An Explicit Communication Strategies Instruction:
Iranian EFL Learners' Self-Reported Use of Communication Strategies

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Abstract

The present study explored the effect of explicit Communication Strategies (CSs) instruction on Iranian EFL learners' usage of these strategies in their educational tasks at different proficiency levels. To conduct the study, the researchers chose 20 Iranian EFL teachers and their 150 students at two universities in Tabriz, Iran. Accepting a mixed-methods design, the researchers used a questionnaire, an English language proficiency test, and a semi-structured interview to collect the required data. The findings indicated that after receiving communication strategy instruction, teachers and students had positive attitudes toward the usefulness of CSs in the language learning process. However, learners in different proficiency levels had different preferences toward CSs. While advanced learners showed their inclination to use compensation strategies, intermediate learners preferred to use metacognitive. Elementary learners favoured using cognitive CSs. These differences can be attributed to individual differences and contextual factors that suggest pedagogical implications for both teachers and students and provide tentative subjects for further studies.

Keywords: communication strategies, learners' perceptions, communication strategies training, strategy instruction, willingness to communicate

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1. Introduction

Problems with speaking skills and communication is mainly the most extensive trouble that nearly all foreign language students experience during their learning process (Al-Murtadha, 2019; Dörnyei, 2005; Donker et al., 2014; Ellis, 2005). Many language researchers argued that language learners might benefit from Communication Strategies (Hereafter CSs) training courses to overcome their communication problems (Chan, 2021; Gatbonton, 2008; Lam, 2010).

Although there is no agreement between second and foreign language researchers about the definition of CS, CSs are often described as apparatuses that students can employ to solve their interaction problems (Cao, 2014; Gatbonton, 2008). Using CSs is one of the language tactics to overcome linguistic difficulties, solve language learners' speech problems in second or foreign language, and encourage communication (Daguay-James & Bulusan, 2020; Kaufmann et al., 2021; Naughton, 2006; Soodmand Afshar & Bayat, 2021). As Cao (2014) states, "CSs are solutions to difficulties in communicating with a second or foreign language learner" (p. 54). Dewaele (2019) defines CS as individuals' efforts to discover a way to bridge the communication gap effort and existing language resources. CSs may boost students' confidence and help them take risks when speaking English as a foreign language (Maleki, 2007; Mellati et al., 2022; Peng, 2007; Pornpibul, 2005). Nakatani (2010) also indicates that the employment of CSs leads to language learning. Since CSs affect all interaction activities, it has received special attention among EFL teachers and learners (Chan, 2021; Lee et al., 2019; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Mellati et al., 2013). One of the EFL teachers' responsibilities is deciding daily about the type of CSs and the way to teach them (Tsui, 2009).

While many researchers have paid particular attention to Communication Strategies (CSs), Iranian educational system has rarely instructed it and mainly focused on learning activities such as learning grammatical points, translating written works, and reciting words (Bozorgian & Alamdari, 2018; Khajavy et al., 2018; Mellati & Khademi, 2014; Rahimi et al., 2008). Teaching English as a foreign language in this educational system emphasizes receptive skills such as understanding reading passages and correcting grammatical structures in writing (Shakki et al., 2016). It involves little instruction of verbal communication skills such as listening and speaking (Alavi et al., 2021; Elahi Shirvan et al., 2019). Due to numerous reasons such as bashfulness, nervousness, lack of self-confidence, lack of linguistic knowledge, and low proficiency, language learners make mistake when

they want to speak. Many language learners are reluctant to speak English since they are afraid of making mistakes. Only a few language learners try to speak English in their classroom activities, whereas others are quiet and speak in their L1, or tell, 'I don't know'. Repetition of this experience might slowly lose language learners' motivation to learn a new language (Rahimi et al., 2008). The learners may not be able to employ the appropriate words, structure, or language expressions in the classroom. Indeed, lack of linguistic knowledge and insufficient skills in using the acquired knowledge for communication are among the student's significant problems (Mesgarshahr & Abdollahzadeh, 2014; Mellati & Khademi, 2015). Learners' problems in their speaking and communication skills indicates that despite six years of language learning in schools, students' oral performance remains under the desired level (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2019; Khajavy et al., 2018; Mellati & Khademi, 2018). Studies in language teaching have also shown that communication strategies used instinctively in the first language do not automatically translate into a second or foreign language. In fact, communication strategies need to be explicitly taught to language learners to develop their skills (Lee & Lee, 2020). In addition, teachers are not always aware of the importance of teaching communication strategies to their students or, if they do, do not explicitly teach their students how to use them. They themselves do not use these strategies as a role model for their language learners (Khajavy et al., 2018; Lee & Lee, 2020).

