THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-EFFICACY AND READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES USED BY IRANIAN MALE AND FEMALE EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT
This study explores the relationship between self-efficacy and reading comprehension strategies used by Iranian male and female English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. The data of this study were collected by administering two questionnaires. A questionnaire of general self-efficacy and a questionnaire of reading strategy use. The instruments were administered to EFL advanced English learners at MAAD Institute located in the city of Shiraz, Iran. The sample consisted of 50 students (22 males and 28 females). In the current study, Pearson Coefficient-Moment Product was used to determine the relationship between self-efficacy and reading comprehension strategies. Results of the study revealed that there was a positive relationship between these variables. To find out whether there was any statistically significant difference between male and female learners regarding the use of reading comprehension strategies as well as the difference between male and female learners’ self-efficacy, independent samples t-tests were used. Gender differences regarding these variables were not significant. The findings of this study have significant implications for both EFL learners and teachers. Encouraging EFL learners to increase their self-efficacy can be quite helpful for them to achieve higher scores in the reading comprehension. Moreover, by increasing the self-efficacy among the teachers, it can be transmitted to EFL learners and develop their sense of efficacy.

KEYWORDS: self-efficacy, reading, reading comprehension strategies

INTRODUCTION
Reading is an essential skill and probably the most important skill for second language learners to master in academic contexts. It is an indispensable skill for learners in English as a foreign language (Grabe, 1991). As one of the language skills, comprehension of written texts, or reading skills, forms the stepping stone for the education of a learner. The main concept in reading skill is ‘comprehension’. It enhances the process of language acquisition and helps students to read for different purposes. The most successful readers are those who use cognitive strategies to
comprehend the text better (Behjat, Yamini, & Bagheri, 2012). Rigney (1978) as cited in Nasiri and Zaferanieh (2012, p. 64) posits that detonation of researchers in second language learning has focused on readers’ strategies. Reading comprehension strategies are of interest for what they reveal about the way readers manage their interaction with written text, and how these strategies are related to text comprehension. Research in second language reading suggests that learners use a variety of strategies to assist them with the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information.

Reading comprehension strategies indicate how readers conceive of a task, how they make sense of what they do when they do not understand. In short, such strategies are processes used by the students to improve reading comprehension and overcome comprehension failures (Singhal, 2001). In spite of this crucial role of reading, many students still have problems concerning reading. This seems true even if the learners have a considerable amount of linguistic knowledge. Therefore, it can be suggested that there are some non-linguistic factors in the process of reading comprehension (Bagheri & Faghiih, 2012). Anders (2002) claims that language learning is affected by both domains which are the mental and emotional sides of human behavior.

Self-efficacy as one of the most important affective factors influences emotional sides of learners. It plays a key role in language learning and motivates students effectively. Many researchers asserted a significant relationship between language learning and self-efficacy.

In the language learning process, learners with high self-efficacy participate in tasks more rapidly, work harder, and persist longer when encountering failures than those who doubt their own capabilities (Liao, 2009, as cited in Wang, 2011). So, EFL learners should believe in their abilities and make greater efforts when encountering failures rather than to attribute all their failures to their lack of abilities.

Most of students’ difficulties are due to students’ self-beliefs. Students’ low self-beliefs in themselves rather than their lack of ability in many situations are reason of their low motivation, participation, performance and achievement (Pajares, 2003, as cited in Heidari, Izadi & Ahmadian, 2012). Additionally, when students judge themselves as capable of managing learning activities confidently, they are more likely to overcome the difficulties they face and achieve the goals they have set (Liang, 1998, as cited in Wang, 2011). Self-efficacy has proven to be responsive to improvements in students’ methods of learning and predictive of achievement outcomes. This empirical evidence of its role as a potent mediator of students’ learning and motivation confirms the historic wisdom of educators that students’ self-beliefs about academic capabilities play an essential role in their motivation to achieve (Zimmerman, 2000).

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Since the advent of self-efficacy, various research studies discover self-efficacy beliefs which influence both success and failure of EFL students. The concept of self-efficacy is a part of social cognitive theory proposed by Albert Bandura in 1997. Self-efficacy refers to "an individual’s judgment about his or her ability to accomplish a given task" (Bandura, 1997, as
According to Pajares (1996), self-efficacy is person’s beliefs to run a specific task successfully and is communicated closely to beginning task engagement, persistence, and achievement. Learners’ beliefs in their capabilities affect performance better than their real ability (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1991, as cited in Raoofi, Tan and Chan, 2012). This does not mean that people can accomplish tasks beyond their abilities because they believe they can. People for competent functioning require harmony between self-beliefs on the one hand and possessed skills and knowledge on the other hand. Rather, it means that self-perceptions of capability help determine what individuals do with the knowledge and skills they have (Pajares, 1997, as cited in Chen, 2007). According to Bandura (1997), there are four main sources of self-efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional states.

