Effect of Online Strategies-based Instruction on Iranian EFL Learners' Speaking Scores: A Case of Affective and Social Strategies Instruction

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Abstract

Enhancing speaking ability is an important component of the acquirement of a language. The present study is consistent with developing speaking ability through online strategy-based instruction. The innovative aspect of this study is applying the Moodle course management system as an instructional platform. To this end, a group of 80 Iranian female and male students at the intermediate level took part in the treatment. They were divided into four groups of 20. The participants in experimental groups benefited from social and affective strategies instruction. In order to evaluate the effect of the treatment pre and posttests design were utilized. Consequently, the data was analyzed through One-Way ANOVAs and t-tests. The findings revealed that strategy treatment was successful in improving the participants' speaking ability. However, there was no considerable difference between the performance of male and female treatment groups. Therefore, the findings suggest that online strategy-based instruction can positively influence the speaking ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. This study might have educational implications for material practitioners, CALL package designers and distance learning planners to include strategy instruction in English courses.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, Online Learning, Speaking Ability, Strategy Instruction

1. Introduction

Nowadays, due to technological advancements, online education has become widespread. In fact, despite its short history, this new trend has already had a facilitative role in education, especially in second language pedagogy. Xiao (2018) states that in the last 20 years distance learning has shifted from the margins into the core of education programs. An increasing number of educational Internet-based services such as online dictionaries, electronic books, online private language tutoring courses, virtual schools, online journals, and other information resources permit learners to effectively participate in communicational settings and develop their knowledge of the second language (L2). With the growth of the Internet and technological advancements, students now have an opportunity to integrate their learning with new pedagogical methods as well as to determine the time, physical place, and rate of their learning (Zarei & Abbasi, 2013). Therefore, research in this field may be efficient and valuable in the procedure of language teaching and learning.

Pylkin et al. (2019) mentioned some positive features of distance learning. They declared that, through the use of the Internet, a wide range of people have access to education; they have an opportunity to learn from home and reduce the cost of transportation, accommodation, course books, etc. In addition, learners have the chance to control the attained knowledge and get feedback via the Internet. Besides, distance courses encourage learners to search and interpret information autonomously and promote the demand for self-centered education.

Another concern of the present study is enhancing the speaking ability of language learners. It is important to highlight that since the 1960s and 1970s, the communicative value of language has been regarded as one of the most influential issues in language learning and teaching (Littlewood, 2007; Richards & Rodgers 2014). Learning speaking skill which is worth considering as the most central phase of learning a second or foreign language insofar as an accomplishment in learning a language is determined when one can perform successful conversations (Nunan, 1995). Besides, there is a tendency in many second language approaches to a gradual change from instructor-centered courses to more student-centered classes (Piaget, 1948). This change has led to greater focus and more attention to both learners and learning as an alternative to teachers and teaching. One outcome of this movement is paying more attention and focus on applying and utilizing language learning strategies (LLS) by learners and teachers in L2 learning and teaching setting.

As Chai and Fan (2016) argue student-centered learning design is connected with individuals' factors like learners' motivation, autonomy, and self-directedness to learn. Learning strategies are the deliberate intentions and steps that are performed by learners to accomplish a learning objective (Chamot, 2004). In fact, the rationale for language learning strategy research is that investigators are able to supply a list of efficient learning strategies used by successful learners; then, instructors, curriculum designers, material planners, and less successful learners may apply and utilize them to foster their language skills (Zarei & Shahidi Pour, 2013). While the significance of strategies instruction is well-established in the literature (Ferris, 201; Hung, 2016; Oxford, 2002), no systematic study has delved into online strategy-based instruction. LLS research in a technology-enhanced setting needs further study. Thus, this study proposed to investigate the effectiveness of social and affective strategies-based instruction in enhancing Iranians' speaking ability in a newly developed context of the Internet.

The results of this study can inform second language learners about the beneficial aspect of strategies and online courses for language learning. Additionally, confirmation of the findings of this study can lead to a great achievement for instructors, curriculum designers, material developers, and less successful learners to bolster the quality of their second language speaking programs. It seems that this study can benefit a wide range of stakeholders at both theoretical and application levels. To achieve the purpose of the study these research questions were addressed:

1. Does online social and affective strategies-based instruction improve Iranian EFL learners' speaking score?
2. Are there any significant differences between the speaking developments of female and male Iranian EFL learners taught social and affective strategies?

