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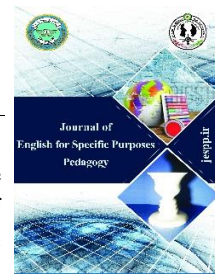
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## Research Paper

### The enhancement of willingness to communicate (WTC) among EAP students of English language and translation through the instruction of communication strategies

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#### Abstract

This study aims to explore (1) the effect of Communication Strategies (CS) on EAP Students of the English language and translation's Willingness to Communicate (WTC) using a quasi-experimental design and (2) learners' perceptions concerning how CS training affects their WTC through interviews. Using explanatory mixed method, the study performed a pre-/posttest experiment for the quantitative phase and compared the effects of CS training on WTC between an experimental and a control group. Semi-structured interviews permitted a qualitative exploration of learners' views on CS impacts. Sixty pre-intermediate EAP students of English language and translation in the two intact groups of experimental ( $n=30$ ) and control ( $n=30$ ) groups were selected based on convenience sampling. The participants' English Levels were determined using the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). A WTC questionnaire was used for pre-/post testing. Interviews were developed using a protocol covering strategy experiences and perceived WTC influences. Participants performed pretests. An experimental group underwent eight CS training sessions in 4 weeks, while the control group was offered regular classes. Post testing was conducted. Interviews were carried out and analyzed thematically. An independent t-test was conducted to compare the post-WTC scores. Quantitative results using ANCOVA,  $F(1, 57) = 29.00, p = 0.002$ , revealed that using communication strategy training enhances the level of willingness to communicate (WTC) of EAP students. Also. Qualitative results using interviews showed that CS enhanced confidence through navigating a systematic series of challenges, including decreased anxiety and enhanced competence in social, academic, and professional settings. The findings come with implications for integrating the teaching of CS into EAP pedagogy for developing oral proficiency.

**Keywords:** Improving communication; Efficacy; Second language learning; Willingness to communicate (WTC); Communication strategies

#### 1. Introduction

English occupies an important position in educational programs (Badpa & Mardani, 2025). Consequently, the country has implemented the teaching of the English language at various levels of education (Badpa, 2024). The English language has significant importance in communication (Badpa et. al., 2023). Willingness to communicate (WTC) is a concept that indicates an individual's tendency to participate in communication,



particularly in speaking (Macintyre & Wang, 2024). In English classes, WTC refers to the extent to which students want to talk in English, influenced by factors such as confidence, anxiety, and perceived communicative competence (Yashima et al., 2024). Recent studies emphasize that WTC is not static but dynamically shaped by classroom environments and instructional strategies (Pawlak & Zarrinabadi, 2024). WTC can be defined as "a readiness to be involved in further communication, at a specific time, with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (Macintyre et al., 1998). This includes the consideration of WTC as an important factor affecting L2 learners' actual, successful, and later language proficiency (Shin & Eslami, 2015). Meanwhile, communication strategies (CSs) are considered to be "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (Tarone, 1980).

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) refers to a specialized branch of English language instruction aimed at equipping students with the necessary skills to effectively communicate in academic settings. This includes developing competencies in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, tailored specifically for academic contexts such as universities and research institutions. EAP programs often focus on enhancing students' abilities to understand complex texts, produce scholarly writing, engage in discussions, and deliver presentations, thereby facilitating their success in higher education (Hamp-Lyons, 2001).

According to Conrod (2001), there are two types of WTC: inside and outside of the classroom. As mentioned by Lee and Lu (2021), students' WTC inside the classroom is more suitable in countries with an EFL context. In these countries, the classrooms become the usual place for communicating in English.

Studies have shown that talking or interacting with others is very important for learning a second language. Long (1983) suggested that when people talk to each other, they can learn new words and grammar rules from their peers and teachers.

Experts argued that teachers can increase students' WTC in a second language. They suggest that teachers should listen to students' problems and give them the right support to learn better. Helping students to communicate is a hard job for L2 teachers in the classroom because many factors can affect students' WTC (Yashima et al., 2016).

According to Borg (2011), people are also interested in what L2 students think about learning a second language. Students' and teachers' thoughts and ways of teaching mostly come from their education, experience, situation, and practice, but sometimes they might not agree with each other. However, if teachers and students have different ideas, it might affect how students learn, what they learn, how they act, and how happy they are.

Teachers want to know how to make their students more willing to speak a second language. However, this is not easy because many EFL students, especially in Asia, are very quiet, shy, and do not like to talk (Liu, 2005). The same goes for Iranian students as well. Iranian students are usually not active and do not like to talk in the classroom. They might be afraid of losing face and avoid talking when they feel the place is not safe for them.

Studying EFL students' WTC in Asian countries would help us learn more about L2 teaching and learning in Asia. Because teachers are important in encouraging students' WTC in the classroom and students have their ideas about how they learn, this study looks at the ways that teachers help their students' WTC in the classroom and what students think about their teachers' strategies.

In its early formulation, the model accounted for three subclasses of competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence, with later discussions making it four with its discourse competence. One reason the model became a common guide was that it also examined the practical implications regarding the syllabus design, teaching methodology, teacher education, and teaching materials. In simple terms, this model expects language learners to achieve a high degree of communicative competence as a result of a functionally organized syllabus-and the attempts to make communication as meaningful as possible.

Iranian EFL learners encounter many difficulties in communicating successfully in English, reporting low WTC (Al-Mahrooqi & den, 2012). Training Iranian EFL learners in CSs could potentially enhance their WTC (the central focus of this study). However, little research has investigated the role of CS in enhancing WTC among Iranian EFL learners. This study aims to address this gap. Low WTC prevents learners from actively participating in and maximizing benefits from EFL classrooms (Kang, 2005). Training Iranian intermediate EFL learners in CSs and enhancing their WTC may help improve their communication competence and proficiency. However, few studies have investigated the effects of CS training on WTC among Iranian EFL learners, pointing to a research gap that this study aims to address.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Theoretical Background

#### 2.1.1. *Willingness to Communicate (WTC)*

Macintyre et al. (2003b) defined WTC as considering the probability that one would engage in verbal interaction given that the opportunity presented itself (p. 590). According to McCroskey and Richmond (1991), from its inception in L1 studies, WTC was seen as a relatively stable characteristic maintained across different communicative situations and contexts. Given Macintyre et al. (1998), WTC was understood under the pyramid model as a situational construct composed of approximately 30 factors, organized format-wise into six levels. Factors that act as enduring, trait-like influences fall into the lower three levels of the constructs, while the upper three levels take account of more fleeting situational variables.

