

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Impact of Teaching Oral Communication Strategies to Engineering Students at a South-Western Nigerian University

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ABSTRACT - This study sought to examine the impact of teaching oral communication strategies on a cohort of ESL learners studying at the engineering faculty of a university in Lagos State of Nigeria. A quasi-experimental design was adopted to identify the cause-and-effect relationship between the teaching of oral communication strategies and the participants' use of those strategies. Hence, an English-speaking task was administered twice to a group of seven undergraduate engineering students who, through snowball sampling, were non-randomly chosen from the engineering faculty at the aforementioned university. In-between the two phases of the speaking task, a four-hour training session on the use of oral communication strategies was conducted. Data were then collected through the participants' responses to the spoken task and were transcribed and coded according to Tarone's communication taxonomy. Using an independent sample t-test to analyse the data, the findings revealed a statistically significant increase in the participants' use of oral communication strategies after the training. This implies that teaching oral communication strategies is impactful in improving the participants' English-speaking competence. The research is concluded with a recommendation for further studies with large samples for more generalisable findings. This research will inform language education policy makers of the need to heighten second language learners' and teachers' awareness of oral communication strategies use via their incorporation in the language curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

In spite of cultural and ethnic diversity, linguistic plurality, and national barriers, the use of English as a lingua franca has cut across the entire globe. The rapid spread of English - whose origin is traced back to Anglo Saxon - stemmed from the expansion of the world market brought about by development in various facets of Science and Technology (Sri Andayani, 2022). Over the years, English has taken a more significant role than ever as it has become widely used everywhere in the world for a wider range of communicative purposes (Nishanthi, 2018). Nowadays, a massive number of foreign language speakers opt for English courses that would equip them with the communicative skills necessary to become part of the current global economy (Samanth Reddy, 2016).

In various engineering fields, especially, English is the main medium used for knowledge acquisition, research publication, oral discussions, as well as paper presentation at workshops and conferences worldwide (Sanyasi et al., 2020). As affirmed by Saravanan and Sankar (2020), potential employers in the present time prefer to employ graduate engineers who are both tech-savvy and good English communicators. Therefore, communicative competence in English is given utmost importance since communication tasks such as oral presentation, negotiation with clients, group discussion, persuading customers, and socialising with colleagues have become part of the operations at engineering workplaces as well as other professions (Rajprasis & Hemchua, 2015; Kim, 2021). Nevertheless, in spite of the significance attached to the ability to communicate in English at engineering workplaces, a considerable number of undergraduate engineering students are found lagging behind in the required level of English communicative competence with which to tackle their future workplace communicative situations (Gashaye, 2015; Kakepoto et al., 2022).

In the Nigerian context, Gowon and Akanya (2019) reported the current performance of students in all facets of education as abysmal and demanding questioning, since a large proportion of learners in various educational institutions produced poor quality English with very low intelligibility. The recent reports by the West African Senior School Certificate Exam (WASSCE) indicated a mass failure of students in English language. For more than a decade, secondary school students have performed below an average in the WAEC (West African Examination Council) English exams, and no substantial improvement has been realised so far (WAEC's Chief Examiner's Reports, 2008 – 2019). Moreover, other researchers reported a lack of improvement in the English proficiency of a vast number of Nigerian students preparing for higher learning up till recently (e.g. Gowon & Akanya, 2019; Ismaila & Galadima, 2020). In actual fact, this worrisome situation is owing to certain factors, one of which revolves around teachers' incompetency in handling English courses and lack of flexibility to accept modern language teaching or learning approaches (Stella et al., 2018).

Specifically, it is indubitable that a large proportion of undergraduate engineering students encounter challenges in the course of their undergraduate studies given their usual low spoken English proficiency that emanates from weak language skills (Conrad, 2017; Maria de Souza, 2019). However, as research has proven that being able to recourse to appropriate communication strategies tremendously assists L2 users in compensating for communication breakdowns amidst English communication (Amuthan et al., 2018; Namaziandost & Imani, 2020), insufficient knowledge of such strategies with which to enhance one's skills in conveying messages has demotivated a large number of L2 learners in the course of struggling to complement their communication deficiencies (Ahmed & Pawar, 2018).

