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# Investigating the Role of Self-directed Learning and Personal Self-concept in Reading Comprehension of EFL Intermediate Students

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**Abstract**

In the field of foreign language education, self-directed learning and personal self-concept are essential as they can empower students to attain optimal success in language learning by engaging students to express their ideas confidently, think reflectively, and make use of language learning strategies. The main purpose of the present study was to investigate the role of self-directed learning and personal self-concept in reading comprehension. Moreover, the current study aimed to determine that whether self-directed learning and personal self-concept help to increase students' scores in reading comprehension. The participants in this study were 170 EFL intermediate-level EFL students in two foreign language institutes named Diplomat and Safir in Tehran and Karaj. Gõni's personal self-concept questionnaire and self-directed learning questionnaire were used and the students' reading skills were measured with the standard PET test. The obtained data were analyzed by multiple linear regression in SPSS software. Results of the study showed that there was a significant correlation between students' comprehension scores and learners' self-directed learning, but there was a little correlation between their self-concept and reading comprehension scores. Based on the research findings, it was concluded that self-directed learning has an important role in students' comprehension, but not personal self-concept. It is possible to make students more successful in acquiring language skills by guiding students towards using self-directed strategies.

**Keywords:** Intermediate-level students, personal self-concept, reading comprehension, self-directed learning

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## 1. Introduction

Reading is one of the language skills, which have a very complex process (Van den Broek & Espin, 2012). It is a basic and essential skill for foreign learners because most of the target language's resources are provided in writing. When we read something, we try to understand the author's meaning. Comprehension also largely depends on the background of knowledge. Nunan (2003) argues that "good readers know what to do when faced with problems. Meaning is neither in the reader nor in the text." Also he believes the reader's background knowledge is integrated with the text to create meaning. The text, the reader, the fluency, and the strategies together define the act of reading.

The role of language learners is highly influential in learning English and has been debated for many years (Kocak, 2003). "There has been a noticeable growth of interest in learning autonomy (LA) in general and in language teaching and learning in particular" (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2011). Al-Araj (2015) states that since reading comprehension proved to be challenging in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, better comprehension can take place when learners act autonomously through social interaction and collaboration in the classroom where teachers need to provide learners with opportunities to become autonomous individuals who are self-motivated and responsible for their learning. Little (2012) indicates, "Learner autonomy is the product of interdependence rather than independence, which attends to the synergy between whole and individual activities." Consequently, the enhancement of autonomy in reading stems from the combination of social and reflective processes.

Personal development, in the broadest sense of the term, encompasses all those aspects related to the person, both individually and socially, including all the different aspects of human psychological development (Madariaga & Goñi, 2009). However, in a more restricted sense, the term personal, as opposed to social, refers to those more specific, individual, or private aspects of this development." From the very beginning, the study of the scientific field of self-concept has attracted a lot of attention and continues to be of interest to researchers today. In short, self-concept is how one sees oneself, that is, in the most private and personal areas of life, not just physically and academically/professionally and socially. Without a proper perception of oneself as an individual, independent of the physical self and social self, in aspects that have generally been examined under the heading of ethical-moral self-concept, self-perception of self, or emotional self, one cannot answer the question, 'Who am I?'. Goñi (2008) states that There is a definite lack of models that aim to integrate the various components or dimensions of personal self-concept that may fully explain this notion.

As mentioned above, a lot of research has been done focusing on self-directed learning and self-concept separately. So there is little information about the role of self-concept and self-directed learning in reading comprehension. This study identified and described people's self-concept and self-direction in reading comprehension. This research investigated a case of intermediate-level English learners through SDL and self-concept questionnaires, and then the role of two variables on reading comprehension was measured with the PET reading section. The reason for involving intermediate-level students was that they are theoretically motivated, both intrinsically and extrinsically, to think about immediate and long-term goals, and most importantly, they need individual responsibility.

### *1.1 Statement of the Problem*

The importance of reading is not hidden from anyone whether for those who read for pleasure, information, career, or study purposes, or for those who want it for pedagogical purposes, and perhaps for good writing models. And also we know that self-directed education was of particular importance, but COVID-19 reminded us of the importance of encouraging children to learn more independently by making many changes in the traditional learning environment in our country. Instead of attending classes and sitting next to classmates, learners are forced to learn remotely and independently from home. In these situations, learners had to know their abilities and attitudes to overcome their learning difficulties, especially in the case of reading comprehension.

