The Interaction between Iranian EFL Learners' Interest in Reading Comprehension Topics and their Reading Comprehension Ability

Fatemeh Samadi

M.A student in TEFL , Department of English Language Teaching,
Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University,
Arak, Iran.
fatemehsamadi36@yahoo.com
and
Fatemeh Aziz Mohammadi
PHD in English literature, Department of English literature,
Arak branch, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran

Abstract

According to Anderson (2003), reading is the interaction of four things including the reader, the text, the fluent reading or the ability or read at an appropriate rate with adequate comprehension, and strategic reading, or the ability of the reader to use a variety of reading strategies to accomplish a purpose for reading (p. 8). Discovering the best methods and techniques or processes the learners choose to access, is the goal of research in reading strategies.

This article reports on an empirical study that examines the learner's ability in reading comprehension. On the other hand, the important issue which the researchers mentioned was attention to genders' interest in different topics in reading comprehension. So, the study was carried out at two high schools in Markazi province.

The results has shown that female and male students were not different in general reading comprehension, however male learners could answer male based text better than female learners while female learners had priority in female based text.

Keywords: Reading comprehension ability, Gender oriented Reading comprehension, Reading comprehensions topics.

1. Introduction

As Khalaji (2012) pointed out: Since reading is an important skill in language learning, it is necessary to define it. Aebersold and Field (1997) define reading as follows: "Reading is what happens when people look at a text and assign meaning to the written symbols in that text" (p. 15). In this definition, there are two necessary entities for the process: the text and the reader. Reading as a skill is then the interaction between these two entities. So, Khalaji continued his discussion about reading: "According to Stauffer (1969) reading means "getting information from the printed page" (p. 5). It can be concluded from this definition that one of the reasons for reading is to get some information out of the text in order to find out something or in order to do something with the information you get. It may not be necessary to read a text fully depending on the purpose. Therefore, readers develop some strategies to deal with reading.

As Wallace (1992) says "Experienced readers make judgments during any reading activity about the degree of care and attention which the material warrants. In the real world, effective reading means a flexible and appropriate response to the material in hand, and this is always guided

by the reader's options, including the option to give up" (p. 5). While one is reading a text, there is always a purpose in his/her mind because reading is a purposeful activity. In this sense, the purpose for reading determines how the text should be read. If the person is looking for a number in a telephone directory, s/he should be very selective. S/he should scan the directory for the number needed. On the contrary, a researcher needs to read an article in detail to get the main ideas of the writer and to learn more about the subject. Nevertheless, it can still be argued that any reading is selective. Wallace (1992) shares the same idea by saying, "Just as we filter spoken messages in deciding what to attend to, so do we filter written messages. And even when we commit ourselves to a full reading, that reading will still be selective, some parts being read with greater care than others" (p. 5). "

Recent models of text comprehension agree on the idea that reading comprehension embraces three components: text, mental representation (world knowledge), and integrated situation model (Prestin, 2008).

The reader decodes the words to get a mental representation of the text, but this gives him a superficial understanding of the text. The reader has to integrate the text-based knowledge and world knowledge to get a deeper understanding. This integration is accomplished through building a situation model (e.g. Perfetti, Landi, and Oakhill, 2005). What all these models of reading comprehension suggest is that reading comprehension is an interactive process of making meaning and requires effort on the part of readers (Anderson, 1999; Grabe, & Stoller, 2002; Erten and Razı, 2009).

As a matter of fact, The reader decodes the words and sentences to get a mental representation of the text, so, he/she realize the text-based knowledge and world knowledge to get a deeper understanding. This integration is accomplished through building a situation model (e.g. Perfetti, Landi, and Oakhill, 2005). Anderson, 1999; Grabe, & Stoller, 2002; Erten and Razı, 2009suggest that reading comprehension is an interactive process of making meaning and requires effort on the part of readers .Some researchers such asAlptekin, 2006; Donin et al., 2004; Ehrlich, 1990; Fukkink et al., 2005; Kintsch, 1998; McNamara, 2001; McNamara & Kintsch, 1996; Salmero´n, Kintsch, & Can˜as, 2006; Van den Broek, Rapp, & Kendeou, 2005; Wei, 2009,belive that the reader integrate different sources of knowledge to construct a cognitive representation of the text information.

