

## Oral Communication Strategies Used by Iranian EFL Learners and their Relationship with the Learners' Self-efficacy Beliefs and Anxiety Level

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### Abstract

This study examined the oral communication strategies (OCS) employed by Iranian intermediate English as a foreign language (EFL) learners and the relationship between the use of these strategies and the learners' self-efficacy beliefs and anxiety level. To this end, 160 participants were selected through convenience sampling. Next, three questionnaires were employed to determine the strategies the participants employ for coping with speaking and listening problems, their anxiety level, and their general self-efficacy. The results indicated that the most and the least frequently used strategies were "accuracy-oriented" and "message abandonment" strategies when facing speaking problems and "word-oriented" and "fluency-oriented" strategies when confronting speaking problems. In addition, the results showed a significant positive relationship between OCSs and self-efficacy beliefs of the learners and a significant negative relationship between OCSs and their anxiety level. The findings imply that OCSs are helpful in both increasing EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs and reducing their anxiety level. Further implications of the results are discussed in the study.

**Keywords:** Anxiety, Listening strategies, Oral communication strategies, Self-efficacy beliefs, Speaking strategies

## **1. Introduction**

Understanding communication strategies that students employ can help EFL teachers choose the most appropriate strategies for pedagogical purposes. However, in guiding students to become efficient in communication, EFL teachers may need to explore further the influence of other learner variables on the use of OCSs by students. In this regard, many factors may influence the EFL learners' choice of strategies to cope with their oral communication problems. These factors may include gender (Green & Oxford, 1995), language proficiency (Poulisse & Schils, 1989), anxiety (Azizfar & Fariadian 2015), motivation (Dörnyei, 2005), and aptitude (Rastegar & Gohari, 2016). Among these factors anxiety is one which is believed to negatively influence the learners' use of the target language in communication and self-efficacy is believed to have a positive influence. As such, the researchers believed that the learners' choice of OCSs might be affected by their anxiety and/ or self-efficacy beliefs. However, to the researchers' best knowledge, the relationship between the type of strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners with the two variables of anxiety and self-efficacy beliefs have not been addressed so far. Thus, this study was an attempt to examine the OCSs that Iranian EFL learners employ to cope with their oral communication problems. In addition, the study investigated the relationship between these strategies and the learners' anxiety level as well as their self-efficacy beliefs. In particular, the following main research questions were posed:

1. What strategies are adopted by Iranian intermediate EFL learners to cope with their oral communication problems?
2. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian intermediate EFL learners' oral communication strategies and their self-efficacy beliefs?
3. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian intermediate EFL learners' oral communication strategies and their anxiety level?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Oral Communication Strategies**

Naturally most second language (L2) learners have problems in communicating in the L2. In addition to the L2 proficiency, learners can benefit from strategies that help them to overcome communication problems. These strategies were generally called communication strategies. However, Nakatani (2006) developed an Oral Communication

Strategy Inventory (OCSI) and used the term oral communication strategy (OCS) instead of the term communication strategy to avoid confusions which may arise regarding the oral or written types of communication strategies. According to Nakatani, most of the previous studies on communication strategies were conducted using Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford in 1989 which has two inherent problems. First, SILL has confused learning strategies with communication strategies and second, communication strategies in SILL are mainly related to initial learning and retrieval of vocabulary items (Nakatani).

Nakatani's (2006) inventory includes 58 items and is divided into two parts. The first eight categories deal with the strategies for coping with speaking problems and the second seven categories are concerned with the strategies for dealing with listening problems. A brief description of these strategies based on Nakatani (pp. 155-157) is summarized in Table 1.

