CHAPTER SIX
Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

6.1 Introduction
This research study was conducted to examine the effects of explicit teaching of reading strategies on EFL intermediate learners in the Gilan province of Iran, as a means of investigating reading comprehension problems in EFL contexts. In this chapter, I summarize the key findings of the study and discuss ways in which the findings can contribute towards pedagogical decisions while teaching English to Iranian EFL learners. Following this, I end this chapter with recommendations for further research and posit the limitations of the study.

6.2 A discussion of the key findings of the study
This study attempted to seek answers to the three research questions restated below:

1. Will a cognitive – constructive approach to reading enhance autonomy in reading behaviour of Iranian EFL?

2. Will explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies significantly improve learners’ reading comprehension ability?

3. Will explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies significantly improve learners' awareness of these reading strategies?

The results of the data analysis (tabulated in Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 in Chapter 5) indicate that reading autonomy in EFL contexts can be enhanced through a cognitive-constructive pedagogical approach. The findings of the study complement and lend support to the research hypothesis that explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies contribute positively towards enhancing the autonomy of students in reading. This also answers the second research question, and is validated by the responses to the questionnaires used before and after the intervention, and also from the results obtained through paired sample t-test and independent t-test, which confirm that the participants in
the experimental group performed better than the control group after the intervention. The answer to the third question “Does explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies significantly enhance learners' awareness of these reading strategies?” was also found to be “yes” based on the results obtained from the post-intervention questionnaire, which confirmed that explicit teaching of the strategies has raised awareness of the participants in the experimental group.

The statistical scores of the learners’ performance on the tests reject the null hypothesis which states: “There is no difference in mean scores of the Iranian Intermediate EFL learners who receive explicit instruction of the reading comprehension strategies and the learners who do not receive any instruction.” The research findings show that teaching reading comprehension strategies might be a productive way to enhance students’ reading comprehension. The significant improvement on the participants’ score on the tests can be attributed to their experience of being explicitly taught reading comprehension strategies. It may thus be claimed that continuous practice of using strategies with different texts will make learners develop awareness and help them think meta-cognitively and read strategically. The results of the research study reveal that unskilled readers can become skilled readers if they are given instruction in effective strategy use and taught to monitor and check their comprehension while reading.

During the intervention carried out by the researcher with the experimental group, the participants were made to practice strategies to deal with reading texts. For example, they learnt to take notes and highlight the main points, make mind maps, skip less important information, use illustrations in the text, titles, and subtitles to connect with the text. They also learned how to monitor their own reading process and comprehension, and connect their prior information to the material related in the text. Application of these strategies helped them to develop awareness when they read a text. From the results of the study, it may be concluded that explicitly teaching students reading strategies and their use is important in EFL reading sessions. Moreover, the findings substantiate that the EFL learners can be trained to use meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies to read more successfully, which confirms earlier findings of a host of scholars such as Cubukcu (2008), Fan (2009) and Zhao (2009). The findings also show that in addition to making learners
familiar with strategy use, they can also be taught to realize the value, benefits, and importance of using strategies in EFL reading.

According to the results of this research, the following pedagogical implications can be made:

- Teaching explicitly comprehension strategies is an effective key that can enhance reading comprehension ability of the EFL learners in Iran.

- Teaching learners to apply strategies such as inference, skimming, scanning, guessing meaning and summarization might help alleviate the stress, pressure and formality of language reading sessions and allow students to engage more actively in the process of the reading.

- The attitudes of students and their motivation to read in a foreign language (English) change positively through active engagement with strategy use.

- The application of reading strategies makes students less dependent on a dictionary while reading a text.

