



Attitude profiles explain differences in pre-service teachers' reading behavior and competence beliefs



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ABSTRACT

Teachers' reading attitude is important for affecting their students' reading, yet the prevalence of aliteracy is high among teachers. The present study aims to examine whether there are individual differences in pre-service teachers' reading attitudes ($n = 253$) at the time of enrollment in teacher education in Belgium, and whether these differences explain differences in reading behavior and perceived reading competence. Using Cluster Analysis three attitude profiles were identified. Personally-oriented readers (26.9%) appeared to be the more solitary readers, whereas socially-oriented readers (33.6%) were most willing to interact with others about reading. Both profiles were comparable in reading frequency and self-competence beliefs in reading. The profile low-affect readers (39.5%) seemed the most reluctant and aliterate readers. Overall, this study stresses the importance of acknowledging individual differences in reading attitude when designing teacher education courses that provide teachers with the tools and willingness to foster their fellow teachers' and students' reading enthusiasm.

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1. Introduction

Next to teaching students how to decode and comprehend texts, it is critical that teachers motivate their students to enjoy and engage in independent reading, both inside and outside school (Gambrell, 2015). Teachers who frequently read for pleasure themselves and who share how their reading experiences enrich their own lives are most likely to use instructional practices that foster their students' love of reading (Commeyras, Bisplinghoff, & Olson, 2003; Cremin, Mottram, Collins, Powell, & Safford, 2009; Gambrell, 1996; Hiebert, 2009; Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2013; McKool & Gespass, 2009; Morrison, Jacobs, & Swinyard, 1999; Ruddell & Unrau, 2013). As a result, engaged and enthusiastic teachers contribute to their students' school success as reading is one of the most important basic skills in education (Hattie, 2009, 2012; Krashen, 2004; Sullivan & Brown, 2013).

Ideally, all teachers become inspiring reading models before they graduate from teacher training. However, there is a high prevalence of aliteracy among teachers, i.e., the ability to read but a disinterest in personal reading (e.g., Nathanson, Pruslow, & Levitt, 2008). To decrease the likelihood that children and adolescents are confronted with aliterate teachers in their educational careers – and hence, increase the number of enthusiastically and proficiently reading children and adolescents –, it first seems necessary to gain more insight in individual differences

among pre-service teachers. In this study, we will specifically focus on their reading attitudes, reading behavior, and self-competence beliefs in reading.

Research (e.g., Bokhorst-Heng & Pereira, 2008; Conradi, Jang, Bryant, Craft, & McKenna, 2013; Daisey, 2009; Henk, Marinak, & Melnick, 2012; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995) suggests that reading attitude may be a prerequisite for actual reading practices. Furthermore, existing theories mostly acknowledge that attitudes are affected by one's self-competence beliefs (for an overview and model, see De Brabander & Martens, 2014). In the domain of reading, self-competence beliefs – or the cognitive appraisal of actual reading abilities (for a review, see Sundström, 2006) – are shown to be related to actual achievement (Huang, 2011; Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004) as well as to actual reading practices (Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2009; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004). These relations can be explained by the reciprocal model of causation (Mol & Bus, 2011; Stanovich, 1986), suggesting that students who perceive themselves as better readers will read more frequently, will become better readers and will enjoy reading more, and hence, will be more motivated to continue reading for pleasure. Put differently, a positive reading attitude seems an important factor to study when aiming to understand individual differences in reading behavior and perceived reading competence.

Strikingly, hardly any research has yet addressed whether teachers already display a positive or negative reading attitude when they have just enrolled in teacher training (except, e.g., Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Nathanson et al., 2008). Learning more about their reading attitude at an early stage of their teaching journeys is particularly relevant

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for developing teacher education courses that provide teachers with the tools and the willingness to become enthusiastic readers who are a role model for their (future) students (Applegate et al., 2014; Fletcher, Grimley, & Greenwood, 2012; Lundberg & Linnakyla, 1993). Moreover, gaining insight in individual differences may aid teacher educators in encouraging, modeling, and scaffolding the development of their students' reading attitudes, behavior, and (perceived) reading competence so that these students, regardless of their subject and the grade level, will be able to deliver high-quality, motivating reading instruction as professional teachers (Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008).

In recent years, there has been a shift in research that primarily focuses on cognitive aspects of reading (e.g., abilities) to examining affective aspects, such as reading attitude and motivation. In doing so, the multidimensionality of reading is addressed more comprehensively (Afflerbach, Cho, Kim, Crassas, & Doyle, 2013). It should be noted, however, that there is a lack of a consistent definition of reading attitude in the literature, which may be partly due to its conceptual overlap with reading motivation (Conradi, Jang, & McKenna, 2013; Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller, & Wigfield, 2012). For example, motivation involves the tendency to take action, which is also reflected in conative attitudes, or the intention to take action. In this study, we focus on four components of reading attitude that seem particularly relevant for increasing our understanding of pre-service teachers' reading behavior and self-competence beliefs in reading: affective, personal conative, recreational social-conative, and academic social-conative attitudes. Affective attitudes reflect the prevailing feelings about reading, whereas conative attitudes reflect the intention to read (Manstead, 1996; Mathewson, 1994).