Communication strategies have a relatively long history in language teaching and learning. In their study, Huang and Van Naerssen (1987) indicated that more successful L2 learners employ more CSs than less successful ones. On the other hand, some studies (e.g., Poulisse & Schils, 1989) have indicated that less proficient L2 learners employ more CSs and also rely more on reduction strategies. With regard to OCSs, according to Ting and Lau (2008), L2 learners with low proficiency fail to restructure messages as they struggle to find words to communicate their messages to their interlocutors. They also argued that L2 learners use negotiation or interaction strategies in the form of explicit clarification requests and comprehension checks. Furthermore, Nakatani's (2010) study showed a significant relationship between L2 learners' use of response for maintenance and signals for negotiation strategies and their oral performance. The results further indicated that L2 learners with higher levels of proficiency are more aware of the use of strategies and that proficient L2 learners employ the strategies to fill the gaps in their communication, to negotiate meaning, and to improve mutual understanding.

Chen (2009) examined high and low speaking proficiency Taiwanese L2 learners with regard to their use of OCSs. The results indicated that proficient speakers mostly employ social-affective, fluency-oriented, negotiation for meaning while speaking. He also indicated that less proficient speakers employ message reduction and alteration, and message abandonment strategies more frequently.

Table 1.

*OCSs Included in Nakatani's (2006) Inventory*

	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Description</b>
<i>Strategies for Coping with Speaking Problems</i>	Social-affective	involve learners' affective factors in social contexts
	Fluency-oriented	are related to fluency of communication
	Negotiation for meaning while speaking	are relevant to the participants' attempts to negotiate with their interlocutors
	Accuracy-oriented	are concerned with a desire to speak English accurately
	Message reduction and alteration	involve avoiding a communication breakdown by reducing an original message, simplifying utterances, or using similar expressions that can be confidently used
	Nonverbal strategies while speaking	require using eye contact, gestures, or facial expressions to give hints and to help the listener guess the intended meaning
	Message abandonment	are associated with message abandonment by learners in communication
	Attempt to think in English	involve thinking as much as possible in the foreign language during actual communication which normally requires a quick response to interlocutors
<i>Strategies for Coping with Listening Problems</i>	Meaning-negotiation strategies while listening	are clearly characterized by negotiating behavior while listening
	Fluency-maintaining	involve paying attention to the fluency of conversational flow
	Scanning strategies	include focusing on specific points of speech, such as subject and verb, the interrogative, and the first part of the speaker's utterance usually containing important information
	Getting-the-gist	require paying attention to general information contained in speech rather than to specific utterances and considering the context and the speaker's previous sentences to guess overall meaning
	Nonverbal strategies while listening	are related to making use of nonverbal information, such as speaker's eye contact, facial expression, and gestures
	Less active listener strategies	represent negative attitudes towards using active listening strategies for interaction and involves translating the message into the native language little by little and depending heavily on familiar words
	Word-oriented	reflect a learner's tendency to capture the meaning of speech by paying attention to individual words

With regard to the influence of strategy instruction, contradictory arguments can be seen in the literature. Some researchers (e.g., Nakatani, 2005) have pointed out that strategy instruction can yield a significant development in the quality and quantity of strategy use. However, other researchers (e.g., Kellerman, 1991) have argued that either L2 learners receiving strategy instruction use fewer communication strategies or there is no link between communication strategies and their instruction at all.

Generally speaking, a review of the studies on the use of OCSs used by L2 learners reveals that the field is still motivating enough for further research. Researchers have reported conflicting results regarding the use of OCSs, the effect of strategy instruction (Chen, 2009; Kellerman, 1991; Nakatani, 2005), and the amount of strategy use by L2 learners with regard to their proficiency level (Huang & Van Naerssen, 1987).

## **2.2 Self-Efficacy Beliefs**

According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy refers to “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required for attaining designated types of performances” (p.391). Bandura introduced this construct as a part of Social Cognitive Theory. In the current study, self-efficacy refers to the judgment of Iranian intermediate EFL learners about their ability to accomplish a given task which was determined through the Persian adaptation of the general self-efficacy scale constructed by Nezami, Schwarzer, and Jerusalem (1996). The questions examining why learners choose some tasks and stay away from others, why they are successful in doing some but not in accomplishing others, and why they approach some particular tasks with interest and courage and others with stress and fear have led the researchers to the study of learners’ self-efficacy beliefs. The beliefs learners have or develop about themselves are important elements for educational success or failure. As such, it can be concluded that self-efficacy is the fundamental part of the motivation and drive to fulfill the task at hand (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). As a result, the study of this issue has come to forefront of language learning research studies.