Many language researchers believe that communication strategies use facilitates language learners' communication process. They highlighted the importance of CSs for all language learners (Chan, 2021; Lee & Lee, 2020). In this respect, the CS domain of the ELF framework is wider than the SLA framework (Chan, 2021). They suggested that EFL instructors ought to center on CSs in their classrooms (Kaufmann et al., 2021). Nevertheless, most prior studies have shown an unclear representation of used language learning communication strategies since they concentrated on the employment of general categories of strategies. Only a few studies have considered profoundly the variation in specific strategy use by language learners of different proficiency levels (Lee et al., 2019; Mellati & Khademi, 2020). The findings of the preceding research studies are not supportive for teaching and learning of a new language. Language instructors do not know exactly what specific strategies to teach their learners or to employ in their educational tasks and materials. Besides, language learners do not know what definite strategies can make more assistance in promoting their language learning

(Mellati et al., 2018; Peng, 2019). Martínez-Adrián et al. (2017), for instance, argued that language learners, even after thorough communication strategy instruction, were not able to communicate efficiently. They stated that imperfect linguistic knowledge was their major problems. The findings of this study showed that some CSs may need higher proficiency, and novice language learners are not able to use them successfully in their communication practices. Moreover, the proficiency level is related to different learning styles which (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2018) needs to be taken into consideration. Similar studies maintained that a strategy instruction would be effectual, if language teachers to be informed of which CSs may be appropriate for their learners in different proficiency levels (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Naughton, 2006; Setiyadi, 2009).

In addition, Daguay-James and Bulusan (2020) argued EFL instructors should consider students' emotional status and perceptions about CSs in their teaching experiences. Subsequently they may re-evaluate and occasionally alter their classroom educational tasks. Due to the significance of EFL instructors and language learners' beliefs, Nakatani (2010) conducted a review of EFL instructors and language learners as the first essential step in employing communication strategies. Since beliefs manage human behaviours, they argued that educational beliefs and language learners' perceptions of CSs teaching have been one of the concerns of research in modern times (Daguay-James & Bulusan, 2020). Perception is the ability to know something through the senses or the way we regard or interpret something. Teachers and learners' perceptions might have a positive or negative influence on the learning process and learning outcomes (Chin, 2006; Tsui, 2009). Nevertheless, relatively slight research concentration so far seems to have been dedicated to the language learners' points of view or beliefs about the use of different strategies in language learning process. Teachers and learners' perceptions of CSs might be one of the most significant factors of success in learning the English language (Aliakbari & Karimi, 2009; Mellati et al., 2015; Pawlak et al., 2016; Peng, 2019). Some researchers believed that CSs could be taught to students and teachers (Al-Murtadha, 2019; Bozorgian & Alamdari, 2018; Cao, 2014; Dewaele, 2019). More importantly, some scholars believe that perception might be culture and context-bound (Chen et al., 2019; Dong, 2010; Ellis, 2005; Kaufmann et al., 2021). It can be concluded that instruction as a vital factor can pave the way in each and every field of language learning (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2019, 2020, 2021; Shakki, 2022; Shakki et al., 2020, 2021, 2023). Although many researchers have investigated the positive impact of employing communication strategy in language teaching and learning, slight notice

has been paid to communication strategy training and EFL instructors and language learners' beliefs about strategies and their frequent use of those strategies as learning strategies. Reviewing the literature, the researchers found that it is necessary: first, to investigate the types of CSs that language learners use in their communication practices after strategy training and second, explore the impact of CSs teaching on Iranian EFL teachers and students' perceptions of this notion.

2. Review of Literature

Recently, many studies have been conducted to investigate diverse issues associated with CSs. Several linguists categorize CSs in varied manners. The types of classifications presented in the literature differ fundamentally in general classification principles rather than specific strategies (Arabmofrad & Mehdiabadi, 2022; Horness & Jaturapitakkul, 2021; Lee & Ng, 2010; Peng, 2020; Tseng et al., 2006). Researchers implied that CSs have some 'Pros' and 'Cons'. The Cons, who stand against teaching CSs, disagreed with linking CSs to educational issues (Al-Murtadha, 2019; Donker et al., 2014; Peng, 2019). They referred to the divergent views on the pedagogical aspects of language. These researchers compared the second language function with first language performance and discovered some standard features between them (Tseng et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2019; Peng, 2020; Sato & Dussuel, 2021). Mariani (2010) discussed that the 'cons' suppose that mature students have already developed the required cognitive skills in their native language and had the similarities between the first and second language CSs; thus, adult learners can utilize their mother language communication strategies to their second language; therefore, it is no need to teach CSs. In contrast, the advocators of teaching CSs such as Kongsom (2016), Lee and Ng (2010), Maleki (2007), and MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) characteristically favoured and suggested the educational usefulness of teaching CSs. They compared the actual efficiency of L2 with that of the native speaker. They obtained many variations between the two languages. According to these findings, they raised the idea of teaching CSs.

In response to the claim of Cons researchers, one can declare that, although there are some resemblances between first and second language communication, there are also some divergences (Faucette, 2001; Horness & Jaturapitakkul, 2021). Second language students may face various communication difficulties in using L2 (Martínez-Adrián et al., 2017; Mellati et al., 2015); therefore, they may require

developing extra CSs to solve the challenges. In answer to Cons claim about fruitless or effectiveness of education, some research has already been conducted in the language teaching contexts. For example, Rastegar and Gohari (2016) examined the relationship between CSs' usage and EFL language learners' attitudes and oral English output. The findings of this study indicated that when language learners think about their language and speak in English, they could improve their verbal communication skills. This study showed that language teachers should provide learners with practical and valuable simulated verbal tasks exercises in real life to be combined with EFL strategy training to persuade them to think in English. In another study, Moazen et al. (2016) researched on Iranian EFL students' perceptions of CSs in learning English. This study also investigated the impact of gender on learners' perceptions of CSs usage. Data analysis showed that CS training significantly affected students' perceptions and the frequent use of CSs. In addition, the results also confirmed that men performed better in using strategies and language comprehension than women. These findings demonstrate that strategy training is necessary for all learners. This skill can help them speak more effectively with their classmates and coaches and increase their learning achievements.