Despite that, a plethora of research has been conducted on the use of oral communication strategies among undergraduate engineering students (Ahmed & Pawar, 2018; Kongsom, 2016; Rosas, 2016; Masithoh et al., 2018; Thi Thu & Thi Kieu, 2016; Zhou & Huang, 2018), to the researcher's best knowledge, few related studies conducted so far about Nigeria centre upon the importance of organisational communication and its impact on staff's productivity (Ogohi, 2018; Ayeni & Akinola, 2020) and how Nigerian students in diaspora strategise to cope with language barriers in non-English speaking communities (Abdulateef & Efe, 2017). Therefore, this study is an attempt to examine the impact of teaching oral communication strategies on English speaking performance of a cohort of undergraduate engineering students studying at a public university in Lagos state, the South-Western part Nigerian. The research question goes thus: Is teaching of oral communication strategies impactful on English speaking performance of a cohort of ESL engineering undergraduate students at a public university in Lagos state of Nigeria?

This study is significant in that it aims to heighten the awareness of undergraduate engineering students in the South-Western Nigeria towards the role of oral communication strategies in solving the communication breakdowns that often emanates from speaker's insufficient vocabulary with which to achieve a particular communicative goal. This study will as well serve as a source of information to both university language teachers and language educational policy makers in creating models for a successful teaching of those strategies to undergraduate engineering students with the intent of accomplishing the goal of improving their English spoken capability.

Status of English Language in Nigeria

Since the Nigerian independence from British colonisation in 1960, English language has been maintained as an official means of inter-ethnic communication, a tool for sustaining national unity, a benchmark for academic success, and a yardstick for employment eligibility throughout the country (Chinwe, 2017). English plays a pivotal role as the instructional language from the fourth grade of primary education up till tertiary level (Nigerian National Policy on Education, 2013). Therefore, a credit pass in English language in a secondary school leaving exam such as WASSCE (West African Senior School Certificate Examination) and a good performance in JAMB (Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board) are among the major determinants of students' admission to any of the Nigerian universities. Given the heterogeneous composition of the Nigerian setting, the workforce is required to attain a considerable level of English proficiency to carry out effective formal communication and significant official tasks (Umenushe, 2017).

In the past few years, Nigeria has put forward her indefatigable efforts to achieve a technology-based economy. This led to an increasing focus on Science and Technology as the major determinant of the vision's success. Thus, in addition to their technical knowledge, soft skills are considered as imperative for engineers, particularly English communicative competence which directly impacts success of engineering activities worldwide today. Therefore, graduate engineers are expected to be capable of showcasing effective communication skills within the purview of their academic disciplines and workplace communicative events (Saravanan & Sankar, 2020). However, it is evident that a significant proportion of L2 learners find it hard to articulate themselves in good English, and specifically a considerable percentage of undergraduate engineering students have failed to meet the level of English communication competence required of them (Gowon & Akanya, 2019; Kakepoto et al., 2022).

It is noteworthy that teaching and learning of English language across the Nigerian educational levels centre upon reading and writing, while listening and speaking skills are almost overlooked as teachers do not give students much opportunity to articulate themselves during in-class activities (Mukhtar, 2017). This can be held as a debilitating factor that hinders university students' and graduates' ability to command good spoken English. Besides that, as English reading and writing are extensively taught as separate courses in different Nigerian educational levels, there is almost lack of focus on listening and speaking as courses on their own since they are only learned in infrequent cases whereby teachers talk about skills rather than initiating their practice among students.

Despite the role of communication strategies in compensating for linguistic deficiencies which lead to communication breakdown (Ahmed & Pawar, 2018; Prasetio, 2019), there is, however, no sufficient research to create the awareness of undergraduate engineering students in focus on what these strategies are as well as the effectiveness of teaching them in improving L2 users' communicative competence. Hence, this study seeks to examine the impact of teaching oral communication strategies on a cohort of undergraduate engineering students in a South-Western Nigerian university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication strategies are devices that a second or foreign language user employs to bridge a gap left in communication because of speaker's insufficient vocabulary or structures to convey the intended meaning. These

strategies altogether represent one of the components that constitute communicative competence in L2 research. Communication strategies have become a subject of great significance, given the overall analysis of a L2 spontaneous oral discourse which shows a substantial number of linguistic breakdowns which speakers tend to spend time and efforts to compensate for (Amuthan et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2022).

Tarone (1977) defined communication strategies as “strategies used by an individual to overcome the crisis which occurs when language structures are inadequate to convey the individual’s thought” (p. 195). In her definition, Tarone depicted crisis as the gap left in communication owing to speaker’s inadequate linguistic proficiency to achieve a particular communicative purpose. Thus, these strategies are aimed at helping second language speakers to convey their intended meanings when they are short of language structures and/or vocabulary with which to convey their message.

