

# The Effect of Teaching Communicative Strategy on EFL Learners' Willingness to Communicate

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**Abstract**—While attaining language proficiency has turned to a main concern of many, how to do so is still one of the biggest secrecy in TEFL field. With regards to improving learner's language proficiency, MacIntyre postulated willingness to communicate (WTC) as one of the best predictors of being a proficient learner. Moreover, perceiving the status quo of many competent learners who avoid communication as well as their narrow chance in getting proficiency, the researcher attempted to investigate whether teaching communicative strategies affected learners' WTC in general. For this purpose sixty students homogenized in terms of their language proficiency through PET, were randomly divided into two groups of control and experimental. A WTC and a communicative strategy questionnaire were administered before and after the treatment as pretest and posttest. The experimental group underwent 16 sessions of treatment and nine communicative strategies were taught. The results of the WTC pretest and posttest scores of the two groups were compared through ANCOVA which demonstrated significant difference between the two groups, with the experimental group outperforming the control group.

**Index Terms**—communicative strategy, compensatory strategy, willingness to communicate

## I. INTRODUCTION

The decade of 70s is well recognized for the dramatic changes in the field of second language teaching. The emerging continuum of methods in the field of second language teaching aiming at creating communicative speaker mostly had a short shelf life and failed (Larson-Freeman, 2003). According to Richards (2006), the ever growing need for finding competency in interaction motivated the researchers to search for a new method that would enable learners to communicate. Nurturing learners to become communicatively competent, Skehan (1998) suggested giving considerable latitude to language learners so that they would be inclined to interact. Beside all the emphasis on creating the potential to use language communicatively, what has concerned the disciples of CLT method is dealing with passive students who show little signs of intention for interaction and who prefer to remain silent.

On the one hand, one can refer to McCroskey and Richmond (1987) who recognized individual characteristics such as anomie, self-esteem, cultural diversity, shyness, degree of familiarity, communicative apprehension, introversion, extroversion, self-efficacy, self-perceived communicative competence, sex, and age as being highly associated with talking behaviors and frequency of talking in both first and second language. On the other hand, one can point to others who diagnosed situational variables as an influential factor (e.g., Dörnyei, 2004; MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998). For the first time, McCroskey and Baer (1985, as cited in MacIntyre et al., 1998) referred to the concept of *willingness to communicate (WTC)* in native language for explaining the variability in talking behavior in L1. MacIntyre et al. (1998) delved into WTC in second language and converged some affective and social variables into a pyramid-shaped heuristic model to explain —the probability of initiating communication when there is a chance (p. 573).

Since increasing WTC among language learners lead to more successful language acquisition (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010), researchers have attempted to explore how WTC can be improved among EFL learners. As a result, MacIntyre and Donovan (2004) emphasized that being reticent and unwilling to communicate generally has an unfavorable consequence for language learners. On the whole, people who are unwilling to communicate usually run the risk of being considered inefficient in comparison to others who are equally-experienced and qualified (Richmond & Roach, 1992).

Additionally, considering Iran in which English is learned as a foreign language, language classes are the rare opportunities for interaction and communication in English language. Therefore, in such a circumstance learners' unwillingness to communicate in classes could fade away the possible impact of teaching-learning process and thus influence the final outcome.

Equipping learners with learning strategies, specifically communicative strategies may be a plausible solution to this important problem. Since Many studies have provided evidence regarding the effect of strategy instruction on variables

which contribute to the quality of learners' communication and oral production (Tavakoli, Dasjerdi, & Estalkhi, 2011) as well as learners' motivation, self-efficacy and anxiety (Oxford, 1990), it can be assumed that strategy instruction, namely communicative strategies instruction, could make some learners more willing to communicate.

#### *Purpose of This Study*

Since Many studies have provided evidence regarding the effect of strategy instruction on variables which contribute to the quality of learners' communication and oral production (Tavakoli, Dasjerdi, & Estalkhi, 2011) as well as learners' motivation, self-efficacy and anxiety (Oxford, 1990), it can be assumed that strategy instruction, namely communicative strategies instruction, could make some learners more willing to communicate.