To investigate the impact of communication strategy training, Kongsom (2016) concentrated on the effect of CSs' training on the English-speaking ability of engineering students. He explored the effect of CSs' training on fifty-seven Thai undergraduate language learners' CSs use and strategic competence. This study has proved the effectiveness of CS training among second or foreign language learners by citing more empirical evidence. Teaching specific CSs may help develop learners' strategic consciousness and ability and solve their oral communication problems. They surprisingly used all the trained CSs in their subsequent educational activities.

In a class-based quasi-experimental study, Sato and Dussuel (2021) examined the effect of metacognitive education on promoting young learners' learning and their willingness to communicate. They found that teaching strategies could be a helpful learning tool to improve L2 learners' knowledge and increase classroom participation. Similarly, Peng (2019) and Dewaele (2019) acknowledged that while teaching strategies are effectively enhance learners' knowledge and achievements, the learning environment and classroom emotions are the most important predictors of students' willingness to communicate.

In contrast, Al-Murtadha (2019) and ElahiShirvan et al. (2019) asserted that while communicative competence, language anxiety, and motivation all moderately

correlated with learners' Willingness to Communicate (WTC), they argued that the most important predictor is their communicative competence. In confirmation, Lee and Lee (2020) examined the impact of anxiety, risk-taking, learning motivation, their confidence in speaking L2, and intercultural experiences in the tendency to communicate in a second or foreign language in and out of the learning environment. The findings showed that emotional status, demographic, and intercultural educational tasks play diverse functions in different environments. In addition, Maghsoudi et al. (2022) in research on the relationship between self-regulation strategy and language learning believe that Self-regulation strategies make students increase their effort and persistence, which leads to progress and success. When studying, self-regulating students try to make the information meaningful and increase their learning by establishing a logical connection between themselves and the previous information.

Furthermore, Martínez-Adrián et al. (2017) focused on self-reported exploit of communication strategies and found that learners' educational level plays a vital role in both frequency and type of communication strategy use. In addition, Rodríguez Cervantes and Roux Rodriguez (2012) argued that generally, EFL teachers ignore the usage and effectiveness of communication strategies training in their teaching contexts. In similar studies in Iranian EFL context, Yaghoubi-Notash and Karafkan (2015) found a statistically significant difference between elementary and advanced levels in their CSs use, and Mesgarshahr and Abdollahzadeh (2014) confirmed the importance of CSs in the language teaching process. According to the Soodmand Afshar and Bayar (2021) what has been reviewed above, it can be stated that most of the studies conducted on strategy training show the positive and significant effect of strategy instruction.

While many studies have found that CSs teaching can be effective in language teaching contexts, there are still some controversial issues regarding the effectiveness of CSs teaching. Moreover, almost all of them confirmed that the factors that might affect CSs teaching are different from context to context and more investigations are required to confirm the existed findings (Hua et al., 2012; Lee & Ng, 2010; Moattarian & Tahririan, 2013; Nakatani et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2018). The findings of these research studies illustrated that educational level and learners' perceptions could be attributed to these differences. Therefore, the present study investigated the impact of CSs training on Iranian EFL learners' usage of these strategies in their educational tasks and teachers and learners' perceptions of this notion.

2.1. Research Questions

In the same line of research and fill the gap in the literature, this study has taken a step towards answering the following research questions:

1. Are there any statistically differences among elementary, intermediate, and advanced Iranian EFL students' self-reported use of communication strategies in their classroom activities after receiving CSs training?

2. What types of the taught CSs do these students use while performing oral tasks?

3. What are the Iranian EFL instructors and language learners' perceptions of the usefulness of communication strategies training?

3. Method

3.1 Context of the Study

The study was conducted in the Iranian EFL context. Islamic Azad University and Payame Noor University are two universities in Iran with many branches in different cities. These two universities have a conversation course at their tertiary level. The focus of this course is on language communication. The students are encouraged to use English in and out of the classroom. Teachers in this course assigned appropriate conversation activities to learners to check their conversation ability and provide adequate feedback. The current study was carried out at Tabriz branches of these two universities.

3.2 Participants

The sampling procedure in this quasi-experimental study was availability sampling. Twenty EFL teachers (7 male teachers and 13 female teachers) with the age range of 30 to 48 agreed to participate in the study and assist the researchers to gather the necessary data for the study. The researchers used telephone calls, e-mails, and in person invitations to invite the participants. All of the language teachers had teaching experiences in English communication classes at two Iranian universities (Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch, & Payame Noor University, Tabriz Branch) more than five years. In addition, 150 EFL learners (53 males and 57 females) studying at these two universities under the teaching of the teacher

participants in the present study were invited to the study. They were studying English conversation courses in twenty classes in the first semester in the academic year of 2019-2020 with the age range of 17 to 32. The results of Oxford Placement Test showed that the participants were in different proficiency levels; 30 (20 %) were in elementary level, 81 (54%) were in intermediate level, and 39 (26 %) were in advanced level. To have homogenous groups, the researchers ranked the students according to their scores in OPT and chose the 30 students of elementary level, 30 top students of advanced level, and 30 students of intermediate level from the middle. Fifty-one students of elementary level and nine students of advanced level were excluded from the study. Therefore, the participants of this study were 90 students from three proficiency level (N= 90). All of the participants (both teachers and learners) were well versed about the nature and purpose of the study from the beginning. The researchers ensured them that their information to the questionnaire would be held in strict confidence and they could withdraw their contributions at any time without penalty.

