



The Relationship among EFL Learners' Self-Esteem, Autonomy, and Reading Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to see whether any significant relationship exists among EFL learners' self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension; and whether there is any significant difference between EFL learners' self-esteem and autonomy in predicting their reading comprehension skill. For this purpose, 121 EFL participants who were studying English Language Literature and Translation at Islamic Azad University Central Tehran Branch, were randomly selected. The researcher tested different ranges of students with different levels of proficiency. The Coopersmith self-esteem inventory, autonomy questionnaire and reading comprehension section of Preliminary English Test (PET) were administered. Correlation and regression analysis demonstrated that there is a significant relationship among EFL learners' self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension. There is also a significant difference between EFL learners' self-esteem and autonomy in predicting their reading comprehension.

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Introduction

Due to the significance of the reading skill in learning and assessing knowledge of foreign language, many researchers have been interested in determining and identifying factors influencing the process of comprehension (e.g., Block, 1992; Brantmeier, 2002; Burns, Roe, & Ross, 1999; Erten&Topkaya, 2009; Heidari, 2010; Lehr, Osborn, & Hiebert, 2005). There are some non-linguistic factors in reading, such as reader variable and text which affect the comprehension of readers (Anders, 2002). He added that reader variables are strategies used by readers; their background knowledge, motivation, personality, and self-esteem. According to him, self-esteem is one of the most important reader's variable.

Considering the learner's self-esteem, it is necessary to recognize how learners think about themselves and about language learning (Gestwicki, 1999). Therefore, there can be a relation between language learning and self-esteem. Brown (2000) maintains that "no successful activity can occur without some degree of self-esteem"(p.145).

Research findings have provided evidence that autonomy is of general concern in second or foreign language learning (Dafei, 2007; Wenden, 1998; Zhang & Li, 2004). Demo and Parker (1987) believe that in real situations both self-esteem and autonomy are interacting variables, in the sense that language learning can affect the degree of self-esteem and vice versa; that is to say, by strengthening one, the other factor will be strengthened.

Little and Dam (1998) believe that the autonomous learner should have the ability to shape and direct the learning process, and evaluate their learning to compare it with their learning goals and the things they have achieved.

Taking the role of all mentioned factors into consideration, each of these attributes could be just as a piece of the puzzle. The correlation between reading comprehension as a target and any of these variables on the one hand and the relationship

between each pair of them on the other hand can provide us with a more holistic yet precise approach toward reading.

Statement of the Problem

Many researchers have already investigated the relation between autonomy and reading comprehension on one hand and between self-esteem and reading on the other. Each of these factors has been individually examined in the literature. However, few researchers have investigated the relationship between autonomy, self-esteem and reading comprehension. As a result, in this study it seems necessary for the researcher to investigate the relationship between the self-esteem, autonomy and reading comprehension of EFL learners.

To fulfill the purpose of the study, an attempt was made to find the answer to the following questions:

Q1: Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension?

If a significant relationship is found, the following question will be considered:

Q2: Is there any significant difference between EFL learners' self-esteem and autonomy in predicting reading comprehension?

In order to investigate the above-mentioned research questions, the following null hypotheses are stated:

H01: There is no significant relationship among EFL learners' self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension.

If this hypothesis is rejected, the following null hypothesis will be raised:

H02: There is no significant difference between EFL learners' self-esteem and autonomy in predicting reading comprehension.

Considering these hypotheses, two questionnaires and a PET reading comprehension were administered among 174 undergraduate students of Islamic Azad University Central Tehran Branch. From among those who received the questionnaires, a number of 148 questionnaires were returned to the researcher, of which 121 were filled out completely, and therefore, could be used for further analysis.

Significance of the study

Discovering the relationship between self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension will encourage those who are involved with language training to use reading materials purposefully and efficiently. If a significant relationship is found between self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension this insight can assist in the development of effective instruction.

Limitations

1. The participants of this study were undergraduate students whose age usually ranges between 18 and 25; therefore, the result of the study will not be generalizable to other age groups.
2. The number of male and female subjects in this study was not equal, so gender may act as an intervening variable.

The Review of Literature

Introduction

In order to meet the essential requirements of this research, the review of literature will be allocated to the study of the following three general topics: "Self-esteem", "Autonomy", and "Reading comprehension".

