

A Comparison between Reading Aloud and Silent Reading among Iranian EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the comparison between reading aloud and silently among Iranian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in general, and the effect of gender and topic familiarity on comprehension performance regarding these two modes. The participants included 100 intermediate level male and female EFL learners enrolled in private English Language Institutes in Iran. The subjects were divided into two groups of fifty. One group consisting of males and females read the texts silently and the other group of males and females read the same texts out aloud.

Two expository passages were selected from McCall-Crabbs Standard Test Lessons in Reading, Book D and Book F (1979). The data obtained from students' scores on the reading comprehension tests was analysed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18. Results of descriptive statistics as well as independent samples t-test revealed that the participants who read the texts silently outperformed the group who read the same expository texts loudly and the difference was statistically significant.

It was also found out that there was no significant difference between males and females who engaged in silent reading; however, females outperformed the males while reading aloud. Moreover, the results of paired samples t-test showed that topic familiarity had a significant effect on reading comprehension regardless of the reading mode the students applied. Therefore, it was concluded that topic affected learners' reading comprehension performance. The study suggests that reading comprehension may be enhanced if the differing capabilities of readers are recognised.

Furthermore, gender and topic familiarity can be taken into account as substantial variables in order to improve EFL reading skills. The findings of this research have some pedagogical implications for the teaching and learning of reading skills in EFL contexts. Also, recommendations are made for future research in the area of EFL reading.

Keywords: Reading skill, Silent reading, Reading aloud, Topic familiarity, Gender

ÖZ

Bu çalışmada, genel anlamda, İranlı İngilizce Yabancı Dil Programı öğrencileri arasında sesli ve sessiz okumadaki kıyaslamayı ve kavrama performansı ile ilgili bu iki teknik üzerinde cinsiyetin ve konuya olan aşinalığın etkisi izlenmektedir. Katılımcılar, Özel İngilizce Enstitüsü'ne kayıtlı orta seviyede 100 erkek ve kadın İngilizce Yabancı Dil Programı öğrencilerinden oluşmaktadır. Denekler, 50'şer kişilik iki gruba ayrılmıştır. Bir grup metinleri sessiz okuyan bayan ve erkeklerden, diğer grup ise metinleri sesli okuyan bayan ve erkeklerden oluşturulmuştur.

McCall-Crabbs'ın okumada standart ölçme dersleri(1979) " Standard Test Lessons in Reading" adlı kitabından, Kitap D ve Kitap F adlı iki parça seçilmiştir. Öğrencilerin okuduğunu anlama sınavı sonuçlarından elde edilen veri, Sosyal Bilimler için İstatistik Paketinin (SPSS) 18. Sürümü kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Hem betimsel değer sayımları sonuçları, hem de bağımsız iki grup arası farkların t-testi sonuçları; metinleri sessiz okuyan katılımcıların, aynı metinleri sesli okuyan katılımcılardan daha iyi performans sergilediklerini ve aradaki farkın istatistiki olarak kayda değer olduğunu göstermektedir.

Sonuç olarak, erkek ve bayanların sessiz okumada kavrayış becerileri arasında kayda değer bir fark olmamasıyla birlikte sesli okumada kadınların erkeklerden daha iyi performans gösterdikleri belirtilmektedir. Dahası, eşleştirilmiş t-test sonuç numuneleri, öğrencilerin hangi okuma biçimini kullandıkları gözletilmeksizin , konuya olan aşinalığın okuduğunu anlama üzerinde kayda değer bir etkiye sahip olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, okuyucuların değişiklik gösteren yeteneklerinin farkına varıldığı takdirde, okuduğunu anlamının da artabileceğini önermektedir. Buna Ek olarak, cinsiyet ve konuya aşinalık, İngilizce dilinde okuma

becerilerini geliştirebilmek adına, mevcut deęişkenler olarak gözönünde bulundurulabilir. Bu araştırmanın bulguları, İngilizce Yabancı Dil Programı ortamlarında, okuma becerilerini öğretim ve öğrenme için bazı eğitsel doğurgulara sahiptir. Yanısıra, İngilizce Yabancı Dil Programı okuma alanında ileri çalışma adına tavsiyelerde bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Okuma becerisi, sessiz okuma, sesli okuma, konu aşinalığı, cinsiyet

To My Family

My Father and Mother

My Beloved Sisters Mahin and Maryam

My Treasured Brothers Khosro, Nasser, and Kazem

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ÖZ	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	viii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Presentation	1
1.2 Background of the Study	1
1.3 Statement of the Problem	3
1.4 Purpose of the Study	4
1.5 Significance of the Study	5
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	6
2.1 Presentation	6
2.2 Reading Skill	6
2.2.1 Definition of Reading Comprehension	7
2.2.2 Processes of Reading	8
2.2.3 EFL/ESL Reading	9
2.2.4 Reading Strategies	11
2.3 Theories in Second/Foreign Language Reading	12
2.3.1 Process Approach	12
2.3.2 Schema Theory	14
2.4 Second/Foreign Language Reading Processing	15
2.4.1 Bottom-up Processing (Data-Driven)	15
2.4.2 Top-down Processing (conceptually- driven)	16

2.4.3 Interactive Processing	16
2.5 Gender, Topic Familiarity, and Second/Foreign Language Reading	17
2.6 Silent Reading versus Reading Aloud.....	20
2.7 Summary	24
3 METHOD.....	25
3.1 Presentation	25
3.2 Research Design	25
3.3 Research Questions	26
3.4 Context of the Study.....	26
3.5 Participants	27
3.6 Data Collection Instruments	30
3.7 Data Collection Procedures	31
3.8 Data Analysis Procedures.....	35
3.9 Test of Normality	40
3.10 Case Processing Summary	41
3.11 Summary	42
4 RESULTS	43
4.1 Presentation	43
4.2 Research Question 1	43
4.2.1 Group statistics results (descriptive statistics for the two groups).....	43
4.2.2 Independent Samples t-test	44
4.3 Research Question 2	44
4.4 Research Question 3	47
4.4.1 Paired Samples t-test.....	47
4.5 Summary	50

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	51
5.1 Presentation	51
5.2 Discussion of Major Findings	51
5.2.1 A comparison between silent reading and reading aloud regarding learners’ reading comprehension performance.....	51
5.2.2 Gender effects on Iranian EFL reading comprehension	53
5.2.3 The effect of topic familiarity on EFL learners’ comprehension performance engaged in silent reading and reading aloud	54
5.3 Conclusion.....	55
5.4 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study	56
5.5 Pedagogical Implications	57
5.6 Suggestions for Further Research.....	59
REFERENCES.....	61
APPENDICES	73
Appendix A	74
Appendix B.....	77
Appendix C.....	80
Appendix D	84

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: The Characteristics of Participants in Shokouh-e-Enghelab Institute	28
Table 3.2: The Characteristics of Participants in Iranmehr English Language Institute	29
Table 3.3: The Characteristics of Participants in Novin English Language Institute	29
Table 3.4: The Characteristics of Participants in Pouyesh English Language Institute	29
Table 3.5: Reliability Statistics for Jet Stream.....	30
Table 3.6: Reliability Statistics for Titanic	30
Table 3.7: Data Collection Procedure in Aloud and Silent Reading Groups.....	35
Table 3.8: Raw Data on Female Students' Test Scores in Reading Aloud Group.....	37
Table 3.9: Raw Data on Male Students' Test Scores in Reading Aloud Group	38
Table 3.10: Raw Data on Female Students' Test Scores in Silent Group	39
Table 3.11: Raw Data on Male Students' Test Scores in Silent Group	40
Table 3.12: Test of Normality Distribution of Data.....	41
Table 3.13: Case Processing Summary for Silent and Reading Aloud Groups.....	41
Table 4.1: Group Statistics (Descriptive Statistics for Two Groups)	43
Table 4.2: Independent Samples t-test for Silent and Aloud reading	44
Table 4.3: Group Statistics for Gender Difference in Silent Reading.....	45
Table 4.4: Independent Samples t- Test for Gender Difference in Silent Group.....	45
Table 4.5: Group Statistics for Gender Difference in Aloud Group	46
Table 4.6: Independent Samples t-test for Gender Difference in Aloud Group	47
Table 4.7: Paired Samples Statistics for Topic Familiarity in Silent Reading.....	48
Table 4.8: Paired Samples Statistics for Topic Familiarity in Reading Aloud	48

Table 4.9: Paired Samples t-test for Topic Familiarity in Silent Reading 49

Table 4.10: Paired Samples t- test for Topic Familiarity in Reading Aloud..... 49

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Presentation

This following chapter includes four sections. The first section is concerned with the background of the study; the second and the third sections investigate the statement of the problem and purpose of the study respectively. The final section focuses on the significance of the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

Nowadays, learning a second or foreign language is increasingly becoming a necessity for everybody and learning a language as EFL/ESL requires proficiency in four skills. As far as language teaching and language learning are concerned, reading is one of the significant skills playing an increasingly important role in learning a language. The skill of reading has its own modes two of which are reading aloud and reading silently. Many studies have been conducted on reading aloud and reading silently with inconsistent and equivocal results. (Juel & Holmes, 1981; Bernhardt, 1983; Davis, 1988; Wilkinson & Anderson, 1995; McCallum et al., 2004).

As far as the literature is concerned, the results have been inconsistent mainly because of different participants with different characteristics (McCallum et al., 2004). The studies on comprehension after reading silently and reading aloud have shown that the best reading mode for elementary readers to comprehend is reading aloud. Additionally, students with elementary levels of proficiency benefited from

reading aloud. Moreover, reading aloud in this level promoted their reading skills in general (Kragler, 1995).

As Gibson (2008) cited, reading aloud could help reading skill through linking sound and alphabetic improvement. Reading aloud was useful in improving writing skills through the implementation of oral proofreading. Moreover, the benefit of reading aloud can be stated in terms of autonomous learning which may have contribution in making anxious learners become confident. Reading aloud may be the only way for shy students from which they can benefit. Controlled, imitative activities can make students feel secure enough to make their preliminary speeches during class activities so that after a while reading aloud can pave the way for such students to speak spontaneously and independently. On the other hand, Juel and Holmes (1981) pointed out that readers' processing time on difficult words decreased in silent reading. This trend was most striking for poor readers.

Gibson (2008) stated that reading aloud was a useful instrument for learning vocabulary. However, some other studies indicated the equality between silent reading and reading aloud in terms of their impact on learning vocabulary. Aita (1986) suggested that differences due to reading mode were mainly a function of the speed of advanced level amalgamation and the processes of comprehension that took place when the aim of participants was comprehension through reading.

