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## Exploring EFL Teachers' and Students' Perceptions in Iranian Universities and Institutes on the Feasibility of Teaching Communication Strategies

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Raziyeh Behroozian\*

Ph.D., Lecturer at Nabie Akram University, Tabriz, Iran

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Research Expert, Center of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Tabriz, Iran

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### Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the possibility of teaching communication strategies perceived by EFL teachers and students in their classrooms. The participants of the study included 20 pre-intermediate English language teachers and 110 of their students in three selected universities and one institute in Tabriz, Iran. The literature review shows that teaching communication strategies are still surrounded by controversy. In this mixed methods study, data were gathered from a modified questionnaire and a structured interview. Tiwaporn Kongsom's (2016) taxonomy was adapted in designing a questionnaire steered at eliciting students' and teachers' perceptions about CSs teachability and teachers' actual CSs teaching activities and practices. The results of the present study showed that after receiving 12 weeks communication strategy instruction and through comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test, it is obvious that students performed better on the post-test than the pre-test. Thus, strategy teaching was the factor of progress. The findings of the qualitative and quantitative phases revealed that teaching CSs are possible and teachers' and students' hold positive perception towards the possibility of teaching and usefulness of CSs and the instruction of specific CSs improved the students' oral performance and engaged them in oral tasks.

**Keywords:** Teachers' communication strategies, ESL/EFL settings, classrooms interaction, oral communication strategies, pre-intermediate students' perceptions

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### INTRODUCTION

Communication is an inevitable part of L2 learning and English language is the most prevalent communication tool in international situations and in the contemporary globalized world. Communication is a device by which the different needs, opinions and beliefs of teachers and students are transmitted to each other in order to make cooperation and achieve the learning results.

Communication affects all individual interaction activities. Brown (2001, p.165) links interaction to communication, saying, "...interaction is, in

fact, the heart of communication: it is what communication is all about". Communication is beyond and further than speaking. Speaking is a significant element of communicating, but it is not the only instrument. Pratama and Zainil (2020) studied about EFL learners' communication strategies related to speaking performance. They found that it is good for the students to know about communication strategies so that they might solve communication problems in different conditions. In line with the communicative approach, Newton and Nation (2020) propose that an effective approach to teaching speaking should focus on both accuracy and fluency development as well as an integration with

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\*Corresponding Author's Email:

*behroozyan216@gmail.com*

other language skills. Thus, the essence of communication is to achieve effective learning outcomes that can be facilitated by specific strategies or techniques.

The subject of communication strategies and their teachability have been a crucial topic (Chan, 2021) in SLA. Renandya, W.A., & Nguyen, T.T.M. (2023) believe that it is widely accepted in SLA research that L2 development depends on the amount of input that learners receive as well as opportunities they have for output (understood as exchanges of meanings, not repetitive drills without understanding). Strategies for L2 oral communication are commonly known as 'communication strategies' (hereafter CSs). Generally, CSs are the means used to fill the gaps in communication and CS use involves the decision of the speakers in an effort to communicate to achieve their communicative goal (Bui, 2012). Therefore, to prevail over the obstacles of speaking and facilitate learning results, the student requires some strategies, so communication strategies are techniques that learners use to master linguistic shortages and solve their speech problems in the L2 to support communication. CSs keep the communication channel open (Dobao & Martínez, 2007).

Consequently, communication strategies and whether they can be taught or not, have turned into a major topic for all foreign language learners and teachers to facilitate learners' oral performance in English and to enhance the usefulness of their communication (Littlemore, 2003). The present study aimed to explore the Iranian pre-intermediate EFL teachers' and students' perceptions about the possibility of CSs in their classrooms.

### Statement of the problem

L2 communication involves not only speaking, interpreting and listening but also writing, translating and reading (Guo, 2010). Most of the problems that can be mentioned for Iranian university students are that language teaching has traditionally been aimed at developing linguistic competence and the strategic competence is largely ignored by language textbooks and teachers, although it is of vital importance for English language students.

Many Iranian students are unable to communicate in English when they finish secondary school (Altaieb, 2013; Diaab, 2016) or even when they graduate from university (Altaieb & Omar, 2015). This indicates that students' oral performance is disappointing (see, e.g. Cahyono & Widiati, 2008; and Rachmawaty & Hermagustiana, 2010). Arguably, difficulties in communication can be associated with the learners themselves, the teaching approaches, the curriculum, and the background to which they belong (Al Hosni, 2014).

The third problem, teachers use Persian language when teaching in Iranian universities and schools (Alhmali, 2007; Shihiba, 2011; Alsied & Ibrahim, 2017), follow the Grammar Translation Method, avoid listening and speaking activities to save classroom time (Orafi, 2008), in other words, class usually lack audio and visual facilities (Al Moghani, 2003), overuse error correction and dominate the classroom talk (Al-dabbus, 2008), and overemphasis accuracy at the expense of fluency (Diaab, 2016). The attempts to overcome these gaps are described as communication strategies. Thus, "the learner needs to acquire not only a repertoire of linguistic items, but also a repertoire of strategies for using them in concrete situations" (Littlewood, 2000).

The findings of this study are important from two aspects. Theoretically, CSs are significant and one of the predictors of success for language learning (Aliakbari & Karimi, 2009; Pawlak, Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; Peng, 2019), and in second language acquisition (SLA) (Wei, 2011), which enable languages to be learnt better and faster (Celce-Murcia, 2008).