Definition of Key Terms

Self-Esteem

Theoretical work in the area of self-esteem began a century ago with seminal works by James. According to James (1890), the self is "part of me" that is one's body, abilities, reputation, strengths, weaknesses, and possessions (as cited in Harris, 2009).

Jacoby (1994) maintains, "Self-esteem is a feeling of worth that we have of ourselves. Self-esteem is a kind of belief about a self that a person brings with him or herself when facing the world (Blascovich&Tomaka, 1991).

To Cooley (1902), the self has several aspects and the most dominant one is the social self. The social self arises from one's observations of how others react to the self; that is, people learn to identify themselves through the perceptions of others, termed as the looking- glass self.

According to Blascovich&Tomaka (1991), self-esteem is generally considered as the evaluative gadget of self-concept, a broader exhibition of the self that includes cognitive and behavioral facets.

Some researchers have suggested that a high level of self-esteem facilitates the achievement of goals (Leary, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007). High self-esteem can help with coping skills and low self-esteem can lead to avoidance of problems, these both relate to how students achieve goals in their daily lives.

Individuals with high self-esteem may set higher goals for themselves and become more inclined to continue in facing with failure (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003).

According to Harris (2009), there are different ways for measuring self-esteem. Researchers may measure people's self-esteem by saying, "Tell me about yourself." They may give an open-ended questionnaire with the phrase "Who am I" at the top, followed by a series of blank lines. They might give people a pile of cards, each with a statement or phrase and tell them to sort the statements into a series of piles ranging from "most descriptive" to "least descriptive" of themselves. The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) is one of the most widely used measures of self-esteem (Harris, 2009). It was designed to measure the respondents' attitudes toward self in personal, social, family, and academic areas of experience. It has been used to determine the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement, assertiveness, peer relationships, and creativity.

Coopersmith (1967, 1981) based his criterion on the premise that self-reports do add to the perception of the self-esteem of individuals.

Among the most recent studies in Iran, the result of the study conducted by Zare and Riasati (2011) indicated that the anxiety and academic level of students were significantly and positively related to the learner self-esteem level of their sample. Koosha, Ketabi&Kassian (2011) showed that gender has a significant impact on the speaking skill while age does not have a significant impact on this skill. A research conducted by Rashidi, Yamini and Riazi (2009) revealed that introversion did not have an impact on students' level of self-esteem; however, extroversion influenced participants' learner self-esteem. Bagheri and Faghih (2012) found that higher levels of self-esteem in MA students lead to higher levels of reading comprehension and vice versa.

In this study, self-esteem is operationally defined in terms of the participants' scores on the questionnaire designed by Coopersmith (1967) which includes a 58-item self-report inventory in which the participants read a declarative statement and then check whether the statement is "like me" or "unlike me."

Autonomy

In the domain of foreign language learning, it was Holec's (1981) seminal study "autonomy and foreign language learning" which triggered a growing interest in the concept of learner autonomy in the last two decades. He defines learner autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's own learning, which he then specifies as to have, and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning.

One of the definitions that most researchers agree with is the individual learner's acceptance of responsibility for his or her own learning (Benson & Voller, 1997; Little, 1991, Dickinson, 1995).

Little (1991) believes "autonomy is a capacity - for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. An autonomous learner has the means to translate the barriers between learning and living that have been a major preoccupation of educational psychology and curriculum development (Little, 1995).

The original theory and practice of autonomy emerged from research on adult self-directed learning (Zhe, 2009), a process in which individuals accept responsibility for all the decisions concerned with their learning.

According to Boud (1995), an autonomous learner is the one who is prepared to take some significant responsibility for his own learning.

Learners who accept responsibility for their learning are more likely to achieve their learning targets; and if they achieve their learning targets, they are more likely to maintain a positive attitude towards learning in the future (Dickinson, 1987).

There is an increasing interest toward the notion of autonomy in the domain of EFL teaching and learning all over the world, especially by Iranian researchers. Among the most recent ones, the result of the study conducted by Nematipour (2012) indicated that visual and auditory learning styles were significantly and positively related to the learner autonomous level of her sample. SheikhiBehdani (2011) showed that Iranian EFL learners' autonomy was significantly related to critical thinking ability. Also, research conducted by Kashefian-32

Naeni and Riazi (2011) revealed that age did not have an impact on students' readiness for autonomy; however, marital status and professional status influenced participants' learner autonomy.

