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## Unveiling Effective Student Communication Strategies for English Mastery

*Mengungkap Strategi Komunikasi Siswa yang Efektif untuk Penguasaan Bahasa Inggris*

**Siti Nur Aqida , Sitinur@umsida.ac.id, (0)**

*Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo  
[<https://ror.org/017hvkd88>], Indonesia*

**Vidya Mandarani, vmandarani@umsida.ac.id, (1)**

*Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo  
[<https://ror.org/017hvkd88>], Indonesia*

<sup>(1)</sup> Corresponding author

### Abstract

This research explores how communication strategies assist seventh-grade students in overcoming English-speaking challenges at SMP Muhammadiyah 9 Boarding School Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo, Indonesia. Using qualitative methods, including observation and semi-structured interviews, the study identifies various strategies employed by students, such as avoidance, paraphrase, borrowing, appeal for assistance, and mime, with language switch in borrowing being predominant. Findings indicate a positive impact of these strategies on students' ability to achieve communication goals. This study underscores the importance of optimizing communication strategies to enhance English proficiency and facilitate effective communication in language learning environments.

#### Highlight:

**Diverse Strategies Identified:** Students use varied methods to tackle English-speaking difficulties.

**Dominant Technique:** Language switch in borrowing prevails among student strategies.

**Effective Impact:** Communication strategies positively enhance student English proficiency and communication success.

**Keyword:** Communication Strategies, English Proficiency, Seventh-Grade Students, Qualitative Research, Language Learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

In speaking English, we find a wide variety of problems, according to Megawati and Mandarani, the researchers assumed that to overcome problems in speaking English, the application of communication strategies is carried out when there are communication problems, using certain tricks can help them keep the conversation going and carry out oral communication well [1]. With the use of this communication strategy, the students take good advantage of the communication strategy to overcome their difficulties in speaking.

Some the notion stated by Tarone of communication strategies of the earlier research said that communication strategy (CS) as a reciprocal attempt of two interlocutors to make an agreement about a particular meaning in which the necessary meaning strategies do not appear to be shared [2]. Here that researcher seen the CS as tool used in negotiating shared meaning, in a situations where both interlocutors are attempting to agree on communicative goal. According to Corder as cited in Dörnyei CSs are a systematic technique used by a speaker to express his [or her] meaning when faced with some difficulty [3]. Furthermore, Faerch & Kasper as cited in Celce-Murcia et al. they state that communication strategy is a verbal plan that the speaker uses to overcome problems in the planning and execution stages of achieving communicative goals; e.g., avoiding trouble points or compensation for not knowing a vocabulary item [4]. From several definitions of communication strategy, communication strategies is approved by Megawati and Mandarani as a conscious plan for solving the individual's problem in achieving particular communication goals [1].

Based on the all the statement above about definition of communication strategies, the researchers agree that communication strategies is a series of ways that people used in overcoming problems in communicating to achieve a goal. That's why speaking in English is not considered easy, for some people, especially students in junior high school. Most students have difficulties while learning English, according to Megawati and Mandarani, the researchers stated that it was because they have to arrange words or sentences that they are going to say, whether it is new words or not for them to produce a sentence that has meaning and avoids ambiguity [1]. Not only that, Santoso and Taufiq also revealed that when people became the center of attention in front of such an audience, they experienced fear and anxiety, which caused nausea and excessive sweating [5]. Therefore, in this research, the researchers look at how communication strategies are used by students, especially junior high school students.

The researchers carried out pre-observation activities that had been carried out at one of the schools and Islamic boarding schools in Sidoarjo. In this pre-observation, he researcher found several problems faced by students, especially speaking English in class, including fear of pronouncing words in English, difficulty composing word by word, lack of vocabulary, and several other problems. In addition to these problems, during the pre-observation at the school, the researcher also found the use of communication strategies in students.

From the results of the pre-observation above, the researchers found that there are some communication strategies used by the students when speaking English. Not only that, in this school, the use of English in communicating is a third language, after Indonesian and Arabic. Thus, the researcher draws problems that will be analyzed in this research, including what types of communication strategies are used by students while in English classes and whether the use of various types of communication strategies can help students overcome problems when speaking English in class. In order to understand how or what strategies students use when having problems communicating in English, particularly in class, researchers examined communication strategies in students at SMP Muhammadiyah 9 Boarding School Tanggulangin Sidoarjo. By doing this, researchers were able to determine and suggest what prospective teachers and students can do when experiencing this.