Khiat (2015) said that "the learners need to acquire different learning strategies by receiving constructive feedback from an instructor, receiving support from peers, and engaging in both independent and guided practices to become self-directed learners." As well, Richards (2015) pointed out that "the Internet and other technological devices enable free access to large amounts of materials, applications, and language learning programs, which, in turn, help students to improve their language skills in or out of the classroom." Success in learning remotely requires learning to build independence for learners. The establishment of independence does not occur suddenly but involves the gradual progress of the learner along a continuum. "Self-directed learning (SDL) is a learning process, where the learners take responsibility for their learning.

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However, the degree of responsibility taken is related to the degree of interest, desire, and personality traits of a person" (Toit-Brits & Zyl, 2017). Also to be aware of oneself is to have a concept of oneself. How someone thinks about, evaluates, or perceives themselves is essential for autonomous learning. The skill of "learning to learn" and creating the right conditions need to know yourselves. Learners first should understand their capabilities, habits, etc. then they can start learning, especially autonomous learning. The reason for involving intermediate-level students was that they are theoretically motivated, both intrinsically and extrinsically, to think about immediate and long-term goals, and most importantly, they need individual responsibility.

Many researchers examined the components of self-directed learning and self-concept separately. Mariano and Batchelor (2018) in their study indicated that "SDL has produced several positive results. Self-directed learners effectively acquire and retain content and are more likely to seek information beyond what is offered in their formal learning settings." Vaziri and Barjesteh (2019) conducted a study on whether teaching reading strategies to hotel employees and their autonomy affects their attitude or not: the results of this study showed that there is a significant relationship between ESP learners' autonomy and reading strategies. Zarei and Ghahrmani (2010) conducted a study on the correlation between master's students' autonomy and their comprehension ability. They concluded that there is a correlation between these two variables.

In addition, Zafarian and Nemati (2015) examined the comprehension of English language learners and the autonomy of the learner to see if they have an effect or not. The results of their study report the positive effect of learning autonomy on reading comprehension, and they also said that it is possible to predict the reading comprehension of language learners. Green et al. (2012) say that "self-concept is relevant for the development of reading competence, as we know that both self-concept and academic motivation generate positive attitudes towards school work and participation. Mustafa et al. (2012) have studied the effects of active learning on foreign language self-concept and reading comprehension achievement. According to the results of their research, the group that actively used learning techniques showed increasing progress in reading comprehension.

*1.2 Research Questions*

The following questions were addressed in the present study:

1-Is there a significant correlation between self-directed learning and reading comprehension?

2-Is there a significant correlation between personal self-concept and reading comprehension?

3-Do self-directedness and personal self-concept help Iranian EFL intermediate students improve their reading comprehension skills?

## 2. Literature Review

Based on the findings, the researchers came to the conclusion that language learners in most cases receive stereotyped notes and questions from teachers, and they also become highly dependent on teachers, which inhibits the development of their English skills. It is important that English language classes at all educational levels promote self-direction and self-concept of the learner, because it is certain that passiveness and dependence on teachers do not benefit. This matter becomes more important when during the covid-19 pandemic there was no teacher to teach in person and there was no interaction between the students themselves. Therefore, it is essential to guide learners towards independence (Stevani, 2022). Since learners become aware of their own thinking, find their own thoughts and strategies, and direct their motivation towards useful results, so many teachers are interested in independent learning of learners (Ariebowo, 2021; Kosnik et al., 2016; Surya et al., 2021).

Increasing attention to reading comprehension is undeniable because an information-based society requires high skills in reading comprehension. Brown (2001) points out that "research and study of the four language skills separately are less effective. Therefore, it is difficult to learn and even teach speaking without listening and reading without writing." Since learning depends on resources and using resources depends on understanding, reading is extremely important. Reading comprehension is built by discerning the full meaning of a text by combining different sources of information such as prior knowledge, linguistic information, situational information, and context (Koris & Pal, 2021).