#### 2.1.2. *Theoretical Frameworks on WTC*

This section explores four theoretical frameworks on WTC, namely, the Social-Psychological Framework, the Sociocultural Framework, the Affective-Emotional Framework, and the Cognitive Framework. These frameworks provide a theoretical understanding of the factors that influence individuals' WTC in different contexts.

**2.1.2.1. Social-Psychological Framework.** The Social-Psychological Framework is a theoretical perspective that explains individual behavior from a social-psychological perspective. SCT has been used as a basis to study WTC. SCT suggests that people will be willing to express themselves in communication, as such behavior is likely to be followed by effects such as approval from others, self-advancement, and accomplishment (Macintyre et al., 2016).

**2.1.2.2. Sociocultural Framework.** The Sociocultural Framework is a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the role of social and cultural factors in shaping individual behavior. Within this framework, two theories that are relevant to WTC are Activity Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

- Activity Theory

Activity Theory is a theoretical framework that essentially explains how an action undertaken by an individual is permeated by a social and cultural context. Activity Theory states that an individual undertakes an activity that has social and cultural meaning for him or her. The activity thus becomes part of a broader cultural practices system that will influence individual behavior. The study of WTC has resorted to Activity Theory. Communicative activities recognized in their social and cultural context foster individuals' WTC and are, in turn, part of Activity Theory (Macintyre et al., 2016).

- Zone of Proximal Development

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a theoretical concept that explains how individuals' learning is influenced by their social and cultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, individuals' learning is influenced by the difference between their current level of development and their potential level of development.

**2.1.2.3. Affective-Emotional Framework.** The Affective-Emotional Framework is a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the role of affective and emotional factors in shaping individual behavior. Within this framework, two theories that are relevant to WTC are Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and Emotion Regulation Theory.

- Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is a concept that refers to the feeling of unease, apprehension, or nervousness that individuals experience when using a foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986). FLA can be influenced by various factors such as language proficiency, self-efficacy, and context.

- Emotion Regulation Theory

Emotion Regulation Theory is a theoretical perspective that explains how individuals regulate their emotions in response to different situations (Gross, 1998). According to Emotion Regulation Theory, individuals use various strategies to regulate their emotions, such as reappraisal, suppression, and expression.

**2.1.2.4. Cognitive Framework.** The Cognitive Framework is a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the role of cognitive factors in shaping individual behavior. Within this framework, two theories that are relevant to WTC are the Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) and the Information Processing Theory (IPT).

- Cognitive Load Theory

Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) is a theory that explains how individuals process information and the cognitive resources required for different types of tasks (Sweller et al., 2011). According to CLT, there are two types of cognitive load: intrinsic cognitive load, which is the inherent difficulty of a task, and extraneous cognitive load, which is the cognitive load that is imposed by the instructional materials or the learning environment.

CLT has been applied to the study of WTC. According to CLT, individuals who experience a high level of cognitive load are less willing to communicate because they are overwhelmed by the cognitive demands of the communicative task (Macintyre et al., 2016). Conversely, individuals who experience a low level of cognitive load are more willing to communicate because they can devote their cognitive resources to the communicative task.

- Information Processing Theory

Information Processing Theory (IPT) is a theory that explains how individuals process and store information in memory. According to IPT, information is processed through a series of stages, including sensory memory, working memory, and long-term memory.

IPT has been applied to the study of WTC. According to IPT, individuals who can process and store information related to communication tasks are more willing to communicate because they are better able to recall the information when needed (Macintyre et al., 2016). Conversely, individuals who have difficulty processing and storing information related to communication tasks are less willing to communicate because they feel that they lack the necessary knowledge and skills to communicate effectively.

## 2.2. Willingness to Communicate and Its Factors

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is a key determinant in language acquisition, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. In the case of Iranian intermediate language learners, employing a wide array of communication strategies would empower the students to enhance WTC and develop language proficiency and communicative competence. This literature review attempts to combine recent discoveries relevant to WTC and focuses primarily on the classroom environment, technology integration, and instructional strategies that entail communication strategies.

### **2.2.1. The Role of Classroom Environment**

For EFL learners, a supportive classroom ambiance is important for developing their WTC. According to Khajavy et al. (2016), a positive classroom atmosphere boosts the willingness of the learner to communicate, linking WTC with other factors like communication confidence, motivation, and language achievement. Thus, it could be deduced that educators should henceforth assign top priority to an encouraging environment that may facilitate open communication, which is well aligned with the focus on communication strategies in language instruction.

Moreover, Ebadi and Amini (2022) outline the necessity of providing scaffolding techniques in blended learning environments as preconditions of these particular kinds of teaching methods in motivating learners and increasing their self-efficacy, as both are essential in increasing WTC. This indicates the need for teachers to apply supportive strategies towards possible communication willingness towards this category of learners.

### **2.2.2. Technological Integration**

Emerging technologies, especially Artificial Intelligence and Automatic Speech Recognition, have potential in making fantastic strides in WTC. Tai and Chen (2020) have found that interaction with intelligent personal assistants, such as Google Assistant, significantly reduces speaking anxiety and assists in achieving communicative confidence among EFL learners. This means that integrating the technology within language learning environments produces fewer intimidating environments, thus increasing learners' willingness to communicate.

Furthermore, AI has been credited with enhancing communication skills by Rusmiyanto et al. (2023). AI can provide personalized and interactive learning experiences, which can prove helpful in developing a wide range of communicative skills, including WTC. This means that introducing an AI-driven communication strategy into language pedagogy is an appropriate way to help increase WTC for Iranian intermediate learners.

This concept is further consolidated by Zhou and Wei (2018), who report findings on embodied conversational agents that implement communication strategies and affective backchannels. The study purports that these agents could be effective in stimulating learners' willingness to communicate, an idea that technological advances can be exploited to improve WTC.

### **2.2.3. Instructional Strategies and Feedback**

The role that instructional strategies play in enhancing WTC is paramount to its realization. Ebadi and Ebadijalal (2020) study the influence of explicit, implicit corrective feedback on WTC among EFL learners and conclude that explicit feedback enhances one's self-confidence, exerting an important impact on communication. Thus, the finding implies that teachers should provide specific feedback in fostering the learners' WTC.

