Investigating the Relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' Self-Esteem and their Receptive Skills across Genders

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Abstract

Purpose: The present research was conducted to discover the possible relationship between self-esteem and the receptive skills of EFL learners in Iran across genders.

Methodology: The design of the study was correlational or ex post facto design. The researchers used three instruments for data collection in the current study. A language proficiency test to measure the participants' proficiency level, Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and finally two tests of listening and reading adopted from Preliminary English Test. To begin the research, in order to clear the language proficiency level of the learners, the researchers gave all learners a language proficiency test in Payame Noor University in Tabriz. After the test, the researchers finally selected 52 candidates whose test scores were between one SD below and above the mean as the homogeneous sample for further data collection. Then they collected some parts of the data from Coopersmith's self-esteem questionnaire to find out the learners' self-esteem. Finally, they gathered the last part of the data which was the learners' receptive skills from two tests of listening and reading adopted from PET. With the intention of testing all the research hypotheses, the researchers ran Pearson correlation analysis as the chief statistical analysis.

Findings: The Results showed a significant correlation between the self-esteem and reading skill of the learners across genders. Also no relationship could be found between the self-esteem and listening skill of the learners across genders.

Conclusion: From the findings, self-esteem had deep-seated and improved positive possessions on reading performances of the learner. But when it comes to listening performance, not self-esteem, but most linguistic knowledge and strategy use, mark the failure or success of a learner. It seems that there are some other factors of which affect the process of listening comprehension.

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1. Introduction

Generally speaking, languages are taught in terms of four skills of speaking, listening, writing, and reading and comprehension. Listening and reading are called receptive skills, because for the learners it is not essential to produce language to do these, they try to receive and then understand it. Sometimes they call these two skills passive skills too. Every language user needs to master these skills when learning a natural language. Although English language learners have approximately the same goals, their learning strategies and methods remarkably differ from each other. Teachers are expected to be aware of differences among learners; furthermore, they must be able to tailor the teaching materials such as textbooks so as to fit the target teaching context (Harmer, 2007).

These days, one of the main objectives in English language learning and teaching process is to increase alertness about learners' self-esteem and their probable special influences in the learning and teaching process and successively, on education results. Additionally, since the frequent student factors that seem to impact on the procedure of language teaching (Blair, 1982), the prominence and importance on the personality types among students is certainly related in recent language teaching and its correlated education settings. The achievement of second language learning is due not only to cognitive elements, but to self-esteem, personality, and emotional aspects of the students (Brown, 2000; Carrel, Prince & Astica, 1996).

Self-esteem effects on the learners' understanding and ability. It can be recognized and accepted that high self-esteem learners often have higher objectives and aims for themselves and become more enthusiastic to carry on despite failure. Moreover, high self-esteem might help learners have the assurance to encounter challenging circumstances as clearly as perceive satisfaction from their growth and accomplishment (Murk, 2006). Oden, Ebuta and Nta (2014), add that learners who are self-confident in their educational abilities believe in better scores of examinations and quality of their work to produce professional and personal benefits. On the other hand, learners who lack self-esteem in their educational abilities think about a low score even beforehand they enroll in a course or start an examination.

According to Eagly (1987) and Eagly and Karau (2002), it is reported in research studies that both male and females in their attempts to improve their language performances, females outscored males in EFL learning. Thus gender is considered as an imperative biological factor that is of huge significance in the process of second language acquisition. There are chief differences in language production of women and men, in a way neither education nor any other attempts can close the gap. A gender difference is an inequality between male and female. In line with gender role theory, common gender stereotypes are "cultural expectations for gender right behaviors". Females and males are trained for the right behaviors and from the family and contained by cultivation they strengthen up with. As a result, "non-physical gender differences are a product of socialization" (Zoghi, Kazemi & Kalani, 2013).