Regarding the above discussion, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Male and Female learners are different in General Reading comprehension test.

H2: Male and female learners are different in their female based text.

H3: Male and female learners are different in their male based text.

H4: Male and female learners differ in their male and female based text.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participant

The initial sample of this study consisted of 113 students with the age range of 15-18. They consisted of two groups: 1) Female students have been lived in Arak for more than 7 years .2) Male students have been lived in Arak for more than 7 years. By means of a background questionnaire some information about subjects were elicited.

2.2. Materials

The different materials which were used in this paper includes:

a) Questionnaire on readings interest : It determined male and female's interest in different reading Comprehension topics. To meet the aim, the subjects were requested to mark the topics from a list according to their interest. This test has included 29 topics.

B) Background questionnaire: It was utilized to elicit some information as: the subjects full name, their age, name of their school and the language/languages they use.

c) Language Proficiency Test (Transparent): This test was composed of multiple choice cloze passage, 30 questions about grammar ,10 questions about vocabulary and 10 questions for reading comprehension, totally it contained 50 questions.

d) General reading comprehension test: It was used to determine the proficiency level of the subjects in reading comprehension ability .This test was consisted of two separate texts with 6 questions in each one.

e) Gender oriented Reading comprehension test: It was used to measure the effect of subjects   interest on their reading comprehension ability.

2.3. Procedures

Firstly, the subjects were informed that their performance will be kept confidential and will not have any effect on their final exam scores. The following procedures were adopted in order to meet the objective of this study.

Phase 1: At the very beginning of the research, Questionnaire on readings interest was administered to the participants. In this part, male and female students marked especial topics which were more desirable for them. This process was done by means of a five-point Likert scale questionnaire (Never/ Seldom/ Sometimes/ Usually/ and Always true of me).

Phase 2: The Background questionnaire was given to the subjects to fill them out.

Phase 3: The Transparent test was given to 113 male and female high school students. Two groups of High and Low language proficiency levels were identified, that is, those whose scores were 1SD below the mean were taken as Low and those whose scores were 1SD above the mean as High level, making 98 students in total. The time allowed as determined at the pilot study was 45 minutes.

Phase 4: The reading comprehension test was administered among the subjects to be completed in 30 minutes as determined at the pilot study in order to have an assessment of their English reading comprehension ability.

Phase 5: The subjects were given the gender-oriented reading comprehension test. That is Male-based text (M.B.T) and Female-based text (F.B.T) and Male, Female-based text (M.F.B.T).

3. Results and Discussion

Independent samples 't' test and repeated measure ANOVA were employed to compare the mean scores of data. Statistical representation of the analyzed data is given in Tables 1 and figure 1.

Table 1. Results of t-test and one-way ANOVA for mean scores in General Reading on male and female students.

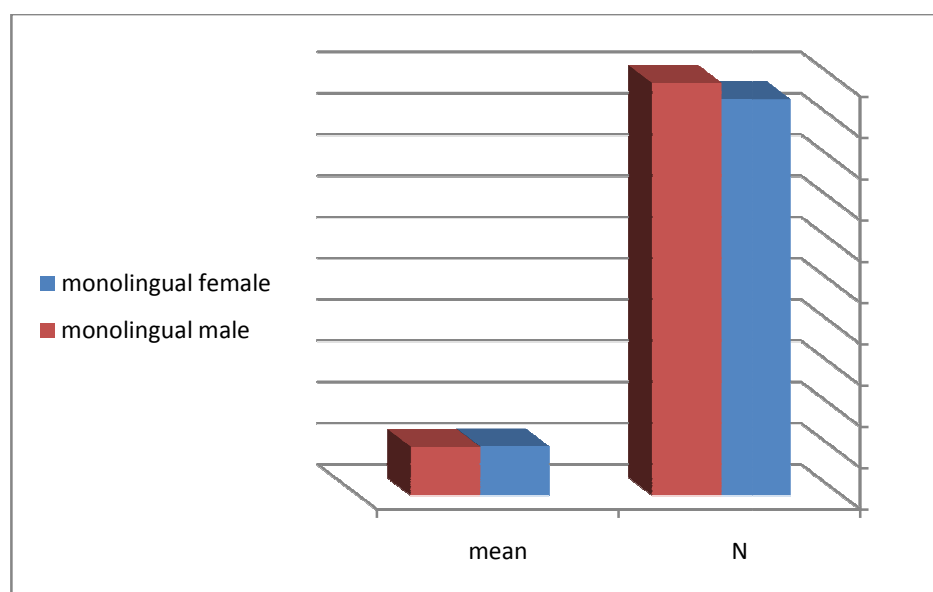| Group	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error mean	P value
female	48	5/95	2/65	0/383	0/906
male	50	5/90	2/19	0/310	