2. Literature Review

In today's society, increasing second language learning demands and the shift of emphasis in teaching towards student engagement and peer support has led to the recognition of the importance of online-based instruction in second language pedagogy. In this new educational setting, an opportunity has been provided to students to reinforce their second language skills through the utilization of a lot of appealing materials in spite of the physical place and time and to keep their connectivity with other students as well as receiving feedback. Although the determined student might attain conversational fluency by living in a target context, this opportunity is unavailable to many.

In this way, Zarei and Abbasi (2013) have highlighted features contributing to distance learning. They argue that the availability of various sources and having control over the learning process can lead to an improvement in the quality of education.

Fortunately, modern technologies offer many additional appealing and engaging activities in online language learning environments for students and users. Over the past years, different English teaching methods and various language learning procedures have been developed and popularized to facilitate and support language learning. However, recent approaches regard the role of the learners as the most central and particular feature in the procedure of language learning. As a result, learner factors such as enthusiasm, genius, age, gender, occupation preference, cultural background, cognitive style, and learning strategies have been explored widely (Zarei & Hashemipour, 2015; Ziahosseini & Salehi, 2008).

Actually, learner autonomy is one of the required elements of Internet-based education. Schwienhorst (2003) supposes that autonomy in CALL requires learners in explanatory self-estimation and self-determination. In this environment, learners deal with self-instructional materials which help them to develop and enhance their knowledge (Reinders, 2018). Generally, one of the aspects of this study as an online-based instruction was to assist learners to become more self-determining and autonomous.

To confirm the efficacy of CALL in developing learner autonomy, Zarei and Hashemipour (2015) conducted a study to examine the efficiency of CALL and conventional instruction on fostering learners' autonomy and enthusiasm. Based on the research goal two questionnaires related to learners' autonomy and motivation were distributed. Findings specified that computer-based instruction had a considerable effect on both participants' autonomy and motivation. Researchers also emphasized that recent approaches involve a greater share of responsibility for learners. In other words, modern teaching considers learner autonomy as a facilitator of the learning procedure.

Likewise, to encourage learners to accomplish academic goals and enhance their speaking skills, this research was an effective guide to applying language learning strategies. Language learning strategies studies started in the 1970s with the influential effort of Joan Rubin. Consequently, a model of "the good language learner" was proposed to determine what strategies successful learners used (Rubin, 1975). Actually, learning strategies are procedures that improve language learning and teaching processes. Students learn how to overcome language learning difficulties and compensate for inaccuracies and deficiencies. Strategies are usually intentionally and

purposefully applied, particularly in the early phases of coping with a new language task. Once strategy learning takes place through repetition, it can be applied more effectively and automatically (Chamot, 2004).

From another point of view, language learning strategies refer to particular steps, performances, or skills that learners employ to develop their L2 skills (Oxford, 2002). On the other hand, Oxford (2017) carried out a study to investigate various definitions of language learning strategies. Thirty-three existing definitions were collected, classified, and then coded. After all, she presents a comprehensive and special definition as follows: second language learning strategies are complicated, active operations, selected and used by learners to complete and finalize various tasks. Strategies are beneficial in helping students promote their language performances, and improve long-lasting proficiency.

Strategy training has been studied in all language abilities, i.e., listening (Ridgway, 2000), speaking (Canale, 2014; Hedge, 2000; Méndez, 2007, 2011; Mugford, 2007; Nakatani, 2005; Sayer, 2005), reading (Baker, 2002; Block & Pressley, 2007; Grabe, 2009), and writing (Ameri-Golestan, 2012; Ferris, 2011), vocabulary strategies (Nation, 2008), among others.

Also, this study is an attempt to help learners improve their speaking skills by applying relevant strategies. As Canale and Swain (1980) argue, strategic competence refers to the familiarity of spoken and gestural communication strategies that improve the efficiency of communication and, where essential, allow the participants to correct misconceptions and handle communication breakdowns.

As the focus of this study, learners learn how to apply affective strategies for managing their feelings and viewpoints and increasing confidence and persistence in language learning. Students, for example, make affirmative declarations about themselves after completing a task and reduce anxiety by relaxation, deep breathing, laughter, games, meditation, and music. Also, learners reinforce themselves to speak even when they are anxious about making a wrong sentence. In addition, learners apply social strategies to communicate effectively, without uncertainty to facilitate learning the new language. Learners in such educational settings raised questions and cooperated with their peers (Oxford, 2004).