Mastery experience: this is the most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy and refers to learning through personal experience where one achieves mastery over a difficult or previously feared task and thereby enjoys an increase in self-efficacy. Vicarious experience: this source refers to the self-evaluation that people derive from observing and comparing themselves with a given social model. Social persuasion: this source refers to the fact that encouragement from other people increases self-efficacy while discouragement decreases it. Physiological and emotional states: the last source of self-efficacy is through physiological and emotional states. People rely partly on their emotional states in judging their capabilities. They interpret stress reactions and tension as signs of vulnerability to poor performance.

Self-efficacy is an essential factor in academic achievement and can change success of EFL learners. EFL learners should have both the will and adequate knowledge to be highly self-efficacious in language learning. In the case of EFL learners, those who have confidence in their academic capabilities have positive expectations and believe they will score high marks in their examinations, on the other hand, the reverse is true of those who are lacking in confidence regarding their academic capabilities and believe they will not score well in an examination (Habibian & Roslan, 2014). The research on the role of self-efficacy and its relationship with foreign language learning and also reading comprehension is very important. Matheny and Edwards (1974) as cited in Seeger (2009) believe when students are in a supportive classroom environment with a teacher that promotes responsibility for learning skills, self-efficacy is also supported. In response, achievement was higher for the students that were assigned to teachers with high self-efficacy.

A reader’s sense of oneself and his/her reading ability contributes to motivation to read: “A motivated reader will develop a sense of self-efficacy and high expectations for success” (Moskal & Blachowicz, 2006, p.22). Self-efficacy is strongly related to reading comprehension. EFL learners should use appropriate reading comprehension strategies to improve their reading comprehension. Reading comprehension strategies are some organized and planned activities used by learners to understand a text. So, EFL learners with high self-efficacy know how to improve their reading comprehension because their teacher is self-efficacious and guides them how to use reading comprehension strategies effectively. Hosenfeld (1997) believed successful readers helped the meaning of the passage in mind while reading, read in broad, skipped...
inconsequential or less important words. Unsuccessful readers on the other hand, lost the meaning of the students when encoded, read in short phrases, pondered over inconsequential words, seldom skipped words as unimportant. So, in his study successful readers had a positive self-efficacy while unsuccessful readers had a negative self-efficacy. In addition to theoretical review, this literature has practical evidences of self-efficacy and its relation to language learning and reading.

Rubin (2001), Wenden (1998) and Oxford (2001) as cited in Shang (2011) state that a good reader becomes an active participant in the reading process; one who requires the integration and application of multiple strategies while reading. This is also where good readers and poor readers can be distinguished from each other in terms of their control over strategy use.

Tilfarlioglu and Cgnkara (2009) investigated the self-efficacy of EFL learners enrolled at Gaziantep university’s school of foreign languages (GUSFL). In this study, 175 preparatory learners participated. The data were collected through the English as a foreign language self-efficacy questionnaire. The study showed that EFL learners at GUSFL had a strong sense of self-efficacy in language learning tasks.

Li and Wang (2010) explored the relationship between self-efficacy and the use of reading comprehension strategies. Participants were 182 sophomore English students. Results revealed that reading self-efficacy was significantly related to the use of reading comprehension strategies in general. Readers with high self-efficacy reported significantly more use of reading strategies than those with low self-efficacy.

Shang (2011) investigated the relationship between EFL proficiency level and reading strategy use. Findings showed that there was a positive relationship between reading strategy use and perceptions of self-efficacy. Rahimi, Riazi, and Saif (2008) did a study about factors influencing the use of language learning strategies by Persian EFL learners. Their results showed proficiency level and motivation as major predictors of language learning strategies use. Also, gender had not any effect on the performance of the students. Naseri and Zaferanieh (2012), in a study, found the relationship between reading self-efficacy beliefs, reading strategy use and reading comprehension level of Iranian EFL learners. Michigan reading comprehension test, a self-reported reading strategy use questionnaire, and a reading self-efficacy questionnaire were administered to eighty junior and senior EFL students. Findings showed that there were significant strong positive correlation between reading self-efficacy beliefs and reading comprehension and also between reading self-efficacy beliefs and reading strategy use.