In addition, Morrice et al. (2019) study WTC concerning language learning orientations and disclose that the motivation and context of the learners greatly affect their willingness to communicate outside of the classroom.

### **2.2.4. Cultural Awareness and Communication Strategies**

The integration of cultural awareness into communication strategies is another crucial aspect of enhancing WTC. Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi (2018) indicate that effective communication strategies should encompass cultural components to improve learners' willingness to communicate in diverse contexts. This is particularly relevant for Iranian intermediate learners, who may face specific cultural challenges in language use.

Furthermore, Chavez et al. (2023) highlight that the use of various language learning strategies positively correlates with motivation and proficiency among Persian students. This finding suggests that tailored communication strategies that consider cultural contexts can enhance WTC by fostering motivation and proficiency in language use.

## **2.3. English for Academic Purposes (EAP)**

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is a specialized domain within English language teaching that focuses on equipping learners with the linguistic and communicative skills necessary for success in academic settings. EAP instruction is particularly crucial in an increasingly globalized educational landscape, where students from diverse linguistic backgrounds pursue higher education in English-medium institutions. This literature review synthesizes key findings from recent research on EAP, emphasizing methodologies, teaching practices, and the integration of academic literacy across disciplines, while also identifying knowledge gaps and suggesting future research directions.

### ***2.3.1. Methodologies in EAP Research***

Recent studies have highlighted the diverse methodologies employed in EAP research and instruction. For instance, the use of the Toulmin model for assessing persuasive writing and a Corpus-Based Approach (CBA) for analyzing academic texts demonstrates the varied strategies available to EAP practitioners (Adara, 2017). These methodologies are essential for shaping effective instructional practices that align with academic writing expectations across different disciplines. Furthermore, the examination of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) within EAP contexts has revealed its potential to enhance language proficiency among non-English-speaking students, while also uncovering challenges related to implementation, such as mismatched expectations and time constraints (Flowerdew, 2019). This underscores the necessity for EAP educators to adapt instructional strategies to meet the specific needs of their learners.

### ***2.3.2. Curriculum Integration and Academic Literacy***

The integration of EAP into various academic disciplines is a prevailing theme in the literature. Wingate (2016) advocates for a collaborative approach to academic literacy instruction, where EAP specialists' partner with subject lecturers to address students' disciplinary needs. This collaborative model not only enriches students' understanding of academic conventions but also fosters a more cohesive educational experience. Additionally, the role of the Internet in EAP instruction has been explored, revealing both positive attitudes towards digital resources and a significant gap in their effective integration into curricula (Hyland, 2018). As EAP continues to evolve, it is imperative to train educators in leveraging digital tools to enhance language development.

### ***2.3.3 Teacher Beliefs and Practices***

Research on teacher beliefs and practices in EAP has revealed critical insights into the complexities of instructional methodologies. Alexander (2012) found that teachers' beliefs significantly influence their pedagogical approaches, yet discrepancies often exist between beliefs and classroom practices. This highlights the need for ongoing professional development and reflective practice among EAP educators. By fostering an environment of continuous evaluation and adaptation, teachers can better align their methodologies with the evolving demands of academic language education.

### ***2.3.4. Vocabulary and Language Skills Development***

A significant area of focus within EAP literature is the development of academic vocabulary. Nasir (2020) emphasizes the importance of targeted vocabulary instruction for English language learners (ELLs), particularly regarding functional academic vocabulary essential for university success. The positive student feedback regarding innovative instructional strategies, such as texting, suggests that incorporating engagement-driven methods can greatly enhance vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, the investigation into recurrent word combinations in academic writing has highlighted the linguistic challenges faced by English language learners (ELLs), indicating a need for tailored English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction to address these specific challenges (Atai & Dashtestani, 2013).

### 2.3.5 Challenges in EAP Instruction

Despite the advancements in EAP research, several challenges persist. The ongoing struggle with the effective implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodologies in EAP contexts, as identified by Farooq (2015), points to systemic issues such as overcrowded classrooms and limited resources. Addressing these challenges is crucial for optimizing EAP instruction and ensuring that students gain the necessary skills for academic success.

## 3. Research Questions

The goal of this study was to examine the effect of communication strategies on EAP students of the English language and translation's WTC and learners' perceptions concerning how CS training affects their WTC. To achieve the purpose of this study, two major questions were addressed:

1. To what extent does the implementation of communication strategy training influence the level of willingness to communicate (WTC) among EAP students of English language and translation?
2. What are the viewpoints of English language and translation students about the association between the utilization of communication methods and their level of willingness to communicate (WTC)?

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Research Design

The study adopted an explanatory mixed methods research design to investigate, in-depth, the influence of communication strategy training on WTC among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed sequentially in response to the two research questions.

Concerning RQ1, a quasi-experimental design was employed to ascertain whether communication strategy training indeed exerts a significant influence on learners' WTC. The study features one experimental group that received CS that lasted for 8 sessions and one control group that did not receive any training as regards communication strategies. Whereas the independent variable was communication strategy training, the dependent variable was WTC. The WTC was operationalized as a pre- and posttest, using a widely accepted WTC scale by Yashima et al. (2004). The scale operationalizes WTC through a 7-point Likert scale, including 32 statements that are provided in six dimensions, such as Motivational Intensity.

With RQ2, a qualitative phenomenological approach was adopted to explore students' views and experiences of the influence of strategy use on their WTC. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with five randomly selected learners from the experimental group who represented a diverse level of WTC based on the pretest scores. The interviews, focusing on six main areas, sought to elicit how strategies helped in overcoming communication problems, boosting confidence, and gathering suggestions to enhance strategy training.

### 4.2. Participants

The study took place at the University of Arak, Iran, where 60 pre-intermediate Iranian EFL learners in their second year of an English Language and Translation program participated in the study. Their ages were in the range of 18-22 years, with a mean age of 20. They were of both gender and were selected through convenience sampling.

The experimental group was treated with a total of 8 hours of communication strategy training over four weeks, comprising eight sessions of one hour each. The researcher taught the training and the explanation, modelling, and practice of strategies using role plays and information gap activities. The control group did not receive any special training during the time of the experiment, except for their regular English lessons.

For the qualitative part, five participants were randomly selected from among the participants in the experimental group. After completion of the quantitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants individually.

### 4.3. Instruments

The instruments used in the study included the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), the Willingness to Communicate Questionnaire (WTC), and a semi-structured interview.