In this study, learner autonomy is operationally defined in terms of the obtained scores by participants on the questionnaire designed by Zhang and Li (2004, p. 23) which consists of 21 items. Participants have to answer each item on a five-point Likert scale (1=never, 2=seldom, 3=occasionally, 4=often, 5=always).

Reading Comprehension

According to Eskey (2002), reading comprehension is “a process of acquiring information from a written or printed text and relating it to what you already know to construct a meaning of the text”(p. 6).

Reading comprehension is operationally defined in this study in terms of the participants' obtained score on a test excerpted from the Cambridge site. The test contains 5 parts and a total number of 35 questions.

In order to accomplish the purpose of the study, the following three instruments were utilized:

Over the past decade, a number of Iranian researchers tried to probe the learners' level of comprehension and ways to attain higher levels through different studies. Kafipour and HosseiniNaveh (2010) indicated that vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary learning strategies contributed to the learner reading comprehension level. Memari (2000) examined the effect of skimming on the reading speed and comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. The result indicated students should be conscious of the strategies needed for improving their comprehension. Also, Shakeri's study (2012) showed that learners' use of reading strategies and their level of reading comprehension have a significant relationship with each other. It also proved that higher levels of autonomy will result in higher levels of reading comprehension.

Methodology

Introduction

In an attempt to investigate the relationship among EFL learners' self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension, a detailed description of participants, instrumentation, procedure, design, and statistical analysis of the study would be of use.

Participants

The number of the participants in this research were 121 male and female EFL learners, between the ages of 18 to 25. They were selected randomly and consisted of undergraduates majoring in English Translation and English Literature at Islamic Azad University Central Tehran Branch.

Instruments

Coopersmith Self-esteem Questionnaire

The questionnaire contains 58 items. For each item, participants answer whether the statement provided is “like me” or “not like me”. If participants answer “like me” for item number 2, 4, 5, 11, 14, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 28, 29, 32, 36, 45, and 57 they are given one mark, and if they choose “not like me” they are given no mark. Item number 6, 13, 20, 24, 27, 34, 47, and 55 are known as lie items. If a participant answers “like me” for 3 or more of these items, it suggests that he or she is trying too hard to present him or herself in a positive light. These participants should not be included in the analyses. The rest of the items are marked in reverse order; which means if participants answer with “like me” they are given no mark and if they answer with “not like me” they are given one mark. The standard time allocated to this test is 30 minutes, but for this research, the participants answered it in 15 minutes. Scores between 25 and 50 are associated with high self-esteem while lower scores show low self-esteem. Coopersmith (1967) reported a desirable value reliability of 0.88 for the test (Kohansal, 1995). Acceptable reliability (internal consistency

and test-retest) and validity (convergent and discriminate) information exists for the CSEI (Bolton, 2003).

Autonomy Questionnaire

In order to measure the degree of participants' autonomy in learning, the researcher utilized the questionnaire designed by Zhang and Li (2004, p. 23) which includes 21 items. Participants had to answer each item on a five-point Likert scale (1=never, 2=seldom, 3=occasionally, 4=often, 5=always). The questionnaire has proved to have high content validity and high reliability. The questions were classified by Oxford (1990, p. 17), Wenden (1998, p. 34-35) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990). The standard time allocated to this test is 40 minutes, but participants answered it in 15 minutes. In order to turn the participants' selected choices into scores, the choices A, B, C, D and E are marked one, two, three, four and five, respectively. The total score turned out to be 105.

PET Reading Comprehension Test

A PET reading comprehension test derived from the Cambridge site and published in 2010 to measure the reading comprehension of participants. The reading component consists of 35 questions with five separate reading tasks in all. Each of the 35 questions carries one mark, which comprises 25% of the total marks for the whole examination. Texts are drawn wherever possible from the real world and are adapted as necessary to the level of the PET examination. To this end, item writers work with a grammatical syllabus and a vocabulary list, which is updated annually to reflect common usage (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Procedure

In order to achieve the purpose of the research, the following procedure was carried out:

Before administrating the questionnaires, the process of completing the questionnaires was fully explained to the participants. Due to the nature of correlational study, no criterion for establishing homogeneity was adopted. Moreover, the researcher selected the students randomly. Thence, the three questionnaires were administered to 174 participants. The researcher observed the process to make sure participants had fully understood the explanations and were able to answer the questions.

It should be added that administering each of the above-mentioned questionnaires took 40 minutes of each 90-minute class and three sessions were required, each for one questionnaire.