Regarding the problems about unwillingness to communicate such as silence, hesitation, and incompetent students and with respect to the abundant evidence in terms of the influential effect of strategy training on various aspects of language learning, the purpose of this study was to determine whether teaching communicative strategies could significantly influence EFL learners' willingness to communicate.

In order to investigate the impact of teaching communicative strategy the following research question was formulated.

1) *Does communicative strategy instruction have a significant effect on EFL learners' willingness to communicate?*

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### A. *Willingness to Communicate in First Language*

For the first time McCroskey and Baer (1985) introduced the term *Willingness to Communicate* in first language (As cited in MacIntyre et al., 1994). McCroskey is one of the prominent researchers who has dedicated many studies on WTC in native language. According to MacIntyre (1991), McCroskey referred to WTC as a reasonable explanation for all of differences in humane communication behavior. McCroskey and Richmond (1987) figured out that the causes of fluctuations in amount of talking are considerably rooted in personality. They also emphasized that situation can impact WTC but "individuals show a regular tendencies across situation". (p. 216)

McCroskey (1994) developed an instrument that measures WTC in various contexts with various receivers. He searched for antecedents, variables that lead to differences in WTC. McCroskey and Richmond (1994) considered introversion, anomie, alienation, self-esteem, cultural divergence, communication skill level, and communication apprehension as the strong antecedents of WTC.

### B. *Willingness to Communicate in Second Language*

While many research dedicated to investigate the impact of psychological and social factors in L1 communication, a void of research felt in second language acquisition field (Dörnyei, 1995). Apparently, just a limited number of factors were recognized as predictors of L2 communication. Some factors like anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, have no role in L2 learning (MacIntyre et al. 1998). The premiere studies that integrated some psychological factors with L2 acquisition can be referred to Gardner's (1985) *Socioeducational model* and Clément's (1980) *social context model*.

MacIntyre (1994) noted that he expanded these two above-mention models by the compounding WTC notion that he retrieved from McCroskey. He stressed that reasons of being willingness or unwillingness to communicate in L1 isn't generalizable to L2 and maintained that variables influencing WTC in L2 are much more complex than variables influencing L1. He also postulated that the distinction between WTC in L1 and L2 rooted in social, political and intergroup issues that aren't influential in WTC in L1. Therefore, model of structural model, Path model and pyramid model of WTC appeared that is the magnification of many psychological factors that integrated to L2 learning (Kim, 2004). Later, Yashima (2002) and Hashimoto (2004) based on MacIntyre et al. (1997) model added other factors to WTC.

#### **1. Pyramid Model**

In 1998, MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels defined WTC as "the probability of engaging in communication when free to choose to do so" (p.546). They developed a comprehensive model of willingness to communicate in L2. Dörnyei (2005) described WTC model as

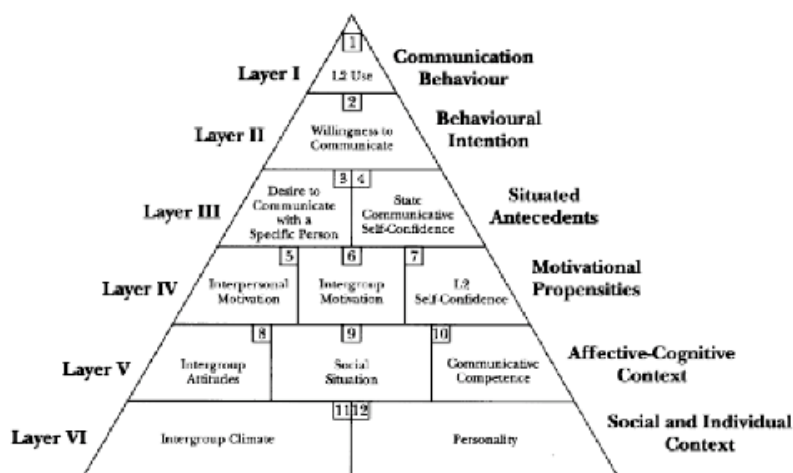
Composite ID (individual difference) variable that draws together a host of learner variables that have been well established as influences on second language acquisition and use, resulting in a construct in which psychological and linguistic factors are integrated in an organic manner. (p. 202)

MacIntyre and et al (1998) described the heuristic model of WTC as a pyramid-shaped structure that includes six categories. All the variables in the pyramid model are hypothesized to have two different influences on WTC "situational influences" and "enduring influences".

