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Exploring Direct and Indirect Strategies in Communication: The Case for ESL Learners

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Abstract

There are many forms of communication. The sender can choose different forms of communication to send different messages for different reasons. Whatever form of communication, one thing remains important-communication strategies. The use of appropriate communication strategies ensures that the information is conveyed. The sender (of the information) needs to negotiate meaning so that that message gets understood. Do learners use different categories of communication strategies? This study is done to explore perception of learners on their use of communication strategies. Specifically, this study is done to explore how learners perceive the use of direct and indirect communication strategies. This study is also done to investigate if there is a relationship between direct and indirect communication strategies. The instrument used is a survey with three sections. The first section is the demographic profile. The second and third sections are about direct and indirect communication strategies respectively. This study has shown that learners resort to a variety of communication strategies to get their message across. The use of direct and indirect communication strategies give an impact to how the message is received. The findings bear interesting pedagogical implications in the teaching of oral communication in the language classroom.

Keywords: Communication, Direct, Indirect, Negotiate Meaning, Strategies

Introduction

Background of Study

Why are communication strategies useful? For many, communication comes naturally while others need a little help to communicate successfully. In this day and age, there are many forms of communication. According to Palmero (2019), both verbal and non-verbal; skills are needed for effective communication. In general there are several forms of communication; though. The first form is verbal communication. This is the most common form and people communicate verbally via face-to-face and even online. Next comes non-verbal communication. This can come in the form of gestures, hand-signals, body language and it can be intended or unintended. The third form is written communication. This form of communication needs the language skills of the writer to get his/her message across to the reader. Next, listening is also a form of communication. While some may still need to "see"

the speaker as they listen, many have gotten used to understanding through hearing. The last form is visual communication. This type of communication helps the sender emphasize the intended message with the help of visual, eg, in the form of diagrams, colours, or even videos.

Whatever form of communication, one thing remains important-communication strategies. The use of appropriate communication strategies ensures that the information is conveyed. According to Zulkrunian & Kaur (2014), many times, the sender (of the information) needs to negotiate meaning so that that message gets understood. Do learners use different categories of communication strategies? This study is done to explore perception of learners on their use of communication strategies. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions

- How do learners perceive the use of direct communication strategies?
- How do learners perceive the use of indirect communication strategies?
- Is there a relationship between direct and indirect communication strategies?

Literature Review

Communication Strategies

In order to communicate, a person needs to use communication strategies. Yaman & Kavasoglu (2013) divides communication strategies into several components. Firstly, when communicating directly, the speaker wants to use fluency-oriented strategies. The speaker tries his/her best to speak clearly to be heard. They need to take time to express what they want to say. They need to pay attention to their pronunciation and also keep to the conversation flow. Secondly, the speaker is constantly use strategies to enable them to negotiate for meaning. These strategies include the speaker giving examples so that their point is clear to the listeners. They may also be seen to repeat what they wanted to say so the listener understands them. Thirdly, the speaker also used accuracy-oriented strategies. Accuracy-oriented strategies include the speaker making attempts to improve their language use so that their message is accurate.

Besides direct communication strategies above, the speaker needs to use indirect communication strategies as well. The first indirect strategy is social-affective strategies. These strategies involve the speaker using filters on one end and attempting to enjoy the conversation and relaxing in the social interaction. In addition to that, speaker also use message reduction ,orientation and non-verbal strategies. The speaker may use gestures or even facial expressions. They may also make eye contact besides also reducing the message so that it is easily understood.

Past Studies on Communication Strategies

The study by Seng,et.al (2023) was done to look at direct and indirect strategies. 132 learners participated in this study. The instrument used for this study is a survey. The data collected from the respondents were then analyzed using SPSS. The findings show that rehearsal has the highest mean (3.8), but critical thinking has the lowest(3.5). The research also reveals that the help-seeking strategy has the highest mean (4.1),whereas the metacognitive self-regulation strategy has the lowest mean (3.5). From the correlation analysis, the research also indicates a significant association between direct and indirect strategies ($r=.779^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). In other words, this research proves that there isa strong relationship between direct strategies and indirect strategies language learning.

Zulkurnian & Kaur (2014) conducted a study to look at the types of oral communication difficulties faced by Diploma level ESL learners. It also explores the types of oral communication strategies used by the students to cope with speaking and listening problems. Instrument used is a survey. 100 respondents participated in this study. 16 of the respondents were interviewed and took part in a journal writing activity to explain the difficulties they faced. Findings showed that difficulties occurred due to the learners' language proficiency. Findings also revealed that the learners negotiated meaning to be understood. They resort to using different communication strategies to better communicate.