Magogwe and Oliver (2007), in their study, investigated that learners differed from each other with respect to their reading comprehension ability, reading self-efficacy beliefs and the use of reading comprehension strategies. This study showed that the relationship between reading self-efficacy beliefs and reading strategy use was not affected by gender. Poole (2005) in a study, compared the academic reading comprehension strategies of 248 (138 male and 110 female) advanced college ESL students. Findings showed very few strategic differences between male and female students regarding the use of strategies. He explored that ESL readers were
affected by factors other than gender. Ghezlou, Kordi and Nasrabady (2014) investigated gender differences in reading strategy use, reading self-efficacy, and perceptual learning styles among EFL learners. In this study, 127 sophomore EFL students participated. The findings showed that gender did not have any significant effect on the performance of Iranian high intermediate EFL learners.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The following research questions will be answered in the current study:

1. Is there any statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners’ self-efficacy and the extent to which they use reading comprehension strategies?
2. Is there any statistically significant difference between Iranian male and female EFL learners' self-efficacy?
3. Is there any statistically significant difference between Iranian male and female EFL learners regarding the use of reading comprehension strategies?

METHODOLOGY
Participants
The participants were selected from MAAD Institute in Shiraz, Iran. All of them were native speakers of Persian. Their age ranged from 18 to 25. They were 50 advanced English students (22 males and 28 females) and they consented to the collection of data from their records.

Instruments
To study the relationship between self-efficacy and reading comprehension strategies two questionnaires were used by the researcher:

General Self-efficacy Questionnaire
This questionnaire is the Persian adaptation of the general self-efficacy scale constructed by Nezami, Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1996) which includes 10 items that measures self-efficacy based on subjects’ tendencies. Subjected participants indicate the degree of their agreement with each item on the basis of a 4-rank Likert graded from “I totally disagree” with a score of 1 to “I totally agree” with a score of 4.

Reading Strategy Use Questionnaire
This Questionnaire adopted from 1- Oxford’s (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL, ESL/EFL version 7.0), 2-Carrell’s (1989) Meta-cognitive Questionnaire, 3- Pintrich et al.’s (1991) The Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), 4- Baker and Boonkit’s (2004) English Reading Strategies Questionnaire, and the Shangs’ (2011) teaching experiences were integrated and employed in this questionnaire. The questionnaire, containing altogether 43 items, consisted of four major categories of general use of reading strategies: cognitive (items 1-13), meta-cognitive (items 14-25), compensatory (items 26-35) and test taking (items 36-43) strategies. Each of which uses a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging
from 1 (never or almost never true of me) to 5 (always or almost always true of me). This questionnaire used by Shang (2011) to elicit subjects’ reported frequency of using the selected reading strategies in Taiwan. Based on the interactive model of the reading process and the information offered by Weinstein and Mayer (1986), Pintrich (1991), and Oxford (1990), 10 sets of reading strategies were selected as essential for EFL students to enhance their English reading comprehension.

Reliability and Validity of General Self-efficacy Questionnaire and Reading Strategy Use Questionnaire

To ensure the validity of questionnaires, the committee members' advice was sought. Each strongly confirmed the appropriateness of questionnaires. In order to estimate how reliable the self-efficacy questionnaire was, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was computed based on Cronbach’s alpha. The Cronbach’s alpha was .82. Also, the reading strategy use questionnaire was processed by SPSS for its Cronbach’s alpha. The Cronbach’s alpha for categories of cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, and testing strategies were .80, .83, .79, and .81 respectively.

Procedure

In the current study, data collection was done in one session at MAAD Institute. For administration, the researcher delivered the reading strategy use and the general self-efficacy questionnaires to the participants. They were asked to complete the questionnaires in a time-limitation of 30 minutes. Before administration, the researcher explained to the participants how to answer the questionnaires. The participants were assured that all the information would be kept confidential and would not be used anywhere except for the purpose of the study.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was manipulated. This study involved the following statistical procedures:

1: To find whether there was any significant relationship between self-efficacy and reading comprehension strategies, Pearson Coefficient-Moment Product was run.
2: To find whether there was any significant difference between males and females’ self-efficacy as well as the difference between males and females regarding the use of reading comprehension strategies, independent samples t-tests were run.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1

To investigate the first research question, coefficient correlation between self-efficacy and reading comprehension strategies was calculated and they were shown in Table 1. The correlation between self-efficacy and reading comprehension strategies was r = .811 and the p-value was .000 which was smaller than 0.5 (p < .05). The correlation between the two variables was significant. This means that there was a positive relationship between the two variables.
Research Question 2
In this section, the results of male and female learners’ self-efficacy were compared. It was needed to find out whether there was any difference between male and female learners’ self-efficacy. According to Table 2, The mean score of males and females were almost the same.

