
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring Communication Strategies in English Speaking Skills: A Study of Students at the University of Danang-University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam

Nguyen Duong Nguyen Chau¹ ✉ and Luu Ngoc Bao Thi²

¹M.A. Faculty of Foreign Language Teacher Education, the University of Danang-University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam

²Faculty of Foreign Language Teacher Education, the University of Danang-University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam

Corresponding Author: Nguyen Duong Nguyen Chau, **E-mail:** ndnchau@ufl.udn.vn

ABSTRACT

The study focuses on communication strategies, specifically examining how they are perceived and used in English-speaking activities, as well as the impacts of verbal communications strategies (VCSs) on the performances of second-year English students from the Faculty of Foreign Language Teacher Education and the Faculty of English at the University of Danang-University of Foreign Language Studies (hereafter called EFL students for brief) as well as to propose appropriate solutions to assist them to improve their communication skills. Data were collected from 280 questionnaires, and the analysis of the in-depth interviews was conducted with 10 student informants and observations of 40 students in total. The findings show that most students were familiar with the term "communication strategies", though they did not know exactly what the term referred to. Additionally, EFL second-years employed all twelve studied VCSs at various frequencies. Both positive and negative influences were reported, and judgement about errors from surrounding people was chosen as the biggest obstacle when applying VCSs. Several solutions were discussed in the study to solve these problems.

KEYWORDS

Communication strategies; English speaking activities; perception; practice; difficulties

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1. Introduction

Communication can be considered to be among the key motivators for language study. The situation is even more pronounced for students with linguistic majors since the ability to achieve effective communication partly mirrors their capacity in the workplace. Additionally, in this day of globalization and international integration, English has opened up various job opportunities for those who can master it, and promising work prospects have drawn much attention to the teaching and learning of this global language. This explains the increasing number of English-majored in schools and, consequently, the importance of familiarizing students with strategies to make the most of what they have learnt.

The preceding arguments have underlined the importance of communication strategies (CSs) in second language classrooms in general and English classrooms specifically. Nonetheless, not all Vietnamese students are familiar with the assistance, and many struggle to deliver their ideas verbally. For these reasons, we conduct the study to find out the perception that students hold towards CSs in English speaking skills, as well as the types of VCSs employed and their impacts on English speaking skills of second-year students whose majors are English language teaching and English language at the University of Danang-University of Foreign Language Studies (UD-UFLS) to pinpoint the difficulties they face and suggest some practical solutions to help them improve their communication competence. To achieve the aim stated, this research tried to answer the following questions:

1. How do second-year EFL students at UD-UFLS perceive CSs in English speaking skills?

2. What types of VCSs are used by second-year EFL students at UD-UFLS, and how do they affect their English speaking skills?
3. What difficulties do second-year EFL students encounter when using VCSs in English speaking skills?

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Communication

Allen and Guy (1974: p.11) defined communication as “the primary basis of direct social relations between persons” and “a sharing process which develops a common social experience.” According to Apps (2014: p.12), the word “conversation” is comprised of the words *con* (with) and *versare* (turn); and thus, “conversation is turn and turnabout – you alternate”. The definition makes communication a two-way activity that involves numerous turns of interaction between two people. A broader range of participants can be found in that of Brennan (2013), as she described communication as a cooperative activity in which two or more people interact through language usage and nonverbal cues.

In this study, communication is understood as a two-way verbal activity in English that involves numerous turns of interaction to exchange messages between two or more second-year English students from UD-UFLS.

2.2 Communication Strategies

Although there has been little consensus on the definition of communication strategies, the definition provided by Corder (1981: p.103) has gained widespread acceptance: “Communication strategies are a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his/her meaning when faced with some difficulty”. This definition aligns with Canale and Swain's (1980) and Faerch and Kasper's (1983) conceptualizations of CSs, which emphasize problem-orientedness and systematicity/consciousness. Some academics also broadened the viewpoint by including attempts to “enhance the effectiveness of communication” into the definition (Canale, 1983: p.26).

In this study, communication strategies refer to the employment of verbal and non-verbal mechanisms of second-year English students at UD-UFLS in the pursuit of a successful exchange of information.

2.3 Importance of Communication Strategies

Canale and Swain (1980: p.30) drew public attention to the importance of strategic competence by viewing them as actions to “compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or insufficient competence”. The significance of communication strategies can be attributed to their ability to assist low-proficiency learners in obtaining useful information. Sharing the same viewpoint, Mariani (1994) evaluated communication strategies based on their ability to give students solutions to transitory obstacles that hinder speakers from directing communication as they expect. In 1995, Dornyei emphasized the teachability of these strategies in second language learning out of the conventional controversy, reasoning that L2 learners might benefit from instruction on how to cope with performance problems as they “provide the learners with a sense of security in the L2 by allowing them room to manoeuvre in times of difficulty”. These arguments serve as a solid foundation for acknowledging communication strategies in both classroom and non-classroom settings.

2.4 Perception

“The way you notice something, or the ability to understand the true nature of something” (Hornby, 2003: p. 938).

2.5 Taxonomy of Communication Strategies by Brown (1994)

In his book “Principles of Language Learning and Teaching” (1994: p.138), Henry Douglas Brown classified communication strategies into two major groups: Avoidance strategies and Compensatory strategies. Brown based his typology on Dornyei's (1995: p.58), with notable modifications such as the addition of a new tactic - prefabricated patterns - into Compensatory strategies, as well as the integration of time-stalling strategies into the compensatory section rather than separating it to form a third major group, as Dornyei did. As he mentioned in his book, Avoidance strategies are approaches that speakers use to avoid a lexical or grammatical item or topic, whereas Compensatory strategies help compensate for knowledge gaps.