It revises additional evidence for strategy-based teaching and speaking ability in L2. A holistic approach to teaching speaking implies that it is not about practicing language "doing" but that it "need[s] to be conceptualized as structured and supported learning opportunities for developing these various components of speaking competences" and to raise students' awareness about them (Goh & Burns, 2012, p.53).

Second, pedagogically, this study uses an alternative method of teaching CSs to develop the oral ability and conversation of Iranian

students. Furthermore, the findings of this may be useful for raising awareness among curriculum designers in equipping and adjusting the pedagogical system in Iran in the future of the need to consider CSs when designing or revising the CLT syllabus books. Therefore, incorporating up-to-date academic and methodological developments in the field with teaching practice is essential for the future development of the English teaching profession in Iran (Mohamed, 2014). Thus, the findings of this study would provide valuable and rich insights in this field. Consequently, the total purpose of this article is as follows:

To identify strategies that are useful and teachable for EFL students.

To investigate the activities that teachers prefer to use in teaching CSs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Reviewing the literature of earlier study concerned with how human beings relate to communication strategies and the relationship between their perceptions and the reported frequency of using the communication strategies. For example, initially, at the beginning of the 1970s, the concept of communication strategies was launched on the acquisition of second language and has still attracted the attention of researchers. In 1972, Selinker coined the term of 'communication strategy' "as one of the five central processes involved in L2 learning" (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997, p. 175).

Communication strategies maximize the L2 acquisition and provide opportunities to the learners reaching mutual agreement and in sustaining the interaction (Ting and Phan, 2008; Spromberg, 2011; Rodriguez and Roux, 2012; Sukirlan, 2014; & Daly and Sharma, 2018). Many empirical studies in ELT classrooms, conducted in a variety of contexts including a few recent studies in the Iran world, show that various benefits can be gained from communication strategies teaching (CST). Previous research on teachers' communication strategies in classroom interaction covered a wide range of areas in the field of applied linguistics from teaching TEFL, teaching English as a second language (TESL) to L2 acquisition and learning. Furthermore, Hmaid (2014) and Tarhuni (2014)

have studied the impact of teaching CSs and LLs, respectively, as part of language learning in post-secondary schools.

During this decade, the process of training CSs through classroom teachers has transformed the learning process from traditional to modern strategies and methods that increases real-life communication. Teacher 'creates classroom activities in which students must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies, and work to avoid communication breakdown'. Additionally, a study was performed on using discussion-based technique in EFL settings in Iran (Fatehi Rad & Sahragard, 2019).

Indeed, in recent decades, the classrooms of 21st century are different from the classrooms of the 20th century (spring, 2005). It is essential to highlight that University teaching has experienced a substantial change in recent years. Milienos *et al.* (2021) point out that higher education members have faced a "moving process," which means that professors moved from a teacher-centered to a student-centered model in which the student is the leading actor. Tadesse & Khalikd (2022) analyzed the university system's "effectiveness universe". They consider university teaching an academic activity involving extensive practice, experiences, professional skills, and discipline.

Therefore, according to Khezrab, T., Raissi, R., & Hedayat, N. (2023), different studies in Iran have investigated the students' and teachers' perceptions about using strategy and technology (Ahmad, 2019; Bahri & Mahadi, 2016; Boridani, 2019; Bozorgian, 2019; Daltio *et al.*, 2018; Davidovitch & Yavich, 2018; Jafari & Chalak, 2016, as cited in Hashemifardnia *et al.*, 2018; Rahmani, 2017).

A vast amount of evidence about learners' CSs is available in the literature, with the similar and contradictory findings reflecting the complexity and sensitivity of CSs with regard to the classroom contexts, which suggests a need for more in-depth. Accordingly, exploring learners' use of CSs for the negotiation of meaning and maintaining interaction is vital for deducing the pedagogical implications of classrooms (Nakatani, 2010).

Considering the different points of the research perspectives, along with the respect to the

teachability of CSs as the purpose of this study, little research has investigated the role of teachers' and students' perceptions of the use of CSs in the classroom. Very few teachers are aware of the value of strategy use in developing interactive skills for oral communication in the English as Second Language (ESL) classroom (Lam, 2004; Lam & Wong, 2000). In view of this, the present study aims to gauge perceptions of Iranian ESL pre-intermediate universities and institutes participants toward the teachability of CSs in the use of strategies for oral communication tasks.

### **Perception and its definition**

In discussing on the teachability of CSs to learn language, Garrett, (2006) defines perception as one of the universal and pervasive structures with regard to today's social psychology in which perceptions act a key role in understanding social behaviors and opinions. The act or knowledge of perceiving, or a mood of understanding reality by means of the senses or of the mind; cognition. The cognitive component comprises beliefs, values, and thoughts (Garrett, 2010; Hohenthal, 2003; Pickens, 2005).

Whereas a significant number of research has been done in the field of teaching communication strategies, the concept of belief has been ignored and if students' beliefs are of particular interest; teachers' perceptions have not been very fortunate in stimulating the interest and research of scholars. They and what they think are again important in everything that occurs in the classrooms.