Based on the research problem above, the researchers found some previous research on the same topic about communication strategies used by students when they faced problems speaking English. In first previous research, according to Astutik, in her research, she analyzed communication strategies in EFL students based on Tarone's taxonomy theory in speaking class [6]. Three second semester students in the English education study program were the subjects of this research with three different levels of speaking. In her research, the researcher used descriptive qualitative method and she carried out some steps in collecting data: observed the learners, recording the students speaking, transcribing the oral speaking, selecting data concerning with the research questions, and identifying the communication strategies. The result of her research show that the dominant communication strategy used by students at the passive and moderate levels is borrowing and the dominant students at the active level are paraphrased. The researcher implied that the use of communication strategies is a way to solve communication breakdown especially for learner who does not have high English proficiency and the researcher also concluded that the implication of using CSs can help the EFL learners to explore their ideas and feelings into speaking so the learners are able to communicate in the target language.

In the second previous research, Hua's research intends to look at how speakers with high and low competence differ in their usage of communication strategies [7]. It was made up of ten English speakers with low Arabic skills and ten English speakers with strong Chinese and Arabic skills. To determine the communication strategies utilized, information from self-report questionnaires and audio recordings of oral group conversations was used. The results revealed that the individuals employed 10 of the twelve categories of communication strategies listed by Tarone (1980), Faerch and Kasper (1983), and Willems (1987). Code-switching, an intralingual strategy, was utilized the least and word-switching, an interlingual approach, was the most often employed method of

communication. This suggests that in order to improve communication, international students studying at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) need to be made aware of the appropriate communication strategies based on their level of proficiency. This can be done by making low- and high-proficiency speakers aware of the strategies that speakers with different proficiency levels use.

In a third previous research by Herawati which had the same objective as the others, the researcher identified the different types of communication strategies that eighth-grade students at SMP N 1 Surakarta most frequently used [8]. The researcher also observed how the communication strategies helped in the improvement of the students' speaking abilities. Conversations students in the speaking class had were recorded and afterwards transcribed to provide the research data. This research had two stages: observation and tape recording, which is how the data was collected. The theory of communication strategies based on Tarone was then used to assess the transcribed data. To give the data validity in this research, the researcher additionally employed triangulation procedures. To validate the accuracy of the analytic findings, researchers employ inter-rater reliability. The research findings included the following outcomes: 1) all respondents employed all Tarone-based communication strategies, including subject avoidance, message abandonment, paraphrasing, coinage, native language switching, miming, and appeals for help, 2) native language switching was the type of communication strategy that respondents used the most frequently, and 3) among the various functions of communication strategies, respondents used miming, coinage, paraphrasing, and native language switching to improve their speaking abilities. However, the researcher also states that these communication techniques, such as topic avoidance and message abandonment, did not support students in improving their speaking abilities. This is because students preferred to keep clear of topics that did not relate to them and they preferred to close the conversation even though they had not yet reached communicative competence, which prevented them from increasing their capacity to explore new vocabulary.

The purpose of this research is therefore different from previous studies because it focuses more on the communication strategy employed by the student in the English class. This is because each student uses a different communication strategy, and researchers are interested in finding out whether or not using such various communication strategies could benefit the student when they are having difficulty speaking English in class, particularly at this particular school where English is the third language after Indonesian and Arabic.

From the background and previous research, there are several theories regarding communication strategies and their types, one of which is from Tarone [9]. The first is avoidance, in avoidance divided into two sub-categories, topic avoidance and message abandonment. In the topic avoidance, the learner tries not to talk about unknown concepts or structures of the target language. In the message abandonment, the learner starts talking about a concept but cannot continue and stops in the middle of the conversation.