Other researchers such as McCallum et al. (2004) argued that no specific differences have been observed while the students were reading aloud and silently in an EFL classroom. However, these researchers suggested that reading silently was more efficient when people's comprehension in reading was evaluated separately. Reading silently can be beneficial for readers, because it may eliminate vocalization, which may hinder reading comprehension.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

L2 reading comprehension skill is to some extent overlooked among Iranian EFL learners. These types of students, who are mostly at advanced level of proficiency, are proficient in listening, speaking, and writing, but not as proficient in reading skills as they are expected. These claims are based on the researcher's personal experiences in teaching at English language private institutes in the context of Iran. The researcher has taught English language at different levels of proficiency from elementary level to advanced levels. During these years of teaching, it was observed that most EFL students are not aware enough of different techniques applied in reading comprehension.

Iranian EFL learners in private English language institutes follow instructors' methodologies in reading without having permission to employ their own modes in reading, either silently or aloud. Many students may be proficient in silent reading, but they are asked to read out aloud. Likewise, many students may be poor in reading aloud, but they are required to read silently.

Regarding the issue of gender-favoured text in reading comprehension, EFL readers including males and females have not benefited from their own interest. Moreover, selecting a topic both in reading and testing administration as well as developing material rarely have been considered in accordance with the interest of the learners. This is the issue that requires instructors as well as institutes' administrations to take it into account seriously.

Moreover, it is important for teachers to make learners aware of the processes involved in language learning and to help them find environments that suit their needs best (Little, 1991). Learners have to develop special skills for determining

their own needs, goals, ways of learning and evaluation. Therefore, raising awareness can be regarded as one of the important issues applied in ELT.

The current study attempted to introduce or at least reinforce these different modes of reading in terms of reading aloud and silently to EFL learners in Iran, though the number of participants and the area of conducting research were so limited that the final results may not be over generalized. The current study also tried to focus on raising Iranian EFL learners' awareness in reading comprehension to become more proficient in the upper levels.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The aim of the current research was to compare silent reading and reading aloud in terms of comprehension performance among Iranian EFL learners. The comparison was used to determine whether any differences in Iranian EFL learners' comprehension performance can be found between the reading modes namely silent reading and reading aloud in general. It was also used to determine the existence of any significant differences between the two gender groups of EFL learners in terms of the reading mode they used. Moreover, the effect of topic familiarity on Iranian EFL learners' comprehension, when they are reading silently and aloud was aimed to be obtained in particular.

This study, therefore, intends to address these research questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference between silent reading and reading aloud regarding Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance?
2. Is there any significant difference between females and males in their reading comprehension when they are engaged in reading text silently and aloud?
3. Does topic familiarity affect Iranian EFL learners' comprehension performance when they are engaged in reading text silently and aloud?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The current study can be considered useful in terms of understanding the effect of reading mode on reading comprehension performance. The results of this study may help Iranian EFL learners to determine their capabilities and difficulties when they are engaged in different modes of reading. Therefore, the significance of this research can be that it may raise Iranian EFL learners' awareness of these differences. Moreover, the current research signifies the selection of appropriate reading materials for EFL learners. In other words, instructors can provide reading text with more familiar topics and those of general interest.

The findings of the current research will benefit the following individuals; language teachers, curriculum designers, material developers, as well as learners. The findings can also contribute to teachers' understanding of gender differences in the context of Iran. Not only English language teachers and learners, but also secondary and high school teachers teaching L1 reading may benefit from the results of the current study by being aware of the differences between the two modes of reading: silent and reading aloud.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Presentation

This chapter consists of five sections. The first section deals with an overview of reading skills, definitions of reading, the reading process, reading for EFL/ESL students, and reading strategies. The second section focuses on different theories in second or foreign language reading including process approach and schema theory. The third section is concerned with L2 reading processing in terms of bottom up, top down and interactive processes. The fourth section discusses gender and topic familiarity in L2 reading. The last section pertains to the comparison between two different modes in reading comprehension: silent reading and reading aloud.

2.2 Reading Skill

Reading comprehension is a skill that is necessary for all individuals' success. No matter what the level of proficiency, gender, field of study, and educational institute the learners attend, they will have to face some reading of texts during their academic life. Alderson (2000) defines reading as a complicated process in which researchers are unable to identify all of its features, though there are some commonalities in terms of interaction between the written text and a reader while reading is performed.

Reading comprehension can be defined as an interactive mental process. Three fundamental activities are applied regarding the mental process including linguistic knowledge, schematic knowledge and knowledge about a given topic (Rahmani & Sadeghi, 2011). Chastain (1988) stated "reading is a basic and complementary skill

in language learning’’ (p. 216). Urquhart and Weir (1998) described reading as an intellectual skill which one can apply while reading a text. Reading could be seen as an unconscious process which seems simple, but as a matter of fact it is a complex and complicated process since it involves a great deal of precise knowledge which needs to be acquired or learned (Birch, 2002).

2.2.1 Definition of Reading Comprehension

What is the aim of reading? The aim of reading is comprehension, therefore it can be noted that comprehension is the reason for reading. If comprehension does not follow reading, it cannot be called reading. Mayer (2008) claimed that understanding the printed materials in a text was regarded as an important academic activity and provided the ground for the learning of academic subjects (cited in Teng, 2009).

There are four main component processes in reading comprehension suggested by Hannon (2001). The first process includes retrieving relevant knowledge from long-term memory. The second one refers to integrating accessed knowledge with information from the text. The third process is making inferences based on information in the text, and the fourth one is recalling newly learned text from memory. However, it is not very easy to appropriately describe and elaborate on reading comprehension in such a brief fashion.

There are some abilities in terms of reading comprehension such as an interacting process or linguistic process proposed by Grabe (2002). Grabe (2004) also maintained that reading comprehension “implies processing efficiency, language knowledge, strategic awareness, extensive practice in reading, cognitive resources in working memory to allow critical reflection, and appropriate purposes for reading” (p. 19).

Moreover, many varying definitions have been presented in terms of reading comprehension and its components. Alfassi (2004) defined reading as a complex cognitive activity which was absolutely necessary for adequate functioning as well as for accessing information in modern society. According to Anderson (1999), “reading is an active, fluent process which involves the reader and the reading materials in building meaning. Meaning does not reside on the printed page, nor is it only in the reader” (p.1).

Zhou (2008) stated that the amalgamation of boosting proficiency and acquiring knowledge prepared a ground for foreign language reading to play a fundamental role at entire levels, from elementary, intermediate to advanced levels. He also concluded that “it is a multivariate skill involving a complex combination and integration of a variety of cognitive, linguistic, and non-linguistic skills ranging from basic low-level processing abilities to high-level knowledge of text representation and the integration of ideas with the reader’s global knowledge” (p. 27).

2.2.2 Processes of Reading

Day and Park (2005) believe that it has been several decades that the theories and the models of reading have changed from receptive process to interactive process. Similarly, according to Birch (2002), reading can be viewed as a number of interactive processes. The first process refers to different processing strategies such as top down and bottom up along with the knowledge base. These processes interact with each other and lead to reading accomplishment. The second one involves the interaction between the reader’s mind and the written text and the result will be the comprehension of the message by the reader. The third process is concerned with the interaction between the reader and the text writer indirectly through time and space,

because it is the writer who is sending information to the reader, but it is the reader's job to grasp the information from the writer.

Collins and Smith (1982) also stated that there are two types of processing skills: the first process is concerned with the comprehension monitoring skill. The reader attempts to gain control of his/her development in reading comprehension and to compensate the probable failure, and the second one refers to benefiting from clues in the text to produce, assess, and review hypotheses about existing and future trials in the text.

In addition, Grabe and Stoller (2002) presented a list of fundamental procedures that are activated during reading a text. They divided the reading processes into lower –level processes and higher –level processes. The lower level processes are concerned with lexical access, syntactic analysing, semantic proposition formation, and working memory activation. On the other hand, the higher level processes are composed of text model of comprehension, situational model of the reader, background knowledge use and inference, and executive control process.

Regarding this categorization, the role of linguistic processes was characterized in lower-level processes which were regarded as more skills oriented. In contrast to lower level processes, the role of readers' prior knowledge as well as deductive skills in comprehension process was represented in higher level processes (Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

2.2.3 EFL/ESL Reading

Are there any differences between L2 reading and L1 reading? If yes, what are the main differences? To answer these questions, Singhal (1998) showed that not only were there similarities between L1 and L2 reading, but there were also some differences. With regard to the similarities, she noted that both contexts necessitated

knowledge of content, formal, and linguistic schema. However, culturally based knowledge or content schema differentiated L2 readers from L1 readers.

According to Grabe and Stoller (2002), L2 reading is more complicated and intricate because of two divergent cognitive resources and language processes. They listed these main sorts of differences including linguistic and processing differences, individual and experiential differences, and socio-cultural and institutional differences.

In a study conducted by Ueta (2005), some differences were observed in terms of the monolingual Japanese educational context. It was noticed that the extent of verbal, structural and discourse knowledge at early stages of L1 and L2 reading were quite different. The next comparison between L1 and L2 reading revealed that the amounts of exposure to L2 reading were different. The third difference concerned the linguistic differences across any two languages. The fourth observation revealed L2 proficiencies as a foundation for L2 were different.

The fifth issue in terms of comparison between these two contexts refers to the influence of working with two languages as they interact with each other. The sixth factor showed that the motivation for reading in L2 was different. Also, it was observed that learners' affective factors such as stress, anxiety and expectation level for L2 reading were different. Furthermore, the types of text in the L2 context as well as the way of organizing discourse were different.

Ueta (2005) concluded that there were some factors which should be given priority to promote L2 reading ability in EFL context. He categorized these factors as follows:

- To enhance vocabulary, grammar, discourse knowledge in English
- To promote fluency and automaticity

- To increase the amount of exposure for L2 reading
- To relieve students' anxieties and enhance students' motivation (p.9).

2.2.4 Reading Strategies

It is believed that reading is a problem-solving activity; therefore the idea of strategic reading has become subject of investigation in recent years. Many different readers with different background knowledge, cultural backgrounds as well as different cognitive and affective factors employ reading strategies to comprehend a text. Oxford (1990) classified language learning strategies into direct and indirect strategies. According to this categorization, the direct strategies refer to memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies, while indirect strategies refer to metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies.

Reading strategies are usually divided into two major categories by reading researchers: cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies aid the reader at getting meaning from the text. Generally speaking, studies in L1 and L2 reading research provided two cognitive strategies as bottom up and top-down (Block, 1986; Carrell, 1989; Davis & Bistodeau, 1993).

Therefore, it can be implied that bottom-up and top-down are included in cognitive strategies. On the other hand, metacognitive strategies are those sorts of strategies that are employed to control and adjust cognitive strategies (Devine, 1993 & Flavell, 1981). These strategies include "checking the outcome of any attempt to solve a problem, planning one's next move, monitoring the effectiveness of any attempted action, testing, revising, and evaluating one's strategies for learning"(Baker & Brown, 1984, p. 345).