### **Definitions of CSs**

A review of CS definitions reveals that CS researchers have not yet reached a consensus on a definition of CSs. Selinker first used the concept of "communication strategies" (CSs), it has been the subject of much discussion but also of little consensus as to its correct. It can be said that CSs are defined differently as; "ways of achieving communication by using language in the most effective way" (Bygate, 2000, p. 115); "tactics taken by L2 learners to solve oral communication problems" (Lam, 2006, p. 142); "CSs were regarded as language learners' problem-solving behavior in the process of target language communication.

Communication strategies are attempts to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the second-language learner and the linguistic knowledge of his or her interlocutor in real communication situations (Cervantes & Rodriguez, 2012). Finally, Communication strategies are necessary to successfully communicate and deal effectively in the target language and to address problems or breakdowns, and to remain active in communication (Chou, 2018). As a result, in the present study, CSs are referred to as "strategies which a language user employs in order to achieve his intended meaning on becoming aware of problems arising during the planning phase of an utterance due to his/ her linguistic shortcoming".

### **Classification of CSs**

The theoretical and empirical research on oral communication strategies taxonomies provided a detailed frame for analyzing how language learners manage to carry on meaning and to continue communication. Many researchers have tried to classify them in various taxonomies or in purposeful clusters. The types of classifications presented in the literature differ fundamentally in general classification principles rather than in specific strategies (Tseng, Dörnyei, & Schmidt, 2006). For the purpose of this study, the researchers adapted Kongsom's (2016) taxonomy of CSs, who classified them on the method of problem management.

Kongsom's (2016) taxonomy consisted of five main categories. It was used as the basis for the selection of the CSs to address in the questionnaire. From among 16 CSs, 11 strategies were selected to be included in the questionnaire items to solve communication problems. This view supported by many researchers (Kongsome, 2016; Rossiter, 2003; Lam, 2004; Wen, 2004; Nakatani, 2005; Le, 2006), who maintained that these CSs are very useful for students to solve their communication problems.

### **Teachability of Communication Strategies Research**

The review of the related literature on the issue of CSs teachability showed that teaching CSs has been controversial over the last decades.

There are broadly two different schools of thought to research on CS (Kasper & Kellerman, 1997; Yule & Tarone, 1997). One approach or ‘Cons’ proponents focus on the cognitive processes (e.g., Al-Murtadha, 2019; Peng, 2019) believe that cognitive processes are unaffected by instruction and that CS are therefore not teachable. They disagreed to link CSs and educational issues.

The other approach or ‘Pros’ supporters, focuses on the linguistic expressions used in CS in identifying strategy types. The proponents of this approach (e.g., Rastegar and Mirzadi Gohari 2016; Kongsom, 2016; Konishi & Tarone, 2004; Maleki, 2010; Alibakhshi, 2011) advocate the necessity to teach these linguistic expressions needed for effective L2 communication language use. They recommend the pedagogic usefulness of teaching CSs. This is because, teaching CSs can be a substitute for the absence of natural settings of language use in the EFL context (Scattergood, 2003) and can also aid teaching in a classroom affected by the psycholinguistic problems of the students like anxiety (Jones, 2004).

Nonetheless, CSs used within language classroom interaction can contribute to the learning process (Mariani, 2010; Rohani, 2013). Hinkel (2005) put that a considerable number of researchers (the Pros), support and recommend the teaching of CSs to language students (Dewaele, 2005; Nakatani, 2005; Lam, 2005; and Alibakhshi, 2011). The present investigation adopts the latter stance that, through instruction and communicative practice, L2 learners’ strategic competence is likely to develop.

### **Responding to the Claims and Suspicions of ‘Cons’ & Advocating of CSs teachability**

According to Dornyei (2005), one of possible reasons for the controversy is that most of the arguments on both sides are based on indirect evidence. The Cons, who stand against teaching CSs, compared the L2 function with L1 performance and discovered some resemblances between them (Lee et al., 2019; Sato & Dussuel, 2021). In response to the Cons researchers’ claim, it can be stated that, while there are certain common features between L1 and L2 communication, there are also some

differences between the two languages (Faucette, 2001).

Furthermore, in answer to Cons second claim that CSs are most likely to be achieved in actual conversation and not developed in class. Pros researchers responded that CSs learning fills the interval between the class and communication in actual life, and helps the students to bridge the gap between the two situations, improves students’ consciousness with the use of their language resources to reduce communication difficulties and, as a result of teaching, an increase in the use of CSs increases and helps to the student’s security, self-confidence (especially that of low achievers) and motivation to communicate (Gallagher Brett, 2001, p. 54).

Namaziandoost, Ehsan, Imani, Ava (2020) investigated the effects of Self-Repetition and Comprehension Check Strategies on Iranian students’ speaking fluency. Both of them enhanced students’ speaking fluency. The findings of the study demonstrated that teaching CSs is “pedagogically effective” (583) and that it fosters the use of interactional strategies (cf. 583). In terms of interaction skills, research has shown that ELF speakers manage to successfully communicate their meaning and establishing rapport with their interlocutors by employing various interactional resources, shared non-native speaker status and negotiation strategies (e.g. Mugford, 2021; Taguchi & Yamaguchi, 2021). Moreover, Wong & Waring, (2021) stated that in interactional talk, learners may benefit from interactional features and conversational strategies but textual tasks do not teach conversational strategies.

Kongsom (2016) focused on the effect of CSs’ training on English speaking ability. His study provides more empirical evidence that the instruction of CSs is possible and desirable among second or foreign language learners. Teaching specific CSs may help develop learners’ strategic consciousness, strategic ability and solve their oral communication problems.