Avoidance Strategies	
1. Message abandonment	Leaving a message unfinished because of language difficulties
2. Topic avoidance	Avoiding topic areas or concepts that pose language difficulties
Compensatory Strategies	
3. Circumlocution	Describing or exemplifying the target object or action (e.g., the thing you open bottles with for corkscrew)
4. Approximation	Using an alternative term which expresses the meaning of the target lexical item as closely as possible (e.g., ship for sail boat)

5. Use of all-purpose words	Extending a general, empty lexical item to contexts where specific words are lacking (e.g., the overuse of thing, stuff, make, do, as well as using words like thingie, what-do-you-call-it)
6. Word coinage	Creating a nonexisting second language (L2) word based on a supposed rule (e.g., vegetarianist for vegetarian)
7. Prefabricated patterns	Using memorized stock phrases, usually for "survival" purposes (e.g. Where is the___? where the morphological components are not known to the learner)
8. Nonlinguistic signals	Mime, gesture, facial expression, or sound imitation
9. Literal translation	translating literally a lexical item, an idiom, a compound word or structure from first language (L1) to L2
10. Foreignizing	Using a L1 word by adjusting it to L2 phonologically (i.e., with a L2 pronunciation) and/or morphologically (e.g., adding to it a L2 suffix)
11. Code-switching	Using a L1 word with L1 pronunciation or a third language (L3) word with L3 pronunciation in L2
12. Appeal for help	Turning to the conversation partner for help either directly (e.g., What do you call ___?) or indirectly (e.g., rising intonation, pause, eye contact, puzzled expression)
13. Stalling or time-gaining strategies	Using filling words or gambits to fill pauses and to gain time to think (e.g., well, now let me see, as a matter of fact)

2.6 Taxonomy of Communication Strategies in this Study

The study focuses solely on language-involved strategies and, therefore, proposes an adapted taxonomy of verbal communication strategies from Brown's. This is because the author seeks to gain a better understanding of the direct influence of language use on the success of information sharing in order to identify any impediments and serve as a reference for English-speaking training. Furthermore, the art of nonverbal communication requires further investigation with careful thought as it can be further subcategorized. Thus, the study just focuses on how students transfer their messages verbally. The narrowed-down taxonomy to be used in this study is as follows:

Avoidance Strategies	
1. Message abandonment	Leaving a message unfinished because of language difficulties
2. Topic avoidance	Avoiding topic areas or concepts that pose language difficulties
Compensatory Strategies	
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3. Literature Review

In the international setting, Dornyei was credited for being the first to use this term to explain certain types of errors made by L2 learners. However, Færch & Kasper (1983) were the first to recognize learners' problem-solving behavior during teaching language as a "communication strategy". Smith (2003) used within-groups method to investigate communication strategy among adult learners of English in a computer-mediated environment. Computer-mediated communication was found to shape the use of communication strategies, and all kinds of strategies were nearly equally effective in terms of subsequent acquisition of target lexical items embedded in the tasks. Numata (2009) from the University of Iowa investigated the effects of communication strategies on second language acquisition to determine how L2 learners employed communication strategies during tasks and how well challenges were solved using the strategies. The findings demonstrated that the study's subjects, intermediate and advanced Japanese learners, gained substantially from the effort of maintaining their conversations.

In the Vietnamese setting, Le Thi Le Huyen (2013) looked into the use of communication strategies in oral presentations by third-year English majors at Hue University, College of Foreign Languages. Most of the students appreciated the roles of studied strategies. It was also revealed that time-gaining strategies were the most popular while waiting strategies were the least used. Additionally, both good and negative impacts were recorded, with the former outweighing the latter. Vu Kieu Hanh (2020) examined the communication strategies used by 30 first-year Forestry students at the Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry while doing one-way and two-way speaking activities. The study found that students utilized a variety of communication strategies, including avoidance, target language-based, L1-based, modification, and non-linguistic. Modification devices were the most commonly employed communication method, while avoidance strategies were the least popular. In 2022, Duong My Tham et al. examined non-English majors' attitudes towards code-switching as a communication strategy in relation to their English proficiency. The study found a positive correlation between individuals' attitudes towards code-switching and their English skills. It also suggested that code-switching was viewed as a tool for communication rather than a hindrance in English language classrooms.

Generally speaking, prior research focused on communication strategies as a whole, with few studies looking specifically at the effects of verbal communication strategies on students' improvement in their English speaking ability. Moreover, little has been done on second-year English students of FFLTE and FE from UD-UFLS in this matter. For these reasons, we decided to conduct this study about verbal communication strategies in the English speaking skills of second-year EFL students at UD-UFLS.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Methods

The study was conducted in quantitative and qualitative approaches. Questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and recordings were used to collect data in this study. Questionnaires were designed based on several adaptations from Le Thi Le Huyen's (2013), in line with checklists from the book "Principles of Language Learning and Teaching" (Brown, 1994: p.136-137).

4.2 Population and Samples

- Population: In this study, the population consists of students from the Faculty of Foreign Languages Teacher Education and the Faculty of English from UD-UFLS.
- Samples: 280 second-year students from the Faculty of Foreign Languages Teacher Education and the Faculty of English from UD-UFLS.