According to Rigney (1978) readers employ many strategies in reading comprehension which promote them in terms of acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information (cited in Naseri, 2012). Regarding L2 reading, it was suggested that there was no necessity to define and provide different strategies for the readers, but to determine the suitability of the text, context, and reading task in terms of second language learners linguistic and schematic knowledge (Birch, 2002).

Urquhart and Weir (1998) regarded reading strategies as “ways of getting around difficulties encountered while reading” (p. 95). Naseri (2012) noted that reading can be performed with many different aims. These purposes include reading a student’s thesis in order to criticize, or reading a simple newspaper text or an article for fun. Birch (2002) stated that “the strategies allow the reader to take the text as a source of information and, drawing on the knowledge base as another source, make sense of what is on the printed page”(p. 2).

2.3 Theories in Second/Foreign Language Reading

Substantial progress has been made in order to appreciate the full meaning and nature of L2 reading. It is noteworthy that these developments along with finding and exploring the concept of L2 reading have played an important role in teaching reading , learning reading , and testing reading. So far, some definitions in terms of L1 and L2 reading have been discussed. Below, there are two theories regarding reading in the foreign language context.

2.3.1 Process Approach

Reading was believed to be a passive skill where readers aimed at decoding the text in order to appropriately comprehend it. Reading was also believed to be made up of a hierarchical list of word recognition. In this view, reading was assumed as a

product rather than a process so that getting the intended message of a writer sufficed (Zhou, 2008).

In contrast to this view, Yang (2000) maintained that the process approach considered reading as a successful phenomenon when a complete extraction of meaning in a text was performed. Unlike writing and speaking skills, which are viewed as creative and productive skills, reading and listening are regarded as both receptive and recreative skills. According to Chastain (1988), the reader ought to activate his/her prior and linguistic knowledge to receive the meaning of the text.

McNeil (1992) proposed four presumptions regarding the process approach. The first one included the influence of readers' prior knowledge on what they are going to learn from the text. It can be inferred that there is a direct relationship between their background knowledge and its effect on learning. The second assumption referred to the strategies called top-down (concept-driven) and bottom up (data-driven).

The application of the first strategy (top-down) is concerned with reader's goals and expectations which influence reading comprehension. The application of the second strategy (bottom-up) includes three dimensions: a) activating schemata b) applying schemata while setting expectations for reading c) bridging gaps by means of obtained information in the text.

The third assumption includes the capability of a reader in processing a text. The more capable he or she is in processing a text, the more successful he or she will be in understanding, storing, and recalling the text.

The fourth issue is the context in which the action of reading takes place and that will affect recall. In addition, the readers' purpose of reading and perception influence his or her beliefs regarding the significance of the text principle.

2.3.2 Schema Theory

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (William, 1976), the word process means “a system of operations in the production of something”. Chastain (1988) stated that there are three key words in the sentence above, which are very significant for second language learners. The key words include system, operation, and production which can be found in the dictionary definition. He noted that the word *operation* suggested a process containing some activities which are systematic and these systematized activities lead to a product.

Also, he pointed out that the process of reading could be inferred as an operation which is activated by the cognitive system as well as linguistic knowledge. One not only receives information from the printed text, but also recreates the meaning of the text. The theory regarding this view of communication is schema theory.

Schema theory is one of the theories concerned with how people read. According to Harris and Hodges (1995) schema theory is described as an integration of new knowledge with prior knowledge. Therefore, it can be said that schema theory considers the new information and links it to the relevant information already in the mind so that a meaningful relationship can be created through this occurrence and the result will be comprehension of the text or message.

Schema theory has a very crucial role regarding the reading comprehension process. Anderson (1980) defined a schema as “large, complex units of knowledge that organize much of what we know about general categories of objects, classes of events, and types of people” (cited in Chastain,1988 p.42).

Sankarakumar et al. (2012) proposed that the role of schema has been found to be crucially influential in the top-down approach of reading comprehension process. Swaffar (1988) emphasized the role of schematic knowledge as more effective in

comprehension performance rather than linguistic knowledge. Moreover, the role of schema has been recognized in making the reader aware of the interaction between the text and prior knowledge to enhance comprehension (Nassaji, 2002).

Regarding the specific categories of schema theory, Carrel (1983) maintained that there were two types of schemata which people as language processors possess. The first type is known as formal schemata which is claimed to be background knowledge about the “organizational structures of text” (p. 84). On the other hand, the second type of schemata refers to content of schematic knowledge in which the reader is required to be more familiar with the content area of a text. The examples for this type could be one about using a computer or the history of television.

2.4 Second/Foreign Language Reading Processing

Reading comprehension as an active, receptive, and dynamic skill makes increasing contributions in the process of learning a foreign language. In studies by some scholars, three processes have been formulated regarding reading comprehension (Madden & Nebes, 1980). These processes include bottom up processing (data-driven), top-down processing (conceptually driven), and interactive processing.

2.4.1 Bottom-up Processing (Data-Driven)

Bottom-up or data-driven processing is concerned with the reader’s recognition and analysis of perceived linguistic data such as vocabulary and sentences and comprehending the meaning of the text with little aid from prior knowledge (Ueta, 2005). Hunt (1982) maintained that in bottom-up processing thought moves from specific pieces of information to more general knowledge. Madden and Nebes (1980) noted that “in a data driven process the brain begins with externally received stimuli

and analyses that information to arrive at its final interpretation” (cited in Chastain, 1988, p.36).

Moreover, the language in reading, for instance, was assumed as the basis for comprehension in bottom up processing so that meaning resides in the reading passage (Chastain, 1988).

2.4.2 Top-down Processing (conceptually- driven)

In this process of reading, the role of the reader’s background knowledge in reading comprehension is considerable. He or she is active and capable of predicting and processing information (Yan, 2011). It can be inferred that this process follows Goodman’s psycholinguistic guessing game. Goodman (1967) maintained that “efficient reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time” (p. 126).

Madden and Nebes (1980) noted that “the brain initiates processing with a general knowledge of the subject and proceeds to relate the information it already has to the new data it receives”(cited in Chastain,1988, p.36). Hunt (1982) stated that the top-down process reflects the direction of thought. In contrast to bottom up process, the top- down approach moves form general knowledge to specific pieces of information.

2.4.3 Interactive Processing

According to the interactive model of reading, the information-processing system in reading consists of different levels of processing that operate in a parallel manner. It represents reading as a combination of top-down and bottom-up processing in continuous interaction (Roe et al., 2005).

Carrell et al. (1988) stated that “interactive models of reading assume that skills at all levels are interactively available to process and interpret the text” (p.59). According to this model, readers are simultaneously processing information from text and the information from their prior knowledge. Through the interaction of these mental processes, meaning is formed by the readers. Then, the readers can identify the meaning and structural category of word, sentences, and text details (Aebersold & Field, 1997).

According to Nuttall (1996), reading is an interactive process. It is more than solely getting the author’s ideas, because both the reader and the writer depend on one another. Moreover, Cohen (1990) noted that reading is a dynamic interaction between the writer and the reader. Meaning is created for the text through “retaining newly acquired knowledge, accessing recorded and stored knowledge and attending to the writer’s clues as to the meaning intended for the text” (p.75).

In sum, reading calls for the reader’s active interaction with the text being read in interactive processing model in reading.

2.5 Gender, Topic Familiarity, and Second/Foreign Language

Reading

The role of gender and familiarity of the topic in EFL/ESL reading comprehension have been taken into consideration in some studies (Carrel 1987; Bugel & Buunk, 1996; Young & Oxford, 1997). In a study conducted by Bugel and Buunk (1996), it was revealed that males and females received higher scores when the topic of the text was in accordance with their interests.

They pointed out that topicality has significant role in terms of differences among males and females regarding reading comprehension performance. On the other hand, Young and Oxford (1997) found that there was no significant statistical

difference between males and females in the study conducted with native speakers of English who were learning Spanish as a second language.

Carrel (1987) concluded that content familiarity played an important role in comprehending a text. In her study, two groups of people with different cultural backgrounds were given two different texts, one familiar and another unfamiliar. It was revealed that people who were familiar with the content of the text markedly outperformed those who were unfamiliar with the text on which they were tested.

Peretz and Shoham (1990) reported that EFL students were more successful when they were administered a test with a familiar topic relating to their field of study than those whose content of the test did not relate to their field of study. Moreover, the first group found the text easier than the second group. This can be regarded as the effect of content as well as topic familiarity on reading comprehension.

Furthermore, Al-Shumaimeri (2005) found a significant difference between males and females' general comprehension of two expository texts. His study revealed that males outperformed females regarding gender –neutral text. By gender neutral text, it can be implied that the degree of the text interest is equally the same both for males and females. In other words, the text is not neither males' nor females' favoured. Brantmeier (2003) found that there were considerable interactions between the gender of the readers and the text type among second language learners with intermediate level of proficiency. The results showed a significant gender difference in comprehension performance which was assessed by a test in multiple-choice format and recall writing. In his study, males scored better on the passage entitled *boxing*, and females could get the better score on the passage entitled *a frustrated housewife*. The study proved that there could be a direct relationship between the

content of the passage and gender of the readers, in such a way that may influence second language reading comprehension.

Shahmohammadi (2011) emphasized that the activation of schemata is highly dependent on the topic interest and content familiarity along with gender. She found that the English reading comprehension book of pre- university students did not follow the typical interest of females in Iran. It was revealed that the negligence in developing gender-appropriate material led to unsatisfactory performance of pre-university female students. Therefore, it can be stated that topic interest based on readers' gender, can play an important role regarding comprehension performance in L2 reading.

Yazdanpanah (2007) concluded in her study conducted in North Cyprus that the topic of the text could not affect the comprehension performance. She used three different texts entitled *the latest technology used in the design of houses*, *how to make changes in life*, and *space travel*. According to Bugel and Buunk's (1996) classification, passages 1 and 3 were male topics and passage 2 was a neutral topic. Therefore, it could be inferred that the reading test was gender-biased favouring males. She found that females and males performed equally, though the texts were not female- favoured.

Regarding the theme of the reading text, Pae (2004) investigated the influence of sex on English reading skill among Korean EFL students. He found that males were more enthusiastic about contextual information, and they performed better on the items related to mood, impression, and tone, while females performed better on items regarding logical inference.

2.6 Silent Reading versus Reading Aloud

There have been many contradictions in the results regarding the comparison of silent reading and reading aloud. These investigations have come up with many results which are not consistent simply due to differences in terms of participants' personality or test administration context (McCallum et al., 2004).

Many scholars suggested that these reading modes might scientifically affect comprehension in a different way (Juel & Holmes, 1981). Moreover, the different effects of these two modes (silent vs. aloud) may be rooted in the readers' own individual proficiency and skills (Kragler, 1995). The reason why individuals are not as successful in reading aloud as in silent reading may refer to the type of reading process.