From the initial 174 administered questionnaires, 148 sets of questionnaires, including answered for all the three questionnaires and were considered for statistical analyses regarding the relationship among the variables.

To encourage participants to answer the questionnaires, the researcher promised to send the results to their email addresses. Participants were required to hand in the questionnaires right after finishing them because the researcher could not reach them later.

In the first session, the researcher handed out the self-esteem questionnaire, in the second session the autonomy questionnaire, and in the final session the PET exam was administered. The final step was conducting the statistical procedures by the researcher to see whether or not there was any relationship among EFL learners' self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension.

Design

The design of this study is descriptive since the focus of the researcher is to describe and interpret the current status of phenomena. Correlational research describes the degree to

which two or more quantitative variables are related. In other words, the researcher aimed at identifying the quality and quantity of the relationship between the two or more variables rather than establishing a cause and effect relationship. Therefore, the design of the current study is an ex post facto one. The Spearman correlation was used in order to find the correlations.

Results

In order to test the null hypotheses of the study, the descriptive statistics were obtained and the assumptions of linear correlation were checked, the results of which are presented in the following sections.

To run correlation, the following assumption should be checked: linear relation between each pair, normality of distribution of variables, and homoscedasticity of regression.

To check the linearity of relations, the researcher needed to visually inspect the data by creating scatterplots. Since there were multiple variables in the study, the researcher created a multiple scatterplot for self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension which is presented in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1.1 Multiple Scatterplot of Self-Esteem, Autonomy and Reading Comprehension

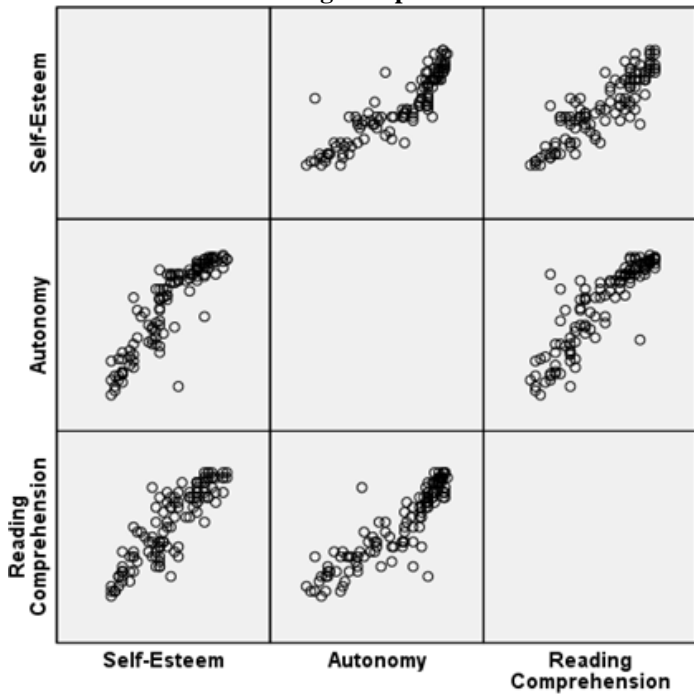
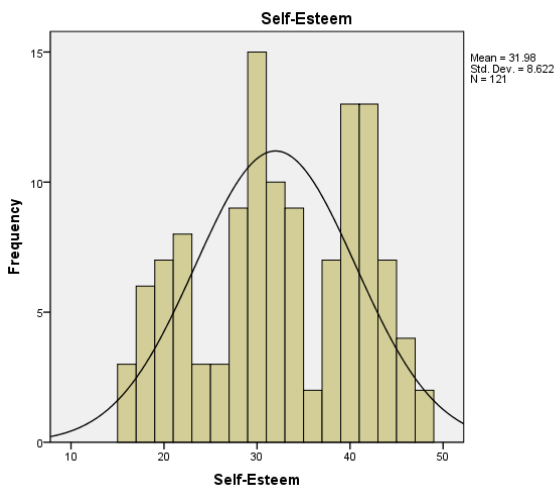


Figure 4.1.3 Histogram of the Distribution of Scores from the Self-Esteem Questionnaire



The inspection of Figure 4.1 shows that there was no kind of non-linear relationship between the scores on self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension, such as a U-shaped or curvilinear distribution. It was therefore, appropriate to test for a linear relationship in the data by performing a correlation considering this assumption.

To check the normality of the distributions, the descriptive statistics of the data were obtained and are reported thoroughly in the next three sections.