The study by Belaman et.al (2022) was done to explore communication strategies used in oral presentations. It is also done to investigate students' fear of oral presentations. 210 students participated in this quantitative study. The instrument use dis a survey. Findings revealed that students use use message reduction, orientation, and non-verbal strategies the most and they are influenced by several internal and external factors that cause fear in oral presentation. The use of oral communicative strategies has proven to be effective in assisting learners to overcome their fear in oral presentation

The study by Zamani et.al (2022) was done to look at the communication strategies used by learners in the classroom context. This study explores two views of communication strategies and they are (a) Interactional view, which is used to avoid disruptions in communication, and (b) Psycholinguistic view which is used to solve the communicator's problem to fill in the gaps in communication. The instrument used in this study is a survey with two main sections: interactional view and psycholinguistic view. The interactional view is measured by 12 items while the psycholinguistic view is measured by 14 items. Analysis of data showed interesting findings about interactional and psycholinguistic views on the use of communication strategies to help language learners reduce their fear of learning the language.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. The concept of this study is a combination of the categories of communication by Joyce (2012) and oral communication strategies by (Yaman & Kavasoglu, 2013). According to Joyce (2012), direct communication strategies are used when the speaker resorts to immediate approach to get their message across. Next, speakers use indirect communication strategies when the speakers attempt to convey meaning not just by words, can be by using non-verbal cues or with the help of social support around. The choice of what type of communication strategy to use by the speakers depend on what type of performance they are aiming for in the speech (Rahmat, 2022). The indirect and direct communication strategies by Joyce (2012) are scaffolded to merge with the categories by Yaman & Kavasoglu (2013) to reveal the framework in figure 1 below. Indirect communication strategies are measured by (i) social -affective strategies, and also (ii) message reduction , orientation as well as non-verbal strategies. Next, direct strategies are measured by (i) fluency-oriented strategies, (ii) negotiation for meaning strategies and (ii) accuracy oriented strategies.

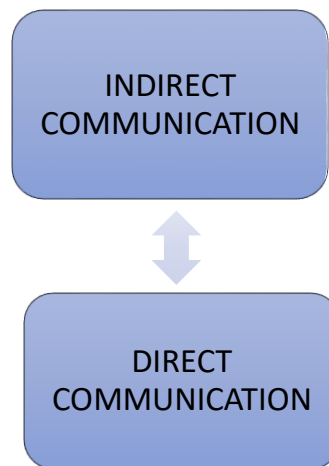


Figure 1-Conceptual Framework of the Study
 Indirect and Direct Communication Strategies

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore undergraduates’ perception of their use of direct and indirect communication strategies in the ESL classroom. A purposive sample of 161 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Yaman & Kavasoglu (2013) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 3 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 11 items on indirect strategies. Section C has 15 items on direct strategies.

Table 1
Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	TYPE OF COMMUNICATION	SUB-COMPONENT	NO OF ITEMS	TOT ITEMS
B	INDIRECT	social-affective strategies	6	11
		message reduction, orientation and non-verbal strategies	5	
C	DIRECT	fluency-oriented strategies	6	15
		negotiation for meaning strategies	4	
		accuracy oriented strategies	5	
		Total number of items		26

Table 2
Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.934	26

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .934, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Q1.Gender