The success of this pedagogical strategy - explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies - to a large extent relies heavily on students’ motivation to learn the new strategies and apply them in their private reading. So, it becomes the teachers’ responsibility to present the new strategies to the learners in such a way that they consider themselves capable of applying the new knowledge on their own and in their private reading. This depends on the teacher’s training and expertise in teaching the strategies to the learners. The teacher must be able to create an atmosphere that encourages exchange of opinions regarding strategy usage and persuades students to change their misconceptions about reading, particularly, in a foreign or a second language. The teachers also need to convince and assure the learners that it is all right to make mistakes in the process of applying learned strategies, and that they will gradually begin to use them independently in their reading. In addition, in each class it is likely that there will be learners who struggle to catch up with the rest of the class. Teachers should be encouraging and supportive to those who lag behind the programme and anticipated goals.

In addition to these factors, the effectiveness of strategy instruction in enhancing reading comprehension skills of EFL learners would rely on the following points:
• The size of the class must be small, comprising not more than fifteen or twenty learners, or the teacher will not be able to attend to the needs of the whole class. In fact, the smaller the class is, the more is the time available to the teacher to attend to individual students, and the more probability of internalization of the learned strategies.

• The teachers must structure instruction in a manner that starts from simpler strategies such as skimming and scanning to more complicated ones such as inference and summarization. Learning how to use the strategy would increase the level of the learners’ self-confidence in applying the strategies, so handling of more complicated texts would not be a difficult task to carry out. Moreover, it is vital to offer timely and proper assistance when eliciting feedback from the learners during the whole class and through individual practice. The more students try to overcome the challenges proposed by the exercises to practice the strategies, the more confident they are likely to be in reading on their own and applying strategies. However, the teachers should bear in mind that learning and changing of old habits takes time; it takes a lot of time to get every individual in the group to be an active reader. Moreover, changes do not happen overnight, and they need extended practice, help and support from teachers.

• The reading comprehension class activities and practice after explicit presentation of the strategies should be teacher-assisted and student-centered, such that there is gradual assignment of more responsibility and independence to learners. Each practice session of the strategy should aim towards the goal of transferring the whole responsibility of strategy use to the learners.

• Teachers can help their learners evaluate the efficiency of strategy use by helping them clarify what they are trying to achieve, the strategy they are applying, the productivity of the strategy application, and what other strategies could be tried.

• Apart from skills and knowledge, explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies requires great commitment and patience on the part of the teachers as well as acknowledgement that it is worth employing the method to reading comprehension. Hence that the administrators of schools and private institutes need
to realize the crucial need for in-service TTC classes (teacher training classes) that can provide the materials and training for the teachers teaching reading comprehension strategies to EFL learners. Administrators should also put in place a system which regularly observes and evaluates teaching and learning efficiency in the English reading class, and provides a space for learners to read beyond their course books.

6.3 Pedagogical implications and recommendations for further research directions

It is hoped that the findings of this research have brought to light the possible problems that learners in ELF contexts may encounter while reading in English. It is also hoped that the pedagogical procedures described have positive implications for teachers and learners of English in EFL contexts as well as administrators and curriculum developers. Teachers need to be encouraged to invest some time in learning how to teach reading comprehension strategies themselves so that they can include them as a part of their instructional materials in reading sessions. Teachers should also be made aware that even though it will take them more time to prepare activities for reading strategy practice and implement them, the benefits gained from these activities would be worth the labour.

Another important discovery based on the research experience is that strategies need to be taught over a sufficient duration for the training to be effective. These should be presented over a number of contexts with a variety of texts to make sure that the learners learn to use the strategies automatically. Each strategy has its own application and usage in reading skills. It should also be remembered that some strategies are harder to teach than others, and may take longer for students to internalize. For example, if the teacher wants her students to learn and apply more complicated strategies such as inference or summarization, then students should be given more practice with related texts. In addition, the more the learners are trained, the more they will be accustomed to using strategies and can automatically make use of strategies whenever they read the text. It is also suggested that the teacher allocate more time for training of less proficient learners in the group in
strategy practice; they might not catch up with others and may need more practice and help from the teacher to keep up with their peers in the class.

