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## Research Paper

# The Effect of Strategy-based Instruction on Iranian EFL Learners' Learner Autonomy: Learners' Perceptions

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## Abstract

The current study was an effort to investigate the impact of strategy-based instruction (SBI) on Iranian tertiary learners' perception of autonomy. To this purpose, forty-eight English Translation students in a reading comprehension course at Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran, were selected and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Then, a package of nine 90-minute strategy-based instruction sessions was integrated into the experimental group, and the conventional method of reading was applied for the control group. After the intervention, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 12 learners of the experimental group. The results obtained from statistical data analysis revealed that SBI had a significant impact on Iranian learners' perception of autonomy. However, this impact was only observed in the *Activities component* of Learner Autonomy. The results of the interview indicated that the non-significant values of the other two components of Learner Autonomy could be explained by the culture-bound and context-dependent nature of Learner Autonomy. The results also showed that integrating SBI in English language classes raises learners' awareness and fosters their autonomy. The findings of this study highly recommend the development of more strategy-based courses in universities and the integration of SBI in various ELT classes in order to raise learners' awareness and foster Learner Autonomy.

**Keywords:** *Instructional design, learner autonomy, learners' perception, reading comprehension, strategy-based instruction*

## تأثیر آموزش راهبرد محور بردیدگاه دانشجویان ایرانی نسبت به خوداتکایی از دیدگاه دانشجویان زبان انگلیسی

در سه دهه گذشته، بحث‌های زیادی در مورد ابعاد مختلف خوداتکایی و مؤثر بودن آن در فرایند یادگیری زبان مطرح شده است. در این پژوهش تأثیر آموزش راهبرد محور بردیدگاه دانشجویان ایرانی نسبت به خوداتکایی مورد بررسی قرار گرفته است. برای این منظور، نظر دانشجویان در مورد ابعاد مختلف خوداتکایی از طریق یک پرسشنامه و یک مصاحبه نیمه ساختار یافته بررسی شد. 48 دانشجوی مترجمی زبان که درس خواندن و درک مطلب داشتند انتخاب شدند و بطور تصادفی در دو گروه آزمایش و کنترل قرار گرفتند. نه جلسه نود دقیقه‌ای آموزش راهبرد محور در گروه آزمایش گنجانده شد، در حالی که روش معمول خواندن برای گروه کنترل اعمال شد. پس از آموزش، یک مصاحبه نیمه ساختار یافته با 12 نفر از دانشجویان گروه آزمایش انجام شد. یافته‌ها نشان داد که آموزش راهبرد محور تأثیر بسزایی در خوداتکایی دانشجویان ایرانی دارد. اما این تأثیر معنادار تنها در مولفه مربوط به فعالیت‌های پرسشنامه مشاهده شد. معنادار نشدن مولفه‌های دیگر را میتوان به عوامل فرهنگی و زمینه‌ای ربط داد. براساس نتایج بدست آمده از این پژوهش، گنجاندن آموزش راهبردمحور در کلاسهای زبان انگلیسی دانشگاه که باعث افزایش آگاهی زبان آموزان و ارتقای خوداتکایی آنان می‌شود، پیشنهاد می‌گردد.

**واژگان کلیدی:** آموزش راهبرد محور، برنامه درسی، خوداتکایی فراگیران، دیدگاه دانشجویان زبان انگلیسی، مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب

## Introduction

Autonomy is a multidimensional concept and can be influenced by various factors such as the individual beliefs and ability, contextual and instructional factors, and culture. Despite the fact that a notable body of research has already investigated language strategies and LA in Iranian context, there is a gap in the literature between teachers' and learners' perceptions of LA, that might play a key role in the acceptance or rejection of the impact of Strategy-Based Instruction on EFL Learners' perception of autonomy. In addition, very few accounts of learners' beliefs about LA have been published in Iranian EFL context. Therefore, to explore the impact of the individual beliefs, contextual and instructional factors, and culture on LA, the current study was conducted.

