

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES USED BY STUDENTS IN ENGLISH LEARNING ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRAK

This study investigated students' communication strategies in English language learning at SMA Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan. The objectives of this study were to identify the types of communication strategies used by students and to describe how the strategies were applied during classroom interaction. This study employed a descriptive qualitative design. The participants were ten eleventh-grade students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observation and open-ended questionnaires distributed through Google Forms. The data were analyzed using the qualitative analysis procedures proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, including data reduction, data display, categorization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed five types of communication strategies based on Tarone's theory: avoidance strategy, paraphrase strategy, transfer strategy (code-switching), appeal for assistance strategy, and non-verbal strategy. Among these, transfer strategy was the most dominant strategy used by students. Furthermore, communication strategies were used to maintain interaction, convey intended meaning, avoid communication breakdown, support speaking fluency, and increase students' confidence during classroom interaction. The study concludes that communication strategies play an important role in helping students overcome speaking difficulties and participate actively in English learning activities.

Keywords : *Communication Strategies; English Learning; Classroom Interaction; Speaking Skill; EFL Students*

INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role as an international language used in education, technology, business, and global communication. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language and is expected to help students develop communicative competence. Communicative competence refers not only to grammatical mastery but also to the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in various communication contexts. Therefore, English language learning should emphasize meaningful communication rather than merely learning language structures.

Speaking is considered one of the most important language skills because it enables learners to express ideas, opinions, feelings, and information directly. However, many students still experience difficulties when speaking English. Problems such as limited vocabulary, insufficient grammatical knowledge, pronunciation difficulties, and lack of confidence often hinder students from communicating effectively in the classroom.

Based on preliminary observations conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan, many students showed hesitation during speaking activities. Some students frequently paused while speaking, mixed Indonesian and English, asked classmates for assistance, or remained silent when they were unable to express their ideas. These findings indicate that students face various communication difficulties during English learning activities.

To overcome such difficulties, students often employ communication strategies. According to Tarone (1980), communication strategies are systematic attempts used by learners to express meaning when they encounter linguistic limitations. Communication strategies help learners maintain interaction and avoid communication breakdown during communication activities. Similarly, Cohen (1998; 2011) argues that communication strategies enable learners to convey intended meaning, support fluency, and increase confidence during communication.

Several previous studies have reported that language learners frequently use communication strategies such as code-switching, paraphrasing, asking for assistance, and non-verbal communication. However, studies investigating communication strategies among senior high school students, particularly at SMA Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan, remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to identify the types of communication strategies used by students and describe how these strategies are applied during classroom interaction in English language learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan. The participants consisted of ten eleventh-grade students selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in English speaking activities and their experiences in dealing with communication difficulties during classroom interaction.

The data were collected through classroom observation and open-ended questionnaires distributed via Google Forms. Classroom observation was conducted to identify communication strategies used by students during English learning activities, while the questionnaires were used to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and difficulties in speaking English.

The collected data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The analysis consisted of data reduction, data display, categorization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The communication strategies identified in the study were classified based on Tarone's (1980) framework of communication strategies.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Communication Strategies Used by Students

The findings revealed five communication strategies used by students during English learning activities: avoidance strategy, paraphrase strategy, transfer strategy, appeal for assistance strategy, and non-verbal strategy.

NO	Communication Strategy	Description
1.	Avoidance Strategy	Students avoided speaking or stopped communication
2.	Paraphrase Strategy	Students used simpler expressions to explain meaning
3.	Transfer Strategy	Students mixed Indonesian and English
4.	Appeal for Assistance	Students asked teachers or peers for help
5.	Non-verbal Strategy	Students used gestures and facial expressions

Tabel 1. Types of Communication Strategies Used by Students

Among these strategies, transfer strategy (code-switching) was identified as the most dominant communication strategy. Students frequently mixed Indonesian and English when they experienced vocabulary limitations or grammatical difficulties. This finding indicates that students relied on their first language to maintain communication and avoid communication breakdown.

Students also used paraphrase strategies by replacing unfamiliar vocabulary with simpler expressions. In addition, appeal for assistance strategy was frequently used when students encountered vocabulary, pronunciation, or grammatical difficulties. Some students employed avoidance strategies by pausing or stopping communication, while others used non-verbal strategies such as gestures and facial expressions to support communication.

These findings support Tarone's (1980) theory that language learners employ various communication strategies to overcome linguistic limitations. The dominance of transfer strategy suggests that students preferred maintaining communication through code-switching rather than terminating interaction when communication difficulties occurred.

Functions of Communication Strategies

Based on Cohen's theory (1998; 2011), communication strategies served several important functions during classroom interaction. They helped students maintain interaction, convey intended meaning, avoid communication breakdown, support speaking fluency, and increase confidence.

The findings indicate that communication strategies enabled students to continue participating in discussions, presentations, and question-and-answer sessions despite their linguistic limitations. Through code-switching, paraphrasing, asking for assistance, and using non-verbal communication, students were able to express ideas more effectively and maintain classroom interaction.

These findings are consistent with Cohen's perspective that communication strategies facilitate successful communication by helping learners compensate for language deficiencies. Therefore, communication strategies play a significant role in supporting effective classroom interaction and English language learning.

CONCLUSION

This study found that students at SMA Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan used five communication strategies during English learning activities, namely avoidance strategy, paraphrase strategy, transfer strategy, appeal for assistance strategy, and non-verbal strategy. Transfer strategy was identified as the most dominant strategy used by students. Furthermore, communication strategies helped students maintain interaction, convey meaning, avoid communication breakdown, support speaking fluency, and increase confidence during classroom interaction. Therefore, communication strategies play an important role in helping students overcome speaking difficulties and participate actively in English language learning.

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