Many researchers also investigated the efficiency of language learning strategies, some studies will be reviewed. Alzubi et al. (2017) conducted a study to examine the improvement of learner autonomy through the precise use of language learning strategies in EFL reading in a mobile-based language learning setting. To this purpose, a questionnaire borrowed from Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), was

distributed to thirty-two participants to determine their reading strategy use moderated by smartphones. The data analysis revealed around sixty percent of language learning strategies includes memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Consequently, these results confirm the development of strategies in an internet-based context, where these strategies are applied by learners to manage their own learning procedures in almost self-governing learning situations, regardless of time, position, availability of sources, and material selections.

Likewise, Hung (2016) carried out a project during a semester among sixty Taiwanese EFL learners. Students were required to send a short video presentation about classroom questions and topics on Facebook, subsequently, two video-based oral feedback activities. Learners' strategic behaviors were explored in the procedure of video-based peer feedback production and investigated the strategies applied by learners while providing video-based spoken feedback. Research findings showed that the most applied strategy was transforming language for accuracy and regular practices, in company with watching others' spoken feedbacks, jotting down comments for future improvements, and negotiating with classmates.

Similarly, Hengki et al. (2017) conducted an experimental verification among Indonesian sophomores within which the researchers explored the effectiveness of cooperative learning for developing EFL speaking skills. Findings confirmed that cooperative learning strategy allows the foreign language learner to simultaneously learn the target language and share values and overcome obstacles with others.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that since this newly developed environment of learning can integrate different activities that maintain the development of language skills, increase the motivation of the learner and decline the learning pressure and anxiety. Computer technology has brought about many revolutionizes in language learning pedagogy. Although some studies have been conducted on strategy instruction in Iran, a little experiment has been done to evaluate the impact of social and affective strategies-based instruction on enhancing Iranians' speaking scores in the Moodle context of learning.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The populations of the study were Iranian EFL learners. The sampling was based on a convenience sampling procedure. The participants were 40 intermediate female and 40 male students studying in Iran Language Institute (ILI). They ranged from 15 to 30 in terms of age. They were placed in the

relevant groups after taking ILI's placement test. In addition, the Oxford Placement Test (Allen, 2004) was conducted at the beginning of the treatment in order to double-check the placement. Consequently, participants were randomly assigned to two female and male experimental groups and two female and male control groups (FEG, and MEG; FCG, and MCG).

Table 1

Demographic Background of the Participants

No. of Students	80 intermediate students
Gender	40 Females & 40 Males
Native Language	Persian
Institute	Iran Language Institute
Academic Years	2018

Participants were asked at the end of the semester if they had attended any other English courses. The scores of those who answered yes were excluded from the data analysis. Besides, the examiner was actively involved at all stages of the study to upload lessons content, provide feedback, and administers tests.

3.2. Materials and Instruments

3.2.1. Iran Language Institute Conversation Series

The educational content of this course was based on the coursebook published by Iran Language Institute (2016). Iran Language Institute Conversation Series, entitled ACT. It is a ten-level interactive English course for adult learners. It offers a robust and comprehensive focus on everyday English communication with a clearly structured progression. The rationale for choosing this book as the course content was that the design and sequence of the book are in good accordance with the selected procedures suggested by Dörnyei (1995) for teaching strategies embedded in the instructional material.

For the purpose of this study, all the units were designed in computer format including text boxes, pictures, audios, and video clips. Moreover, the Moodle e-learning platform was used as a course delivery. A platform that provides the possibility to work and learn together in forums, wikis, glossaries, database activities, and much more. Indeed, forum tools, with group features, can be conducted in different ways to post content or create a new discussion topic (thread).

3.2.2. Cambridge English Proficiency Speaking Test

Before the treatment, a spoken test, the Cambridge English proficiency speaking test, was administered to evaluate students' speaking ability in both control groups and experimental groups as the research pre-test. After the treatment, a post-test evaluated their speaking ability. To obtain meaningful results pre-test and post-test are the same. The test is 16 minutes long and consists of three parts which were administered to the students to test their speaking ability at two phases before and after the treatment. Both pre-test and post-test were chosen from the Cambridge English proficiency peaking test. The scores were calculated out of 200 for both pre-test and post-test for all control groups and experimental groups. The standard test arrangement is 2 candidates and 2 examiners. One examiner administers the test, supplies applicants with the required materials and elaborates necessary steps. The other examiner does not play a role in communication.