Strategy-Based Instruction (SBI) is an approach that focuses on the strategic training by incorporating the learners into the regular language curriculum. Four steps as the core features of an SBI model are identified: (1) raising awareness, (2) modelling and presentation (3) supplying multiple practice opportunities, and (4) assessing the effectiveness of strategies and assigning them to new tasks (Benson, 2006; Burkert and Schwiendorfer, 2008).

Although many Iranian SLA experts have stressed the importance of strategies in enhancing autonomy, curriculum designers and material developers have not paid enough attention to implementing these strategies (Amirian and Azari Noughabi, 2017; Khademi, Mellati, and Etela, 2014). Smith (2008) believes that utilizing a Strategy-Based Instruction (SBI) might be an applicable solution to make language learners involve in and reflect on the process of learning.

As for the West, Benson (2016) believes that there has been a dramatic increase over the last decades in the number of studies that have focused on learning-to-learn, general skills and lifelong learning as the necessary conditions for the wide global educational climate. The cornerstone of these conditions, he states, is the concept of Learner Autonomy (LA) which after more than 30 years of practice and research on LA, remains a key theme in the field of English language teaching and is the focus of numerous books, conference presentations, and journals (Benson, 2011; Cotterall, 2000; Pawlak, 2017).

## Review of Literature

A good number of studies have been conducted on SBI and learners' beliefs regarding LA both in western countries and in Iranian EFL context. These studies have mostly focused on identifying the effect of learners' strategy training on LA (Benson, 2013; Course, 2017; Dislen, 2011; Horwitz and Gregersen, 2002) and learners' beliefs about LA in language learning field of study (Ng & Confessore, 2010; Nguyen and Gu, 2013; Ushioda, 2011). Riley (2009) asserts that language learners have beliefs about the essence of language and language learning which is shaped based on their experiences, attitudes, and expectations. Little (2009) state that beliefs affect students' characteristics and cause personal differences in educational settings. Yoshiyuki (2011) argues that learners' beliefs might be realistic or unrealistic, which needs to be dealt with appropriately by the teachers to create a cooperative and supportive environment in the classroom. Hozayen (2011) and Abdel Razeq (2014) emphasize the effect of the educational context and culture on readiness for autonomous learning and learners' perceptions. These investigators observe that most learners display little autonomy in their learning and in dealing with their favoured teachers who take responsibility for all classroom activities.

A growing interest in research on LA can be traced in Iran as well. This tendency has mostly focused on exploring the relationship between LA and various skills, strategies, and styles (Soodmand Afshar and Rahimi, 2014; Vaziri and Barjesteh, 2019), strategy used by autonomous and non-autonomous learners (Valizadeh, 2016), critical thinking, academic

achievement, and proficiency (Faramarzi, Elekaei, and Tabrizi, 2016), and training learning strategy (Khademi, Mellati, and Etela, 2014; Teimourash and Yazdani Moghaddam, 2018). However, rare effort has been made to investigate the effect of certain reading strategies-based interventions on LA in Iranian university context. In a study, Kavani and Amjadiparvar (2018) probed the effect of SBI on motivation, self-regulated learning, and reading comprehension ability of 55 Iranian EFL learners. They claimed that SBI significantly affect motivation, reading comprehension, and self-regulation of the learners. However, Karimi and Dastgoshadeh (2018) in their study could not find any significant effect of SBI on reading autonomy of Iranian undergraduate students. They emphasize that teachers need sufficient time for fostering LA among EFL learners.

### Research Questions

Based on what was stated above, the present study addressed the following research questions:

Q1. Does strategy-based instruction have any statistically significant impact on Iranian EFL learners' autonomy in terms of its components?

Q2. What are Iranian EFL students' perceptions towards LA?

### Method

#### Design

Due to the fact that a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data paves the way to attain more accurate and reliable findings, this study was conducted with a mixed methods design.

#### Teaching Materials

The materials taught to the participants comprised: 1) *Active Skills for Reading* (Anderson, 2014), 2) *More Reading Power* (Pearson, 2012), and 3) *Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test* (2003).