However, some researchers do not see a need for the inclusion of communication strategies in the language curriculum since L2 learners are naturally not unaware of them in their use of mother tongues (Bongaert & Poulisse, 1989). On the contrary, more recent research (Mansyera & Zainil, 2020; Namaziandost & Imani, 2020) contended that the case with L2 learning is different as L2 learners need an exposure to different sorts of skills that would help them to achieve communicative competence, one of which is developing one’s ability to use communication strategies in a quest to achieve targeted communicative goals.

Following a substantial number of studies on definition, theory and taxonomy, and critical analysis of theoretical frameworks of communication strategies (Tarone, 1977; Canale, 1983; Dornyei & Scott, 1997), the dawn of the millennium witnessed continued efforts in widening L2 teachers’ awareness of communication strategies and employment of the studies so far in improving their L2 curriculum and instruction. Therefore, the interest focused on the review of research on the established theoretical backgrounds (Karpati, 2017; Oweis, 2013, Wongsawang; 2001), followed by the development of L2 communication strategy instruction (Konchiab, 2015).

Nevertheless, since 2009, a plethora of research has been dedicated to the examination of communication strategies employed by different cohorts of ESL students (Ahmed & Pawar, 2018; Komang et al., 2019; Prasetyo, 2019). On that note, a rigorous study of the available literature unveils ESL/EFL learners as employing a variety of communication strategies in their oral speech interactions and productions, depending on their level of linguistic competence. Specifically, the higher the level of language proficiency of users, the less frequent their use of communication strategies is and vice versa (Masithoh et al., 2018; Zhou & Huang, 2018). Moreover, research revealed that ESL users of high proficiency tend to employ target language-based strategies, whereas those with lower proficiency often resort to own language-based strategies and message avoidance (Ahmed & Pawar, 2018; Zhou & Huang, 2018). However, it is apparent that most of the studies so far on the use of communication strategies among non-native users of English language were conducted in EFL contexts. Whereas only little research has been undertaken to find out about the like of this situation in ESL contexts including Nigeria. This justifies the need to carry out this study with a focus on a particular region in Nigeria.

Teachability of Communication Strategies

Since the inception of communication strategies discourse, scholars have agitated on whether to teach those strategies to ESL/EFL users or otherwise. However, while strong theoretical arguments are in opposition to teaching such strategies, the real practical experience has always proven their teaching as effective in enhancing L2 learners’ communicative competence (Dornyei, 1995).

Those with an opposing view to the teachability of communication strategies contend that strategic competence is a communicative feature that manifests in speakers’ use of their first language and is transferable to a second or foreign language (Bongaert & Poulisse, 1989; Bongaert et al., 1987; Paribakht, 1985). The implication of this is that adult ESL/EFL users would automatically have a recourse to the like of communication strategies they use in their mother tongue while endeavouring to compensate for breakdowns amidst their communication in English. Moreover, communication strategies are depicted as a part of non-linguistic knowledge which describes the pattern of using what the learner knows of L2 as they convey their message to the speakers of target language (Tarone, 1981). As a result, it is the linguistic knowledge rather than communication strategies which serves as a catalyst for an effective communication (Bialystok, 1990; Kellerman, 1991).

Bialystok (1990) and Nijmegen researchers’ group (Kellerman et al., 1987) underpinned this claim in their psycholinguistic theory holding that communication strategies are products of cognitive process, and that any attempt to focus on the surface structure it produces rather than the root will be futile. What this implies is that so long as communication strategies are produced by cognitive process, teaching linguistic knowledge to L2 learners rather than communication strategies can enhance their competence at speaking. Kellerman (1991) concluded that teaching communication strategies in classroom is unjustifiable and called for a focus on developing learners’ linguistic knowledge, leaving such strategies to take care of themselves.

As observed by the researcher, all the arguments established against the teaching of communication strategies are mere assumptions rather than findings of empirical research. There is no sufficient evidence to substantiate that teaching of any communication strategies can inhibit the development of linguistic prowess necessary in enhancing learners’ ability to communicate effectively. However, as researchers like Dornyei and Scott (1997), Faerch and Kasper (1983), Nakatani (2010), and Tarone (1980) corroborated, teaching communication strategies is helpful to L2 learners as it enlightens them

on what they can actually do to prevent communication breakdowns despite insufficient amount of vocabulary with which to express themselves. Inasmuch as the linguistic development that leads to an enhanced language proficiency requires certain length of time to be attained, L2 learners are in a dire need of some devices with which to bridge the gap between their communicative goal and the linguistic capability with which to achieve the end until they are fully developed linguistically.

