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**GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THEIR PERCEPTIONS,
PREFERENCES AND BELIEFS WITH REGARD TO LEARNING
ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH
STUDENT-CENTERED AND TEACHER-CENTERED
APPROACHES**

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**Hamzah Barakat Najadat, Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi, Gender Differences in their
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Comprehension through Student-Centered and Teacher-Centered Approaches-
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Abstract: This study investigates the gender differences among undergraduate students at Northern Border University (NBU) in their perceptions, preferences and beliefs toward learning reading comprehension skill through teacher-centered and student-centered approaches. Teacher-centered approach is completely based on behaviorism theory as it is considered students as passive recipients and the teachers are the main focus and source of information while student-centered is based on the constructivism theory where students are the main focus in the learning process. Specifically, the present study uses a quantitative research approach that employs a closed-ended questionnaire to collect the data. The Mann-Whitney U Test statistical technique used in statistics was used to examine the differences between the two groups, males and females. A total of 322 Saudi undergraduate students volunteered, 180 males and 142 females. The results showed significant difference between males and females for preferences and beliefs while showed weak significant difference for perceptions and opinion.

Introduction

Mastering all English language skills is a must in learning. Still, reading and comprehension are among the most important skills that a high school student must reach an advanced level of achievement. However, reading comprehension is shown a weak level in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and there is a notable weakness among male and female students, and it is always a source of concern for them.

For a long time, the teacher-centered approach is appeared to a dominant method in the educational process in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, especially in higher education. Where the teacher is the first and main source of information and the focal point on which the course of the classroom runs in most of the classes. While the student is absent and devoid of authority in determining his responsibilities and choosing the type of education for him. At the same time, student-centered is considered a more diversified method that opens the way for students to interact and increase the level of involvement in the class while eliminating several factors that contribute to reducing performance. Student-centered impacts the effectiveness of simulation-based teaching environments among students (Dervić, Glamočić, Gazibegović-Busuladžić, & Mešić, 2018)

Gender is one of the most important variables taken into account when researching, especially when it comes to the educational process. One of the aims of the current study is to explore the effect of the teaching method in learning reading comprehension on male and female students. The aim is to reveal any possible significant differences between students' gender in their perceptions, preferences, and beliefs regarding learning English reading comprehension through student-centered and teacher-centered approaches. Various research reached different outcomes in this manner.

Cakici, D. (2017) reported the existence of gender differences among undergraduate students in term of their preferences and favoring the teaching approach in learning. Payaprom and Payaprom (2020) conducted a study to

identify the preferred learning approach, along with the relationship between gender, educational majors and learning method preferences among undergraduate students. Moreover, according to the findings, there was small meaningful significance between students' preferred learning method preferences and gender. Kovačević and Akbarov (2016) investigated the dominated teaching approach at the International University of Sarajevo. Furthermore, the scores were analyzed on gender lines. The respondents from all the colleges showed that in relation to teaching method preference, there was statistically a zero significant difference. According to Amiri, F., & Saberi, L. (2019) the impact of the student-centered approach on the motivation of learning among EFL male and female Iranian students was reported to be as weak diversity differences in motivation.

Methods

The main aim of this study is to investigate any possible differences in the preferences, beliefs and perceptions of male and female Saudi EFL students on learning reading comprehension through student-centered and teacher-centered approaches. The study was carried at Northern Border University (NBU) Saudi Arabia.

In order to answer the research question in the present study, a quantitative study was employed using a questionnaire with 45 items divided into five sections as the following: A for demographic information. B for students' views about learning English reading comprehension. C for students' preferences on learning English reading comprehension. D for students' opinions about reading comprehension teachers related to student-centered and teacher-centered learning approaches. The study analyzed the responses on the questionnaire from 322 undergraduate students from Northern Border University (NBU). This study was restricted to a sample of participants from Northern Border University (Deanship of Preparatory Year and Supportive Studies) which it is located in the north of Saudi Arabia. The participants were 322 undergraduate students with 180 male students and 142 female students in

their first semester. The questions of the survey questionnaire were adopted and modified from Jeanjaroonsri' (2018) 32 survey questions, Lancaster's (2017) 13 survey questions and Çakıcı's (2016) 42 reading strategies survey questions. The question in this study was analyzed using students' responses from the questionnaire through Inferential statistics SPSS version 25 Mann-Whitney U test to find the differences between-group by comparing the overall scores of males and females based on the variables.

Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

A content validity took place for the present study through presenting the questionnaire items to a group of experts in the field of teaching English. The experts were 5 English language professors with great experience in teaching English as a second language, mainly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The reliability measure in each construct of the question is exceeded the minimum value of 0.6 as recommended by Rouquette and Falissard (2011). According to Creswell (2012) the minimum value for the acceptance of a construct should be 0.7. The condition set for the reliability acceptance of the construct was thus 0.7. No items were deleted because all items fulfilled the condition of acceptance, as shown in Table 3.2, indicating that this questionnaire would be reliable and appropriate for use in the main study.

Table 3. 1 Cronbach's Alpha Results for Reliability

No	Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Students' views about learning English reading comprehension	13	0.91
2	Students' preferences on learning English reading comprehension	12	0.92
3	Students' opinions about reading	10	0.92

teachers related to student-centered and teacher-centered learning approaches.

4	Students' beliefs about English reading strategies	10	0.94
7	Overall	45	0.93

Results

The main aim in this article was to recognize any possible differences between students' gender in their perceptions, preferences and beliefs with regard to learning English reading comprehension through student-centered and teacher-centered approaches.

This question was answered by comparing the responses between females and males on the variables of the questionnaire. First of all, an initial analysis was run in SPSS to explore the distribution and normality of the data. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) propose that normality (i.e. the assumption that variables are normally distributed) can be measured using either graphical or statistical methods. In this study, skewness and kurtosis was used to check the normality of the data. The Skewness and Kurtosis results on most of the items on the questionnaires exceeded the threshold of -2.58 and $+2.58$ which indicated that the data is not normally distributed as recommended by Hair, Sarstedt Hopkins and Kuppelwieser (2014). This reflects that the data has not satisfied the cut-off value of multivariate normality distribution. Therefore, the study proceeded data analysis with Mann-Whitney U test to measure if there are differences between male and female respondents. This is non-parametric test used instead of parametric t-test when data were non-normally distributed.

Moreover, the results reported the effect sizes (r value) of the difference between the group variables (male and female). Effect size is a quantitative indicator of the experimenter effect magnitude. The greater the size of the

effect the stronger the relation between two variables (Kotrlík, Williams and Jabor, 2011). In this research, Cohen's (1988) categorization of effect size values were used. Based on this categorization ≥ 0.10 represents small size effect, ≥ 0.5 shows medium while ≥ 0.8 is considered large effect size. This implies that if the mean of two groups does not vary by or more than 0.2 standard deviations, the difference is insignificant, even though it is statistically important.

Table 4. 1 Gender Differences on the Students' Views about Learning English Reading Comprehension

Gender	N	Mean Rank	U value	z value	p value	r value
Male	180	156.03	11796.0	-1.619	0.105	0.090
Female	142	168.43				
Total	322					

* $p < 0.05$

Table 4.6, showed the result of the Mann-Whitney U test (independent sample U test) comparing the differences between male and female respondents on the first construct. The results ($U = 11796.0$, $z = -1.619$, $p = 0.105$, $r = -0.090$) revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female respondents on their general views about learning English reading comprehension. By comparing between the mean rank values of the male respondent (*Mean Rank* = 156.03) and female respondents (*Mean Rank* = 168.43), the result revealed that there was no wide margin difference. However, the result indicated that female respondents have more positive perceptions toward general views on reading comprehension as presented under this variable. The r value also supported the non-significant result as it indicated a small effect size ($r = 0.630$).

Table 4. 2 Gender Differences on the Students' Preferences on Learning English Reading Comprehension

Gender	<i>N</i>	Mean Rank	<i>U</i> value	<i>z</i> value	<i>p</i> value	<i>r</i> value
Male	180	173.52	10617.00	-3.30	0.001*	-0.184
Female	142	146.27				
Total	322					

* $p < 0.05$

Table 4.8, shows the result of the Mann-Whitney U test (independent sample U test) comparing the differences between male and female respondents on the first construct. The results ($U = 10617.00$, $z = -3.30$, $p = 0.001$, $r = -0.184$) revealed that there is significant difference between male and female respondents on their general views about learning English reading comprehension. The difference observed in the mean rank value though comparing the two groups (males and females) revealed that the difference was significant, male respondents (*Mean Rank* = 173.52) and female respondents (*Mean Rank* = 146.27). This result clearly indicates that male respondents are different with female respondents in terms of their preferences on student-centered approach on learning English reading comprehension. However, the *r* value indicates small effect size ($r = -0.184$) which corresponded with non-significant differences found in most of the items on this construct.