3.3 Instrumentations

Four instruments were used for data collection:

3.3.1 Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

Oxford Placement Test (OPT) produced by the Oxford University Press. OPT was used to diagnose the proficiency level of the participants at the outset of the study. OPT has two sections: vocabulary section and grammar section. The vocabulary section of OPT has two subcategories: ten cloze test questions and twenty-five multiple-choice questions. The grammar section of this test also has two subcategories: ten multiple-choice questions and fifteen cloze test questions. Based on the criteria of the OPT and the council of Europe level, level A (elementary) are learners whose scores are between 0-29. Level B (intermediate) are learners whose scores are between 30-47, and level C (advanced) are learners whose scores are between 48-60.

3.3.2 Self-reported Communication Strategy Questionnaire

A self-reported questionnaire was used to explore self-reported use of CSs in their

classroom activities. The items for the Communication Strategy Inventory (CSI) were designed to measure the frequency of used communication strategies after receiving strategy-training instruction. The primary edition of this inventory was derived from Nakatani's (2010) Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI), Lam's (2010) Strategy Questionnaire, Alahmed's (2017) Strategy Questionnaire, and Kongsom's (2016) Communication Strategy Questionnaire. The questionnaires' items, based on Kongsom's (2016) taxonomy, targeted the components of the CSs. The Items of the questionnaire were written in the form of statements about using communication strategies in a Likert-scale format that starts from never and ends to always. The participants show their attitudes towards each item and the concept under question as well. A preliminary form of the CSI, which consisted of 30 items with A Likert-scale format, was administered to a sample of 100 people from the same teaching contexts. Then, a factor analysis using Maximum likelihood factoring with iteration and an oblique (Direct Oblimin) rotation was run. Then Maximum likelihood analyses showed the existence of five factors emerged for the items with the eigenvalues of more than 1. The results of scree test showed that three components should be remained for further investigation. The results of the parallel analysis also confirmed the results of the scree test. The researchers were performed Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to check the validity of the last version of the questionnaire. The results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) indicated that the questionnaire measured three factors. Based on the results of this analysis, the researchers deleted many questions of the questionnaire. Reviewing the literature, the researchers called them cognitive strategies, metacognitive, and compensation strategies. The final version of the questionnaire included nine items of a five-point Likert Scale that measures three general categories of CSs, namely, cognitive strategies, metacognitive, and compensation strategies. The subcategories of these three broad categories were nine strategies. These strategies were circumlocution strategy, use of all-purpose words strategy, appeal for help strategy, clarification request strategy, pause fillers and hesitation devices strategies, topic avoidance strategy, comprehension check strategy, confirmation check strategy, and self-repair strategy. The researchers were piloted the final edition of the questionnaire with 20 language learners from the similar population to check the reliability of the questionnaire. The results of Cronbach Alpha coefficient showed the reliability index of .79 (r = .79) that is an acceptable index.

3.3.3 Semi-Structured Interview

A 30-minute semi-structured interview was conducted with 5 teachers and 15 students (five students from each level randomly). The interview had six free-response questions; therefore, the instructors and learners had an opportunity to deliver and offer their attitudes. The interview held in English, and the researchers asked some questions about instructors and learners' beliefs about the usefulness of CSs training and related actions required to teach them. Some of the questions of the interview were as follow: what do you know about communication strategies, i.e., what is the meaning of communication strategies from your point of view? What activities do you (as an EFL teacher or student) prefer to use in teaching CSs? Is explicit communication strategy instruction effective in solving their learning problems and promoting your language performance?

3.3.4 Communication Strategy Instruction

The researchers chose nine CSs of the questionnaire employed in language classrooms to solve learners' potential communication problems. The five-phase strategy training procedure was adopted form Nakatani (2010) that were "review, presentation, rehearsal, performance, and evaluation" (p. 10). In the first stage, the language learners worked on what learned in the previous session and repeated the educational task at the opening of a new lesson. In the second stage, the language learners informed about the purposes and procedures of the new educational tasks. Then, using brainstorming strategy, they discussed basic dialogues and the probable communication strategies that they can use in their conversations. During the rehearsal phase, the students practised and made plans for employing particular CSs. Language learners could recognize which learned strategies would be constructive for interaction in the educational tasks. In the performance phase, persuaded to utilize communication strategies deliberately, they performed the educational tasks and observed their performance. In the last phase of training, the language learners checked and reviewed their strategy use. In the first session, the teachers introduce the notion of communication strategies. The second session was dedicated to teaching and practicing comprehension check, third session: use of all-purpose words; fourth session: circumlocution; fifth session: clarification request; sixth session: appeal for help; seventh session: confirmation check; eighth session: pause fillers and hesitation devices; ninth session: topic avoidance; and the tenth

session was dedicated to teaching and practicing self-repair.