Based on the conditions above, the current study conducted to discover the probable correlation between self-esteem and the receptive skills of EFL learners in Iran across genders. Self-esteem is a remarkably widespread construct in contemporary psychology (Zeigler- Hill, 2013). Self-esteem is described as the complication of feelings about oneself that guides behavior, influences affective evaluator of individual's evaluator, and drives motivation in learning (Stevick, 1990). Branden (2001) differentiates self-esteem into two aspects, such as self-confidence which is the sense of efficacy and self-respect which is the sense of worthiness. Frequently, self-esteem is interchangeably used with self-concept, self-competence, and self-efficacy. Consequently, Burns (1979) declares that self-esteem is a negative or positive outlook of an individual towards him or herself. It means an individual who has high self-esteem is self-confident. Those who have low self-esteem ordinarily indicate signs of stress and sadness. A few researchers can be found who have tried to explore the correlation between self-esteem and English success and accomplishment in terms of different skills or sub-skills. Besides, in the mentioned study, some similar topics were examined in different contexts and on EFL learners' achievements by some divergent

researchers. Some of these studies which are related to self-esteem and receptive skills are mentioned below: In line with the study by Branden in (2001) fifty randomly selected university learners about discovering the relationship between self-esteem and writing performance, no correlation could be found. No relationship was between high level of writing skill and high level of self-esteem; also, nor was any result concerned the low level of learners writing skill and its correlation with low level of self-esteem. In another study, Tremblay, Sire, and Balkin, (2000) stated that there was a significant relationship between self-esteem and academic accomplishment of learners in Canada.

Hisken (2011) supported a positive correlation between learner's reading skill and their self-esteem in America. In line with the study Rashidi, Yamini, and Shafiei (2011) also found that self-esteem and learner's oral communication was significantly correlated in Saudi Arabia. Bagheri, Faghih (2012) research did focus on self-esteem and paragraph writing, but they included English language proficiency as their unseen variables in the study. They found correlation between the self-esteem and English language proficiency of Iranian EFL students. This study used Nashre Ebteda version of TOEFL proficiency test (structure and reading sections) and Coppersmiths' self-esteem questionnaire.

On the support of the positive role of self-esteem and reading skill Sadeq Bargheri and Faghih (2012) also reported strong support. They further found self-esteem as a vital affective factor. It had a significant function in reading ability. Also in a study by Ghafoori and Nourelahi (2015), they reported a significant relationship between self-esteem and reading performance. It can be said that there was a positive relationship between the two factors. While the students' self-esteem increased, their success in English reading also improved. They found that learners with lower self-esteem had lower, and students of high self-esteem had higher reading achievement scores.

In an investigation on self-esteem and listening ability by Hayati and Ostadian (2017), it was reported that the correlation between self-esteem and EFL students' listening skill for the entire sample was 0.50 which indicated a positive correlation between them. They further added that learners with lower self-esteem had lower, and students of high self-esteem had higher listening achievement scores. They believed that it might be caused that learners with high self-esteem are supposed to do well. In the light of the above considerations and reflections, it is discovered that maximum of the researches above revolve around the correlation between self-esteem and some selected English skills. Though, not much consideration has been remunerated to recognize the correlation of more than one skill in English language skill and self-esteem among Iranian EFL students. Consequently, the current research was an endeavor to find the possible and probable relationship between Iranian female and male EFL learners' self-esteem and their listening and reading skills. The current research enjoyed one more issue, i.e. gender, which was hardly ever considered in the past studies.

2. Methodology

The following steps were taken in the present study. Arrangements were made with the officials of Payame Noor University for data collection. The researchers, as part time instructors at Payame Noor University did explain both to the learners and the officials that their answers would be used merely for investigation goals. At that time, the researchers gave the learners a package of instruments. It must be mentioned that all the learners were told NOT to enter their names on the instruments, for the reason that it has emotional impact on their honesty in answering. Every set of data had a code, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, etc. With the purpose of clearing the language proficiency level of the learners, the researchers gave all 80 female and male participants who aged between 19 and 50, majoring in English teaching, Translation, and Literature, a language proficiency test (Oxford Placement Test). From among the initial group, 16 participants did not continue to cooperate and we did have to eliminate them. Furthermore, 12 students because of different language proficiency level couldn't be located at the same level as other students. Finally, based on the results, 52 students (32 females and 20 males) who scored within one SD below and