As self- efficacy is an influential factor in human behavior, it has been related to different variables, such as self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2000) and teacher education (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990).

Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2007) examined the relationship between self-efficacy,

anxiety, and gender on the listening comprehension and reading ability of undergraduates studying French. The results of their study revealed that reading self- efficacy and reading proficiency are significantly correlated for all learners (both males and females) while with regard to listening self-efficacy and listening proficiency, the results indicated only a significant relationship for females. Likewise, Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) revealed that learners' perceived mastery experiences could predict their self-efficacy in writing. In this regard, females had a greater amount of self-efficacy and lower anxiety, and elementary school learners were more self-efficacious than the learners in secondary school.

### **2.3 Anxiety**

The concept of anxiety plays a significant role in L2 learning. According to Spielberger (1983), anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry related to an arousal of the automatic nervous system. Anxiety can usually be divided into two types. One type of anxiety is called trait anxiety which is a more long-lasting anxiousness about everything (Scovel, 1978) and the other one is called state anxiety which refers to the experience when performing a particular task or activity in a particular context such as giving a lecture before a group (Brown, 2001). Trait anxiety has not proved to be helpful in predicting L2 achievement because of its global and ambiguous nature.

Price (1991) interviewed highly-anxious students to gain insight into the subjective experience of language anxiety. In general, the interviews were consistent with the foreign language anxiety construct identified by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). The participants spoke about their test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. All of them identified speaking the target language to be the greatest source of anxiety. Khodadady and Khajavy (2013) investigated the relationship between language anxiety and motivation and foreign language achievement among Iranian EFL learners. The results of the study indicated a positive relationship between anxiety and external motivation and a negative relationship between anxiety and internal motivation. In addition, the results revealed that language learners' English achievement can be significantly predicted by both their anxiety and motivation.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants**

As the proficiency level of the participants may influence the use of OCSs in different forms, to control the variable of proficiency level only intermediate EFL learners were selected for the current study. This was done through the administration of the Quick Placement Test (QPT). One of the researchers personally attended six language institutes in Tehran and administered the test to 250 adult EFL learners selected through availability. Based on the results of this test, 160 learners were selected as the sample of the study. The sample consisted of males (n=72) and females (n=88). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 35 years old. The participants were selected through convenient sampling. In other words, only those participants who were appropriate and available for this study were selected.

#### **3.2 Instruments**

To answer the questions of the study, four instruments were employed, namely, the QPT, the OSCI, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, and the general self-efficacy scale. Each of these instruments is elaborated on separately below.

##### **3.2.1. The Quick Placement Test**

The Quick Placement Test (QPT) is a flexible test of English language proficiency developed by Oxford University Press and Cambridge ESOL to give teachers a reliable and time-saving method of finding a student's level of English. It is quick and easy to administer and is ideal for placement testing. The scores on this test range from zero to 60 and those scoring between 30 and 39 are considered as intermediate. The test takes approximately 30 minutes to administer; all the questions in the test are in multiple-choice format; answers are recorded directly on the answer sheet; and the answer sheets can be quickly marked using the overlays provided.

##### **3.2.2. The Oral Communication Strategy Inventory**

To determine the strategies that the participants employ for coping with speaking and listening problems, the Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI) designed by Nakatani (2006) was used. The questionnaire consists of 32 items of eight categories

related to speaking problems on a five-point scale, as well as 26 items of seven categories for dealing with listening problems, both ranging from 1 for “never” to 5 used to show “always”. According to Nakatani, the reliability of the scale was confirmed by Cronbach’s alpha (speaking part: .86; listening part: .85). For the current study, the overall reliability of the inventory was measured through alpha as a measure of internal consistency based on the data obtained from a piloting on 25 Iranian EFL learners. The results indicated that the OCSI has a relatively high internal consistency reliability ( $r = .83$ ).

