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Instructional Efficacy of Self-Regulated Learning on Iranian EFL Learners' Speaking Ability

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Abstract. The aim of the present study was to investigate Iranian EFL learners' awareness and use of the self-regulated learning strategies to check for the possible effects of such strategies on learners' speaking ability. The participants in the study were 40 EFL Iranian learners aged 18-20, attending a speaking course in four English language institutes in Shiraz, Iran. The participants were randomly divided into two groups; namely, the control and experimental, each including 20 learners. The students in the experimental group were subjected to the self-regulated learning intervention to promote awareness and use self-regulated learning strategies. In contrast, the control group students were taught using traditional approaches to English speaking with no use of such strategies. However, the content of the instruction was the same for both groups done by the same teacher for 14 consecutive weeks. The instruments used in the study were two comparable IELTS full speaking test, to evaluate the participants' speaking skills. In addition, the Self-regulation Questionnaire (Brown, Miller, & Lawendowski, 1999) was employed to measure the participants' awareness and use of self-regulated learning strategies. The results indicated that that there was

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a significant difference between the performances of the participants in the experimental group on the speaking ability pre-and post-tests; thus, a considerable progress in their speaking ability was observed as a result of their knowledge on how to use self-regulated learning strategies. In addition, the participants in the experimental group employed self-regulated learning strategies more frequently to improve their speaking ability than the participants in the control group. However, there was no significant difference between male and female participants' use of self-regulated learning strategies.

Keywords: Self-regulated learning, iranian EFL learners, english speaking ability.

1. Introduction

Self-regulation is a dynamic concept that involves those activities and thinking processes that learners can engage in and are likely to change, rather than fixed traits that individuals either possess or lack. For example, self-regulation focuses on how learners actively manage their feelings and motivations to learn. Besides, self-regulation improves with practice: learners draw on previous experience to build a repertoire of beliefs and strategies that enhance learning. Pintrich (2000) defines self-regulated learning (SRL) as:

> "an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and contextual features of the environment" (p. 433).

Besides, Zimmerman (2000) defines self-regulated learning as the degree to which students are motivated, use meta-cognitive strategies, and become behaviorally active in their learning process and in accomplishing their goals. Self-regulation encompasses monitoring, management, and control of cognition, motivation, and behavior in order to achieve self-determined goals (Wolters, Pintrich, & Karabenick, 2003). According to Pintrich and Garcia (1994), cognitive learning strategies (e.g. elaboration, rehearsal, and organization), meta-cognitive control strategies (e.g. planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning outcomes), and resource management (e.g. time management and the management of the learning

environment) should be used effectively in self-regulated learning. Learners should possess the characteristics of self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions sequentially planned to reach their personal objectives (Zimmerman and Campillio, 2003).

Moreover, the goal of teaching learning strategies is to help learners to consciously control how they learn so that they can be efficient, motivated, and independent language learners (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999). Self-regulation (SR) may be broadly defined as the effort made by students to deepen, monitor, manipulate, and improve their own learning (Corno & Mandinach, 1983). Accordingly, the main objective of the present study is to explore possible impacts of self-regulated learning strategies on the spoken communication of Iranian EFL learners. As such, the objectives of the study may be summarized as follows:

1. To find out the possible effects of self-regulated learning strategies awareness on speaking ability of Iranian EFL learners.

2. To explore the possible differences between male and female learners with regard to the use of self-regulated learning strategies and whether such differences are significant or not.

2. Literature Review

This section presents the previous research on self-regulated learning and the use of self-regulated learning strategies for the development of speaking skills.

2.1 Self-regulated learning

Self-regulation is a dynamic concept that involves those activities and thinking processes that learners can engage in and which are likely to change, rather than fixed traits that individuals either possess or lack. For example, self-regulation focuses on how learners actively manage their feelings and motivations to learn. Besides, self-regulation improves with practice: learners draw on previous experience to build a repertoire of beliefs and strategies that enhance learning. Pintrich (2000, p. 435) defines self-regulated learning (SRL) as “an active, constructive

process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and contextual features of the environment".