3.4 Procedure

The researchers invited 20 EFL teachers and their learners to contribute in the study. All of them were informed about the purpose of the study. At the outset of the study, the researchers administered Oxford Placement Test (OPT) to determine the learners' English proficiency level. Before conducting the course, to ensure that the language learners received the equal amount of CSs instruction or equal treatment, a teacher trainer taught the teacher participants how to teach CSs in their classrooms. Based on Nakatani's (2005) communication strategy training, in this three-session training course, the teacher participants were familiar with different activities to use CSs in their classrooms. Through some practical exercises, the trainer checked the teacher participants' understanding of the trained strategies. In the next step, the researchers administered the questionnaires. They distributed the questionnaires among the language learners. They surveyed in a part of normal class time, and it took language learners about 15 minutes to complete them. After the pretest administration of the questionnaire, the researchers began the treatment phase. In this phase, the teachers were required to train the language learners how to use CSs in their classroom activities. Based on the procedure of communication strategy training identified by Nakatani (2010), the teacher participants taught each CS to the students under the following steps: review, presentation, rehearsal, performance, and evaluation. In these steps, the teachers tried to increase students' understanding of CSs and their communicative potentials. The students reflected on the nature and purposes of each simulation task that encourage them to follow the training session at the beginning of each new lesson. According to the teacher's instruction, through brainstorming strategy, the students determined the goals and procedures of the recent pedagogical activity and discussed them. Teachers encourage the language learners to take risks and utilize CSs in their language performance. They encourage the students in cooperation with their peers to think about their daily activities to make plans for utilizing CSs. They also create adequate models for the appropriate use of certain CSs in the context. The teachers performed the tasks as a model and explained the cultural and environmental differences of every pedagogical task and different ways of conducting. Then, the learners monitored their performance based on the provided model. The instruction was performed over 10 weeks (one session per week, 60 minutes) under the

Nakatani's (2010) communication strategy instruction cycle. Every session of the instruction was explained in the communication strategy instruction. Going to the shop and looking for accommodation were role-plays that were used as oral communication task to check the participants' use of strategies after receiving strategy instruction. In going to the shop task, learners get the roles of sellers and customers. In looking for accommodation task, one learner can act as the estate agent and the other can be the buyer.

After the treatment, at the end of the term, the researchers gave the questionnaire to the language learners to determine their self-reported use of CSs in their classes after CSs training. The researchers distributed the questionnaires among the students. Completing the questionnaire took them about 26 minutes on average. Finally, a 30-min semi-structured interview was conducted with 5 teachers and 15 learners (five learners from each level randomly). At the end of the term, the teachers answered the interview questions.

Figure 1

The Study Procedure
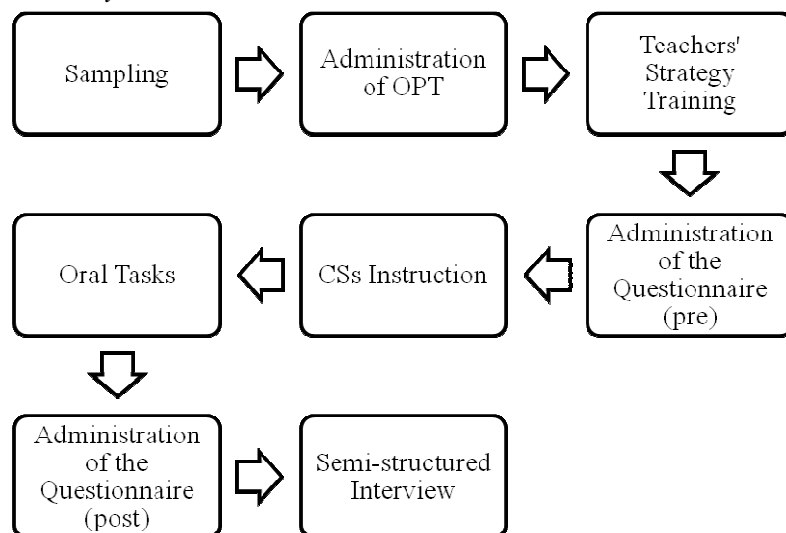
Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected for data analyses. Using descriptive analysis, the researchers compared the number of communication strategies that students in different proficiency levels used in the oral communication task to answer the first research question. To answer the second

research question, the researchers compared posttest scores of the questionnaire with the pretest scores using SPSS software. To answer the third research question, the teachers' responses to the interview questions were transcribed and qualitatively analyzed to know teachers' attitudes about the efficacy of CSs. To analyze the qualitative data, the researchers employed thematic analysis. Thematic Analysis technique was used to make replicable and valid inferences by interpreting and coding interview responses. By systematically evaluating texts, the responses converted into some main ideas. Qualitative data analyzing procedure was as follows: The transcribed passage was read several times to find the main ideas of the teachers' opinions. Then, the researchers coded and analyzed manually and subjectively the main ideas.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

After sample selection, to determine the proficiency levels of the students at the outset of the study, the researchers conducted OPT test. The results of OPT showed that participants were in three different levels: elementary (M= 24.40, SD= 2.35), Intermediate (M= 41.46, SD= 3.03), and advanced (M= 50.50, SD= 1.53). The lowest number of students were in elementary level (N=30). For the purpose of the study, the researchers chose 30 participants of the intermediate and advanced levels. To run statistical analyses, the researchers checked the normality of the scores of CS questionnaire. For this purpose, a *Shapiro-Wilk Test* of normality was run. The observed p-values for the scores of pre- and post-test scores (.346 and .090) were not significant, showing that the normality hypothesis could be confirmed.