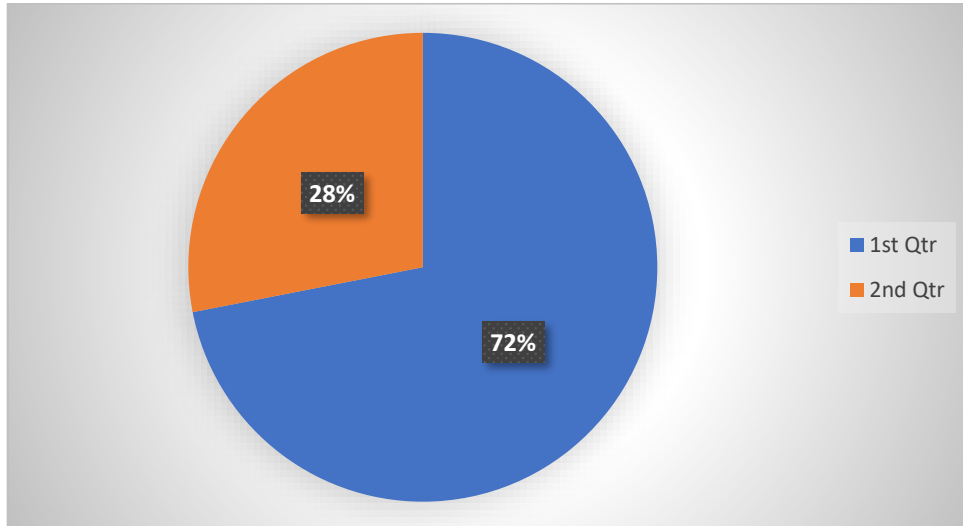


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 shows the percentage for gender. 52% of the respondents are male while 48% are female students.

Q2.Discipline

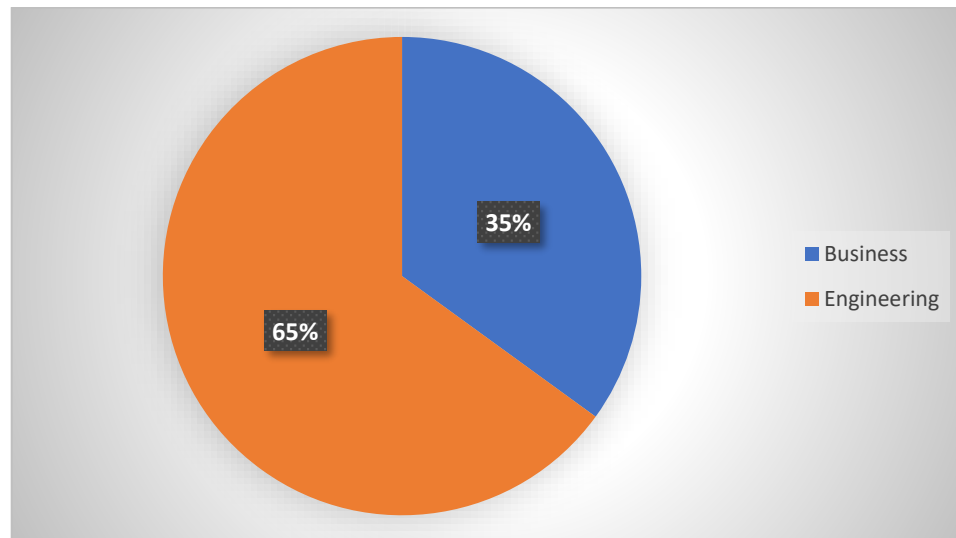


Figure 3- Percentage for Discipline

Figure 3 shows the percentage for discipline. 35% are from the business discipline and 65% are from the engineering department.

Q4 Type of OP

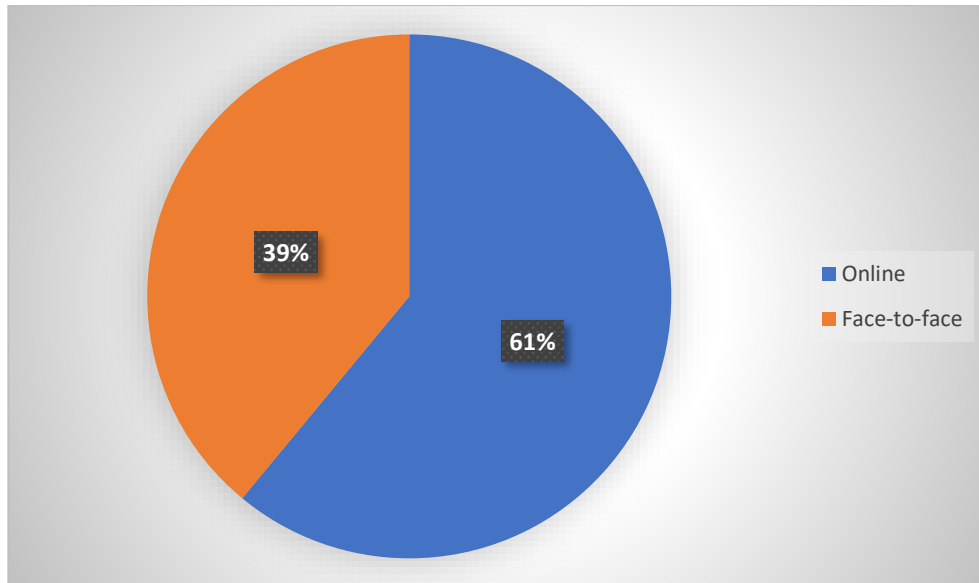


Figure 4-Percentage for Type of OP preferred

Figure 4 shows the type of OP -Oral presentation preferred. 61% preferred online presentations while 39% preferred to have face-to-face oral presentation.