#### 4.3.1. Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT)

OQPT is a standardized test taken by hundreds of English teachers across the globe to determine their students' most suitable levels. The test consists of 60 multiple-choice questions, and the level of the test-taker is determined by the correct answers. The test is sectionalized: the first part consists of Questions 1-40 and deals with grammar and vocabulary items relating to all students; the second part only starts after the first has been thoroughly completed, involving questions 41-60.

The OQPT consists of 60 multiple-choice items and measures a student's general language ability. This test was used as a homogeneity measure to assign pre-intermediate EAP learners to appropriate proficiency levels or classes for the language course. Unlike other placement tests, the OQPT assesses not only knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also evaluate how learners apply this knowledge in communication, enabling students to use English naturally and confidently in real-world situations. The participants in this study were classified at the pre-intermediate proficiency level, with scores ranging from 18 and 29. The reliability index for OQPT was estimated at 0.911 using the KR-21 method. Additionally, three experienced EFL university instructors assessed its face and content validity before administration.

#### 4.3.2. Willingness to Communicate Questionnaire (WTC)

The present study employed McCroskey's (1992) WTC questionnaire. McCroskey's questionnaire consists of 20 items that are used to assess willingness to communicate in English in terms of the communication context (public speaking, talking in meetings, group discussions, and interpersonal conversations) and types of receivers (stranger, acquaintance, and friend). It is operationally defined as the sum of the points that the student achieves based on this WTC scale. The respondents chose the five-point Likert type ranging from 'Strongly Disagree = 1' to 'Strongly Agree = 5'. Cronbach's alpha reliability index of the WTC questionnaire was estimated at 0.86. Meanwhile, a panel of TEFL-experienced university instructors accepted the face and content validity of the questionnaire.

#### 4.3.3. Semi-structured Interview

The participant sample for the qualitative phase consisted of five individuals, with semi-structured interviews being conducted with them to gain in-depth knowledge about their experiences, attitudinal disposition towards communication strategy use and its influence on WTC. The interview protocol was developed based on the research questions and consisted of open-ended questions.

With permission, the interviews were recorded, with interviews conducted in English. Probing for information was used to gather more detailed, specific, and deliberated responses from the participants. Each interview lasted around thirty minutes in length.

### 4.4. Data Collection Procedure

OQPT was used to compare the English proficiency level of the two intact groups of the study: experimental ( $n = 30$ ) and control groups ( $n = 30$ ) at the outset of the study. In the first week, participants from both groups completed the WTC pretest questionnaire during class. Questionnaires were coded to maintain confidentiality while enabling the matching of individual WTC pre- and posttest scores. Weeks two through five: The experimental group underwent one-hour strategy training sessions led by the researcher, beginning in week 2, whereas the control group had regular English classes. The training consisted of ten communication strategies. Each session dealt with 2-3 strategies through explanation, modeling, role plays, and information-gap activities relevant to practice in applying the strategies. In the 6th week, a posttest was administered to both groups using

the same WTC questionnaire. Inter-rater reliability for scoring was established when a second rater, not involved in the original scoring process, carried out a blind review on 20% of the questionnaires, whereby agreement reached 95%. The 5 qualitative phase participants selected were given times for semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted in a private room on the campus in Week 7, with permission to audio-record. Open-ended questions in the interview protocol were asked of each participant; further details were probed as required. The interviews were then fully transcribed.

#### 4.5. Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data obtained from WTC pre- and posttests were entered into SPSS. An independent samples t-test was performed to check the homogeneity of the SA and PA groups OQPT scores since there were just two independent groups with merely on single shot test. In addition, one-way analysis of covariance (1-way ANCOVA) was adopted to answer the first research question of the study, as there were two independent groups with one set of WTC scores as the dependent variables, i.e., pretest and posttest scores. The scores on the pretest were considered as the covariates.

Regarding the second research question, qualitative data were meant to reveal the views of Iranian intermediate EFL learners regarding how using communication strategies affected their WTC. Interview recordings with five participants who were selected for qualitative inquiry were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts underwent open, axial and selective coding to identify emergent themes from participants' perceptions and experiences. Thematic analysis was then done to understand the patterns in how participants viewed the impact of strategy use on their WTC, such as reducing anxiety, enhancing competence, or bolstering self-confidence, emphasizing the importance of trustworthiness in thematic analysis, highlighting that it is essential for ensuring the credibility and reliability of qualitative research findings. By being transparent about the analytical process, researchers can allow others to follow their reasoning and understand how conclusions were drawn.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. OQPT Results

As explained earlier in chapter three of this study, there were two intact groups of the experimental group ( $n = 30$ ) and the control group ( $n = 30$ ) in this study. Therefore, an independent samples t-test was used to confirm the homogeneity of the two groups' OQPT proficiency scores. We used a parametric analysis of an independent samples t-test as four assumptions of interval data, independence of subjects, normality and homogeneity of variances were met (Field, 2017). The first assumption is not violated because the present data are measured on an interval scale. Bachman (2005, p. 236) states that the assumption of independence of subjects is met when "the performance of any given individual is independent of the performance of other individuals", as this was true in the present study. The third assumption is the normality of the data, which was tested through the ratios of skewness and kurtosis. As displayed in Table 1, skewness and kurtosis ratios did not exceed the ranges of +/- 1.96, denoting that the assumption of normality was not violated. Also, Table 1 shows that the mean score of the experimental ( $M = 37.40$ ,  $SD = 5.31$ ) and control groups ( $M = 36.27$ ,  $SD = 5.98$ ) are close to each other.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics and Skewness and Kurtosis Ratios for the Two Groups of OQPT Scores*

Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM	Skewness Ratio	Kurtosis Ratio
Experimental	30	37.40	5.31	0.969	-0.137	-1.395
Control	30	36.27	5.98	1.093	-0.010	-1.710

Based on the results represented in Table 2, the hypothesis of equal of variances was met since the significance value associated with Levene's Test (0.33) exceeded 0.05. Additionally, according to the results manifested in Table 4.4, independent samples t-test detected no statistically significant difference in the English proficiency scores between the experimental and control groups,  $t(58) = 0.78$ ,  $p = 0.44$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . As a result, it

was concluded that the students in the experimental and control groups were homogeneous considering English language proficiency.