Reading aloud requires a reader to investigate the meaning of a text with her/his limited cognitive resources. In this case, the reader has to deal with both pronunciation, intonation and at the same time to extract meaning from the text. Therefore, the limited cognitive resources for pronunciation, intonation and vocalization reduce the reader's overall comprehension (Hale et al., 2007).

In addition, various advantages of silent reading have been emphasized. Hopkins (1997) believes that learners can benefit from silent reading since they will be provided with a better opportunity to read a text at their own speed. Moreover, silent reading can facilitate learners' confidence in their ability to work through and understand a text autonomously. Therefore, silent reading is believed to be a mode that prepares learners for life-long reading. Furthermore, McCallum et al., (2004) found that silent reading in the context of an individual assessment of reading comprehension leads to greater efficiency.

In contrast, some scholars found that reading aloud leads to better comprehension under some conditions. Swalm (1972) and Elgart (1978) pointed out that young people performed more satisfactorily on reading comprehension after reading aloud. Some researchers believe that reading aloud enhances reader's comprehension – especially that of poor readers. In such instances, they can facilitate comprehension by hearing themselves while reading the text (Kragler, 1995; Swalm, 1972).

Yet, Mendak (1986) argued that in terms of reading mode, the most effective mode for comprehension was silent reading and it was also one of the important aspects of reading instruction. Finally, other researchers' results revealed that no difference has been observed between reading comprehension scores after reading aloud and reading silently (Holmes & Allison, 1985).

In addition to studies into differences in reading silently and aloud for comprehension performance, there have also been investigations in terms of fluency. Regarding this issue, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD, 2000) reported that there was not sufficient evidence to determine whether silent reading helped to improve reading fluency or not.

Although many studies have revealed that the best readers were those who most frequently read silently to themselves, the report concluded that these studies could not come up with the definite answer to the question of whether independent silent reading improves reading skills or that good readers simply prefer to read silently to themselves (Prior et al., 2011).

The report made a recommendation indicating that if silent reading was used as a classroom technique, with the purpose of developing reading skill and fluency, it should be done in combination with other types of reading instruction, such as

guided oral reading. Therefore, from this perspective, it can be inferred that reading silently and reading aloud are somehow interrelated.

There are also varying theories and findings related to reading aloud. For example, some research findings supporting reading aloud have concluded that learners understand better when they are reading aloud because they try to pay more attention to the words in order to pronounce each one well (Elgart, 1978).

Parallel to this argument, it is claimed that reading aloud can be an accelerator for beginning readers as they concentrate on specific words, facilitating comprehension. According to this manner of thought, reading aloud makes children ready for the next step and that is silent reading (Fuchs & Maxwell, 1988).

The research made by Miller and Smith (1990) in which silent reading and reading aloud were compared, they divided their findings into three categories in terms of reading proficiency. They observed that poor readers performed better at reading aloud while average readers were more apt at silent reading. Moreover, they suggested that there was no significant difference between silent reading and reading aloud for those with stronger reading proficiency.

It is worth noting that some other researchers have not found any significant differences in comprehending the texts between these two modes. (Davis, 1988; Armbruster & Wilkinson, 1991; Bernhardt, 1983; Wilkinson & Anderson, 1995). In terms of differing effects of reading aloud and silent reading on comprehension, Prior et al. (2011) argued that “beginning and poor readers benefit from oral reading, whereas older and proficient readers may comprehend better after silent reading” (p. 184).

In a study conducted by Gibson (2008), it was revealed that reading aloud can be beneficial for four academic purposes, “speaking practice, making graphemic-

phonemic connections diagnosing pronunciation problems, improving fluency, and practicing reading skills” (p. 34). The study showed that the participants confessed the benefits of reading aloud in compensating for any occasional monotony.

Gabrielatos (2002) believes in reading aloud as a learning activity. He believes that “RA [Reading Aloud] is probably the single technique in ELT which is not explicitly associated with any of the modern teaching methods” (p.1). Swalm (1972) claimed that the reason why reading aloud is superior to silent reading is rooted in the satisfaction that the reader creates in a listener by the forced- reading of each word. While reading silently, the student can simply avoid difficult words, which may lead to poorer comprehension.

Elgart (1978) and Swalm (1972) also noted that “reading orally is superior because it allows the student to use two senses, sight and sound, while silent reading uses only the sense of sight” (cited in McCallum et al., 2004, p.242) .On the other hand, Nuttall (1996) pointed out that not only did reading aloud always help with comprehending the meaning of the text, but due to the main focus of the reader on the pronouncing the word appropriately and correctly, it led to the ignorance of meaning. In other words, the reader concentrated so meticulously on the impeccable pronunciation that the main purpose of the task – understanding the meaning of the text – was ignored (Al-Abri, 2011).

Therefore, the research findings concerning the comparison of reading aloud and silent reading can be divided into three parts. The first group includes those who determined the superiority of reading aloud to silent reading. The second group argues that silent readers are more successful than those who read and the third group has not found any significant differences between these two reading modes. In short, these findings show that the result of the studies have been contradictory.

It should be kept in mind that there are many characteristics such as age, and level of proficiency which should be taken into account when comparing silent reading and reading aloud. Regarding what has been investigated and discussed so far, there is still high degree of divergence among researchers and scholars in terms of the efficiency of silent reading and reading aloud in readers' comprehension performance.

2.7 Summary

This chapter investigated the different definitions of reading skill in L1 and L2. It also discussed different processes of reading such as bottom up, top down, and interactive approaches in reading comprehension. Moreover, reading strategies and their role on reading comprehension have been explored. This chapter has also discussed the theories in L2 reading including process approach and schema theory. Regarding the main focus of the current research on different modes in reading (i.e. silent reading and reading aloud), the findings and the results of previous and current studies in the area of gender, topic familiarity, silent reading, and reading aloud have also been examined. It is noteworthy that no studies have been found in terms of comparison between reading aloud and silent reading in Iranian EFL context.

Chapter 3

METHOD

3.1 Presentation

In this chapter the research design, the context of the study, the participants, the data collection instruments, the procedures used for the collection of data, and data analysis procedures will be presented. The test for normality distribution of data and case processing summary will be also discussed.

3.2 Research Design

The research followed the comparative study with quantitative method in data collection procedure in which two groups of participants were administered two reading comprehension tests. Comparative research is a broad term that includes both quantitative and qualitative comparison of social entities (Mills et al., 2006). The underlying goal of comparative study is to search for similarity and variance. Comparisons not only uncover differences between social entities, but reveal unique aspects of a particular entity that would be virtually impossible to detect otherwise. (Mills et al., 2006).

Ragin (1994), described some characteristics of the comparative research as follows: One of the main characteristics of comparative research refers to the examining patterns of similarities and differences across a moderate number of cases. According to Ragin (1994), knowledge of cases is considered an important goal of comparative research, independent of any other goal. Moreover, the typical goal of a comparative study is to unravel the different causal conditions connected to different

outcomes - causal patterns that separate cases into different subgroups. Furthermore, the characteristics of comparative study allow researchers to employ their research in an objective and statistically valid way (Ragin, 1994).

3.3 Research Questions

This study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference between silent reading and reading aloud regarding Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance?
2. Is there any significant difference between females and males in their reading comprehension when they are engaged in reading text silently and reading aloud?
3. Does topic familiarity affect Iranian EFL learners' comprehension performance when they are engaged in reading text silently and aloud?

3.4 Context of the Study

The current study was conducted among Iranian EFL learners from four private language institutes in Babol, a city in the north of Iran. According to the curriculum of the Ministry of Education, English courses are offered at secondary and high schools mostly based on the grammar translation method—which do not fulfil the students' requirements for foreign language achievement. Therefore, they have to compensate by learning English at private institutes. There are many private institutes in Iran in which teachers and supervisors are recruited as experts in English language teaching. Moreover, these institutes need to get permission from the Ministry of Education; without permission such activities are considered illegal.

The private institutes in which the researcher collected the data are both legal and well-regarded with many branches throughout Iran. These institutes have been working for many years with high level of experience. Many EFL learners who graduated from these institutes, are employed there as teachers or teacher trainers.

The institutes in which the current research was conducted follow the rules and regulations of Iran's Ministry of Education. To determine the level of proficiency of students, the students take TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) placement test which includes an oral interview. They are tested by ELT (English Language Teaching) experts who are recruited by the language centres. The role of these experts is not only administering tests or evaluating the level of students' proficiency, but also observing instructors during their teaching activities in class.

The instructors are also recruited based on their scientific knowledge and expertise in ELT, teaching experience, and their good command of the English language. It should be mentioned that most of the instructors are near native in their level of proficiency.

The system of teaching in these institutes is mostly based on the communicative approach. The classes are student-centred. There are four academic semesters in these institutes with the length of each semester being two and a half months. Classes are conducted for one and a half hours per day twice a week. The students are required to attend a total of 20 sessions per semester. The final assessment of students is based on class activities, and midterm and final exams.

3.5 Participants

The present study consisted of 100 intermediate level Iranian EFL learners who participated voluntarily. The participants consisted of both males and females divided into two equal groups of 50.

The participants in the silent reading group were 25 males and 25 females. This combination was replicated in the reading aloud group. The EFL learners, who participated in the current study, were learning English at various branches of English Language institutes in Iran, including Shokouh-e-Enghelab English

Language Institute (15 males and 15 females for silent reading), Iranmehr English Language Institute (15 males and 15 females for reading aloud), Novin English Language Institute (10 females for silent and 10 females for reading aloud), and Pouyesh English Language Institute (10 males for silent reading and 10 males for reading aloud). The participants were given the test at their own educational institute. They were put in two groups of male and female, and then they were divided into the different reading modes of silent and reading aloud.

Most of the participants, who took part in the current study, were teenage high school students with ages ranging from 13 to 15 (mean=14), learning English as a foreign language in the aforementioned English language institutes. Furthermore, since the researcher had already taught or was teaching at the institutions, he benefited from the voluntary and warm participation and cooperation of participants, teachers, and directors. Tables 3.1 through 3.4 show the specific characteristics of participants such as age, gender and the institutes' names where the study was conducted. These tables also show the type of mode the participants were employ for reading the texts.

Table 3.1: The Characteristics of Participants in Shokouh-e-Enghelab Institute

Institute	Type of reading	Gender/Number of the participants	Age range
Shokouh-e-Enghelab English Language Institute	Silent	Male 15/ female15	13-15

Table 3.1 shows the name of the first institute, Shokouh-e Enghelab Institute, in which 15 males and 15 females participated in the current study to take the reading comprehension test silently. It is worth noting that the average age of the participants in all four institutes is 14.