Findings for Direct Communication Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive the use of direct communication strategies? In the context of this study, direct communication strategies include (i) fluency oriented strategies, (ii) negotiation for meaning strategies and (iii) accuracy oriented strategies.

(i) fluency oriented strategies

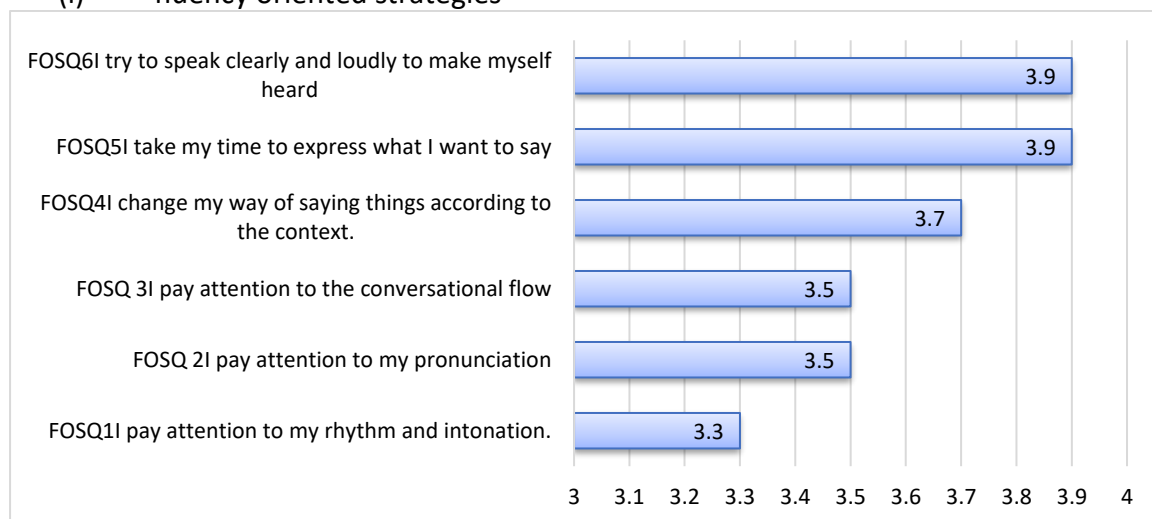


Figure 5- Mean for Fluency Oriented Strategies

Figure 5 above shows the mean for fluency oriented strategies. Two items share the highest mean of 3.9 and they are “FOSQ5I take my time to express what I want to say” and “FOSQ6I try to speak clearly and loudly to make myself heard”. This is followed by the mean

of 3.7 for the item “FOSQ4I change my way of saying things according to the context.”. The lowest mean of 3.3 is for the item “FOSQ1I pay attention to my rhythm and intonation.”.

