

Short Paper

Oral Communication Strategies Inventory of AB English Language Students

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Date received: May 3, 2024

Date received in revised form: October 1, 2024

Date accepted: October 24, 2024

Recommended citation:

Perez, A.C., & Perez, L. (2024). Oral Communication Strategies Inventory of AB English Language Students. *Puissant*, 5, 2449-2463.

Abstract

This quantitative research sought to ascertain what and to what extent are oral communication strategies utilized by AB English Language students. The Oral Communication Strategies Inventory questionnaire identified the most utilized oral communication strategies of the respondents. Results of the study reveal that the majority of the students incurred a 1.75 grade in GE4: Purposive Communication, where oral communication is given due focus, indicating high communicative competence. Furthermore, the respondents regularly utilize seven (Fluency oriented, Negotiation for Meaning while Speaking, Accuracy oriented, Message reduction and alteration, Non-verbal strategies while speaking, and Attempt to think in English) of the eight categories of oral communication strategies, with Message Abandonment strategies being utilized to a lesser degree. Based on the findings, enrichment materials such as workbooks and intervention activities such as mentoring programs can be implemented further to augment the oral communication level of the respondents. Also, given the study's limitations in terms of the population covered, further studies can be conducted for a more general overview of the subject matter.

Keywords – Oral Communication, Oral Communication Strategies, OCSI, AB English Language, Oral Competence



INTRODUCTION

Oral communication skills are crucial for college students as they navigate academic and social environments. Effective oral communication enables students to articulate ideas, collaborate with peers, present information persuasively, and engage in meaningful discourse (Wilkes, 2016). Given its significance, understanding the oral communication strategies employed by college students is essential in enhancing their competencies.

Despite attendance at seminars or conferences and participation in training and workshops, many college students still encounter challenges when it comes to oral communication. These may include fear of public speaking (Marinho, de Medeiros, Gama & Teixeira, 2017; Tridinanti, 2018), difficulty in organizing thoughts coherently (Ashraf, Rubab & Ajmal, 2020), and lack of confidence in expressing ideas verbally (Matulesy & Hikmah, 2021). Understanding these challenges will enable school administration to formulate strategies for developing the oral communication skills of students.

Although previous studies have explored various aspects of oral communication among college students, including communication apprehension (Kho & Ting, 2021), communication competence (Morreale, Staley, Stavrositu & Krakowiak, 2015), communication styles (Bocar, 2017; Judith, 2019; Panisoara, Sandu, Panisoara & Duta, 2015) and communication strategies (Diobi & Nashruddin, 2023; Masithoh, Fauziati & Supriyadi, 2018), there is still a need to delve deeper into the specific strategies employed by college students to effectively communicate orally in academic and non-academic contexts. As such, this study is pursued to address this gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Oral Communication Strategies

Oral communication strategies are systematic, communication-enhancing devices that are utilized by speakers of a language to handle various difficulties, in hopes of avoiding miscommunication or total communication breakdown (Nakatani, 2006). While the concept of employing oral communication strategies is not entirely an innovative field, there has not been a single absolute definition as it normally covers a range of various strategies (Dornyei, 1995). Of these definitions, the pioneering work of Nakatani (2006) categorized these strategies into either “achievement or compensatory strategies” generally utilized by good speakers of the language, or “reduction or avoidance strategies” commonly associated with “low ability learners”. From these, Nakatani (2006) identified eight (8) major categories of oral communication strategies namely, (1) Social Affective, (2) Fluency-oriented, (3) Negotiation for Meaning while Speaking, (4) Accuracy-oriented, (5)

Message Reduction and Alteration, (6) Non-verbal Strategies while Speaking, (7) Message Abandonment Strategies, and (8) Attempt to think in English.

The first category, Socially Affective Strategies, generally deals with controlling emotions and attitudes during the communicative act. Chuanchaisit & Prapphal (2009) further elaborate that these strategies have clear features that seek to reduce and control anxiety and minimize silence to facilitate smooth communication.

Fluency-oriented strategies, on the other hand, are communication strategies that aim to maintain the conversation flow by paying close attention to elements of speaking such as rhythm, intonation, and pronunciation. For Isa (2017), such strategies are crucial for ESL learners as they ensure that they clearly understand and decode the intended message of the communicative act.

As for Negotiation for Meaning while Speaking strategies, these involve processes that speakers utilize to reach a clear understanding of the communicative act. Some examples include asking for clarification, rephrasing, and comprehension and confirmation checks (British Council, n.d.). Hartono and Ihsan (2017) further affirm that such strategies are more normally utilized by EFL learners as compared to ESL learners.