### **3.2.3 The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale**

To determine the anxiety level of the participants, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was employed. The scale was designed by Horwitz et al. (1986). It consists of 33 questions in three fundamental components of foreign language anxiety, namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The inventory can be viewed as a quantitative questionnaire, because it is a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). With possible scores ranging from 33 to 165, sum of the answers showed each participant’s score and the scores were interpreted according to the FLCAS (less than 76: low anxiety; 76-119 points: moderate anxiety; and more than 119 points: high anxiety). The reliability and validity of the test has also been reported by the test developers. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis using structural equation modeling demonstrated that the FLCAS is a valid (TLI, AGFI, CFI>.94, RMSEA=.049) and reliable (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.891$ ) instrument. For the current study, the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated through Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  ( $r = 0.83$ ) and was proved to be high.

### **3.2.4 The General Self-Efficacy Questionnaire**

To provide information regarding the general self-efficacy of the participants, the adapted version of the 10 item 4-point Likert scale general self- efficacy questionnaire was applied. The study used the Persian version of this scale that was localized for the Iranian EFL context by Nezami et al. (1996). The choices in this scale range from 1 for “*not at all true*” to 4 indicating “*exactly true*”. This scale has been confirmed to involve one factor for all subjects except for those suffering from post-acute coronary syndrome. Thus, the present study was conducted by considering the original scale that had one construct. In



order to estimate how reliable, the self-efficacy questionnaire was, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was computed through Cronbach's Alpha. The Cronbach's Alpha was .89, which was quite satisfactory.

### **3.3 Data Collection Procedure**

In order to collect the data, first the subject matter experts were asked to comment on the validity of the instruments. This was done to make sure if appropriate instruments had been selected for the study. Then, the instruments were piloted on 25 EFL learners with similar characteristics to those of the participants of the main study and Chronbach's Alpha was computed for each of the instruments to check their reliability. Next, one of the researchers asked 11 language institutes for cooperation and explained the objectives of the study to them. Only six out of 11 available language institutes verbally agreed to cooperate. Having obtained the consent of the authorities and having assured the participants that the answers would be used anonymously, the researcher administered the placement test in the first session. Only intermediate EFL learners were selected for the study based on the scoring procedure available for this standardized test. On the whole, 160 Iranian intermediate EFL learners were selected. Then, in three separate sessions, the OCSI, the FLCAS, and the General Self-efficacy questionnaire were administered to the participants. The first and the second sessions each lasted about 45 minutes and the third session lasted about 20 minutes. This time included not only the administration of the questionnaires but also the clear instructions given by the researcher and refreshment time provided for the participants.

### **3.4. Data Analysis Procedure**

To answer the first question, which was concerned with the types of OCSs used by the EFL learners, the mean and rank of the subcategories of the speaking and the listening sections of the OCSI questionnaire were calculated and reported. Then to answer the second and third questions, concerned with the relationship between OCSs and self-efficacy beliefs and anxiety level, first descriptive statistics were run separately for scores on each of the instruments. Next, the normality of distribution of the scores on the OSCI, the FLCAS, and the General Self-Efficacy Questionnaire were examined through Kolmogorov Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk. Finally, two Spearman rank-order correlation

coefficients were calculated to check the relationship between the use of OCSs by the participants and their self-efficacy beliefs and also the relationship between the use of OCSs and the anxiety level of the participants.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 OCSs Adopted to Cope with Oral Communication Problems

To answer the first research question, which intended to identify the strategies adopted by Iranian intermediate EFL learners to cope with their oral communication problems, the Mean and Standard Deviation of each category in the OCSI were computed separately. Then, the strategies were ranked from the highest- to the lowest- frequently used categories. The ranking was done separately for the speaking and listening problems. The findings obtained for the strategies employed to deal with speaking problems are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

#### *OCSs Employed When Facing Speaking Problems*

Rank	Category	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Accuracy-oriented	127.35	26.15
2	Social-affective	120.50	25.15
3	Attempt to think in English	120.11	24.19
4	Negotiation for meaning while speaking	120.00	25.50
5	Message reduction and alternation	118.37	22.50
6	Fluency-oriented	117.20	22.00
7	Nonverbal strategies while speaking	110.00	24.35
8	Message abandonment	107.00	25.00

