MALES AND FEMALES DISCREPANCIES IN READING FLUENCY: FOCUSING ON ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract: The main focus of this study is to check if there is any significant difference among Iranian advanced males and females EFL learners’ reading fluency. To fulfil this objective, 20 males and 20 females were selected based on an Oxford Quick Placement Test. Each participant read two reading passages and their voices recorded for further analysis. Later, two raters analyzed the recorded voices based on accuracy measurement criteria. The researcher checked inter-rater reliability for reading fluency and it was 0.986. After analyzing the data via independent samples t-test, the results revealed that female participants performed better than the males in terms of reading fluency. Conclusions are made concerning the applicability of these results to the Iranian EFL contexts.

Keywords: males; females; reading skill; reading fluency; advanced EFL learners.

INTRODUCTION
Teaching reading nowadays plays an important part in learning English as a second or foreign language. Reading is one of the four main skills in language teaching which has an important role in language teaching systems. Berado (2006, p. 60) clarifies the purpose of reading as “... different things for different people, for some it recognizes written words, for others it is an opportunity to teach grammar and learn speech.” Chastain (1988) argues that “reading is a fundamental and complementary language learning skill. Second language students need to learn to read for conversation and to read more and more relevant texts” (p. 216), noting that reading for meaning or reconstructing the meaning of the writer is at the heart of the reading process. Essentially, the primary purpose of reading is to interpret or comprehend a text.

Alderson (2000) views reading as “a pleasurable activity that can bring pleasure to the readers” (p. 28). Readings introduce new vocabulary, grammar and even new cultures to students. Despite the importance of understanding reading, most students in Iran suffer from weakness in understanding reading.

Throughout recent decades, extensive research has concentrated on whether males and females vary throughout cognitive abilities. While there is general consensus that men and women do not differ in general intelligence (Halpern, 2000), discrepancies in gender are commonly observed for more basic cognitive abilities, such as visual-spatial ability (Voyer, Voyer, & Bryden, 1995) and language ability (Miller & Halpern, 2014; Namaziandost, Shatalebi, & Nasri, 2019).

Nevertheless, Hyde (2005) had suggested the theory of gender similarities hypothesis (GSH), which stated that on most, but not all, psychological variables males and females are identical. That is, both men and women, and boys and girls, are more alike than they are other. This states that, in size, most gender differences are small or negligible (near zero). An exception to this hypothesis may be the gender gap found cross-cultural in reading achievement (Reilly,
Reading fluency is described as the ability to read a text easily, accurately and with the proper expression (NICHD, 2000; Abedi, Namaziandost, & Akbari, 2019). Rasinski (2004) noted that this description would include comprehension. A reader with fluent reading makes reading effortless, using adequate units of sense and understanding words automatically. When fluent reading students make an intuitive interpretation, they learn how to easily connect words to interpret text (Tankersley, 2003; Shakibaei, Shahamat, & Namaziandost, 2019). The foundations of reading fluency were logically based on the theory of automated communication by LaBerge and Samuels (1974). According to this hypothesis, students who interpret words immediately while reading devote much of their cognitive resources to a higher level of cognitive functions, such as text comprehension. Often, students who do not really have correct skills and a certain degree of fluency in reading have difficulty in understanding the text as they devote much of their time to accurately articulating words. Individuals who are unable to read fluently overwhelm their working memory at word level, according to Perfetti (1985), and their working memories are incompetent to interpret the document.

There are a number of reasons for difference in student reading fluency (Topping, 2006). These differences are listed as word decoding processing, the level of vocabulary obtained in the family and social environment (view word vocabulary), the rate of decoding of unfamiliar words, the use of context skills that help decode words, the possible meanings of a word, speed-related creation of holistic meaning, priority of fluent reading for students over accurate reading depending on the situation (Tahmasbi, Hashemifardnia, & Namaziandost, 2019).

Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp and Jenkins (2001) convey that fluency tests of oral reading have a vital role to play in evaluating and witnessing development in reading abilities. Hosp and Fuchs (2005) argue that testing oral reading fluency is an important aid in recognizing difficulties in reading skills. Using the new criteria in assessing the fluency of reading entails a vital job of controlling students and making the right choices when it comes to testing, identifying and reviewing changes. Oral reading fluency criteria-created by Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006) by implementing them on a large number of tests are the most preferred quality values worldwide (Namaziandost, Nasri, & Ziafar, 2019).