The fraction of skewness on Standard error of skewness for self-esteem $(-.180/.220 = -.81)$ was within the acceptable range of ± 1.96 .

As illustrated, scores appear to be reasonably normally distributed.

Descriptive Statistics of the Autonomy Scores

The descriptive statistics related to the obtained scores on the instrument appear below in table 4.2.

The fraction of skewness on Standard error of skewness for autonomy $(-.690/.220 = -.81)$ was not within the acceptable range of ± 1.96 . This means that the distribution showed a significant deviation from normality; therefore, parametric correlation could not be run on the participants' scores obtained from the autonomy questionnaire. The researcher conducted a Spearman correlation.

Figure 4.1.5 Histogram of the Distribution of Scores from the Autonomy Question

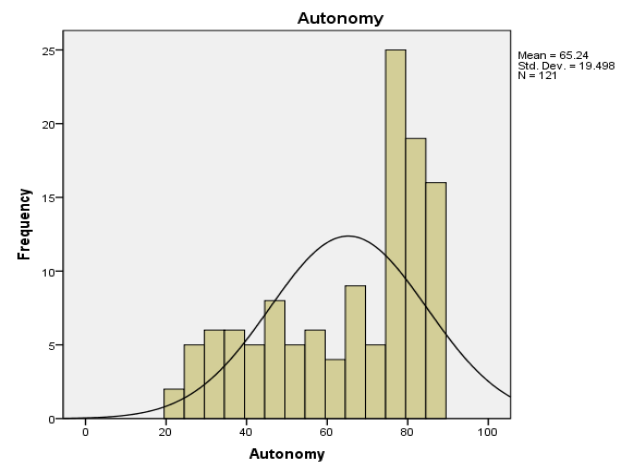
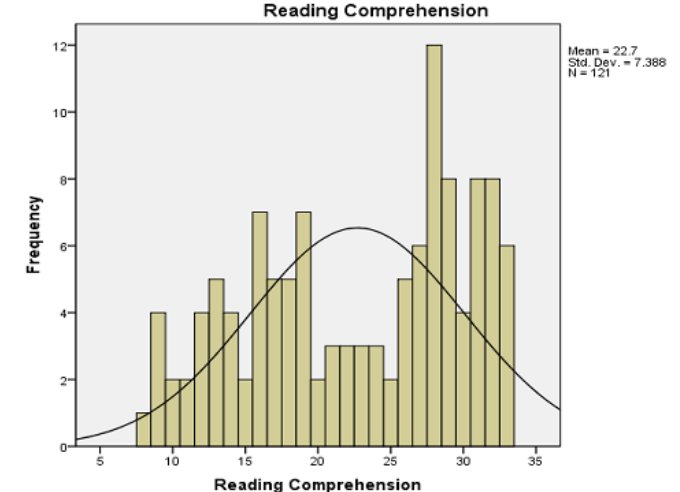


Figure 4.1.7 Histogram of the Distribution of Scores from the Reading Comprehension Test



The actual shape of the distribution for autonomy can be seen in Figure 4.5. As illustrated, scores do not appear to be reasonably normally distributed.

Table 4.2.1 Correlation of the Obtained Scores on the Questionnaires

	Self-Esteem	Autonomy	Reading comprehension
Spearman's Self-Esteem Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.919	.880
rhoSig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
N	121	121	121
AutonomyCorrelation Coefficient	.919	1.000	.911
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
N	121	121	121
Reading Comprehension Correlation Coefficient	.888	.911	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
N	121	121	121

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.2.2 Correlation Report

No of cases	R	Sig(2-tailed)	R2
121	.919	.000	.84
121	.88	.000	.77
121	.911	.000	.82

Table 4.3.1 Variables of the Regression Model

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Autonomy, Self-Esteem		Enter

a. All requested variables entered.