"Enduring influences" can be defined as long-term properties of the environment or person that can possibly apply to any situation, while "situational influences" can be described as more transient and dependent on the specific context in which a person functions at a given time". (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 546).

MacIntyre and et al. (1998) Hypothesized that three layers on the top of pyramid have situational influences and we can considered them as the most direct and probable cause of L2 communication. The three layers closest to the top of the pyramid are Communication Behavior (L2 use = Layer I), Behavior Intention (WTC = Layer II), and Situated Antecedents (Desire to Communicate with a Specific Person = Layer III). The bottom three layers comprises of —

Layer IV (Motivation Propensities), V (Affective-Cognitive Context), and VI (Social and Individual Context = the bottom of the pyramid). They have relatively stable, enduring influences on the process of L2 communication.



Figur 1. Heuristic model of variables influencing WTC (Source: MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1998, p. 547)

### C. Communication Strategies

According to Tarron (1981) in decades of 50s and 60s, there was a void of no systematic work about the developing second language acquisition. He believed that in decades of 70s some research were dedicated to distinguish the differences between first and second language acquisition and subsequently on error analysis. He explained that the result of all these research laid the foundations for emerging a new notions such as ‘approximate system’, ‘transitional competence’ and ‘interlanguage system’.

Based on Richards (1978) the concept of Interlanguage that analyzes the process of second language learning is drawn from studying on language of pidgins, Creole, regional dialect and English as a foreign language.

Considering the interlanguage as a series of system (Ellis, 2003) different types of interlanguage have been introduced. Farch and Kasper (1984) divided interlanguage to three parts, interlanguage as a linguistic process, interlanguage as a learning process, and the interlanguage as a communication process. In studying of learning process of interlanguage system, the concern is identifying the processes involved in language learning as well as strategies which the learners draws upon in developing his interlanguage system.

#### 1. Teaching Communicative Strategy

Farch and Kasper (1984) recommend teaching communicative strategy to language learners and argued that by teaching communicative strategy explicitly, learners become aware of their implicit knowledge of communicative strategy besides they learn how to use communicative strategy in informal and formal situation.

Dörnyei (1995) is one of the advocates of communicative strategy teaching. He underestimates the generalizability of those studies that didn’t support teaching of communicative strategy. He claimed that those studies that don’t support communicative strategy teaching are based on two or three typologies while there are variety of communicative strategy. On the other hand many researchers conducted some research to underpin efficiency of teaching communicative strategy (e.g., Farch &Kasper, 1984; Maleki, 2007).

Dörnyei (1995) criticized the process of teaching second language in language classes. He believed that lack of proficiency in many language learners, to a large portion is due to overlooking teaching communicative strategy. He also maintained that by teaching communicative strategy learners sense of security and self-confidence would be enhanced.

### III. METHOD

#### A. Participants

The participants of this study were 60 pre-intermediate EFL learners selected from among an existing intact group of 88 students based on their scores on a sample language proficiency PET (the 60 students whose scores were one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen) and randomly assigned to two groups; the experimental and the control group.

#### B. Instrument

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the researcher applied two instruments: PET as a general proficiency test to homogenize the participants and one questionnaire that measured the participants’ willingness to communicate. The WTC Scale adapted from MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Conrad (2001). The scale consisted of a total of 27 items that

measure L2 WTC in four basic skill areas (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and the participants' willingness to communicate inside and outside of classroom.