The second is paraphrase, which comprises the following: The learner uses inaccurate vocabulary from the target language, but has enough semantic aspects in common with those that are desirable to satisfy the interlocutor (e.g. "pipe" for "water pipe"). Word coinage occurs when students invent new terms to explain the intended concept (for example, "airball" for "balloon"). Circumlocution occurs when a student explains the traits or aspects of an object or action rather than using the structure of the desired target language ("She is, uh, smoking something." "I'm not sure what it's called. That's, uh, Persian, which we use a lot in Turkey.").

The third is borrowing, which includes literal translation and language switch. In the literal translation the learners translating word for word from the original language (e.g. "He invites him to drink," for "They toast one another."). In the language switch the learners use native language terms without the need to translate to the target language (e.g. balon for balloon, tirtil for caterpillar).

Fourth is an appeal for assistance, here the learners ask for the correct term (e.g. "What is this? What called?"), and the last is mime, the learners use nonverbal strategies or perform lexical actions in communicating (e.g. clapping one's hands to illustrate applause).

The researchers analyzed data using Tarone's theory as the foundation and also used certain examples from the reviews that have been provided above. The researchers categorized communication strategies into twelve categories with a total of five subheadings. In Tarone's theory, it does not only focus on verbal strategies but also non-verbal ones, which makes this theory suitable as the basis for this research at SMP Muhammadiyah 9 Boarding School Tanggulangin Sidaarjo.

## METHOD

In conducting this research, the researchers uses qualitative research. According to Creswell, stated that data in qualitative research are frequently gathered in the field at the location where subjects experience the topic or subject being studied [10]. They don't send out equipment for people to complete, nor do they usually bring people into a lab (a contrived situation). A main aspect of qualitative research is the close-up information gained by actually speaking with individuals and observing how they behave and act in their context. The researchers meet face-to-face, frequently throughout time, in a natural situation. Based on the book by Sidiq et al., the qualitative research is a study aimed at understanding the phenomena experienced by the subjects of the study [11]. For example, the behavior, perception, motivation, action, and so forth, holistic in a naturally specific context without



any human interference and using optimally as a common scientific method.

This research was conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 9 Boarding School Tanggulangin, which is located in Sidoarjo. With regular seventh graders, as many as 30 female students and 6 students were the subjects of this research. Even though it is a regular class, the rules in this Islamic boarding school to separate male students from female students remain the same.

## A. Data Collection Technique

To collect data the researcher used observation and interview based on the book by Rahmadi. In the observation stage, the researcher uses systematic observation techniques or also called structured observation, where the researcher determines in advance what will be observed systematically [12]. In this research, what is observed are the communication strategies used by students in speaking English. So during the observation, the researcher filled in the observation sheet and noted important things, then the researcher also observed in depth how students used communication strategies during English classes. The researcher also acted as a non-participant, meaning that the researcher did not interact with teachers or students in the classroom. In this observation, the researcher used a voice recorder during the observation.

In the interview technique, the researcher used a semi-structured interview technique, where this type of interview is included in the in-depth interview category or, in its implementation, is freer than a structured interview. Through interviews with this model, the researcher wanted to collect information about whether or not there were effective communication strategies used to help students who had difficulty speaking English in class. The reason the researcher chose this interview technique is because the researcher has prepared an interview instrument that will be given to the subject, but later in the interview it is more free, so the researcher can develop interview questions. This interview technique was used by the researcher to collect data on the issue of whether the communication strategies used by students can help them in speaking, especially in English classes.

## B. Data Analysis Technique

According to Rahmadi, he stated that data analysis techniques are techniques used to simplify data into a form that is easier to read and interpret or gives significant meaning to analysis [12]. In the data analysis in this research, the researcher adapted Miles and Huberman's theory as cited in the book by Sidiq et al., [11]. The basis of this data analysis based on Miles and Huberman is the paradigm view of positivism. In analyzing the data with this model, Miles and Huberman mentioned that there were three series of activities carried out, including the following; 1) Data Reduction, researchers process data obtained from the field by summarizing, choosing the main things, focusing on important things, looking for themes and patterns, and discarding unnecessary information. 2) Data Display, after the data is reduced, the next step is to display the data. In displaying the data, researchers use short descriptions or narrative forms. 3) Conclusion Drawing, in drawing conclusions and verifying them, researchers make preliminary decisions on data where these conclusions are temporary and then verify them by rethinking while writing or reviewing the field notes.

