Contextual and Educational Dimensions of EFL Teacher Engagement in Second Language Acquisition Research

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Abstract: This mixed methods study investigated the contextual and educational dimensions of engaging language teachers in second language acquisition (SLA) theory and research to inform second language pedagogy. To this end, 132 Iranian English teachers completed the questionnaire designed by Nassaji (2012) that includes both Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. The participants had academic degrees in majors related to English language. They constituted two groups of public sector (n=66) and private sector (n=66). Each group was divided in two sub-groups, one with Bachelors of Arts (B.A.) and the other with Master of Arts (M.A.). Quantitative data analyses revealed a significant difference between the perceptions of the participants of public and private sector with B.A and M.A. degrees towards the relevance and usefulness of SLA research, the role of teachers and researchers, and perceiving teacher as researcher. Moreover, analyzing the open-ended questions revealed instances of attitudes, motivations, and challenges experienced by the participants reflecting the need to use SLA theory and conduct research to enrich pedagogical practices, ability to conduct research, access, understanding research articles, and dealing with institutional constraints. The findings have implications for policy makers to encourage practice-oriented research courses and research-oriented practicums across both contexts of public and private sectors.

Keywords: Teacher research, Research engagement, SLA Research

Introduction

The contemporary literature on second language pedagogy emphasizes teachers' professional growth through engaging language teachers in reconciling SLA theory and research with language pedagogy (Borg, 2010, 2015; Lyster, 2019; Nassaji, 2012, 2018). This burgeoning body of literature witnesses long-held debates addressing the divide between SLA theory and second language pedagogy reflecting lack of attention to teacher research (e.g. Borg, 2007, 2009, 2015; Borg & Sanchez, 2015; Çelik, & Dikilitaş, 2015; Lyster, 2019; Marsden & Kasprowicz, 2017; Mehrani, 2015, 2016; Tavakoli, 2015; Yuan, Sun, & Teng, 2016). These debates result in what Yuan et al. (2016), among others, refer to as the necessity of "a teacher research movement" (p. 220) in the field of English language teaching (ELT), including English as a

second language (ESL), English as a foreign language (EFL), and English as an international language (EIL). In addition, the effects of the context of teaching on the instances and quality of this engagement have received scholarly attention (e.g. Celik & Dikilitaş, 2015; Mehrani, 2015, 2016; Nassaji, 2018; Vinogradov, 2015; Yuan et al., 2016). However, Borg and Sanchez (2015) highlight the role of academic education while they criticize the instructional teacher research programs because they primarily focus on university courses than school teachers.

In spite of the consensus on the importance of encouraging engagement in teacher research as informed by SLA theory (e.g. Borg, 2010, 2015; Nassaji, 2012), the related literature reflects a paucity of endeavors to encompass both contextual and educational factors as two interrelated variables influencing teacher research status nationally and internationally (e.g. Mehrani, 2015, 2016; Vinogradov, 2015; Yuan et al., 2016; Yucel & Bos, 2015). Highlighting the need for further research on Iranian EFL teachers' research engagement, Mehrani (2016) suggests that the contextual differences in the curricular and administrative constraints among the private sector (i.e. private language institutes) and formal public education (i.e. schooling system provided by the Ministry of Education) in Iran need to be taken into consideration. According to him, these variations tend to result in the discrepancies in the instances and quality of teacher research engagement, knowledge, and motivation. Although Mehrani (2015, 2016) studied Iranian EFL teachers' perception and motivations regarding research engagement, in spite of his suggestions, he did not differentiate differences across contexts and formal education. Thus, given the scarcity of research in this area in Iran, and considering the importance of context of instruction (i.e. public versus private sector) and formal education (i.e. academic degree) in teacher research engagement, this line of research calls for further scholarly endeavor on the interconnection of these two areas in Iran as an EFL context.

Review of Literature
Teacher Research

Teacher research is briefly defined by Borg and Sanchez (2015) as a "systematic self-study by teachers (individually or collaboratively) which seeks to achieve real-world impact of some kind and is made public" (p. 1). They differentiate teacher research from teacher reflection by emphasizing on the making the result public. In addition, to prevent the overlaps existing in the definitions provided by other scholars, they state that action research is a type of "teacher research which is typically defined by repeated cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection through which changes to practice are evaluated" (p. 2). To investigate the extent and quality of research engagement among English language teachers, Borg (2007) conducted a mixed-method survey through responding to questionnaire and interviews. The results indicated teachers' moderate levels in reading and conducting research based on their "conceptions of research and their perceptions of the institutional research culture" (p. 731). In this study, as well as in his next study (Borg, 2009), he elaborated on the obstacles affecting research feasibility and teachers' attitude towards and knowledge and skills in conducting and understanding research. These obstacles mainly included lack of time and interest, difficulty of language of research articles, and impracticality of research findings in classroom.

Contributing to this line of research, Nassaji (2012) highlighted the role of ELT teachers' knowledge of SLA theory and integrating this knowledge with their pedagogical practices through conducting research and implementing findings to their pedagogical practices. More specifically, he addressed the role of context of instruction (ESL versus EFL) in teachers'

research and practice. This study was carried out through responses of 201 EFL and ESL teachers to a written questionnaire, with both Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. The findings indicated that the majority of the teachers of the two groups believed in the usefulness of their knowledge about SLA theory and its application to their pedagogical practices. Meanwhile, many mentioned that they gain most of their pedagogical knowledge from their classroom practices rather than their theoretical knowledge. Another consensus among the majority of the participants was that although they could easily access to research articles and journals, "lack of time, difficulty of research articles, and lack of interest" (p. 337) prevented them from engaging in reading and conducting SLA research.

Another attempt to investigate language teachers' beliefs and perceptions regarding the link between SLA research and pedagogical practices was carried out by Tavakoli and Howard (2012). The findings indicated that the teachers maintained a positive attitude towards second language research; however, in practice, they were "mainly skeptical about the practicality and relevance of L2 research" (p. 229). In addition, the teachers regarded pedagogical practices as a start point for SLA research and believed that teacher training courses are responsible for strengthening the gap between the theory and practice. Subsequently, Tavakoli (2015) further studied language teachers' views about their engagement in SLA research and its relationship with language pedagogy. This study was informed by community of practice (CoP) as the conceptual framework, and its findings revealed that the teachers realize SLA research and second language teaching as two separate "CoPs, and attribute the divide to the limited mutual engagement, absence of a joint enterprise, and lack of a shared repertoire between them" (p. 37). They suggested that to bring these two communities close to each other, "[b]oundary encounters, institutionalized brokering and a more research-oriented teacher education provision" (p. 37) need to be taken into account.

Relatively recently, Marsden and Kasprowicz (2017) investigated the positive role of educators' engagement in SLA research. Their findings indicated limitations and barriers of educators' research, and the positive effect of the educators' indirect exposure to articles from professional journals. Moreover, Lyster (2019) conducted a study to improve teacher research through, first, engaging teachers as a team of teacher-researchers, second, involving teachers in the action research investigating the role of second language use in classrooms of other subjects, and third, instructing teachers to carry out research on the role of biliteracy instruction. The results, highlighted the positive role of cooperation between teachers and researchers as well as teachers' instruction of SLA.