Teachers’ limited awareness of reading comprehension strategies and its implementation also merits immediate attention from supervisors and administrators. Teachers need to be coached on how to implement and teach these strategies to the learners. More professional development through in-service teacher training is needed to aid teachers in the successful practice and implementation of a variety of strategies. Teachers need to be provided with formal and informal training that guide them in the systematic utilization of reading strategies aimed at enhancing reading comprehension. In this regard, the teacher’s book can play an essential role in providing many examples of effective reading comprehension instructional techniques.

The research findings discussed above show that more investigation on the impact of explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies to Iranian EFL learners is needed. Future research investigations on a larger sample can be made in order to generalize the impact of explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies to Iranian EFL learners. It is also suggested that this study be replicated over a longer period of time, so the results could be generalized with more certainty.

This study has focused on Iranian EFL learners at intermediate level. Similar research can be done on Iranian learners at elementary, upper, pre intermediate, or advanced levels. In addition, this research, which was conducted on one experimental group, may be replicated by comparing the results of intervention on two or more experimental groups. Moreover, this study did not record the effect of reciprocal teaching (peer teaching) by the learners during class activities after presentation of the strategy. Future research could focus on different aspects of reciprocal teaching and its benefits for the learning purpose as well. The results of this study presented a promising improvement and influence on the Iranian intermediate EFL learners’ reading comprehension. Nevertheless, the researcher would recommend future research focus and more specific probes into cognitive strategies like using graphic organizers, semantic mapping, questioning, and visualization strategies to see how such strategies affect reading comprehension abilities of EFL readers.
The intervention for the field study was carried out in the course of two months due to time constraints of the institutions. Because of the restricted period over which the field study was conducted, the researcher was not able to give the participants a delayed post-test and a delayed post-intervention questionnaire to investigate the retention period of the strategies by the experimental group. It is suggested that future research could take this issue into consideration.

More studies are recommended to investigate the reciprocal effects of explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies and extensive reading on reading ability of the Iranian EFL learners. The results obtained from this study suggests that the EFL educators in Iran should allocate more time and budget on training teachers for teaching reading comprehension strategies to the EFL Iranian learners. It is also suggested that curriculum developers and administrators should not only take teaching of reading comprehension strategies as a serious and effective way of improving reading skill of the learners but should also plan new ways to boost the learners’ motivation, and enthusiasm for reading in their private time.

To sum up, reading comprehension strategies instruction has proved to be an efficient approach that could help the Iranian EFL learners to improve their reading comprehension ability if they receive it explicitly. Iranian EFL teachers, educators, course designers, administrators and also researchers have to take into consideration the importance of this approach in enhancing Iranian EFL learners’ reading comprehension. Such stakeholders need to blend this methodology with all learning levels in the Iranian EFL context, so that Iranian EFL learners are able to comprehend reading texts at the early stages of learning English as a foreign language.

6.4 Limitations of the study

As explicated in Chapter 1, although the current study has been carefully designed, it has many limitations. For example, this study did not take into account the role of gender and explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies. In this study, participants were chosen based on their proficiency level in the target language and comprised learners of a particular age bracket. Another possible limitation of this study is the small sample size.
Since this research was conducted with a small size of participants (only 60), the findings of this study should be treated with caution. The duration of the intervention programme is another limitation; this research project was carried out over an eight week period. There may be a need for a longer duration in intervention programmes to obtain better and more robust results. On account of the intricacy of the intervention programme, it was impossible to determine the relative merits of each of the intervention’s strategies. This limitation may raise the question of whether all the strategies are equally important. These limitations could affect and influence the finding and outcomes of the study, so it is suggested that these areas of limitation should be considered when interpreting and generalizing the findings from this study.

6.5 Conclusions

In this study, we have tried to bring to light an encouraging result to the instructional training of the cognitive strategies in facilitating Iranian intermediate students’ EFL reading comprehension. The theoretical framework for the study was established on Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural learning and Bandura’s (1971) social cognitive theory, which have been discussed in detail in Chapter Two. The findings are supportive of the research hypotheses; the analysis of the results of the research data show that the learners’ motivation to read increased as an outcome of the explicit teaching of reading strategies, and they benefited from the programme. According to the outcomes of this research we can conclude that the research study and the impact of explicit instruction to improve reading skills was effective in not just providing credibility to the study, but also in benefitting the participants of the study notably.