Previous research has shown that the use of technology can enable students to improve their essential content and world background knowledge by reading online articles about their own culture (Yanti et al., 2021). Research shows that achieving reading comprehension requires that young learners learn to read and read to learn. Therefore, young

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students should gradually acquire reading skills and engage in reading and be motivated (Martha et al., 2021). Teachers support students' need for independent reading activities by enabling them to choose interesting reading materials and understand the value of reading text to achieve reading competence (Xie, 2020) and as a result, English language learners can activate their prior knowledge and exchange their cultural perspectives with speakers of the target culture (Ningsih & Yusuf, 2021).

Block and Parris (2002) say "as educators increase students thinking and learning processes, they put them on the path to thinking about the effectiveness of the strategies they have set for achieving the goals they have set." It is called "thinking about thinking", which in explanation can be said to be a process called metacognition. Therefore, applying a long-term metacognitive strategy to plan future tasks, and evaluate our progress and results, is the right way to help students to have more control over their intellectual and emotional processes. Knowles (1975, p. 14) argued that "there is overwhelming evidence that (active learners) lead to more and better learning than (reactive learners) learning in which a person passively waits for teacher training." Long (2003) articulated the relationship between these and learning strategies well. According to him, the main feature of self-directed learning is the extent of active comprehensive control over the learning process.

Also, self-concept is related to motivation, students' progress, and engagement with learning, so it has been considered among other educational matters since the 1950s (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003, Cited in Walker, 2015). What is related to the correct understanding of each person's current self is the perception that the person has of their past or future. Wilson and Ross (2001) stated in their research that according to the theory of temporal self-appraisal, people tend to rely only on their positive evaluation by moving away from their negative self and getting closer to their positive self. There is also an innate tendency for people to view their past more negatively (Ross & Wilson, 2002) (e.g., "I'm Better than the Past") and to view the future more positively (Wilson et al., 2012) (e.g. "I will be better than I am"). Mercer and Williams (2014) said that "self-concept and the concept of self, have become important in learning a second language or foreign language (L2)."

According to the literature review, three variables of reading comprehension, self-directed learning, and personal self-concept have not been studied together. But many articles have been studied in pairs and concerning them, we can say that each has a positive relationship on the ability of reading (Linderholm & Wilde, 2010; Kapur, 2019; Mentz et al., 2020; Geng, 2015).

## 3. Methodology

### *3.1 Design of the Study*

To answer the research questions and test the research hypotheses, a quantitative design was used. In this study, by collecting data from questionnaires and a reading comprehension test, we quantitatively found the relationship between independent (self-directed learning and personal self-concept) and dependent (reading comprehension) variables. The meaning was extracted from the data by using the multiple linear regression (MLR) technique.

### *3.2. Participants*

The participants of this study include one hundred and seventy EFL intermediate-level female and male students (N=170) from two language institutes in Tehran and Karaj. All learners of the study were Iranian and native speakers of Persian. The age of participants ranged from 12 to 16 years old. They completed two questionnaires related to self-directedness and personal self-concept. Also, they answered the reading section of the Preliminary English Test (PET) to assess their reading comprehension.

### *3.3 Instrumentations*

In the present study, the instruments used for the topic discussed are the reading section of the PET test, the self-directed learning questionnaire, and the personal self-concept questionnaire. It should be noted that since the mother tongue of the students is Persian, the Persian translation of the questionnaires should have been used. A review of related sources, articles, and research did not find a translation of these questionnaires. As a result, the researcher translated the questionnaires under the supervision of the supervisor, and to validate the translations, they were sent to the faculty members of English department of Rajaee University, and they expressed the necessary reforms with great grace, and then the questionnaires were administered.

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3.3.1 PET

PET, the Standard English language proficiency test, is a test to measure the level of language proficiency of language learners. This exam consists of two parts, reading and writing, but due to the saving of time and money, and most importantly, the practical issues related to this study, only the reading part, which contains 35 four-choice questions, was implemented.

3.3.2 Goñi et al. Personal Self-Concept Questionnaire (2011)

PSC, the personal self-concept questionnaire, is a questionnaire containing 18 items. PSC assesses personal perceptions. According to Gõni, self-perception includes self-actualization (SF), honesty (HON), autonomy (AU), and emotional self-concept (ESC). This questionnaire is a Likert scale with five response options ranging from strongly disagree "1" to strongly agree "5." It should be noted that items 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 17 are reversed.