The Landscape of Teacher Research in Iran

In the Iranian landscape of language pedagogy, the importance of research engagement of Iranian EFL teachers has recently received attention. Among the scarce related studies conducted in Iran Mehrani (2015) examined the extent of Iranian EFL teacher' involvement in reading and conducting research related to language pedagogy as well as the motivation to promote the extent and quality of this involvement. The results indicated a moderate level of engagement in reading and conducting research among the participants. In addition, teachers showed their motivation to engage in teacher research as a result of improving their "professional development, instrumental incentives, institutional expectations and pedagogical concerns that can promote teachers' research engagement" (Mehrani, 2015, p. 83). In another study, Mehrani (2016) investigated

Iranian EFL teachers' conceptualizations of research. These conceptualizations revealed to be linked to a mainstream standard and positivistic view towards research that perceived research as having "a priori research questions, objectives and rigorous data, a large number of participants, and the use of statistics for the analysis of results" (p. 95). In addition, teachers believed that their research results should be a solution to a pedagogical problem, applicable to the pedagogical practices, and contribute to creation of new knowledge by offering new alternatives to language pedagogy (Mehrani, 2016).

Borg (2010) in a comprehensive review of teacher research literature criticizes the language teachers' naiveté in choosing methodology, in reporting the results, and in generalizing these results on the part of the teachers who have not yet received sufficient education in this regard. In addition, Borg (2007) remarks that while "more informed use of and involvement in research by teachers can enhance the quality of education" (p. 731), this research engagement stems from academic and educational background and instruction related to the research courses they had received. It should be mentioned that in Iran, undergraduate programs provide students with research courses to learn the basic theoretical concepts of research and conduct research in a limited scope. However, graduate and postgraduate programs actively involve students in doing research through conducting research-based term projects and theses. In addition, research articles constitute important sources of reading as course materials and sources for projects and theses.

To date, however, the extensive search of literature for endeavors on the role of formal education or academic degree in EFL teachers' research engagement, as well as the context of instruction (i.e. private sector versus public schooling system) indicates insufficient, if any, attempt in this respect. To bridge this gap, this research investigated the variations between contextual factors in tandem with the variations in academic degree as an indicative of theoretical knowledge gained from academic and formal education. Thus, this study draws upon the patterns of teacher research engagement among teachers working for language institutes and the school teachers i.e. teachers working for the Ministry of Education (MoE). It is an attempt to shed light on the variations in research engagement as well as the motivations, challenges, and barriers influencing the instances and quality of teacher research engagement across contexts and educational background. In this study, the following research questions guide the procedures:

1. What are the differences between institute teachers and MoE teachers with B.A. and M.A. degrees in terms of familiarity with SLA theory and research?
2. How easily do institute teachers and MoE teachers with B.A. and M.A. degrees access and consult SLA theory and research?
3. To what extent do institute teachers and MoE teachers with B.A. and M.A. degrees read sources related to SLA theory and research?
4. What are the judgement of institute teachers and MoE teachers with B.A. and M.A. degrees regarding teachers' research engagement?
5. What are the expectations of institute teachers and MoE teachers with B.A. and M.A. degrees of SLA theory and research?

It should be mentioned that since in this study the questionnaire by Nassaji (2012) was used as the instrument, the research questions are close to Nassaji's (2012) research questions. However, the research questions are in line with the purpose of the study, and their content differs based on the changes in the independent variables.

Methods
Participants

The participants of this study included 132 Iranian EFL teachers selected based on convenience sampling. They consisted of 66 school teachers (henceforth MoE teachers) and 66 teachers of private sector (henceforth institute teachers). Each group was divided into two sub-groups of B.A. teachers and M.A. teachers consisting of 33 teachers (Henceforth referred to as B.A. MoE teachers, M.A. MoE teachers, B.A. institute teachers, and M.A. institute teachers). All participants held degrees in majors related to ELT including English language and literature, English translation, teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), and linguistics. They included both male and female, ranged between 22 to 48 years of age, and their length of English teaching experience ranged from 1 year to 23 years.

Instrumentation

The Nassaji's (2012) questionnaire on language teachers' perspectives about SLA research was used. This questionnaire includes both Likert-scale items and open-ended questions across the 5 following sections.

Section A, includes demography. This section was slightly modified to elicit information not addressed in Nassaji's (2012) questionnaire. These included the context of instruction and the educational background of the participants. No other modification was applied in other sections.

Section B incorporates seven questions addressing the teachers' formal familiarity with SLA research. These questions investigate (1) the extent the participants find SLA research courses useful, (2) their experience in conducting SLA research, (3) the obstacles which have probably prevented them from conducting SLA research, (4) the ease of access to research articles, (5) their experience in publishing articles on SLA research, (6) their institutes' (or schools') support, and (7) their use of research findings.

Section C includes twelve 6-level Likert-scale items, addressing the participants' perceptions of the usefulness and relevance of SLA research to language pedagogy, the relationship between teachers and researchers, and seeing teachers as researchers.

Section D includes 5 questions encompassing the participants' views about the usefulness of reading SLA research for classroom, their experience of reading articles on SLA teachers, the relevance of information provided by them, the possible reasons behind finding SLA research useless, the sources of information they may consult to learn about pedagogical issues, and names of major journals of the field they may refer to.

Section E includes two open-ended questions, which address the teachers' expectations of what they learn from SLA research.

Design

The questionnaire (Nassaji, 2012) simultaneously involves the respondents in answering to both Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. Thus, this study used the parallel mixed methods design, which according to Clark and Creswell (2015)

is a set of procedures that researchers use to concurrently collect both quantitative and qualitative data, analyze the two datasets separately, compare and/or synthesize the two sets of separate results, and make an overall interpretation as to the extent to which the separate results confirm and/or complement each other. (p. 392)

Procedures and Data Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed among 355 Iranian EFL teachers. Since the assumption for data collection and analysis was having equal number of questionnaires in each sub-group, effort was made to distribute the questionnaires equally across institutes and schools and among teachers with B.A. and M.A within these contexts. From among the 154 received responses, after identifying and excluding the 19 incomplete responses, the 3 questionnaires (2 from B.A. institute teachers and 1 from B.A. MoE teachers) were randomly excluded to have equal number of questionnaires in each sub-group. Thus, 132 responses were analyzed (33 responses in each sub-group).

Accordingly, the questionnaires were grouped based on the information adopted from Section A. In section B, the Likert-scale items were descriptively analyzed based on the frequency of answers of each group, and the open-ended questions were qualitatively analyzed. With regard to Section C, Likert-scale items were scored and then analyzed through performing Two-way ANOVA tests. This test is performed to measure the main effect of each and the interaction between two or more categorical independent variables on a continuous dependent variable (Creswell, 2003). Accordingly, the contexts of language instruction (i.e. school and institute) and the educational background (i.e. B.A. and M.A. degrees) constituted the independent variables, and the scores measured from quantitative items represented the dependent variable. The analysis of Section D, due to the similarity of the items with Section B, were similar to this section. Finally, the two open-ended questions of Section E were analyzed qualitatively.

Results and Discussion
Familiarity with SLA Research

The first research question addresses the participants' familiarity with SLA theory and research as well as having the experience of conducting SLA research and publishing research articles. Frequency and percentages of the answers to the corresponding questions provided answer to this question. The results are summarized in Tab. 1.