above the mean were chosen as the homogeneous sample for further data collection. The given time for the test was 65 minutes. In the subsequently session, the selected learners were given the self-esteem questionnaire. The researchers organized it a point to make manageable the learners with some signals concerning the answering process and the importance of their careful responding. The particular time for responding the questionnaire was about 25 minutes. In another session, the learners were given the tests of receptive skills. 85 minutes were given to the learners to test their reading and listening performances.

After the required data were collected, the researchers entered them into SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all test scores. The normality of the scores distributions was checked through Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality. When the normality assumption was proved, the Pearson correlation coefficient as parametric inferential statistics was calculated in order to investigate the research questions. The design of the research was ex post facto or correlational design. In addition, the researchers defined the degree of correlations between the variables, specifically learners' self-esteem (independent variable) and reading / listening performances (dependent variables). The researchers used three instruments for data collection in the current study, Oxford Placement Test (OPT) to measure the learner's proficiency level, the Cooppersmith's (1967) self-esteem questionnaire and finally two tests of reading and listening adopted from PET.

The first instrument OPT is a typical language proficiency test designed by Lynda Edwards (2007). The test comprises 50 multiple choice questions that evaluates students' intelligence of fundamental vocabulary and grammar from elementary to intermediate phases, an elective writing task that evaluates students' skill to create the language, and an evaluation text with 10 graded reading questions. The second instrument Coopersmith Self-Esteem record is a 50-item evaluate of attitudes toward oneself. The list was first planned to evaluate children's self-esteem. The Cooppersmith's (1967) self-esteem inventory which was modified by Ryden (1978) for apply on adults which consists of 58 items. The analysis has a "lie scale" mechanism to show if you demand besides a lot to look to get in height self-esteem. If you answered "like me" to three or more of the following items, retake the test with an eye toward being more realistic in your responses: 48, 41, 34, 27, 20, 13, 6, and 1. this questionnaire was translated in Persian language to escape any the misunderstanding for the participants. The validity of the inquiry form was checked by back-translation and specialists' views. The reliability of the items was checked thorough Cronbach's alpha internal consistency. Both listening and reading tests which were from Preliminary English Test (PET 2012), were used in this study as the third instrument. Two main skills of listening and reading were recognized, and both of these were evaluated in a assess constituent of the invariable name. The Listening test comprised four parts and 10 listening text. The number of questions were 25 and the given time was about 30 minutes with 6 minutes more to handover the responses. Every text was heard two times. Recording had a form accents corresponding to ordinary variant of native lecturer accents. And every question carried one mark. This gave a sum of 25 marks. And the Reading part of PET comprises 35 questions, plus five detached reading tasks in each part. Each of the 35 questions carries one mark. It was predicted that applicants would expend about 50 minutes on the Reading part.

3. Findings

The 52 male and female learners who scored within above the mean and one SD below were chosen as the homogeneous sample for further data collection. Table 1 shows the frequency of gender distribution of the current study.

Table1. Gender Frequency Distribution

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	20	38.50	38.50	38.50
	Female	32	61.50	61.50	100.00
	Total	52	100.00	100.00	

As Table 1 indicates, for gender variable, frequency and percentage have been calculated. According to the evidence given there, among 52 participants, 20 students are male and 32 students are female. It means that 38.5% are male and 61.5% of the whole samples are female. To describe the research variables, 52 participants who had initially accepted to take part in the research study were given the self-esteem questionnaire and tests of listening and reading skills from PET. Table 2 below displays the results of descriptive statistics for the learners' self-esteem, reading and listening, test scores.