On the contrary, a sizeable number of other scholars are in favour of teaching communication strategies, maintaining that such an idea is practically credible and effective (Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Paribakht, 1986; Savignon, 1972). Moreover, there have recently been lots of studies indicating the effectiveness of teaching communication strategies to L2 learners (Benali & Lopez, 2018; Fahmi et al., 2017; Namaziandost & Imani, 2020; Suwartono & Kerti, 2020).

Pinphet and Wasanasomsithi (2022) examined the impact of project-based blended learning with teaching of communication strategies on the development oral communicative ability of undergraduate engineering students. Using a cohort of 20 university students at a faculty of engineering in Thailand, the researchers conducted an oral communication strategies' training with a focus on circumlocution, asking for confirmation, asking for clarification, and use of fillers and hesitation gambits. Moreover, the participants' English communicative ability was tested both before and after the training based on the following six components identified by the Common European Framework Reference (CEFR), namely range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, coherence, and pronunciation. The results of the post-test as compared with the pre-test revealed a significant improvement in the participants' English-speaking ability after the oral communication strategies training as part of project-based blended learning.

Namaziandost and Imani (2020) undertook a study to examine the effect of two communication strategies, namely self-repetition and comprehension check on English speaking fluency of Iranian EFL learners. To achieve this end, the researchers non-randomly selected 90 EFL respondents out of 140 learners who have studied for five years at a language institute in Iran. Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was conducted on the selected respondents to ascertain their level of English-speaking proficiency. The respondents were then divided into three groups, namely two experimental groups who were taught about the aforesaid two communication strategies, and one control group which was made to learn speaking with the aid of traditional activities such as question and answer, dialogues, topic discussion, and role playing. Overall, the findings unveiled that both self-repetition and comprehension check strategies have a positive effect on the improvement of respondents' English-speaking fluency.

Despite lack of direct implication, this research agrees with several other studies alluding to the effectiveness of teaching communication strategies by corroborating its enhancement of students' communicative competence (Fahmi et al., 2017; Namaziandost & Imani, 2020).

The study conducted by Suwartono and Kerti (2020) sought to examine the impact of oral communicative strategies on the English-speaking performance of a group of Indonesian EFL learners. In order to achieve this end, the researchers conducted a communicative strategy training session with a cohort of 30 students of Teachers' Training Program at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwoketo, Indonesia. These participants were chosen among others owing to their lack of class participation and lower learning achievement. Using observation, interview, diary and test, data were collected both prior to and after the classroom instruction. The taught communication strategies are paraphrase, miming, fillers and assistance request. The findings of the study showed a significant improvement in the participants' use of the taught communicative strategies leading to an enhanced speaking performance.

Likewise, Benali and Lopez (2021) carried out a study to examine the effectiveness of communicative strategies' instruction on speaking performance of a group of Spanish EFL learners. To achieve this end, the researchers conducted a communicative strategies' training on 116 participants whom, after a proficiency placement test, were grouped into two categories, namely high proficient and low proficient participants. Then the participants did an oral task in the form of story-telling and answering interview questions in the pre-training, during training and post-training phases. Upon the training which centred on eight communication strategies, namely paraphrasing, restructuring, appeal for authority, asking for repetition, gap fillers, providing active response, shadowing and chunks, the findings revealed a substantial improvement in the participants' strategic competence which translated to an enhanced speaking performance. Moreover, the high proficient participants were found with ability to use the taught communication strategies more than their low proficient counterparts. Although no sufficient details are provided concerning which of the eight communication strategies the participants used most proficiently and which they were unable to use much, this study adds credence to the teachability of communication strategies and empirically proves the significant effects it has on English speaking performance of ESL or EFL learners.

To sum up, a plethora of studies so far has proven the instruction of communication strategies as effective in enhancing L2 learners' strategic competence which then culminates in improving their communicative proficiency. Therefore, based on the presented arguments underpinning the teachability of communication strategies, the present research sought to examine the teaching of communication strategies and its impact on the communicative performance of the aforementioned cohort. This study will play a pivotal role in enlightening ESL learners on the need to acquire such devices with which to address the issue of oral communication incompetence both within the researched population and outside.