Self-regulation refers to the use of processes that activate and sustain thoughts, behaviors, and affects so that one could attain his goals (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). In other words, self-regulation refers to taking charge of our own learning by coordinating the thinking skills. Self-regulation has three components:

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that they can be efficient, motivated, and independent language learners (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999). Self-regulation (SR) may be broadly defined as the effort made by students to deepen, monitor, manipulate, and improve their own learning (Corno & Mandinach, 1983). In addition, SR includes factors such as resource management, goal setting, success expectations, and deep cognitive involvement (Trawick & Corno, 1995).

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- *Self-observation: Deliberate attention to specific aspects of one's own behaviors.*

- *Self-judgment: Comparing one's current progress toward a goal with a standard.*

- *Self-reaction: Making evaluative responses to judgments of one's own performance.*

Accordingly, it can be suggested that learners regulate their own learning by observing what they are able to do, then comparing what they have observed to a standard of some kind and making judgments about the quality of this performance, and finally making plans regarding what to do next.

2.1.1 Self-regulated learning strategies and speaking skills

Most studies on the field of speaking have focused on communication strategies which have been defined as a systematic technique employed by speakers to express their meaning when faced with some difficulty (Bialystok, 1990). According to Faerch and Kasper (1983) communication strategies are conscious plans used to solve problems in reaching a particular communicative goal. Besides, as stated by Stern (1983), such strategies are the techniques of coping with difficulties in communicating in an imperfectly known second or foreign language. Communication strategies bring a number of benefits to the communication process. For

instance, they can facilitate learners' communicative competence in a foreign language by focusing on interaction and interlocutors' negotiation behavior for coping with communication breakdowns, and thus enhancing the effectiveness of communication (Canale, 1983).

Communication strategies are investigated interactionally and psycholinguistically. The interactional view is based on the interaction process between language learners and their interlocutors and the negotiation of meaning (Tarone, 1980). As was mentioned earlier, Oxford's (1990) divides learning strategies into six categories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. Of these, compensatory strategies (e.g., talking around the missing word to aid speaking and writing) help the learner make up for missing knowledge especially when speaking a second language. According to Cohen (1998), compensatory strategies used when speaking and writing as communication strategies are intended only for language use.

Negotiation for meaning while using listening and speaking strategies is related to negotiating behavior in listening and speaking when language learners face problems during interaction to maintain the conversational goal with addressees (Nakatani, 2005). Yaman, Irgin and, Kavasoglu (2011) observed that Turkish EFL students prefer to use communication strategies and they ask for repetition when they do not understand what the speaker says. For example, they tend to use gestures when they have difficulty understanding. It was also noted that Turkish students pay attention to their rhythm and intonation during communication. Moreover, compensatory strategies are one of the strategy categorizations that are often employed by Turkish EFL students when communicating. On the other hand, compensatory strategies are used as achievement strategies to solve problems in the planning phase due to insufficient linguistics resources available to language learners (Yang & Gai, 2010).

Rashtchi and Khani (2010) examined whether metacognitive strategy instruction prior to oral tasks was more successful than conventional ways in improving EFL learners' oral proficiency. The participants were 56 students selected from a language institute in Tehran. They were as-

signed into control and experimental groups. The control group practiced oral tasks following a warm-up. In contrast, the experimental group practiced oral tasks after receiving metacognitive strategy instruction. The results showed a significant difference between the oral proficiency and metacognitive strategy use of the two groups. Besides, the experimental group outperformed the control group leading to the conclusion that instruction on metacognitive strategy use prior to oral tasks had a significantly greater impact on EFL learners' oral proficiency.

Teng (2011) studied the communication strategy use of 318 EFL college students at a university in Taiwan. The data were collected through a role-play task, a communication strategy questionnaire, and an interview guide. The questionnaire of communication strategies included 26 strategies of seven factors for coping with listening problems and 32 strategies of eight factors for speaking problems. The results of the study indicated that the participants used non-verbal strategies more frequently and adopted least often accuracy-oriented strategies. It was also found that the more proficient EFL learners used fluency-oriented strategies and negotiation for meaning while speaking more frequently than less proficient EFL learners.