Table2. Statistics Descriptive

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mini	Maxi
	Valid	Missing				
Self-esteem	52	0	39.56	7.008	24	49
Reading and comprehension	52	0	28.42	4.290	20	35
Listening	52	0	21.29	2.346	16	25

In relation to the descriptive figures indicated in table 2 a total number of 52 learners participated in the research. Table 2 shows the description of the research variables. In this table, mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum have been calculated. As the consequences shown in disclose, mean score achieved from self-esteem test is 39.56 and its standard deviation is 7.008 minimum is 24 and maximum is 49. Also, mean score achieved from reading test is 28.42 its standard deviation is 4.290 minimum is 20 and maximum is 35. Moreover, mean score achieved from listening test is 21.29 its standard deviation is 2.346 minimum is 16 and maximum is 25.

Before finding the relationships between the self-esteem and receptive skills of the learners, through the Pearson correlation coefficient test which is a method of parametric inferential statistics, checking the normality of the scores distribution was essential. For this purpose, the researchers used One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. In this test was the normality of the variable distribution. If the level of significance was more than 0.05, the null hypothesis wouldn't be rejected and it would be accomplished that the distribution of the intended variable is normal. Due to the collected significance levels, it can be inferred that all variables are of the normal distribution (Significance level> 0.05). Therefore, the normality assumption could be confirmed. In order to discover the correlation between Iranian male EFL learners' self-esteem and their listening skill in the first hypothesis, the researchers used Pearson correlation test. Table 3 indicates the test outcomes for the self-esteem and listening performance among male students.

Table3. Pearson correlation test for Self-esteem and Listening among male students

		Listening
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	0.0220
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.9270
	N	20

As table 3 displays, the Pearson correlation coefficient intended concerning the connection between self-esteem and the listening performance of learners is .022, with the level of significance being 0.93, which, obviously, shows no correlation between self-esteem and the listening skill. Definitely, according to the upshots, the first null hypothesis was displayed to be correct since the P value was 0.93 which was more than .05. Therefore, no significant relationship could be found between the self-esteem and listening ability of Iranian male students. In order to discover the correlation between Iranian female EFL learners' self-esteem and listening skill in the second hypothesis, the researchers used Pearson correlation test. Table 5 indicates the test outcomes for the self-esteem and listening performance among female students.

Table4. Pearson correlation test for Self-esteem and Listening among female students

		Listening
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	0.116
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.528
	N	32

As table 4 displays, the P e a r s o n correlation coefficient intended concerning the correlation between self-esteem and the listening performance of students is 0.12, with the level of significance being 0.53, which, obviously, shows no correlation between self-esteem and the listening skill. Definitely, according to the upshots, the first null hypothesis was displayed to be correct since the P value was 0.53 which was more than .05. Therefore, no significant relationship could be found between the self-esteem and listening ability of Iranian female students. For testing third hypothesis, which finds the correlation between Iranian male EFL learners' self-esteem and their reading skill, the researchers used Pearson correlation test. Table 6 displays the test upshots for the self-esteem and reading performance of male learners.

Table5. Pearson Correlation test for Self-esteem and Reading among male students

		Reading and comprehension
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	0.6970**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.0010
	N	20

The results shown in Table 5 indicated that Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.70 and the significance level of the test was 0.001. Due to the fact that the significance level of the Pearson test was smaller than 0.05 the probability of the variable independence would be rejected, namely there was a positive correlation between male students' self-esteem and reading skill. For testing forth hypothesis, which finds the correlation between Iranian female EFL students' self-esteem and their reading skill, the researchers used Pearson correlation test. Table 6 indicates the test upshots for the self-esteem and reading performance of female learners.

Table6. Pearson Correlation test for Self-esteem and Reading among female learners

		Reading and comprehension
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	0.7390**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.0000
	N	32

The results shown in Table 6 indicated that Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.74 and the significance level of the test was 0.001. Due to the fact that the significance level of the Pearson test was smaller than 0.05 the probability of the variable independence would be rejected, namely there was positive relationship between female students' self-esteem and reading skill.