Moreover, this study has implications for institutes in Iran that have been implementing a variety of pedagogical strategies to help students increase their English proficiency levels and prepare for academic work. The concept of ‘explicit teaching’ is new to Iran’s context and the findings suggest that strategies can be taught, which will help EFL intermediate students improve their reading comprehension ability. In fact, cognitive strategies can advance and benefit Iranian students from the beginner level to a higher level of reading comprehension. If teachers in Iran modify learning strategies to fit students’
needs and adapt these reading strategies to facilitate academic learning, it is expected that Iranian students will considerably improve their proficiency levels in English. In addition, they will be able to transfer these skills to reading in Persian or other languages, as well as reading other subject materials across the curriculum. This study offers momentum for the idea that reading strategy training can make learners acquire skills for enhancing reading ability in EFL reading classrooms and other academic subjects, which in turn will help their achieve better academic performances.

One feature of this study that makes it different from the other studies reported in the literature on reading comprehension in the Iranian context is the focus on explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies. This study focused on five very important and effective strategies in reading, while most of other studies in the context of Iran teach English reading in ‘traditional’ ways such as translating content or making students answer comprehension questions. The criteria for choosing these five strategies was based on the personal experiences of the researcher as a teacher (ten years as a teacher, teacher trainer, supervisor and observer) and consultation with experts (such as the supervisor of the research and other ELT scholars) and Iranian teachers.

To sum up, as one of the most important goals of teaching reading is to help students develop as strategic and independent readers, several suggestions for EFL reading teachers can be made on the basis of the findings of the study:

- Strategies can be taught through direct explanation, explicit teacher modeling, and comprehensive feedback from the teacher.
- Students should be encouraged to know what the strategies are, and where, when and how they can be used.
- More importantly, they should be informed of the value and usefulness of strategies in EFL reading.
- Making use of reading comprehension strategies will equip the EFL Iranian learners with more control over their reading, and help them avoid the feeling of frustration.
- EFL readers, particularly less proficient EFL readers, should be given comprehensive and explicit strategy training for a long period. As Gaskins (1994) claims, teaching of strategies needs to be carried out over an extended time in an
explicit and direct mood with support and feedback to change indifferent readers to strategic ones.

- Strategic reading by EFL learners requires commitment of the teachers, administrators, and the school system. The stakeholders - administrators, teachers, guardians and learners should understand that the process of reading is more than the simple decoding of word and sentence meaning. In order to help the learners to be successful readers, teachers need to model the strategies, make learners apply them to new reading texts, and assess the learners’ ability to comprehend the text. This requires allotment of time, supervision, and diligence on the part of the teachers.

- The aim of this study was to help the learners to become independent readers. Iranian English learners need to start reading on their own, and read more outside the classroom, because this autonomy will boost their motivation to read more, and help create autonomous readers who will be more purposeful and focused in their reading activities. This in turn will help them to use the full extent of their reading capacity and transfer their abilities to different types of reading. It is also hoped that learning to be autonomous readers would assist the learners in having more control over their reading behaviour. This would help them eliminate those factors which affect their reading negatively and teach them to personalize the strategies to fit into their reading style and personality.

In conclusion, the results of the study suggest that foreign language reading pedagogy, especially for adult students in academic settings, would benefit from the inclusion of explicit and direct strategy training. Improving reading ability takes time and is a gradual process that requires continuous efforts. Therefore, language teachers should help their students become strategic readers so that they can continue to make improvement outside the classes. The findings of this study adds to the growing body of literature in the context of Iran in particular, and EFL language learning studies in general, that cognitive reading comprehension strategy instruction can not only increase intermediate Iranian EFL students’ reading comprehension, but also make them more motivated and more involved readers of English.