As depicted in Table 2, the category of accuracy-oriented category ( $M = 127.35$ ,  $SD = 26.15$ ) was the most frequently used strategy the participants employed for coping with their speaking problems. This category involved the following five items:

1. I pay attention to grammar and word order during conversation.
2. I notice myself using an expression, which fits a rule that I have learned.
3. I correct myself when I notice that I have made a mistake

4. I try to emphasize the subject and verb of the sentence.
5. I try to talk like a native speaker.

The findings in Table 2 also indicate that the least frequently used category for coping with speaking problems was message abandonment ( $M = 107$ ,  $SD = 25$ ) with the following four items:

1. I leave a message unfinished because of some language difficulty.
2. I ask other people to help when I can't communicate well.
3. I give up when I can't make myself understood.
4. I abandon the execution of a verbal plan and just say some words when I don't know what to say.

Similar information for the strategies Iranian intermediate EFL learners employed for coping with listening problems are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3.

*OCSs Selected When Facing Speaking Problems*

Rank	Category	Standard Deviation	Mean
1	Word-oriented	25.80	97.50
2	Getting the gist	22.29	95.90
3	Scanning	23.40	94.50
4	Nonverbal strategies while listening	25.40	93.80
5	Less active listener	19.80	93.20
6	Negotiation for meaning while listening	19.91	90.40
7	Fluency-maintaining	21.35	89.60

Based on the data presented in Table 3, word oriented strategy ( $M = 97.50$ ,  $SD = 25.80$ ) was the most commonly used strategy by the participants of the study to cope with the listening problems they encountered. This category included the following items:

1. I pay attention to the words that the speaker slows down or emphasizes.
2. I guess the speaker's intention by picking up familiar words.
3. I try to catch every word that the speaker uses.
4. I pay attention to the first word to judge whether it is an interrogative sentence or not.

Meanwhile, the least frequently used listening strategy by the participants was

fluency-maintaining ( $M = 89.60$ ,  $SD = 21.35$ ). This category consisted of the following items:

1. I pay attention to the speaker's rhythm and intonation.
2. I send continuation signals to show my understanding in order to avoid communication gaps.
3. I use circumlocution to react to the speaker's utterance when I don't understand his/her intention well.
4. I ask the speaker to give an example when I am not sure what he/she has said
5. I pay attention to the speaker's pronunciation.

## 4.2 The Relationship between OCSs and Self-efficacy Beliefs and Anxiety

To answer the second and the third research questions which were concerned with the relationship between OCSs and self-efficacy beliefs and anxiety, first descriptive statistics were run and normality of distribution of the scores for each of the three questionnaires were examined. Then the relationships were investigated.

### 4.2.1 Self-efficacy

Descriptive statistics related to the scores of the participants on the adapted Persian version of the General Self-efficacy Questionnaire showed a mean score of 29.04 with the standard deviation of 7.11. On the other hand, the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk run to examine the normality of the distribution of the scores, as presented in Table 4, indicated significant differences in the scores ( $p = .000$ ). As a result, the assumption of normality of the distribution was revealed to be violated.

Table 4.

#### *Tests of Normality for Self-efficacy*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Efficacy	.222	160	.000	.924	160	.000

### 4.2.2 Anxiety

Descriptive statistics on the participants' scores on the FLCAS, that is, the anxiety

questionnaire showed a mean score of 86.41 with the standard deviation of 30.49. Moreover, the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov (Sig. = .001) and Shapiro-Wilk (Sig. = .000) tests showed statistically significant differences among the scores, indicating the violation of the assumption of the normality of the distribution. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.