	Groups	Sub-groups	Yes	NO	Total Yes Responses
Courses Taken in SLA Theories	MoE Teachers	B.A.	33 (100%)	0	127 (96%)
		M.A.	33 (100%)	0	
	Institute Teachers	B.A.	28 (85%)	5 (15%)	
		M.A.	33 (100%)	0	
Courses Taken in SLA Research Methods	MoE Teachers	B.A.	33 (100%)	0	127 (96%)
		M.A.	33 (100%)	0	
	Institute Teachers	B.A.	28 (85%)	5 (15%)	

		M.A.	33 (100%)	0	
Conducting Research	MoE Teachers	B.A.	2 (6%)	31 (94%)	72 (54%)
		M.A.	33 (100%)	0	
	Institute Teachers	B.A.	4 (12%)	29 (88%)	
		M.A.	33 (100%)	0	
Publishing Research	MoE Teachers	B.A.	2 (6%)	31(94%)	24 (18%)
		M.A.	7 (21%)	26 (79%)	
	Institute Teachers	B.A.	1(3%)	32 (97%)	
		M.A.	14 (42%)	19 (57%)	

Table 1: Teachers' Familiarity with SLA Research across Groups and Sub-groups

Note: Since the percentages have been rounded up, they may not add up to 100 for all items.

As indicated in Tab. 1, 96% of the participants have participated in both SLA theory and research courses. This is due to the fact the national curriculum in Iran provides courses of teaching methodology, testing, and linguistics at both B.A. and M.A. levels, and in these courses concepts related to the SLA theories are also dealt with. In open-ended questions, the participants who reported they had not attended such courses, mentioned that they could not remember attending these courses in their education because it belonged to more than two decades ago.

With regard to conducting research, all of the M.A. teachers reported they have already conducted research; however, only 2 B.A. MoE teachers and 4 B.A. institute teachers reported they had conducted SLA research. This is due to the research-based nature of curriculum of M.A. programs which entails conducting at least one research project as thesis for program completion.

In case the participants answered they had not conducted research, they would be asked about the reason. Tab. 2 summarizes the reasons reported by each sub-group. Since all M.A. teachers in both contexts indicated they had already conducted SLA research, Tab. 2 only includes B.A. teachers.

	Groups	**Total**
I don't have time to do research.	B.A. MoE Teachers	16 (48%)
	B.A. Institute Teachers	15 (45%)
I don't have the ability to do research.	B.A. MoE Teachers	25 (75%)
	B.A. Institute Teachers	25 (75%)
I am not interested in doing research.	B.A. MoE Teachers	21 (63%)
	B.A. Institute Teachers	23 (69%)
I think research is not needed.	B.A. MoE Teachers	22 (66%)
	B.A. Institute Teachers	11 (33%)
Second language acquisition research is not very useful for language teaching purposes.	B.A. MoE Teachers	17 (51%)
	B.A. Institute Teachers	22 (66%)

Table 2: The Reasons for Not Conducting SLA Research

According to Tab. 2, there are similar patterns among the responses of the two groups regarding lack of time, ability, and interest as obstacles for conducting research. However, the perspectives towards the necessity and usefulness of research revealed a different pattern. Accordingly, 22 (66%) B.A. MoE teachers versus 11(33%) B.A. institute teachers indicated that research is not needed. This result, which shows MoE teachers consider it unnecessary about twice more than their institute ones, may indicate that the fixed curriculum and syllabus of schools did not leave room for teachers to see the necessity of research in their context. On the other hand, slightly more B.A. institute teachers (66%) as compared to B.A. MoE teachers (51%) did not admit the usefulness of SLA research for language teaching purposes.

In the other open-ended questions addressing research experience, M.A. teacher of both groups remarked that they had conducted research as a part of their higher education requirements, but they expressed more interest in conducting research independently. This indicated concerns of M.A. teachers of both MoE and institute contexts for improving their teaching through using results of SLA research. In contrast, the answers of B.A. teachers of both contexts revealed their perceived problems, in addition to what is mentioned in Tab. 2, as difficulty of texts, lack of facilities, and lack of motivation. Some examples are provided below.

"It is not my job; there is no place for it." (B.A. Institute Teachers)
"I don't need to do that and no one asks me to do." (B.A. Institute Teachers)
"I am not required and paid to do it." (B.A. MoE Teachers)
"I can't afford it. Research is a luxury." (B.A. MoE Teachers)

Publishing research was another point answered by the participants. Although only 24 (18%) of the participants reported that they had published research articles, the 21 (16%) M.A. teachers outnumber the 3 (2%) B.A. teachers. Although the push to publish is increasing in higher education programs, the number of those who have publications constitutes only 18% of the whole participants. Answers to the open-ended questions indicated the participants' lack of time and interest in publishing articles, the long process of publication, and the publication fee in some journals as reasons for the low rate of their publication.

These results were in line with the studies supporting research courses to engage teachers in SLA research (e.g. Borg & Sanchez, 2015; Lyster, 2019; Marsden & Kasprowicz, 2017; Vinogradov, 2015; Yuan et al., 2016; Yucel & Bos, 2015). For instance, Yucel and Bos (2015) emphasize that engaging in research provides a source of self-reflection and awareness, thus, it is indispensable for teachers to be familiar with knowledge and skills of research. Although the factor affecting research engagement aligned with Mehrani (2015), Nassaji (2012), and Tavakoli and Howard (2012), these studies did not differentiate between educational background (B.A. vs. M.A.) and context (institution vs. MoE). In this study, however, the variations of answers among the groups reflected that graduate degrees engage teachers with research and increase their awareness of its importance across both contexts. However, lower degrees of research engagement in undergraduate degrees reveals to be the result of obstacles, including lack of ability, motivation, and interest alongside lack of time among B.A. teachers. More specifically, whereas it seems that lack of motivation from institutes has made B.A. teachers unaware of the usefulness of SLA research, lack of budgets and research funds at schools as well as the fixed curriculum have rendered B.A. MoE teachers unaware of its necessity.

Accessibility of Sources and Support

The second research question examined the accessibility of sources of SLA theory and research as well as the support teachers received from their institute or school for conducting research. Analyzing Section D provided answer to this research question. Tab. 3 tabulates the accessibility of the research articles and other related sources for the participants.

	Groups	Sub-groups	Yes	NO	Total Access
Ease of Access	MoE Teachers	B.A.	15 (45%)	17 (51%)	90 (68%)
		M.A.	25 (75%)	8 (24%)	
	Institute Teachers	B.A.	19 (57%)	15 (45%)	
		M.A.	31 (93%)	2 (.6%)	

Table 3: Accessibility of the Sources of SLA Research

As shown in Tab. 3, ninety (68%) participants indicated that they can easily access these sources. This included 45% of B.A. MoE teachers, 75% of M.A. MoE teachers, 57% of B.A. institute teachers, and 93% of M.A. institute teachers. Comparing the results indicates a higher degree of accessibility to SLA research sources among M.A teachers across both contexts. The answers to the open-ended questions also supported this result. Whereas the M.A. teachers reported ease of access to sources, B.A. teachers primarily mentioned difficulty and lack of interest in approaching sources of SLA research. In addition, the institute teachers both at B.A. and M.A. groups revealed to have easier access than their MoE counterparts. According to the answers to the open-ended questions, their curriculum-oriented job description and lack of research funds constituted major obstacles. The participants also were asked to explain the sources they consulted to reach SLA theory and research to enrich their teaching. The reported sources are illustrated in Tab. 4. The percentages are based on the number of the participants who reported their access to SLA sources also indicated in Tab. 3.