Table 3. 2: The Characteristics of Participants in Iranmehr English Language Institute

Institute	Type of reading	Gender/Number of the participants	Age range
Iranmehr English Language Institute	Aloud	Male 15/ female15	13-15

Table 3.2 shows the characteristics of the participants of the second institutes, Iranmehr English Language Institute, where 15 males and females participated in the study by reading aloud. As is evident, the age range is from 13 to 15, as at the previous institute.

Table 3.3: The Characteristics of Participants in Novin English Language Institute

Institute	Type of reading	Gender/Number of the participants	Age range
Novin English Language Institute	Aloud/Silent	Female/20	13-15

Table 3.3 also shows that 20 female students from Novin English Language Institute with the average age of 14 participated in the current study by reading aloud and silently. It should be mentioned that 10 female participants took the test by silent reading and 10 female participants took the test by reading aloud.

Table 3.4: The Characteristics of Participants in Pouyesh English Language Institute

Institute	Type of reading	Gender/Number of the participants	Age range
Pouyesh English Language Institute	Aloud/Silent	Male/20	13-15

Table 3.4 indicates the characteristics of the participants who took part in the current study. It also shows that 20 male students of Pouyesh English Language Institute with the average age of 14 took the test in the current study. It needs to be noted that 10 male participants took the test by reading silently and 10 male participants took the test by reading aloud.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instrument consisted of two expository reading texts adopted from McCall-Crabbs Standard Test Lessons in Reading, Book D and Book F (1979). The first reading text, as *The Jet Stream*, includes 191 words about jet stream and its influence on the weather and flying industry in America (Appendix A). The second reading text, as *The Titanic*, involves 182 words about the disaster of the *Titanic* (Appendix B).

There are 10 items to be answered for each passage. Moreover, the type of the questions used for these two texts was of the multiple-choice format, with literal rather than inferential items.

The reliability was obtained for the two texts. The reliability results were 0.665 for *The Jet Stream* passage (see Table 3.5) and 0.646 for *The Titanic* (see Table 3.6), which can be minimally acceptable according to Devellis' categorization in terms of reliability scale (1991).

Table 3.5: Reliability Statistics for Jet Stream

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.665	10

Table 3.6: Reliability Statistics for Titanic

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.646	10

3.6.1 The rational for the choice of data collection instruments

The rational for the choice of data collection instruments can be explained as follows: Since the film *The Titanic* is one of the most popular and well-known movies in the world, it was assumed that most students were likely to have watched it, or at least to have heard about the story. In contrast, as the word *Jet Stream* is used

for weather reporting in America and sounds like a technical term, it was assumed that most students had not heard about it or possessed little information on this topic.

Moreover, since the participants in both groups were required to recall the text by not looking back at the main text after reading aloud or silently, the type of the literal questions in multiple-choice format was ideal to assess their comprehension. Another rational for choosing these passages lied in their being gender neutral. Since these passages were previously used by Al-Shumaimeri's (2005) study as gender-neutral texts, it could be inferred that these reading texts were appropriate to be used as gender neutral ones in the current study.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

Prior to the study, the research proposal and a permission letter were sent to the four institutes where the present study was conducted (Appendix C). After obtaining the written permission from all four language institutes, the researcher started to collect the data. The data for the current research was collected during the Spring semester of 2011- 2012 academic year.

The data collection procedures for the current study took seven days. To provide the preliminary preparations, the researcher made an appointment to see directors and instructors in order to justify and explain the research design. It ought to be mentioned that the directors of all institutes asked the researcher to inform them about the result of the study. The students were assured that their participation was completely voluntary and confidential. Based on standard research ethics, the participants gave their consent through a signed letter which was previously provided to them by the researcher (Appendix D).

The study began with the participation of 15 male students of the Shokouh-e Enghelab English language institute who were assigned to the silent group randomly.

In the first step, they were informed about the research design and how they could cooperate with the researcher fully. They were informed that their reading comprehension performance was going to be measured in a silent mode. They were also instructed that the time they were going to spend in order to read the content of the first text and answer the comprehension questions was seven minutes.

The second step of the current study was distributing the first comprehension text *The Jet Stream*. While the researcher was distributing the text, he assured the participants knew that their score in the experiment would not affect their final or midterm assessment. They were also informed that writing their names is optional.

In the third step, they were asked to read the whole text silently in the specific time allowed. The participants were then given the questions in a multiple-choice format. They were required to read the text carefully because they would have to return the text to the researcher before taking the question booklet. The rationale behind this was that of maintaining equality between the two groups since the reading aloud would follow the same procedure.

In the fourth step, the researcher took the text back from the participants and in the fifth step he distributed the question booklets to the participants. In this step, each participant was asked to write the same number on both question booklets. For example, student A was asked to write number 1 on his/her paper, student B was asked to write number 2 on his /her paper, etc. Since the participants were not supposed to write their names, the rationale behind this request lied in codifying the papers for scoring, so that the researcher would know that papers numbered 2, for instance, belong to one specific individual participant.

In the sixth step, the researcher monitored the students in order to answer any potential questions relating to the comprehension questions. The researcher ensured

he showed kind and accommodating demeanour throughout the data collection procedure. In the seventh step, collecting the completed comprehension question papers, the researcher thanked the students for their participation and wished them success in their lives and further education.

In the eighth step, completing and giving the first comprehension test, the researcher allowed a short break in order to ensure that the students were refreshed. Then, the second text *The Titanic* was distributed to those participants and the same procedures were followed. There was no difference in procedures between the first and the second comprehension tests.

The same process was carried out with the participants of the silent group which comprised of 35 Iranian EFL learners (15 female students from Shokouh-e-Enghelab English language institute, 10 male students from Pouyesh English language institute and 10 female from Novin English Language institute). It should be mentioned that the whole procedure for the male and female groups took three days to be completed for the silent reading group.

Parallel to the silent group, the participants in the reading aloud group included 25 males and 25 females. The second phase of data collection started with 15 female students from Iranmehr English Language Institute. The process for data collection in this mode was to some extent different from that in the silent reading group.

The first step of the data collection procedures for the reading aloud group was to explain and elaborate on the research design as had already been done with the silent reading group. It was explained to the participants that their reading comprehension was going to be measured by reading aloud mode. In the second step, they were escorted to the exam room individually by the researcher. Since it was their first

experience to be tested in such a way, the researcher attempted to lower their anxiety and stress by being especially friendly with them.

In the third step, the first text *The Jet Stream* was given to the individual participant and she was asked to read it aloud. During this step, the participant's pronunciation was not corrected. In the fourth step, the researcher took the text back from the participant after reading aloud. In the fifth step, the researcher gave her the comprehension questions booklet to answer.

As was performed in the silent reading group, the participant was asked to write the same number on both question booklets so that the researcher can recognize the exam papers of the two texts belong to one individual participant while scoring. In the sixth step, the researcher monitored the participant's activity, as he did with the silent reading group, to answer any possible questions or solve any unexpected problems. Finally, in the seventh step, the researcher collected the participant's question booklet at the end of the allowed time, which was again seven minutes. In the eighth step, completing the first text, the participant was given the second text *The Titanic* in the same way. At the end, the researcher expressed his appreciation to those who participated in the study.

The same process was followed for the other participants in the reading aloud group, who were 35 Iranian EFL learners including 15 male students from Iranmehr English language institute, 10 female student from Novin English Language institute and 10 male students from Pouyesh English language institute.

It is necessary to mention that the data collection procedures for this phase took four days. Table 3.7 summarizes all the procedures which were carried out for the present study. It shows that the data collection procedures occurred in eight steps for both the silent and reading aloud groups.

Table 3.7: Data Collection Procedures in Reading Aloud and Silent Reading Groups

Silent group		Aloud group	
Step 1	Explaining the design of the research to the participants	Step 1	Explaining the design of the research to the participants
Step 2	Distributing the first text among the participants (The Jet Stream)	Step 2	Escorting the individual participant to the exam room
Step 3	Asking the participants read the text silently	Step 3	Asking the participant to read the first text (The Jet Stream) aloud
Step 4	Taking back the text from the participants	Step 4	Taking the text back from the individual participant
Step 5	Distributing the question booklet in a multiple choice format	Step 5	Giving the question booklet to the participant
Step 6	Monitoring the students while taking the test	Step 6	Monitoring the participant while taking the test
Step 7	Collecting the paper answered by the participant after seven minutes	Step 7	Collecting the papers answered by the participant after seven minutes
Step 8	Distributing the second text among the participants(The Titanic)	Step 8	Asking the participant to read the second text (The Titanic) aloud

3.8 Data Analysis Procedures

The first phase of data analysis was processed by scoring participants' exam papers collected by the researcher at the end of the allowed time and scoring 1 point for each true answer. As was already mentioned, there were 20 items altogether for the two passages that the participants were required to answer the questions. The data needed to be analysed quantitatively. Therefore, in the second phase of data analysis the researcher utilized statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 18 for

descriptive statistics to get the mean scores of the reading aloud and silent reading groups.

Since to determine whether there was a significant difference between the obtained mean scores, independent samples t-test was required for the first and second research questions. The reason why independent samples t-test was utilized is that as there were two groups in this study and the two groups performed independently from each other (an individual language learner's ability did not depend on another learner's ability), an independent samples t-test was deemed as the best statistical procedure to analyse the data collected.

Afterwards, to analyse the data obtained from the third research question, paired samples t- test was utilized to determine the effect of topic familiarity on reading comprehension performance of participants in reading aloud and silent reading groups. The reason why paired samples t-test was used is that this statistical procedure compares the scores on the two variables for the same people or group. Since there were two reading texts for silent group and two reading texts for loud group, paired samples t-test was utilized.

Scoring the participants' answer sheets, the raw scores of the two groups with gender specification were listed as shown in Tables 3.8 to 3.11.

Table 3.8: Raw Data on Female Students' Test Scores in Reading Aloud Group

Number of students	Test 1 (out of 10)	Test 2 (out of 10)	Total (out of 20)
S 1	4	4	8
S 2	3	5	8
S 3	5	6	11
S 4	3	3	6
S 5	5	4	9
S 6	5	4	9
S 7	4	4	8
S 8	2	7	9
S 9	6	5	11
S 10	5	6	11
S 11	1	7	8
S 12	1	1	2
S 13	5	5	10
S 14	5	4	9
S 15	4	5	9
S 16	3	3	6
S 17	2	6	8
S 18	0	6	6
S 19	5	7	12
S 20	1	8	9
S 21	7	6	13
S 22	7	5	12
S 23	3	3	6
S 24	2	6	8
S 25	5	5	10

As it was displayed in Table 3.8, the number of female EFL learners who participated in the study was 25. They were sorted from student 1 to student 25. These participants were given 2 reading comprehension tests and asked to read aloud. The total score of the 2 tests were itemized as is indicated in Table 3.8.

