[a]
M.A. teachers	29	37.6	21	27.27	1.28
Across-group chi-	1.65		7.00[b]		

[a] Significant at the 0.05 level
[b] Significant at the 0.01 level
Note: Percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

The across-group comparison, on the other hand, displayed that higher frequencies were registered for M.A. teachers in both text-based and competence-based instructional moves. The results of across-group chi-square analyses revealed that M.A. teachers' higher recorded frequency in instructional moves related to competence-based orientation reached a significant level ($\chi^2 = 7.00$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.01$), while the difference between the two groups was not statistically noticeable regarding text-based pedagogical moves. Since the only distinguishing factor between the two groups was attending graduate teacher education programs (or lack thereof), it can be concluded that M.A. teachers' stronger disposition to competence-based orientation in their actual classroom practices can be attributed to the influence of such programs.

The significant difference in the frequency of competence-based instructional moves between B.A. and M.A. teachers further elucidates another contradiction between their theoretical beliefs about teaching reading and real classroom practices. Indeed, teachers reported more or less similar beliefs about competence-based orientation in their responses to the relevant items of TORI. This discrepancy between verbalized beliefs and

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actual practices may give support to the idea that teachers' responses to TORI items are indicative of what they think an ideal reading class should look like rather than the way they perform in real classroom setting.

5. Discussion

Considering L2 educators' theoretical orientations toward reading instruction, the findings support the idea that both B.A. and M.A. teachers significantly favored competence-based over text-based orientation. This concurs with Karimi and Dehghani's (2016) findings, which indicated that teachers with academic TEFL certifications registered a higher mean score in competence-based orientation compared to those who did not have any university-based degree in TEFL. Although Karimi and Dehghani (2016) did not detect a significant difference between certified and uncertified teachers' beliefs, the consistent patterns observed in both studies lend support to the argument that university-based L2 teacher education programs (both B.A. and M.A.) in Iran sensitize students to competence-based orientation to reading instruction. Indeed, the authors' experience of attending and/or teaching in some of these programs and personal communication with a number of university professors confirm that university instructors tend to place greater emphasis on subjects that are in line with the principles of competence-based orientation. For example, presenting a history of various teaching methods in their Teaching Methodology course, instructors in undergraduate programs typically encourage students to adopt CLT (which promotes pair/group work and autonomous learning) in their own teaching. This massive publicity in favor of competence-based orientation to teaching reading is even more evident in graduate TEFL programs where students are exposed to highly sophisticated, state-of-the-art theoretical discussions on L2 teaching/learning.

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On the other hand, a striking finding of the current study, which is at odds with conventional wisdom, is the lack of a significant difference between B.A. and M.A. teachers with regard to their overall mean scores in competence-based theoretical orientation. In fact, given that a larger bulk of graduate university programs is devoted to the presentation of recent theories in L2 teaching/learning (in comparison with the general focus on both old and new theories in undergraduate programs), the researchers assumed that M.A. teachers would cultivate a significantly stronger tendency toward competence-based orientation compared to their B.A. counterparts. To justify this unforeseen finding, it appears that there is a threshold for tilting the balance of reading theoretical orientation toward competence-based teaching and, insofar as this threshold is crossed by coursework in B.A. and M.A. TEFL programs, the student teachers begin to embrace competence-based orientation. If so, the inclusion of further discussions in support of competence-based orientation will not measurably enhance student teachers' theoretical support for this orientation type. Demarcating the borders of this threshold is beyond the scope of the present study and needs further investigation.

In addition to this hypothetical threshold, B.A. and M.A. teachers' equally heightened recognition of competence-based theoretical orientation to reading instruction may be attributed to the influence of university professors' favorable attitude toward this orientation type. More specifically, against the backdrop of the other-oriented nature of non-western cultures (Kim & Park, 2006), Iranian B.A. and M.A. student teachers tend to give maximal weight to the ideas propagated by their instructors. Inasmuch as university professors encourage the use of competence-based approaches to reading instruction in both undergraduate and graduate programs, B.A. and M.A. student teachers will uniformly accede to this orientation type.

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Analyzing the observed teachers' actual classroom performance highlighted compelling misalignment between instructors' theoretical orientations to and practices in reading instruction. Although the findings in this regard are in contrast with the results obtained in a few previous studies on reading instruction (Johnson, 1992; Lau, 2007; Lü and Lavadenz, 2014), they are corroborated by the majority of researches reporting partial or no correspondence between L2 reading teachers' theoretical beliefs and practices (Farrell & Ives, 2015; Garden, 1996; Karimi et al., 2016; Karimi & Dehghani, 2016). Following Basturkmen (2012), a major source of conflict in the findings of studies which have demonstrated correspondence (or lack thereof) between teachers' beliefs and practices is the research method they have adopted for data collection. Most of the studies that have reported abundant congruity between teachers' beliefs and practices have either used self-report instruments to measure both dimensions (e.g. Lau, 2007; Lü & Lavadenz, 2014) or observed teachers who wholeheartedly subscribed to a particular reading instructional orientation (e.g. Johnson, 1992). Partial or no belief-practice correspondence has been documented in approximately all the other studies that have utilized more objective procedures for measuring L2 reading teachers' beliefs and practices.