Kong (2006) and Wang (2008) also found that the CS training had a positive effect on helping students to overcome communication barriers, enhancing their confidence in spoken English communication and improving the efficiency of their spoken English study.

Although numerous empirical studies and academic writings have been conducted on the CSs employed in educational situations, but the studies are still far from enough and they might not portray real representations of the issue being investigated. Hence, in line with the purposes of the present study and in order to fill the gap in the literature to obtain a more comprehensive picture, the following research questions were formulated:

*RQ1. Which strategies do EFL learners find more useful and teachable in their classrooms?*

*RQ2. What activities do teachers prefer to use in teaching CSs?*

## METHODOLOGY

Mixed-methodologies are considered to be the appropriate research designs in social sciences and particularly in L2 acquisition (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). According to Ahmed Frewan (2015, P.68), one of the important characteristics of the research methodology is that, "You always need to justify your choice of a certain methodology". Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in this study to collect empirical data from the pre-intermediate level students' questionnaire and teachers' structured interviews.

### Participants

The data were collected from twenty teachers (7 males, 13 females) and one hundred and ten pre-intermediate students (55 males, 55 females), during the first semester in the academic year 2019-2020. All participants were male and female, aged 17 to 48. The study population took part from three different universities and one private language institute in Tabriz– a city in the northwest of Iran. Universities and an institution include Tabriz National's University, Islamic Azad University of Tabriz, Azarbaijan Shahid Madani University and Top private Language Institute.

### Instruments

A language proficiency test, a questionnaire and an interview were three instruments used as the main modes of data collection. The English language proficiency test and the questionnaire

were used for quantitative part to collect data from student participants and the interview was used for qualitative part to collect data from the teacher participants of the study.

### Preliminary English Test (PET)

The PET test was used in this study to make sure that the students were not significantly different in terms of their general language proficiency. Therefore, the main reason for ensuring homogeneity in terms of overall language proficiency was to know whether each of the students had English skills and were equally the same in terms of language proficiency.

### Questionnaire

A questionnaire was used as an instrument to elicit Iranian students' perceptions about the possibility of teaching CSs and their usefulness. The questionnaire was made in accordance with Nakatani's (2006) Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI), Hamid's (2014) adapted version of Lam's (2006) Strategy Questionnaire, Alahmed's (2017) Strategy Questionnaire, and Kongsom's (2016) Communication Strategy Questionnaire.

It was designed with 29 items five-point Likert scale for 11 CSs and one free talk item. Among the 16 CSs that can be used to solve communication problems, the items targeted 11 of these strategies, which were defined in Kongsom's (2016) taxonomy. The proposed classification was distributed into five main categories of CSs based on an Alahmed scale (2017). The designed questionnaire was piloted with 34 learners randomly selected from the same population in order to check the internal reliability of the items and also to detect any problems with the items and apply any necessary modifications and revisions.

### Structured Interviews

The present study employed a structured interview to give the researcher more control over the subject matter being investigated. The interview was pilot tested with four English teachers (two males and two females) with similar characteristics to the teacher participants of the study.

In this qualitative task, each of the twenty teachers interviewed by the researcher and the

study took place in the real world of teachers. The characteristics of a qualitative research approach are that it describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 395).

The structured interview consisted of six open-ended and there was freedom and flexibility during interview. The questions were in English and asked about the teachers' ideas and beliefs about the possibility of teaching CSs, their usefulness, and activities needed to teach the students. It was administered in written form and by hand (using pen and pencil) as it was found to be easier and preferred by most of the participants than oral and face to face method.

### Procedures

From among 26 teachers who taught in three universities and one private institute in Tabriz, 20 teachers (7 males and 13 females) accepted to cooperate with the researcher and personally participate in the study. The teacher participants were requested to administer the proficiency test and the questionnaire to their classes in the subsequent term and integrate the teaching of selected CSs in their conversation classes as part of their teaching syllabus.

At the outset of the term, the English proficiency test was administered to the students in several classes. The total number of students who took the test and returned their papers was 153. The test had the purpose of identifying the learners' general English proficiency and select a homogeneous sample by excluding those who scored beyond the range of one standard deviation around the mean score of the group. The analysis of the test results showed that 110 scores were within the homogeneity range and 43 scores were either too high or too low, thus excluded from the later stages of data collection.

Before the administration of the questionnaire, their reliability and validity were checked. Reliability is primarily concerned not with what is being measured but with how well it is being measured. The reliability of the questionnaire was examined through their pilot administration to a group of 34 students from the same population. Cronbach  $\alpha$  as an indicator of internal consistency of the questionnaire

items before and after the CS instruction was found to be .79 and .83, respectively.

The next step was the administration of the questionnaire in two phases; at the beginning of the term as pre-test and at the end of the term as the post-test to the selected students. In first phase, all students took pre-test in order to measure their CSs knowledge and to know their perceptions on strategy use prior to the treatment.

In treatment phase, all the students received specific CSs instruction for 12 sessions, every session for 60 minutes. They were instructed on the basis of strategy instruction cycle of Dornyei (2005) and Kongsom's (2016) model was used for teaching CSs. This model distributed into five CSs categories based on Alahmed's (2017) scale namely, positive self-solving, interactional, time-gaining, non-taught, and non-verbal CSs.