*Tests of Normality for Anxiety*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Anxiety	.096	160	.001	.957	160	.000

**4.2.3 The Oral Communication Strategies Inventory**

The Mean score of the participants on the OCSI, that is, the questionnaire on OCSs, was shown to be  $M = 210.91$  with the standard deviation of 47.02. Possible scores on this inventory range from 58 to 290; however, for the participants of this study, the minimum score was 92 and the maximum was 265. Likewise, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk were run to determine the normality/abnormality of the distribution of the scores on this measure. The results are presented in Table 6. As the table indicates, the differences in both tests are shown to be statistically significant (Sig. = .000). Therefore, the distribution of scores on the whole inventory is not normal.

Table 6.

*Tests of Normality for the OSCI*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
OCSs	.179	160	.000	.863	160	.000

**4.2.4 The Relationship between OCSs and Self-efficacy Beliefs**

In the three previous sections, it was shown that the scores on the three variables of the study were not normally distributed. In the case of this research question, as the distribution of the scores on the OCSI and the General Self-efficacy Questionnaire did not

have normal distributions, Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was computed to examine the relationship between the use of OCSs and self-efficacy beliefs of the participants. Spearman's correlation is a nonparametric measure of the strength and direction of association that exists between two variables measured on at least an ordinal scale. It is denoted by the symbol  $r$ . The test is used for either ordinal variables or for continuous data that has failed the assumptions necessary for conducting the Pearson's product-moment correlation. The results of the Spearman rank-order correlation are reported in Table 7 below.

Table 7.

*Correlation between OCSI and Self-efficacy*

		Correlations		
			OCSI	Efficacy
Spearman's rho	OCSI	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.860
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	160	160

As depicted in Table 7, there is a strong positive correlation between the use of OCSs by the participants and their self-efficacy beliefs ( $r = .86$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This indicates that EFL learners who employ more OCS for coping with their oral communication problems, enjoy having a higher sense of self-efficacy.

#### 4.2.5 The Relationship between the OCSs and Anxiety Level

Similar to the previous part, to examine the relationship between the OCSs employed by Iranian intermediate EFL learners and their anxiety level the Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was run because of the abnormal distribution of the scores on measures of both variables. The results are reported in Table 8.

Table 8.

*Spearman correlation between OCSI and anxiety*

			OCS	Anxiety
Spearman's rho	OCS	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.804
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	160	160

As the data indicates, there is a statistically significant negative correlation between the anxiety level of the participants and the OCSs they employ ( $r = -.804$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In other words, those students who use fewer strategies to cope with communication problems have higher levels of anxiety.

## **5. Discussion**

This study intended to examine the strategies that Iranian EFL learners adopt for coping with speaking and listening problems as well as the relationship between these strategies and self-efficacy and anxiety level of the participants. The results of descriptive and inferential statistics indicated that among speaking strategies, “accuracy-oriented” was the most commonly used strategy and “message abandonment” was the least frequently used strategy. For listening, “word-oriented” and “fluency-oriented” were the most and the least frequently employed strategies, respectively. In addition, it was found that there is a significant positive relationship between the strategies that EFL learners employ and their self-efficacy beliefs. Furthermore, a significant negative relationship was found between OCSs and the anxiety level of the participants.

This study indicated that Iranian intermediate EFL learners were familiar with speaking and listening strategies and this might imply their being active strategy users. The results obtained from the current study are similar to the ones obtained by Chamot and Kupper (1989) and Goh and Kwah (1997). Moreover, the results showed a difference in the strategies used by learners in different situations, that is, when facing speaking problems and when confronted with listening problems. It was revealed that for dealing with speaking problems, the students focus mostly on accuracy and that message abandonment is their least frequently used strategy in such situations. The frequent use of the accuracy-oriented strategies may be related to the types of teaching and learning activities in the Iranian instructional setting which mostly emphasizes accuracy. On the other hand, low frequency of the employment of message abandonment is indicative of the learners’ willingness to do their best to express themselves. This suggests that such learners can benefit the instruction of OCSs. Regarding the use of OCS when facing listening problems, the results showed the learners’ inclination to focus more on words and less on fluency. This also suggests that learners need instruction of OCSs. The types of strategies selected by learners of this study may be different from studies carried out in

other contexts. In that case, the differential results, according to Chamot (2005), can be attributed to the context of learning, which can have a strong influence on learners' choice of OCSs.