Beckle (2013) studied the effects of enhancing self-regulated learning in the teaching of spoken communication on speaking efficacy and performances of second year students attending spoken and written communication lessons in the College of Business and Economics of Bahir Dar University. The students were randomly divided into a control group and an experimental group. The control group received no treatment while the participants received the treatment in the form of instruction on self-regulated learning. The results showed that 56% of the variance in speaking performance and 39% of the variance in speaking efficacy were accounted for by the self-regulated learning intervention. The qualitative analysis also indicated that the experimental group improved its speaking efficacy and performances. Generally, the findings showed that the experimental group outdid the control group in both speaking efficacy and performances.

3. Methodology

This section describes the methodology used in this study including the participants' selection, the data collection instruments, and the methods of data analysis.

3.1 Participants

The present study employed an experimental method in the sense that it made use of both experimental approaches and statistical analyses of quantitative data, including comparison of experimental and control groups, and formal systematic measurement of quantities such as the numerical values assigned to the speaking ability and learning autonomy of Iranian EFL learners. The participants in this study were selected through cluster random sampling in English language institutes in Shiraz, Iran. Accordingly, the participants included 40 Iranian intermediate EFL learners aged 18-20, attending speaking courses in four English language institutes in Shiraz. The participants were randomly divided into two groups: the control group with 20 learners (10 males and 10 females) and the experimental group including 20 learners (10 males and 10 females). The students in the experimental group were subjected to the self-regulated learning intervention by their teacher to get to know and use self-regulated learning strategies. In contrast, the control group students were taught the course using traditional approaches to speaking English with no use of self-regulated learning strategies (e.g. triggering change, searching for options, formulating a plan, implementing the plan, and assessing the plan's effectiveness). However, the content of the instruction was the same for both groups done by the same teacher for three hours per week for 14 consecutive weeks.

3.2 Instruments

The instruments used to collect the data were two comparable speaking tests based on IELTS full speaking test (British Council, 2014) in which the examiner asked general questions on familiar topics such as home, family, work, studies and interests, biography, hobbies and the like as a pre-test and post-test to measure the participants' speaking ability both before and after the study. The total scores of the tests for each student

were taken as a measure of their speaking performance. Besides, the Self-regulation Questionnaire (Brown, Miller, & Lawendowski, 1999) was distributed among both groups after the treatment. This questionnaire consisted of 63 items with a five-point Likert scale with the following scale points; strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain or unsure, agree, and strongly agree.

The collected data through the questionnaires and tests were analyzed by SPSS Software Package (Version 19) in order to answer research questions and test the research hypotheses. To do so, descriptive statistics, t-test, and Pearson correlation test were used to analyze the data.

4. Results

This section presents the results of data analysis performed to find out the impact of using self-regulated learning strategies on speaking ability of Iranian EFL learners and to determine possible differences between male and female learners with regard to their use of self-regulated learning strategies.

4.1 Impact of self-regulated learning strategies on iranian EFL learners' speaking ability

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the participants' scores on the speaking pre-test.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' Performance on the Pre-Test

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	Control	40	4.80	.853	.135
	Experimental	40	4.65	.802	.127

As can be seen in the above table, the mean score of the speaking ability for the participants in the control group is 4.80 out of a total score of 9 and the mean score of the participants in the experimental group is

4.65. This shows that although the participants in the control group slightly outperformed those in the experimental groups, both groups had a rather poor performance on the pre-test and they had a low level of speaking ability at the beginning of the study. However, as results of the paired samples t-test for the participants' scores on the speaking pre-test in Table 2 indicate, there are no significant differences between the mean scores of the participants in both control and experimental groups ($P > 0.05$), that is to say the participants in both groups had a similar performance on the speaking pre-test. Accordingly, the two groups had the same level of speaking ability at the beginning of the study and the participants were homogeneously assigned to both groups.