To check the students' self-reported use of CSs before conducting communication strategy instruction, the researchers conducted communication strategy questionnaire before the course. They run a One-Way ANOVA to check their differences (see Table 1).

Table 1
The Results of ANOVA for Self-reported Questionnaire and its Three Subcategories in Pretest

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Cognitive	2.956	2	1.478	.466	.629
Metacognitive	2.289	2	1.144	.336	.716

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Compensation	.022	2	.011	.003	.997
Communication strategies	2.022	2	1.011	.108	.898

A one-way ANOVA was run to inspect the difference of communication strategy use among students in three different levels, as measured by the scores of self-reported communication strategy questionnaire. The language learners were divided into three groups according to their proficiency level (Group one: Elementary; Group two: Intermediate; Group three: Advanced). There was no statistically significant difference at the $P < .05$ level in the questionnaire scores and its three subcategories for the three groups: Cognitive (F (2, 87) = .466, P = .629); Metacognitive (F (2, 87) = .336, P = .716); Compensation (F (2, 87) = .003, P = .997; and the whole questionnaire (F (2, 87) = .108, P = .898).

To check the effect of explicit CS training instruction on the language learners' self-reported use of CSs, the similar analysis was conducted after the students received the strategy instruction. The results of a one-way ANOVA for posttest are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
The Results of ANOVA for Self-reported Questionnaire and its Three Subcategories in Posttest

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Cognitive	276.156	2	138.078	47.638	.000
Metacognitive	303.289	2	151.644	64.044	.000
Compensation	103.089	2	51.544	21.229	.000
Communication strategies	122.422	2	61.211	7.914	.001

A one-way ANOVA was run to discover the difference of communication strategy use among students in three different levels, as measured by the scores of self-reported communication strategy questionnaire. The language learners were divided into three groups according to their proficiency level (Group one: Elementary; Group two: Intermediate; Group three: Advanced). The differences were statistically significant at the $P < .05$ level in the questionnaire scores and its three subcategories for the three groups: Cognitive (*F* (2, 87) = 47.638, P = .000); Metacognitive (*F* (2, 87) = 64.044, P = .000); Compensation (*F* (2, 87) = 21.229, P

= .000; and the whole questionnaire (F (2, 87) = 7.914, P = .001).

The results of analysis show that language learners in various proficiency levels favor diverse communication strategies. The following tables represent the students' self-reported use of nine communication strategies used in this study.

Table 3
The Results of Post Hoc Test of Scheffe for Circumlocution Strategy

Level	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Advanced	30	2.33	
Intermediate	30	2.57	
Elementary	30		3.67
Sig.		.631	1.000

The results of Table 3 reveal that elementary EFL learners used "circumlocution" strategy more frequent that their peers in intermediate and advanced level.

Table 4
The Results of Post Hoc Test of Scheffe for All-purpose Words Strategy

Level	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05
		1
Elementary	30	2.93
Intermediate	30	3.13
Advanced	30	3.20
Sig.		.647

The values in Table 4 indicate that the difference among EFL learners in using "all-purpose words" strategy in their oral tasks is not significant.

Table 5
The Results Post Hoc Test of Scheffe for Appeal for Help Strategy

Level	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Advanced	30	2.33	
Intermediate	30	2.50	
Elementary	30		3.60
Sig.		.745	1.000

The results of Table 5 show that elementary EFL learners used "appeal for help"

strategy more frequent that their peers in intermediate and advanced level.

Table 6
The Results Post Hoc Test of Scheffe for Clarification Request Strategy

Level	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Advanced	30	2.37	
Intermediate	30	2.53	
Elementary	30		3.73
Sig.		.768	1.000

The results of Table 6 show that elementary EFL learners used "clarification request" strategy more frequent that their peers in intermediate and advanced level.

Table 7
The Results Post Hoc Test of Scheffe for Pause and Fillers Strategy

Level	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Elementary	30	2.63	
Intermediate	30	2.97	
Advanced	30		3.83
Sig.		.254	1.000

The results of Table 7 show that advanced EFL learners used "pause and fillers" strategy more frequent that their peers in intermediate and elementary level.

Table 8
The Results Post Hoc Test of Scheffe for Avoidance Strategy

Level	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Elementary	30	2.87	
Intermediate	30	2.90	
Advanced	30		3.90
Sig.		.988	1.000

The results of Table 8 show that advanced EFL learners used "avoidance" strategy more frequent that their peers in intermediate and elementary level.

Table 9
The Results Post Hoc Test of Scheffe for Comprehension Check Strategy

Level	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Advanced	30	2.43	
Elementary	30	2.53	
Intermediate	30		3.97
Sig.		.886	1.000

The results of Table 9 show that intermediate EFL learners used "comprehension check" strategy more frequent that their peers in elementary and advanced level.