#### Framework of the Study

The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) framework proposed by Chamot et al. (1999) was adapted in this study for each SBI session. This framework includes cognitive strategies such as “guessing unfamiliar words from contextual clues”, “summarizing main ideas from a text”, “looking for logical relationships between paragraphs” and “trying to find out the organizational aspects of text” and metacognitive strategies such as “determining in advance what my reading purpose is and then reading the text with that goal in mind”, “looking for specific aspects of information and focusing on that information while reading the text”, “checking the effectiveness in strategy use”, “checking whether the goals for reading are accomplished”. CALLA consists of five basic stages of *preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and expansion*.

#### Participants

Two intact classes were selected through convenience sampling at Islamic Azad University, Islamshahr Branch, Tehran, Iran, to act as the participants of the study. They were 48 sophomore English Translation students sitting at reading comprehension course. They were randomly assigned to experimental (N= 27) and control groups (N= 21). Their first language was either Azari Turkish or Persian. Their age ranged from 19 to 30, including both males and females. They accepted to participate in the study voluntarily, and they were free to leave the study whenever they want without penalty.

## **Instruments**

To collect the required data, the following instruments were employed.

### **Learner Autonomy Questionnaire**

This questionnaire was adopted from Chan, Spratt and Humphreys (2002), was used as a pre-test and post-test. It contained 4 sections and 52 items. To be sure about its reliability, it was piloted with 20 learners of the same population. Based on the results of reliability analysis, 10 items were omitted. The revised version with the reliability index of .75 ( $r = .75$ ) and 42 questions was finally administered to the participants.

### **Semi-structured Interview**

To know more about the participants' beliefs about SBI and LA, a thirty-minute semi-structured interview was conducted with 12 students of the experimental group. The learners' experience, motivation, and attitudes towards SBI and its impact on LA were the focus of the interview. To certify the reliability of the data, two ELT experts checked the codes extracted from the interview.

### **Procedure**

To achieve the purposes of the study, along with regular reading activities, a package of nine 90-minute SBI sessions was integrated into the participants' (experimental group) reading course (Appendix). In the control group, the students did not receive explicit strategy training, but exactly the same curriculum and textbook as the experimental group was followed. Here the learners were exposed to the relatively more traditional, teacher-centred role of language instruction. There were conventional activities such as giving synonyms, antonyms or definitions for new words and paraphrasing some parts of the text. The participants were also told that they were part of the experiment.

The plan for the nine sessions in the experimental group was as follows:

In the first session, the instructor trained the students to improve their reading comprehension by learning to activate their relevant prior knowledge and experiences from long-term memory in order to extract and construct meaning from the text. The students learned about two types of reading materials: fiction and nonfiction. Besides, the instructor told them how to choose books for extensive reading and how to preview a book.

In the second session, the students learned about and practised ways to get information quickly from a text. The students were trained to preview the material before reading; they were taught how to quickly look at a passage to get the gist by focusing on the title, pictures, and making some questions. Moreover, based on the information delivered earlier, the teacher encouraged the students to make a prediction about what would happen in the next paragraph. In this way, they learned how to read actively.

In the third session, the teacher focused on skimming and scanning strategies and helped the students to get the gist or general idea and look for a specific piece of information and key words in a text. They were also trained to identify the purpose of reading. The students should have asked themselves: 'why am I reading?', and 'What do I want to know?'

In the fourth session, the students were trained to make inferences and fill the gaps by bringing together what was written in the text, what was unwritten in the text, and what was already known by the reader in order to extract and construct meaning from the text. Moreover, they got familiar with the questioning technique. They were practising dialogues with text (authors), peers, and teachers through self-questioning, question generation, and question answering.

In the fifth session, the instructor taught the students how to recognize text structure including: recognizing key parts of the sentences, identifying topic and supporting sentences, highlighting a sentence and analysing it for complexity, identifying words' parts of speech and their role in meaning, noticing transitional signals (or signal words) to understand how an idea relates to other ideas in the sentence or paragraphs, paying attention to pronouns and their references, identifying synonyms and related words.