Figure 1. Results of t-test and one-way ANOVA for mean scores on F.B.T scores on male and female students.

According to obtained mean and standard deviation, there wasn't meaningful difference between male and female in General Reading Comprehension test($p > 0/05$).As a result the first hypothesis was rejected.

Table 2. Results of t-test and one-way ANOVA for mean scores on F.B.T scores on male and female students.

Group	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error mean	P value
female					
male					

Regarding the second research hypothesis(Male and female students are different in their text based female).So, as indicated in table1and figure1: There is meaningful difference between male and female learners in T.B.F.($p < 0/05$).So the obtained means have   shown that females outperform males in F.B.T. So, the second hypothesis was accepted.

In a study on gender differences in achievement test performance at the college level , Doolite and Welch (1989) found notable gender differences for items associated with specific passages ,reporting that female scored higher than male with humanities-oriented reading passage. In a study of gender difference in L2 reading comprehension in the Netherlands, Bugel and Buul (1996) found that the topic of text is an important factor explaining gender-based differences among scores obtained on the reading part of the national foreign language examination.

Males scored significant better on the multiple choice comprehension items for essay about laser thermometers, volcanoes, cars, and football player. Female achieved significantly higher scores

on the comprehension tests for essay on text topics such as midwives, a sad story, and a housewife's dilemma. (Shahmohammadi, 2011)
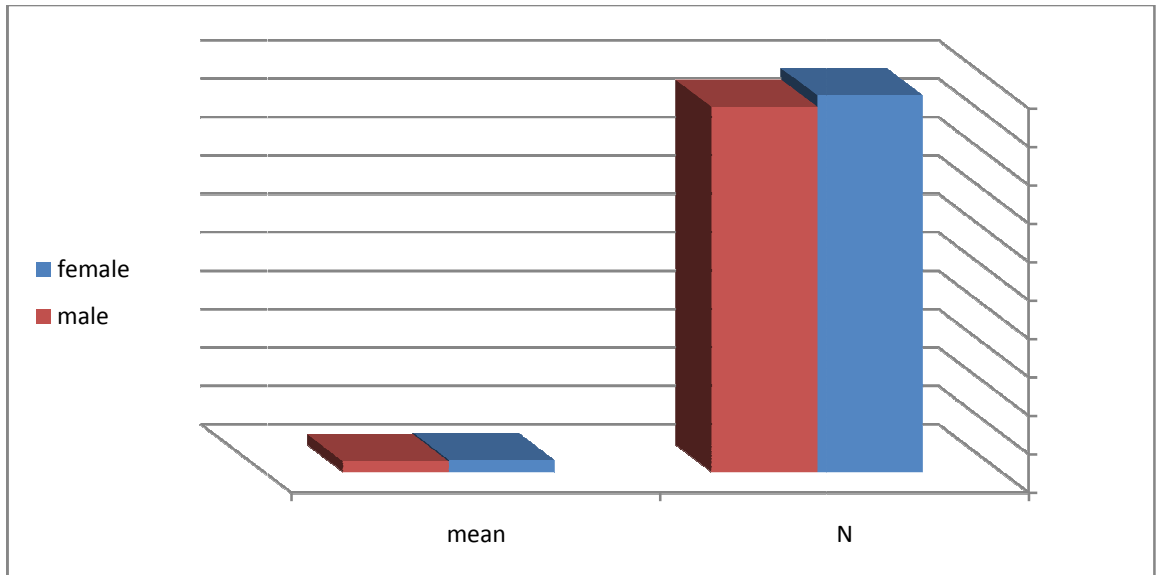

Figure 2. Results of t-test and one-way ANOVA for mean scores on F.B.T scores on male and female students.