3.3.3 Self-directedness Questionnaire

The items are included, 23 items from the Learner Autonomy Readiness Instrument (LARI) (Kocak, 2003); 9 items from Self-Rating Scales of Self-Directed Learning (SRSSDL) (Williamson, 2007); and 12 items from the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS) (Yan, 2007). They are divided into Motivation, Awareness, and Language Learning Strategies. It is a Likert scale with five answer options from strongly disagree "1" to strongly agree "5."

3.3.4 Reliability of the Instruments

In order to measure the reliability of the two questionnaires used in this research and the PET test, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. The closer the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is to 1.0, the higher the internal consistency of the items. Reliability calculation was measured using SPSS software, Cronbach's alpha for the reading section of the PET test with 35 items is .722. According to the indicators, the reliability of this test is evaluated respectable and it can be concluded that the researcher has used a reliable tool.

Cronbach's alpha for Goni's personality self-concept questionnaire (2011) with 18 items was .782. According to the indicators, the reliability of this questionnaire is considered respectable and it can be concluded that it is a suitable tool. The items of self-directed learning questionnaire are derived from three questionnaires. By calculating Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of this questionnaire with 43 items is .872. Therefore, the reliability index of this questionnaire is evaluated very well and it can be concluded that it is a suitable tool.

*3.4 Procedure*

The study procedure was completed in three phases in the spring of 2022. In the first phase, language learners answered the self-directed learning questionnaire consisting of 43 items to check their level and desire for independence and their orientation and plan to follow the path of benefiting from learning strategies. This questionnaire includes three subcomponents: motivation, awareness, and learning strategies. According to the results of this questionnaire and with the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, all three factors of the questionnaire were higher than the average, although their awareness and understanding of learning strategies requires more work from teachers and learners themselves.

In the second phase, the participants answered the 18-item Personal Self-Concept Questionnaire (2011) provided by Goñi et al. This questionnaire includes four subcomponents: Self-fulfillment, Autonomy, Emotional adjustment, and Honesty. By analyzing two questionnaires in SPSS, a relatively good agreement was found between the answers of the students, which shows their honesty and responsibility. Also, according to the findings of SPSS, both questionnaires have good reliability. In the third phase, the standard PET test was considered, since this test has two parts, listening and reading, or in other words, receptive skills, according to the practical issues, only language learners were asked to answer 35 questions related to reading comprehension. This test is a very suitable scale to check the reading skill level. The information collected from three stages was analyzed with SPSS software and the results are detailed in the data analysis section.

*3.5 Data Analysis*

In this quantitative research, multiple linear regression (MLR) techniques were used, a statistical technique aimed at modeling the linear relationship between explanatory (independent) variables that uses several independent variables

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to predict the outcome of a response (dependent) variable. First, by using two questionnaires of self-directed learning and personal self-concept as independent variables, the opinions of language learners, and then their scores by reading comprehension test were collected. Then by giving information to SPSS and applying the MLR technique, the researchers found out the role of two independent variables on the dependent variable, and the relationship between self-directed learning and personal self-concept was also investigated. Finally, based on the results of the study, we addressed the question of whether self-directed skills and the right concept of skills and talents help to improve learning and increase reading comprehension scores or not.

**4. Results**

The number of participants is 170, and according to Table 1, there are three variables, in which Total3RC represents Reading Comprehension the dependent variable with a mean of 21.32. Total1SD (Self-directed) and Total2SC (Self-concept) are independent variables of research with a mean of 185.85 and 8.596, respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of two questionnaires and the test

| | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total3RC | 21.32 | 4.079 | 170 |
| Total1SD | 185.85 | 11.089 | 170 |
| Total2SC | 8.596 | 8.596 | 170 |

The correlations between the variables in our model are provided in the Table labeled Correlation and Table 2 may be the most important table to consider. According to Julie Pallat in the SPSS Survival Manual, a complete relationship between two variables can be established when the correlation is above .3. In Table 2, we see that the correlation between our dependent variable, Reading Comprehension, and our independent variables, self-directed and self-concept, is .498 And .200, respectively. Therefore, students' self-direction contributes to their ability and skills in reading comprehension while their perception of themselves has little to do with comprehension skills.