To investigate whether there was any significant difference between male and female learners’ self-efficacy, an independent samples t-test was run. As Table 3 indicated, sig was .975 which was higher than the predetermined value of ‘0.05” (p > 0.05). This means that there was not significant difference between male and female learners’ self-efficacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37.2273</td>
<td>2.52477</td>
<td>.53828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37.2500</td>
<td>2.51845</td>
<td>.47594</td>
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Table 3: Independent Samples t-test for male and female learners’ self-efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Upper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>-.032</td>
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Research Question 3
As Table 4 indicated, Descriptive statistics showed that the mean score of males was 4.6318 and the mean score of females was 5.0714 and they were almost the same.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of male and female learners regarding the use of reading comprehension strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension Strategies male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.6318</td>
<td>.93012</td>
<td>.19830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.0714</td>
<td>1.02012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To investigate whether there was any significant difference between male and female learners regarding the use of reading comprehension strategies, an independent samples t-test was run. As Table 5 indicated, the p-value was higher than 0.05. This means that the difference between two variables was not significant.

Table 5: Independent Samples t-test for male and female learners regarding the use of reading comprehension strategies

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Upper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension Strategies Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the findings of the study, when reader’s self-efficacy increases ones’ success in reading comprehension increases and conversely when reader’s self-efficacy decreases ones’ success in reading comprehension decreases. Also, gender can not be a factor that influences on the performance of males and females. Both highly self-efficacious male and female students use...
reading comprehension strategies effectively in the same way and there is not statistically significant difference between male and female students in reading comprehension and use of reading comprehension strategies. So, self-efficacy and reading comprehension are related to each other. The results of this study are in agreement with studies reported by Huang and Chang (1998), Ho (2005), Mills et al. (2007), Rahemi (2007), Li and Wang (2010), Hashemi and Ghanizadeh (2011), Doordinejad and Afshar (2014), Naseri and Zaferanieh (2012) that confirm and refer to the positive relationship between language learner and English achievement. The findings of the present study about gender is consistent with the findings of Magogwe and Oliver (2007) who believed that reading achievement is not affected by gender. On the other hand, the results are in contradiction with studies by Wolters and Rosenthal (2000) who believed that there is not any relationship between reading comprehension, use of reading comprehension strategies and self-efficacy. Similarly, Choi’s (2005) findings indicated no significant correlation between either general self-efficacy or academic self-efficacy. In language learning strategy studies involving gender, efforts have been made to investigate the strategies used by males and females and ‘the sex difference findings to date show that in typical language learning situations females use significantly more learning strategies than males and use them more often’ (Oxford 1989, p. 239). Bonyadi, Nikou, and Shahbaz (2012) believed that gender did not have any important role in both self-efficacy and use of learning strategies.

**CONCLUSION**

Self-efficacy is an important concept which is considerably related to language learning. Teachers should increase their own self-efficacy beliefs in order to motivate students to improve their reading skill. Also, teachers should raise learners’ consciousness and develop reading abilities. Self-efficacy increases learners’ willpower and instigates them to use reading comprehension strategies effectively. So, students should use their knowledge, skills and self-efficacy to attain good status in their reading comprehension skills. Reliance of students on their capabilities can help them to cope with learning barriers. So, self-efficacy is more effective in determining and predicting the reading performance of language learners than their proficiency level. EFL learners’ self-beliefs can affect their reading comprehension negatively or positively depending on the strength of their self-efficacy. Therefore, self-efficacy is essential to learner’s willpower and will influence on one’s performance. It encourages EFL learners to make educated guesses while reading a passage. A relaxed atmosphere for language learning increases self-efficacy in the classroom. According to Ahmadi (2013), reading teachers need to go beyond their traditional roles by providing opportunities for their students to become motivated and develop their reading comprehension proficiency.

Teachers should not only focus on teaching the reading comprehension strategies without paying attention to the development of learners’ affect. Also, they should nurture academic self-efficacy and instigate positive attitude of students towards learning.

**Limitations of the study**

There are several limitations in this study: First, the sample size was relatively small. It was difficult for the researcher to gather data from numerous EFL learners. Second, this study only
focused on investigating students’ reading comprehension on the TOEFL test. More studies with different types of test should be done to explore major barriers in reading comprehension. Third, because this study only investigated advanced EFL students, the results cannot be generalized to freshmen and sophomores. Fourth, this study only was limited to the reading skill therefore more studies need to be carried out with regard to other language aspects.

REFERENCES