Accuracy-oriented strategies, meanwhile, are strategies regularly utilized by ESL learners who aim to speak as accurately as possible and thus focus on the speech forms and grammatical accuracies of messages, all the while self-correcting when mistakes arise (Nakatani, 2006).

The use of familiar and common words to avoid relatively uncommon and new words, even at the risk of deviating from the original communicative goal constitutes Message Reduction and Alteration strategies (Nakatani, 2006). Chuanchaisit & Prapphal (2009) have noted that these strategies are more commonly utilized by low-ability speakers, tending to replace concrete and exact but uncommon words with more abstract but familiar words.

Non-verbal strategies while speaking, which include body language, movement, posture, gestures, the use of space (or proxemics), paralanguage, facial expressions, eye contact, and touch (or haptics), are more commonly utilized by ESL learners as the proper usage and understanding greatly helps in the contextualization of the communicative act, thereby clarifying the meaning better (Saleem et.al., 2022).

Message Abandonment strategies, on the other hand, as noted by Iliyas (2015), serve as a “last resort” for most as it entails leaving the message unfinished. While it normally arises from limited vocabulary, it can nonetheless occur for high-ability speakers as well due to various social factors. Also important to note is how message abandonment strategies are adopted due to the inability to develop alternative means to convey the originally intended message.

Finally, attempting to think in English as an oral communication strategy is normally employed by low-ability learners that often arise from learners' negative attitude towards their first language (L1), hence the desire to construct sentences in English (Rachmawaty et al, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research utilized the quantitative design, particularly descriptive research. Through the descriptive research design, the study ascertained the most dominant Oral Communication Strategy utilized by the chosen respondents. Additionally, descriptive statistics were also utilized in the characterization of the respondents' demographics.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study are 278 AB English Language (ABEL) students of Pangasinan State University – Bayambang Campus during the second semester of the Academic Year 2023-2024. As the program is designed to “integrate theory and practice to prepare students for effective communication in English in diverse contexts and situations” (Commission on Higher Education, 2017), the said students are expected to be the most competent in terms of oral communication using the English language.

Data Gathering Instruments

The primary data-gathering instrument utilized in this research is the Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI) developed by Yasuo Nakatani (2006). Originally developed to measure the communicative strategies utilized by English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, it has since been refined to be an effective instrument for understanding oral communication strategies. Borne out of a 3-stage research project, the OCSI is divided into seven (7) speaking strategies namely, (1) Social-affective, (2) Fluency oriented, (3) Negotiation for meaning, (4) Accuracy oriented, (5) Message reduction and alteration, (6) Nonverbal strategies while speaking, (7) Message abandonment, and (8) Attempt to think in English strategies.

To provide better insight into the overall oral communication strategy utilized by students in the ABEL program, the respondents were also asked about their current year level and the grade they incurred in their General Education subject, Purposive Communication, where the concept of oral communication is discussed at length.

RESULTS

Demographics

From the total 342 students enrolled in the program, 278 answered the OCSI questionnaire. Representing 39.93% of the total population, 111 4th-year students participated in the study, while 86 (30.94%) were 2nd-year students, 63 (22.66%) were 3rd-year students, and 18 (6.47%) were 1st-year students (Table 1a).

Table 1a. Demographics of Respondents (Year Level)

Year Level	#	%
1 st Year	18	6.47%
2 nd Year	86	30.94%
3 rd Year	63	22.66%
4 th year	111	39.93%
Total	278	100%

As for the grades incurred by the respondents in GE 4: Purposive Communication, a total of 6 (2.16%) incurred a grade of 1.00 to 1.25, indicating “Excellent” performance. The majority of the respondents (48.56%), however, incurred a grade of 1.50-1.75, or “Very Good”. Additionally, no student incurred a grade of 4.00 or “conditional”, 5.00 or “failed”, or INC (incomplete), but one student (0.36%) did drop the subject (Table 1b).

Table 1b. Grades Incurred in GE 4: Purposive Communication

Year Level	#	%
1.00	1	0.36%
1.25	5	1.80%
1.50	42	15.11%
1.75	93	33.45%
2.00	65	23.38%
2.25	35	12.59%
2.50	29	10.43%
2.75	6	2.16%
3.00	1	0.36%
4.00	0	-
5.00	0	-
INC	0	-
DROP	1	0.36%
Total	278	100%

Oral Communication Strategies Inventory

The first six (6) statements cover social affective strategies employed by the respondents. Of these, four (4) are “regularly utilized”, while two (2) are “sometimes utilized”. Additionally, trying to give a good impression to the listener is the most utilized at 3.6799 mean, while not minding the risks of making mistakes is the least utilized at 3.1871 mean (Table 2).