Even though reading may be mainly viewed as an individual or personal activity; teaching, on the other hand, is by definition a social activity and teachers' role particularly is a social one (McKool & Gespass, 2009). Importantly, it is among the evidence-based classroom practices that are considered critical for supporting reading enthusiasm that students are provided with opportunities to engage in social interactions about what they are reading (Gambrell, 2015). Furthermore, attending to this "social side of (...) reading" seems to make students more comfortable with others and with themselves (Ivey, 2014, p. 165; Salmivalli, Ojanen, Haanpää, & Peets, 2005). In our study, we therefore focus on both personally-oriented (i.e., affective attitude, personal conative attitude) and socially-oriented reading attitudes (i.e., academic and recreational social-conative attitudes). To become role models for reading, it seems particularly relevant that pre-service teachers like to read (affective attitude), have clear personal reasons for doing so (personal conative attitude), and that they are willing to interact about their reading experiences (social conative attitudes). We will specifically distinguish between academic and recreational social-conative attitudes, because our sample consists of college students, whose intention to talk about their assigned readings for school may differ from their intention to share about their readings outside school (Conradi, Jang, Bryant, et al., 2013; McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer, 2012). Existing research has hardly examined these four components simultaneously, whereas it seems very likely that their interplay may explain individual differences in pre-service teachers' reading behavior and perceived reading competence.

The first aim of our study is to examine whether it is possible to identify reader profiles based upon differences in pre-service teachers' affective and conative reading attitudes. Such reader profiles could be used as a data-driven approach for teacher education programs and could make it possible to gain a more accurate insight into the initial reading attitudes of the potentially heterogeneous group of pre-service teachers. Our second aim is to examine whether these attitude profiles explain differences in pre-service teachers' reading behavior and self-competence beliefs in reading. In line with Applegate and Applegate (2004), we expect to identify a group of pre-service teachers with relatively low reading attitudes that will hardly read for pleasure and will not perceive themselves as competent readers. In addition, we expect to

distinguish between pre-service teachers who are personally- versus socially-oriented readers. Research has not yet shown whether the intention to interact about reading will explain differences in reading behavior and self-competence beliefs in reading.

In measuring reading attitudes and behavior, we adopt a multiliterate view on reading: In addition to asking about the frequency with which they read books, we include other reading materials (news-papers, magazines, comics) and focus on both the print and the digital reading of these materials. Research indicates that the inclusion of print and digital reading are necessary to get a good insight into the reading of students living in the 21st century (Alexander, 2012; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, & Henry, 2013; Schiefele et al., 2012). Overall, this study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) Can we profile differences in the reading attitude of pre-service teachers, by specifically focusing on affective and conative components?
- (2) To what extent do the profiles of pre-service teachers' reading attitude explain differences in (a) perceived reading competence and (b) reading behavior?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A group of 253 pre-service teachers (63.1% women, 36.9% men) studying at a university college in a large city in Belgium was analyzed. On average, participants were 21.48 years old ($SD = 3.45$; Range: 19–42 years). Most pre-service teachers (90.92%) had Dutch as their first reading language. Some (23.7%) had an immigrant grandmother, of whom 15% came from Morocco (8.7%) and Turkey (6.3%). The highest educational level of most of their fathers was secondary education (43.3%), whereas 19.2% received a Bachelor's degree and 17.9% had a Master's degree.

Participants were in their first year of a professional teacher education bachelor program (180 credits). To be admitted into this program, there is no entrance exam other than that students need to have a high school diploma. All students had such a diploma, while 7.7% also had already received a Bachelor or Master's degree in another field. Pre-service teachers choose one of three graduation tracks: to become a teacher in either kindergarten (2.5-to-6-year-old children), primary education (6-to-12-year-old children), or in the first grades of secondary education (12-to-14-year-old children). In our study, 27.4% (98.5% females) were in their first year of the kindergarten-track, 20.2% (74% females) in the primary-school track, and 52.4% (40.9% females) in the secondary-school track.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Reading attitude

For each item in the attitude scales, pre-service teachers indicated the extent to which they agreed with a statement on a four-point Likert scale. Answer possibilities ranged from 1 = I totally disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I agree, to 4 = I totally agree. To cover all four attitude constructs, we grounded our items in existing theory (e.g., De Brabander & Martens, 2014; Sundström, 2006) and also included several existing items from PISA-2009 (OECD, 2010), Stokmans (1999), and from the survey that was validated by McKenna et al. (2012) and Conradi, Jang, Bryant, et al. (2013). To calculate a total subscale score, the item scores were averaged per subscale. Higher scores corresponded with more positive attitudes.

Principal Component Analysis with oblique rotation (direct oblimin) indicated evidence of construct validity. Outcomes revealed that a three-factor model seemed to offer the best solution ($KMO = 0.88$). The first factor explained 31.2% of the variance and included the two personally-oriented scales (affective and personal conative attitudes).

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