Chapter 69

The Relationship Between Online Information Seeking Anxiety and English Reading Proficiency Across Gender

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' online information seeking anxiety and reading ability is investigated. The sample included 177 high-school students of an urban area in Iran. In order to measure their reading ability, the reading section of Primary English Test (PET) was used. To assess their online information searching anxiety, Information Seeking Anxiety scale (ISAS) was used. The results of the correlational analysis showed that there is a negative relationship between ISAS (and all its components) and PET. When male and female participants were considered separately, English reading was not found to be related to anxiety among boys; while it was moderately associated with anxiety among girls. The result of regression showed that EFL reading ability is a significant predictor of online information seeking anxiety and can predict more than 7% of the variance of online informa-tion searching anxiety; however the power of reading to reduce searching anxiety was found to be much stronger (more than 18%) among females.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most essential skills for daily life and academic achievement. Reading enables people to communicate and obtain information via written media (Alfassi, 2004) and gives students the opportunity to process and understand the scientific information. Contrary to earlier beliefs that reading is a passive skill, it is now considered a process in which the reader utilizes many strategies and skills

as well as cross-cultural knowledge to decode the written input and understand the meaning of the text appropriately and fluently.

Reading is a complicated and purposeful cognitive, socio-cultural and linguistic process that demands the readers to use all aspects of their communicative competence to extract the meaning from the text or *construct meaning* as it is called recently. This process includes activating the knowledge of language, knowledge of discourse and pragmatics, knowledge of culture and the topic, and knowledge of communication skills and strategies. Therefore, readers are more successful in encoding passages with familiar topics and are less successful and motivated to read and comprehend passages whose topics are not familiar or they have no experience about them.

Readers read the text with various goals and the goal of reading task affects the way readers process the input. Finding the specific information on certain topics has long been considered as a part of strategic reading. In other words, one goal of reading instruction is making students able to find the information they require on certain subjects of interest.

With the fast overspread of online resources and databases in the modern era, many students read to search and find the required information as fast as possible using these resources. Students now prefer to search the Internet instead of using printed resources in the libraries due to the fast and free access to a large amount of information available online. It is reported that most university and even high-school students consider the websites and online resources as their first source of information (Lazonder & Rouet, 2008). As students rely highly on the Internet to find information for their projects, they may their interest to refer to libraries and using printed resources such as books, reference book, and periodicals (Walraven, Brand-Gruwel & Boshuizen, 2010). As a matter of fact the tendency of young generation to use printed resources has drastically declined recently.

It is noteworthy to mention that searching online resources and finding the desired information is not an easy task and students commonly face lots of problems when they search the Internet, especially when they have to evaluate the result of their search to select the useful or redundant information. Most of the time students do lots of search and save the files in their computers, while they do not know what to do with the collected materials at the end of their search. Sometimes they even do not remember why they have saved certain materials and if they are useful for their projects.

The problems associated with this type of searching can be related to both cognitive and emotional aspects of online searching, as online information searching is a kind of problem solving process. It is suggested that cognitively being aware of certain online searching strategies such as behavioral, procedural, and metacognitive strategies may help users to handle this process in a more efficient way, have better search results, and thus become more skillful information searcher (Tsai, 2009).

The emotional side of online searching is related to negative feelings, such as attitudes and anxiety, which arise when students search online resources. This feeling may resemble to any negative emotions people have when they are working with technologies. This negative feeling or what is specifically labeled as information searching anxiety is very prevalent among different types of Internet users. Information searching anxiety is a multi-faceted construct that is influenced by technology-related, information-related, and user-related variables. From technological point of view, this anxiety can be related to the availability of technological devices and the interface of the websites or databases as well as users' digital literacy, computer self-efficacy, and their technophobia. The information-related variables may be related to topic/key-word identification, availability of resources/databases, and the process of evaluation/retrieval of the searched materials. User-related variables such age, gender, and language background can also affect the process and product of searching sessions.

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