Table 3.9: Raw Data on Male Students' Test Scores in Reading Aloud Group

Number of students	Test 1 (out of 10)	Test 2 (out of 10)	Total (out of 20)
S 1	5	5	10
S 2	2	1	3
S 3	4	6	10
S 4	1	5	6
S 5	5	4	9
S 6	2	2	4
S 7	1	2	3
S 8	3	4	7
S 9	4	6	10
S 10	5	4	9
S 11	4	3	7
S 12	3	7	10
S 13	4	4	8
S 14	3	2	5
S 15	2	6	8
S 16	3	3	6
S 17	1	5	6
S 18	4	3	7
S 19	2	5	7
S 20	3	3	6
S 21	2	6	8
S 22	2	4	6
S 23	4	6	10
S 24	3	4	7
S 25	6	3	9

Table 3.9, similarly, specifies the number of male EFL learners who were asked to read the texts aloud. It also reveals the raw scores of the first and the second tests as well as the total score. It should be noted that the highest score for each test is 10. It means that there is 1 point for each item. As can be seen, the highest and the lowest scores in this group are 10 and 3 respectively.

Table 3.10: Raw Data on Female Students' Test Scores in Silent Group

Number of students	Test1 (out of 10)	Test 2 (out of 10)	Total (out of 20)
S 1	1	3	4
S 2	6	3	9
S 3	1	3	4
S 4	4	5	9
S 5	3	4	7
S 6	4	3	7
S 7	5	6	11
S 8	6	4	10
S 9	4	4	8
S 10	2	9	11
S 11	5	6	11
S 12	4	7	11
S 13	2	5	7
S 14	5	8	13
S 15	5	8	13
S 16	4	5	9
S 17	5	8	13
S 18	6	7	13
S 19	6	8	14
S 20	6	8	14
S 21	4	8	12
S 22	5	8	13
S 23	5	7	12
S 24	5	8	13
S 25	4	7	11

Table 3.10 illustrates the statistical characteristics of the participants' scores in the first phase of scoring. As the table shows, 25 female EFL participants took test 1 and test 2 in the silent reading mode. The total scores of this group were also fed into the SPSS software to come up with the statistical output. Table 3.11, indicates the raw scores of the participants who took the two tests and their total scores. This group comprised 25 male EFL learners who were engaged to take the reading comprehension test in a silent mode.

Table 3.11: Raw Data on Male Students' Test Scores in Silent Group

Number of students	Test 1 (out of 10)	Test 2 (out of 10)	Total (out of 20)
S 1	8	6	14
S 2	6	7	13
S 3	8	7	15
S 4	5	6	11
S 5	7	8	15
S 6	3	7	10
S 7	5	7	12
S 8	5	4	9
S 9	3	6	9
S 10	5	6	11
S 11	6	6	12
S 12	2	2	4
S 13	4	2	6
S 14	3	2	5
S 15	5	3	8
S 16	5	3	8
S 17	4	4	8
S 18	1	2	3
S 19	6	7	13
S 20	7	5	12
S 21	6	9	15
S 22	6	3	9
S 23	4	8	12
S 24	3	7	10
S 25	6	7	13

3.9 Test of Normality

Testing for distributional assumptions in general and for normality in particular has been a major area of continuing statistical research-both theoretically and practically. A possible cause of such sustained interest is that many statistical procedures have been derived based on particular distributional assumptions-especially that of normality (Shapiro& Wilk, 1965). "Normality is one of the most common assumptions made in the development and use of statistical procedures" (Thode, 2002, p. 1). Hain (2010) stated that the distribution in test normality can be regarded as one the most important distribution in statistical analysis.

Since the data was analysed quantitatively, the raw data was fed into SPSS software version 18 and the output appeared as seen in the preceding and following tables. The first procedure in terms of data analysis was performed to determine the normality distribution of the data. Therefore, Shapiro-Wilk was utilized to ascertain the normality of the test.

Table 3.12: Test of Normality Distribution of Data

Group	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Silent	.959	48	.092
Aloud	.970	50	.224

(P<.01)

It is worth noting that the very low raw scores of 2 male (student number 18) and female (student number 3) participants in silent reading group were eliminated to avoid coming up with abnormal results. Table 3.12 indicates that the tests administered to both silent and reading aloud groups were quite normal since there was no significant difference between them in terms of distribution of scores.

3.10 Case Processing Summary

The number of the participants and their analyses of scores are shown in Table 3.13. As was already mentioned, there were two groups in the present study: Silent reading group and reading aloud group.

Table 3.13: Case Processing Summary for Silent and Aloud Reading Groups

Group	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Silent	48	96.0%	2	4.0%	50	100.0%
Aloud	50	100.0%	0	.0%	50	100.0%

Statistically speaking, the total number of the participants in both groups were the same (N=50). It means that 100% of selected participants took part in the present study. In data analysis procedure, as can be seen, two participants (4.0%) in the silent group were missing. This deletion was made to ensure the normality of the test.

Finally, 96% of participants' data in the silent group and 100% of participants' data in the aloud group were analysed.

3.11 Summary

This chapter examined the method of the current research. It explained the overall research design of the study, and addressed the research questions of the study. Thereafter, the context of the study was described. Then, the chapter presented information concerning the data collection instruments, the participants, the data collection procedures and the way the data was analysed. Finally, test for normality distribution of data and case processing summary were presented.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

4.1 Presentation

This chapter presents the results of the current study based on the answers of the three research questions posed in the study.

4.2 Research Question 1

Is there a statistically significant difference between silent reading and reading aloud regarding Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance? To answer this question, the mean scores of the two groups were required in the first step. Then, the independent samples t-test was applied to compare the mean scores of the groups to determine any significant difference between the comprehension performance of silent reading and reading aloud groups comprehension performance.

4.2.1. Group statistics results (descriptive statistics for the two groups)

Looking at Table 4.1, it can be easily seen that the mean scores of these two groups are different, i.e., the silent group has a mean score of 10.69, thus performing better than the aloud group which has a mean score of 7.98.

Table 4.1: Group Statistics (Descriptive Statistics for Two Groups)

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Silent	48	10.69	2.69	.39
Aloud	50	7.98	2.36	.33

4.2.2 Independent Samples t-test

However, Table 4.1 is not sufficiently informative, as it does not show whether the difference between the two groups is statistically significant. To find that out, we need to look at table 4.2. As there were two groups in this study and the two groups performed independently from each other (an individual language learner's ability did not depend on another learner's ability), an independent samples t-test was deemed as the best statistical procedure to analyse the data collected.

Table 4.2: Independent Samples t-test for Silent and Aloud reading

Group	T	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Silent and Aloud	5.27	96	.000	2.70	.51	Lower 1.692	Upper 3.723

P<.05

Table 4.2 indicates that the difference between the performances of the two groups is significant ($P<.05$, $t\text{-value}=5.27$). Therefore, the most important thing about Table 4.2 is that the researcher is more than 99% sure that his findings did not come about by chance, or by pedagogical intervention. It can be safely concluded that the silent group did in fact perform better. As a result, it has been revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between silent reading and reading aloud regarding learners' reading comprehension performance.

4.3 Research Question 2

Is there any significant difference between females and males in their reading comprehension when they are engaged in reading silently and reading aloud? To answer the second research question asking whether there is any significant difference between genders in their reading comprehension when engaged in reading silently versus reading aloud, the following analyses were performed.

The same analysis for the second question was performed to obtain the result and see the gender difference between the two groups. To do this, the descriptive statistics analysis was applied in the first step to calculate the mean scores of males and females in the silent group.

Table 4.3: Group Statistics for Gender Difference in Silent Reading

Reading mode	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Silent Reading	Male	24	10.54	3.18	.65
	Female	24	10.66	2.89	.59

As Table 4.3 shows, the mean scores of males and females in the silent reading group are 10.54 and 10.66 respectively. Superficially, it appears that the mean score for females is more than males' mean score in the silent reading group. Therefore, it can be suggested that the female participants who read the texts silently outperformed the male participants in the same group.

However, Table 4.3 did not inform convincingly whether there was significant difference between the two genders in silent reading. Therefore, another analysis was needed to compare the mean scores of the two genders.

Table 4.4 Independent Samples t- test for Gender Difference in Silent Group

Group	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Silent	-.142	46	.88	-.125	.87	Lower -1.89	Upper 1.64

P<0.05

Table 4.4 shows the results of the independent samples t-test which compared the means of the two groups statistically. It indicates that the difference between the performances of the two groups is not significant. ($P > 0.05$, $t\text{-value} = -.142$). The most important thing in Table 4.4 was that the researcher got .88 (sig.) which was more than 0.05 (the probability level $P > 0.05$). Since $.88 > 0.05$, therefore, it can be

concluded that the answer to the first part of the second research question would be no significant difference has been observed between genders regarding their silent reading comprehension.

The second part of research question two is concerned with the comprehension performance among male and female participants who were engaged in reading aloud. To investigate and analyse the data in this group, the same analytical processes were employed to get the final result. The first step of analysis was taken as descriptive statistics of these two groups.

Table 4.5: Group Statistics for Gender Difference in Aloud Group

Reading mode	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Aloud	Male	25	7.24	2.12	.42
Reading	Female	25	8.72	2.38	.47

As it can be seen in Table 4.5, the mean scores of males and females are 7.24 and 8.72 respectively. According to this analysis, it can be noted that the females did in fact perform better than males.

To determine definitively whether there was a significant difference between males and females regarding their reading comprehension performance in the reading aloud group, we have to look at Table 4.6. It indicates that the sig. is .025 which is less than 0.05. ($p < 0.05$, t value = -2.31). Therefore, it can be concluded that unlike the performance of males and females in the silent group, there was a significant difference between the two genders in their reading comprehension when engaged in reading aloud.

Table 4.6: Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Difference in Aloud Group

Group	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Aloud	-2.31	48	.025	-1.48	.63	Lower -2.76639	Upper -.19361

P<0.05

As the results show, it can be seen that there was not any significant difference between genders in the silent group; however, based on findings in the loud group, there was a significant difference between males and females performances in the aloud group. Males and females performed equally the same when they were engaged in silent reading. On the other hand, females outperformed the male participants regarding their comprehension performance when they were reading aloud.

4.4 Research Question 3

Does topic familiarity affect EFL learners' comprehension performance when they are engaged in reading silently and reading aloud?

4.4.1 Paired Samples t-test

A paired samples t-test was run to compare the mean scores for the two reading texts (Jet Stream and Titanic) and to determine the efficiency of topic familiarity in silent reading and reading aloud separately.

To obtain the answer of the third research question, we refer to Table 4.9. It shows the paired samples statistics of both males and females in silent reading group who took the tests. The total number of the participants as was already mentioned was 100 males (N=50) and females (N=50). However, two participants were already removed in silent group due to test of normality distribution.