In the sixth session, the students worked on five patterns that are commonly used in English writing that are: listing, sequence, comparison, problem-solution, and cause/effect. For this purpose, first, they were familiarized with certain words and the phrase that signal these patterns then; they practiced with a variety of exercises and examples.

In the seventh session, the instructor guided the students on how to choose a good dictionary, and how to get information from it appropriately. Moreover, the students learned and practised identifying word parts (root, prefixes, & suffixes) and what were collocations.

In the eighth session, the instructor directed the students on how to become a more effective vocabulary learner. For this purpose, she gave them some guidelines for choosing words and phrases to learn. The instructor also trained the students how to use contextual clues, structural clues, and word strategies to predict new words' meaning. He also emphasized that it was not necessary to check every individual word in a dictionary when they read a passage.

In the ninth session, the instructor highlighted some reasons for learning to read faster and gave some timed reading guidelines. The students read several passages and practised finding their reading rate and calculating their word per minute (WPM). In addition, this session was a practise session in which students practiced using all strategies they had learned. The instructor also talked about the importance of metacognitive strategies, strategies that are used for planning, monitoring, and evaluating a learning task. The students were directed to think about and had control over their reading process. The teacher equipped students with the skill of evaluating their comprehension by reflecting on how well they read. They were directed to find the point of difficulty by looking back or rereading the text. The learners recognized what they understood and what they did not. In this way, they modified the strategies to meet their own learning needs.

After the SBI sessions, in the tenth session, the LA questionnaire was administered to one session in both experimental and control groups. Finally, a 30-min semi-structured interview was conducted with 12 participants of the experimental group, and the obtained results were transcribed for further analysis.

## Results

To check the impact of SBI on Iranian EFL students' LA and to answer the first research question, one-way ANCOVA was conducted. The results of this quantitative analysis are represented in the following tables.

**Table 1**

*The Results of Checking for Homogeneity of Regression Slopes*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	9307.457 <sup>a</sup>	3	3102.486	74.061	.000
Intercept	1483.219	1	1483.219	35.407	.000
Grouping	392.849	1	392.849	9.378	.004
Reading. Pretest	7470.260	1	7470.260	178.326	.000
Grouping * Reading. Pretest	2.199	1	2.199	.052	.820



Error	1843.210	44	41.891
Total	151984.000	48	
Corrected Total	11150.667	47	
a. R Squared = .835 (Adjusted R Squared = .823)			

The results in Table 1 show that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was not violated. The only value that is very important in this table is the significance level of the interaction term  $p = .82$ .

**Table 2***Descriptive Statistics for ANCOVA*

Grouping	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Control	116.76	20.298	21
Experimental	135.44	12.482	27
Total	127.27	18.688	48

As the results in Table 2 show, the mean and standard deviation of two groups are (M= 135.44, SD=12.48) for Experimental group and (M= 116.76, SD= 20.29) for the control group. The results show a big difference among the two groups in their autonomy scores (the results of autonomy questionnaire) at the end of the study. Meanwhile, to ensure the participants' autonomy ability (N=48), ANCOVA was conducted (see Table 4).

**Table 3***The Results of ANCOVA*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Squared	Eta
Pre-autonomy	.842	1	.842	.003	.956	.000	
Grouping	4116.320	1	4116.320	15.072	.000	.251	

A one-way between-groups analysis of covariance was also conducted to compare the effect of SBI on Iranian EFL learners' LA. The independent variable was the type of group (experimental group under SBI & control group), and the dependent variable was the responses on the LA Questionnaire administered after the completion of the treatment. The covariate in this analysis was the participants' scores on the pre-treatment administration of the LA Questionnaire. Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate. After adjusting for pre-treatment scores, there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups on the post-treatment of the scores of LA Questionnaire,  $F(1, 45) = 15.072$ ,  $P = .000$ , partial eta squared = .251. To answer the sub-questions of the first research question, the researchers conducted MANOVA.