# RESULT AND DISCUSSION

## A. The types of communication strategies students use by students while in English class.

In this chapter, researchers will answer the first research problem about what types of communication strategies are used by active and passive students. The researcher found and discussed the communication strategies used by students. These findings will be a reference to answer the first problem formulation regarding what types of strategies students use during English classes.

English subjects, especially in seventh grade, are scheduled on Monday and Wednesday for one lesson hour. In the first week of learning, the teacher provides material about Simple Present Tense, ranging from structure and function to examples of its use. In the first meeting, the teacher gave the material, in the second meeting, the teacher gave an assignment to make a story about students' "Daily Activities" using Simple Present Tense.

In the second week, the teacher gives material in the form of Simple Present Continuous Tense, in the same way. However, in the second meeting, the teacher gave an assignment in the form of making a dialog with her friend using Simple Present Continuous Tense.

Tabel 1. Communication Strategies used by students.

NO	Type of Communication Strategy	Frequency	
		1st week	2nd week
1	Avoidance Topic Avoidance Message	5	3

		Abandonment	2	3
2	Paraphrase	Approximation	2	4
		Word Coinage	3	2
		Circumlocution	3	2
3	Borrowing	Literal Translation	3	4
		Language switch	7	5
4	Appeal for Assistance		4	7
5	Mime		3	5
		<b>Total</b>	32	35

**Table 1.**

In table 1 shows that the students used communication strategies in English class. As can be seen from the table, practically all students in English classrooms apply Tarone's theory in their usage of communication strategies. Of these strategies, borrowing is the one that students use the most frequently, followed by avoidance, paraphrase, appeal for assistance, and mime.

The following are examples of communication strategies used by students during class:

Student X1 : I go to school at 7 am, then I studying until 12 o'clock or more. After that I eat some food in canteen with my friends. After that, I back to home . Then.... I don't want to tell what happen in my home . So, at 10 pm I go to sleep. S tudent IV : ( teeling their habits) My name is Chaira Putri and... everyday I wake up at 5 am in the morning. And... ee.. I take a shower, and then I pray subuh. And... after that.. emm.. I breakfast and then emm..... (quite for a while) . Student V : But.. Are.... You... eee.. don't... you... (can't continue h e r question)
--

**Table 2.**

In the example above, is the use of a communication strategy in the form of Topic Avoidance and Message Abandonment in Avoidance, according to Tarone, usually someone who does this strategy when they are talking and they cannot continue their words or suddenly they are silent for a long time or change the topic [9].

S tudents I : I read a novel about "love". (instead said Romance Novel ") Student X V : Sometimes, I like... play a game with my friends at home , the game is like... ee ... we have to jump with one foot and then we take ee ... like ee .. rocks. (instead said Hopscotch). Student XXI : I like a check-out some emm things in Shopee . (instead said buy)
---

**Table 3.**

The examples above, the students used Tarone's communication strategy of approximation, word coinage, and circumlocution in Paraphrase. The use of the word "novel about love" here means "romance novel", this can be understood because the words love and romance have almost the same meaning but their use here is not correct. This is the same as Tarone's theory that Approximation is the incorrect use of the vocabulary in the target language but still has the same enough semantic features. Other example is a circumlocution that used by student, because here the student describe the characteristic of hopscotch game. Then the last example is a circumlocution, because the student used a new word "check-out" that mean which means buying something in an online store. These two examples are comparable to what Santoso and Taufiq reported in their study, in which students attempt to explain their opinions with facts and logical reasoning [5].

Student I:(teeling their habits) At afternoon I pray dhuhur and eat lunch at canteen. Then... I go home, then I take a bath and pray ashar. After that I go to "les" in Kalidawir. Then.. I go home and pray magrib.Student III:(teeling their habits) At school I always happy because I meet my friends. At afternoon I pray dhuhur and lunch with my friends. After that eemm... I sometimes have a "kelas peminatan" at 2 pm. I go home at 4 pm.Student XXIV: I am just looking a "Komik" book. ( speak use Bahasa)Student XIX : We have the last exam eemm... I think is "IPA".
--

**Table 4.**

The example above is the use of Literal translation and Language switch in Borrowing by students in English class. According to Tarone [9], language switch is the use of the mother tongue without translating it into the target language, here she uses native language words such as "Les" instead of saying "Courses". The same thing happened with students, but in this second example she used the native language "Kelas peminatan" instead of saying "Elective class". This is comparable to what Santoso and Mandarani explained, in that students strive to create understandable statements but lack the necessary translation skills and they do not have enough translation skills [13]. The other example, here the student also uses the same category, the student does not translate into the target language, but still uses her native language, she says "IPA" instead of saying "Science".