As Nourzadeh concluded, With respect to the third research hypothesis (Male and female students are different in their text based male). There was a relationship between Iranian Preuniversity EFL learners' gender and their use of reading strategies. This finding, therefore ,supports the findings of other studies in this area (Nunan,1999; Ehram & Oxford, 1989; Oxford*et al.* 1995). The female subjects showed more strategy awareness than male subjects.

Table 3. Results of t-test and one-way ANOVA for mean scores on M.B.T scores on male and female learners.

Group	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error mean	P value
female		2/57	1/06	0/107	0
male		3/4	1/24	0/128	

Regarding to obtained mean, there is meaningful difference between male and female students in their M.B.T.(p<0/05).Obtained mean which belong to these data have shown that males are better than females in M.B.T. Therefore the third hypothesis was accepted.

According to fourth hypothesis (Male and female students differ in their text based male & female),the following mean and standard deviation were obtained:
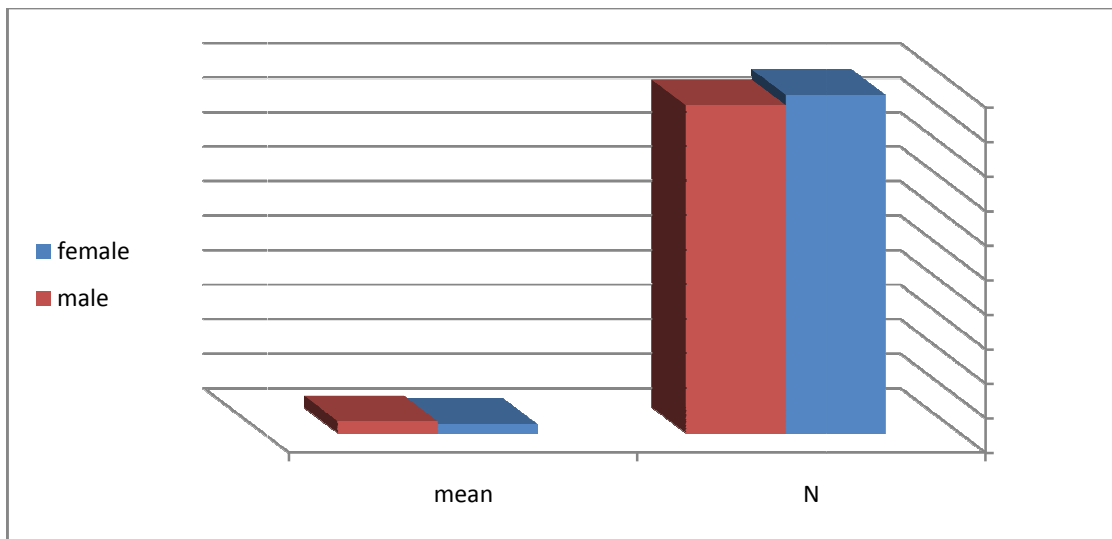
Figure 3. Results of t-test and one-way ANOVA for mean scores on M.B.T scores on male and female learners.

Table 4. Results of t-test and one-way ANOVA for mean scores on (M.F.B.T)scores on male and female students.

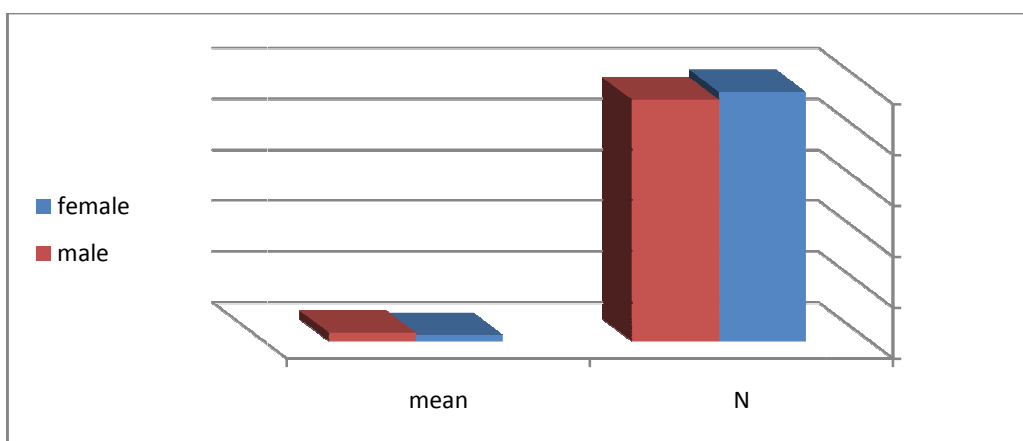| Group	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error mean	P value
female		2/82	1/218	0/123	122
male		3/1	1/275	0/130	