For first step, teacher gave the names of eleven CSs for models and instructed how to apply CSs while they encounter problems during conversation and then encouraged the students to activate their comprehension by recognizing the types of strategies in the passage under study. Then, teacher provided opportunity for students to use these strategies. Furthermore, they were prepared examples of how CSs are employed in real life environment. By the end of the study, the students' perceptions toward the teachability and usefulness of CSs was tested again through administration of the post-tests.

Finally, the structured interview was administered in written form to the teacher participants. The interview used in the study had six free response questions and was given to the teacher participants in written form at the end of the term, so the teachers had a chance to comment and provide their opinion.

The respondents were first given the purpose of the study and then were asked to answer the interview questions truthfully without any bias. They were made aware that if they do not answer truthfully the whole study will be negatively affected and hence become invalid. Meanwhile, students responded an open-ended question in the questionnaire.

### Data Collection

The main modes of data collection consisted of a language proficiency test, a questionnaire and

an interview. The research processes comprised two phases of data collection and analysis. In the first phase, data were collected through questionnaire, and interviews.

Students' performances in applying the communication strategies were collected from students' responses in the questionnaires. The questionnaire data was collected for the first time before any instruction about CSs and students were requested to write down their answers on a questionnaire at the start of the term. And the second set of data was collected after students were trained for twelve sections. The results of pre-test and post-test scores in the questionnaire were statically compared with each other.

Structured interview as qualitative research is an inquiry where researchers collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected people in their natural settings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 395). According to the nature of the open-ended questions in a question (item 30) of questionnaire and in interviews, in order to gain mindful responses, the questions were given to the students and teachers in written form in English and were asked about their ideas and beliefs regarding the possibility of teaching CSs, their usefulness, and activities needed to teach them. Some of the interviewees completed the interview questions in their home and after several follow ups interview responses, the researcher succeeded to collect all the information.

## Data Analysis

### Analysis of quantitative data

Analysis literary work means "breaking down of a topic or object into its component parts and understanding how those parts fit together" (Hammond, M., & Wellington, J., 2013, p. 9). Quantitative statistical analysis was carried out through mean scores, frequency, and percentile distribution and was followed by a descriptive analytical procedure to show the pattern of strategies used by the students individually.

The data analysis of this study was performed in two stages. In the experimental phase of the study, the descriptive statistics were found for the English proficiency test scores, pre-test, and post-test questionnaire results. In

the first stage and in terms of proficiency test, the analysis of the PET test results showed that 110 scores were within the homogeneity range and 43 scores were either too high or too low, thus excluded from the later stages of data collection.

### Analysis of qualitative data

In the second stage, analysis of data obtained from interviews was performed by identifying common ideas in the respondents' descriptions of their experiences and the initial transcriptions were developed based on the theoretical frame and the available data collected from the participants. So, the relevant information broken down into phrases or sentences, further, grouped into categories that reflect the various aspects of meanings. Then, the researchers analyzed and merged coded data to create topics through separating and labeling them. As Marais, Lourens & Alberts (2004) stated the focus here will be on the interpretation and consideration of the results and the drawing of inferences, all of which form part of the pursuit of research to the problem (p. 5-6).

For a qualitative question such as free question in the questionnaire (item 30), the researcher performed a qualitative analysis. The data collected from the one open-ended question were examined by the researcher to find out students reported teachability and usefulness of CSs. These data were transcribed and analyzed subjectively (thematically) based on Braun and Clarke (2006) and Dorney (2007). Finally, the summary of the findings of the students' responses was written in a few brief statements.

## RESULTS

From four sections included in a standardized Cambridge test, with respect to limitations in the administration and practicality considerations and since reading comprehension is interwoven with other language skills, only the first section was administrated to 153 students.

Reading test organized in five parts including matching, multiple-choice and filling in the blank forms with a total score of 35. One hundred and ten students whose score fell  $\pm$  1SD the mean was selected as the main sample for



the present study. In other word, as indicated in Table 1, the participants who had scores between

18.5 and 31 were selected as the sample for the present study.

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive Statistics for English Proficiency Test Scores*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PET	153	10	35	24.69	6.167
Valid N (listwise)	153				

As indicated in Table 1, the students had a mean score of 24.69 and the SD of 6.17. To make sure that the students of the study were not significantly different in terms of general English proficiency, an independent samples t-test was run.

### Checking the Normality of the Distributions

The hypothesis of t-test, namely, normality was examined before performing the main statistical test by calculating One-Sample Kolmogrov-Smirnov test of normality. The results of the analyses in Table 2, indicate the normality of the distributions.

**Table 2**  
*Results of One-Sample Kolmogrov-Smirnov Test of Normality of the Distributions*

		pre-test	post-test
N		110	110
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	Mean	88.47	108.97
	Std. Deviation	22.547	19.908
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.077	.073
	Positive	.077	.049
	Negative	-.046	-.073
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.807	.763
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.533	.605

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data

It was shown in Table 2 that the p-values was above the alpha level of significance (.05) and were seen for both pre-test and post-test scores (.533 and .605). It shows that the normality hypothesis could be confirmed and it was legitimate to use parametric inferential statistics to compare the two means obtained from pre-test and post-test.

### Results of the Pre/Post Training Tests for Five CSs Categories

To explore the differences between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of five taught categories of CSs usage includes: Positive self-solving, Interactional, Time-gaining, Non-taught and Non-verbal CSs, the t-test was used for the related means, and the statistical significance of this difference was assessed.

