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The Relationship among EFL Learners' Self-Directed Learning, Resilience, and Willingness to Communicate

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Abstract
The present study aspired to scrutinize the relationship among EFL learners' Self-directed Learning (SL), Resilience (RE), and Willingness to Communicate (WTC). To accomplish this purpose, 124 male and female undergraduate EFL learners, within the age range of 20 to 32, were selected through convenience sampling. These EFL learners were asked to fill in three questionnaires, namely the SL Questionnaire (Williamson, 2007), the RE questionnaire (Wagnild & Young, 1993), and the WTC questionnaire (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001). The results manifested that there was a significant and positive correlation between RE and WTC, SL and WTC, and RE and SL. Furthermore, in order to compare RE and SL in terms of predicting WTC, a regression analysis was conducted, the results of which indicated that SL makes the strongest statistically significant unique contribution to predicting WTC. Meanwhile, RE turned out to be the second significant predictor of WTC. This highlighted the significance of enabling EFL learners to operate independently and become self-directed language learners.

Keywords: Resilience; Self-directed learning; Willingness to communicate

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a process which enables human beings to exchange information and ideas(Yashima, 2002), and it is fundamentally important for the development of human relationships. Having authentic oral communication among individuals from various cultures and backgrounds is one of the prime objectives of second/foreign language learning (MacIntyre, 2007). Quite recently, English has established its position as a lingua franca (Mitchell & Myles, 2004), and, simultaneously, the social constructivist theory, which highlights the role of active and planned communication in second language (L2) learning, has been receiving growing endorsement (Ashton-Hay, 2006; Zaker, 2016a, 2016b). Consequently, a myriad of studies have attempted to study the mental constructs which assist learners in effectively developing the oral communication skills (MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003; Sheldon, 2008; Yashima, 2002).

While speaking has an essential role in social communication, language learners differ conspicuously from one another in terms of proficiency in speaking (Barraclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988). The oral communication skill, i.e. speaking, has been frequently acknowledged as "the most demanding of the four skills" (Bailey & Savage,

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1994, p. 7) and the most challenging skill for language learners to develop (Brown, 1994). Effective verbal or oral communication is dependent on a number of factors, and one factor that seems to have an important impact on speaking is willingness to communicate (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011).

Willingness to communicate is the first step to speak, and it plays a key role in learning how to speak in a second/foreign language (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998; Moazzam, 2014). The concept of willingness to communicate was first introduced in the domain of first language (L1) learning by McCroskey and his colleagues (J. C. McCroskey, 1992; J. C. McCroskey & Richmond, 1990; Zakahi & McCroskey, 1989) in order to explain individual differences in L1 communication (MacIntyre et al., 2001). It was defined as the "variability in talking behavior, which is rooted in a personality variable" (J. C. McCroskey & Baer, 1985, p. 3). Willingness to communicate in the L1 was assumed to be the likelihood of an individual taking part in communication once offered the opportunity to do so (J. C. McCroskey & Baer, 1985).

Willingness to communicate is considered a concept not only to describe individual differences in L1 but also differences in L2 communication (Yashima, 2002). Regarding L2 contexts, willingness to communicate is defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with specific person or persons using an L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). Willingness to communicate in an L2 context is believed to assist language learning as it can increase the number of opportunities for using authentic L2 (MacIntyre et al., 2001) which is considered a crucial element for language development (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011).

MacIntyre et al. (1998) argued that willingness to communicate is a multifaceted factor which is influenced by many mental, cognitive, metacognitive, and personality factors. In the same vein, Dörnyei (2005) underlines the role of psychological factors in the process of language learning, especially in developing the speaking skill. Considering the importance of willingness to communicate in learning a foreign language for language learners (MacIntyre et al., 1998), many attempts have been made to identify and determine the factors which influence, enhance, or even impede learners' willingness to communicate.