b. Dependent Variable: Reading Comprehension

Table 4.3.2 Model Summary-R and R Square

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.915	.838	.835	2.998

a. Predictors: (Constant), Autonomy, Self-Esteem

b. Dependent Variable: Reading Comprehension

Table 4.3.3 Regression output: ANOVA table

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5488.631	2	2744.315	305.310	.000
	Residual	1060.659	118	8.989		
	Total	6549.289	120			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Autonomy, Self-Esteem

b. Dependent Variable: Reading Comprehension

Table 4.3.4 Regression Output: Coefficient

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		standardized Coefficients	T	Sig	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1(Constant)	1.76	1.052		-1.676	.096	-3.846	.320					
Self-Esteem	.378	.069	.0441	5.446	.000	.240	.515	.886	.448	.202	.210	4.767
Autonomy	.190	.031	.501	6.197	.000	.129	.251	.893	.496	.230	.210	4.767

a. Dependent Variable: Reading Comprehension

Table 4.3.5 Residual Statistics - Predicted Variable: Reading Comprehension Residuals Statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	8.46	32.32	22.70	6.763	121
Std. Predicted Value	-2.107	1.422	.000	1.000	121
Standard Error of Predicted Value	.297	1.356	.452	.136	121
Adjusted Predicted Value					
Residual	8.37	32.33	22.70	6.766	121
Std. Residual	-13.322	12.453	.000	2.973	121
Stud. Residual	-4.444	4.154	.000	.992	121
Deleted Residual	-4.507	4.188	.000	1.003	121
Stud. Deleted Residual	-13.706	12.662	.001	3.041	121
Mahal. Distance	-4.932	4.520	-.002	1.036	121
Cook's Distance	.183	23.560	1.983	2.464	121
Centered Leverage Value	.000	.195	.008	.021	121
	.002	.196	.017	.021	121

Descriptive Statistics of the Reading Comprehension Scores

The PET reading comprehension test was the last instrument which was used to collect the required data for the dependent variable of the study. The descriptive statistics related to the obtained scores of the test appear below in Table 4.6.

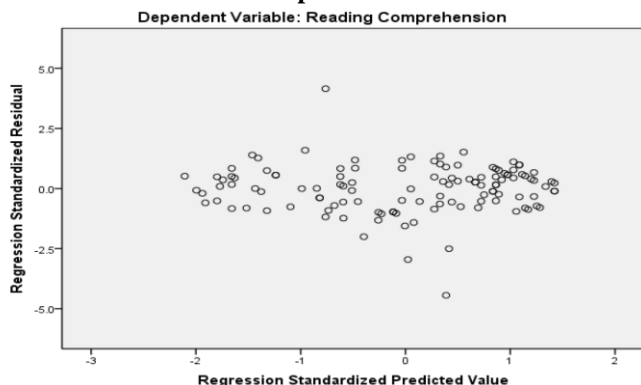
As demonstrated in table 4.3., the distribution of data for reading comprehension came out to be normal as the fraction of skewness on standard error of skewness ($-.298/.220 = -1.35$) was within the range of ± 1.96 . This means that the distribution did not show a significant deviation from normality; therefore, parametric correlation could be run on the participants' scores obtained from the Reading Comprehension Test.

The actual shape of the distribution for reading comprehension can be seen in figure 4.8. As illustrated, scores appear to be reasonably normally distributed.

Homoscedasticity for Regression

To check the assumption of homoscedasticity, that is, the assumption that variance of residuals for every pair of points on the independent variable is equal, the researcher examined the residuals plot.

Figure 4.1.8 Plot of Studentized Residuals for Reading Comprehension



As demonstrated by Figure 4.10, the cloud of data is scattered randomly across the plot and thus the variance is homogeneous. Since the assumption of normality correlation was not observed for autonomy, the researcher ran Spearman's correlation. This will verify the hypotheses of the study which will be presented in the succeeding sections.

Testing the First Null Hypotheses

In order to test the first null hypothesis of the study the researcher had to conduct a Pearson Correlation Coefficient analysis based on the ex post facto design. Since the assumption of normality of the distributions was violated, the researcher had to employ a non-parametric statistical analysis to investigate the research hypotheses. Spearman's Rank Order Correlation as the non-parametric alternative to Pearson's Product Correlation was used to calculate the relationship between the variables. Table 4.4 shows the results of Spearman's correlation.

As demonstrated in table 4.5, the correlation between self-esteem and autonomy came out to be significant at .05 level ($r=.919$, $p=.000 < .05$). Also self-esteem showed a significant correlation with reading comprehension as well ($r=.88$, $p=.000 < .05$). Autonomy and reading comprehension were also significantly correlated ($r=.91$, $p=.000 < .05$).