### C. Procedure

#### 1. Procedure in Phase 1

At the first step, PET was administered to 88 pre intermediate learners and sixty students who scored one standard deviation above and below the sample mean were chosen and then randomly divided into two groups; one experimental group that contained totally 30 participants and one control group that contained totally 30 participants.

In order to understand the effect of communicative strategy training on students' willingness to communicate, one questionnaire was distributed among all participants in the control and experimental groups. The questionnaire was the WTC questionnaire which measures the degree of WTC among language learners.

#### 2. Procedures in Phase 2

Nine communicative strategies (Circumlocution, appeal for help, approximation, time-stalling devices, message abandonment, confirmation check, comprehension check, clarification request and all-purpose word) from Dörnyei and Scott's (1995) taxonomy were selected for the instruction to the experimental group. Reasonable body of research suggests teaching these strategies since they encourage language learning and increase risk-taking of language learners (e.g., Dörnyei, 1995; Farch & Kasper, 1984; Maleki, 2007). Dörnyei (1995) believes that teaching these strategies increases learners' motivation to initiate conversation, gives them a sense of security, and helps them stay in conversation.

The treatment was conducted during 16 sessions and each communicative strategy was taught in one session. Three sessions were dedicated to communicative strategy review. In each session, the explicit communicative strategy lasted for 40 minutes. The students were encouraged to work in groups. They were also informed of the rationale and value of communicative strategy instruction. They were given a list of names and examples of communicative strategy. Table 3.2 gives a summary of the objectives of communicative strategy instruction in each lesson. Each communicative strategy was taught based on Dörnyei's (1995) suggestion for teaching communicative strategies. Based on his suggestion communicative strategy instruction should follow the following steps:

1. Raising learner awareness about the nature and communicative potential of CSs by making learners conscious of strategies already in their repertoire, sensitizing them to the appropriate situations where these could be useful, and making them realize that these strategies could actually work.
2. Encouraging students to be willing to take risks and use CSs.
3. Providing L2 models of the use of certain CSs through demonstrations, listening materials and videos, and getting learners to identify, categorize, and evaluate strategies used by native speakers or other L2 speakers.
4. Highlighting cross-cultural differences in CS use might involve various degrees of stylistic appropriateness associated with CSs (e.g., in some languages particular CSs may be seen as indications of bad style).
5. Teaching CSs directly by presenting linguistic devices to verbalize CSs which have a finite range of surface structure realizations.
6. Providing opportunities for practice in strategy use appears to be necessary because CSs can only fulfill their function as immediate first aid devices if their use has reached an automatic stage. (pp. 62-64)

To encourage learners to use communicative strategy, they were encouraged to practice it through activities. For practicing circumlocution and approximation students were asked to define and describe objects. In order to learn to use approximation, students were given plenty of synonyms as well as a dialogue in order to practice approximation through the dialogue.

The activities focusing on appeal for help, confirmation check, comprehension check, and clarification request involved the employment of different tasks in which students practiced asking for the cooperation of their interlocutors. For example, in using appeal for help one participant had to pretend that she did not know one key word. For confirmation check students were paired up and practiced a dialogue in which one of the interlocutors could not understand something and the other interlocutor had to explain it for each other. For comprehension check, students practiced check question through a dialogue. Moreover, for clarification request students were paired up and played chain misunderstanding. That is, a student sat in a circle and pretended not to understand what other interlocutors said and asked for repetition. Furthermore, for topic avoidance, students were taught how to go off the point and evade answers. For hesitation devices, students had to insert hesitation devices through a dialogue.

At the end of the treatment period, the two mentioned questionnaires were administered to both the control and the experimental group in order to see whether there were any changes in students communicative strategy use as an indication of the validity of communicative strategy instruction and subsequently in WTC to verify the null hypothesis of the study

### D. Data Analysis

The collected data fed into SPSS. To come up with reasonable answers to the research question ANCOVA was run.

## IV. RESULT

### Participant Selection

In order to come up with two groups of homogeneous participants, the control and experimental group, the researcher needed to select eighty eight participants and then select sixty homogeneous participants.