Table 2. The test and two questionnaires correlation analysis

| | | Total3RC | Total1SD | Total2SC |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pearson Correlation | Total3RC | 1.000 | .498 | .200 |
| | Total1SD | .498 | 1.000 | .333 |
| | Total2SC | .200 | .333 | 1.000 |
| Sig. (1-tailed) | Total3RC | | .000 | .005 |
| | Total1SD | .000 | | .000 |
| | Total2SC | .005 | .000 | .000 |
| N | Total3R | 170 | 170 | 170 |
| | Total1S | 170 | 170 | 170 |
| | Total2SC | 170 | 170 | 170 |

*4.1 Results of Investigating the Null Hypotheses*

The first null hypothesis was that learners' self-direction does not play a significant role in their reading comprehension scores. According to Table 2, the correlation between self-direction and reading comprehension is .49. So, this hypothesis is rejected, that is, the more students advance in the path of self-direction and have their own

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program together with the class and the teacher, the better grades they get. In this study, better scores were obtained in reading comprehension.

The second null hypothesis was that learners' personal self-concept does not have much effect on their reading comprehension scores. According to Table 2, this hypothesis cannot be rejected. This means that although learners' self-concept is considered an important component and may help guide learners, it does not play a significant role in their comprehension skill scores.

The third null hypothesis was that the two independent variables, i.e. learners' self-direction and personal self-concept, don't help improve reading comprehension skills. The examination of this hypothesis is very close to the previous two hypotheses. According to Table 2, there is a significant correlation between self-directed learning and reading comprehension, so it can be said that the more teachers learn the skills of being self-directed in learning and the more language learners seek to promote learning independence, the better their academic progress will be. However, based on these results, the student's personal self-concept does not help much to improve scores and reading comprehension results.

As we can see in the summary box of the model in Table 3. R square shows how much of the variance obtained in the dependent variable (Reading Comprehension) is explained by the model (which includes Self-directness and Self-concept variables). In this case, R is equal to .250. Multiplying this number by 100, self-direction and self-concept explain 25% of the variance in reading comprehension.

Table 3. The regression model summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. The error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 500.a | .250 | .241 | 3.554 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Total2SC, Total1SD

b. Dependent Variable: Total3RC

There are two cases of tolerance and VIF in the table of coefficients. Tolerance less than .10 and VIF above 10 indicate the concern of multicollinearity. There is no concern in this study. Using the 1-R formula, the tolerance value is obtained for each variable in the form of a square, and it indicates how much of the specified independent variable is not explained by other independent variables in the model. And the inverse of the tolerance value (1 divided by the tolerance) is obtained as VIF (Variance Inflation Factor). Table 4 states that Tolerance is not less than 0.10 and VIF is not more than 10.

Table 4. Multiple linear regression coefficients

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients Beta | T | Sig. | Zero-order | Part | Collinearity Statistics | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | B | Std. Error | | | | | | Tolerance | VIF |
| | Constants | -12.908 | 4.601 | | -2.805 | .006 | | | | |
| | Total1S | .179 | .026 | .486 | 6.832 | 0.0 | .489 | .458 | .889 | 1.125 |
| | Total2S | .018 | .034 | .038 | .534 | .594 | .200 | .036 | .889 | 1.125 |

a. Dependent Variable: Total3RC

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The results related to Mahal. Distance and Cook's Distance are shown in Table 5. Mahal. Distance is analyzed according to the critical value. The critical value for two and three variables is 13.82 and 16.27, respectively. (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013 originally from Pearson and Hartley, 1958). The maximum value for Mahal. Distance is 7.890, which is less than the critical value. About Cook's Distance according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013, p. 75), cases with values larger than 1 are a potential problem. Here as shown in the Table, the Maximum value for Cook's Distance is .075, suggesting no major problems.