Table 4.7: Paired Samples Statistics for Topic Familiarity in Silent Reading

Reading mode	Texts	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Silent	Jet Stream	48	4.75	1.50	.21
	Titanic	48	5.87	1.99	.28

As it can be seen in Table 4.7, the mean score of the participants who read the first text *The Jet Stream* is 4.75. On the other hand, the mean score of the participants who read the second text *The Titanic* is 5.87. These mean scores indicate that participants who read the second text *The Titanic* scored better than those who read the first text *The Jet Stream*.

Table 4.8: Paired Samples Statistics for Topic Familiarity in Reading Aloud

Reading mode	Texts	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Aloud	Jet Stream	50	3.42	1.66	.23
	Titanic	50	4.56	1.61	.22

In addition to Table 4.7 which reveals the descriptive statistics for the participants in the silent reading group, we need to look at Table 4.8. It shows the paired samples statistics of participants in the reading aloud group. With regard to the specification of two tests, the mean score of the first text *The Jet Stream* is 3.42, while the mean score of the second text *The Titanic* is 4.56. Thus far, it can be pointed out that with regard to the different texts with different topics, the participants performed better in comprehending the second text *The Titanic*.

Since these findings were not informative and reliable enough to come up with the final results, it needs further investigations and analyses to be employed to determine whether the difference between the mean scores is statistically significant or not. As to the significance of the difference between the mean scores in silent group, Table 4.9 reveals that the sig. is .001 which is less than the alpha level of 0.05 ($P < 0.05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that since the term *The Titanic* is familiar to

the participant in silent group, their performance in the second text (Titanic) is better than the first text.

Table 4.9: Paired Samples t-test for Topic Familiarity in Silent Reading

Reading Mode	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Er Mean	Std. Dev.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Silent	-3.62	47	.001	-1.12	.31	2.14	Lower -1.744	Upper -.5

P<0.05

Regarding the performance of the participants in the silent reading, which confirmed that the students with the more topic familiarity comprehend the text well, it is also needed to investigate the significance of the difference between topic familiarity of the text and students' comprehension performance in reading aloud.

Looking at the Table 4.10, it can be concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the texts in the aloud group. As the table shows, the sig. is .001 which is less than the alpha level (P<0.05). As a result, the students in the reading aloud group performed better in comprehension of the second text (The Titanic) than the first text (The Jet Stream). It reveals that they completed the text with a familiar topic better than the text with an unfamiliar topic.

Table 4.10: Paired Samples t- Test for Topic Familiarity in Reading Aloud

Reading Mode	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Er .Mean	Std. Dev.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Aloud	-3.52	49	.001	-1.14	.32	2.28	Lower -1.78	Upper -.49

P<0.05

Regarding the third research question, it can be said that topic familiarity does affect readers' comprehension performance. It can also be added that no matter which reading mode the engaged in, (silent reading or reading aloud) both topic and content familiarity influenced readers' comprehension performance. On the other

hand, the texts with unfamiliar topics and content may not affect comprehension as good as familiar topics and content.

4.5 Summary

This chapter presented statistical analyses in terms of descriptive statistics and the most important and applicable processes such as independent samples t-test and paired samples t-test to compare the means of the groups. As there were three research questions, two of them were analysed using independent samples t-test and one of them was analysed using paired samples t-test. The results showed that there was a significant difference between reading aloud and silent reading in terms of comprehension performance as the silent reading group outperformed reading aloud group. The results also showed that females outperformed males in reading aloud, however there was no significant difference between the performance of these two groups in reading silently. Moreover, it was resulted that familiar topic affected the comprehension performance of the participants of both groups.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Presentation

This following chapter discusses the major findings and conclusion of the current study. Moreover, the limitations and delimitations of the study will be presented. Furthermore, it also pertains to the pedagogical implications in English language teaching. Finally, it suggests further studies for prospective researchers who are interested in the field of foreign language reading.

5.2 Discussion of Major Findings

This study sought to explore three important issues regarding reading comprehension in general, and silent reading and reading aloud in particular: a comparison between silent reading and reading aloud regarding learners' reading comprehension performance b) gender effects on Iranian EFL reading comprehension c) The effect of topic familiarity on EFL learners' comprehension performance engaged in silent reading and reading aloud. The following section will discuss the major findings of the current study in the light of above mentioned issues.

5.2.1 A comparison between silent reading and reading aloud regarding learners' reading comprehension performance

Regarding the first research question, (Is there a statistically significant difference between silent reading and reading aloud regarding learners' reading comprehension performance?) the result showed quite definitively that the reading comprehension performance of the silent reading group is better than that of the reading aloud group.

Thus, it can be interpreted that the readers who read the passage aloud concentrate less on concept and meaning in comparison with the readers who read the text silently and as a result perform less satisfactorily on the comprehension questions. In silent reading, the reader can more effectively focus on the concept and perceive the meaning of the text. That is perhaps due to the fact that the meanings as well as the ideas are not duly attended to because of the presence of the vocalization variable when reading aloud.

Since the extent of the difference in the results is great, it can be claimed that the result did not take place by chance. It can be maintained that the current study revealed that reading comprehension was enhanced when students read the texts silently as opposed to reading them aloud. In addition, it was shown that the more passages are read silently, the more comprehension takes place by the foreign language learners.

Therefore, earlier claims by some other researchers can be confirmed or at least reinforced, and it is suggested that reading aloud may hinder comprehension because cognitive resources are applied primarily to achieving phonological recordings, as opposed to extracting meaning from the text (Juel and Holmes, 1981; Mendek 1986; Hopkins, 1997).

The results also support research findings indicating the existence of the difference which is quite significant between reading comprehension performance in silent and aloud modes. As the study measured the intermediate level student's comprehension, the results confirm that reading silently is more beneficial for intermediate level (Fuchs and Maxwell, 1988). Moreover, the findings affirm Miller and Smith's (1990) study in which silent reading was appropriate for average readers.

On the other hand, the findings of the current study reject some previous research findings. The results of these studies indicated that reading aloud can aid understanding the meaning of the text (Swalm, 1972; Elgart, 1978; Nuttall, 1996; Gabrielatos, 2002). Moreover, some other previous studies support research findings indicating no significant difference existed between reading comprehension while reading aloud and silently (Holmes and Allison, 1985 McCallum et al., 2004).

5.2.2 Gender effects on Iranian EFL reading comprehension

Concerning the second research question, (Is there any significant difference between females and males in their reading comprehension when engaged in reading silently and reading aloud?) the results of the study revealed that there was no significant difference between males and females regarding comprehension performance in reading silently. Therefore, these findings were parallel to the studies conducted by Young and Oxford (1997). As Young and Oxford (1997) found in their study, there was no significant difference between males and females in the study conducted with native speakers of English who were learning Spanish as a second language.

On the other hand, these findings are in contrast with Al-Shumaimeri (2005) who found significant difference between males and females' general comprehension of two expository texts. In his study, males outperformed females with a gender – neutral text. According to the findings, the two passages used in the current study lacked gender superiority or inferiority. In other words, these passages were gender neutral texts. This equality of performance may be as a result of the gender neutrality of the text.

According to Shahmohammadi (2011) there can be a direct relationship between the interest of gender and the content of the text. When the text is not in favour of

males' interest or is neutral, their schemata may not be activated. Similarly, when a female learner finds a text mostly favoured to masculine interests, she might not perform well enough in comprehending due to her weak activation in schemata. Therefore, our findings confirm this statement in silent reading which both genders performed equally well in reading comprehension. It can be concluded that females and males performed equally when engaged in silent reading. In other words, males or females' schemata might not have been activated enough to outperform one another due to the gender-neutrality of the texts.

Regarding the gender neutral texts in the current study, one of the important points relating to female's superiority in reading aloud may refer to the self-confidence from which the students benefited. It shows that females may be more confident than males when they are asked to read a text aloud in front of the test taker. It also shows that they may concentrate more than males while reading aloud and receive the message of the text more effectively.

5.2.3 The effect of topic familiarity on EFL learners' comprehension performance engaged in silent reading and reading aloud

Based on the third research question, the results showed that the given topic of a reading passage affects students' reading comprehension performance. The findings are in line with some studies in the literature (Carrel, 1987; Al-Shumaimeri, 2005) which argued that topic and content familiarity affected students' comprehension performance.

As Carrel (1987) concluded, content familiarity played an important role for comprehending a text. In her study, two groups of people with different cultural background were given two different texts, one familiar and another one unfamiliar. It was revealed that people who were familiar with the content of the text

outperformed those who were unfamiliar with the text on which they were tested. Moreover, Al-Shumaimeri's (2005) findings revealed that the participants were more successful with familiar text than with unfamiliar text.

In addition, the findings confirm Peretz and Shoham's study (1990) which pointed out that the more related the topic was with their field of study; the more successful EFL students are in comprehension. The current study also revealed that the participants outperformed in the text in which they were assumed to be familiar (Titanic). The findings also support Bugel and Buunk's (1996) study. They found that males and females obtained higher scores when the topic of the text was in accordance with their interest.

The findings of this study are, however, in contrast to Yazdanpanah's (2008) study. Although she used texts which were familiar to males, the females still outperformed the males regardless. She found that the topic did not affect the performance of the two genders. However, the findings of the current study indicate that topic familiarity could influence readers' performance.

Regarding the results of the current study, it can be pointed out that previous inconclusive, equivocal, and inconsistent findings in terms of silent reading and reading aloud maybe rooted in many different variables. These variables include gender difference, topic familiarity and other characteristics such as test tasks, text types, and readers' level of proficiency in second or foreign language.

5.3 Conclusion

The present study explored the differences between silent and aloud reading in terms of comprehension performance, gender differences, and topic familiarity. It showed that silent reading was supported by Iranian EFL learners with intermediate

level of language proficiency. The current study showed that the readers reading silently outperformed those reading aloud in terms of comprehension performance.

In addition, gender difference was also investigated regarding comprehension performance. It was determined that there was no significant difference between males and females' responses when they were engaged in silent reading. On the other hand, the results of participants in the reading aloud group showed that when they were engaged in reading aloud, females outperformed the male participants in comprehension performance.

According to the results, the students in both reading aloud and silent reading group performed better the second reading test entitled *The Titanic* than the first reading test entitled *The Jet Stream*. Therefore, it can be concluded that topic familiarity affected reading comprehension performance among Iranian EFL readers with an intermediate level of proficiency regardless of the two reading modes-reading aloud and silently.

5.4 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The current study encountered the following limitations. The first limitation refers to the number of the participants. If the number of the participants had been more than 100, the results might have been more supportive. The second limitation refers to the time limit during data collection procedures.