4. Discussion

The first and second research questions investigated any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-esteem and their listening skills in both genders. There are a small number of studies on the correlation between self-esteem and listening comprehension. There are not across genders studies on the field. The current study showed no correlation between the self- esteem and listening skill. Namely the findings of the current study differ from one study carried out by Hayati and Ostadian (2017). It was reported that the correlation between self-esteem and EFL students' listening skill for the entire sample was 0.50 which indicated a significant correlation between them. They further added that learners with lower self-esteem had lower, and students of high self-esteem had higher listening achievement scores. They believed that it might be caused that learners with high self-esteem are supposed to do well.

On the other hand, the current study exposed that there was no correlation between the self- esteem and listening skill of the learners. The findings can be in line with one investigation which was done by

Maruyama, Rubin and Kingsbury (1981). They argued that academic accomplishment was greatly steady across time. They stated that nearly all community scientists who have viewed accomplishment as independent of self-esteem as a minimum have regarded self-esteem as reflecting long-ago accomplishment (p. 973). In line with these statements, it can be capable of be incidental that social and psychological reasons employ insufficiently if any effect on listening skill. Bearing in mind these results, this points to the reality that listening and self-esteem have no causative effect on each other. Maruyama, et al. acknowledged that usual relations between self-esteem and achievement might take place during the earliest days of college while both achievement and self-esteem are unbalanced.

These findings show that when it comes to listening performance, not self-esteem, but most linguistic knowledge and strategy use mark the failure or success of a learner. It seems that there are some dynamic variables of which impact the process of listening comprehension. These variables can be both specific and some more general variables. General variables can be practice/experience in listening to the goal language: usage of the media (radio, TV, cinema, etc.), general background knowledge and general intelligence of the world. And some more specific variables can be age, sex, type and educational background of school, alertness, physical health, knowledge of the target language, intellectual, powers of analysis and selection, memories (short term and long term), knowledge of the specific topic or subject, sense of purpose and motivation while listening, attitude of the listener to the message, attitude of the listener to the speaker, level of interest and listener's powers of concentration and attention.

Based on these analyses, it seems that curriculums can be organized to improve teachers' skills to completely cooperate with learners to utilize and individualize a wide variety of teaching and learning methods; to request collaborative co-operating which may definitely effect on learners' accomplishment from the beginning of their listening lesson. In other words, no specific each type of high/low self-esteem learner performs better in listening performance. It seems that the learning and teaching circumstances are almost equal for both high/low self-esteem learners and language learning such as listening. The third and fourth research questions of the current research explored the correlation between Iranian EFL students' self-esteem and their reading skill in both genders. Based on the findings of the current research paper, a positive correlation between self-esteem and reading performance of both female and male learners was found. The findings of our research on the correlation between self-esteem and reading ability are in a strong agreement with the following works. In a study by Ghafoori and Nourelahi (2015), it was reported that there was a significant relationship between self-esteem and reading performance. It can be said that there was a positive relationship between them. While the students' self-esteem increased, their success in English reading also improved. They found that learners with lower self-esteem had lower, and students of high self-esteem had higher reading achievement scores.

Based on the link between self-esteem and reading performance, if they give the teachers and educators extra help concerning their particular attitudes and behaviors to increase learners' self-esteem that of course at the equivalent time is a motivate for their improving their reading ability. As more as possible they feel secured in the classes the additional they are encouraged to take part in reading activities. Moreover, instructors are needed to improve excessive readiness and willingness to increase learners' determinations in the reading development, since it helps, if it brings them a high level of self-esteem, and they show any kind of improvement in their reading skill, as well. Programs may be organized to invite collaborative help which may absolutely effect on learners' achievement from the initial time of their reading class; to improve educators' skills to cooperate with learners to utilize and individualize an eclectic-ranging diversity of schooling and learning procedures. Because of these outcomes, EFL reading teachers and lesson planers are self-assured and motivated to lecture learners how to think about their peculiar learning along with improving their deliberate skill in EFL reading. Commentaries from instructors of reading usually comprise recommendations; the sense a learner feels about her affect, and is precious by, how she or he reads. Consequently, as it is found in this study and regarding the common connection of reading and self-esteem

we can improve this fact that educators by providing learners' everyday practice on reading and learners with systematic reading lessons, which begins from a small essay to an extended essay may anticipate their self-value and self-esteem. Their conviction in their capabilities would amazingly flaunt and curve them into learners that are capable to read very well with their self-esteem support right now.