Sources	MoE Teachers		Institute Teachers	
	B.A.	**M.A.**	**B.A.**	**M.A.**
Books	15 (100%)	25 (100%)	19 (100%)	31 (100%)
Internet	15 (100%)	25 (100%)	19 (100%)	31 (100%)
Journals	15 (100%)	25 (100%)	12 (63%)	31 (100%)
Online Books	4 (26%)	25 (100%)	15 (78%)	25 (80%)
Online Journals	5 (33%)	21 (84%)	7 (37%)	24 (77%)
Instructional Videos and Films	11 (73%)	13 (52%)	19 (100%)	17 (55%)
Discussion with Experts	4 (26%)	19 (76%)	13 (68%)	17 (55%)
Discussion with Colleagues	3 (20%)	25 (100%)	19 (100%)	31 (100%)
In-service Courses Held by School or Institute	7 (46%)	21 (84%)	9 (47%)	13 (42%)

Table 4: Sources that the Participants Consult to Find about SLA Research

As shown in Tab. 4, of the participants who answered this question, books (100%) and the Internet (100%), journals (100%), and discussion with colleagues (100%), followed by online books and online journals constitute the most frequently reported available sources of access. Although the reported sources followed approximately a similar pattern as the sources reported in Nassaji's (2012) total result (ESL vs. EFL), in this study (Iranian EFL teachers), M.A. teachers of the two contexts reported higher access, and institute teachers appeared to have more

access to sources than MoE teachers. In addition to the result of Nassaji (2012), the participants also reported consulting experts, using instructional video sources, and attending in-service courses. More specifically, across the two contexts, instructional videos revealed to be more accessible and useful among B.A. teachers, which could be due to the ease of understanding the content. Besides, B.A. teachers revealed their attention to in-service training as a venue for accessing sources along with improving their knowledge. These results matched with the suggestions of Nassaji (2012), Marsden and Kasprowicz (2017), and Mehrani (2015) to encourage educators to introduce more resources and provide teachers with facilities to gain access to resources for using SLA theory and research to inform their language pedagogy.

Reading Sources of SLA Research

In the third research question, the participants' tendency to read sources related to SLA research (e.g. research articles, books, websites, videos, etc.) were examined. Like the previous research question, Section D provided data for this question. In case the answers indicated that participants rarely or never read these sources, they were asked to elaborate on their reasons. Accordingly, 26 (78%) B.A. institute teachers, 10 (30%) of M.A. institute teachers, 20 (60%) B.A. MoE teachers, and 19 (57%) M.A. MoE teachers reported that they rarely or never read research articles. The reasons reflected in their answers are summarized in Tab. 5 below.

Reasons	MoE Teachers		Institute Teachers	
	B.A.	**M.A.**	**B.A.**	**M.A.**
I don't have time.	8 (40%)	19 (100%)	8 (31%)	10 (100%)
Research articles are very difficult to read and understand.	19 (95%)	8 (42%)	26 (100%)	3 (30%)
I cannot easily access them.	9 (45%)	16 (84%)	11 (42%)	1 (10%)
I am not interested in reading them.	13 (65%)	11 (58%)	18 (69%)	10 (100%)
I do not find them very useful to read.	19 (95%)	18 (95%)	21 (80%)	9 (90%)
Total	20 (100%)	19 (100%)	26 (100%)	10 (100%)

Table 5: The Reasons of Lack of Interest in Reading SLA Sources

As shown in Tab. 5, various reasons were reported across the participants' academic degrees. As such, M.A. teachers of both groups represented lack of time (100% and 100%), lack of usefulness (95% and 90%), and lack of interest (58% and 95%) as their major reasons for not reading sources of SLA research. However, B.A teachers reported difficulty of sources (95% and 100%), lack of usefulness (95% and 90%), and lack of interest (65% and 69%) as their major reasons. This indicates that both B.A. and M.A. teachers share the concerns for lack of usefulness of and interest in reading SLA research sources. More specifically, institute teachers reported less interest and attributed less usefulness to reading these sources. However, as a major reason, lack of time prevents M.A. teachers of both institute and MoE teachers from reading these sources while the major obstacle for B.A. teachers of both contexts, especially MoE teachers revealed to be difficulty of the research sources. Like M.A. teachers, B.A. MoE teachers expressed slightly more interest in and ascribed less usefulness to reading sources of SLA research. Probably the limitations caused by fixed curriculum (see 5.2, Tab. 3) and the insufficient access to the SLA sources (see 5.2, Tab. 4) have demotivated MoE teachers from reading sources of SLA research.

With respect to the support that the teachers may receive from their context of teaching, 3 (100%) of B.A MoE teachers and 26 (79%) M.A. MoE teachers mentioned that they did not receive support from their schools. One MoE teacher added in the open-ended question that *"they ask us to fill questionnaire for other researchers. But they want us to do what they say not to take time of class for research."* In addition, 25 (75%) B.A. institute teachers and 23 (70%) M.A. institute teachers said that they do not receive support from their institute to do research. In elaborating on this limited support, the teachers who reported they received support from their institutes or schools, in open-ended questions mentioned they receive permission to observe classes, interviewing students, and applying new methodologies in their classes as examples. In an open-ended question, an institute teacher mentioned: *"We are sometimes allowed to give questionnaires to colleagues and interview them."*

These results shed light on the reasons behind lack of teachers' willingness to read research articles and other sources related to SLA theory and research. This can probably highlight the role of contextual limitations to engage in research, which constituted one of the major reasons that influenced the role of education and research courses. In addition, the teachers' tendency to consult SLA resources, especially among M.A. teachers, indicated their familiarity with the subjects of study and their educational and professional needs. For instance, when the participants were asked about the name of the journals they studied from among the provided list (item 5, Section D), the M.A. teachers of both groups selected well-known and prestigious journals of the field at the international level (e.g. TESOL Quarterly, The Modern Language Journal, etc.) whereas only a few B.A. teachers selected them. Instead, among MoE teachers, Roshd Journal (the journal published by the Ministry of Education) was more frequently reported to be accessed and studied. Moreover, among B.A. teachers, many mentioned Roshd Journal and reported they study other Iranian journals mainly in Persian language. This indicates role of the context of instruction in selection of the appropriate source of study, which implies the need for educators to attract teachers' attention to the sources related to their context and introduce different sources at international level. Contextual factors enriching teacher research engagement is also supported by Vinogradov (2015) who maintains "to improve our classroom practice … [m]oving out of our comfort zone allows for new ways of thinking" (p. 71).

Judging the Role of Teachers and Researchers

The fourth research question attested the potential differences between familiarities of the teachers with the role of teachers in SLA research. To find answer to this research question, responses to Section C were analyzed. This section consists of twelve 6-level Likert-scale items with their answers ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Similar to Nassaji (2012), this sections examined three themes including the teachers' views about the usefulness and relevance of SLA research to language pedagogy (items 8, 9, 11, and 12), views about the relationship between teachers and researchers (items 1,4,5,6, and 7), and views about seeing teachers as researchers (items 2, 3, and 10). These themes are addressed in the following sub-sections, and finally, an overall comparison between these perspectives elaborate on the effects of context, educational background, and their interaction.