**Table 4***Descriptive Statistics for MANOVA*

Grouping	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
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Post. Responsibility. R	Autonomy.	Control	21.38	4.129	21
		Experimental	21.59	2.886	27
		Total	21.50	3.446	48
Post. R	Autonomy. Abilities.	Control	33.76	7.469	21
		Experimental	35.85	4.729	27
		Total	34.94	6.100	48
Post. R	Autonomy. Activities.	Control	65.38	9.526	21
		Experimental	78.00	8.494	27
		Total	72.48	10.888	48

Mean and standard deviation of three subcategories of autonomy questionnaire is presented in Table 4 above. As the results of analyses show, the biggest mean score is for activity. The results also show a significant difference among the three groups in their autonomy scores at the end of the study. Meanwhile, to ensure about the significance of the difference, MANOVA was conducted, (see Table 6).

**Table 5**

*The Results of MANOVA Analysis: Multivariate Tests*

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Squared	Eta
Grouping	Wilks' Lambda	.703	5.764 <sup>a</sup>	3.000	41.000	.002	.297	

a. Exact statistic

A one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of covariance was performed to investigate the effect of SBI on the components of LA Questionnaire. The dependent variable was subdivided into three subscales, i.e. responsibility, abilities, and activities scores. The independent variable was grouping (experimental group under SBI and control group).

**Table 6**

*The Results of MANOVA for Every Dependent Variable*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Grouping	Post-Autonomy. Responsibility	1.737	1	1.737	.139	.711	.003
	Post-Autonomy. Abilities	39.912	1	39.912	1.077	.305	.024
	Post-Autonomy. Activities	1454.462	1	1454.462	18.033	.000	.295

Preliminary assumption testing was conducted and no serious violations noted. There was a statistically significant difference between experimental and control group on the dependent variables,  $F(3, 41) = 5.76, P = .002$ ; Wilks' Lambda = .70; partial eta squared = .29. Using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .017, the researchers found that the only difference that reach statistical significance was *Activities*,  $F(1, 43) = 18.03, P = .000$ , partial eta squared = .29.

To explore the learners' beliefs about LA, the selected students from the experimental group took part in a semi-structured interview. The results of interview were transcribed and read several times and finally, the main themes were elicited. The main themes are presented below:

### **Learners' beliefs about the characteristics of the autonomous learner**

The participants expressed four basic characteristics for autonomous learners, including being responsible, being active, being motivated and using metacognitive strategies. Considering responsibility and independence, STU 10 believed that, "autonomous learners are self-reliant, independent, and improve their learning themselves. They do their best in every difficult or easy situation. They are responsible, disciplined, and punctual". STU 9 asserted that, "They stand on their own feet. They know what they want and how to reach it".

Regarding being active, the participants believed that autonomous learners engage themselves in various in and out of class activities, doing self-studies, and were daring enough to risk and experience new tasks. These characteristics were evident in the remarks made by STU 5: "They are taking part in the class and out of the class activities, asking help and guidance from their teachers. For them, just a clue from the teachers is enough".

Motivation was another basic theme elicited from the interviews. The participants believed that autonomous learners are highly motivated and follow their own goals. For example, STU 12 held that, "We are active and motivated, and follow our own goals. We are looking for more knowledge and do not limit ourselves to assignments assigned by the teacher. We risk and are not afraid of making mistakes".

The participants also emphasized that autonomous learners outline, manage, and evaluate their own learning process. For example, STU 1 stressing this point, said: "Autonomous learners know what they want, so they plan and manage their time and activities". STU 11 added that "They can identify, focus and find solutions for their own weak points".

### **Learners' beliefs about teachers' role in fostering LA**

Drawing upon the data gathered from the interview, three main categories within the theme of teacher's role; that is, guiding students, giving projects and assignments along with feedback, and encouraging learners to learn, were found. Most students highlighted the role of the teacher as a guide and facilitator, STU 5 asserted that "Although I can identify my goals, teachers should be there to help me... to guide me, since I don't have enough experience. I cannot learn without them".