**Table 3**  
*Students' perceptions of their taught CS usage in five categories (pre-post-test)*

Categories	test	Mean	Std Deviation	T - test	sig
Positive self-solving CS	Pre-test	3.4	.496	5.220	0.000
	Post-test	3.91	.561		
Interactional CSs	Pre-test	3.58	.554	3.442	0.001
	Post-test	3.93	.396		
Time-gaining CSs	Pre-test	3.76	.922	0.700	0.487
	Post-test	3.89	.832		
Non-taught CSs	Pre-test	3.49	1.069	0.101	0.920
	Post-test	3.47	1.184		
Non-verbal CSs	Pre-test	3.51	0.998	1.231	0.220
	Post-test	3.31	1.110		

Table 3 shows that the students reported changes in the profile of their perceptions of CSs in post-test. The comparison of pre-test/post-test in positive self-solving CSs such as; 'Approximation' showed that the significance of alpha level is more than 0/05 ( $p > 0/05$ ) and is non-significant. This means that, it increased statistically, but this increase is not significant.

In seven other individual CSs from the categories of positive self-solving and interactional CSs such as, 'Circumlocution', 'Use of all-purpose words', 'Self-repair', 'Confirmation check', 'Comprehension check', 'Clarification request, and 'Appeal for help', there are significant differences between the pre-test and post-test students' perceptions toward the teachability and usefulness of CSs and their significance were smaller than 0/05 but in the post-test, their perceptions toward the teachability and usefulness of CSs were stronger than those in the pre-test. It can be concluded that these seven strategies of the two categories in post-test phase attracted the perceptions of students in terms of teachability and usefulness, therefore, they are teachable and useful.

In the remaining other three categories such as, time-gaining, non-taught, and non-verbal CSs includes, 'Pause fillers & hesitation devices', 'Topic avoidance', and 'Gesture & facial expression' strategies, the difference is non-significant since the amount of significance is larger than 0/05 ( $P > 0.05$ ).

After instruction, there were some increases in time-gaining CSs (e.g., pause fillers and

hesitation devices), while in the other two categories such as, non-taught CSs (e.g., topic avoidance), and non-verbal CSs (e.g., gesture & facial expression strategies), students mean scores decreased in post-test. In other words, the amounts of the mean scores of two last categories in pre-test were higher than post-test. Comparing these three categories revealed that the difference among them is not statistically significant. It can be concluded that the last two strategies in post-test phase is less perceived students' attention in terms of teachability and usefulness, therefore, they are somehow less useful. This result lends support to Wannaruk (2003) and Teng (2012) studies, who remark that EFL students decreased their usage of non-linguistic strategies after treatment. An explanation for the decline in usage is that after instruction there is more understanding, so there is no need to demonstrate the target words (Thitaidisai, 2011).

#### Comparing the Perceptions in Pre-test and Post-test

Having established the normality assumption, the researcher ran the paired samples t-test to compare the participants' perceptions mean scores in the pre-test and post-test and to answer the research questions. Table 4 displays the results of the descriptive statistics consists of mean and SD for the scores in pre-test and post-test.

**Table 4**

*Descriptive Statistics for Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Students' Perceptions*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	pre-test	88.47	110	22.547	2.150
	post-test	108.97	110	19.908	1.898

As it was shown in Table 4, in the pre-test, the mean score was 88.47 and in post-test

was 108.97. Table 5 shows the results of the analysis.

**Table 5**  
**Results of Paired-Samples t-test; Comparing Pre-test & Post-test Perceptions and Mean Scores**

Pair	pre-test - post-test	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
1		-20.500	9.351	.892	-22.267	-18.733	-22.992	109	.000

As shown in Table 5, the p-values were lower than the alpha level of significance (.05). It shows that the null hypothesis of no difference between two means could be rejected and the difference between two mean scores was statistically significant. The results of the data analysis to answer the research question 1 showed that the participants' perceptions significantly increased toward the nine CSs after

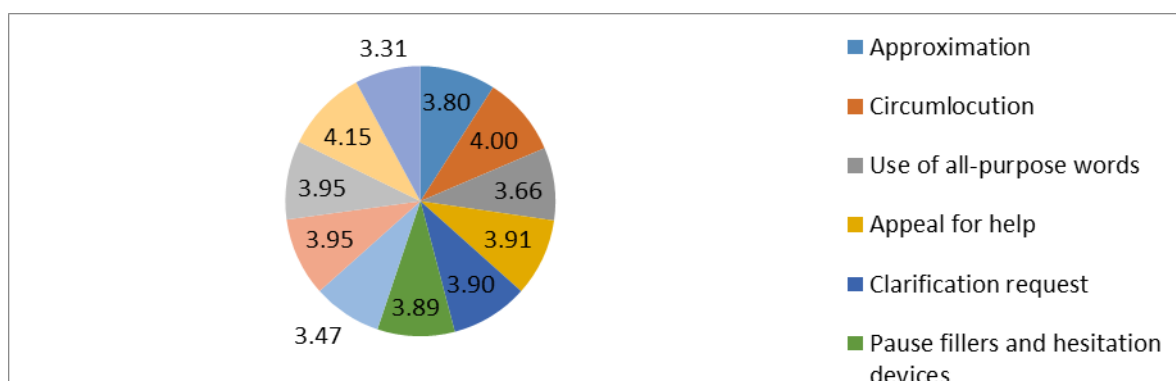
the instruction of them with the exception of two strategies; 'Topic avoidance', and 'Gesture & facial expression'. They found these nine strategies more useful and teachable.