In the first part, the interviewer asks participants some questions that focus on information about themselves. Each participant is then given two minutes to speak, comment after the partner and to participate in a more unrestricted discussion. Consequently, the participant is provided a card contains a question and he/she is given 2 minutes to talk about it. After the participants have spoken, they are asked another question connected to the topic on the card. This process is recurred as a result the partner obtains a card and talks for 2 minutes and replies a follow-up question.

Finally, the participants are asked more questions, which leads to a discussion on a general theme. With regards to external validation, the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) can do scales (Jones, 2002) reports a strong experimental link between test performance and perceived real-life language proficiencies.

With regard to the reliability of these tasks, the inter-rater reliabilities were computed after the administration. To do so, the speaking test was marked independently by a minimum of two trained assessors. Neither assessor knew what scores the other has given the participant, nor what scores the participant has achieved on any of the other sub-tests.

3.2.3. Moodle E-learning Platform

Moodle is a free course organization system for online learning. The theory behind Moodle construction is based on socio-constructivist pedagogy which supports inquiry- and discovery-based approach to facilitate interaction and online learning. A venue in which, self-discovery and learning happen through engaging in negotiations. Anyone can adapt, extend or modify Moodle for both commercial and educational projects and benefit from the

accessibility, cost-efficiency, and flexibility as well as other advantages of using Moodle.

Moodle environment provides the condition for the integration of a wide variety of resources. These include any kind of text, graphics, video or audio. Also, evaluation and assessment can be administered easily via a wide range of assessment strategies. In addition, it provides the possibility to work and learn together in forums, wikis, glossaries, database activities, and much more. Indeed, forum tools, with group features, can be conducted in different ways to post content or create a new discussion topic (Moodle, 2019).

In this newly developed context of learning, in order to achieve the goals of this study learners have the opportunity to participate in pre-specified group tasks include role-plays, problem-solving, decision making and various group discussions (e.g. negotiating the conditions behind a series of logic dilemmas, deciding on the guests and their right seats in a party, and discuss beliefs about the effectiveness of capital punishment). By participating in such activities, learners are given the opportunity to express themselves, provide and receive feedback, prevent inappropriate interruptions, and observe the principles of turn-taking.

Consequently, by applying these tasks learners be taught social-affective strategies such as cooperation, asking questions, expressing feelings and attitudes, and taking calculated risks among others. For example, teaching affective strategies can be practiced by giving the students a fairly contentious subject and theme, such as friends are more important than family and ask them to express their viewpoints and opinions. The instructor can divide the participants into groups contain a mix of views within each group and give details that for this negotiation, the objective is to prevent their voices from rising and try to manage their feelings as much as possible. Also, the instructor may monitor and give feedback on these areas (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019).

Besides, learners have the chance to enhance their speaking ability by learning content embedded in fun pages, cartoons, games, and motivating pictures.

3.3. Procedure

The present study benefited from a quantitative research method to investigate the issue of online strategies-based instruction from different aspects. In light of the research objectives, an experimental design was employed in this study to investigate the effectiveness of strategies-based instruction in enhancing Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability in the Moodle

platform. Indeed, data gathered from administering English speaking pre-test and post-test during 2018 in Kermanshah, Iran.

Actually, to homogenize the participants, in addition to ILI's placement exam, an Oxford placement test (Allen, 2004) was conducted at the beginning of the in order to double-check the placement. Based on the results, participants were divided into two EGs (one female and one male group) and two CGs (one female and one male group). After administering the pre-test, the experimental groups were provided treatment based on strategy-based instruction and the tasks were given to them to facilitate learning and practicing strategies. To formulate the initial framework of instructing social, affective strategies, the following six procedures borrowed from the study by (Dörnyei, 1995) were followed and implemented. This procedure includes six interrelated phases as follow:

Table 2

Dörnyei Procedure of Strategy Instruction

Awareness-raising
Supporting students to be enthusiastic to take risks and apply the strategies
Supplying L2 models of the use of particular strategies
Calling attention to cross-cultural dissimilarities in strategies used
Instructing strategies directly
Supplying opportunities to apply strategies

According to Cohen (2011), materials and contents that include both awareness-raising and strategy-based activities can be valuable for the learners to achieve knowledge and skill in language learning in general and strategy use in particular. Examples of these tasks may include problem-solving activities, simulations, and discussions that make use of referential or real questions to which the teacher, or the student, does not know the answer beforehand. Such activities, because of their unpredictable feature, may provide the learner with engaging opportunities to participate in cooperative turn-exchange and discussions. Consequently, social-affective strategies such as cooperation, asking questions, expressing feelings and attitudes, and taking calculated risks among others may be intrigued and used.