Table 5. Residuals statistics of two questionnaires and the test

| | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Predicted Value | 16.04 | 25.49 | 21.32 | 2.037 | 170 |
| Std. Predicted Value | -2.595 | 2.044 | .000 | 1.000 | 170 |
| Standard Error of Predicted Value | .274 | .815 | .452 | .136 | 170 |
| Adjusted Predicted Value | 16.13 | 25.40 | 21.33 | 2.030 | 170 |
| Residual | -9.077 | 8.944 | .000 | 3.533 | 170 |
| Std. Residual | -2.554 | 2.516 | .000 | .994 | 170 |
| Stud. Residual | -2.588 | 2.527 | -.001 | .003 | 170 |
| Deleted Residual | -9.324 | 9.018 | -.007 | 3.599 | 170 |
| Stud. Deleted Residual | -2.634 | 2.569 | -.002 | 1.008 | 170 |
| Mahal. Distance | .007 | 7.890 | 1.988 | 1.868 | 170 |
| Cook's Distance | .000 | .075 | .006 | .010 | 170 |
| Centered Leverage Value | .000 | .047 | .012 | .011 | 170 |

Figure 1 shows the correlation between independent and dependent variables. The best case for L is from bottom left to top right, which is also true here.

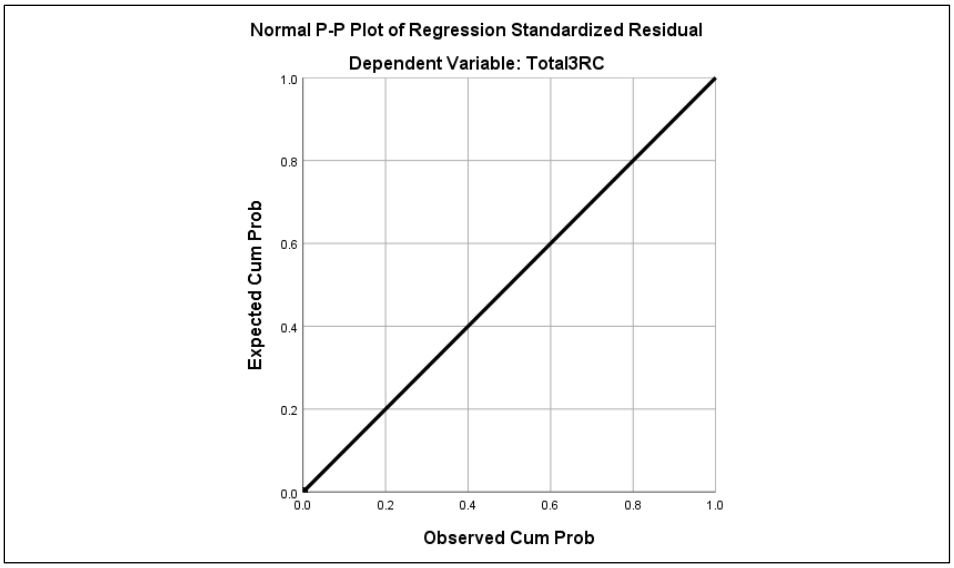



Figure 1. Normal P.P plot regression standardized residual

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*4.2 Results of the Research Questions*

4.2.1 First Research Question

The first question was whether self-directed learning plays a significant role in reading comprehension. According to the correlation table and Normal P.P, we can answer this question by guiding students towards self-directed learning, there is a significant improvement in their reading comprehension. In this study, it was shown that the more students learn independently with the class and the teacher, the better their comprehension scores. The correlation between self-directed learning and reading comprehension was .498, which shows a significant relationship. In this study, students who were more aware of their learning role and sought self-directed strategies performed better.

But regarding the role of the second component, personal self-concept, on reading comprehension, the data show that although knowing who we are and what our attitude towards learning is, it does not have a significant role on the learning process. The correlation between self-concept and reading comprehension was .200, which is below the standard. As a result, students' grades have no significant relationship with their self-concept, or at least it is very low.

4.2.2 Second research question

The second question was whether personal self-concept plays a significant role in reading knowledge. To investigate the role of the second component, personal self-concept, on reading comprehension, the data show that although knowing who we are and what our perspective towards learning is, it does not have a significant role on the learning process. The correlation between self-concept and reading comprehension was .200, which is below the standard. As a result, students' self-concept has no significant role on their reading comprehension scores at least it is very low. But, it can be said that anything that raises a person's self-awareness and gives him a clear vision of himself helping him progress and improve his skills. Students should move towards self-awareness and self-directedness.