4.3 Data Collection

First, questionnaires were employed to collect students' opinions about their perceptions and self-assessment of the use of VCSs and their impacts. Second, interviews were used to gain additional information regarding their chances to improve VCSs in the university, and third, recording was employed as a way to double-check what has been gained from students' answers and their actual performances.

4.4 Data Analysis

To begin, the author determined students' perceptions, their use, and their assessment regarding VCSs impacts on their English speaking skills based on the questionnaire results. The frequency and the percentage that each studied factor contributes to students' perception, usage, perceived impacts of VCSs, difficulties, and suggested solutions were the expected results. Then, the author used recordings to confirm questionnaire results and, if necessary, added additional details to the final findings.

4.5 Data Analysis Tools

The study analyzed the collected data and calculated the percentage of researched elements using Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 26.0.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Subject Traits

280 second-year English students participated in the study in order to investigate their perceptions, their use of VCSs, and the effects of these on their performances.

Table 1: Number of students participating in the study

Faculty of English	258
Faculty of Foreign Language Teacher Education	22
Total	280

5.2 Results from Questionnaires and Interviews

5.2.1 General Information

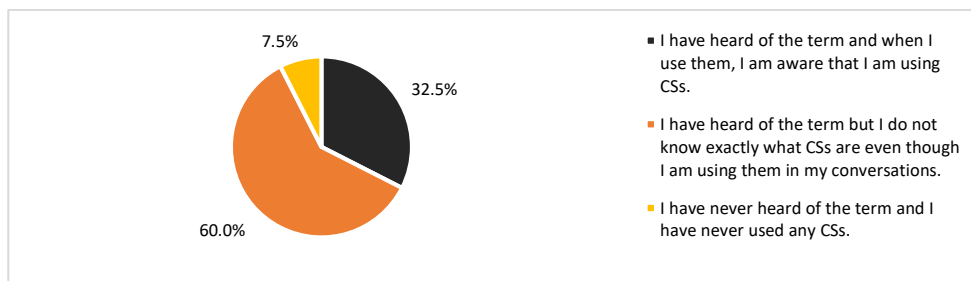


Figure 1: Students' acquaintance with CSs

According to Figure 1, the majority of second-year EFL students were quite familiar with the term "communication strategies", as only 7.5% responded that they had never heard of the term or used any CSs. Nevertheless, 60% of students did not know exactly what the term referred to, though they confirmed using what was shown as examples of CSs.

When questioned about his experience with CSs in general, and VCSs in particular, student A shared, "Looking back, I do use these methods in my daily life. I was told that during an IELTS examination, for example, if I couldn't answer a question right away, I should use filler words to gain time. However, the instructions normally ended like that, so I didn't know that I was actually using a communication strategy". Student B added, "Perhaps one of the reasons for this lack of awareness is because of us students' passive learning style over the years. To some extent, our reliance on school resources and teachers may limit our access to the concept of communication strategies".

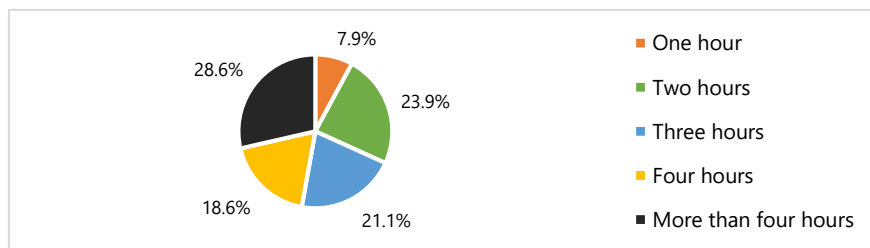


Figure 2: The average amount of time students spend speaking English a week

Figure 2 depicts the average amount of time spent on English interactions among second-year EFL students. According to the results, pupils speak English for two to more than four hours every week, with figures for the option "more than four hours" being the highest of all (28.6%). Given that they are English majors, it is understandable that just 7.9% of responses were "one hour". 18.6% of participants claimed to communicate in English for four hours. Overall, Figure 2 provides context for the potential usefulness and importance of CSs if adopted by the investigated subjects since the approaches would undoubtedly come in handy given the time spent discussing English among these students.

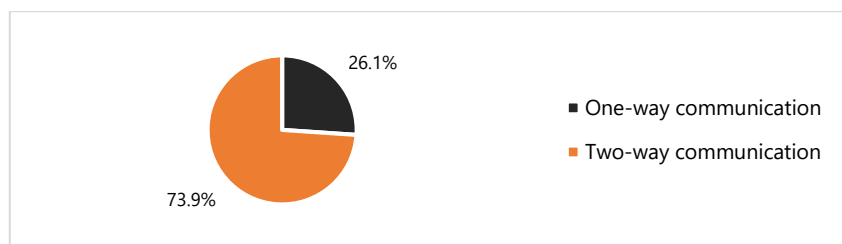


Figure 3: Forms of students' English speaking activities

73.9% of students' English speaking activities are in the form of two-way communication, which involves interaction between two or more people. The interview with student C provided further information: "One-way idea delivery seldom happens in my class. Ideas are normally exchanged two-way, either with the teacher or with my friends. I think that, apart from oral exams, we all use English to convey our opinions to others. Most of our assessments these days take the form of presentations or paper tests, though. Language is used to connect ideas of people together after all".