Essentially, in a group of low-skilled people, MacArthur, Konold, Glutting, and Alamprese (2010) explored sex differences in reading execution and found that ladies performed better on proportions of reading fluency than men similarity overall. Because of these findings, variables that could contribute to the sexual orientation difference in reading execution of grown-up children have been investigated next to no review. The current research consequently aimed at evaluating the differences between sexual orientation of reading achievement in a group of fighting grown-up reads.

Regarding the mentioned points, the following research question is formulated: 1) Is there any
significant difference among Iranian advanced males and females EFL learners’ reading fluency? and 2) Which one of reading fluency or reading accuracy can be more affected by the Iranian learners’ gender?

**METHOD**

**Participants**
Deciding to carry out this work, firstly, the researcher selected 80 students from a private English language institute. Then, he distributed the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) among them and based on their performance, he chose 40 advanced students for the target participants. Based on OQPT, most of the respondents were at advanced level of language proficiency. Both males (n=20) and females (n=20) were included in this research and their age range was 17 to 21.

**Instruments**
The first instrument utilized in the present study to homogenize the participants was a proficiency test. This test was OQPT which was answered by all the participants in the current study. This instrument was used to gather information on the learners’ proficiency. It included 60 multiple-choice items and the learners who achieved from 55 to 60 were determined as the advanced level.

The next instrument used in this study was a reading test. In this test, the researchers asked each participant to read 2 passages. In this method, student orally read a text for ten-minute. Participant reading products were recorded and subsequently analysed by two raters based on the criteria for fluency measurement. Reliability between rates was established by running Pearson Correlation Coefficient Formula on the two sets of fluency scores and it was 0.986.

**Data Analysis**
For answering the research question, after gathering the sufficient data the researcher analyzed the data by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) software version 22. Firstly, Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was run to check the quality of data normality. Finally, Independent Samples t-test was run to find out the gender differences in reading fluency.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**
In the first step, normality of the distributions was checked by running a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tests</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnova</th>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Group Reading Fluency Test</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Group Reading Fluency Test</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Sig. value under the Kolmogorov-Smirnov part of the table represented a value higher than .05, which indicates that the distribution of scores for the fluency test was normal. Therefore, it is safe to proceed with parametric test (i.e. independent samples t-test in this case) and make further comparisons between males and females.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male group</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.58</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female group</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.97</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 2, it could be found that the mean score of the Female group learners (M = 17.97) was larger than the mean score of the Male group learners (M = 12.58). To find out whether this difference was a statistically significant or not, the researcher had to look down the Sig. column below the Sig. (2-tailed) column as presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
As Table 3 shows, since sig. (.000) is greater than the .05 with df=48, the difference between the reading fluency test is significant at (p<0.05). According to the results of the Independent Samples t-test, female participants outperformed the male group on the reading fluency test.

In general, the purpose of this analysis was to investigate the role of gender in reading fluency of Iranian advanced EFL learners. Additionally, the research was an attempt to examine whether the class of Iranian learners was more influenced by reading fluency. Statistical analysis results showed that the female participants outperformed the male participants in terms of fluency in reading comprehension. In other words, it was also revealed that the female participants were more affected by reading fluency.

There may also be cross-cultural evidence of gender differences in reading proficiency in large multinational student achievement assessments (Lynn & Mikk, 2009; Reilly, 2012). One such source is the International Student Assessment Program (PISA) run by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) across member nations and partners. It seeks to assess student achievement in reading, mathematics, and science age 15 (which in most countries is typically towards the end of compulsory schooling). In the 2000, 2003, and 2006 waves of the PISA assessment, Lynn and Mikk (2009) found significantly sized gender differences across all nations, while Reilly (2012) reached a similar conclusion with the 2009 data set. There was also considerable variation across nations that researchers attribute to cultural factors such as gender equality at the national levels (Reilly, 2015; Ziafar & Namaziandost, 2019). Although the majority of studies which recruit sufficiently large and representative samples have found gender differences in reading, it is also important to acknowledge that there are some rare exceptions. Kaufman, Kaufman, Liu, and Johnson (2009), for example, published an overview of the standardizing sample for the Kaufman Academic Achievement Test–Brief Form. The authors did not find significant gender differences in adult reading, although there were significant gender differences in children as reported with this instrument by Scheiber, Reynolds, Hajovsky, and Kaufman (2015). Nevertheless, it is unclear whether this was the result of disparities in study material of reading tests, or whether the existing consequences of educational disparity in their cross-sectional population (adults aged 22–90) were confounded. It is therefore important to recognize within what contexts gender differences may be identified in education, but their presence is not a foregone conclusion (Namaziandost, Banari, & Momtaz, 2019).