Since the data collecting phase coincided with the students' midterm exam, it was not possible to take up much of their time in order to administer a comprehension test for both reading modes for the same group. Therefore, it was preferred to divide the participants into two groups to engage one group in reading text silently and one group in reading aloud.

The third limitation refers to the type of students' answers given to the test. It was assumed that some students might not read the text and answer the comprehension questions with great care. There can be probability of some participants' lack of attention while they were answering the questions. However, the delimitation of the study in terms of data collection instruments refers to the type of the comprehension questions which were literal rather than inferential. As the participants confessed orally, they could benefit from such a text rather than their stereotype questions taken as a midterm or final exam at their institutes. They expressed that they experienced an appropriate way of testing administration by not looking back at their question booklet while answering the comprehension questions.

5.5 Pedagogical Implications

Pedagogical implications for the first issue can be considered as learners' raising awareness of both teachers and students. In other words, Iranian EFL learners are required to be recognized in terms of capabilities in different reading modes during the instructional procedure. These capabilities can be reinforced and improved by the instructors so that the learners get familiar with their strong and weak points in reading comprehension in general and different reading modes such as reading silently and reading aloud in particular. These reading modes may be interesting for the learners when they are aware of existing such modes in reading comprehension.

Since the study indicated that silent readers outperformed those reading aloud (regarding the first research question), it can confirm Hopkin's (1997) findings that silent reading can also facilitate learners' confidence in their capabilities to work through and understand a text autonomously. Therefore, instructors can help students to become autonomous learners by getting them to in a silent mode which aids comprehension.

Another pedagogical implication for the instructors can be related to gender differences. As English instruction is in substantially higher demand in Iran's English language private institutes, compared to secondary school or high school, instructors need to take these gender differences into account. The instructors' expectations can parallel to findings of the current studies regarding gender differences. As far as the findings of the current study are concerned, females were more successful in reading aloud than males. On the other hand, there was no significant difference between males and females in silent reading. Therefore, instructors can employ reading aloud for females in class activities than males. On the other hand, males can benefit from reading silently during class activities.

The current research revealed that topic and content familiarity of the texts could affect students' comprehension. These findings may have some contributions to material development. Those who are in charge of materials development need to take it into consideration. They can prepare materials which are in accordance with the interest of the students. Not only can material developers benefit from the findings, but also teachers can introduce texts with topics based on students' interest, especially for extensive reading. This trend may promote students' reading proficiency and prepare them for advanced levels. The instructors can also activate the learners' schema through giving pre-reading activity. In this way, the instructors are able to recognize the learners' interest in terms of topic. Consequently, the instructors can introduce and work on the reading materials with familiar topics which have been already recognized in pre-reading activities for the whilst-reading activities.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Research

The present study may have some contributions to make to the growing research in reading comprehension skills in the two different reading modes. As it was mentioned earlier, the study investigated three issues in reading including the difference between reading aloud and silent reading modes among Iranian EFL learners, gender differences and topic familiarity in reading comprehension.

The present study also makes some suggestions for further research. The current study was conducted among Iranian EFL learners with intermediate level of English proficiency. First, the researcher suggests that the future studies can be conducted in the whole part of the Iranian context for further investigations since the number of private institutes was only four in Babol, a city in north of Iran.

The second recommendation refers to the number of the participants. The current study comprised only one hundred students. Since the researcher conducted this research study on a limited number of participants, the results might need to be further investigated with participants on a larger scale. The third suggestion is concerned with the type of test and text. As it was seen in the current study, the researcher utilized the literal kind of reading comprehension text. It could also be performed in terms of inferential and narrative texts as opposed to literal and expository texts.

Moreover, the type of the test task was in multiple-choice format. The findings and results may be different with dichotomous items (Yes/No Questions or Short Answers). The fourth suggestion comprises the level of proficiency of the participants in the current study. As the current study was concerned with the study of the intermediate students, the participants with the higher or lower levels of proficiency may produce different results.

The fifth suggestion is concerned with the type of data collection procedures. In this case, the whole participants as one group, can be administered the reading comprehension tests in reading silently and aloud. The final suggestion for prospective research is considered as the study in further educational institutions including secondary schools, high schools, and universities since the current study was only conducted in private English language institutes in Iran.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

The Jet Stream

Just as there are powerful currents like the Gulf Stream in the oceans, there are raging streams of air high in the sky. These are called jet streams. One jet stream blows always from west to east over the United States and is about 100 miles wide. This great current of wind usually flows at a speed of more than a hundred miles per hour. Ordinarily it flows five or six miles above the earth, but sometimes it dips as low as two miles.

One day in May, the jet stream collided over the Texas Panhandle with warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico, thus producing fifty tornadoes in Kansas and Oklahoma. Frequently the jet stream also causes hailstorms and cloudbursts. When it turns to the southeast, it pushes Atlantic Ocean hurricanes away from the land. When it does not, hurricanes often rip into the mainland causing great destruction.

Pilots flying eastward have learned how to locate and stay in this jet stream, thus gaining speed with less fuel used. Those pilots who fly into the jet stream when travelling westward sometimes make little headway even while flying at top speed.

Instructions: Choose the best possible answer.

1. A jet stream is:

- a) gas left by a jet airplane.
- b) a new type of fish.
- c) an air current.
- d) a water current.

2. A jet stream blows from:

- a) east to west
- b) north to south
- c) west to east
- d) south to north.

3. The jet stream collided with warm air over Texas Panhandle in:

- a) August
- b) July
- c) May
- d) April.

4. A southeast jet stream:

- a) increases hurricane size
- b) causes hurricanes
- c) pushes hurricanes inland
- d) pushes hurricanes out to sea.

5. A pilot flying eastward in the jet stream:

- a) uses more fuel and flies more slowly
- b) uses less fuel and goes faster
- c) uses more fuel and goes faster
- d) uses less fuel and goes more slowly.

6. A pilot flying westward should try to:

- a) stay in the jet stream
- b) avoid the jet stream
- c) fly at top speed
- d) fly slowly.

7. The width of a jet stream is usually about:

- a) 100 miles
- b) 200 miles
- c) 300 miles
- d) 400 miles.

8. The jet stream is likely to be part of the weather report in:

- a) China
- b) Russia
- c) Europe
- d) the U.S.

9. The jet stream is compared to:

- a) currents in the ocean
- b) the wind

c) the Milky Way d) a flying airplane.

10. The writer of this article uses the word “raging” to describe the jet stream because:

a) it makes people angry b) it moves very fast

c) it causes hurricanes d) it always results in hailstorm and cloudburst.

Appendix B

The Titanic

On the night of April 14th, 1912, one of the worst calamities at sea that the world has ever known occurred. The British luxury ship, S. S. Titanic, was on its maiden voyage to the United States. The Titanic was considered the fastest ship afloat and all but unsinkable. Over 2,200 passengers were aboard, many of them the upper class of Europe and America.

In spite of warning messages, the huge ship collided, going at full speed, with an iceberg south of Newfoundland. There were not enough lifeboats to seat everyone. Because of the panic, many lifeboats were launched with only a few people aboard. Over 1500 lives were lost. The “safest ship in the world” sank on its very first voyage. To add to the irony of the catastrophe, there was another ship only ten miles away that could have saved hundreds of people. They never heard the SOS because their wireless operator had gone to bed.

As a result of this disaster, patrols were established to locate icebergs and strict rules concerning safety precautions on ships are enforced.

Instructions: Choose the best possible answer.

1. The Titanic sank:

- a) off the coast of the U.S. b) 2,200 miles from port
c) in wintertime d) close to Newfoundland.

2. The Titanic was:

- a) a British ship b) sailing to Europe
c) from America d) in Newfoundland.

3. Many lifeboats were launched:

- a) on the iceberg b) by the social elite
c) without anyone aboard d) without being full.

4. How many people were killed in the incident?

- a) 2,200 b) 1,500 c) over 2,200 d) over
1,500.

5. Because of the Titanic:

- a) people no longer panic b) there are new ship safety regulations
c) Newfoundland is patrolled d) no ships ever sink.

6. The other ship did not hear the SOS because:

- a) it was too far away b) none was sent
c) everyone was asleep d) the wireless operator was in bed.

7. Another word for calamity is:

- a) construction b) collision
c) catastrophe d) consideration.

8. A maiden voyage refers to the voyage:

- a) that is its first voyage b) that has only maidens aboard

c) that is fun and full of energy d) that carries passengers from Europe to other places.

9. The sinking of the Titanic was partly caused by:

a) not having enough lifeboats b) no warning message being sent
c) too much panic d) its fast speed.

10. The writer of this article considered the calamity of the Titanic to be:

a) ironical b) expected c) possible d) a joke.

Appendix C

Written Permission Letters

Iranmehr English Language Institute,

I am a graduate student in English Language Teaching at Eastern Mediterranean University. As part of my master thesis under the supervision of Professor Dr. Naciye Kunt, I am conducting a research study that requires the Iranian EFL students to take two reading tests with the purpose of comparing the differences between reading aloud and silent reading.

I would be grateful if you grant me permission to collect data in your institute.

Thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

Mohsen Jafari

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English Language Teaching Department

Eastern Mediterranean University

Tel: +989355023743, +905338313147

E-mail: jafari_mohsen@yahoo.com

Shokouh-e-Enghelab English Language Institute,

I am a graduate student in English Language Teaching at Eastern Mediterranean University. As part of my master thesis under the supervision of Professor Dr. Naciye Kunt, I am conducting a research study that requires the Iranian EFL students to take two reading tests with the purpose of comparing the differences between reading aloud and silent reading.

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Thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

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Pouyesh English Language Institute,

I am a graduate student in English Language Teaching at Eastern Mediterranean University. As part of my master thesis under the supervision of Professor Dr. Naciye Kunt, I am conducting a research study that requires the Iranian EFL students to take two reading tests with the purpose of comparing the differences between reading aloud and silent reading.

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Thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

Mohsen Jafari

MA Candidate in TEFL

English Language Teaching Department

Eastern Mediterranean University

Tel: +989355023743, +905338313147

E-mail: jafari_mohsen@yahoo.com

Novin English Language Institute,

I am a graduate student in English Language Teaching at Eastern Mediterranean University. As part of my master thesis under the supervision of Professor Dr. Naciye Kunt, I am conducting a research study that requires the Iranian EFL students to take two reading tests with the purpose of comparing the differences between reading aloud and silent reading.

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Thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

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Appendix D

Consent Letter

Dear student,

These two reading tests have been designed to compare EFL learners' comprehension in silent reading and reading aloud .It is important that you answer the questions carefully.

Your identity and individual responses will be kept confidential and the results will be used only for research purposes.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Please indicate your approval by signing below.

Thank you very much for your contribution.

Mohsen Jafari

MA Candidate in TEFL

English Language Teaching Department

Eastern Mediterranean University

I agree to participate in this study by taking the test.

Student's signature