Student XV : Hello, guys. My name is Ervin and everyday I always wake up at 5 am. After wake up I pray subuh and after that I take bath. I never breakfast at home , because my apa ini (pointing to her stomach) ee... stomach yaa ? Ee ... will sick in the morning. Student X III : Eee... three... three apa bahasa inggrisnya "tiga kali"? (asking in whispering)

**Table 5.**

Another example, like the one above, is the use of Appeal for Assistance. Tarone revealed that Appeal for Assistance is like asking others for correction on the words we say to the target language, or asking for help to translate to the target language. This time, the student uses the sentence "my apa ini...ee stomach ya?" as a way of asking for help to correct whether it is correct or not. The example above also uses the same type of communication strategy in the form of Appeal for Assistance, only in a different context. Here, the student tries to ask his friend for a word in the target language by whispering because he doesn't know the translation in the target language.

Student XX VI : Emm... I always ee.. thiss.... TikTok everyday. (while moving her index finger exemplifying scrolling her phone) Student XXX : ( teeling their habits) Hello... my name is Aini, and... everyday I wake up at 5 o'clock. And... I take bath and.. praying subuh. Then... I help my mother to cooking breakfast...then I go to school. And... afternoon I eat lunch and pray dhuhur... Then I back in my home at 3 o'clock... Then I take bath and pray ashar... then I scroll TikTok... And I pray magrib. After that I... study and before sleep I... (mimic tooth brushing style) my teeth and pray isya. Thank you

**Table 6.**

Next is the form of using the Mime strategy by students, where according to Tarone's theory, Mime is a type of strategy that uses limb movements or nonverbal. Like the example above, the student moves her finger like she is scrolling up and down her cellphone screen. The next example is also still the same, namely the use of communication strategies in the form of Mime, here the student moves her hand in front of her mouth up and down, implying that she is brushing her teeth.

## **B. The use of various communication strategies help students overcome problems when speaking English in classroom.**

In addition, researchers also analyzed answers from interviews with six seventh grade students of SMP Muhammadiyah 9 Boarding School Tanggulangin. The researcher selected six students to be interviewed at this time, the selection of these six students was taken from the head of each group as a representative to obtain information and answer the second problem formulation about the presence or absence of influence on them using communication strategies when speaking English in class. Here are some answers from the students:

### a. The difficulties in speaking English

According to Yumniamatillah, she stated that students sometimes had difficulties speaking English in class, and these difficulties ended up interfering with one another [14]. First, spelling, mother tongue, and various accents all have an impact on how difficult it is to pronounce English words. Second, a lack of understanding and use of the second word contributes to its absence. Third, a lack of motivation and audience interest have an impact on low self-confidence. Lack of training contributes to the latter's difficulties using grammar. The researchers questioned students on the following topics to determine whether or not they had difficulties speaking English in class:

Do you have difficulties in speaking English in the classroom? Can you mention it? Answer: Student I :Yes I have sometimes, the difficulty is usually because my pronunciation is still not good, and sometimes I am still confused about when to use Verb 1, Verb 2 or Verb 3. Student II : Yes, often. First, I don't have confidence in myself, then I'm afraid that what I'm saying is wrong in grammar or pronunciation, and I don't have a lot of vocabulary memorized.

**Table 7.**

According to the answers of the students, most of them indicated that they were less able to pronounce words in the target language, had a lack of vocabulary, and used grammar. From the three answers above, it can be concluded that it falls into the category of nothing or hard to say something. According to Penny Ur as cited in Fahira, he stated that there are four types of problems in speaking: inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participants, and the use of the mother tongue [15]. Some words were challenging for them to say or spell and the pronunciation is different in English. The researcher saw that the students were still not correct in pronouncing a word in the target language (English). for example, saying the word "stomach (/stʌm.ək/)" but they were still wrong by saying "stomek".