In this regard, EGs received a treatment consisting of various communicative pair work activities, native speakers' group discussions on relevant topics, and problem-solving activities, doing the same task that the learners had to accomplish in class. In some of these short conversations and group discussions, interlocutors benefit from using social and affective strategies in order to avoid communication breakdowns and enhance mutual understanding. Then, the teacher provided demonstrations to use strategies and encouraged learners to recognize, classify, and assess strategies applied

by native speakers of English. In the next phase, students were given time to get ready to perform relevant similar role-plays with their partners and participate in problem-solving, decision making and other various forms of group discussions as mentioned before.

These tasks prepare and train students for managing their feelings and attitudes and develop self-assurance and perseverance in language learning. Students, for example, make positive statements about themselves after completing a task and reduce anxiety by relaxation, deep breathing, laughter, games, meditation, and music. In addition, subjects in experimental groups were achieved instruction contains social strategies for assisting them to interact with others, without uncertainty in order to learn the new language. In such educational settings, learners raised questions and cooperated with their peers (Oxford, 2014).

Consequently, the training of the use of social and affective strategies complemented with discussions and feedback. Later during the classes, an increasing amount of improvisation provided. The activities are focusing on interactions to provide more opportunities to utilize the target language strategies in a lifelike situation. This activity could not only raise students' awareness of the different classroom work arrangements, but also stimulate social-affective strategies such as cooperation, discussing feelings, empathizing with peers, and relaxation. Furthermore, the organization of each unit focuses to enhance speaking proficiency, but the other language skills are also developed systematically.

The experiment lasted for 2.5 months; while CGs received no strategies-based treatments at all but followed their regular EFL curriculum. Instruction in these groups was similar in length and content to the EGs, without any specific strategies instruction focus. A useful and meaningful environment of Moodle e-learning was selected as a delivery platform. It was imperative that the learners, according to the term schedule that they received at the beginning of the course, take part in the sessions, study the lessons, carry out the related assignments, and submit their response within the time specified by the system for their instructor.

In the final phase of this study, participants were required to take part in the post-test after the training. The Cambridge English proficiency speaking test was administered. The Speaking test is 16 minutes long and consists of three parts as explained in the previous sections.

3.4. Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, IBM SPSS Statistics 24 software was utilized. In addition to descriptive statistics, two one-way ANOVAs were

employed to check the significance of the difference between the performances of different groups. In addition, to have a better picture of the results, a matched t-test was run.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

The students' speaking ability at the initial phase and at the end of the experiment was observed through pre-test and post-test, and the data was analyzed.

To more assurance that there were no statistically significant differences between the means of all four groups on the pre-test, a One-way ANOVA was accomplished in the first phase of the study. Table 2 demonstrates the results.

Table 3

One-way ANOVA for Intermediate Students' Speaking Scores in the Pre-test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	109.650	3	36.550	1.160	.331
Within Groups	2395.100	76	31.514		
Total	2504.750	79			

Based on table 3, there were no statistically significant differences between the means of control and experimental groups (p=.3). To be more precise, the control and experimental groups were homogeneous in their speaking ability at an early stage. To conclude whether there were any statistically significant differences between the means of control and experimental groups on the post-test, another One-way ANOVA was employed after the treatment. Table 4 demonstrates the results.

Table 4

One-way ANOVA for Intermediate Students' Speaking Ability in the Post-test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3815.837	3	1271.946	34.710	.000
Within Groups	2785.050	76	36.645		
Total	6600.888	79			

As Table 4 shows, differences between the means of control and experimental groups were significant after the treatment. In fact, the participants in the experimental groups outperformed meaningfully those in the control groups (P=.0). This shows that although the participants of the

four participating groups started with a non-significant difference, they were of different speaking ability at the end of the study. To identify the exact location of the difference, it was essential to run a post hoc comparison to see the difference. Table 5 presents the results of post hoc Scheffe.