It can be seen that second-year EFL students have several opportunities to practice English both within and outside of the classroom. During school, records show that teachers used a range of exercises to encourage children to express their ideas. For example, following each Video Watching segment, there is usually a discussion section with open questions in the materials and follow-up questions to explain the points made by the students. Interactive presentations are also a vivid example of the wealth of ideas exchanged using English. Furthermore, students participated in a variety of activities that required them to speak English, either in their part-time jobs or with their friends.

5.2.2 Perception of Communication Strategies

Table 2: Students' perception of the role of CSs

	Frequency	Percent
Communication strategies help communicators deal with linguistic or sociolinguistic problems in communication.	170	60.7%
Communication strategies help explore the alternative ways of using what the learners have already known in order to deliver messages.	210	75%
Communication strategies show whether learners are good at English or not.	56	20%
Communication strategies ensure a productive communication of information.	102	36.4%

As displayed in Table 2, students can generally understand the fundamental roles of CSs, which are to assist them in dealing with linguistic or sociolinguistic problems in communication, as well as to explore alternative ways of using what they already know to deliver messages (75% and 60.7% respectively). Figures show that EFL students do not consider CSs an indicator of good English speakers (20%), which is an appropriate way to view CSs. Surprisingly, most students underestimated the importance of CSs in facilitating a productive flow of information, as only 36.4% of the total responses were positive. The excerpt from student B's interview may help to explain this: "A productive flow of information, from my point of view, shouldn't contain too many filler words as these. That's why I seldom use them, as I think that they may make my speechless coherent and make me sound unsure of what I am saying."

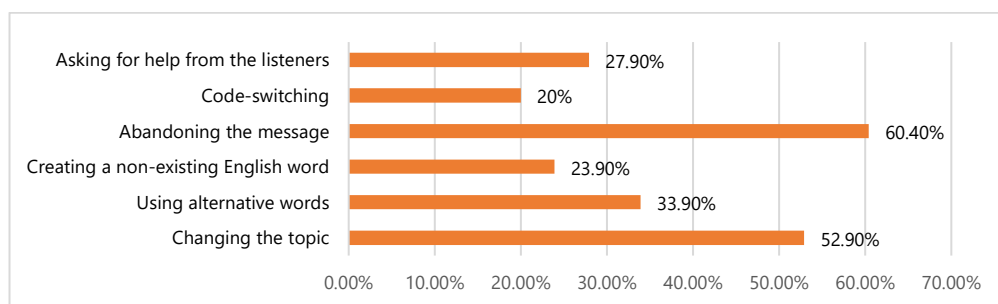


Figure 1: Students' understanding of avoidance strategies

Figure 4 shows how well students comprehend subject avoidance strategies. The majority of participants chose the two correct answers: "changing the topic" and "abandoning the message when you can't express it" (52.9% and 60.4%, respectively). Humble figures followed these options, with 33.9% for "using alternative words". 23.9% of the total response was for "creating a non-existing English word", and 20% was for "code-switching". These were classified by Brown (1994) as compensatory strategies, as stated in Chapter 2. This suggests that students are able to distinguish between avoidance and compensatory strategies.

Table 3: Students' attitude towards CSs

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I think communication strategies are necessary in conversations of all kinds.	1	5	4.22	0.69
I think avoidance strategies are important when my knowledge is insufficient.	1	5	3.80	0.91
I think compensatory strategies are important when my vocabulary is not enough to express my thoughts.	1	5	3.93	0.66
I think communication strategies make my conversation more engaging even when I do not have any problems in delivering my ideas.	1	5	4.04	0.77
I think communication strategies play an important role in my growth as a non-native English speaker.	1	5	4.23	0.87

In general, students had a positive attitude towards CSs, with results witnessing consistency among participants. They strongly agreed on the importance of CSs in general, as well as their role in their language development in particular. The significance of avoidance strategies was the least recognized, while the role of CSs in developing students' abilities as non-native English speakers was the most valued (3.80 and 4.23, respectively, for the mean of two options). Some possible reasons were gained from the interview with student C regarding the low figures for the importance of avoidance strategies: "Avoidance doesn't seem to be a good way to respond to problems, in my opinion. Moreover, while this may aid in real-life conversations, our English-speaking exercises are mostly in the classroom, where assessments are conducted. I think that is a reason for my indifference to this kind of strategy, though admittedly, it is very helpful in certain circumstances."

5.2.3 Types of Employed Communication Strategies

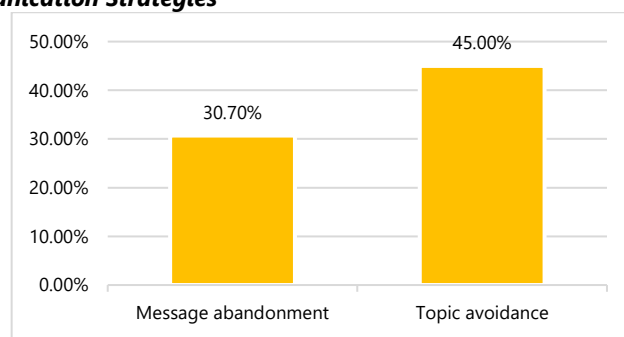


Figure 2: Types of avoidance strategies employed by students

Figure 4 illustrates the percentage of students who believed in adopting investigated avoidance strategies. Overall, a main category of CSs, avoidance methods are not favoured by second-year EFL students, as fewer than half of them claimed to use them in their English speaking activities (45% for topic avoidance and 30.7% for message abandonment). The findings aligned with that of Vu Kieu Hanh (2020), as their observation during the study found that avoidance strategies were the least adopted in both one-way and two-way tasks by first-year students at Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry.