Accordingly, the researcher calculated the mean scores of participants' responses to each strategy in the CS questionnaire. Table 6 revealed the means of participants' responses to five choices in 11 selected strategies in the questionnaire.

**Table 6**  
**The Mean Values for Selection of Choices for 11 Strategies in the post-test post experimental**

Ranking		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error of Mean
1	Approximation	3.67	220	0.499	0.067
2	Circumlocution	4	330	0.676	0.091
3	Use of all-purpose words	3.66	330	0.838	0.113
4	Self-repair	4.15	330	0.641	0.086
5	Confirmation check	3.95	440	0.483	0.065
6	Comprehension check	3.95	330	0.49	0.066
7	Clarification request	3.9	440	0.55	0.074
8	Appeal for help	3.91	440	0.564	0.076
9	Pause fillers and hesitation devices	3.89	110	0.832	0.112
10	Topic avoidance	3.47	110	1.184	0.16
11	Gesture	3.15	110	1.02	0.091

The data are also presented in Figures 2.



**Figure 1**  
**Pie Chart for the Distribution of Means across Strategy Types**

According to the data presented in Table 6 and Figure 1 and based on the students' data analysis results, after the CS instruction, the use of these eleven taught CSs were related to obvious growth in the frequency of use such as 'Self-repair', 'Circumlocution', 'Confirmation check', 'Comprehension check', 'Appeal for help', and "Clarification check" respectively. These strategies played positive roles in helping pre-intermediate students solve communication problems and improve their speaking abilities, enhance their interactions, and develop their language learning in general.

The key findings of second question was to seek the type of activities that teachers prefer to perform in their classrooms to encourage the teaching of communication strategies an assist their students learn communication strategies. An analysis of the data obtained from teacher participants' answers to six free responses to the interview questions revealed that communication strategy training is better achieved through involving learners in communicative activities. About the content, doing certain amount of practice in the class was the most favored criterion and was in line with Ergen's and Durmuş's (2021) who stated that preparing and checking assignments took so much time to prepare the requisite number of class activities.

Analysis of interview data revealed that various activities related that teachers preferred to teach and use different tasks and strategies which students find more teachable and useful. On the other hand, the students are ready to make reformulation from time to time as one of the descriptors says (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 85) because they were able to use the self-repair, evaluations and interpretive summary strategies in their different alternatives during the expansion activity in the expected way.

The findings of this study revealed that communication strategies can be developed using some classroom activities which teachers prefer to use for teaching CSs include 'backs to the board', 'card games', 'topic description', 'picture/object and word description', 'picture difference activity', 'taboo game', 'storytelling or retelling', 'role playing', 'cartoon description', 'word description', 'paraphrase and circumlocution, avoidance strategies', and the use of 'gestures.

As a whole, Oral communication activities in the CSs instruction classes seemed to increase students' self-efficiency and self-confidence in using CSs, and encouraged English students to be autonomous learners. Regarding with that, Lin et al. (2022) clarified the positive impact of robot-assisted language learning on oral interactions in language classrooms. These activities were new for them, and such novelty can strengthen a pleasant learning environment.

## DISCUSSION

This part discussed and interpreted the key aspects of the findings of two data collection methods, namely developed questionnaire and structured interviews, in relation to the following research questions.

The statistical analysis of the CSs questionnaire showed that the eleven taught CSs as the ones which could best help the students overcome their problems in communication and would support their oral communication performance and language learning in general. After the 12-week teaching program, there were statistical increases in six taught CSs, especially self-repair, circumlocution, confirmation and comprehension check, appeal for help, and clarification request.

These findings are in congruence with the findings of the researchers like Sato (2005), Nakatani (2005), Tavakoli et al. (2011) have suggested that strategic instruction helps learners to enhance their awareness and skills of communication strategies and become independent speakers. They increase their progress and confidence in their communication with foreign languages.

In addition, the analysis of students' perceptions revealed that less use of topic avoidance and gesture & facial expression might imply that the students can gain more meaning across other students as they had enough foreign linguistic resources. This view confirms to Alibakhshi and Padiz (2011), who predicted that learners in the post test phase would decrease the use of reduction strategy.

Secondly, in order to answer the second research question, the key findings of interviews to examine the kind of activities and tasks teachers usually apply in their classrooms,

indicated that practice activities would not only encourage, but also push learners to use communication strategies. The types of activities introduced by the teachers are strategies that are commonly introduced in terms of functions, such as giving instructions, directions, and definitions.

Some possible activities found in the research and the language learning strategies surveyed, in general, involve solving communication problems through negotiated meaning. Via interviews, the study's findings showed that communication strategies can be developed using some classroom activities such as 'backs to the board', 'card games', 'word games', 'video recording', 'story telling', 'picture/cartoon/word description', 'taboo game', 'role-play', etc

The general consensus among interviewees was that pair/group work activities in class are useful and highest mean among other activities, while "quality/quantity of error correction" was the lowest mean. Marashi and Khatami's (2018) view that cooperative learning promotes creativity and motivation among learners in an ELT environment, a point which is supported by Fallah et al. (2022). Additionally, Ratminingsih et al. (2022) mentioned that WhatsApp, as a discussion or collaborative tool, WhatsApp as an M-learning technological tool (Lyken et al., 2022), Kahoot as a game-based vocabulary learning tool (Ahmed et al., 2022), and Moodle platform as a real technological tool for motivation (Raman et al., 2022) acquired positive students' perspectives on comfortable and proper learning, oral and written communication skills development, critical thinking, and pedagogical content knowledge understanding.

