

## **The Correlation of Reading Comprehension Ability of Persian and English Languages in Iranian EFL Learners**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The present study aimed to investigate the relation between Iranian EFL students' reading comprehension abilities of Persian which is supposed as their mother language (L1) and English as a target language (TL). In this regard, 109 Iranian students of some private school with the proficiency levels of intermediate are constituted in the study. Two types of standardized reading comprehension tests in both Persian and English languages were distributed to the participants without having any treatment. The analysis was done based on the students' scores in the tests and the results showed that there is no significant correlation between their Persian and English comprehension abilities.*

**Keywords:** *EFL learners, First language (L1), Target language (TL), Reading comprehension*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1. Statement of topic area**

As one of the language skills, reading skill forms the stepping stone for the education of EFL learners. The concept in reading skill is comprehension which enhances the process of language acquisition and helps the students to read for different purposes. According to Nassaji (2003), linguistic deficiency constrains the reading comprehension process and limited language proficiency leads to inefficient processing of text. On the other hand, depending on the proficiency level of the learner, more time and cognitive attention will be spent on decoding the message rather than lessening the cognitive workload which has been shown to be a preliminary stage of fluency development and effective comprehension. In this regard, many scholars have attempted to find new comprehension strategies while the importance of comparative analysis between the learners' L1 and the TL has been always recognized as a need. According to Butzkamm & Caldwell (2009), this paradigm shift to the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis has occurred recently and indicates a welcoming attitude to teacher usage of students' L1 in teaching. However, the "judicious and principled use" of L1 remains an unresolved issue while teachers often feel guilty for straying from the path of teaching using only the TL (Turnbull, 2001). Students' reading comprehension disabilities can occur due to several reasons: the material might be beyond their level; they may have limited prior knowledge about the text; or they may not be aware of how the reading material is structured.

#### **1.2. Review of literature**

Reading is a complex activity. The goal of reading is "to construct text meaning based on visually encoded information" (Koda, 2007, p.1). Theories about reading and numerous teaching techniques have created an awareness of the influence that reading skill has on other skills such as listening, speaking, writing, and even translating (Sheng, 2000). Furthermore, reading is probably the most important skill for the second language learners in academic contexts (Carrel, 1989).

Researchers view reading as an active, interactive process, which involves not only more understanding of words and sentences, but also the creation of a model within the mind of the reader (Ruiz-Funes, 1999). It can be seen as an "interactive" process between a reader and a text which leads to automaticity or (reading fluency). In this process, the readers interact dynamically with the text as they try to elicit the meaning in which various kinds of knowledge are being used.

On the other hand, Comprehension is recognized as an acquired skill that is focused on the understanding of input. Brown (2007) identifies comprehension as "the process of receiving language; listening or reading; input" (p. 379). Therefore, comprehension may not be exclusively devoted to input alone; it may also affect the fluency of a learner's output.

There has been extensive research in L2 reading comprehension, and over the last twenty years, there have been enormous breakthroughs in understanding significant factors including, but not restricted to, lexical processing (how the brain makes meaning out of input), eye movements, cultural familiarity, and first language (L1) effects which is the intended area of this study. It is evident through different studies that L1 does play a role in L2 reading comprehension and that the use of L1 "is beneficial at all levels of ESL" (Seng & Hashim, 2006). Many studies have indicated that both L1 reading skills and L2 linguistic knowledge contribute to L2

reading comprehension (Fecteau, 1999). For example, many L2 reading errors are the result of lexical knowledge gaps which can be supplemented by L1 lexical inference, depending on the reader's proficiency level (Fecteau, 1999).

### **1.3. Purpose of study**

Regarding the mentioned problems, the role of L1, as an important interference in the students' reading abilities of the TL, motivated the researcher to investigate the correlation between the students' reading comprehension abilities in their mother language (Persian) and their target language (English). Therefore, teachers need to be aware whether EFL learners who possess the ability to transfer the prior linguistic knowledge, prior skills or existing schemata facilitate their learning of reading in the target language or not.

### **1.4. Research question & Hypothesis**

Although some researchers have paid plenty of attention to the role of L1 on the TL reading comprehension, little is known about how the EFL learners' reading comprehension skills are correlated in their L1 and TL. This study is to answer the research question: "is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension abilities in English and Persian languages?" The following null hypothesis is stated: H0: There is no correlation between Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension abilities in English and Persian languages.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Subjects**

The setting of the current study was in several English institutions in three cities of Iran: Qom, Delijan, and Mahallat. The study involved 136 Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. All participants were with the age range of 15 to 23 years. In order to ensure about their actual proficiency levels and to increase the homogeneity of the participants, Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was administered to the subjects and they were all considered in the intermediate levels. As a result of the test, 109 learners were depicted out of the whole number of participants.

