

The Impact of Gender on the Self-Efficacy of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners in Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

The present investigation was an attempt to study the effect of gender on Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy while reading comprehension. To that end, an OPT was administered to 100 university students learning English language in institutes. Learners who scored between one above and below the standard deviation were selected. 40 learners were selected and they were divided into experimental and control group, each group contained 20 learners. A reading comprehension test was administered to both groups as a pre-test to take their initial knowledge of reading comprehension. The reading section of a TOEFL test was selected to test the reading ability of the participants. A self-efficacy questionnaire was also distributed among the participants. The experimental group received treatment in order to help them improve their self-efficacy beliefs in ten sessions. The control group received no treatment. Finally both groups sat for the post-test of the same reading comprehension test. The results were analyzed through independent samples t-test and it was explored that gender had no effect on Iranian EFL learner's self efficacy while reading.

Keywords: self-efficacy, reading comprehension ability, learner's belief, gender

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is one of the most significant skills of a good language learner in normal daily life. It is a major component in language learning and teaching and is seen as the promoter of language learning. Although reading is now well recognized as a critical dimension in language learning, it still remains one of the least understood processes. According to Morley (2001), during the 1980s, special attention to reading was incorporated

into new instructional frameworks, that is, functional language and communicative approaches. Throughout the 1990s, attention to reading in language instruction increased dramatically.

Reading comprehension is now generally acknowledged as an important facet of language learning; nevertheless, "much work remains to be done in both theory and practice" (Morley, 2001). The importance of reading in language learning can hardly be overestimated, as people always do more reading than other skills. Through reception, we internalize linguistic information without which we could not produce language (Brown, 2001).

A. Statement of the Problem

Reading involves a complex process that allows us to understand and interpret spoken messages in real time by making use of a variety of sources such as phonetic, phonological, prosodic, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic (Lynch, 1998). On the other hand, it is well documented that language learning success or failure is influenced by the affective side of the learner. Many times affective factors come to impede the reading process. Of the factors impeding the process may be self-efficacy, which is defined as "beliefs in one's capabilities to recognize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs are assumed to influence task choices and goals setting, effort in pursuit of goals, persistence, resilience in the face of difficulties and the final outcome (Schunk and Meece, 2006).

According to Pajares and Schunk (2001), self-efficacy provides the foundation for human motivation, well-being and achievement. Individuals tend to select tasks for which they feel competent and confident, and high efficacious individuals tend to contribute more effort, persist longer and rebound faster when they encounter problems or setbacks (Pajares and Schunk, 2001). It was found that students with high self-efficacy tend to perform better than those low scoring self-efficacious students do (Pajares, 2006) although there is no absolute connection between self-efficacy and achievement, because self-efficacy reflects how capable individuals believe they are, rather than how capable they really are (Pajares, *ibid*).

B. Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to realize whether EFL learner's gender affect their self efficacy while they start to read passages or not. Since self-efficacy is a prerequisite to learning on the whole, and language learning in particular, it is of significance to both learners and teachers. Due to the relationship between self-efficacy and learning a foreign language and consequently on achieving better marks in testing, it has positive wash-back effects. It contributes to all stakeholders in the process of teaching and learning.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mill's (2004) quantitative study investigated the relationship between French reading and listening self-efficacy and French reading and listening proficiency of American college students. The results showed that French reading self-efficacy is a predictor of French reading proficiency but French listening self-efficacy is not a predictor of listening comprehension. Rahil Mahyuddin, *et al.* (2006) conducted a research on the relationship between student's self-efficacy and their English language achievement. In Malaysia, English is a second language but since 2003, English has been the medium of instruction for mathematics and science subjects for year one, form one and form six students. A descriptive-correlational study was conducted on 1,146 students from eight secondary schools in the Petaling district, Selangor. The instruments used to measure self-efficacy were the Self-efficacy Scale developed by Bandura (1995) and the Self-efficacy Scale developed by Kim and Park (1997). The findings showed that 51 percent of students had high self-efficacy while 48 percent showed low self-efficacy. Correlational analysis showed positive correlations between several dimensions of self-efficacy, that is, academic achievement efficacy with academic performance in English language. In conclusion, achievement in English language will improve when students have high self-efficacy in the language.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Materials and Methods

In this study, the data were gathered through questionnaires to boost understanding and interpretation of the results. The questionnaires were distributed among the students in the classes. They were asked to choose the reason or reasons they might not learn English as

efficiently as their other courses and determine the effect of self-efficacy from their own points of view. After they completed the questionnaires, they were divided into experimental and control groups, male and female, and the experimental groups received treatment, that is, they were instructed how to improve their self-efficacy beliefs. Then the results obtained from the groups were analyzed through SPSS software (SPSS Inc., 2012).

IV. RESULTS

Data Analysis Procedure

SPSS software (SPSS Inc., 2012) was used to analyze the results obtained in this study. For the present research and the hypothesis that was going to be tested, independent-samples t-test was considered appropriate. An independent-samples t-test is used when the researcher has two groups of participants and collects data under two different conditions.

Pre-test/post-test designs are an example of the type of situation where this technique is appropriate. The researchers had access to four sets of scores on the posttests and pretests of both the experimental and the control groups. In the following section the statistical results of the study have been summarized in tables.

Table 1: Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Participants dimension1	male	24	14.5000	2.13664	.43614
	female	24	15.4583	1.74404	.35600

According to the statistics in table 1, there were 48 participants, 24 of whom were male and the others were female. The table shows that the standard deviations for male and female participants were 2.13 and 1.74, respectively. On the other hand, the means of the cited groups were 14.50 and 15.54, respectively. This table shows just the means and standard deviations of the two groups involved in the study, but it does not show anything about the significance of the differences between the two groups. In order to see whether the

data presented in table 1 show any significant difference between them, the researcher ran an independent samples t-test the results of which are summarized in table 2.

Table 2: The Results of Independent Samples Test for both Genders Participating in the Study

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Participants	Equal variances assumed	1.325	.256	-1.702	46	.095	-.95833	.56299
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.702	44.226	.096	-.95833	.56299

The results in table 2 indicate that there is no significant difference between the male and female participants of the present study. As it is shown, the p-value is .25 which is more than .05. Also the value for two tailed p is .96 in the second row of the table. Thus the hypothesis can be safely accepted. It means that there was no significant difference between male and female learners in the study.

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