(ii) negotiation for meaning strategies

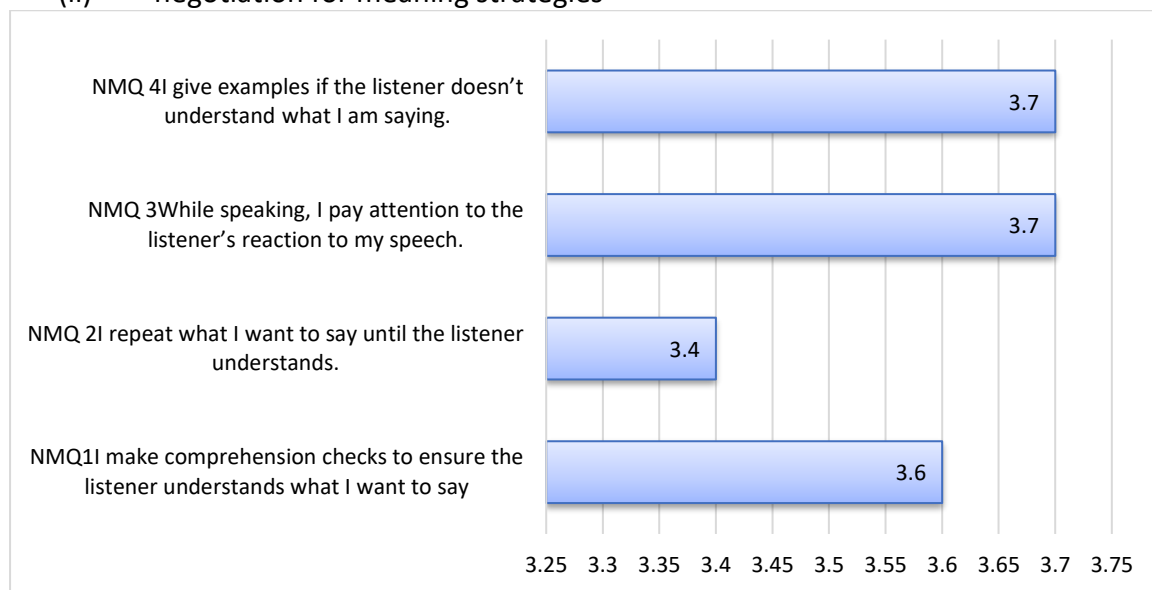


Figure 6- Mean for Meaning Strategies

Figure 6 shows the mean for meaning strategies. Two items share the same highest mean of 3.7 and they are “NMQ 3While speaking, I pay attention to the listener’s reaction to my speech” and “NMQ 4I give examples if the listener doesn’t understand what I am saying”. This is followed by the item “NMQ1I make comprehension checks to ensure the listener understands what I want to say” with a mean of 3.6 and lastly, the item “NMQ 2I repeat what I want to say until the listener understands.” With a mean of 3.7.

(iii) accuracy oriented strategies

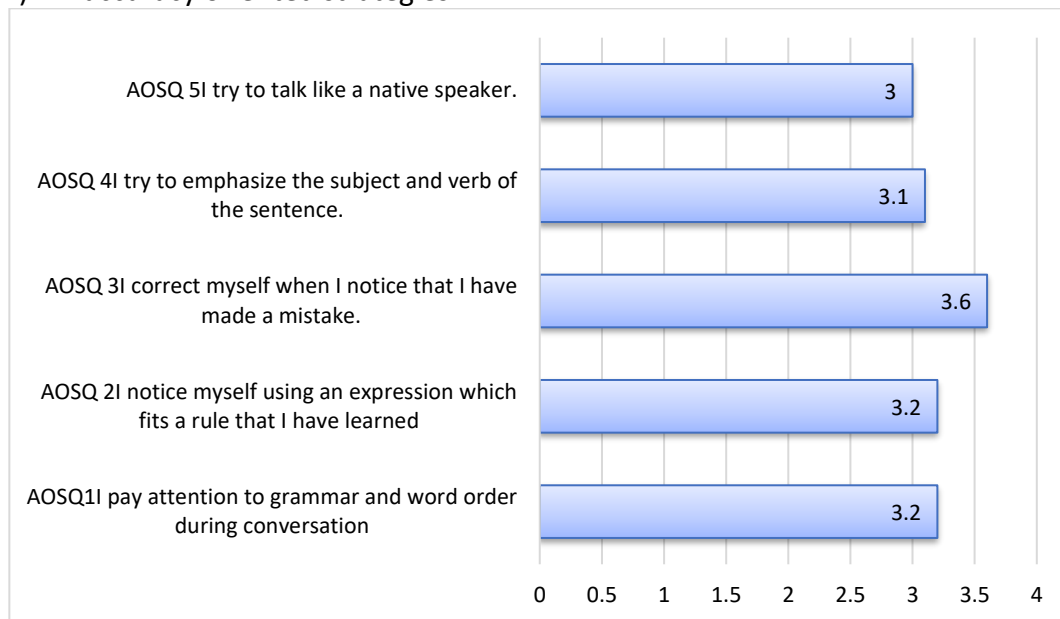


Figure 7- Mean for Accuracy Oriented Strategies

Figure 7 shows the mean for accuracy oriented strategies. The highest mean is 3.6 for the item “AOSQ 3I correct myself when I notice that I have made a mistake”. Next, two items share the same mean of 3.2 and they are “AOSQ1I pay attention to grammar and word order during conversation” and “AOSQ 2I notice myself using an expression which fits a rule that I have learned”. The lowest mean is 3 for “AOSQ 5I try to talk like a native speaker”.