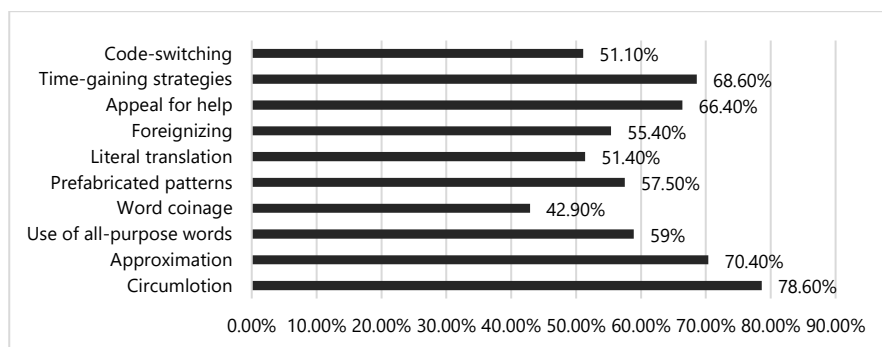


Figure 3: Types of compensatory strategies employed by students

Circumlocution and approximation were the two highest employed according to students' self-assessment (78.6% and 70.4%, respectively). They are followed by time-gaining strategies at 68.6% and appeal for help method at 66.4%. Other prominent figures include that of all-purpose words (59%), prefabricated patterns (57.5%), foreignizing (55.4%), literal translation from L1 to L2 (51.4%) and code-switching (51.1%). Word coinage is the least popular option, with only 42.9% of the total responses. Noticeably, word coinage is also the least chosen option among the twelve studied strategies. Various factors contributed to the result, yet one plausible explanation is that the study participants, who were all B2-level English learners with a certain degree of proficiency, tended to use word coinage primarily for describing localities that lacked direct English equivalents.

5.2.4 Influence of Verbal Communication Strategies on Students' English Speaking Skills

Table 4: Positive influence of VCSs on students' English speaking skills

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication strategies help me to convey important points more easily.	1	5	4.14	0.72
Communication strategies help me with appropriate responses to continue my conversations, reducing awkward silence.	1	5	4.23	0.61
Communication strategies compensate for my linguistic shortage.	1	5	3.86	0.77
Communication strategies help me avoid misunderstandings caused by cultural differences.	1	5	3.88	0.84
Communication strategies boost my confidence when speaking English.	1	5	4.26	0.77
Communication strategies gains me more time to think of ideas when I can't speak immediately.	1	5	4.14	0.89
Communication strategies encourage me to practice English more as I don't have to be afraid of not knowing the right words.	1	5	3.99	0.85

Table 4 reveals that students agreed with all assertions concerning the possible benefits of VCSs, with scores ranging from "agreement" to "strong agreement" (Mean>3.41, Std. Deviation<1). The most obvious result was an increase in confidence, whereas the least noticeable was compensating for language deficiencies. Interestingly, while many researchers believed that the latter was one of the primary reasons for delivering CSs in the classroom, students appear to place a higher value on the mental support they receive during English speaking exercises. It seems that immediate benefits such as increased confidence (4.26) and appropriate response during conversation (4.23) capture students' attention more than long-term incentives like addressing linguistic knowledge gaps (3.86) and preventing misunderstandings due to cultural differences (3.88), which can be seen from the scores given for each statement.

Table 5: Negative influence of VCSs on students' English speaking skills

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overreliance on communication strategies may demotivate me to expand my knowledge.	2	5	3.71	0.88
Overuse of filler words may make my speech incoherent.	1	5	3.89	0.83
Prefabricated patterns may make my speech sound unnatural.	1	5	3.98	0.87
Prefabricated patterns may lead to misunderstandings if I just remember them vaguely.	2	5	3.94	0.87
Communication strategies may make messages misleading as people interpret them differently when the correct words are not used.	1	5	3.92	0.95

Generally speaking, statements about possible negative impacts of VCSs on their English speaking skills receive as much agreement as that of positive impacts. Received results fluctuated in the range of "agreement" ($3.41 < \text{Mean} < 4.20$, Std. Deviation < 1). When considering demotivation to expand knowledge and misunderstandings stemming from vaguely remembered patterns, participants rated these factors with a minimum score of 2 rather than the lowest possible score of 1. Notably, while most students reported concern about unnatural speech, they did not view the potential for demotivation in learning English to be a disadvantage of using VCSs as much, given that these are respectively the highest and lowest scores demonstrated in Table 5.

From Table 4 and Table 5, it can be seen that while second-year EFL students appreciated the benefits of VCSs in English speaking activities, they still encountered several drawbacks. This underscores the need for VCS instruction in schools, as clear guidelines can help students learn and adapt these strategies to their own needs and avoid overreliance and its negative effects.