**Table 2**

*Independent Samples T-test for the Two Groups OQPT Scores*

Factor	Levene's Test for Variances		T-test for Means			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
Equal variances assumed	0.947	0.334	0.776	58	0.441	1.133
Equal variances not assumed			0.776	57.178	0.441	1.133

## 5.2. Addressing the First Research Question

The first research question of the current study inquired into the extent to which the implementation of communication strategy training affects the level of willingness to communicate (WTC) among EAP students of English language and translation. To investigate this research question, analysis of covariance was applied. As Pallant (2013) points out, ANCOVA is employed when we have a two or more-group pretest/posttest design (e.g., comparing the impact of different interventions, taking before and after measures for each group). The scores on the pretest are dealt with as a covariate to control for pre-existing differences between the groups.

ANCOVA assumes that the following assumptions are met: no influence of treatment on covariate measurement, reliability of covariates, no strong correlations among covariates, linear relationship between dependent variable and covariate, equality of error variances, and homogeneity of regression slopes. Since the covariates were measured before the treatment, they could not be influenced by the treatment. Therefore, this assumption was not violated. In addition, there was only one covariate in each ANCOVA analysis. Hence, the assumption of correlation among covariates was not applicable.

To check the assumption of the reliability of covariates, the Pearson product-moment correlation was checked. Results showed that the covariate was measured reliably ( $r = 0.864$ ). Table 3 contains the results of checking the assumption of a linear relationship between the dependent variable (posttest of WTC) and the covariates (pretest of WTC). As seen in Table 3, the linear relationship between posttest of WTC and the covariate of WTC was significant ( $F = 24.41$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); therefore, the linearity assumption was met.

**Table 3**

*Linear Relationship between the Posttest WTC and the Covariate of WTC*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)	77.190	10	9.649	3.368	0.007
	Linearity	69.931	1	69.931	24.410	0.000
	Deviation from Linearity	7.259	9	1.037	0.362	0.917
Within Groups		19.813	19	2.865		
Total		102.742	29			

The results showed that the significant value associated with Levene's test (0.68) exceeded the selected significant level (0.05), and so the homogeneity of variance assumption was not violated for WTC scores in the two groups. According to Field (2017), the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors are analogous to standardized scores (z-scores) that can be compared against the critical values of +/- 1.96 at 0.05 levels. Since all ratios were within the ranges of +/- 1.96, it was concluded that the assumption of normality was met (Table 4).

The next assumption relates to the homogeneity of regression slopes. The results indicated that the significance level of the interaction (Group\*Pretest) between group and the pretest of total WTC was above 0.05 and, therefore, not statistically significant,  $F(1, 56) = 0.41, p > 0.05$ . This means that the pretest and posttest of WTC scores in the two groups enjoy the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes.

Descriptive statistics, including the number of students, mean, standard deviation, and standard error of means for the WTC scores in the experimental and control groups, were summarized in Table 4. Table 4 shows that the mean of WTC in the experimental group ( $M = 57.55, SD = 10.50$ ), and control group ( $M = 66.65, SD = 11.20$ ) are not far from each other on the pretest; nonetheless, the mean of WTC in the experimental group ( $M = 72.50, SD = 10.67$ ) is much higher than the mean of the control group ( $M = 68.20, SD = 12.43$ ) on the posttest.

**Table 4**

*Descriptive Statistics Skewness and Kurtosis Ratio for WTC Scores on Pretest and Posttest by Group*

Test	Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM	Skewness Ratio	Kurtosis Ratio
Pretest	Experimental	30	66.55	10.50	2.38	-0.819	-1.313
	Control	30	65.65	11.20	2.505	-1.336	-0.253
Posttest	Experimental	30	72.50	10.67	2.386	-1.685	0.454
	Control	30	68.20	12.43	2.781	0.256	-0.678

In order to depict the results of both pretest and posttest for the two groups in terms of WTC, a Line Chart (Figure 1) was made. As it is observable from the Line Chart, the means of WTC in the experimental and control groups are much closer to each other on the pretest than on the posttest, where the mean of WTC for the experimental group is considerably larger than that of the control group.

**Figure 1**

*Line Chart for Two Groups' Means of WTC (Pretest & Posttest)*

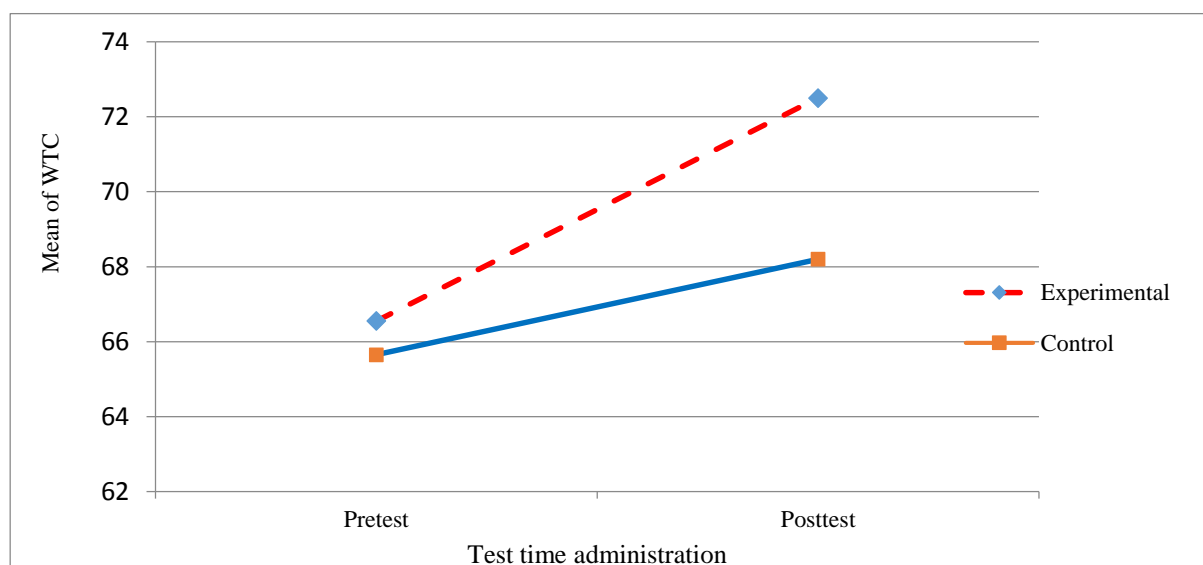


Table 5 summarizes the results of the ANCOVA. After adjusting for the WTC scores on the pretest, there was a significant difference,  $F(1, 57) = 29.00, p = 0.002, p < 0.05$ , partial eta squared = 0.34, among the WTC means of the two groups on the posttest; thus, it could be claimed that using communication strategy training influence the level of willingness to communicate (WTC) among EAP students of English language and translation.