#### 1. PET Administration for Homogenizing the Participants

In order to homogenize the participants, the PET was administered to the 88 non-randomly selected pre-Intermediate EFL learners. The descriptive statistics of the participants' scores on the PET is provided in Table 4.1 below. According to the table, the mean and the standard deviation of the scores were 63.97, 65 and 10.56 respectively.

TABLE 4.1  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR PET

Statistics		
PET		
N	Valid	88
	Missing	0
Mean		63.9773
Median		65.0000
Mode		59.00 <sup>a</sup>
Std. Deviation		10.56124
Minimum		40.00
Maximum		85.00

Figure 4.1 below shows the histogram of the PET scores of the 88 students who took the PET from whom the main participants of the study were to be chosen.

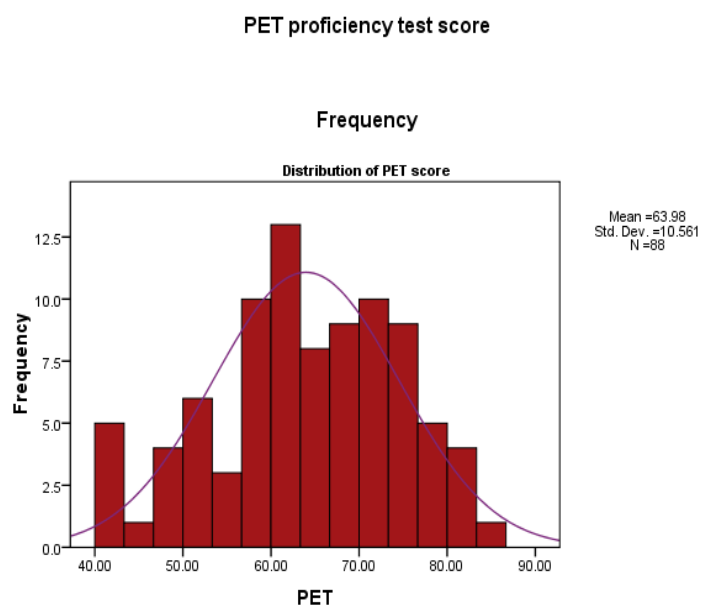


Figure 4.1 distributions of PET score

In order to answer the research question of the study an ANCOVA had to be run among the pretest and posttest WTC scores of the two groups. The focus of this part is analyzing the data obtained by WTC questionnaire.

#### 2. Testing the Assumptions for running ANCOVA

##### 2.1 Normality

In order to check the normality assumption of the scores obtained on the pretest and posttest of WTC in the two groups, Shapiro-Wilk Test was used. The normality result in Table 4.2 shows that the  $p$  value was .40 and .32 in the control and experimental groups respectively on the pretest of WTC. The results also indicated that the  $p$  value was .091 and .53 on the posttest of WTC in the control and experimental groups respectively. Since the  $p$  values for all sets of scores are greater than the selected significant level, .05, the normality assumption is met.

TABLE 4.2  
SHAPIRO-WILK TEST OF NORMALITY ON THE PRETEST AND POSTTEST OF WTC

Variable	Groups	Statistic	df	Sig.	
WTC	Pretest	Control	.946	30	.400
		Experimental	.961	30	.325
	Posttest	Control	.940	30	.091
		Experimental	.970	30	.534

**2.2 Homogeneity of variance**

As demonstrated in Table 4.3, the homogeneity of variance in pretest and posttest WTC scores was met ( $F_{(1, 58)} = .513, p = .48 > .05$ ).

TABLE 4.3  
LEVENE'S TEST OF EQUALITY OF ERROR VARIANCES ON THE POSTTEST OF CS

Variable	F	df1	df2	Sig.
WTC	.513	1	58	.477

**2.3 Linearity**

To assess the linearity assumption, the researcher checked the scatterplot between the covariate (pretest scores) and the dependent or response variable. Figure 4.3 demonstrates the data points for these variables along with the regression line and the Loess line. As demonstrated in Figure 4.2, there appears to be a linear (straight-line) relationship between the covariate and the response variable in both groups and thus running ANCOVA is legitimate.