Table 4. 3 Gender Differences on the Students Opinions about Reading Teachers Related to Student-Centered and Teacher-Centered Learning Approaches

Gender	<i>N</i>	Mean Rank	<i>U</i> value	<i>z</i> value	<i>p</i> value	<i>r</i> value
Male	180	168.03	11604.00	-1.617	0.106	-0.090
Female	142	153.22				
Total	322					

* $p < 0.01$

Table 4.10 shows the results of the Mann-Whitney U test (independent sample U test) comparing the overall scores between male and female respondents on the third construct of the questionnaire. The results ($U = 11604.00$, $z = -1.617$, $p = 0.106$, $r = -0.090$) revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female respondents on their perceptions on reading teacher related to student-centered and teacher-centered learning approaches. The difference in mean rank values between the male respondents (*Mean Rank* = 168.03) and female respondents (*Mean Rank* = 153.22) was not wide. Meanwhile, the r value (-0.090) shows a small effect size. This means that the gender difference did not play significant roles on the students' perceptions on reading teacher related to student-centered and teacher-centered learning approaches.

Table 4. 4 Gender Differences on the Students' Beliefs about English Reading Comprehension Strategies

Gender	<i>N</i>	Mean Rank	<i>U</i> value	<i>z</i> value	<i>p</i> value	<i>r</i> value
Male	180	169.71	11303.00	-2.003	0.045*	-0.112
Female	142	151.10				
Total	322					

* $p < 0.05$

Table 4.12, shows the result of the Mann-Whitney U test (independent sample U test) comparing the differences between male and female respondents on the first construct. The results ($U = 11303.00$, $z = -2.003$, $p = 0.045$, $r = -0.112$) revealed that there is significant difference between male and female respondents on their general belief about learning English reading comprehension strategies. The difference observed in the mean rank value though comparing the two groups (males and females) revealed that the difference was significant, male respondents (*Mean Rank* = 169.71) and female respondents (*Mean Rank* = 151.10). However, the r value indicates small effect size ($r = -0.112$). This result clearly indicates that male

respondents are different with female respondents in terms of their preferences on learning English reading comprehension.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed that there was weak significant correlation between learning approach preferences and gender among language majoring students. These results correspond to previous research in this area. Looking at the first 14 items in the questionnaire, it is noticed that both male and female participants highlighted the usefulness over the student-centered approach in which they have the freedom of choice and their classes. In contrast to the teacher-centered approach, they feel that they are provided with more space to contribute to the class and to participate in the different activities such as brainstorming.

They also highlighted the importance of being engaged in the class and interacting with the material, the teacher, and their fellow students. Moreover, they both indicated that teachers and instructors should encourage them to participate positively in the different classes. In contrast, they don't like to be restricted in terms of class participation as the case and the traditional teacher-centered where the teacher is the sender of the information.

This positive participation was called 'the students' voice' which was a term used by (Singhal, 2017). The researcher used the term 'students' voice' to indicate the students' ability to express their sounds, opinions, and thoughts freely in the class. This 'voice' used to be restricted and limited in the traditional teacher-centered classes where teachers were the only speakers and senders of information.

As for the gender differences on the students' performances on English reading comprehension, the results came similar to the ones on the first construct. Both male and female participants were attracted to the reading class where teachers and instructors encourage them to use different critical thinking activities. They also were of the view that they should take

responsibility for achieving the stated learning objectives with the teacher and not only to play a passive role in the class.

An example of this responsibility is the choice of topics and the freedom inside of the classroom. This idea had been highlighted Al-Zu'be (2013) who claimed is that teachers should encourage the students to come up with their own topics to discuss. The researcher said that this might more helpful to the students as they may perform better in these topics rather than and other topics forced by the teachers.