Table 10
The Results Post Hoc Test of Scheffe for Confirmation Check Strategy

Level	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Advanced	30	2.50	
Elementary	30	2.80	
Intermediate	30		3.97
Sig.		.432	1.000

The results of Table 10 show that intermediate EFL learners used "confirmation check" strategy more frequent that their peers in elementary and advanced level.

Table 11
The Results Post Hoc Test of Scheffe for Self-repair Strategy

Level	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Advanced	30	2.60	
Elementary	30	2.73	
Intermediate	30		3.73
Sig.		.816	1.000

The results of Table 11 show that intermediate EFL learners used "self-repair" strategy more frequent that their peers in elementary and advanced level.

4.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

Conducting a semi-structured interview with 5 EFL teachers and 15 students (five

students from each level randomly), the researchers collected the qualitative data of the current study. Using Thematic Analysis, the researchers analyzed the qualitative data The researchers selected open coding to code the transcribed texts. Some of the Iranian EFL teachers' main perceptions towards the possibility of teaching communication strategies are presented in the following paragraph.

Some main points that were highlighted in the interviews are presented here: Some of the teachers and learners supported that communication strategies can help learners increase their communication skills.

If students use strategies like clarification request or other strategies, they finally come to learn to increase their self-confidence in. In other words, since they have been practiced almost every day, they will be a part their daily conversations. I think CSs could be one of the adequate apparatuses to help learners remove the obstacles of learning a language (teacher # 3; several participants stated this idea).

Some of them supported the explicit communication strategies training. They also highlighted that communication strategy teaching help learners to maintain their conversations with each other.

When language learners are not fluent in their speaking, they should be encouraged to use communication strategies. For instance, in our classroom, I persuaded my students to ask other students to repeat themselves if they do not comprehend, ask other students to explain, or ask students to speak slowly (teachers # 1 & 4; several students mentioned this idea).

Some of the teachers and learners believed that using communication strategies improve learners' motivation and self-confidence that are significant factors in learners' success.

I can see that when students learned how to use communication strategies in their routine conversations, they were motivated to participate in classroom activities. Students' engagement and involvement were increased to a great extent (teachers # 1, 2, 4, & 5; several students mentioned this idea).

The students argued that communication strategies play a central role in their language learning. However, they have diverse understandings of communication strategies and how they can be used in their communications. Misunderstanding of communication strategies can be counterproductive.

I do not know how to use some the communication strategies in my speaking. I need more practice to uptake them (four out of five students in elementary level mentioned this idea).

Generally, the findings of the interviews showed that teachers and learners welcomed explicit teaching of CSs. The learners believed that learning communication strategies increases their motivation to interact in the foreign language classroom activities.

Checking oral task after receiving explicit strategy instruction, the researchers explored the kinds of strategies that the students use in their educational tasks. It seemed that advanced students put an extra effort in trying to use communication strategies through their conversations. In contrast, less proficient students felt exhausted and frustrated to think about appropriate CSs to use. Similar to the findings of the questionnaire, approximately all of the interviewees agreed that comprehension and confirmation check are the most helpful with the highest value among other CSs, while all-purpose words was the least helpful with the lowest value.

5. Discussions

Similar to the findings of the Maleki (2007) and MacIntyre and Legatto (2011), the qualitative and quantitative data analysis suggested that CSs training were constructive. In addition, the results of the current study demonstrated that the learners used different strategies in elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels. The statistical analysis of the communication strategy questionnaire indicated that elementary learners favoured to use cognitive strategies in their communications; intermediate learners preferred to employ metacognitive strategies in their conversations; and advanced learners preferred to use compensation strategies.

The statistical analysis of the collected data also indicated that the instruction of specific CSs had a positive effect on language learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of CSs. The results of the questionnaire showed either an enhancement or reduction in the usage of specific CSs after treatment. From the findings, it was clear that students were significantly varied in their perceptions towards the usefulness of CSs. Likely, CSs training persuaded the language learners to use these communication strategies in their conversation and assisted them to enhance the understanding of CSs. The findings accepted the results of MacIntyre

and Legatto (2011), which pointed out language learners who learn these strategies are more confident when they speak English in the class. Using CSs employment, EFL learners could transfer the meaning correctly, improve their fluency, and expand their language knowledge. Most of the language lerarners evaluated these strategies positively. Similarly, Nakatani (2010) and Le (2006) stated that the CSs are very useful in helping language learners if they face communication problems.

The results of the questionnaire also have shown that learners realized the significance of employing CSs of their daily conversation and that the curriculum had been affected by the use of these strategies considerably. Their answers showed that the CSs training creates an innovative way in learning. The results of the communication strategy questionnaire also revealed that EFL learners in different proficiency level tend to employ different strategies. Consistent with what Martínez-Adrián et al. (2017) found, the findings corroborated that teaching CSs aids the students' sense of security even in the face of problems in English communication. These positive attitudes on the usefulness of CSs help generate a positive motivation for communicating and learning in a second or foreign language (Peng, 2007). The results obtained from the questionnaire were similar to Kongsom's (2016), who concluded that the further application of taught CSs after their instruction seemed to raise students' awareness and had positive perceptions towards the teachability of CSs and its usefulness.