Table 5

Scheffe Test for Intermediate Students' Post-test Scores

| (I) class	(J) class	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FEG	MEG	-.350	1.914	.998	-5.82	5.12
	FCG	12.900*	1.914	.000	7.43	18.37
	MCG	14.300*	1.914	.000	8.83	19.77
MEG	FEG	.350	1.914	.998	-5.12	5.82
	FCG	13.250*	1.914	.000	7.78	18.72
	MCG	14.650*	1.914	.000	9.18	20.12
FCG	FEG	-12.900*	1.914	.000	-18.37	-7.43
	MEG	-13.250*	1.914	.000	-18.72	-7.78
	MCG	1.400	1.914	.911	-4.07	6.87
MCG	FEG	-14.300*	1.914	.000	-19.77	-8.83
	MEG	-14.650*	1.914	.000	-20.12	-9.18
	FCG	-1.400	1.914	.911	-6.87	4.07

The results noticeably demonstrate that introducing strategies to the students did make a distinction in their performances in the posttest. Indeed, both participants of the experimental groups did better than those of the control groups. Based on Table 5, the mean score of the students in FCG was significantly lower than that of students in the experimental groups (P=.0). Another significant difference was pertinent to the one between the mean scores of MCG and both experimental groups (P=.0). This helped the researcher answer the first research question (Does online social and affective strategies-based instructions improve Iranian EFL learners' speaking score?). It can be claimed that online strategy-based instruction can positively influence the speaking scores of intermediate students.

The mean score of the FEG, however, was not significantly different from that of the male experimental group (P=.9). So, we can safely claim that there are no significant differences among the means of the EGs. This helped the researcher answer the second research question (Are there any significant differences between the speaking developments of female and male Iranian EFL learners taught social and affective strategies?). As a result, gender does not have any function in the effectiveness of online social and affective

strategies-based instruction on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' speaking scores. The graphic representation of the results (Figure1) demonstrates the differences among the groups more evidently.

Figure 1

Means Plot on the Intermediate Students' Speaking Scores in The Post-test
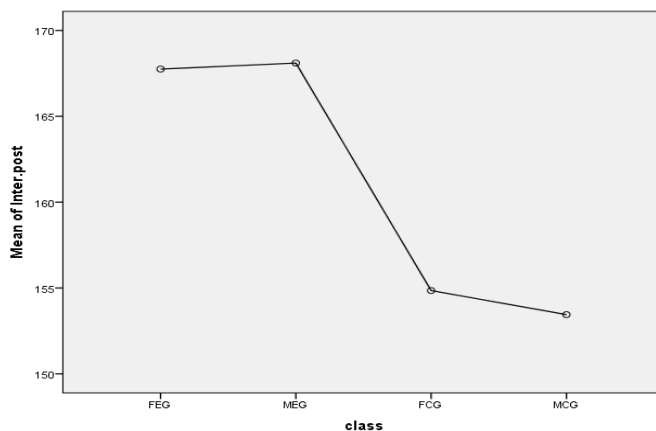
However, in order to have a better picture of the treatment and participants' performances, a paired-samples t-test was run, comparing the groups' pretest and posttest mean scores. Table 6 presents the results of paired-samples t-test for the groups in the pretest and the posttest.

Table 6

Paired Samples T-Test for the Experimental and Control Groups

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
EG	pretest - posttest	-16.75	5.437	1.216	-19.295	-14.205	-13.776	19	.000
EG	pretest - posttest	-3.85	3.281	.734	-5.386	-2.314	-5.248	19	.000
CG	pretest - posttest	-3.85	3.281	.734	-5.386	-2.314	-5.248	19	.000
CG	pretest - posttest	-2.30	1.525	.341	-3.014	-1.586	-6.744	19	.000

The results show that there was a highly considerable increase in speaking scores from the pretest. The highest improvement belonged to the FEG, the result of the paired-samples t-test specified that the post-test mean score of the students in MEG was higher than their pre-test scores. Like the treatment groups, the speaking score of the students in the control groups improved significantly. The least, however, significant improvement was related to the male control group.

4.2. Discussion

To answer the research question exploring the effect of online strategies instruction on the speaking ability of Iranian intermediate students, the obtained data was analyzed through statistical procedures. The results revealed that the strategies instruction has had a great impact on improving the speaking ability of Iranian intermediate students. The results of the study also exposed participants in the experimental groups, who were taught to apply strategies, performed better. Strategies instruction improved their communication skills and increased their use of strategies noticeably.

Findings also helped the researcher answer the second research question: (Are there any significant differences between the speaking developments of female and male Iranian EFL learners taught social and affective strategies?). As a result, gender does not have any function in the effectiveness of online social and affective strategies-based instruction on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' speaking scores.