Also, as it is evident from Table 5, there was a strong relationship,  $F(1, 57) = 161.50, p < 0.05$ , between the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores on the WTC. This means the WTC scores gained on the pretest

affect the WTC scores obtained on the posttest. Additionally, Table 5 shows that the partial eta squared (effect size) value is 0.74.

**Table 5**

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects on WTC*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	161.523	2	80.761	103.938	0.000	0.785
Intercept	7.335	1	7.335	9.440	0.003	0.142
Pretest	125.485	1	125.485	161.497	0.000	0.739
Group	22.534	1	22.534	29.001	0.000	0.337
Error	44.290	57	0.777			
Total	14854.250	60				
Corrected Total	205.813	59				

### 5.3. Addressing the Second Research Question

The purpose of the second research question was about English language and translation students' viewpoints about the association between the utilization of communication methods and their level of willingness to communicate. The interviewee participants were coded as S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5. The answers were provided in the participants' L1 and were then translated into English. The interview questions focused on 6 areas:

1. *Past experiences of a lack of WTC inside and outside the language classroom*
2. *Reasons for the lack of WTC*
3. *Effect of learning CSs on WTC in different contexts*
4. *Usefulness of CSs in different situations*
5. *Effect on overall communicative ability*
6. *Effect on anxiety and self-confidence*

As for the past experiences of a lack of WTC inside and outside the language classroom, three of the participants said:

**S1:** *Before learning communication strategies in this program, I struggled with the willingness to communicate both in my English classes and socially outside of school. I was afraid to speak up for fear of making mistakes or looking foolish in front of others. However, learning different verbal and nonverbal strategies to handle unfamiliar situations has helped me to feel more confident putting my ideas out there. Now I have techniques like asking questions, acknowledging others' responses, and using body language to actively listen that help me participate more. I've noticed a big difference in my comfort level communicating since gaining these tools. The strategies have given me a way to still be an engaged communicator even when I lack confidence in my language abilities.*

**S4:** *In the past, my lack of English proficiency led to my avoiding communication whenever possible, both in my English studies and in daily life. I was worried that if I spoke, others would focus on my mistakes rather than what I was trying to say. Now that I understand strategies like preparing questions in advance, keeping an open and engaged posture, and using rephrasing to buy time if I get stuck, I feel much more willing to actively participate. Learning communication strategies has given me a framework to work from, so I'm not so afraid of the unpredictability of conversation. I feel my willingness to communicate has grown tremendously since gaining these techniques.*

**S5:** *Before taking this class, I had a very difficult time communicating in English due to a lack of confidence and strategies. In my language courses, I would rarely contribute for fear of saying something wrong.*

*Outside of class, I avoided speaking with others in English whenever possible. However, since learning about communication strategies like paraphrasing, asking follow-up questions, and gesturing to supplement my words, I have seen a marked improvement in my willingness to communicate. I now feel prepared to handle unfamiliar situations rather than freezing up. These tools have given me a framework to rely on, so I am not so worried about every little error. I notice myself actively engaging in conversations more in both my studies and personal life. Learning strategies have given me strategies to still participate effectively even when I have limited language abilities. I am much more willing to communicate thanks to these new techniques.*

Concerning the reasons for the lack of WTC, follow-up questions were asked to understand what participants perceived as factors inhibiting their WTC, such as anxiety over errors, vocabulary limitations, or cultural differences. The following were stated:

**S2:** *Before learning strategies, the biggest factor limiting willingness to communicate was anxiety over making mistakes. I was afraid that any error would reflect poorly on me. I didn't want to take risks for fear of embarrassment. Now, I understand that errors are a natural part of language learning. Strategies like paraphrasing buy me time and acknowledgement signals help others understand my intentions. I'm less paralyzed by anxiety and more willing to try.*

**S3:** *For me, a lack of vocabulary was the primary inhibitor. When I didn't know how to express my ideas, I just remained silent. The strategies have given me tools to work around limitations like describing concepts or using examples. Rephrasing has allowed me to keep conversations moving even if I forget a word. I feel more equipped to participate successfully despite lexical gaps.*

**S5:** *Cultural differences also discouraged my communication previously. I didn't understand certain norms. Now, awareness strategies help me navigate unknowns while gestures help me supplement my meaning. Questions help clarify assumptions. Feeling more informed culturally has boosted my confidence to interact cross-culturally. I'm more willing to converse despite inherent cultural barriers.*

Concerning the effect of learning CSs on WTC in different contexts, participants were asked how CS training affected their WTC levels in social, academic, and professional situations, like conversations with friends, participation in class, presentations, etc. They provided the following answers:

**S2:** *The CS training has significantly helped improve my WTC in all situations. With friends, I'm more comfortable sharing opinions using acknowledgement signals. In classes, I regularly participate by building on others' responses. Strategies provide structure so I can present assignments. CS even helped me network confidently at a recent internship fair using open body language. I have strategies for any scenario now, which empower me to communicate more.*

**S4:** *Before CS, I rarely talked socially or in class because of a lack of confidence. Now, conversation flows freely with friends as I use follow-up questions to keep it going. Academically, paraphrasing and gestures buy me processing time to actively engage in discussions. Strategies remain crucial during challenging oral presentations, too. CS training has transformed my participation across environments by smoothing social interactions and equipping me in professional contexts.*

**S5:** *CS empowered me to communicate much more frequently and fluidly in every domain. Socially, acknowledgements help strengthen bonds. Academically, prepared questions encourage participation. Even professionally, summarizing assists in addressing networking inquiries. Now with tools like providing examples and rephrasing, my WTC flourishes in any setting rather than avoiding communication. Strategies' ubiquity benefits situations extensively.*

Concerning the usefulness of CSs in different situations, participants were asked when and how participants employed specific CSs they had learned, and what their perceived benefits were. The following were provided by four participants:

**S1:** *During a class discussion, I used prepared questions to actively participate. By building on others' responses with acknowledgements, I stayed engaged. This strategy allowed natural involvement compared to my past silence.*

**S3:** *When chatting with international students, I employed paraphrasing to ensure understanding. Even with limited proficiency, this technique kept the conversation flowing smoothly. It alleviated previous anxieties over direct translation.*