Secondly, the key findings of the interviews demonstrated that to encourage the teaching of CSs, teachers should perform various activities in their classrooms. The results also indicated that CSs could be expanded by employing some educational tasks that provide opportunities to use CSs (Sato & Dussuel, 2021). The current study has shown that since CSs facilitate teaching and learning tasks, they are not separated from classroom activities (Peng, 2019). Although not all of the teachers thought alike about the effectiveness of teaching CSs, the majority of them believed that communication strategies are constructive. They felt CSs as comfortable modelling English for students (Al-Murtadha, 2019). Teachers suggested that using more pair and group work due to CS might promote fluency and creativity in language use. While elementary students prefer strategies such as circumlocution, appeal for help, and clarification request, the results of the study demonstrated that advanced learners are more interested in using pause and fillers, avoidance, and all-purpose words strategies in their classrooms conversations. In confirmation, MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) argued that students could profit from teaching CSs

and become motivated as they gain experience to use these strategies successfully. Teachers gave an opportunity to their students to learn some new speaking strategies to become more independent in language use, resolve communication problems, fluently speak and have the opportunity to enhance speaking skills and employ the taught CSs in their conversations. Students transferred all CSs to their utterances while they spoke English after the 12-week CS education. Thus, they received strategy-based education and learned several strategies that developed their communication ability (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2019). The instruction could also enhance students' confidence and security when they attempt to interact with their teachers or classmates in and out of the class. While some learners have a positive view over the usage of strategies such as all-purpose words, they have a negative view about strategies such as topic avoidance. This finding confirmed the findings of Lee and Ng (2010) and Kongsom (2016), who all found that participants decreased their use of reduction and repetition strategies because they understood that the communication strategies did not make the conversation easier and might affect the quality of the teaching procedure and students' learning if they were overused.

Researchers adopted different approaches based on the conceptualization of CSs, which influenced their views about the educational perspective of CSs. Approximately, all of the teachers in the study stated that teaching CSs are helpful to EFL learners and encourage them to become independent in their interactions. Nakatani (2010) proposes, "It was easy for learners to lose confidence when faced with a communication problem" (p. 126). He emphasizes that students who try to look for various strategies to prevent their communication problems are better learners. However, teachers reported that learners are different in using CSs in their speaking; some are more fluent and more confident. They pinpointed the role of proficiency level, the significance of enhancing language learners' consciousness of CSs, and the significance of promoting students' communicative competence.

In a similar vein, Nakatani (2010) believed that to develop language learners' effective communication skill, instructors should prioritize encouraging and reinforcing the learners to use the language outside of the classroom. Generally, the analysis of learners' perceptions revealed that focusing on using and practicing CSs in their educational tasks not only produce opportunities that help learners engage in speaking activities productively, but push them to use CSs and emphasize their effectiveness. As a result, teachers should notice that teaching CSs played positive

roles in helping learners solve communication problems, develop speaking skill, support their interactions, and develop their language learning. The teachers' responses strongly suggested that CSs training and the employment of these educational strategies in the classroom activities helped learners become autonomous in monitoring and maintaining their interactions (Zhang et al., 2018). The researchers found that the CSs training program had a remarkable impact on students' use of these communication strategies. Learners' statements recommended that CSs training play constructive roles in promoting their speaking abilities and provided a new methodology in teaching and learning. These statements are also sources of support for EFL teachers to move from conventional methods to an adequate one.

6. Conclusions

The present study investigated the impact of CSs training on elementary, intermediate, and advanced Iranian EFL learners' usage of these strategies in their educational tasks and teachers and learners' perceptions of this notion. The results of the present study showed that strategy teaching was effective. However, after receiving CSs training, the type of strategies used by language learners in various proficiency levels was different. Elementary learners preferred to employ cognitive strategies, intermediate learners preferred to utilize metacognitive strategies, and advanced learners preferred to make use of compensation strategies in their educational tasks after the CSs training program. The findings also suggested that teaching CSs encouraged foreign language learners to become more confident in their communication. It means that teachers and students held positive perceptions toward the usefulness of CSs. In general, these results revealed that teaching specific CSs are useful for students and plays an essential role in increasing their perceptions toward the CSs usage. The findings indicated that although both students and teachers emphasized the positive effect of strategy training on their attitudes, there are differences between the types of strategies they prefer. While advanced learners became more interested in pause and fillers, avoidance, and all-purpose words CSs, elementary learners became more inclined to circumlocution, appealed for help, and clarification request CSs. The current study demonstrated that communication strategies training offers EFL learners great opportunities to overcome their conversation difficulties. In addition, the findings confirmed that

individual differences play a key role in the acceptance or rejection of any strategy.

The findings of the current study suggested that communication strategy training leads to the enhancement of communication strategy use and the development of EFL learners' communicative ability. In addition, it was demonstrated that communication strategy training raises EFL teachers' consciousness of the usefulness of CSs in enhancing learners' speaking ability in classroom activities. Training of communication strategies is one of the requirements of any teacher education program. Teachers should also learn how to teach these strategies to their students before any course or class. The findings also suggested that individual differences are crucial factors in any language context. Teachers should consider individual differences when they want to apply different methods. Future studies are required to reconfirm the findings of this study. In addition, more studies are required to investigate other factors such as context and culture that may affect CS use in EFL contexts.

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