Usefulness and Relevance of SLA Research to Language pedagogy

One of the instances of teachers' judgement encompassed the relevance and usefulness of SLA research for classroom teaching. To this end, the participants' answers to four 6-level Likert-scale questions in Section C (items 8, 9, 11, and 12) were analyzed. Tab. 6 summarizes the teachers' answers across groups and sub-groups.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
a) Knowing about second language acquisition research improves second language teaching practice.							
MoE Teachers	B. A.	0	3 (9%)	16 (48%)	9 (27%)	5 (15%)	0
	M.A.	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	4 (12%)	8 (24%)	11 (33%)	8 (24%)
Institute Teachers	B. A.	0	0	7 (21%)	6 (18%)	15 (45%)	5 (15%)
	M.A.	0	0	0	4 (12%)	17 (51%)	12 (36%)
Total (132)		1 (.7%)	4 (3%)	27 (20%)	27 (20%)	48 (36%)	25 (19%)
b) Second language acquisition research is not relevant to language teaching.							
	B. A.	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	11 (33%)	15 (45%)	4 (12%)	1 (3%)
MoE Teachers	M.A.	8 (24%)	11 (33%)	9 (27%)	5 (15%)	0	0
Institute Teachers	B. A.	10 (30%)	8 (24%)	7 (21%)	6 (18%)	2 (6%)	0
	M.A.	6 (18%)	21 (63%)	4 (12%)	2 (6%)	0	0
Total (132)		25 (19%)	41 (31%)	31 (23%)	28 (21%)	6 (5%)	1 (.7%)
c) Second language acquisition research provides teachers with practical suggestions for improving second language instruction.							
	B. A.	0	4 (12%)	16 (48%)	11 (33%)	2 (6%)	0
MoE Teachers	M.A.	0	3 (9%)	6 (18%)	5 (15%)	12 (36%)	7 (21%)
Institute Teachers	B. A.	0	0	4 (12%)	12 (36%)	14 (42%)	3 (9%)
	M.A.	0	0	2 (6%)	4 (12%)	18 (54%)	9 (27%)
Total (132)		0	7 (5%)	26 (20%)	32 (24%)	46 (35%)	19 (57%)
d) The knowledge I gain from teaching experience is more relevant to my teaching than the knowledge I gain from second language acquisition research.							
	B. A.	0	0	4 (12%)	3 (9%)	16 (48%)	10 (30%)
MoE Teachers	M.A.	3 (9%)	10 (30%)	9 (27%)	7 (21%)	3 (9%)	1 (3%)

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Institute Teachers	B. A.	1 (3%)	4 (12%)	3 (9%)	9 (27%)	13 (39%)	3 (9%)
	M.A.	3 (9%)	9 (27%)	6 (18%)	10 (30%)	5 (15%)	0
Total (132)		7 (5%)	23 (18%)	22 (17%)	29 (22%)	37 (28%)	14 (10%)

Table 6: Views about the Relevance of SLA Research to L2 Pedagogy

As illustrated in Tab. 6, the majority of the participants (75%) expressed their agreement to strong agreement (20% somewhat agreed, 36% agreed and 19% strongly agreed) with the positive effect of knowing about SLA research in improving pedagogical practices. This pattern was similar among M.A. teachers; however, it appeared to be different among B.A. teachers. That is, whereas B.A. institute teachers followed a pattern similar to M.A. teachers, near half of (48%) B.A. MoE teachers somewhat disagreed with this point. Similar patterns can be observed regarding the other items representing the role of education in understanding the relevance of SLA research with language pedagogy. These patterns also indicate that institute teachers at both contexts have similar ideas while B.A MoE teachers see less relevance as compared to M.A. MoE teachers. This result is consistent with the relative lack of familiarity with SLA research and the reasons expressed by teachers (see 5.1). Probably various levels of familiarity with SLA research contribute to their perceptions of the relevance of SLA research with language pedagogy.

The Relationship between Teachers and Researchers

To explore the teachers' perceptions about teacher-researcher relationship, answers to five 6-level Likert-scale statements in Section C (items 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7) were analyzed. Analysis of the answers to these items is summarized in Tab. 7.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
a) Researchers should be university professors or academics, but not teachers.							
MoE Teachers	B. A.	0	3 (9%)	5 (15%)	20 (61%)	5 (15%)	0
	M.A.	5 (15%)	15 (45%)	10 (30%)	2 (6%)	1 (3%)	0
Institute Teachers	B. A.	6 (18%)	4 (12%)	9 (27%)	11 (33%)	2 (6%)	1 (3%)
	M.A.	11 (33%)	10 (30%)	9 (27%)	3 (9%)	0	0
Total (132)		22 (17%)	32 (24%)	33 (25%)	36 (27.3%)	8 (6%)	1 (.7%)
b) Researchers should carry out research and teachers should teach.							
MoE Teachers	B. A.	0	2 (6%)	4 (125)	5 (15%)	17 (51%)	5 (15%)
	M.A.	3 (9%)	12 (36%)	7 (21%)	9 (27%)	2 (6%)	0

Institute Teachers	B. A.	0	12 (36%)	5 (15%)	7 (21%)	9 (27%)	0
	M.A.	9 (27%)	15 (45%)	5 (15%)	2 (6%)	2 (6%)	0
Total (132)		12 (9%)	41 (31%)	21 (16%)	23 (17%)	30 (23%)	5 (4%)
c) Teachers and researchers should work together.							
	B. A.	0	0	4 (12%)	17 (51%)	14 (44%)	0
MoE Teachers	M.A.	0	0	3 (9%)	11 (33%)	9 (27%)	10 (30%)
Institute Teachers	B. A.	1 (3%)	0	1 (3%)	10 (30%)	17 (51%)	4 (12%)
	M.A.	0	0	1 (3%)	4 (12%)	12 (36%)	14 (44%)
Total (132)		1 (.7%)	0	9 (7%)	42 (31%)	52 (39%)	28 (21%)
d) Researchers should consult teachers for advice on issues they want to research.							
	B. A.	0	3 (9%)	9 (27%)	8 (24%)	12 (36%)	0
MoE Teachers	M.A.	0	0	1 (3%)	10 (30%)	14 (44%)	8 (24%)
Institute Teachers	B. A.	0	1 (3%)	5 (15%)	8 (24%)	13 (39%)	5 (15%0
	M.A.	0	1 (3%)	2 (6%)	7 (21%)	13 (39%)	12 (36%)
Total (132)		0	5 (4%)	17 (13%)	33 (25%)	52 (39%)	25 (19%)
e) Teachers should consult researchers for advice on teaching and learning issues.							
	B. A.	0	0	8 (24%)	12 (36%)	13 (39%)	1 (3%)
MoE Teachers	M.A.	0	0	2 (6%)	6 (18%)	15 (45%)	9 (27%)
Institute Teachers	B. A.	0	1 (3%)	4 (12%)	11 (33%)	15 (15%)	2 (6%)
	M.A.	0	3 (9%)	0	8 (24%)	14 (44%)	8 (24%)
Total (132)		0	4 (3%)	14 (10%)	37 (28%)	57 (43%)	20 (15%)

Table 7: Views about the Relationship between Teachers and Researchers

Tab. 7 represents various patterns among the participants' perspectives towards the division between teachers and researchers. These views were not the same across groups. For instance, among the B.A. teachers, the majority (76%) of B.A MoE teachers agreed or somewhat agreed with the divide between teachers and researchers while more than half (57%) of B.A. institute teachers somewhat strongly disagreed or disagreed, and only 9% of them agreed or strongly greed that teachers should be professors and academics but not teachers. As for M.A teachers, both MoE and institute teachers showed relatively similar views. More than 90% of both disagreed to strongly disagreed with the separation of teachers and researchers. This view is reflected in the second item as well; however, the participants' views range between disagree to somewhat disagree. With regard to the other items, that is the collaboration between teachers and researchers, as shown in Tab. 7, the majority agreed to strongly agreed that teachers and

researchers should work together and provide each other with advice to inform one another's job. This result indicated the participants' perspectives towards the integration of theory and practice via a close relationship between teachers and researchers.