Theoretical Framework

With respect to the teachability of communication strategies, this study was best framed with Tarone (1984) who holds that teaching communication strategies is positively impactful on L2 learners' communicative competence. However, to examine and categorise the communication strategies used by the participants in the course of circumventing communication breakdowns amidst oral productions and interactions, this study adopted Tarone's (1977) traditional theory of communication strategies. According to this theory, any attempt to resolve a communication breakdown resulting from L2 user's low linguistic proficiency is regarded as a communication strategy. Thus, Tarone (1977) described communication strategies as comprising five main components, namely avoidance (i.e. topic avoidance and message abandonment), paraphrase (i.e. approximation, word coinage and circumlocution), conscious transfer (i.e. literal translation and language switch), appeal for assistance and mime. This taxonomy, as conspicuous in its components, stems from the notion that the main role of communication strategies is to fill the vacuum resulting from insufficiency of linguistic resources with which the speaker's communication goals are achieved. In simple language, communication strategies are meant to resolve communication crises that surface at the planning stage prior to their occurrence (Dornyei & Scott, 1997; Tarone, 1977) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Tarone's taxonomy of communication strategies.

No.	Communication Strategy	Description
1.	Avoidance	
a.	Topic Avoidance	The learner just chooses to avoid talking about the concepts whose equivalents in the target language are unknown to him/her.
b.	Message Abandonment	The learner starts to communicate about a concept but unable to proceed amidst the utterance.
2.	Paraphrase	
a.	Approximation	The learner uses a target language's vocabulary item and/or structure which is known to be incorrect but shares a semantic feature with the correct item (e.g. pipe for water pipe).
b.	Word coinage	The learner comes up with a new word in effort to communicate a desired concept (e.g. air ball for balloon).
c.	Circumlocution	The learner describes the features or elements of the object or action in question instead of using the appropriate target language item or structure (e.g. She is, uh, smoking something. I don't know what's its name. That's, uh, Persian, and we use in Turkey, a lot of).
3.	Conscious Transfer	
a.	Literal Translation	The learner translates literally from their first language or mother tongue (e.g. "He invites him to drink, for they toast one another.")
b.	Language Switch	The learner resorts to the use of their native language without taking the troubles to translate. (e.g. balon for balloon).
4.	Appeal for Assistance	The learner requests for a help as to the correct term (e.g. What is this? What is it called?)
5.	Mime	The learner employs a non-verbal strategy rather than a lexical item to express a meaning. (e.g. clapping one's hand to express applause).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the teaching of oral communication strategies and the participants' use of those strategies (Rogers & Révész, 2020). Hence, the below sub-sections present details about the participants of the study, the instrument used to elicit the data, data collection and the procedures observed, and data analysis.

Participants

This study was an attempt to examine the impact of oral communication strategies training on the English-speaking performance of a cohort of undergraduate engineering students from a public university in Lagos State, South-Western part of Nigeria. Through a snowball sampling, an undergraduate engineering student studying at the aforementioned university was found, and non-randomly, he himself reached out to other six students from the same faculty. The participants were seven (i.e. five males and two females) although six of them volunteered to take up the English-speaking task. All these participants have the same cultural and linguistic backgrounds as their mother tongue is Yoruba, one of

the Nigeria's three quasi-official languages. Their age ranges from twenty to twenty-five years old. In regard to their specialty, two of them were students of Information Technology, another two belonged to Civil Engineering, while the rest three were studying Mechanical, Electrical, and Computer Engineering respectively.

As a common practice in the Nigerian schools, these participants set off for their English learning journey right from their fourth grade of primary education when they began to learn the language not only as a core subject but also as a vehicle of instruction of other subjects taught to them. Hence, English had always played a pivotal role in their learning process until their university level in which all their courses were being taught in English plus a compulsory English course whose whole content revolved around lexis and structure. Based on the inclusion criteria, of all the undergraduate students studying in the aforementioned university in Lagos State of Nigeria, the participants of this study were only selected from the Yoruba-speaking ones studying at the faculty of engineering. However, due to the recent lock down of the Nigerian educational institutions as a result of the outbreak of Covid-19 which led to the dispersal of university students, only seven participants (five males and two females) were found with willingness to actively participate in the study as stated earlier.

Instruments

Given its quasi-experimental nature, this study used a speaking task to obtain data. Therefore, a speaking task was designed to be answered by the participants both before and after a 4-hour online oral English-speaking course whose focus is on Tarone's (1977) communication strategies. This course, which took 40 minutes per week, lasted for a period of six weeks. The speaking task consists of two parts, namely interactional (i.e. an interactive session between each pair of participants in which they talked about traveling abroad for study or for a career and the country they would prefer to choose if they were given an opportunity to travel for such a purpose) and descriptive (i.e. each respondent explaining the impact of science and technology on human life). Following the participants' provision of responses to the speaking task, all of which were tape recorded, the transcription and coding process followed. Details about how the data were inter-coded between two coders and how the inter-coder reliability was ascertained shall be explained below.