5.2.5 Students' Obstacles when Using Verbal Communication Strategies

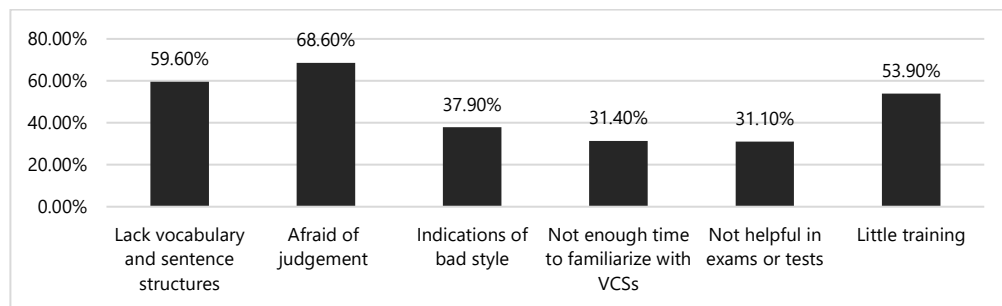


Figure 4: Obstacles to students' VCS use

The most significant obstacle reported by second-year EFL students is the fear of judgment from their conversation partners, accounting for 68.6% of the responses. This may be linked to strategies like word coinage or foreignizing, where students improvise words without strict adherence to vocabulary and grammar rules. 59.6% of students cited a lack of vocabulary and sentence patterns as a barrier to using VCSs, which may be related to strategies such as approximation or preset patterns. Because these strategies deal with flexible word choices to express thoughts, some level of language understanding is required.

The option for little VCSs training received 53.9% of the total response. This demonstrated students' need for VCS instructions and their desire to learn more about these strategies. The survey results show that students did not associate VCSs with poor speaking style, as only 37.9% of them identified this as an obstacle. Time to familiarize themselves with VCSs was not a significant concern either, with 31.4% expressing it as a difficulty. Notably, a mere 31.1% of students reported no improvement in tests or exams after using VCSs, proving the helpfulness of VCSs throughout students' learning path.

5.2.6 Students' Recommended Solutions

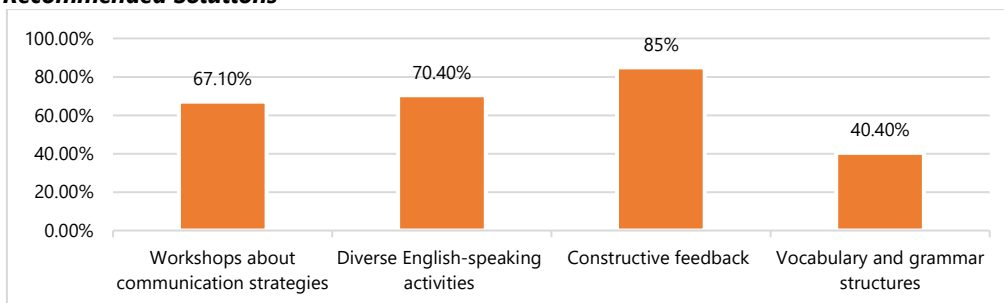


Figure 5: Students' recommended solutions

Students were provided with encouragement on several options for VCS use. The most popular method was to make alterations in how they used VCSs according to constructive peer feedback, which received 85% of all votes. Participating in various English speaking activities to practice different ways to exchange ideas followed at 70.4%. Coming third was workshops about VCSs, with a result of 67.1%, and learning vocabulary and grammar structures earned the fewest votes, accounting for only 40.4% of the total responses. It is clear that students recognized the value of practice in the development of speaking skill techniques, as the most popular options involved actual interactions with peers or native speakers.

Besides, interviewed students added the following methods for the promotion of VCSs: "learn about VCSs through movies, news", "practice speaking with native people through apps", "shadow phrases used for communication strategies", etc.

5.3 Results from Recordings

Twenty pairs of students were involved in the recordings. It can be seen that all twelve researched strategies were used over the study period, though at varying frequencies. In general, students underestimated their use of circumlocution, prefabricated patterns and time-gaining strategies while overestimating their use of topic avoidance, foreignizing, code-switching and word coinage. They self-assessed pretty accurately in terms of how they employed the other approaches. Time-gaining strategies were used most, and foreignizing was used least by EFL second-year students, which is different from what has been gained from questionnaires.

Table 6: Comparison between recordings and questionnaire results

	Recordings	Questionnaires
Message abandonment	27.5%	30.7%
Topic avoidance	10%	45%
Circumlocution	57.5%	78.6%
Approximation	50%	70.4%
Use of all-purpose words	40%	59%
Word coinage	7.5%	42.9%
Prefabricated patterns	80%	57.5%
Literal translation	40%	51.4%
Foreignizing	5%	55.4%
Code-switching	17.5%	51.1%
Appeal for help	47.5%	66.4%
Stalling or time-gaining strategies	82.5%	68.6%

Notably, topic avoidance, foreignizing, code-switching, and word coinage were rarely recorded, as they received results below 10%. Reasons may vary, but it is likely that because the investigation context was exercised in English classes, students are expected to do as assigned. They cannot change the topic at will, which explains the considerably low reported figures compared to questionnaires. Similarly, the use of vocabulary improvisation-related strategies may be limited due to the content of the exercise, which does not always require students to foreignize words to complete their work.

The spontaneous feature of class activities also leads to a high-rising preference for strategies such as circumlocution, time-gaining strategies and prefabricated patterns in students' actual performances as well. To elaborate, exchange in class normally leaves students little time to think and organize their ideas for most of the time. Consequently, even with the help of quickly jogged down keywords, students still encountered certain difficulties when verbally communicating their opinions. Therefore, 83.33% of recorded participants relied on time-buying strategies, while 80% opted for prefabricated patterns and 76.67% used circumlocution when waiting for the correct word to come to their minds.