One of the probable influential psychological factors in developing willingness to communicate and, consequently, speaking process is learners' resilience (Abbott, Klein, Hamilton, & Rosenthal, 2009; Connor & Davidson, 2003). As pointed out by Connor and Davidson (2003), resilience is an influential concept in the field of second/foreign language teaching and learning. Resilience is generally defined as individuals' capability to bounce back and recover from difficulties and adapt to their own surroundings (Wagnild & Collins, 2009). However, in the area of education, (academic) resilience is defined as learners' "ability to effectively deal with setbacks, challenges, adversity and pressure in the academic setting" (Martin & Marsh, 2006, p. 269). It is believed that resilience can substantially contribute to diminishing anxiety, increasing academic achievement, and making the process of dealing with different types of learning pressures simpler (Abbott et al., 2009; Bovier, Chamot, & Perneger, 2004; Connor & Davidson, 2003).

Besides resilience, self-directed learning is another influential learner-related factor which not only determines success in learning but also affects learners' willingness to communicate (Adams, 2014). According to Knowles (1975), self-directed learning is a kind of learning in which learners "take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p. 18). More specifically, in the field of language learning, self-directed learning denotes EFL learners' ability to control their own language learning plan and other language learning-related issues (Smith, 1982). This concept finds more signi-

ficance as "current EFL pedagogical trends seem to primarily focus on a student-centered methodology in which learner autonomy is given a great value" (Nosratinia & Zaker, 2014, p. 1).

Regarding the above-mentioned points and in order to foster L2 communication, it was important to be aware of the different factors influencing the degree of willingness to communicate among L2 and EFL learners. More specifically, the way resilience and self-directed learning would predict willingness to communicate seemed to be an untouched area in the ELT domain. Therefore, this study investigates the relationship among EFL learners' resilience, self-directed learning, and willingness to communicate. To fulfill this purpose, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ_1: Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' resilience and willingness to communicate?

RQ_2: Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' self-directed learning and willingness to communicate?

RQ_3: Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' resilience and self-directed learning?

RQ_4: Is there any significant difference between EFL learners' resilience and self-directed learning in predicting willingness to communicate?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of the present study were 124 (86 or 69% females; 38 or 31% males) EFL learners (Table 1), within the age range of 20 to 32 (M_{age} = 26), studying English Language Teaching, English Translation, and English Literature at Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran, South Tehran, and Science and Research branches in Tehran. These participants were senior undergraduate students. The sampling strategy for selecting the participants was convenience sampling. It should be mentioned that the preliminary number of participants was 284, but 160 of them were excluded from data analysis due to providing incomplete answers, bringing the final number to 124 participants.

Table 1.
The Participants' Characteristics

Gender	Number	Percentage	Age	Age Average
Female	86	69	20 to 32	26
Male	38	31	20 to 29	25
Total	124	100	20 to 32	26

Instrumentation

The following instruments were employed in order to collect the quantitative data and fulfill the purpose of the study:

- The Resilience Scale
- The Self-Directed Learning Scale
- The Willingness to Communicate Scale

Wagnild and Young's Resilience Scale

In order to estimate the participants' level of resilience, the English version of the resilience scale developed by Wagnild and Young (1993) was administered. This instrument has been widely used in different contexts where it has proven to be reliable, valid, and highly practical (Wagnild & Collins, 2009). The questionnaire aims at evaluating the three main skills of adaptability, flexibility, and a balanced perspective of life which are directly related to resilience (Giordano, 1997). The resilience scale has 25 items. The participants were asked to rate the frequency of each category they use on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1 point) to "strongly agree" (7 points).

The ultimate score was computed in the possible range of 25 to 175 with higher scores reflecting higher resilience. The participants were allocated 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Wagnild and Young (1993) reported an internal consistency index of .89 for this instrument. In this study, the reliability of the resilience scale was estimated to be 0.80 using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Williamson's Self-Directed Learning Scale

The English version of the self-rating scale of self-directed learning devised by Williamson (2007) was used for estimating the level of self-directedness in English language learning among the participants. This instrument is comprised of 60 items categorized under five broad areas of self-directed learning, namely Awareness, Learning Strategies, Learning Activities, Evaluation, and Interpersonal Skills.