Seeing Teachers as Researcher

The other 3 items in Section C (items 2, 3, and 10) examined the views supporting the idea of teacher as researcher and teacher engagement with research. The views are analyzed in Tab. 8 below.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
a) A teacher should also be a researcher.							
MoE Teachers	B. A.	0	8 (24%)	16 (48%)	7 (21%)	2 (6%)	0
	M.A.	0	1 (3%)	9 (27%)	11 (33%)	7 (21%)	5 (15%)
Institute Teachers	B. A.	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	8 (25%)	13 (39%)	10 (30%)	0
	M.A.	0	2 (6%)	2 (6%)	8 (25%)	11 (33%)	10 (30%)
Total (132)		1 (.7%)	12 (9%)	35 (27%)	39 (30%)	30 (22%)	15 (11%)
b) In order to be a good teacher, you should also be a good researcher.							
	B. A.	1 (3%)	14 (42%)	11 (33%)	3 (9%)	4 (12%)	0
MoE Teachers	M.A.	1 (3%)	2 (6%)	12 (36%)	13 (39%)	5 (15%)	0
Institute Teachers	B. A.	0	3 (9%)	9 (27%)	11 (33%)	8 (24%)	2 (6%)
	M.A.	1 (3%)	2 (6%)	4 (12%)	7 (21%)	13 (39%)	6 (18%)
Total (132)		3 (2%)	21 (16^)	36 (27%)	34 (26%)	30 (22%)	8 (6%)
c) Second language acquisition research contributes to second language pedagogy.							
	B. A.	0	4 (12%)	16 (48%)	11 (33%)	2 (6%)	0
MoE Teachers	M.A.	1 (3%)	2 (6%)	12 (36%)	13 (39%)	5 (15%)	0
Institute Teachers	B. A.	0	0	4 (12%)	12 (36%)	14 (42%)	3 (9%)
	M.A.	0	0	2 (6%)	4 (12%)	18 (55%)	9 (27%)
Total (132)		1 (.7%)	6 (4.5%)	34 (26%)	40 (30%)	39 (30%)	12 (9%)

Table 8: Views about Seeing Teacher as Researcher

As shown in Tab. 8, with respect to the view that teachers should be researchers, the majority of the participants somewhat disagreed (27%), somewhat agreed (30%), and agreed (22%), and only few (11%) strongly agreed. However, examining the groups indicated that this lack of certainty is most visible among MoE teachers. More specifically, the majority (72%) of B.A. MoE teachers disagreed or somewhat disagreed whereas more than half (54%) of M.A. MoE teachers somewhat agreed or agreed. This view appeared to be similar to institute teachers, especially B.A. institute teachers (25% somewhat disagree and 69% somewhat agree to agree); however, the majority of M.A. institute teachers (94%) appeared to be more inclined with research and seeing a teacher as a researcher (25% somewhat agree, 39% agree, and 30% strongly agree).

The differences between MoE and institute teachers reflected the contextual demands and challenges in MoE context. Also indicated in the results of open-ended questions, the pre-planned curriculum and materials at schools do not leave room for teachers to engage in research to make changes in their pedagogical practices. Also they commented on the lack of fund, time, and support. Although these concerns were also expressed by institute teachers, MoE teachers reported deeper concerns. Further analyses of these items, as shown in Tab. 8, indicated a higher level of agreement among M.A. group in seeing teachers as researchers, teachers' quality of teaching due to being a good researcher, and their role in improving language pedagogy through conducting SLA research. This sheds light on the role of formal and academic education in engaging teachers with research and theory in tandem with teaching practice. This is because M.A. holders become familiar with research during their academic studying. Whereas education affected all the three areas, in this regard, Nassaji (2012) reported that there was not remarkable variations between views of teachers with graduate degrees and teachers with under graduate degrees regarding the role of SLA research to their classroom practices and the teacher-researcher relationship; however, his findings indicated "that those teachers who had undertaken graduate studies had a more favorable view of the relationship between teachers and researchers (p. 352).

The Overall Effects of Context and Educational Background

In order to arrive at an overall analysis of the participants' perspectives about the role of teachers in research, the participants were compared by performing significance tests. To this end, which is a point of departure from Nassaji (2012), the 12 Likert-scale items were scored and compared through performing test of analysis of variance, Two-way ANOVA to measure the main effect and the interaction of two categorical independent variables (education and context) on a continuous dependent variable. Thus, responses (the four sets of scores) constituted dependent variable, and context and educational background as independent variables. This analysis was based on testing the following null hypotheses:

- Level of education has no significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' perception of the role of teachers and researchers.
- Context has no significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' perception of the role of teachers and researchers.
- The interaction between context and level of education has no significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' perception of the role of teachers and researchers.

SPSS version 22 was employed for statistical analyses of the data. Prior to administration of the test, the data were checked for missing cases, outliers, extreme values, independence of cases, homogeneity of variance, and residuals' normality of distribution. Descriptive analysis of the data is tabulated in Tab. 9.

Academic Degree	Context of Instruction	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
B.A.	Institute	49.2424	5.53980	33
	MoE	39.6970	4.57223	33
	Total	44.4697	6.96634	66
M.A.	Institute	58.2121	5.72144	33
	MoE	54.0000	6.01041	33
	Total	56.1061	6.19709	66
Total	Institute	53.7273	7.18662	66
	MoE	46.8485	8.94469	66
	Total	50.2879	8.78890	132

Table 9: Descriptive Analysis across Independent Variables

To check whether the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups, Levene's test was conducted, and the non-significant result, $F(3,128)=1.203$, $p=.312$, indicated the homogeneity of the samples across education and context. Residuals revealed to be normally distributed as the normality test of Shapiro-Wilk was non-significant, $N(132)=0976$, $p=.018$. To test the effect of each independent variable as well as their interactions on the scores, Two-way ANOVA test was conducted. The results of between-subject effect tests is tabulated in Tab. 10.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	6264.515[a]	3	2088.172	69.343	.001	.619
Intercept	333810.939	1	333810.939	11085.043	.001	.989
Education	4468.364	1	4468.364	148.383	.001	.537
Context	1561.485	1	1561.485	51.853	.001	.288
Education * Context	234.667	1	234.667	7.793	.006	.057
Error	3854.545	128	30.114			
Total	343930.000	132				
Corrected Total	10119.061	131				

Table 10: Results of the Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

As shown in Tab. 10, all effects were found to be statistically significant. Accordingly, the main effect of education, $F(1,128)=148.383$, $p=.001$, showed that the participants with B.A. degree (M=44.46, SE=6.96) achieved significantly lower scores than the participants with M. degree A (M=56.1, SE=6.1). The Partial Eta Squared statistic (.537) indicates that the interaction between these two variables accounts for more than 53% of the total variance implying the leading role of education. This result rejected the first null hypothesis and indicated the role of academic degree in shaping the Iranian EFL teachers' perception of the role of teachers and researchers.

Regarding the main effect of the context, F(1,128)= 51.853, p=.001, showed that MoE teachers (M=46.84, SE=8.94) scored significantly lower scores than the institute teachers (M=53.72, SE=7.18) in terms of their perception of the role of teachers and researchers. The Partial Eta Squared statistic (.288) indicates that the interaction between these two variables accounts for more than 28% of the total variance implying the context as the second most important factor in this study. This result rejected the second null hypothesis and indicated the effect of the context of instruction on forming the Iranian EFL teachers' perception of the role of teachers and researchers.