Bamidele (2014) in his work reported that children who have not been able to master reading skills at the same rate as their classmates experience substantial decreases in their self-esteem, self-concept, and motivation to learn to read. Chapman and colleagues also have done significant effort in this section and have constantly discovered that self-concept and reading performance are definitely connected (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995; Chapman & Tunmer, 1997; Chapman, et al, 2000). On the support of the positive role of self-esteem and reading skill Sadeq Bargheri and Faghih (2012) also reported strong support. They further found self-esteem as a vital affective factor. It had a significant function in reading skill. It seems that when planning English lessons, self-esteem needs to be considered as an important subject. They also believe that EFL instructors not only shouldn't forget the different places and societies they come from, but also they should consider the role of individual differences among learners. There are no studies on the connection between self-esteem and reading skill across genders. The reviewed studies didn't report any negative correlation between self-esteem and reading skill.

The current study conducted to find the correlation between Iranian EFL Learners' self-esteem and their receptive skills across genders. The results indicated no significant correlation between the self-esteem and listening skill of the learners. It seems that as soon as it comes to listening performance, not only self-esteem, but nearly all expected most likely language skill level and other psychological factors like individual differences mark the failure or success of a learner. With respect to the third and fourth research questions, there was a connection between self-esteem and reading ability of the learners in both genders. With the purpose of obtaining evident confirmation for this correlation, again the accumulated data were analyzed through Pearson correlation coefficient test. It can be said that a positive relationship was found between two variables. When the students' self-esteem was increased, their accomplishment in English reading was increased too. As the study shows, the students with lower self-esteem had lower, and students of high self-esteem had higher reading achievement scores.

From the findings, self-esteem had deep-seated and improved positive possessions on reading performances of the learner. But when it comes to listening performance, not self-esteem, but most linguistic knowledge and strategy use, mark the failure or success of a learner. It seems that there are some other factors of which affect the process of listening comprehension. The findings obtained from the research can encourage educationalists to act innovatively in the realm of EFL learning and teaching to progress learners' English learning besides to help them in removing the psychological barriers in English learning and teaching. Furthermore, the outcomes of the study can help to attract a significant consideration to the correlation between affective elements and language teaching and learning this research profits the vital stage of validating the probable correlation between Iranian EFL learners' self-esteem and their receptive skills across genders. It offers a good underpinning for further investigations on these subjects, by taking learners' self-esteem effects into account. We can accomplish that this study may be a significant source for the upcoming researchers in Iran who wants to discover the correlation between self-esteem and language learning of EFL students.

The outcomes of the present research also include some invaluable pedagogical implications that should be taken into account by all open-minded stake-holders including EFL educational policy makers, materials developers, syllabus designers, textbook writers and EFL teachers who are inclined to view second language learning from a new and more wide-ranging view and set themselves free of the impeding burden of out-of-date and traditional methods of language education.Regarding the limitations of the study as the recommendation for further researchers, it might be noted that the number of the learners was the major limitation of the present research. Since the population of the study was not large, thus the findings should

be generalized by caution. Next it was the level of the participants. In order to use the results for a wider population, the study should be replicated at all proficiency levels. The third point was the honesty of the learners in answering the self-esteem questionnaire. Another problem was the site of the study which was only Payame Noor University. There should be studies with more and various sites. The last but not least suggestion regarding the limitation of the study was the time limitation. Because of the time constraint, the researcher only worked on self-esteem and receptive language skills, but it could be more effective to work on other personal factors and productive language learning skills.

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