Table 2. Social Affective Strategies Employed

Strategy	Mean	Interpretation
I try to relax when I feel anxious.	3.5612	Regularly utilized
I try to enjoy the conversation.	3.5252	Regularly utilized
I try to give a good impression to the listener.	3.6799	Regularly utilized
I actively encourage myself to express what I want to say.	3.4892	Regularly utilized
I don't mind taking risks even though I might make mistakes.	3.1871	Sometimes Utilized
I try to use fillers when I cannot think of what to say.	3.3201	Sometimes Utilized
Weighted Mean	3.4604	Regularly utilized

In terms of fluency-oriented strategies, five (5) out of the six (6) statements were “regularly utilized”, with the remaining one is at “sometimes utilized”. Also, changing the way of saying things according to the context received the highest mean at 3.6295, while paying attention to rhythm and intonation received the lowest mean at 3.2770. Overall, fluency-oriented strategies are “regularly utilized” by the respondents at 3.5228 mean (Table 3).

Table 3. Fluency-Oriented Strategies Employed

Strategy	Mean	Interpretation
I pay attention to my rhythm and intonation.	3.2770	Sometimes Utilized
I pay attention to my pronunciation.	3.5719	Regularly utilized
I pay attention to the conversational flow.	3.6079	Regularly utilized
I change my way of saying things according to the context.	3.6295	Regularly utilized
I take my time to express what I want to say.	3.5396	Regularly utilized
I try to speak clearly and loudly to make myself heard.	3.5108	Regularly utilized
Weighted Mean	3.5228	Regularly utilized

As for strategies dealing with negotiation for meaning, while speaking, all four (4) statements incurred are interpreted as “Regularly Utilized”. Paying attention to the listener’s reactions, however, received the highest mean at 3.6978, while making comprehension checks to ensure the listener understands received the lowest mean at 3.4928 (Table 4).

Table 4. Negotiation for Meaning while Speaking Strategies Employed

Strategy	Mean	Interpretation
I make comprehension checks to ensure the listener understands what I want to say.	3.4928	Regularly utilized
I repeat what I want to say until the listener understands.	3.6151	Regularly utilized
While speaking, I pay attention to the listener's reaction to my speech.	3.6978	Regularly utilized
I give examples if the listener doesn't understand what I am saying.	3.6403	Regularly utilized
Weighted Mean	3.6115	Regularly utilized

In terms of accuracy-oriented strategies, correcting oneself received the highest mean of 3.7806, while trying to talk like a native speaker received the lowest mean of 3.3525. Overall, accuracy-oriented strategies are regularly utilized by the respondents (Table 5).

Table 5. Accuracy-Oriented Strategies Employed

Strategy	Mean	Interpretation
I pay attention to grammar and word order during conversation.	3.3885	Sometimes Utilized
I notice myself using an expression that fits a grammatical rule that I have learned.	3.4820	Regularly utilized
I correct myself when I notice that I have made a mistake.	3.7806	Regularly utilized
I try to emphasize the subject and the verb of the sentence.	3.4245	Regularly utilized
I try to talk like a native speaker.	3.3525	Sometimes Utilized
Weighted Mean	3.4856	Regularly utilized

As for Message Reduction and Alteration strategies, reducing the message and using simple expressions received the lowest mean at 3.3058, interpreted as “Sometimes Utilized”, while using familiar words is “Regularly Utilized” at 3.6511 means (Table 6).

Table 6. Message Reduction and Alteration Strategies Employed

Strategy	Mean	Interpretation
I reduce the message and use simple expressions.	3.3058	<i>Sometimes Utilized</i>
I use words that are familiar to me.	3.6511	<i>Regularly utilized</i>
I replace the original message with another message because of felt incapable of executing my original intent.	3.3094	<i>Sometimes Utilized</i>
Weighted Mean	3.4221	<i>Regularly utilized</i>

In terms of non-verbal strategies while speaking, establishing eye contact while speaking is the most utilized strategy with a mean of 3.6259, interpreted as “Regularly Utilized”, while using gestures and facial expressions for expressing one’s self is “Sometimes Utilized” at 3.3165 (Table 7).

Table 7. Employed Non-Verbal Strategies while Speaking

Strategy	Mean	Interpretation
I use gestures and facial expressions if I can’t communicate how to express myself.	3.3165	<i>Sometimes Utilized</i>
I try to make eye contact when I am talking.	3.6259	<i>Regularly utilized</i>
Weighted Mean	3.4161	<i>Regularly utilized</i>

With regards to message abandonment strategies, abandoning the execution of a verbal plan and just saying words received the lowest mean at 2.6835, interpreted as “Sometimes Utilized” while asking other people to help received the highest mean at 3.2518 (Table 8).