Table 2. Results of the Paired Samples t-Test for the Participants' Scores on the Speaking Pre-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
Post-test	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.030	.863	-.810	78	.420	-.150	.185	-.519	.219
Equal variances not assumed			-.810	77.704	.420	-.150	.185	-.519	.219

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the performance of the participants in the control group on the speaking pre and post-tests.

Table 3. Performance of the Control Group on the Pre-and Post-Tests

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PreCo	4.80	40	.802	.127
	PostCo	5.05	40	.932	.147

The mean scores of the speaking ability for the participants in the control group in the pre-test and post-test are 4.80 and 5.05, respectively, as shown in the above table. The participants' mean score on the post-test is higher than their mean score on the pre-test. So, it can be suggested that their speaking ability was slightly improved over the course

of the instruction. Nevertheless, as the results of the paired samples t-test shown in Table 4 indicate, there is no significant difference between the performance of the participants in the control group on the speaking pre- and post-tests ($P > 0.05$).

Table 4. Results of Paired Samples t-Test for Performance of Control Group on the Pre- and Post-Tests

Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper			
-.400	1.277	.202	-.808	.008	-1.981	39	.055

Now let's see how the participants in the experimental group performed on the speaking pre- and post-tests to find out if there are any differences between their performances. Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for the performance of the participants in the experimental group on the pre and post-tests.

Table 5. Performance of the Experimental Group on the Pre- and Post-Tests

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PreEx	40	4.65	.853	.135
PostEx	40	7.23	.897	.142

The mean score of the participants in the experimental group for the speaking ability pre-test is 4.65 and their mean score on the post-test is 7.23, indicating that they have a noticeably improved performance on the post-test than on the pre-test. Accordingly, there is a great difference in the speaking ability of the participants of the treatment group at the beginning and at the end of the study. Moreover, as Table 6 shows, the results of the paired samples t-test for performance of the participants

in the experimental group on the pre-and post-test indicate that there is a significant difference between the performances of this group on the pre- and post-test ($P > 0.001$).

Table 6. Results of Paired Samples t-Test for Performance of Experimental Group on the Pre- and Post-Test

Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper			
-2.58	1.357	.214	-3.009	-2.141	-12.005	39	.000

As the results of the paired samples t-test indicate, there is a considerable improvement in the speaking ability scores of the participants in the treatment group at the end of the study after they had received some instruction on how to employ and use self-regulated learning strategies speaking English. Table 7 shows a comparison of the performance of the participants of both groups on the speaking ability post-test.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' Performance on the Post-Test

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Control	40	5.05	.932	.147
	Experimental	40	7.23	.897	.142

As evident in the above table, the mean score of control group on the speaking post-test 5.05 and that of the experimental group is 7.23, showing a considerable difference between the mean scores of the two groups on the post-test. Besides, there is a significant difference between the performances of the two groups on the post-test ($P < 0.001$) as can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Results of Independent Samples t-Test for the Participants' Performance on the Post-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
Post-test	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.082	.775	-11.366	78	.000	-2.18	.205	-2.732	-1.918
Equal variances not assumed			-11.366	77.883	.000	-2.18	.205	-2.732	-1.918

In addition, the mean difference between the performances of the two groups on the post-test (2.18) indicates that the participants in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group on speaking ability test as they made a significant progress in the speaking ability during the course of instruction. Consequently, it can be concluded that such progress in speaking ability was due to the participants' awareness and the use self-regulated learning strategies.

4.2 The participants' awareness of self-regulated learning strategies

Table 9 shows the participants' total mean scores on self-regulated learning strategies in both groups based on their answers to the items in the Self-regulation Regulation Learning Questionnaire (Brown, Miller, & Lawendowski, 1999).

Table 9. Participants' Total Mean Scores on Self-Regulated Learning Strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control	40	164	223	200.22	12.171
Experimental	40	199	252	216.80	9.814
Valid N (listwise)	40				

In the above table, the total mean score of self-regulated learning strategies for the participants in the control group is 200.22 and the total mean score of the participants in the experimental group is 216.80. So, the participants in the experimental group employed self-regulated learning strategies more frequently to improve their speaking ability than

the participants in the control group. This may account for why the participants in the treatment group outperformed those in the control group on the speaking ability post-test. Table 10 presents the result of the independent samples t-test for groups' mean scores on self-regulated learning strategies.