The current study has also shown that CSs is not separate from the teaching and learning tasks as it facilitates these activities. Teachers train students to use CS and provide opportunity for them to begin speaking about the notion of CS to take risks and use these strategies, but prior CSs instruction, they were not able to speak since attempts for teaching was restricted to learning educational tasks rather than verbal communication. The finding of Lam's (2006) study indicates that the instruction of CSs enable students to analyze their speaking abilities, identify CSs they employed,

and recommend alternative CSs as better strategies to their difficulties in communication.

## CONCLUSION

Even if CSs have been researched in the last four decades, but they are still vague and controversy (Jidong, 2011). Despite the argument against the teachability of CSs, this study lends support to previous research on CS instruction and provides more empirical evidence that the instruction of CSs is possible and desirable among second or foreign language learners. Therefore, there is a lot of room for exploration and advancement, and more research is required to confirm the findings of existing CS research from wider perspectives and on more different audiences. After investigating how Iranian EFL teachers and their pre-intermediate students perceived teaching CSs in their classrooms in three universities and a private institution, the results supported CSs teaching. It was a confirmation of previous expressions that were supported CS instruction (Dornyei, 2005; Manchon, 2000; Lam, 2004; Wen, 2004; Nakatani, 2005).

The first focus of the study is to identify students' perceptions of the strategies that are teachable and useful. The analyses of the data collected from the questionnaire revealed that students were varied greatly in their perceptions towards the usefulness of CSs in terms of frequency and the use of specific CSs after treatment.

Participants showed positive feelings and perceptions towards the teaching of eleven communication strategies, especially, these six strategies, including 'self-repair', 'circumlocution', 'confirmation check', 'comprehension check', 'appeal for help', and 'clarification request'. These strategies were utilized by students more than other strategies and their use facilitate autonomy in foreign language students. In addition, students decreased their use of 'Topic avoidance' and 'Gesture & facial expression' after CSs instruction. Furthermore, other taught strategies such as, 'Pause fillers and hesitation devices', 'Approximation', and 'Use of all-purpose word' were considered to be teachable and useful for the students because teaching these strategies promoted positive

attitudes towards language learning and oral interaction. In prior studies (Wannaruk, 2003; Sato, 2005; Nakatani, 2005; Lam, 2007; Maleki, 2010; Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011; Nazari and Allahyar, 2012; Gowan, 2012; and Ugla et al. 2013), different types of increases and decreases after treatment have been considered.

Secondly, the researcher discussed the activities and tasks that help students practice communication strategies which is the focus of the second research question. This question was discussed regarding to nine themes. These themes included backs to the board, card games, word games, picture/object and word description, picture difference activity, taboo game, storytelling or retelling, role playing, and the use of gestures. As a general conclusion, the present research on EFL teachers' perceptions of CSs teaching shows that communication strategies can be taught to foreign language students and aid them to be more confident in their communication.

Based on the above explanations, it can be concluded that the students faced communication difficulties in consequence of the target linguistic shortage. Communication strategies employed by the students are not a sign of communication defeat, on the contrary, communication strategies appeared because students recognized that they had difficulties of explaining their intended meaning and they required to solve the problems.

Every system has its own limitations and this study is no exception. However, there were some limitations in the present study. First, the lack of strategic competence may consider for situations in which students with a good report of grammatical knowledge and a wide range of vocabulary are unable to explain their communicative intent (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991). According to Loewen, 2020 and Park, 2020, the opportunities to try out alternative ways of expressing themselves help learners process language forms at a more in-depth level and thus develop a higher level of awareness of how and why particular forms are used. Therefore, "the learner needs to acquire not only a repertoire of linguistic items, but also a repertoire of strategies for using them in concrete situations" (Littlewood, 2000, p.4), since changes in the students' strategic competence can be better

investigated in a longitudinal study. Second, a limited number of teachers participated in the interview. Therefore, the number of interviews as the main method for data collection in this study was limited. The reason for this restriction was due to the fact that only twenty teachers of the study environments accepted to participate in the research and interview.

In addition, regarding the difficulty in measuring features of oral speech, interviewing students and testing their oral communication performance was excluded because it was practically impossible to test the speaking abilities of a large number of students from different classes in time limitations. Furthermore, transcribing and coding their oral performance and conducting all interviews in the same day is difficult and impossible. Nevertheless, further studies with a small group of students are needed to gain other valuable insights from research to measure students' speaking ability or oral communication performance in other cities and countries.

As a conclusion, the present research on EFL teachers' perceptions of CSs teaching suggests that communication strategies can be taught to foreign language learners and help them become more confident in their communication.

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#### Biodata

**Razieh Behroozian** holds Ph.D. in TEFL. She is a lecturer at Nabie Akram University and works as an expert at Tabriz Agricultural and Natural Resources Research and Education Center. She has published a number of papers and presented as well as participated in many national and international conferences. Her main research interests are EFL teaching, teaching strategies, task-based language teaching and applied linguistics.

Email: [behroozyan216@gmail.com](mailto:behroozyan216@gmail.com)