Table 8. Message Abandonment Strategies Employed

Strategy	Mean	Interpretation
I leave a message unfinished because of some language difficulty.	2.8273	<i>Sometimes Utilized</i>
I ask other people to help when I can't communicate well.	3.2518	<i>Sometimes Utilized</i>
I give up when I can't make myself understood.	2.6942	<i>Sometimes Utilized</i>
I abandon the execution of a verbal plan and just say some words.	2.6835	<i>Sometimes Utilized</i>
Weighted Mean	2.8642	<i>Sometimes Utilized</i>

In terms of employing attempts to think in English, thinking of what to say in one’s native language and later on constructing or translating it in English is much more utilized (3.4784) than thinking first of a sentence in English and using it to fit into the situation (3.3993) (Table 9).

Table 9. Strategies Employing Attempts to Think in English

Strategy	Mean	Interpretation
I think first of a sentence I already know in English and then try to change it to fit the situation.	3.3993	<i>Sometimes Utilized</i>
I think of what I want to say in my native language and then construct it in English.	3.4784	<i>Regularly utilized</i>
Weighted Mean	3.4388	<i>Regularly utilized</i>

Of the eight (8) classifications of oral communication strategies, Negotiation for Meaning while Speaking strategies are the most employed with a mean of 3.6115,

interpreted as “Regularly Utilized”, while Message Abandonment Strategies are the least employed with a mean of 2.8642, interpreted as “Sometimes Utilized”. Overall, oral communication strategies are “Regularly Utilized” by the respondents (Table 10).

Table 10. Overall Oral Communication Strategies Employed

Strategy	Mean	Interpretation
Social Affective Strategies	3.4604	<i>Regularly utilized</i>
Fluency Oriented Strategies	3.5228	<i>Regularly utilized</i>
Negotiation for Meaning while Speaking	3.6115	<i>Regularly utilized</i>
Accuracy Oriented Strategies	3.4856	<i>Regularly utilized</i>
Message Reduction and Alteration Strategies	3.4221	<i>Regularly utilized</i>
Non-Verbal Strategies while Speaking	3.4161	<i>Regularly utilized</i>
Message Abandonment Strategies	2.8642	<i>Sometimes Utilized</i>
Attempt to Think in English	3.4388	<i>Regularly utilized</i>
General Weighted Mean	3.4027	<i>Regularly utilized</i>

DISCUSSION

Demographics of the Respondents

Out of the four (4) year levels, only the second-year and fourth-year students have 3 sections, while the rest have either one or two sections, which explains the high number of respondents in these year levels. Several factors can be identified for this such as the recent move of the Pangasinan State University’s move to reduce the number of first-year students to be admitted for non-STEAM courses, to which the AB English Language program belongs. This is in fact due to an advisory from the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum No. 7, series of 2023 (Commission on Higher Education, 2023) which identified national priority programs, effectively reducing the allowable enrollees for non-STEAM courses.

As for the grades incurred in GE 4: Purposive Communication, the majority of the respondents earned a grade of 1.75, implying that they have performed exceptionally well and have a strong grasp of the topics covered in the said subject. Consequently, Purposive Communication is focused on developing in the students their writing, speaking, and presenting competencies to different audiences and for various purposes (Commission on Higher Education, 2023). The relatively high grades incurred by the students can then be seen as a good performance indicator of them having developed their communication skills.

Oral Communication Strategies Inventory

As was mentioned in the prior chapter, the result for social affective strategies employed by the respondents implies that for them, focusing on building confidence in speaking situations and developing a supportive environment with peers and teachers are

effective ways of developing their oral communication skills. This particular finding echoes the study of Bhanu & Vijaya Kumar (2023) that socio-affective strategies can effectively reduce language anxiety and in turn, improve student performance for ESL students like the respondents.

Additionally, fluency-oriented strategies that focus on smoothness and fluidity of speech are regularly utilized. Although some respondents are still struggling to grasp the nuances of rhythm and intonation, which means they tend to overlook the subtleties of tone. Much like the study of Soekarno and Ting (2020), most ESL learners can familiarize themselves with common terms, thereby minimizing code-switching and the use of literal translation.

As for speaking strategies utilizing negotiation for meaning, since all four (4) statements on this strategy are regularly utilized, it means that the respondents are actively seeking confirmation and clarification during conversations, which ultimately manifests confidence in their communication abilities. Hartono (2017) himself advocates that negotiation for meaning strategies should be regularly utilized as it allows for real-time conversational modifications and adjustments as a valid and appropriate response when interlocutors experience difficulty in understanding messages.