Responses for each item are rated by using a five-point Likert-scale, from 1 "never" to 5 "always", and the minimum and the maximum possible scores of the scale are 60 to 300 respectively. The participants were required to respond in 40 minutes, as suggested by the instrument developer. This instrument reportedly has desirable internal consistency and construct validity (Williamson, 2007; Williamson & Seewoodhary, 2017). In the present study, the reliability of this scale was estimated to be 0.79, using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

MacIntyre, Baker, Clément and Conrod's Willingness to Communicate Scale

To estimate the participants' levels of willingness to communicate, the English version of the Willingness to Communicate in English Questionnaire by MacIntyre et al. (2001) was used. The questionnaire consists of two parts: 1) willingness to communicate in English inside the classroom which includes 27 items on a five-point scale, 1"almost never willing" to 5 "almost always willing", and 2) willingness to communicate in English outside the classroom which is also comprised of 27 items on a five point Likert-type scale, 1 "almost never willing" to 5 "almost always willing".

The total scores of this instrument range between 54 and 270, and the participants are required to respond the questionnaire in 40 minutes. As reported, this instrument is a reliable and valid measure of learners' willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al., 2001). In this study, the reliability of this scale was estimated to be 0.86 using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Procedure

In order for the researchers to fulfill the purpose of the present study and address the research questions, a certain procedure was followed. Initially, a formal approval for conducting the research in the research context was obtained (see participants). Following this, fifteen available classes were chosen based on convenience sampling strategy, and the required explanations were given to the participants prior to administering the instruments. More specifically, the participants were informed about the aim of the study and the procedures of answering the questionnaires. The three questionnaires were distributed in one package with a random order. This randomization was implemented to control for the impact of order upon the completion process and validity of the data.

The total allocated time for answering was 95 minutes, and the researchers were present at the time of administering the questionnaires to resolve any probable problems, followed by collecting and scoring the instruments. The last point to mention is that from the initial 284 administered questionnaires, only a number of 124 sets were usable and completely-answered. This was followed by analyzing the data and answering the research questions, as reported below.

RESULTS

In this descriptive quantitative study, the predicted variable was willingness to communicate and the predictors were resilience and self-directed learning. Further, participants' age and gender were considered the intervening variables. In order for the researchers to answer the research questions, a series of pertinent calculations and statistical routines were conducted whose results are presented in this section.

The Preliminary Analyses

Prior to answering the research questions, it was essential to check a number of assumptions and perform some preliminary analyses (Zaker, Nosratinia, Birjandi, & Yazdanimoghaddam, 2020). To begin with, the assumptions of interval data and indepen-

dence of participants (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) were already met as the present data were measured on an interval scale and the participants were independent of one another. In addition, it was needed to check some other significant assumptions through inspecting the features of the data. These assumptions, according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), are:

1. Linear relation between each pair of variables,
2. Homoscedasticity, and
3. Normality of the distribution of variables.

The following sections will check the three abovementioned assumptions which are pertinent to the first, second, and third research questions of the study. However, as the legitimacy of addressing the fourth research question is dependent on the answers given to the three initial research questions, the preliminary analyses pertinent to the fourth research question are reported after addressing the first three research questions.

Linear Relation between Each Pair of Variables and Homoscedasticity

To check the linearity of relations, the researchers visually inspected the data through creating a multiple scatterplot which is presented in Figure 1.

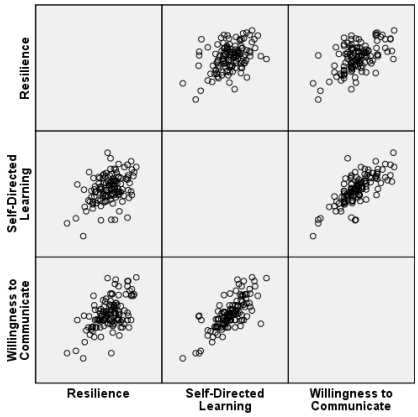

Figure 1. Multiple scatterplot of resilience, self-directed learning, and willingness to communicate

Through inspecting Figure 1, it can be inferred that the relationships among these variables are not fundamentally non-linear. As it can be observed, there is not a U-shaped or curvilinear pattern of distribution. Consequently, the linearity of relations can be confirmed. Moreover, the distribution of scores was not funnel-shape, i.e. wide at one end and narrow at the other; therefore, the assumption of homoscedasticity was met for these variables.