Of course, the students in experimental groups had the opportunity to apply social-affective strategies such as cooperating, asking questions, expressing feelings and attitudes, and taking calculated risks among others effectively and receiving feedback from their teachers and other participants. Consequently, the exchange of these synchronous feedbacks leads to a more comforting and less threatening state in the educational setting. In fact, the results gave an affirmative response to the first research question. In fact, strategy training did have a positive effect on participants' performances in the posttest. Affective strategies, also identified as self-motivational strategies, are helpful for learners in coping with individuality factors which may be significant in their language learning development such as destructive anxiety, low self-esteem, and negative attitudes (Dörnyei, 2003).

These results are in agreement with the findings of the study on social-affective strategy use conducted by Chou (2004) who emphasized that social-affective strategies have the potential to enhance learners' communicative competence and motivation. The results are also compatible with Hedge (2000), Méndez (2007; 2011), Mugford (2007), Nakatani (2005), and Canale (2014) among others, who showed that strategy training,

enhances learners' speaking abilities. Likewise, Nakatani (2006), explored strategy use among EFL Japanese learners, results revealed that students scoring high on an oral test applied social-affective strategies more than did those with low scores.

The results are also in agreement with the findings of Hengki et al. (2017) who believed in the effectiveness of teaching social strategies in the development of communicative language function of speaking. Also, Griffiths and Oxford (2014) confirmed that strategy instruction may lead to success in language learning if explicitly incorporated in the curriculum.

Besides, on the other hand, several reasons have been mentioned in the literature for the effectiveness of online courses. One of the factors which has been mentioned for the superiority of the online courses in second language learning programs pertains to affective factors. Motivation is one of these factors.

In addition, a lower level of anxiety in computer-mediated classes is another advantage. These classes are especially beneficial for those who are introvert and don't like to get involved in group activities. The decrease in the level of anxiety stems from the absence of gazes and eye-contacts which are reported to be torturing for introvert students (Ahmadian & Yadegari, 2009). This benefit to the introverted students might be the reason that made the difference between the online and conventional courses. CALL can provide a situation in which learners are motivated enough to get involved in the process of strategies use and without experiencing the stress of conventional classes as students usually find the online courses appealing environment which can lead to their learning. As a result, learners are now invited to engage to investigate strategies for successful language learning in digital environments (Oxford & Lin, 2011).

5. Conclusion and Implications

Considering both the findings and limitations of this study, certain conclusions can be drawn in terms of the pedagogical implications and recommendations for further research. The pedagogical implications of the study are quite noticeable. As the results showed, online strategy training has a positive effect on EFL learners' speaking scores. The findings of this study can suggest different pedagogical implications. At the overall stage, administrators, policy-makers, and CALL program designers can apply the findings of this research in designing much more well-organized syllabi that are compatible with strategies learning. Moreover, considering strategies-based instruction as a part of instructor educating or in-service programs can be useful.

Besides, the educators, assessors, test-makers, and EFL students in various academic settings can exploit the results of this study. Experts in the field can apply social and affective strategies and related activities to enhance students' speaking ability and also benefit from the integration of educational content with Internet and technological advancements. For this purpose, language teaching curriculums should introduce strategies efficiently, and administrate online courses. Teachers can also assess their students' performances by applying technologies instead of traditional exams.

Besides, such studies have a significant impact on the persuasion and encouragement of the students about the constructive function and effectiveness of online courses in learning English. The study was limited to explore the efficiency of strategy-based instruction on enhancing the speaking ability of participants.

An important point to note is considering the limitations of this study. For example, this study was carried out with a restricted number of participants; it is recommended that you extend the replicates of this study to other language teaching contexts such as universities, or schools. Also, to achieve the intended goals, this study undertakes to investigate the effect of two categories of the strategies namely; affective and social which seem to be more efficient in enhancing EFL learners' speaking scores.

In addition, Moodle management service was applied as a course delivery platform in this study. There are various platforms for delivering online-based courses which can be good choices for further studies. Also, as another limitation of the study, the level of proficiency of the participants was limited to intermediate. Other studies can be done with groups at different levels of proficiency. Finally, focusing qualitative research could be appealing fields for further research. Whereas, Triangulation of different instruments such as interviews and questionnaires for both teachers and learners can also supply a better understanding of the effects of strategies instruction and online courses.

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