With regard to the relationship between OCSs and self-efficacy beliefs, the findings in the present study are in line with the previous studies conducted on self-efficacy beliefs in language learning. Some of the previous studies on self-efficacy and specific language skills (e.g., Mills et al., 2007; Rahimi & Abedini, 2009) have reported that self-efficacy is associated with language learners' achievement in the specific English skills. Furthermore, some studies (e.g., Tılfarlıođlu & Cinkara, 2009) have shown that learners with high self-efficacy beliefs are better strategy users and, as a result, more successful in language learning. In the present study, the significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and the use of OCSs highlighted the previous studies in this regard and provided further evidence to support the link justifying the substantial role of positive self-efficacy as one of the major contributors to the use of language learning strategies and consequently second or foreign language success.

Concerning the relationship observed between OCSs and anxiety in this study, the result is in line with the findings of Aida (1994). Furthermore, according to Woodrow (2006), anxiety can negatively affect the speaking dimension of oral communication for EFL learners. The level of anxiety decreases significantly at high speaking grades and the EFL learners who have a better performance are less anxious than the ones who have lower scores (Woodrow). In addition, Gonen (2009) found that when there is an increase in foreign language (FL) listening anxiety, FL listening strategy use decreases. The results of the present study also support the findings of Sioson (2011) and Lu and Liu (2011). Sioson stated that as language learning strategies "are specific techniques that enable learners to cope and manage their learning, there might have been an increase in their self-confidence, thus lowering their anxiety" (p. 20). The findings are also in favor of studies finding that anxiety can adversely affect a person's ability to learn a second language, particularly speaking. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), for example, argued that anxiety leads to insufficiencies in both learning and performance. In many cases, EFL anxiety is raised by the efforts of learners to produce as accurate sentences as possible in the classroom paying attention to both pronunciation and language choice and use. In such cases, the learners' ability to use OCSs can be of great help to the learners in both having more successful communication and feeling less anxious.



## **6. Conclusion**

This study examined the strategies that the EFL learners use when facing either speaking or listening problems in communication. The results indicated that there were noticeable differences in the choice of strategies in the two cases, that is, in cases of encountering speaking and listening problems. In addition, OCSs revealed to be negatively correlated with learners' anxiety level and positively correlated with their self-efficacy beliefs.

The study has a number of implications. Regarding the first finding, the study implies that some training of the OCSs may be helpful to EFL learners as the nature of the most and the least selected strategies to some extent reflects the contextual features of the Iranian EFL learning environment. Based on the results of this section of the study, "accuracy-oriented" was the most commonly used strategy and "message abandonment" was the least frequently used strategy for speaking while "word-oriented" and "fluency-oriented" were the most and the least frequently employed strategies for listening. In both cases the results are indicative of the Iranian learners' focus on accuracy and details rather than on fluency and the main messages. Thus, the training of the OCSs may benefit EFL Iranian learners. In addition, based on the significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and the use of OCSs, it can be concluded that better strategy users usually find more positive self-efficacy beliefs which can, in turn, lead to more success in second or foreign language learning. It can also be said that learners with high self-efficacy beliefs are better strategy users and, as a result more successful in language learning and language use. On the other hand, the negative relationship between OCSs and anxiety indicates that low anxiety and better use of strategies are related to each other and the literature suggests that both of these are correlated with better achievement in language skills.

The current study had several limitations. First, only three sets of questionnaires were employed to collect the data. Second, the procedure of subject selection was convenience sampling which does not entail selecting participants that are representative of the entire population. Third, the researchers could not control many individual factors, including age, which may have affected the results of this study.

In accordance with the shortcomings of the study, some suggestions are made for further research. First of all, other studies can be carried out by triangulation of data through employing other data collection procedures in addition to using questionnaires.

Secondly, further research is needed to be carried out with a sample randomly selected to be representative of the population. Finally, other studies can investigate the topic controlling some learner variables which may impact the results.

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