Normality of the Distributions

In order to check the normality of the distributions, first, the kurtosis and skewness ratios were calculated, followed by inspecting the distribution histograms and Normal Q-Q Plots. However, as the main measure, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run, results of which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Tests of Normality of the Scores

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Resilience	.058	124	.200*	.987	124	.284
Self-Directed Learning	.063	124	.200*	.986	124	.230
Willingness to Communicate	.087	124	.023	.972	124	.011

[a]Lilliefors Significance Correction. *This is a lower bound of the true significance.

As presented in Table 2, the Sig. value for the scores of willingness to communicate (.023) is lower than the critical value (.05). Therefore, only the normality of distribution for resilience and self-directed learning scores is supported (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Consequently, it was systematically suggested that the assumption of normality is violated for the scores of willingness to communicate. Therefore, the correlational research questions dealing with willingness to communicate (research questions one and two) were

answered through employing a non-parametric test, Spearman rank order coefficient of correlation. In order to answer the third research question, however, the data were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient, a parametric formula.

Answering the Three Initial Research Questions The First Research Question

In order to answer the first research question, the data were analyzed using the Spearman rank order coefficient of correlation which is a non-parametric formula. Table 3 shows the result of this analysis.

Table 3.

Spearman's Correlation between Resilience and Willingness to Communicate

			Resilience	Willingness to Communicate
Spearman's rho	Resilience	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	**.447****
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	124	124
	Willingness to Communicate	Correlation Coefficient	**.447****	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	124	124

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the results of the analysis reported in Table 3, it was concluded that there was a significant and positive correlation between resilience and willingness to communicate, ρ =.447, n = 124, p < .01, and high levels of resilience were associated with high levels of willingness to communicate. According to Cohen (1988), this signified a medium-to-large effect size (99% confidence intervals: 0.242 to 0.613).

The Second Research Question

In order to answer this question, the data were analyzed using the Spearman rank order coefficient of correlation, a non-parametric formula. Table 4 shows the result of this analysis.

Table 4.

Spearman's Correlation Between Self-Directed Language Learning and Willingness to Communicate

			Self-Directed Learning	Willingness to Communicate
Spearman's rho	Self-Directed Learning	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	**.712****
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	124	124
	Willingness to Communicate	Correlation Coefficient	**.712****	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	124	124

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the results of the analysis reported in Table 4, it was concluded that there was a significant and positive correlation between self-directed learning and willingness to communicate, ρ = .712, n = 124, p < .01, and high levels of self-directed learning were associated with high levels of willingness to communicate. According to Cohen (1988), this signified a large effect size (99% confidence intervals: 0.577 to 0.809).

The Third Research Question

In order to answer this question, the data were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient, a parametric formula. Table 5 shows the result of this analysis.

Table 5.
Pearson's Correlation Between Resilience and Self-Directed Learning

		Resilience	Self-Directed Learning
Resilience	Pearson Correlation	1	**.417****
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	124	124
Self-Directed Learning	Pearson Correlation	**.417****	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	124	124

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the results of the analysis reported in Table 5, it was concluded that there was a significant and positive correlation between resilience and self-directed learning, r = .417, n = 124, p < .01, and high levels of resilience were associated with high levels of self-directed learning. According to Cohen (1988), this signified a medium-to-large effect size (99% confidence intervals: 0.207 to 0.59).