As for the third construe regarding the students' opinions on reading teachers related to student-centered and learning approaches, the results were also similar to the one mentioned above. Both males and females agree on the item that teachers use a variety of reading methods. According to Johnson and Van Wyk (2016), there are various activities that can be used by teachers and instructors and their classes such as direct instruction method, question-and-answer method, teaching large classes as a method textbook method whole class discussion... etc. They also mention that there is a balance between the roles of teachers and those of the students. In general, they agree on the fact that teacher's act as facilitators and their reading classes. They further added that teachers continuously encourage them to participate more and interact more with their peers and with the teachers themselves.

Regarding the differences between males and females when it comes to the different strategies used by teachers and instructors in the reading courses, both groups yield the same results. In other words, both of them agreed on the fact that their teachers should use different strategies to encourage them to participate more in the reading classes. Examples of these strategies can be activities such as group work and peer work. The students indicated that giving them the chance to work on exercises themselves would be more interesting.

The above-mentioned results indicate that the students are in favour of the student-centered approach when it comes to reading courses and classes. At

the same time, the students implied that they don't like to be restricted and prevented from positive role in the reading classes. This type of interaction is only available when the approach known as student-centered is fully adopted by teachers and instructors in the different rotational institutions. In relation to previous studies, Payaprom and Payaprom (2020) study showed that there is no relationship between gender and student's learning style preferences ($p=0.45$). The findings of this study indicate that different teaching approaches in the classroom need to be used to accommodate learners with different learning styles, making learning more enjoyable and meaningful for students.

The finding of the present study was also supported by Cakici (2017) who investigated the learner autonomy in Turkish EFL Context. The results of that study showed that EFL student-teachers seem ready to assume greater responsibility and influence over their own learning in some aspects of learner autonomy, while in some other areas they still need support and guidance from teachers. In addition, the findings showed that overall males and females hold similar views on learner autonomy in the sense of EFL. Nonetheless, three things revealed a major gender related disparity. Another study by Kovačević, and Akbarov (2016) showed there was no statistically significant difference between the two genders' preference for a teaching style. And there was no statistically significant difference between the preferences for the teaching style among the three faculties. The findings of this review suggest that the student-centered teaching approach is not always applied. With regard to the students' motivation in student-centered approach, Amiri, and Saberi (2019) study found a significant impact for the learner-centered approach on EFL learners' motivation. And on the other hand, they found that there was no statistically significant difference was found between Iranian EFL students on their learning motivation due to their gender. The finding of the present study was in contrast Salahshour, Sharifi, and Salahshour (2013) finding which indicated that females used learning strategies more frequently than males.

CONCLUSION

This study showed weak significant difference between learning approach preferences and gender among language majoring students, which came in agreement with various outcomes from previous research in this area. Although there were slight differences between male and female participants in relation to the balance of power which supported by student-centered, it is noticed that both male and female participants highlighted the usefulness of the student-centered approach over the teacher-centered approach. There are many student-centered features that students focus on, such as freedom of choice, brainstorming, engaged in the class, and interaction with the material, the teacher, and their fellow students. In opposite to other teacher-centered features such as teacher as the sender of the information, being only passive receivers, etc.

As for the gender differences in the students' performances on English reading comprehension, the results came similar to those on the first construct. Both male and female participants were attracted to the reading class where teachers and instructors encourage them to use different critical thinking activities. The students' opinions on reading teachers related to student-centered and learning approaches were also similar and both males and females agree on the item that teachers use a variety of reading methods. In addition, both agreed that their teachers should use different strategies to encourage them to participate more in the reading classes. Examples of these strategies can be activities such as group work and peer work. All these clues indicate that the students favor the student-centered approach when it comes to reading courses and classes. At the same time, the students implied that they don't like to be restricted and prevented from a positive role in the reading classes. In conclusions, the findings of this study contribute to the existing knowledge in the area of applied linguistics and language teaching approaches

In the light of the limitations and conclusions identified in the present study, it is essential to recommend some future research subjects to be investigated and considered in more comprehensive studies. Additional research should be conducted to investigate whether the student at northern Border University believe their university teachers employ a teacher-centered approach or a student-centered learning approach. If the university seeks their teachers to be teacher-centered or student-centered, it would be informative to know if the students believe whether or not the university teachers are representing the university models and to learn if this would produce a variety in the students' preferred learning approach and devotion to the field of education.

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