Findings for Indirect Communication Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive the use of indirect communication strategies? In the context of this study, indirect communication strategies are measured by (i) social-affective strategies, and (ii) message reduction, orientation and non-verbal strategies.

(i) social-affective strategies

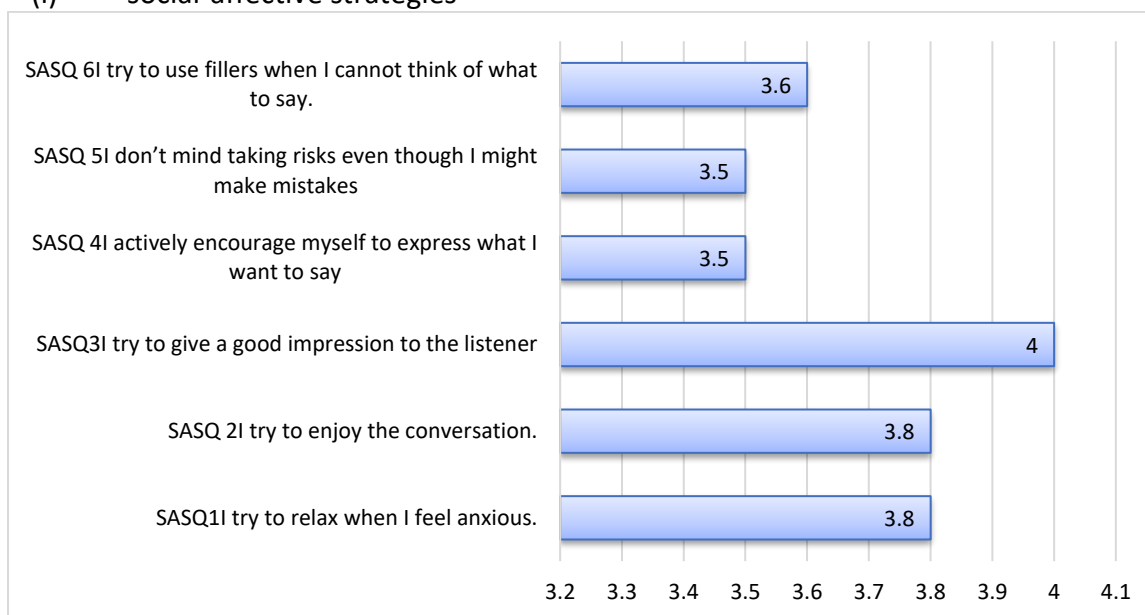


Figure 8- Mean for Social-Affective Strategies

Figure 8 shows the mean for social-affective strategies. The highest mean is 4 for the item “SASQ3I try to give a good impression to the listener”. Next, two items share the same mean of 3.8 and they are “SASQ1I try to relax when I feel anxious” and “SASQ 2I try to enjoy the conversation”. Two items share the lowest mean of 3.5 and they are “SASQ 4I actively encourage myself to express what I want to say” and “SASQ 5I don't mind taking risks even though I might make mistakes”.