Based on the findings of the three initial research questions, both resilience and self-directed learning were significantly and positively related to willingness to communicate. Put another way, resilience and self-directed learning significantly interact with willingness to communicate among EFL learners. Consequently, the researchers could opt for answering the fourth research question, considering resilience and self-directed learning the predictor variables of the predicted variable, willingness to communicate.

Preliminary Analyses Pertinent to the Fourth Research Question

The fourth research question of this study was answered through running a multiple regression analysis. However, there were a number of assumptions which had to be checked before performing the analysis. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), these assumptions are:

1. Sample size
2. Multicollinearity
3. Normality
4. Outliers

Employing the formula proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) for calculating sample size ($N > 50 + 8m$) indicated that this assumption was met as 124 is way above the minimum required number of 66 participants. Furthermore, the researchers implemented some measures in order to systematically inspect the existence of multicollinearity in the sample, the Tolerance value and VIF value. Table 6 reports the Tolerance and VIF values in this study.

Table 6.
Tolerance and VIF Values

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)		
	Resilience	.826	1.210
	Self-Directed Learning	.826	1.210

As reported in Table 6, both of the Tolerance values were desirably higher than .1. Moreover, the VIF values were desirably lower than 10. Therefore, it was concluded that, as required, multicollinearity did not exist in this sample. Furthermore, in order to check the normality, the Normal Probability Plot (P-P)was created which suggested no major deviation from normality. Furthermore, the scatterplot of standardized residuals showed that residuals were rectangularly distributed.

Finally, the researchers inspected the Mahalanobis distance value in order to notice and inspect the existence of outliers. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), when there are two independent variables in the model, the critical value for the Mahalanobis value is 13.28. This means that if the Mahalanobis val-

ue for a variable is larger than 13.28, that case is an outlier. According to the analysis result, the highest Mahalanobis value in this sample was 11.59 which is below the critical level, suggesting the absence of any outlier case. Moreover, the Cook's Distance values were, desirably, smaller than the critical value 1. As a result, the researchers could argue that the assumption pertinent to the outliers is met.

The Fourth Research Question

In order to answer the fourth research question, a standard multiple regression was run. Table 7 presents the regression model summary including the *R* and R^2.

Table 7.
Model Summary – R and R Square

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.786[a]	.618	.612	12.989

[a]Predictors: (Constant), Self-Directed Learning, Resilience. [b]Dependent Variable: Willingness to Communicate.

As reported in Table 7, *R* came out to be 0.786 and R^2 came out to be 0.618. This means that the model explains 61.8 percent of the variance in willingness to communicate (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2015). Moreover, $f^2 = 1.618$ indicated a large effect size for the regression.

Table 8 reports the results of ANOVA (F (2, 121) = 97.814, $p < 0.05$), the results of which were considered significant. This is to say that the model can significantly predict EFL learners' resilience, self-directed learning, and willingness to communicate.

Table 8.
Regression Output: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	33006.374	2	16503.187	97.814	.000[a]
	Residual	20415.069	121	168.720		
	Total	53421.444	123			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Directed Learning, Resilience
b. Dependent Variable: Willingness to Communicate

Table 9 demonstrates the Standardized Beta Coefficients which signify the degree to which each predictor variable contributes to the prediction of the predicted variable. The inspection of the Sig. values showed that both resilience and self-directed learning make a statistically significant unique contribution to the equation as their Sig. values are less than .05.

Table 9.
Regression Output: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Significance	Part
		B	Std. Error	β			Correlation
1	(Constant)	21.055	13.454		1.565	.120	
	Resilience	.332	.071	.287	4.649	.000	.261
	Self-Directed Learning	.649	.065	.622	10.055	.000	.565

The comparison of β values revealed that self-directed learning has the largest absolute β coefficient (β = 0.622, t = 1.055, p = 0.0005). This means that self-directed learning makes the strongest statistically significant unique contribution to predicting willingness to communicate. Therefore, it was concluded that self-directed learning could more significantly predict willingness to communicate scores of the participants. This is also to say that self-directed learning is more positively affected by high levels of willingness to communicate. Resilience turned out to be the second significant predictor of willingness to communicate scores (β = 0.287, t = 4.649, p = 0.005). Finally, the inspection of Part correlation (semipartial correlation coefficient) revealed that self-directed learning uniquely explains 31.92 percent of the variance in willingness to communicate (.565 ×.565 = .3192).