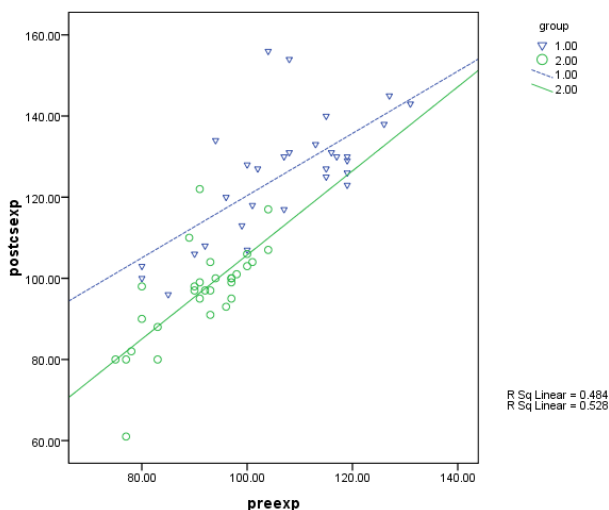


Figure 4.2 the Scatterplot for Checking the Linearity Assumption

**2.4 Homogeneity of Regression Slopes**

In order to check the assumption of the homogeneity of regression slopes, the researcher checked the interaction between the covariate and the grouping variable. The results in Table 4.4 ( $F = 1.204, p = .27 > .05$ ) demonstrate that the interaction was not statistically significant, indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was met.

TABLE 4.4  
TESTS OF BETWEEN-SUBJECTS EFFECTS FOR WTC SCORE

Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Group * WTC Pretest	34.076	1	34.07	1.204	.27

**2.5 The Results of ANCOVA**

The null hypothesis of the current study stated that communicative strategy instructional does not have any statistically significant effect on the intermediate EFL learners' WTC. In order to check the null hypothesis, a one-way between-groups analysis covariance (One-way ANCOVA) was used. Table 4.5 displays the descriptive statistics of the WTC pretest and posttest scores of the experimental and control groups. As demonstrated in Table 4.5, the mean of the pretest WTC scores turned out to be 60.53 and 57.33 for the experimental and control groups respectively. Moreover, the WTC posttest scores were calculated to be 75.4 and 59.3 for the experimental and control groups respectively.

TABLE 4.5  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF WTC

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
postexp1 wtc	30	60.00	91.00	75.4000	7.92029
preexp1 wtc	30	49.00	77.00	60.5333	7.70460
precont1 wtc	30	39.00	76.00	57.3333	9.77447
postcont1 wtc	30	45.00	80.00	59.3333	9.84127
Valid N (listwise)	30				

Table 4.6 below demonstrates the between-subject results for the ANCOVA. As shown in Table 4.6, pretest WTC score was a significant covariate ( $F(1,57) = 105.90, p = .0005 < .05$ ). That is, the two groups were significantly different in terms of WTC prior to the treatment.

TABLE 4.6  
TESTS OF BETWEEN SUBJECTS EFFECTS

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Post exp

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	6880.645 <sup>a</sup>	2	3440.323	121.102	.000	.809
Intercept	463.671	1	463.671	16.322	.000	.223
Pre exp	3008.579	1	3008.579	105.904	.000	.650
Group	2622.984	1	2622.984	92.331	.000	.618
Error	1619.288	57	28.409			
Total	280796.000	60				
Corrected Total	8499.933	59				

a. R Squared = .809 (Adjusted R Squared = .803)

However, the results indicate that ( $F(1,57) = 92.3, p = .0005 < .05$ , partial eta squared = .618) there was a significant difference between the two groups after the treatment far beyond the pretest differences. This indicated that the communicative strategies instruction had a significant effect on the EFL learners' WTC.

## V. DISCUSSION

Since the introduction of WTC in second language, a great deal of attention has been devoted to investigating how WTC can be reinforced in language learners (Osterlan, 2014; Riasati, 2012). Base on the result of this study and observing the behavioral communication of students, after 16 sessions of teaching communicative strategy students' use of strategy dramatically increased and learners were perceived more willingness to communicate.