On the other hand, out of the five (5) statements on Accuracy-oriented strategies, three (3) are regularly utilized while the remaining two (2) are sometimes utilized. The result clearly shows that the respondents pay closer attention to or prioritize clarity in speaking than precision in English grammar and articulation. This could be attributed to the fact that some students may tend to focus on accuracy which inhibits spontaneity and fluency. Mirzaei & Heidari (2012) assert the same that more fluent speakers, as in the case of this study's respondents' high average grade in Ge4: Purposive Communication, tend to focus more on fluency-oriented strategies, along with social affective and fluency-oriented strategies.

Alternatively, for Message Reduction and Alteration Strategies, the results signify that the respondents are not so keen or confident about altering or condensing the message to fit the preferences of the listeners, but they would rather use words that are familiar to them. This in turn echoes the findings of Demir, Mutlu & Sisman (2018) that Message Reduction and Alteration Strategies are much more common for English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners than ESL learners.

Meanwhile, the results for employing Non-Verbal Strategies while Speaking suggest that the respondents believe that the use of eye contact can engage their listeners more effectively than using gestures. Countless studies (Akinola, 2014; Ibrahim, et.al., 2022; Klinzing, 2009; Dash, 2022) have already underscored the importance of non-verbal cues to effective oral communication.

Since all the statements under Message Abandonment Strategies are only *Sometimes Utilized* by the respondents, this suggests that they feel confident in their ability to deliver information to their listeners coherently and convincingly. Additionally, the use of Message Abandonment Strategies should not be seen as only utilized by poor speakers of the language as it is regularly utilized by high and low-proficiency speakers, as observed by Iliyas (2015).

As for Strategies Employing Attempts to Think in English, the result could be attributed to the fact that thinking in one's native language is more natural and automatic than thinking in a foreign language. Also crucial is how translation is regularly utilized as a communication strategy in various contexts, as was identified by Akkaliyeva, et.al., (2021).

Finally, as for the overall strategies utilized by the respondents, Negotiation for Meaning While Speaking Strategies received the highest mean because it fosters a collaborative and cooperative communication environment and builds rapport among the participants. Meanwhile, Message Abandonment Strategies received the lowest mean due to their negative impact on the speaker's credibility and listeners' perception.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was conducted to assess the extent of utilization of the AB English Language students of Pangasinan State University of Oral Communication Strategies, which of the eight (8) categories of oral communication strategies are most and least utilized, and, through the OCSI, determine the oral communication strength of the respondents.

In light of the results of the study, it is revealed that the ABEL students have high levels of communication competence as evidenced by seven (7) out of the eight (8) categories of oral communication strategies being regularly utilized, with the remaining being sometimes utilized.

When analyzed in conjunction with the grades incurred by the respondents in GE4: Purposive Communication, the results further cement that the respondents have the required communication competence expected of tertiary-level students, particularly English Language students.

With the results of the study, the following recommendations are hereby forwarded:

1. Enrichment materials and programs be devised to further develop the oral communication competence of the students. This can take the form of Oral Communication workbooks that take into consideration the findings of the study and can be utilized in the teaching of GE4: Purposive Communication,

and/or Communication Enhancement Intervention Programs that seek to directly augment the deficiencies pointed out in the results of the study.

2. The study only covered AB English Language students of Pangasinan State University. As such, the study should be replicated with a wider scope (i.e. covering the whole College where the ABEL program is a part of, the whole Campus, or the whole University). This would then provide a more comprehensive understanding of how oral communication strategies are utilized by students across a wider range of factors.

IMPLICATIONS

With the Philippines being regarded as one of the largest English-speaking countries in the world, it stands to reason that much work should be done to ensure the communicative competence of students, particularly in the ESL setting. While the OCSI is a simple tool that accounts for the usage of widely categorized oral communication strategies, it is nonetheless effective in providing a “snapshot” of the overall situation of oral communication competence of its respondents, and as such, should be regularly utilized along with other tools in assessing students’ performance.

Finally, the results of this study can be greatly beneficial to education and curriculum specialists, school administrators, and ESL teachers to properly identify how specific oral communication strategies can be utilized in various situations in the hopes of cultivating communicatively competent graduates.

FUNDING

This study did not receive any funding from any person or organization.

DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there has been no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study.

Informed Consent

No Informed Consent is necessary for this piece of work as the research does not involve living human participants and does not utilize any personal data.

Ethics Approval

No ethics approval is necessary for this piece of work as the research does not involve living human participants and does not utilize any personal data.

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