According to Table 4.6 above, the R^2 (or common variance) which is the effect size for correlation, came out to be .84 for self-esteem and autonomy, .77 for self-esteem and reading comprehension, and .82 for autonomy and reading comprehension. Common variances of 25% and above are considered to be large effect size (Cohen, 1992; Larson-Hall, 2010). Moreover, the 95% confidence interval of these common

variances are very small confidence interval. Higher power in a study will result in smaller confidence intervals and more precision in estimating correlation. Therefore, the long effect size with the small confidence interval indicated that the correlation was highly reliable and precise. As the results of the correlational study manifested, the researcher was able to reject the first null hypothesis which stated that:

H01: There is no significant relationship among EFL learners' self-esteem, autonomy and reading comprehension.

Testing the Second Null Hypothesis

Since the correlation between the three variables of self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension came out to be significant, the researcher could legitimately opt for the multiple regression analysis between variables and test the hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference between EFL learners' self-esteem and autonomy, as predictor variables of this study, in predicting their reading comprehension. The following tables show the result:

Table 4.7 shows the variables of the regression model. Self-esteem and autonomy were the predictor (independent) variables and reading comprehension was the predicted (dependent) variable.

Table 4.3.2 Presents the regression model summary including the R and R square.

As reported in Table 4.8., R came out to be .91 and R square came out to be 0.838. This means that the model explains 83.8 percent of the variance in reading comprehension. Table 4.9. reports the results of ANOVA ($F_{2, 118} = 305.31$, $p=.000 < .05$) which proved to be significant.

Table 4.9 demonstrates the standardized beta coefficients which signify the degree to which each predictor variable contributes to the prediction of the predicted variable. Inspection of the Sig. values showed that both self-esteem and autonomy make a statistically significant unique contribution to the equation as both Sig. values are less than .05. The comparison of beta values revealed that autonomy has the largest beta coefficient ($Beta=.501$, $t=6.19$, $p=.000$). This means that this variable makes strongest statistically significant unique contribution to explaining reading comprehension. Therefore, it was concluded that autonomy could more significantly predict the reading comprehension scores of candidates. Moreover, inspection of part correlation (semi partial correlation coefficient) revealed that autonomy uniquely explains 6 percent of the variance in reading comprehension ($.230 \times .230 = 0.052$).

Ultimately, although normality of the distributions were checked for correlation in the previous sections, the residuals table (Table 4. 11) also verified the absence of outstanding outliers as the Cook's distance values did not exceed 1 and Mahalanobis distance value did exceed 13.82 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Table 4.3.5 Residual Statistics - Predicted Variable: Reading Comprehension

Therefore, the researcher was able to refuse the second null hypothesis that stated: "There is no significant difference between EFL learners' self-esteem and autonomy in predicting their reading comprehension." On one hand, a significant correlation was found between the participants' self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension, and on the other hand, the regression analysis model demonstrated that autonomy was the strongest significant predictor of reading comprehension.

Discussion

The analysis of data reported in this chapter yielded that there was a significant relationship among the three variables. The results of the regression analyses also revealed that self-

esteem and autonomy were predictors for reading comprehension. However, it was revealed that autonomy makes the strongest statistically significant unique contribution to explaining reading comprehension. Put simplistically, autonomy is a better predictor of reading comprehension.

The findings of this study are in line with Zarei and Ghahremani's findings (2010) about the relationship between autonomy and reading comprehension. Other studies on self-esteem's relationship with reading comprehension also imply the positive relationship of these two variables. In one study by Bagheri and Faghih (2012), they found that a higher self-esteem will result in higher reading comprehension and vice versa. The above-mentioned premises support the findings of the present study in that they show both self-esteem and autonomy significantly contribute to reading comprehension.

Conclusions and Interpretations

The current research aimed at investigating any possible relationship among EFL learners' self-esteem, autonomy and reading comprehension. It also aimed at seeking any difference between EFL learners' self-esteem and autonomy in predicting their reading comprehension. Rejecting the first null hypothesis of the study, the researcher concluded that there was a significant correlation among EFL learners' self-esteem, autonomy, and reading comprehension. The results of the regression analysis indicated that learners' self-esteem and autonomy could significantly predict their reading comprehension. However, autonomy could be a better predictor of reading comprehension as compared with self-esteem. Therefore, the conclusion was that there was a significant difference between learners' self-esteem and autonomy in predicting their reading comprehension.

The findings implies that fostering the students' autonomy in the classroom or in the relevant training programs in second or foreign language teaching and learning might help improve the students' reading comprehension. It is also inferred that the more autonomous a learner becomes, the more likely he is to achieve reading comprehension.

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