**S4:** *Delivering a presentation and rephrasing helped me work around unknown vocabulary. Despite gaps, I could still make my point clear. This strategy application demonstrated the tools' value under pressure.*

**S5:** *Networking at a career fair proved challenging until utilizing open body language boosted my confidence. Paired with summarization, patrons responded positively. Whereas previously I'd avoid such contexts, now strategies foster interchanges productively.*

The fifth interview question addressed whether CS knowledge enhanced the participants' confidence and competence in comprehending and expressing themselves more effectively in English. Three answers were provided:

**S2:** *Being aware of active listening strategies gave me the confidence to understand conversations better. Using acknowledgements signals comprehension, and asking follow-up questions ensures clarity. Lexical gaps no longer exclude me from exchanges. I can keep up by paraphrasing. These metacognitive tools boosted my self-assurance immensely.*

**S3:** *Before, expressing myself seemed impossible. Now, rephrasing provides autonomy when vocabulary eludes me. Summarizing relays my point. I understand social norms better to navigate discussions. Remembering engagement techniques relieves performance anxiety. CS knowledge transformed how I perceive my communicative ability.*

**S4:** *Strategies presented a structured approach I could apply systematically. No longer was communication a chaotic endeavor, but a learnable skill. Having a process sparked motivation to improve. CS education empowered me with confidence instead of insecurity. I understand linguistic challenges, but also how to overcome them to converse competently through thoughtful preparation.*

The last question elicited the effect of CS on the interviewees' anxiety and self-confidence by asking participants if CS training had any influence on reducing their anxiety and boosting their self-assurance when communicating in English. All participants provided answers:

**S1:** *Before CS training, I felt very anxious communicating in English due to my limited vocabulary and fear of mistakes. However, learning strategies like paraphrasing and acknowledging helped me continue conversations even when struggling to find words. Now I feel reassured that I have the tools to manage unexpected situations. My anxiety has reduced significantly as I am not afraid to try.*

**S2:** *I used to be very self-conscious about my English abilities and would avoid interacting for fear of being embarrassed. Understanding strategies empowered me with confidence that I can effectively express myself through summarization or rephrasing. Now I know that mistakes are natural, and others will understand my intentions as long as I utilize strategies. My self-assurance increased tremendously with this knowledge.*

**S3:** *As someone shy by nature, talking in a new language seemed daunting. However, learning preparatory questions and active listening techniques showed me I have control over conversations. Even during stressful exchanges, these strategies provide the structure that calms my nerves. CS training has helped reduce my anxiety so I can communicate freely without worrying about language limitations.*

**S4:** *In the past, I was very self-conscious about my accent and grammar skills, which prevented me from participating in class. However, after learning communication strategies like gesturing and acknowledging others, I realized language errors are a natural part of learning. These techniques help me focus on meaning rather than perfection. Now I feel more confident contributing to discussions, knowing I have tools to supplement my speech. My anxiety levels have reduced tremendously.*

**S5:** *As an international student, cultural differences always made me hesitate in conversations, fearing I might say something inappropriate. Communication strategies in education opened my eyes to different perspectives. Learning to pay attention to body language and ask follow-up questions enabled me to navigate diverse situations respectfully. Now I understand varying viewpoints better and am not as worried about situational unpredictability. This boosted my self-assurance manifold to interact cross-culturally without stress.*

To summarize, interviews revealed that even though they eventually learnt communication strategies, most of the students had common experiences of a lack of WTC both in and outside school, attributed to anxiety over making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and cultural differentials. They felt unwillingness or anxiety during participation either in face-to-face conversations or in class discussions, along with other social situations, fearing that it would be embarrassing or that they would not be understood. However, after their training on communication strategies, improvement was reported by the participants. Techniques like acknowledging others, asking preparatory questions, paraphrasing, and gestures formed part of important ways through which they were actively participating in conversations and academic functions. Their motivation translated into their practical use, not making them rely totally on the perfection of language competence while creating the confidence for effective communication, despite all odds. Specifically, for the five participants, the CS training was considered effective in increasing WTC from informal, academic, and professional contexts during social interactions to presentations.

Keeping in mind that they looked forward to very specific instances while applying the different strategies, specific benefits cited included maintaining smooth exchanges despite possible gaps, ensuring understanding, and successful networking. They perceived those particular techniques as a means of empowering communication in different contexts systematically, as opposed to reactively. Most importantly, it was thought that the knowledge about communication strategies contributed to better overall communicative competence and the creation of a safety net in terms of self-confidence, as it presented a learnable framework. It undermined the idea that communication is general and unpredictable and conveyed a sense of control and ability to work one's way through challenges. Ultimately, the interviews concurred that the training generally reduced the participants' anxieties about their limitations in communicating in English and increased their self-assurance regarding their perceived ability to communicate competently.

## 6. Discussion

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, two main conclusions were drawn: 1) communication strategies training yielded statistically higher WTC scores than the control condition, and 2) interviews with participants indicated the training effectively improved WTC across diverse contexts by boosting confidence and competence in strategic communication.

### 6.1. Discussion of the Results of the Quantitative Phase

The present study also can take support from Kang's (2005) study in which he found that communication strategy use was the most salient variable in predicting WTC, with other predictors being English proficiency and communication apprehension. Communication strategies, as found in a similar study conducted by Yashima et al. (2004), partially mediated the relation between communicative competence and WTC among 146 Japanese high school EFL students. This means that strategic communication competence is assumed to increase the willingness to engage. This will extend the existing work by demonstrating direct training of communication strategies to increase WTC scores and highlight the causal effects that the strategic knowledge has in fostering engagement.

Corresponding with the outcomes of this study, other research has theorized a reciprocal relationship between communication strategies and WTC such that in using one, growth in the opposite factor is reinforced over the years (Peng, 2018; Xing et al., 2018). The 'strategic competence' would develop through practice, discussing purposefully, using a method for dealing with unknown situations, and allowing confidence to university/college students to use these techniques communicatively. This does not stop improving willingness through improvement in communicative readiness. The current training program might have set off this positive feedback loop, allowing participants to use deliberate strategizing tools to obtain experience in active communication. Follow-up interviews also confirm that strategy training seemed to increase the inclination of the

participants toward participation because they felt enhanced and dominant control over communication (McCroskey & Baer, 1985; Macintyre et al., 1998).