"I get... well... uneasy when I uhm... go to high places. I have difficulty in breathing if I do. Well, I think I can call that a fear since when I was younger, I was just moments away from... well, falling from my house' balcony."

(student H, during an exchange about what triggers fear in students)

It can be seen that in the excerpt, student E was using time-stalling strategies "well", "uhm" while finding the right words. The description "get uneasy when I going to high places" and "have difficulty in breathing if I do" supposedly referred to acrophobia. Prefabricated patterns were among the strategies used by many students. Some common phrases include "I think", "I believe", "in my opinion", "that is an interesting question", "legend has it that", "it is widely agreed that", etc.

Message abandonment was considered to be the least employed by students in the questionnaire stage, and despite the difference in ranking, the figure from recordings supported the point, with only 26.67% of students. It was also found that message abandonment is often accompanied by at least one more strategy. The point is well demonstrated by the excerpt below.

"I have learnt one thing that I do not get... I cannot keep a good relationship with people I do not like. But I can try to behave myself in front of them and keep my distance from them as much as possible."

(student J, during an exchange about how to overcome her problems)

6. Conclusion

The study investigated second-year English students' perception and practice of verbal communication strategies in English speaking activities, as well as the impacts of verbal communication strategies on the performances of students from the Faculty of Foreign Language Teacher Education and the Faculty of English. In general, most students were familiar with the term "communication strategies", though they did not know exactly what the term referred to. Second-year EFL students spent more than four hours per week on English speaking activities on average, with communication typically taking the form of two-way communication. Students claimed to have used all twelve studied VCSs, and message abandonment was the least popular, while circumlocution was the most common strategy. Both positive and negative influences were reported. Judgement about errors from surrounding people was chosen to be the biggest obstacle when applying VCSs in English speaking activities, and feedback-based adjustment to the use of VCSs was what most students recommended as the solution to difficulties. According to recordings, students underestimated their use of circumlocution, prefabricated patterns and time-gaining strategies while overestimating their use of topic avoidance, foreignizing, code-switching and word coinage.

7. Implications

Some implications to help students encourage their use of VCSs are:

- Strategies-based instructions to promote learning autonomy: According to Brown (1994), teaching learners effective learning strategies is crucial to making a language classroom an environment for learning. Chamot (2005) pointed out that explicit instruction is more effective than merely asking students to use strategies because it improves metacognition or the comprehension of their own thinking and learning processes. These findings support the need to inform second-year students about communication strategies in English speaking skills to enhance their active learning.

- Extra activities for pupils to practice VCSs: Aside from obtaining knowledge, hands-on experience is an aspect to consider. Numata (2009: p.145) argued that repeated practice in the classroom should allow learners to accustom themselves to employing CSs in the target language. Furthermore, it has been discovered that students may benefit more from the teaching of CSs if they comprehend the techniques, believe they are successful and do not find their execution to be too challenging (MacIntyre and Noels, 1996).

- Constructive feedback: Feedback has long been shown to improve students' learning processes (Ovando, 1994; Vollmeyer & Rheinberg, 2005; Nyiramana & Christine, 2017). As such, feedback from teachers that is "relevant, timely, factual, helpful, confidential, respectful, tailored to specific needs, and encouraging" is a valuable tool for achieving successful teaching and learning (Ovando, 1994).

- Models for the use of specific CSs: Demonstrations such as movies and audio resources can help learners recognize, categorize, and assess CSs employed by native or L2 speakers (Dornyei, 1995). These could serve as clear directions for students on how to utilize CSs in various situations. From then on, students can reflect on their experiences with CSs and make appropriate changes.

8. Study Limitations

Although the author gained valuable experience from this study, there are some unavoidable constraints. First, because the number of participants in the study was limited, the results of the study may not be as dependable as expected. Second, the study focused

exclusively on second-year English students' perception and practice of verbal communication strategies in English-speaking activities, as well as the impacts of verbal communication strategies on their performances. Particular methods that can be implemented in UD-UFLS to assist them in overcoming their difficulties remain to be researched further and in greater detail. Nonetheless, the author hopes that the scope of the study will be useful to second-year English students as a guideline when seeking help with their speaking skills, as well as teachers who want to learn about and improve students' English speaking skills in particular and communication skills in general.

9. Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the constraints stated above, it is suggested that additional research be conducted on a wider scale in order for the results to be more persuasive, practical, and trustworthy. Furthermore, authors could select not only EFL second-year students but also students from other years, faculties, and languages because communication skills are essential for all. Furthermore, the study focused on students' perceptions, practices, and the impacts of VCSs, so hopefully, more research on effective approaches and procedures to improve students' abilities will be conducted in the near future.

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ORCID iD: 0009-0001-1033-6355

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Appendices
Questionnaire

Exploring Verbal Communication Strategies in English Speaking Skills: A Study of Students at the University Of Danang, University of Foreign Language Studies

We are conducting “Exploring Verbal Communication Strategies in English Speaking Skills: A Study of Students at the University of Danang, University of Foreign Language Studies” in order to assist students in improving their English speaking skills. Your contribution is greatly appreciated. We guarantee that your information will only be used for research purposes. Thank you very much!

1. What is your class?

2. Gender: Male Female

3. Which faculty are you in?

Faculty of Foreign Language Teacher Education Faculty of English

4. Have you ever heard of the term “communication strategies”? (e.g., when you don’t know how to respond immediately, you say “well, let me see” ...)