Table 10. Independent Samples t-Test for Groups' Mean Scores on Self-Regulated Learning Strategies

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t*-test for Equality of Means						
Learning strategies	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.505	.224	-6.705	78	.000	-16.575	2.472	-21.497	-11.653
Equal variances not assumed			-6.705	74.647	.000	-16.575	2.472	-21.500	-11.650

As can be seen in this table, there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants in the control group and in the experimental group concerning the awareness and the use of self-regulated learning strategies ($P < 0.001$). In addition, as the value of the mean difference between the two groups suggests (16.575), the use of self-regulated learning strategies by the participants in experimental groups was significantly higher than the use of such strategies by the participants in the control group.

4.3 Male and female participants' awareness of self-regulated learning strategies

One of the objectives of the present study was to determine possible gender-related similarities and differences concerning the use of self-regulated learning strategies. Table 11 shows how male and female participants in this study employed self-regulated learning strategies to improve their speaking skills.

Table 11. The Use of SRL Strategies by Males and Females

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Males	40	205.95	13.745	2.173
Females	40	211.08	13.526	2.139

The mean score of using self-regulated learning strategies for the male participants is 205.95 and that of the female participants is 211.08. Therefore, the male participants reported less use of self-regulated learning strategies than the female participants. In contrast, the female participants used such strategies more frequently than the males. Table 12 shows the results of Mann-Whitney U Test for males' and females' use of self-regulated learning strategies.

Table 12. Results of Mann-Whitney U Test for Males' and Females' Use of Self-Regulated Learning Strategies

Mann-Whitney U	636.500
Wilcoxon W	1.456E3
Z	-1.574
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.115
a. Grouping Variable: gender	

As can be seen, the value of the significance level indicates that there is no significant difference between male and female participants' use of self-regulated learning strategies. Although the female participants reported that they used self-regulated learning strategies more frequently than male participants, the use of such strategies is not significantly different for both groups. Accordingly, gender might not be seen as a contributing factor in using self-regulated learning strategies.

5. Discussion

The findings of the study indicated that there was a significant difference between the performances of the participants in the experimental group on the speaking ability pre-and post-test, so a considerable progress was made in the speaking ability as a result of the knowledge on how to use self-regulated learning strategies to enhance their speaking ability. This is in line with the findings of Dreyer and Nel (2003) and in particular Anjomshoaa, Golestan, and Anjomshoaa (2012) who observed that the

learners who are aware of a range of efficient reading strategies can significantly enhance their reading ability. Besides, self-regulated learning strategies instructions in this study made the participants in the treatment group employed self-regulated learning strategies more frequently and this improved their speaking ability compared with the participants in the control group. The same finding is supported by Anjomshoaa, Golestan, and Anjomshoaa (2012) who noted that the learners who are aware of a range of efficient reading strategies can significantly enhance their reading ability. Concerning the males' and females' use of self-regulated learning strategies the present study also showed that in line with Noroozi and Birjandi's (1998) study, the female participants used such strategies more frequently than the males. Nevertheless, there was no significant difference between male and female participants' use of self-regulated learning strategies as observed by (Aliakbari and Hayatzade, 2008). This may suggests that gender is not an important variable in using self-regulated learning strategies.

6. Conclusion

As indicated by the results of this study, Iranian EFL learners who received treatment self-regulated learning strategies training used such strategies more frequently and significantly. Accordingly, EFL teachers can raise learners' awareness of such strategies and encourage them to employ them when performing language learning tasks especially for the purpose of improving their speaking skills as was evident in this study. Besides, EFL teachers and researchers are recommended to expose the students to such strategies for more extended time periods to see how such strategies can affect other learners' outcome such as foreign language learning motivation and autonomy. Finally, as gender was found not to be an important variable in self-regulated learning strategies awareness and use, EFL teachers can use such strategies extensively in their language classrooms equally for both male and female learners to enhance their learning process.

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