### b. The solutions to overcome difficulties in speaking English

In addressing the problem of difficulty in speaking English in the classroom, according to Tuyen and Lam, revealed

that the solution that can be used is by building the attention of teachers to students. With this solution, he assumes that the difficulties experienced by students can be overcome, and thus teachers and students can build an effective learning program by using interesting strategies when learning English to create motivation and also facilitate students to speak English as much as possible [16].

Have you ever found it difficult to say something when speaking English? How do you deal with it? Answer: Student III: Yes I have, usually if I suddenly forget a sentence or word, I will use a word or sentence that is almost the same, and sometimes I also use gestures. Student IV: Yes, usually if I can't speak English I choose to be silent, or sometimes ask friends or teachers for help.
---

**Table 8.**

According to Zua as cited in Juhana, she stated that, first, it is important to build an emotional connection between teachers and students [17]. Secondly, when teaching English, teachers need to help students be more focused. Finally, teachers need to create a supportive atmosphere that can reduce problems with students. From the answers above, the students have their own ways of overcoming their problems, but most of them overcome by asking their teachers directly. The way students ask the teacher is one way the teacher has successfully built relationships and a comfortable classroom atmosphere for the students.

The use of certain strategies helps students overcome difficulties with speaking English, in addition to developing positive relationships with their teachers and creating an enjoyable atmosphere for learning. According to Fikni et al., they stated that students should be able to overcome their speaking difficulties in class by using certain strategies [18]. This strategy consists of a series of steps to achieve a certain objective. To obtain information about whether students use strategies in communicating, the researchers asked the following questions:

Do you realize that when you have difficulty saying a word or sentence, you overcome it by using a communication strategy? Answer: Student V: I would say yes Student VI: I didn't know
---

**Table 9.**

Based on Megawati and Mandarani's assumptions, it is necessary to apply communication strategies in speaking classes [1]. In communication strategies, there are various kinds of tricks that can help them continue speaking so that they can do oral communication well. The answers from the students above still do not fully understand the use and perceived benefits of using communication strategies when speaking English, but most of them have actually used various kinds of communication strategies unconsciously.

## CONCLUDING

In this chapter, the researcher concludes the findings from the data that has been obtained and sees whether the findings answer the research problems in this research. First, this research tries to find out the types of communication strategies used by seventh grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah 9 Boarding School Tanggulangin. Researchers discovered that all students in the seventh grade at SMP Muhammadiyah 9 Boarding School Tanggulangin Sidoarjo used communication strategies based on observation data collected four times. The majority of the time, students who struggle with speaking and communicating in English classrooms adopt this communication strategy. Students in the classroom employ nearly all communication strategies, including avoidance, paraphrase, borrowing, appealing for assistance, and mime, to address these communication problems. The majority of communication techniques utilized in seventh-grade English lessons are language switch in borrowing. From the data, the researcher also concluded that the most frequently used strategy by the seventh grade students overall was Language switch in Borrowing. The results of these findings turned out to have similarities with previous research conducted by Herawati on eighth grade students at SMP N 1 Surakarta, namely the frequency of using the most communication strategies is language switch in Borrowing.

Furthermore, to answer the second research problem about the presence or absence of the influence of communication strategies in helping students speak English in class, researchers used data obtained from direct interviews with the six students. According to the data from the interviews, there is a positive impact on the use of communication strategies. Although some students are unaware they use strategies for communication, most of them are able to feel the benefits that they consciously felt the positive influence of employing communication strategies to stay on track and achieve communication goals. The fact that this research additionally analyzes the impact of students' use of communication strategies when speaking English in class sets it apart from previous studies in this area.

Researchers hope that the usage of communication strategies among students can be optimized because the employment of various communication strategies makes the obstacles encountered feel less difficult. The researcher offers gratitude to the students, teachers, and staff at SMP Muhammadiyah 9 Boarding School Tanggulangin Sidoarjo who contributed to achieve the completion of this research. Researchers hope that the usage of communication strategies among students can be optimized because the employment of various communication

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