The students in experimental classes believed that teaching communicative strategy helped them to deal with unpredicted problem while speaking. One student stated since practicing on communicative strategies she wasn't double minded to speak up. Another student said that after learning the communicative strategies she wasn't afraid of raising her hand anymore and volunteered for interaction or providing responses to the posed questions. Another student said that she felt less anxious since she knew how to evade answers whenever she could not communicate.

Beside all the controversial debates about the usefulness of teaching communicative strategy, the result of this study indicates that teaching nine communicative strategies could significantly influence the use of communicative strategy. These changes in students' behavior could be referred to teaching communicative strategy.

Moreover the result of this study revealed that learners' total WTC was affected by communicative strategy instruction. It can be concluded that this result somehow is in concordance with MacIntyre and Noels (1996) finding. They believed that strategy training helps learners to control their emotions and attitudes and gives them more motivation and encouragement to learn more skills. In sum, teaching strategy help learners overcome the psychological barriers in learning.

## VI. CONCLUSION

An ANCOVA was performed to analyze the data obtained by the WTC questioner before and after the treatment. The result ( $F(1, 57) = 92.3, p = .000, p < .05$ ) showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in terms of the improvement in total WTC. Therefore, it can be claimed that teaching communicative strategies significantly affect the participants' performance in the experimental group on the posttest and they performed better than the control group. So, teaching the nine communicative strategies positively influenced the use of communicative strategy in the experimental group. The reason for this improvement could be attributed to the explicit communicative

strategy instruction. Based on Dörnyei (1996) teaching communicative strategies explicitly increase learners' awareness in the use of strategies. Based on this idea, one can draw the conclusion that by teaching nine strategies learners become aware of communicative strategy use. So, based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that teaching communicative strategies can influence learner's willingness to communicate. Additionally, syllabus designers and materials developers have to provide the content of teaching material with comprehensible and proper tasks and exercises to familiarize learners with communicative strategy concept and its features.

#### APPENDIX. WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE QUESTIONNAIRE INSIDE THE CLASS ROOM

Directions: This questionnaire is composed of statements concerning your feelings about communication with other people, in English. Please indicate in the space provided frequency of time you choose to speak in English each classroom situation.

If you are almost never willing to speak English, write 1. If you are willing sometimes, write 2 or 3. If you are willing most of the time, write 4 or 5.

1 = Almost never willing

2 = Sometimes willing

3 = willing half of the time

4 = usually willing

5 = Almost always willing

##### **Speaking in class, in English**

1. Speaking in a group about your summer vacation.

2. Speaking to your teacher about your homework assignment.

3. A stranger enters the room you are in, how willing would you be to have a conversation if he talked to you first?

4. You are confused about a task you must complete, how willing are you to ask for instructions/clarification?

5. Talking to a friend while waiting in line.

6. How willing would you be to be an actor in a play?

7. Describe the rules of your favorite game.

8. Play a game in French, for example Monopoly.

##### **Reading in class (to yourself, not out loud)**

1. Read a novel.

2. Read an article in a paper.

3. Read letters from a pen pal written in native English.

4. Read personal letters or notes written to you in which the writer has deliberately used simple words and constructions.

5. Read an advertisement in the paper to find a good bicycle you can buy.

6. Read reviews for popular movies.

##### **Writing in class, in English**

1. Write an advertisement to sell an old bike.

2. Write down the instructions for your favorite hobby.

3. Write a report on your favorite animal and its habits.

4. Write a story.

5. Write a letter to a friend.

6. Write a newspaper article.

7. Write the answers to a "fun" quiz from a magazine.

8. Write down a list of things you must do tomorrow.

##### **Comprehension in class**

1. Listen to instructions and complete a task.

2. Bake a cake if instructions were not in Farsi.

3. Fill out an application form.

4. Take directions from an English speaker.

5. Understand an English movie.

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