Data Collection

Firstly, it should be noted that the researcher was not there in-person to coordinate the participants for data collection purpose. Rather, an ESL educator, who was pursuing his PhD in the same university volunteered to take up the task of coordinating the participants in all the phases of data collection process. Although the oral communication strategies training had been planned to hold virtually, without his proper checking on the participants and persuasions, having them all to participate in the virtual training and speaking task would have been proven abortive.

To sum up, the volunteer's commitment towards coordinating the participants went an extra mile in ensuring their active engagement in the pre-test, intervention (training on oral communication strategies) and post-test. Moreover, in effort to facilitate the pre-test and post-test (i.e. speaking task both before the oral communication strategies training and thereafter), the coordinator came up with a schedule to appoint the dates on which the participants were to meet to conduct this part at the designated location. In fact, this arrangement really helped when the intervention was conducted. Throughout the training period, the participants were mobilised into different locations where it was envisaged to have access to a better internet network service for an effective virtual class.

The data were obtained through conversations and monologues of the participants in response to the prepared speaking task which comprises two categories, namely interactional and productive. With regard to the first exercise, a situation in which someone was offered to travel abroad for an educational purpose, or a career was brought forth. While the offeree is considering the offer, they have to be the one to choose a country in the West based on what they think is most suitable for them in accomplishing their predetermined goals. The participants were paired into three to address the given situation. As for the second exercise, each participant was asked to produce a monologue on the impact of science and technology on human life.

After the first round with the speaking task, a virtual training session on Tarone's (1977) communication strategies was held with the participants once (i.e. 40 minutes) every week and it lasted for a period of one and a half months. Afterwards, using the same previous task, another speaking session by the participants was tape-recorded to examine how well they had been able to employ the communication strategies learned in tackling the issue of communication breakdown.

Data Analysis

Having obtained the speaking interactions and productions of the participants (in both phases) in response to the speaking task, the following procedures were taken in effort to interpret the data: First of all, it should be noted that the six participants, who took up the speaking task, were grouped into three pairs, namely 'interlocutors 1', 'interlocutors 2', and 'interlocutors 3', with the pair members, 'Learner A-Learner B', 'Learner C-Learner D', and 'Learner E-Learner F' respectively. The data were transcribed and coded according to Tarone's (1977). To ascertain the reliability of the coding process, an ESL volunteering expert also coded the same set of data, using the same benchmark. Afterwards, the level of inter-coder agreement between the two coders was checked and found to be 87 percent, meaning that the two codings

reach a high level of agreement. In addition to the mean score and standard deviation of the use of the adopted oral communication strategies both in the pre and post training phases, an independent sample t-test was run on the coded data, the result of which is presented and discussed below.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study sought to examine the impact of teaching oral communication strategies on English speaking performance of the aforementioned cohort of ESL learners studying at the engineering faculty of a university in Lagos State of Nigeria. The table below presents the study's findings both in the pre and post communication strategies training phases (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of the mean scores of oral communication strategies used before and after the training sessions.

No	Oral Communication Strategies	Pre – CS training		Post–Cs training	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1.	Approximation	0.11	0.18	0.33	0.41
2.	Word coinage	0.23	0.36	0.11	0.14
3.	Circumlocution	0.11	0.18	0.33	0.41
4.	Literal translation	0.00	0.00	0.22	0.27
5.	Language switch	0.68	1.07	2.22	2.71
6.	Appeal for assistance	0.00	0.00	1.67	2.03
7.	Mime	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
8.	Topic avoidance	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
9.	Message abandonment	1.47	2.32	3.11	3.79

Table 2 above presents the mean scores of the participants' use of the oral communication strategies adopted by this study, both in the pre-training and post training stages. As shown in the table, the participants showcased a certain degree of strategic competence since they had a recourse to certain communication strategies in few occasions. Out of the overall nine communication strategies adopted by this study, the participants used seven strategies both in the pre and post communication strategies training phases, namely approximation, circumlocution, literal translation, language switch, appeal for assistance, message abandonment and word coinage.

Therefore, this study found the teaching of oral communication strategies impactful on enhancing the participants' English-speaking performance with respect to approximation, circumlocution, literal translation, language switch, appeal for assistance and message abandonment. However, no impact of communication strategies teaching was felt on the participants with respect to word coinage, mime, and topic avoidance.