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

Considering the nature of the study and the formulated research questions, and based on the results of the statistical analyses, various degrees of association were observed among the three variables of this study. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship among EFL learners' resilience, self-directed learning, and their willingness to communicate. To begin with, the first research question of the study attempted to systematically investigate the relationship between EFL learners' resilience and their willingness to communicate. Based on the obtained results it was concluded that there was a significant and positive correlation between resilience and willingness to communicate.

One basic interpretation of this result could be the idea that not paying due attention to EFL learners' resiliency may result in their ineffectiveness in developing their communication skills. The possible rationalization for this finding may be attributable to the fact that resilient students have some characteristics such as having the capability of successfully communicating, realistically considering their future plans, and accepting responsibility for their own behavior (Bernard, 1993). This finding provides tacit approval for the argument that resilience could help learners in improving their obtained communicative L2 skills (Abbott et al., 2009; Bovier et al., 2004; Connor & Davidson, 2003). However, due to the fact that no previous studies, to the best of the researchers' knowledge and based on the extensive review of the related literature, have directly examined the relationship between EFL learners' resiliency and their willingness to communicate, this specific finding could not be directly compared to those of other studies. However, it might ignite further research in the ELT domain.

The second intention of this study was to systematically investigate the relationship between EFL learners' self-directed learning and willingness to communicate. The findings of the study in this respect indicated that there was a significant and positive correlation between self-directed learning and willingness to communicate. This finding seems to be in line with the argument by Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) that self-directed learning can generally help EFL learners to set higher objectives and participate more effectively in different communicative tasks. This finding is also in line with that of Karami (2016), who observed the same relationship. Moreover, this finding is also in proportion to that of Majedi and Pishkar (2016) who reported a positive relationship between self-directed learning and speaking among EFL learners.

In the next step and through addressing the third research question, it was concluded that there was a significant and positive correlation between the two predictor variables of this study (resilience and self-directed learning). This finding might be attributable to the fact that resilience mainly refers to individuals' positive adaptation (Abrams-Terry, 2014) and their autonomy in taking care of obstacles and new challenges (Kobasa, 1979). Research-wise, this specific result is consistent with those of Chung, Lee, and Park (2017) who found the same correlation among university EFL students.

Having observed a significant and positive relationship between willingness to communicate, on one hand, and resilience and self-directed learning, on the other hand, it was legitimate for the researchers to inspect and compare how resi-

lience and self-directed learning predict willingness to communicate among EFL learners. The obtained findings revealed that self-directed learning could more significantly predict participants' willingness to communicate, and resilience was the second significant predictor of willingness to communicate. More than anything else, this seems to provide a reason for the legitimization of prioritizing EFL learners' assertiveness, independence, and self-directedness in learning.

Reflecting upon the imposed inevitable limitations in this study and contemplating the generalizability of the findings, not being able to collect the data in different sessions and spending 95 minutes on answering all the questions might be a potential factor which could have negatively affected the validity of the data. Besides, in terms of gender, there were not equal numbers of male and female participants in this study; consequently, the aforementioned results should be interpreted with caution. The last point to be made is that participants' internal factors, which are highly diverse and influential (Zaker, 2016a), along with other features of the context and participants can influence the findings of studies in the ELT domain (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013); this suggests that the aforementioned results should be checked and confirmed in other ELT contexts (Zaker, Nosratinia, Birjandi, & Yazdanimoghaddam, 2019). The major implications of the findings are discussed in the following section.

CONCLUSION

In this study, it was attempted to inspect the way resilience, self-directed learning, and willingness to communicate interact with one another among EFL learners. A further goal of the study was to compare the predictive capacity of resilience and self-directed learning in terms of predicting willingness to communicate. There is a unanimous consensus among scientists and educators that the main function of language is to enable individuals to communicate ideas and information with other speakers of the language while highlighting comprehensibility and clarity (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Mitchell & Myles, 2004; Zaker, 2015).