Another interesting result was that the participants in the interview generally referred to giving assignments as a positive factor for improving autonomy. They believed that an external force should exist to push and lead them. STU 2 believed that "Giving more assignments and projects with appropriate feedback make students more responsible and autonomous. When students do research, they can learn more". Similarly, STU 10 commented, "The teachers should give assignments and ask us to study. Otherwise, most of us won't study".

The third theme recurring in the participants' answers was the motivational role of the teachers. For example, STU 12 commented, "Our teachers can motivate us. By their motivation and encouragement, we become determined and can find our way and reach our goals".

### **Learners' beliefs about effective factors for promoting LA**

The participants believed that knowing learning strategies, having consistency in the learning process, engaging in extracurricular activities and writing reflective journals would be useful for LA enhancement.



Concerning the role of knowing learning strategies for the learners' independence and autonomy, STU 9 asserted that "If we know strategies, we won't be dependent on teachers. We know how to study and read for ourselves". STU 7's comment was also typical: It will be more useful if teachers teach strategies in the class, separately with too much practicing. Learning reading strategies motivated me to read more. I feel I am more independent. Knowing strategies helps me study and read appropriately. It gives me awareness and self-confidence.

Another factor for boosting LA, according to the participants, was consistency and perseverance. STU 11 pointed out that, "If we have regular practices with planning, we will become more independent". Extracurricular activities are another recurring theme that emerged from the data. As STU 2 mentioned, "Students who have out of class activities are more responsible and less dependent. Participating in different activities shows their interest to reach their goals".

### Discussion

The above-stated results of the current study proved that Iranian English translation students' overall LA has been fostered by the interventional program. In contrast to Karimi and Dastgoshadeh (2018) and in line with Kavani and Amjadiparvar (2018), the results of the study revealed the significant impact of SBI training on fostering Iranian EFL learners' LA. Generally, the results confirmed the claim of a number of researchers who consider skills and strategies as key features of autonomy (Cotterall, 2000; Little, 2007).

The statistical analysis of the impact of SBI training on LA subscales revealed that only one of the three components of LA; that is, the *Activities* component, was significantly fostered. The *Responsibilities and Abilities* subscales were not remarkably altered. Based on the quantitative results and the results of the interview, it can be inferred that SBI was an effective instruction in promoting the learners' extracurricular activities. The willingness of the participants to take part in various activities such as reading different materials, listening to and watching different English programs, working cooperatively with friends, and planning their own studies demonstrated that strategy training promoted the learners' autonomy noticeably. It is interesting to note that, the participants considered *the activities* (one of the subcategories of the questionnaire) as one of the effective factors for boosting LA. This is compatible with several studies which concluded that learners considered themselves capable of taking responsibilities for certain tasks such as out-of-class activities regardless of their inclination to accept teacher's authority and power. The obtained results also support Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) claim that, "SBI encourages students to find their own pathways to success, and thus it promotes LA and self-direction". Besides, they give emphasis to Kuchah and Smith's (2011) view that activities which are generally initiated by students can make considerable contributions to LA.

In addition, it is important to note that cultural and educational aspects of the learning context might be possible explanations for the non-significant values of the other two components of LA. This confirms what Benson (2006) and Schmenk (2005) argued about the contextual and cultural dependence of the notion of autonomy and the specific educational contexts and cultural factors of Iranian EFL contexts. Another explanation might be related to the nature of the questions of these two components, meaning that most items in the *Responsibilities and Abilities* sections of the LA questionnaire are related to the concept of choice and decision making (e.g. decide the objectives of the course, choose materials, choose learning objectives, etc.). In fact, the educational system in Iran does not permit the students to decide about how to learn and what to learn, from the early stages of learning, and they aren't taught to make decisions. The ministry of education always predetermines the educational goals, educational materials, and assessment methods. Interestingly, unlike some prominent studies that

highlighted the importance of decision-making for being autonomous (Benson, 2016; Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012), decision-making was rarely referred to as an outstanding characteristic of the autonomous learners by the participants of the current study. Actually, Iranian students' beliefs reflect their sociocultural and educational experiences. It is not logical to expect the learners, who are trained under a teacher-centered approach, believe in their abilities and decide on how to learn and what to learn.