### **2.2. Material**

In order to establish the homogeneity of the participants, the OQPT test was utilized and it was piloted by 10 students with the same characteristics. In order to test the reading comprehension of the intended languages, two reading texts were selected from the reading section of "English for everyone" and "Pariz to Paris".

### **2.3. Procedures**

In this study, the following steps were carried out. First, the OQPT test was administered to assess the participants' proficiency level. It is worth mentioning that the test was piloted. Then two piloted reading comprehension tests (one Persian and the other one English) were given to the participants. The students were supposed to answer the questions in 30 minutes.

### **2.4. Analysis**

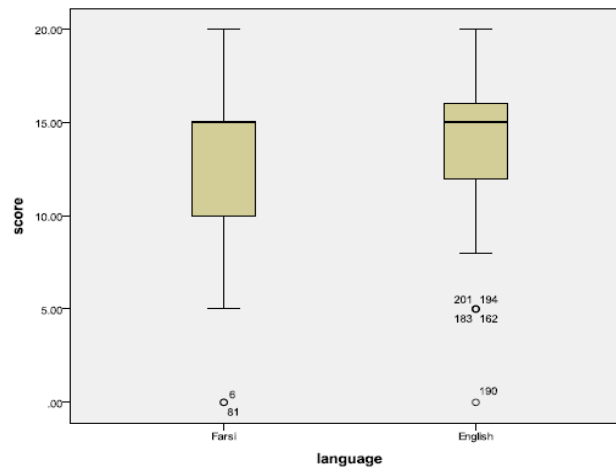
As far as the present study aimed to find out the correlation between reading comprehension in English and Persian, we are dealing with two samples. On the other hand, the null hypothesis refers to no correlation between the samples. So by comparing the samples, it is necessary to apply K-S test to make sure whether the two samples come from the same distribution or not. Finally, the results would be analyzed and checked whether to accept or reject the hypothesis.

## **III. RESULTS**

As it was mentioned, we are dealing with two samples. Therefore, the two-sample K-S test is one of the most useful and general nonparametric methods to do this comparison since it is sensitive to differences in both location and shape of the empirical cumulative distribution functions of the two samples. According to data analysis which is shown in Table 1, the amount of Sig was less than 0.5, so the data distribution is not normal. Figure 1 shows the distance between the empirical distribution function of the samples and the cumulative distribution function of the reference distribution.

**Table1-** Tow-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		score
N		218
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	Mean	14.2385
	Std. Deviation	4.38031
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.275
	Positive	.156
	Negative	-.275
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		4.067
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.000



**Figure 1:** the distribution of the two samples

According to Figure 1, the data distribution is not normal. Therefore, another Non-parametric test like Mann-Whitney test should be used. Analyzing the two English and Persian groups show that there is no significant relation between them. According to the Sig which is more than 0.5, there was not any significant relationship between reading comprehension skill of English and Persian Iranian language learners. (Table 2)

**Table2-** Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>

	score
Mann-Whitney U	5265.000
Wilcoxon W	11260.000
Z	-1.492
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.136

a. Grouping Variable: language

In order to reveal which group has better comprehension skills, the mean scores of two groups were compared based on two numerical values in Table 3. According to this Table, there are better scores in English group, however, it is a pretty small difference and it has no significant effect on the results.

**Table 3 ranks**

	language	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Score	Farsi	109	103.30	11260.00
	English	109	115.70	12611.00
	Total	218		

#### **IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

As it was mentioned earlier, this study aimed to investigate the correlation between Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension abilities in both English and Persian languages. As the null hypothesis, it was assumed that there is no significant relationship between them. Spoken and written are the two forms that any language appears in. The written language involves reading that is a significant skill in learning. Reading effectively and efficiently is of the greatest importance in learning L2 language. It is the only make available of words, phrases, expression, and structures that improves speaking and writing simultaneously. But reading in L2 needs to be done skillfully. According to the results of the present study, there was not a significant relationship between reading comprehension ability in English and Persian languages. As much as other studies there were some short comings and problem I have been faced with. Finding a sample that has been represented in this study was the first difficulty and finding the institutions letting me to accomplish this project was the next one. The other problem was to discover dependable reading test for the intermediate students especially in Farsi because reading and testing reading comprehension in Farsi is so dissimilar. This study was done on both girls and boys at the same range of English and Persian knowledge but I would suggest the further studies to investigate on just boys or girls in order to investigate the effect of gender in this subject.

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