In the current study, two spheres of dissociation between the participating teachers' theoretical orientations to and practices in teaching reading deserve special treatment. First, despite their positive disposition toward competence-based theoretical orientation, both B.A. and M.A. teachers substantially used reading pedagogical techniques conforming to text-based orientation to reading instruction. Although the frequency differences between text-based and competence-based practical orientations reached a significant level only among B.A. teachers, the sharp contrast between what the respondents reported as their theoretical beliefs and what they acted out in classroom settings was remarkable in both groups,

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especially given the established educational policies of the language institutes where the observed teachers worked encouraged them to use competence-based teaching techniques.

This discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and practices may be interpreted as a sign of the relative ineffectiveness of undergraduate and graduate L2 teacher education programs in fostering required changes in student teachers' pedagogical behavior. In particular, both B.A. and M.A. L2 teacher education courses in Iran are offered by university professors who have little (if any) contact with the L2 teaching context outside academia. This has led to excessive emphasis on theoretical coursework at the expense of neglecting the value of clinical experience, a common predicament undermining the effectiveness of teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006, 2012). The vital impact of tight coherence between theoretical coursework and student teaching experience has also been echoed by Scales et al. (2018), who demonstrated that L1 literacy teachers' professional judgment largely originated from their supervised clinical experience in schools rather than theoretical coursework. In a recent study, Gholami and Qurbanzada (2016) further showed that both pre-service and in-service Iranian L2 teachers favor the inclusion of more practice-based courses (e.g. practice teaching, micro teaching, and real classroom observations) in teacher education programs on the account that they help teachers gain a better understanding of teaching possibilities and hurdles.

The conviction about the efficacy of clinical teaching experience during formal training is also strengthened by the second thought-provoking discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and practices, i.e. the significant frequency difference between B.A. and M.A. teachers' resort to competence-based teaching techniques in favor of the latter group (as opposed to no measurable difference recorded between the two groups' theoretical beliefs). In many graduate teacher education programs, M.A.

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student teachers are required to pass a practicum course in which they have opportunities to be involved in practice teaching and/or real classroom observations. This coursework, which is absent from undergraduate programs, gives M.A. teachers a competitive edge in that they are more likely (than their B.A. counterparts) to be exposed to classroom realities, hence discovering how to translate their competence-based theoretical orientation to pedagogical practices. In addition, the majority of M.A. student teachers enter the teaching profession during or prior to their graduate studies (hence, their slightly higher overall teaching experience in Table 1). They are thus constantly involved in comparing their beliefs about reading instruction (which is informed by university courses) with their actual teaching practices, leading to the formation of a more realistic association between the two domains. On the contrary, being deprived of such teaching experiences, B.A. teachers tend to rely on the latest L2 teaching/learning trends while self-reporting their beliefs about reading instruction, but cannot completely materialize their theoretical orientations in the face of classroom realities.

Finally, we should sound a note of caution in interpreting the meager correspondence between the participating teachers' beliefs about and practices in reading instruction. As Basturkmen (2012) posits, a larger degree of belief-practice congruity is observed among seasoned teachers on the grounds that shifts in beliefs precede changes in practice and further work experience is required for beliefs to be fully embedded in practices. In the current study, given that data were collected solely from inexperienced teachers, it is likely that the participants did not have ample practice opportunities to solidify their theoretical principles.

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6. Conclusion

The findings of this study implicate that the inclusion of a finite number of theoretical coursework appropriately serves the goal of swaying L2 teachers to sanction competence-based orientation to reading instruction. In order to promote the symbiotic relationship between teachers' beliefs about and practices in reading instruction, however, L2 teacher educators need to cease their overemphasis on paper-and-pencil tests by embracing a more clinical approach to measuring student teachers' skills. The importance of striking a balance between theory and practice is also expressed by Schneider (in press) in his account of the historical development of teacher preparation programs. In so doing, teacher educators should present a more context-specific training to match teacher applicants' skills with work tasks. Perhaps, a viable solution is forging partnership with language institutes/schools, so that student teachers are required to spend a decent portion of their teacher education experience in real classroom settings. Along the same vein, mentoring ties can be developed between student teachers and veteran instructors to discuss the pedagogical potentials of teacher applicants' newly developed beliefs. Following clinical teaching sessions, student teachers may also be involved in group reflection, where they share their experiences and examine the possibility of implementing their theoretical orientations.

To pinpoint the influence of teacher education on L2 reading teachers' beliefs/practices, we had to control a number of variables, signifying that care must be exercised in generalizing the findings to other groups of L2 teachers. For example, data were collected only from novice teachers with less than three years of teaching experience. It is recommended that future research should be undertaken to study the impact of teacher education on seasoned L2 teachers' reading instructional beliefs/practices. To do so, on-the-job training programs can be presented with special focus on the two

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dominant orientation types to reading instruction (i.e. text-based versus competence-based), followed by assessing their role in reshaping veteran teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. Considering the observed classrooms, the current study was also confined to teachers of students with intermediate English proficiency. Further work needs to be performed to explore how L2 teachers act out their reading instructional beliefs (informed by teacher education programs) while teaching students of other proficiency levels. Finally, we concentrated on the effect of L2 teacher education programs presented by universities in Iran. Interested researchers are advised to broaden the understanding of the role of formal training in molding L2 reading teachers' instructional beliefs/practices by focusing on other teacher education programs across the world, especially the ones in which more attention is being directed to practice-based courses.

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