Figure 4. Results of t-test and one-way ANOVA for mean scores on (M.F.B.T) scores on male and female students.

Regarding to obtained mean, there isn't meaningful difference between male and female students in their(M.F.B.T). (p>0/05).So females and males answered to this text equally. As it is clear in table3 and figure 3, they had same scores in this reading comprehension test. So the fourth hypothesis was rejected.

In particular, the study indicated that all the males and most of the females were able to find the main idea behind the text and also a topic for the text (Ahmadi, Mansoordehghan, 2012).

4. Conclusion

In initial part of this article, there were some definition and discussion about reading comprehension by different researchers. Also, the effect of genders   interest in different topics in reading comprehension was analyzed .

The reader integrates different sources of knowledge to construct a cognitive representation of the text information (Alptekin, 2006; Donin et al., 2004; Ehrlich, 1990; Fukkink et al., 2005; Kintsch, 1998; McNamara, 2001; McNamara & Kintsch, 1996; Salmero´n, Kintsch, & Can˜as, 2006; Van den Broek, Rapp, & Kendeou, 2005; Wei, 2009).

Data analysis in this study indicated that gender doesn't have any effect on reading comprehension ability. So the first hypothesis was rejected ,i.e. General reading ability was equal in both gender. On the other hand, the result of second hypothesis indicated that subjects had better scores in texts which belongs to their interest. It means females could get better scores in F.B.T while males learners outperformed in M.B.T. So the second and third hypotheses were accepted. However, the fourth hypothesis was rejected because both male and female learners had equal scores in M.F.B.T.

So, as Shahmohammadi,(2011)has mentioned: The Selection of reading material is important. Selecting authentic texts for the intermediate levels of instruction should not simply be a matter of examining text difficulty aspects that are based on linguistic features.

In fact, reading is an active process that involves complex, interactive variables .This article serves to provide the foundation for further discussion of choosing topics which related to genders interest.

References

Ahmadi, A& Mansoordehghan, S.(2012). Comprehending a Non-text: A Study of Gender-based Differences in EFL Reading Comprehension .Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 761-770

Anderson, N.J. (2003). Teaching reading. In D. Nunan (Ed.), *Practical English language teachin* Al-Shumaimeri. Y. A. N (2005). Gender Differences in Reading Comprehension Performance in in relation to content familiarity of gender-neutral texts. Paper presented at the The second international conference: Language, culture and literature, Minia University, Eygept.

Bugel, K., & Buunk, B. P. (1996). Sex differences in foreign language text comprehension: The role of interest and prior knowledge. *Modern Language Journal, 80,* (1), pp.15-31. *g* (pp. 67-86).New York: McGraw Hill Publishers.

Karbalaei, A. (2010). A Comparison of the Metacognitive Reading Strategies Used by EFL and ESL Readers The Reading Matrix © 2010 Volume 10, Number 2.

Khalaji, H.R, Vafaeeseresht, K.(2012). The Impact of Reading Strategy Training on the Reading Comprehension of Iranian EFL Learners .Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 135-140, January 2012.

Nourzadeh, A.(2005). On The Relationship Between Iranian EFL Learner' Gender and Their Use Of Reading Strategies at High Schools.

Shahmohammadi, N.(2011). The Effect of Gender Base Materials on Reading Comprehension. International Journal of Human Resource Studies ISSN 2162-3058 2011, Vol. 1, No. 2.