More specifically, there was a slight improvement in the participants' use of approximation and circumlocution between the pre-communication strategies training stage (M=0.11) and the post-communication strategies training stage (M=0.33). However, word coinage used in the pre-communication strategies training stage (M=0.23) saw a slight decline (M=0.11) at the post-communication strategies training stage. Literal translation was not used at all prior to the training session, whereas it was moderately used at the post-communication strategies training stage (M= 0.22). The use of language switch was minimal (M=0.68) in the pre-communication strategies training stage, while it tremendously increased (M=2.22) in the post-communication strategies training stage. Likewise, after its pre-communication strategies training stage (M=1.47), message abandonment witnessed a sharp rise (M=3.11) in the post-communication strategies training stage.

Overall, this study found the teaching of oral communication strategies is impactful in helping the participants to circumvent communication breakdown amidst conversations and speech productions, thereby enhancing their English-speaking performance. A few extracts from the participants' use of communication strategies in the course of their response to speaking task questions are cited below.

Extracts from Pre-Communication Strategies Training Speaking Tasks

Interactional

Interlocutors 1

Learner A: *Where are you going for a career?*

Learner B: *Eh ... I think anywhere that's just ... I don't ... I really don't know which country.*

As can be observed, Learner B used two communication strategies here, namely pause filler and message abandonment. The reason for the former is that the learner obviously needed a few seconds to process what to say in

response to the question. As for the latter, the learner seemed to be short of the right words with which to complete his message. So, he abandoned the first plan since it had failed and began with another plan.

Learner A: *You know, considering that there is a little bit of racism in that country like the ... the ... the kind of ... this kind of ...the allegations every time now and there about how they treat black people. Are you still sure it is a good decision?*

Here, Learner A also adopted message abandonment when she seemed forgetful or not knowing the right lexical terms with which to complete her message conveyance. Hence, message abandonment really helps her to forsake her previously adopted way of passing the message for a new plan.

Learner B: *I already told you the reason for my decision. So, all those ones were not considered.*

Productive

Considering ... em the impact of science and technology in modern day, we would greatly appreciate the fact that ...em... science and technology has improved humans' activities over the years. The ... the invention of most of the ... okay what we use mostly these days as a result of science and technology has helped to improve the way of life of ...em...the people .. people. So, science and technology has greatly improved human activities (Interlocutor 1, Learner A).

In the above extract, Learner A employed two communication strategies, namely pause filler and message abandonment as well. While she used the former thrice, she had a recourse to the latter once. She adopted a pause filler to allow her have sufficient time to process the message, while she used the message abandonment to allow her follow another course in her speech when the first plan has failed.

Extracts from Post-Communication Strategies Training Speaking Tasks

Interactional

Interlocutors 1

Learner A: *Okay. Now, let me get your options straight. If you prefer UK, is it for studies or for career?*

Learner B: *For studies ... for studies. For career too ... for career, eh ...aha ... I'll prefer to be in Nigeria and probably be working for a country abroad.*

It is obvious that Learner B needed more time to process his message dissemination better, and thus, he sought the help of pause fillers to achieve this purpose.

Learner A: *Ahaha ... You're thinking of a remote job. But actually, we're talking about the relocation now if you want to move.*

Here, Learner A means to say 'yeah'. However, when she seemed to forget or not knew the word in English, she ended up code-switching to Yoruba when she said 'ahaha'.

Learner B: *If I want to move, ...eh.... ah.... I have to do my research and see where it actually ... Check for the standard of living and other things sha (message abandonment). But currently I can't really say ... let me just say sha, probably UK too is not bad, and let me say ...em ... Dubai.*

Amidst his message, Learner B used pause filler and message abandonment just for the same purposes identified earlier. Moreover, his use of the Yoruba word 'sha' (which is meant for emphasis) is a language-switch strategy to help him show an emphasis whose English lexical term is probably forgotten by him.

Learner A: *You've mentioned the UK, but you know the cost of living there is high, and their tax is not really smiling over there.*

Learner B: *Yeah ... yeah ... I know.*

Productive

Many of ... during this Covid-19, we're able to buy things at the comfort of our house, and the ... the seller were able to deliver this thing at our ... at our door mouth. It's through technology. Likewise, when we're going out, before this we have to wait for the taxi to come for long time, but now, at our comfort of our phone, through the help of technology, they have integrated the cont ...the cont... the ... I mean ...the driver and the client together (Interlocutor 1, Learner B).