Our findings resonate with other works examining how WTC differs in scenarios or interlocutors. According to Yashima (2002), Japanese learners have shown more willingness to participate with their peers in friendlier, more intimate settings than in formal class discussions. In the same vein, Hashimoto (2002) noted that American students were more willing to communicate with their friends than with their professors. Findings here are similar in that interviews reveal that participants felt much better prepared to engage socially, academically, and professionally without fear of predictability or cultural difference, thanks to strategies. Thus, it would seem that strategic competence helps mitigate the often contextually bound fluctuations in WTC with tools that students can use for transfer across contexts.

## 6.2. Discussion of the Results of the Qualitative Phase

Cinajetic investigating strategies is that indeed also has been a subject matter looking train and between communication strategy with the will to communicate based on some affective factors like anxiety and confidence. The other study does consider the lowering of anxiety and provides an assurance in communicative ability by strategies similar to those noted in previous work. Macintyre and Charos (1996) and Yashima (2002) related strategies used to reduce reticence.

However, Hashimoto (2002) says strategic ability was instead related to an increase in confidence. Further to note, Ling et al. (2013) established causal relationships between strategy awareness and anxiety reduction specifically. By representing communication as a learnable systematizing, strategies may help recast perceived threats in more positive challenges, as suggested by interviews have been shown by Horwitz et al. (1986). The explicit instruction delivered has had a form of psychological empowerment of participants to perceive communication as being within their volitional control rather than as an uncontrollable source of stress (McCroskey & Beatty, 1986).

Aside from that, however, current findings raise issues that were not directly addressed in former research. For example, contextual WTC studies have focused much on Western EFL populations (Macintyre et al., 1998; Yashima, 2002). Interviews here indicate explicit strategy instruction can boost Iranian EFL learners' WTC in many different ways as well by reducing overreliance on language proficiency alone through supplying alternative means of participation underrepresented here. Qualitative data also imparted such unique depth relative to mere quantitative assessment onto the perceptions of participants' transformations after training in terms of effectiveness and control appraisals (Macintyre et al., 1998).

1. The Importance of WTC in Language Learning. From one perspective, enhancing WTC is crucial for fostering active engagement in language learning environments. As noted by Macintyre et al. (1998), WTC reflects an individual's readiness to engage in communication using a second language at specific times and with particular interlocutors. In EFL contexts like Iran, where English communication often occurs predominantly within classroom settings, increasing students' WTC can lead to greater opportunities for interaction, practice, and ultimately proficiency. This aligns with Long's (1983) assertion that interaction promotes language learning through exposure to new vocabulary and grammar structures.

2. Role of Communication Strategies. On the other hand, the role of CSs cannot be overlooked when discussing WTC enhancement. Dornyei and Scott (1997) define CSs as conscious efforts made by speakers to address language-related challenges during communication. By equipping students with effective strategies, such as paraphrasing, asking for clarification, or code-switching, teachers may help alleviate anxiety and boost confidence among learners who typically exhibit low WTC due to fear of making mistakes or losing face (Liu, 2005). This suggests that targeted instruction on CSs could serve as a practical solution to empower Iranian EFL learners.

3. **Teacher Influence on Student Engagement** Moreover, teachers play an instrumental role in shaping students' attitudes towards communication. However, there is also evidence indicating discrepancies between teacher perceptions and student experiences regarding language learning motivations and challenges (Borg, 2011). This raises important questions about how educators can align their teaching methods with student needs effectively.

4. **Cultural Considerations** Cultural factors must also be considered when examining WTC among Iranian students. As highlighted by Yashima et al. (2016), cultural norms around communication may influence students' willingness to speak up in class settings, especially if they perceive the environment as unsafe or unwelcoming for risk-taking in language use. Understanding these cultural nuances is vital for designing interventions that resonate with students' lived experiences.

5. **Addressing Research Gaps** Despite the recognition that CS training could enhance WTC among Iranian EFL learners—a gap identified by Al-Mahrooqi & den (2012)—there remains limited empirical research exploring this relationship directly within this demographic context. Thus far, studies have primarily focused on broader educational settings without delving deeply into specific strategies tailored for Iranian learners' unique challenges.

## 7. Conclusions and Implications

In this section, two major conclusions have been reached regarding the impact of the communication strategies training program, as confirmed by substantial qualitative analyses and concurrent patterns established through participant interviews. One of the conclusions draws attention to a reasonably good score difference obtained between the two experimental and control groups on the WTC, mentioned at the Post-treatment WTC scale difference, said to be statistically significant. To illustrate, the communication strategies training surpassed the other control group, which did not adopt any strategy instruction. Thus, an apparent indication shows that the communication strategies training had a measurable enhancement of participants' reported willingness to use English in various communication circumstances. This quantitative finding gives empirical support to the theory that explicitly designed and practice-based lessons in developing strategic competence enhance WTC among this learner population.

However, to probe the how and why of the strategy's influence on WTC, qualitative data from interviews were also collected from a subsample of participants for further examination. Interpretation of these narratives led to the conclusion that communication strategies training was perceived to positively affect WTC in informal, academic, and professional settings. Participants mentioned anxiety relief with less communication anxiety, improved confidence in using the language despite constraints, and feelings of equipped training to operate deliberately with sustained engagements instead of reactively or haphazardly with pre-set strategies to confront unfamiliar situations.

Importantly, the multi-method investigation shows strong corroborative evidence for the incorporation of communication strategies instruction into EFL syllabi, aiding active communication engagement through the promotion of strategic and psychological readiness among learners. The use of multiple methods thus counter-checks the results against each other while providing an understanding of the mechanisms of changes that extend way beyond any single investigation with questionnaires alone.

The findings point to direct instruction in strategy to be implemented in the EFL teaching method. In this light, making learners aware of the strategies, modeling how to use them strategically, and providing opportunities for guided practice in the classroom will therefore increase their WTC in English more efficiently than concentrating only on language skills. Strategic competence must therefore become one of the core learning objectives for the teachers.

Other specific strategies, such as paraphrasing, agreements, and open-ended questions, assist not only in active listening but also in class interaction. The indirect contingency phrases keep up the smooth inter-student interactions. The examples and the rephrasing encourage the output. The socio-cultural knowledge obviates worries about intercultural misunderstandings. Creative contextual practice subsequently nurtures the unconscious

internalization of the tools before actual performance. Scaffolding for strategic development suits the learner profile and impacts maximally.

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### Authors' Contributions

All authors have conducted the study, collected data, analyzed and interpreted the data, and written up the manuscript.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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