The obtained results in this study showed that EFL learners' willingness to communicate in L2 is significantly and positively correlated with their self-directed learning and resilience. The findings were in agreement with the argument by Skehan (1989) that learners who try to be in charge of their own learning and talk more in classroom and outside the classroom are normally stronger in developing their L2 skills, including communication skills. As stated by MacIntyre et al. (1998), there is a plethora of factors which can affect L2 learners' willingness to communicate; however, in the present study, it was indicated that willingness to communicate is significantly connected to self-directed learning and resilience (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005). Therefore, it seems reasonable to argue that if language learners take responsibility for their learning, or become self-directed learners, they might become more willing to communicate both inside and outside the classroom context (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Needless to say, this can significantly boost their L2 skills. Besides, the ability to overcome communication problems (i.e. resilience) affects the learners' willingness to communicate (Gallagher, 2013), and, as it was confirmed in this study, if EFL learners develop the ability to handle difficulties, especially in learning situations, they would probably be more communicative and willing to take part in future interactions.

Considering the framework and findings of this study, EFL teachers are suggested to inject willingness to communicate into their teaching activities directly, through explanation and direct instruction, or indirectly, through manipulating relevant factors, e.g. resilience and self-directed learning. EFL teachers can support their learners by providing necessary knowledge and instruments which students need to operate independently, or become self-directed in learning. Therefore, teachers need to think thoroughly before designing the classroom activities in order to let students take responsibility for their own learning and become self-directed in learning. They should also focus on enabling EFL learners to handle difficult situations and become resilient. Moreover, EFL teachers should encourage

learners to participate in out-of-classroom activities through assigning pertinent tasks and working on learners' independence so that L2 learning is significantly assisted (Horwitz, 1987). Finally, as it is the case with all learning contexts, EFL teachers should create a stress-free situation inside the classroom in which students feel relaxed and motivated to participate in the activities of communication.

From another perspective, as learners are an integral part of learning (Fahim & Zaker, 2014), they should try to be resilient in the face of learning problems and do their best to eagerly communicate in the target language. They should also understand that talking in the classroom through being self-directed and resilient significantly improves their language learning and enables them to communicate outside of the classroom. They should also grab each single opportunity that allows for the practice and use of English both inside and outside the classroom context. In addition to EFL learners and teachers, EFL syllabus designers, as another major component of EFL learning, are providers of a great portion of the language tasks and activities (Nosratinia & Zaker, 2014). According to Kang (2005), the inclusion of willingness to communicate and self-directed learning in language programs can significantly develop both of these elements. Given the results of this study, it is also suggested that language teaching courses aiming to develop the communicative ability of learners plan the materials and classroom activities in a way that results in the least apprehension about using language and generates the most willingness for communication and participation in the classroom. Also, language teaching programs can include activities or tasks that help learners develop their resilience and self-directed learning. This might be performed in developing materials that implicitly foster students' resilience skills. Moreover, in order to develop EFL teachers' ability in manipulating learners' self-directed learning, preparing in-service courses might be quite fruitful.

Finally, considering the focus of the present study and the inevitable limitations which were faced, other studies are recommended to explore some of the connected avenues and untouched areas. These recommendations are listed hereunder:

a) While the present study focused on willingness to communicate as the predicted variable, other studies may take other internal, personality, cognitive, and metacognitive factors into account as the predicted variable.
b) This research can be replicated by having a mixed method design to increase the validity and reliability of the findings and interpretations.
c) The sampling strategy used in this study was convenience sampling. Other researchers can make effort to use random sampling methods in order to come up with more valid results.
d) In the present study, the effect of gender on the findings of the study was not controlled (38 males and 86 females). Subsequently, it is suggested to replicate this study in a way that the numbers of participants are equal with regard to their gender; thus, gender might not act as an intervening variable.

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