In an effort to circumvent communication breakdown when he does not remember or know the right words or expressions to be used, Learner B employed message abandonment. Similarly, he quickly had a recourse to his mother tongue (Yoruba) to borrow a phrase which he literally translated to English (literal translation).

According to the independent sample t-test analysis of the spoken tasks in pre and post communication strategies training, there is a difference which is considered statistically significant between the mean score of the participants' use

of oral communication strategies in the pre-communication strategies training stage ($M=2.6$, $SD=4.11$) and the mean score of their use of those strategies in the post-communication strategies training stage ($M=8$, $SD=9.75$); $t = 1.659$, $P = 0.049$, $P < 0.05$. Therefore, the results affirm that the teaching of oral communication strategies conducted had a positive impact on the participants' strategic competence, thereby enhancing their speaking performance.

As can be observed, the participants showed certain level of ability to employ oral communication strategies in their overall English-speaking exercise, although they exhibited some improvement after the training. Considering that the participants were found using approximation, word coinage, circumlocution, language switch and message abandonment more frequently after the training than beforehand, the training conducted proved instrumental in facilitating their use of those items, thereby improving their ability to circumvent communication breakdown which surfaces because of insufficient vocabulary with which to communicate particular meanings. Hence, this study agrees with a host of other research that corroborate that teaching oral communication strategies is effective in enhancing L2 learners' strategic competence (Benali & Lopez, 2018; Fahmi et al., 2017; Namaziandost & Imani, 2020; Suwartono & Kerti, 2020).

Besides, the occasional manifestation of an impending communication breakdown during the speaking activities in response to which the participants often alternated between first language-based and target language-based strategies rather than a reliance on the formal implies that the participants of this study are ESL learners of average English proficiency. This phenomenon has been earlier identified by Ahmed and Pawar (2018) as well as Zhou and Huang (2018) who found that L2 users of high proficiency tend to employ target language-based strategies in their attempt to circumvent communication breakdown amidst conversations and message conveyance, while the ones with low proficiency frequently resort to own language-based strategies.

Furthermore, the relatively high frequency of the participants' uses of reduction strategies such as language switch, appeal for assistance and message abandonment is symptomatic of them giving precedence to accuracy over fluency in communication. Lewis (2011) reported that L2 learners who prioritise fluency over accuracy and are ready to take risk in their language learning tend to employ achievement strategies, whereas their counterparts who are anxious to make mistakes, who prioritise accuracy over fluency and avoid risk taking in language are more inclined to resort to reduction strategies in their oral communication.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the proofs by plethora of research that oral communication strategies are effective in enhancing English speaking performance of L2 learners, any effort exerted with a view to heightening learners' awareness of these strategies is praiseworthy, for they are needful in bridging the gap between their set communicative goals and the language tools with which to achieve them.

One of the important implications of these findings is that students need to improve their awareness on the use of oral communication strategies not only because they need to circumvent breakdowns amidst communication interaction and production process, but also to enhance their level of speaking fluency. Hence, given the necessity of enhancing students' communicative competence which culminates in an improved speaking performance, this study recommends the incorporation of oral communication strategies to the English curriculum of undergraduate engineering programmes in the South-Western Nigerian universities as this would make the learning of those items mandatory upon them in the quest to strengthen their communicative English. Likewise, the achievement of this feat may prove difficult without university language teachers getting more exposure to communicative language teaching, particularly communication strategies pedagogy and how students can be helped to take its benefits to the fullest. This makes it imperative upon language policy makers to consider the significance of rigorous training exercise for university language instructors. There is no doubt that teaching these strategies will ease students' language learning process as they are exposed to different ways of managing the communication crises facing them in the course of them attempting to interact with others in various communicative events. Although developing learners' linguistic competence is generally believed to take precedence, educating young learners on the use of such strategies until they acquire a higher level of proficiency is an important measure that should not be overlooked.

Nevertheless, given the small number of participants which questions the generalisability of the findings of this study on the entire undergraduate engineering students in the South-Western part of Nigeria, there is a need for more studies to further delve into the subject matter in a wider scope to create a bigger picture on the effect of teaching oral communication strategies to undergraduate engineers in the whole South-Western Nigeria. Moreover, considering the current globalised world in which English has become a compulsory requirement for professionals from different fields, a focus on engineering students is only a part of the whole. Hence, future studies in this regard are envisaged to have their focus on ESL learners from other spheres of knowledge.

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