The interaction effect, F(1.128)=7.793, p=.006, was analyzed using simple effects analysis. The statistically significant interaction revealed to be a function of the teachers with M.A. degree achieving significantly higher scores than their counter parts with B.A. degree. In addition, institute teachers scored significantly higher than MoE teachers. Although the Partial Eta Squared statistic (.057) indicates that the interaction between these two variables accounts for 5% of the total variance, these results collectively constitute the significant interaction effect. The results provided evidence for rejecting the third null hypothesis. Accordingly, it is indicated that M.A. teachers scored higher than B.A. teachers in both institutes and schools. In addition, institute B.A. teachers scored higher than MoE B.A. teachers, and institute M.A. teachers scored higher than MoE M.A. teachers. While scores represent the teachers' perceptions about the role of classroom SLA research in their pedagogy, the role teachers as researchers, and the relationship between classroom teachers and researchers, this result highlight the importance of the effect of interaction between both education and context on the Iranian EFL teachers' perception of the role of teachers and researchers. Fig. 1 demonstrates the differences between the scores across education level and context.
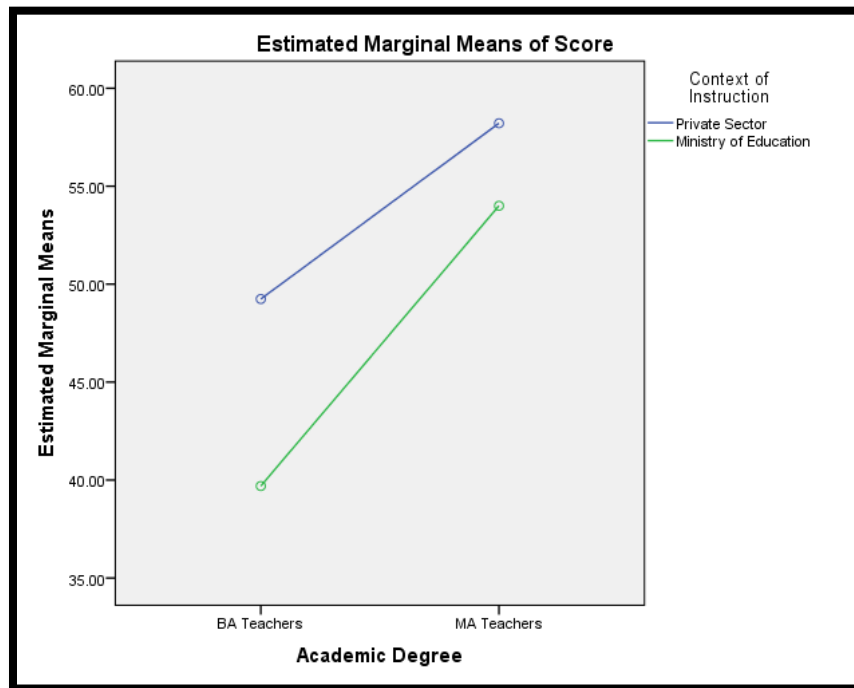

Figure 1: Variations between the Perceptions across Education Level and Context

The results of this research question highlight the prominence of academic knowledge of EFL teachers across the two contexts. The role of education in research engagement influenced by the role of context (institutes versus schools), which has not received due attention in Iran, explain the variations between institute teachers regarding the role of teachers in SLA research and the relevance of SLA teachers to their classroom practices. In particular, the results about the variations between MoE teachers receive support from Çelik and Dikilitaş (2015), who suggest that school teachers should improve their professional growth through being instructed the skills and abilities of classroom research. These results highlight the role of designing research-oriented practicum courses to encourage EFL teachers' perception of the role of research in teaching and teacher as researcher. Findings also contribute to the findings of Tavakoli (2015) in that teachers realize teachers and researchers as two separate communities of practice which need to join. To join these two communities, instruction should empower teachers to engage in research across contexts (Çelik & Dikilitaş, 2015). The results also contribute to the findings of Nassaji (2012) regarding the existing variations among EFL teachers.

The Expectations from SLA Research

The fifth research question addressed the expectations of the teachers of SLA research. To answer this question, the data from the two open-ended questions in Section E were analyzed through thematic analysis (Clark & Creswell, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The first open-ended question asked the participants about their expectations of SLA research, and the second question asked the participants whether they have any additional comment. The responses to both questions of this section included answers of the respondents to this section, including 17 B.A. institute teachers, 20 B.A. MoE teachers, 26 M.A. institute teachers, and 28 M.A. MoE teachers. Three major themes were inferred from thematic analysis of the data, namely, improving pedagogical practices and methodology, concerning practicality of theory and research, and perceiving challenges from educational system.

It should be mentioned that this categorization partly differs from Nassaji's (2012) result in terms of focus on various instances. That is, he inferred the following twelve areas of *expectations:*

> *"(1) Effective instructional strategies;(2) How to keep students motivated and interested; (3) How to teach grammar and vocabulary effectively; (4) How to teach different learners, ability groups, and mixed classes; (5) How to provide effective feedback; (6) What aids and hinders L2 learning; (7) How to perform communicative and task-based/group work activities effectively; (8) Student needs and preferences; (9) The effects of L1 on L2 learning; (10) Classroom management; (11) How to retain language rules and words; and (12) Language learning styles and strategies" (p. 353, adapted from Tab. 10).*

Except for the categories 4, 9, and 11, other nine categories constituted the first theme of the present study. The two other themes emerged from further analysis of the data were also briefly addressed in other parts of Nassaji's (2012) study. For instance, lack of time, difficulty of research language, and limited research fund are mentioned as factors affecting teachers' perceptions of relevance and usefulness of SLA research and their expectations; however, the main theme corresponding to the expectations of SLA research included the twelve categories above. This difference in themes is probably because Nassaji (2012) compared ESL and EFL contexts without addressing the variations within the contexts. However, the present study

referred to the variations within EFL context as the baseline for investigating instances of EFL teachers' engagement in SLA research and theory. That is, in Nassaji's (2012) study, ESL and EFL teachers' pedagogical and methodological concerns were situated in multicultural and multilingual classes, in which the effect of L1 on L2 plays an important role, which might influence instances of their SLA research engagement. However, these points are not reported in the data of this study from Iranian EFL teachers across MoE and institutes with different educational levels. This is probably because the pedagogical and methodological concerns of the participants of this study are influenced by the institutional and administrative constraints in tandem with their different levels of pedagogical knowledge. The interaction between these two factors could influence instances of their SLA research engagement.

Improving Pedagogical Practices and Methodology

The first theme addressed the pedagogical and methodological concerns that the participants expected to learn from reading and doing SLA research. This theme incorporated expecting SLA theory and research to provide information about teaching skills, instructing grammar and vocabulary, providing corrective feedback, managing classroom, selecting and designing materials, knowing learners' styles, assessment, and choosing effective teaching methods. To further elaborate on this theme, some examples representative of these themes are provided as follows.