- I have heard of the term and when I use them, I am aware that I am using communication strategies.
- I have heard of the term but I do not know exactly what communication strategies are even though I am using them in my conversations.
- I have never heard of the term and I have never used any communication strategies.

5. On average, how many hours a week are you involved in English speaking activities (in class, at work, at home with friends...)?

- One hour Two hours
- Three hours Four hours More than four hours

6. Your speaking activities are usually in the form of...

- One-way communication (describing pictures, talking about a topic in 2 minutes...)
- Two-way communication (interactive presentation, answering short questions, discussing with friends...)

7. Which of these do you think are the roles of communication strategies in speaking English? (You may choose more than one option)

- Communication strategies help communicators deal with linguistic or sociolinguistic problems in communication.
- Communication strategies help explore the alternative ways of using what the learners have already known in order to deliver messages.
- Communication strategies show whether learners are good at English or not.
- Communication strategies ensure a productive communication of information.

8. What are some methods of topic avoidance? (You may choose more than one option)

- Changing the subject Abandoning the message when you can’t express your thoughts
- Using alternative words Asking for help from the listeners
- Creating a non-existing English word Code-switching

9. How do you perceive communication strategies? (Tick the option that best suits you)

Note: Avoidance strategies help when the speaker avoids the lexical item for several reasons. For example, speakers avoid the lexical item road entirely because they cannot come up with the word way at the point of speaking.

Compensatory strategies involve compensation for lacking knowledge. For example, speakers may use the thing you open bottles with for corkscrew.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I think communication strategies are necessary in conversations of all kinds.					
I think avoidance strategies are important when my knowledge is insufficient.					
I think compensatory strategies are important when my vocabulary is not enough to express my thoughts.					
I think communication strategies make my conversation more engaging even when I do not have any problems in delivering my ideas.					
I think communication strategies play an important role in my growth as a non-native English speaker.					

10. Which have you used in your speaking tasks when you have difficulties in delivering your messages? (You may choose more than one option)

- Leaving a message unfinished because you can't remember the right word
- Avoiding the topic which you lack vocabulary about (changing the subject, pretending not understanding the question...)
- Giving general descriptions when you can't remember the right word (e.g., the thing you open bottles with for corkscrew)
- Using other words (e.g. ship for sailboat)
- Using all-purpose words like stuff, thing, etc.
- Creating a non-existing English word based on a supposed rule (e.g., vegetarianist instead of vegetarian)
- Translating word-by-word from Vietnamese to English (e.g., a hair beautiful from một mái tóc đẹp instead of beautiful hair)
- Code-switching
- Using memorized stock phrases, usually for "survival" purposes (I'm fine, thank you, and you? when replying to How are you?)
- Asking for aid from the interlocutor (e.g., What do you call...?)
- Using filler/ hesitation devices like well, now let me see, as a matter of fact, etc.
- Foreignizing a Vietnamese word (saying I want to eat a phở, pronouncing phở as /'fəʊ/ and adding the English article a before it. However, English people may not understand the word because they have not eaten it before)

11. How do communication strategies affect your English speaking skills? (Tick the option that best suits you)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
POSITIVE					
Communication strategies help me to convey important points more easily.					
Communication strategies help me with appropriate responses to continue my conversations, reducing awkward silence.					
Communication strategies compensate for my linguistic shortage.					
Communication strategies help me avoid misunderstandings caused by cultural differences.					
Communication strategies boost my confidence when speaking English.					
Communication strategies gains me more time to think of ideas when I can't speak immediately.					
Communication strategies encourage me to practice English more as I don't have to be afraid of not knowing the right words.					
NEGATIVE					
Overreliance on communication strategies may demotivate me to expand my knowledge.					
Overuse of filler words may make my speech incoherent.					
Prefabricated patterns (I'm fine, thank you, and you?) may make my speech sound unnatural.					
Prefabricated patterns may lead to misunderstandings if I just remember them vaguely.					
Communication strategies may make messages misleading as people interpret them differently when the correct words are not used.					

12. What are the obstacles that prevent you from applying communication strategies when speaking English? (You may choose more than one option)

- I lack certain basic core vocabulary and sentence structures to describe the word I want.
- I am afraid of making errors and being judged by other people.
- Cross-cultural differences make some particular communication strategies indications of bad style.

- I don't have enough time practicing English to familiarize myself with these strategies.
- I don't find these communication strategies helpful during exams and tests.
- There has been little training on communication strategies so far.

13. Which solutions would you recommend to enhance the use of verbal communication strategies when speaking English among students? (You may tick more than 1 option)

- Participate in workshops about communication strategies
- Participate in diverse English speaking activities to practice different ways to exchange ideas
- Give and listen to constructive feedback to use the use of verbal communication strategies in an appropriate way
- Enrich vocabulary and grammar structures

Thank You For Your Cooperation!

Interview questions

1. In your opinion, what is the reason for the unpopularity of the concept "communication strategies" among students?
2. Do you think that communication strategies are of great help to your English speaking activities?
3. What difficulties do you encounter when using verbal communication strategies in English speaking activities?
4. What do you think can further promote the use of communication strategies among students in English speaking activities?

Recording checklist

Date:

Time:

Class:

Faculty:

Number of students:

A. Description of the activity:

B. Students' use of verbal communication strategies:

	Yes	No	Notes
Message abandonment			
Topic avoidance			
Circumlocution			
Approximation			
Use of all-purpose words			
Word coinage			
Prefabricated patterns			
Literal translation			
Foreignizing			
Code-switching			