(ii) message reduction, orientation and non-verbal strategies

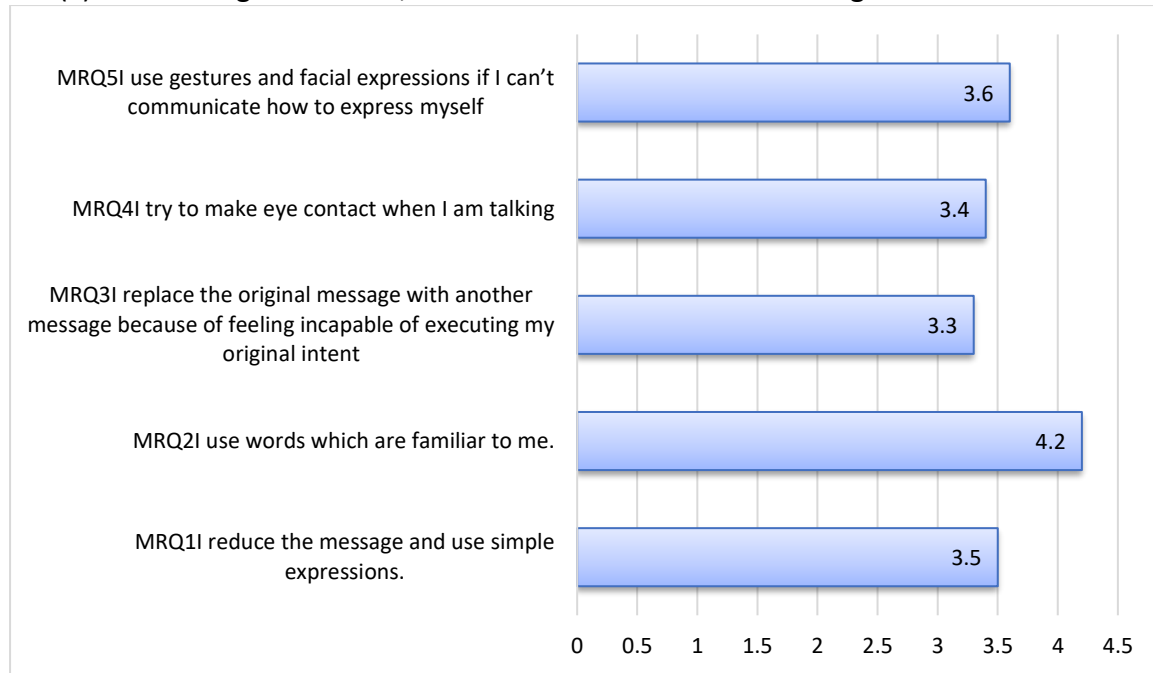


Figure 9- Mean for Message Reduction ,Orientation and Non-verbal Strategies

Figure 9 shows the mean for message reduction, orientation, and non-verbal strategies. The highest mean is 4.2 for “MRQ2I use words which are familiar to me”. This is followed by the mean of 3.6 for “MRQ5I use gestures and facial expressions if I can’t communicate how to express myself”. The lowest mean is 3.3 for “MRQ3I replace the original message with another message because of feeling incapable of executing my original intent”.

Findings for Relationship between Direct and Indirect Communication Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 3- Is there a relationship between direct and indirect communication strategies? To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social and affective strategies data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 3 below.

Table 3

Correlation between Direct and Indirect Communication Strategies

Correlations

		TOTALDIRECT	TOTALINDIRECT
TOTALDIRECT	Pearson Correlation	1	.831**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	161	161
TOTALINDIRECT	Pearson Correlation	.831**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	161	161

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows there is an association between direct and indirect communication strategies. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between direct and indirect communication strategies ($r=.831^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between direct and indirect communication strategies.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

This study has shown that learners resort to a variety of communication strategies to get their message across. The use of direct and indirect communication strategies give an impact to how the message is received. This study has also shown that there is a strong positive relationship between direct and indirect communication strategies. For direct communication, learners use fluency oriented strategies, negotiation for meaning and also accuracy oriented strategies. Fluency oriented strategies involve the learners taking time to express what they wanted to say. In addition to that when they sender focus on being fluent, he/she may not have to pay attention to the rhythm and intonation of the speech. Next, when learners use negotiation for meaning strategies, they pay attention to the listeners' reaction to decide on the next move of communication strategy to apply. The last direct strategy is accuracy oriented. This involve the sender correcting his/her mistakes as they make them in the speech. The findings in this study is in accordance to the study by Belaman et.al (2022) who found that to overcome fear during speech, learners use communication strategies.

Besides using direct strategies, learners also use indirect communication strategies such as social-affective strategies as well as message reduction, orientation, and non-verbal strategies. The goal of using indirect strategies is to use appropriate strategies in interactions. The findings of this study revealed that learners use social-affective strategies to communicate effectively. These strategies are used to allow the speaker to give a good impression to the listener to facilitate interaction. The next indirect communication strategy is using either message reduction, orientation, and non-verbal strategies. This involves the sender resorting to choosing the best word to use, or using the best gestures or facial expressions. The main purpose is the maximise interaction. This is also supported by Zamani et.al (2022); Zulkurnian & Kaur (2014) who agreed that to maximise interactions, the sender of the message need to focus on negotiating the meaning through the use of indirect strategies to maximise understanding.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The teaching of oral communication needs to focus on both direct and indirect communication skills. Just like direct communication strategies, indirect strategies can be taught in the language classrooms. Perhaps the language instructor could spend as much time teaching direct communication strategies as they would for indirect communication strategies. Future researchers could explore for sub-components for both direct and indirect communications strategies. In addition to that, future studies on communication strategies could explore what strategies are used /needed to overcome fear of oral communications.

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