4.2.3 Third research question

The third question was whether self-directed learning and personal self-concept help intermediate-level Iranian EFL students improve their reading knowledge. The answer to this question is closely related to the first question. Because it is obvious that a component plays an important role in understanding the content, it also helps to improve it. Although the progress of students in reading comprehension and other language skills depends on several factors, the results of this research showed that motivating students to use self-directed learning strategies and raising their awareness of not fully relying on the teacher leads to better learning and comprehension. In this study, we argued that self-directed learning explains twenty percent of the variance in reading comprehension, and the results showed a correlation between learners' self-directed learning and their reading comprehension scores.

But it cannot be said that self-concept plays a significant role in learning, especially comprehension, in this research, there was no significant correlation between comprehension scores and self-concept. But it can be said that anything that raises a person's self-awareness and gives him a clear vision of himself helping him progress and improve his skills. Students should move towards self-awareness and self-directedness. Learning English in Iran starts in the seventh year of high school and is implemented through the national school curriculum. One of the most influential things that play a significant role in education is the self-concept self-direction. This study was conducted among institutes' language learners, according to their motivation, perspective, and concepts towards the English language, being self-directed in learning and self-concept is more desirable.

**5. Discussion**

This study aimed to find the role of self-directed learning and personal self-concept in the reading comprehension of intermediate language learners. The research is one of the few studies that measures the self-directedness and self-concept of language learners in a study, and the results are almost consistent with the research of other researchers who have examined these variables separately. The results of the data analysis show that self-directed learning is correlated with comprehension (Table 1), ie that students who are moving towards independence and trying to cope with more language challenges are more successful in learning, especially comprehension. These learners can synchronize their strategies and experience less academic failure in unpredictable situations such as the COVID-19 era.

Another variable was students' self-concept, which according to the data obtained did not have a significant role in comprehension scores, ie the student may know well about himself, but according to the evidence, has no role in their

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scores. As mentioned, the results of this study are consistent with other findings. We found that learners who learn more self-directed also use more learning strategies. Ying Xuan et al. (2018) used the same questionnaire used in this study for their research on self-directed learning. They found that it is really important as it can empower students to attain optimal success in language learning by engaging students to express their ideas confidently, think reflectively, and make use of language learning strategies.

Kocak (2003) also found that students who are self-directed not only perform better but are also more motivated. It can be said that the findings of this study are reasonably valid because other studies can confirm the results. Recently Taherkhani and Moradi (2021) conducted emotional intelligence, autonomy, self-regulation, willingness to communicate, and reading comprehension were positive and significant relationships. And Zafarian and Nemati (2016) researched to measure the effect of independent learning on students' comprehension. According to the results, it can be said that there is a positive and significant relationship between learning independence and understanding. In addition, Zarei and Gahremani (2010) conducted a study to find the relationship between master's students' reading comprehension ability and their independence. The obtained results show that the higher the independence of the learner, the better the ability to understand the material, so there is a significant correlation.

The findings of the present study did not show a significant relationship between self-concept and reading compression. It means that the correlation was lower than average. Many researches also confirm these results, including Mustafa et al. (2012) who have studied the effects of active learning on foreign language self-concept and reading comprehension progress. As a result, there is no significant correlation between foreign language self-concept and reading comprehension scores according to the type of high school students graduated from. On the other hand, researches did not confirm the relationship between self-concept and reading comprehension, for example, Piran and Asadi (2014) conducted a study on language components, and based on this research, reading comprehension scores were strongly influenced by students' self-concept and self-esteem. Goñi et al. (2015) conducted a research that did not examine personal self-concept with one of the language components, but their research proved the positive effect of self-concept on satisfaction.

## 6. Conclusions

In the light of the findings of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

First, self-directed learning as an important variable in the field of education has a positive correlation with reading comprehension as one of the important parts of the English language. Researchers have almost pointed to the positive association between these variables. Second, there was no significant correlation between students' personal self-concept as a variable that greatly contributes to the individual's awareness of their abilities and talents with students' reading comprehension scores. Finally, according to the results, there is a significant relationship between self-directed learning and a person's self-concept. As the ability and skill of language learners increases in these two variables, their comprehension scores also improve. Being self-directed and knowing themselves correctly help language learners in learning.

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