Regarding Learners' beliefs about teachers' role in fostering LA, three main categories were identified, that is, guiding students, giving projects and assignments along with feedback, and encouraging learners to learn. It is noteworthy that the participants' tendency was towards learner-centered approaches, and they all agreed that teachers should be present to scaffold. The role of teachers and their guidance in fostering autonomy in language learners have been emphasized in several studies (Ghobain, 2020; Iamudom and Tangkiengsirisin, 2020). In fact, through scaffolding, the learners are able to 'self-regulate' and take part in the activities more on their own terms (Burkert & Schwienhorst, 2008).

Finally, the students believed that knowing learning strategies, having consistency in the learning process, engaging in extracurricular activities and writing reflective journals would be useful for LA enhancement. This view is in line with Chan's (2003) claim, who argues that developing LA is a steady and long-lasting process, and it takes some persistence and skills to reach the ultimate stage of this process. Little (2007) similarly reasons that there is a natural connection between the desire to act independently, positive attitudes, and the level of persistence. A higher level of comprehension may happen when the learners are autonomous and utilize various skills, strategies, and background knowledge.

### Conclusions

The findings of the current study demonstrated that the interventional program fosters learners' autonomy--an important goal in education. However, from among the three dimensions of SBI framework, only one dimension (*Activities*) had a significant impact on Iranian learners' autonomy. It was revealed that while the EFL learners have positive attitudes towards LA and show a reasonable level of understanding of different aspects of this concept, they face some challenges that are mostly context- and culture-bound. The findings suggest that the enhancement of LA is a culture-dependent and long-term process which requires major reforms in the educational system. In fact, the exam-based system that concentrates on just knowledge and memorization needs to be replaced by a skill-based one. So, the researchers suggest that establishing strategy-based courses might transfer the responsibility from teachers to students, which is the ultimate aim of LA.

To achieve this goal, teachers undoubtedly play an important role in shifting students' attitudes towards autonomy. In fact, they are mediators between theory and practice, and facilitators of autonomy in varied contexts of practice. Although the change of attitudes and thinking must occur within a learner, it would not be achievable without the teacher's directions. It can be inferred from the findings of the present study that instructors along with strategy training can set the ground for the learners to voice their opinions, their complaints, their weaknesses, and their expectations. This can be done through various reflective activities such as writing reflective journals and having regular critical discussions in the classroom. By doing so, teachers can raise learners' awareness and lead them towards autonomy.

A final word is that since LA is a multi-dimensional concept, more in-depth studies are required to address all aspects of the construct in different contexts and cultures. Moreover, further studies should be conducted to investigate the impact that SBI training has on other

important factors in language learning such as motivation, various skills and sub-skills, critical thinking, self-efficacy, and attitudes.

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**Appendix***Weekly 90-minute Sessions of SBI*

<b>Session</b>	<b>Reading Strategy</b>
1	Activating background knowledge, extensive reading
2	Previewing the text, predicting
3	Skimming, scanning, and identifying the purpose of reading
4	Making inferences, questioning technique
5	Recognizing text structure: key parts of the sentences, topic and supporting sentences, signal words or phrases, pronouns, synonyms & related words
6	Identifying patterns commonly used in English writing: listing, sequence, comparison, problem-solution, cause/effect
7	Vocabulary strategies: making good use of dictionary learning new words from reading word parts collocation
8	Vocabulary strategies: guessing meaning from context/structural clues recognizing references
9	Improving reading fluency and reading rate (WPM), focusing on metacognitive strategies: planning, monitoring, and evaluating reading comprehension