The main reason behind the results of this study is that through a well-developed corpus callosum, which is comparatively poorer in males, females have a very strong connection between their right and left-brain hemispheres (Nasri, & Namaziandost, 2019). As a result, females have analytical and logical and motor function to organize their activities very fluently, which in males is relatively weaker. This also makes women more far-sighted, rational and sometimes mentally smarter than men.

Reasons behind the smooth advancement of women in reading are beyond the top. Consideration is given to various natural and socio-social components. A few scientists highlight the pace of psychological and organic improvement. Young women are growing faster than young men. They beat young men as promptly as in the first two years of life in improved discourse (Namaziandost, Neisi, Mahdavirad, & Nasri, 2019). Discourse and reading are two unique methods of language usage. As language enhancement of young men is increasingly slow criteria are the equivalent paying little respect to sex, that is why the exhibition of young men is more unfortunate when testing reading abilities.

Research discoveries led on twins (Harlaar, Spinath, Dale & Plomin, 2005) provide evidence that hereditary elements bring about the distinctions more prominently than ecological components. They also infer that the etiology of individual contrasts and shortages in the underlying long periods of finding out how to read depends on sex: the job of inheritance is of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RFT</th>
<th>Equal variances assumed</th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFT</td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFT</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFT</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>41.58</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-5.39</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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more prominent importance in young men while it is the job of condition in young ladies.

Males and females have completely different approaches when it comes to language learning: male learning is somewhat instrumental, whilst female learning is integrative. It means that women tend to take a greater interest in the target language community, nation and speakers (Abedi, Namaziandost, & Akbari, 2019). Additionally, it is well known that males are better oriented than females, but females possess innate verbal abilities. That means they are better hearers, speakers, writers, and readers. Now you are probably wondering what these all have to do with learning the language? The answer is simple; to learn a new language, it is necessary to listen, speak, read and write in that language. That is the easiest answer to that question and the most accurate. Another reason why women are better language learners than men is because girls (women) engage more skills (speaking, reading, listening, etc.) and elements of language (vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.) than boys (men) who tend to stick with just a handful of practical methods of studying. Perhaps the most important of these is the last reason I will consider. The main reason women are better at learning languages than males lie in their brains, i.e. how their brains process the language. The brain structure is similar. It is split into two hemispheres: left (analytical and logical) and right (musical, visual and non-language). An experiment has shown that both hemispheres are used when females speak, while males use only one. Females are thus more creative and involved in learning than males. With visualization and hearing aid, males learn better, while females process languages more efficiently (Abedi, Keshmirshekan, & Namaziandost, 2019).

For that matter, the gender distinction between productive (speaking, writing) and receptive (reading, listening) and the gender distinction present in acquiring (speaking, listening) and learning (reading, writing) appear to be a problem for any pure nurture-oriented scenario. The human capital approach and gender-specific acculturation are two nutrition-driven theories on gender differences that could be released (Neisi, Hajijalili, & Namaziandost, 2019). The human capital framework bases gender differences in the acquisition of second language on the assumption that men participate more frequently than women in the labor process and the acquisition of the L2 is more important to them than to their wives; who in this approach are assumed to stay at home and take care of the children (Etemadifar, Namaziandost, & Banari, 2019).

Although most examinations that enlist adequately enormous and delegate tests found contrasts of sexual orientation in reading, it is equally imperative to recognize that there are some uncommon special cases. For example, for the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement—Brief Form, Kaufman, Kaufman, Liu, and Johnson (2009) detailed an investigation of the norming test. Noteworthy sexual orientation contrasts were not discovered by the writers in reading for adults. However, huge sex contrasts were found with this instrument in youngsters as detailed by Scheiber, Reynolds, Hajovsky, and Kaufman (2015). Whether this was the result of contrasts in test content cross-sectionally over reading appraisals, or on the off chance that it was perplexed in their cross-sectional example by authentic impacts of instructive disparity (adults matured 22–90). In this way, it is urgent to discern under what settings sexual orientation contrasts might be found in reading, yet their reality is certainly not an inevitable conclusion.

**CONCLUSION**

Generally speaking, this study aimed to investigate if there is any significant difference between males and females in terms of reading fluency. Assuming a nature-based, genetic difference in the acquisition of L1 and L2 female and male equipment does not preclude the interaction of nature (genes) and nursing (environment) in intricate ways and at different levels, from individual to societal. The research results provide strong circumstantial evidence of an initial distinction between nature and gender. The gender gap in favor of L2 female learners in speaking and writing turned out to be a robust, convincing effect that requires further research, both in other combinations of language and for lower levels of education.

**REFERENCES**


Males and females discrepancies in reading fluency: Focusing on advanced EFL learners