"I expect to learn analysis of learner's mind in order to make materials more useful or easier to understand and to understand learner's mistakes and errors." (B.A. Institute Teacher)

"There is a need to revisit the premises underlying SLA theories and cognitive processing in multilingual learners: what should be taught to multilinguals (L1, L2, L3,..), which errors committed by multilinguals should be corrected, and how multilinguals should be tested. (M.A. Institute Teacher)

"I expect to learn how to teach grammar and vocabulary of high school textbooks more efficiently, and how to understand why students keep forgetting some rules and make a mistake repeatedly." (B.A. MoE Teacher)

"I believe that SLA research shall be targeted toward real classroom practice: Affective side of students and their self-esteem are important to the teaching process. Relieving student stress and creating a warm environment for them as they want to prepare for final and university entrance exam." (M.A. MoE Teacher)

Similar to Nassaji's (2012) result, and in line with Nassaji (2018), all participants expressed their concerns for pedagogical and methodological issues. In addition, the responses in this study reflected the teachers' awareness of their expectations according to contexts. Across groups, M.A. teachers elaborated more on the theoretical aspects of their concerns that implied the role of education and academic degree on the teachers' awareness of their expectations and concerns. The expectation of B.A. teachers indicated their lack of time, access, and interest regarding reading the SLA theory and research or the difficulty of the sources.

Practicality of Theory and Research

Practicality of SLA research constituted the second theme in this study. Inferred from the data, the categories explored as corresponding to this theme include: practical and applicable for teaching in the classroom, practical as research to be conducted by teachers-researchers, understandable theory for teachers, understandable research methodology for teacher-researchers, possible to be implemented across context and cultures, acceptable for teachers and learners, and possible to keep teachers update along with the new improvements in theory and research. The following examples further clarify the above mentioned categories.

> *"Knowing the effects of theories on the practical aspects of teaching and learning processes will help us to identify the problematic areas of our students better and help them more."* (B.A. Institute Teacher)
> *"I'd like to find more practical discussions in them and not pure theories… I like to know what is going on in other countries regarding TEFL and try to relate them to my own context."* (M.A. Institute Teacher)
> *"This non-practical way of researching won't help a real classroom teaching. I expect them to be relevant and practical, and realistic."* (B.A. MoE Teacher)
> *"I suppose that SLA research should facilitate the application of the improvements in second language teaching. For instance, when the purpose of learning a second language is being able to communicate a language and not simply gaining mastery over the grammar, vocabulary, phonology, etc., the research in SLA would also help considering this transformation."* (M.A. MoE Teacher)

While data indicated concerns of all respondents, as indicated in these examples, the educational background was perceived to inform instances of the expectation of practicality of SLA theory and research. In addition, the results revealed that the contextual characteristics of the teachers resulted in variations in the instances and aspects of the practicality of research and theory for classroom purposes. That is, institute teachers seemed to be more concerned with trying different ways to apply research results to their classrooms whereas MoE teachers primarily questioned practicality of the existing finding in their classrooms and viewed it as unrealistic. In addressing the relevance and usefulness of SLA research for language classroom, Nassaji (2012) investigates whether "[s]econd language acquisition research provides teachers with practical suggestions for improving second language instruction" (p. 349) (see also 5.4.1, Tab. 6). He also mentions the need for more understandable language of sources of research. However, the other categories mentioned above are not reported in his study (e.g. practicality of conducting research, understandable research methodology, acceptability for teachers and learners, etc.). Although Mehrani (2015, 2016) have reported the practicality of the research and theory in language pedagogy among the other reported obstacles, this theme particularly constituted one of the major concerns of the participants in this study, especially among MoE teachers. Emphasizing this concern by the MoE participants is consistent with the results in 5.2 and 5.3.

Challenges from Educational System

Another theme which emerged from the analysis of the data incorporated challenges faced by the participants. These challenges reflected some of the contextual demands and

constraints existing at schools and institutes. That is, lack of time and fund were reported by all participants, as also reported in the previous studies (e.g. Borg, 2007; Lyster 2019; Marsden & Kasprowicz, 2017; Mehrani, 2016; Nassaji, 2012). However, more specific concerns were revealed across contexts in this study. As such, curricular issues, pre-planned and fixed syllabus teaching, and teaching to test (preparing students for nation-wide tests) (see also 5.2 and 5.3) were particularly reported by MoE teachers as obstacles affecting their expectations of SLA research. In addition, demands from the supervisors for following the institute's lesson plans, keeping the students or their families satisfied for marketing issues, and following national regulations were mainly reported by the institute teachers. Some examples indicating the participants' perceived and experienced challenges are provided as follows.

"Institute wants us to do what is good for students and families. They pay money and want their children to get high grades and the certificate not our scientific teaching." (B.A. Institute Teacher)

> *"In my private classes I can make decisions alone and try to change my methods and use my SLA knowledge. But usually in institutes you are not allowed to bring innovations to your class. You have to follow some strict rules and programs."* (M.A. Institute Teacher)
> *"Ministry of Education doesn't accept repeated changes. Curriculum of ministry is fixed and we can change only our minor practices in the class."* (B.A. MoE Teacher)
> *"We should follow the program suggested by the ministry and schools. Also we should prepare students for Conkoor [university entrance exam in Iran]. This takes our time. Our job is to teach high school students who have their own problems with English. Research doesn't solve the problems."* (MoE M.A. Teacher)

The results of the third theme reflected in these examples indicated that the contextual limitations further influence the teachers' expectation of the application of SLA research in their classrooms regardless of their academic backgrounds.

Overall, the findings of this research question indicated a variety of expectations that the teachers expressed based on their perceived needs for learning teaching methodology from SLA research, their concerns for practicality of conducting SLA research in classroom, and their perceived and experienced challenges and constrains regarding conducting SLA research across contexts. The analysis of the first theme and the two other themes are supported by Borg (2007), Nassaji (2012, 2018), Lyster (2019), and Mehrani (2015, 2016). However, these studies have not deeply addressed the concerns for national issues of educational contexts, curriculum constraints, and marketing demands across each context among EFL teachers. Although educational background informed the expectations of the participants regarding the first theme, there was a distinction between two other themes regarding the participants' experiences of challenges caused by workplace limitations and the practicality of research engagement caused by these limitations. In other words, the contextual demands and educational backgrounds revealed to affect teachers' expectations and practices of SLA research in different respects. Aligned with the findings of Çelik and Dikilitaş (2015), the present study addresses the importance of school teachers' awareness towards their own contextual constraints. This indicates the need for further attention by Iranian policy makers in Ministry of Education as well as stakeholders of language institutes to provide opportunities for developing teachers' research knowledge.

Conclusion

The current study is an attempt to reconcile theory and practice through investigating contextual and educational dimensions of engaging EFL teachers in research informed by SLA theory. These dimensions, which have not received considerable attention in the teacher research literature, confront teachers with a variety of situations and constraints that require their awareness to make informed pedagogical decisions, and SLA theory and research are supposed to enrich these decisions. Thus, this study endeavored to explore how EFL teachers with different levels of education across different contexts conceive of SLA research; how they perceive their own role as researchers; how they can access sources of study; how they can conduct research; and what they expect from SLA research. The results indicated various instances in the perception of and engagement in SLA research as well as various challenges and constraints experienced and expressed by them. Highlighting the contribution of formal education as well as in-service programs including instructing SLA theory and research, the realities and demands across contexts of instruction call for more investment in engagement of EFL teachers with classroom research informed by SLA theory. Thus, to see more initiatives, empowerment, awareness, and professional growth among teachers, educational Iranian policy makers and ELT stakeholders should cater for resources and sufficient education required for an effective and successful engagement in teacher research.

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