

**An Analysis of Students' Speaking Communication Strategies
at The Eleventh Grade of The Computer and Network Engineering Program
in SMK Teknologi YPL Lirik**

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Abstract

Article History:

Received: 14/05/2026

Accepted: 23/06/2026

Published: 10/07/2026

Keywords:

*Communication
Strategies, Speaking
Skill, Vocational High
School*

This study aimed to analyse the communication strategies used by the eleventh-grade students of the Computer and Network Engineering Program at SMK Teknologi YPL Lirik. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach supported by quantitative data. Data were collected through a validated questionnaire consisting of 25 items based on Tarone's (1980) taxonomy, which includes five strategies: avoidance, paraphrase, borrowing, mime, and appeal for assistance. Percentage formulas were used to quantify the frequency of each strategy, while qualitative interpretation was applied to explain patterns and pedagogical implications. The participants were 17 eleventh grade TKJ students selected through total sampling. The findings showed that the overall use of communication strategies reached 73.27%, categorized as Good. Among the strategies, appeal for assistance was the most frequently used (78.35%), followed by mime (75.88%) and paraphrase (74.62%). Meanwhile, avoidance (68.52%) and borrowing (68.00%) were categorized as fair good. These results indicate that students tended to rely on social and non-verbal compensatory strategies rather than independent linguistic strategies. The study concludes that communication strategies play an important role in supporting EFL speaking performance, and teachers are encouraged to integrate strategy training and communicative activities to help students develop greater speaking autonomy.

Kata Kunci:

*Strategi Komunikasi,
Kemampuan
Berbicara, Sekolah
Menengah Kejuruan*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi komunikasi yang digunakan oleh siswa kelas XI Program Teknik Komputer dan Jaringan di SMK Teknologi YPL Lirik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif yang didukung oleh data kuantitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner yang

telah divalidasi, terdiri dari 25 butir pernyataan berdasarkan taksonomi Tarone (1980), yang mencakup lima strategi: avoidance, paraphrase, borrowing, mime, dan appeal for assistance. Rumus persentase digunakan untuk mengukur frekuensi penggunaan setiap strategi, sementara interpretasi kualitatif diterapkan untuk menjelaskan pola dan implikasi pedagogis. Partisipan berjumlah 17 siswa kelas XI TKJ yang dipilih melalui total sampling. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan strategi komunikasi secara keseluruhan mencapai 73,27%, yang dikategorikan sebagai "Baik." Di antara strategi tersebut, appeal for assistance menjadi strategi yang paling sering digunakan (78,35%), diikuti oleh mime (75,88%) dan paraphrase (74,62%). Sementara itu, avoidance (68,52%) dan borrowing (68,00%) berada pada kategori cukup baik. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa siswa cenderung mengandalkan strategi kompensatoris sosial dan non-verbal dibandingkan strategi linguistik yang mandiri. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa strategi komunikasi memiliki peran penting dalam mendukung kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL), dan guru disarankan untuk mengintegrasikan pelatihan strategi serta kegiatan komunikatif guna membantu siswa mengembangkan kemandirian berbicara yang lebih baik.

INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role as a global language used in education, technology, and international communication. Therefore, English proficiency is no longer optional but becomes a necessity to support academic and professional development (Hasanova & Abdullayeva, 2025). In Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory subject; however, students' speaking is still relatively low. Speaking is considered the most difficult skill because it requires spontaneous interaction, linguistic competence, and confidence (Brown, 2018). In practice, many students experience problems such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and limited opportunities to practice, which hinder their ability to communicate effectively (Hanifa, 2018). This issue is more evident in vocational high schools, where students tend to focus more on technical skills than language development (Purnomo et al., 2021). Based on preliminary observation at SMK Teknologi YPL Lirik, students particularly

struggle with limited vocabulary and low confidence, often stopping when they encounter difficulties in speaking.

To address these problems, communication strategies are considered an important approach to help students maintain communication. Communication strategies refer to learners' conscious efforts to overcome linguistic difficulties and continue interaction (Rusiana & Sulistyo, 2018). This issue is particularly relevant for students in the Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) program, who are increasingly expected to use English in technical contexts such as reading hardware and software documentation, communicating in online technical forums, and operating English-language interfaces. Despite the growing demand for English communicative competence in the technology sector, TKJ students at SMK Teknologi YPL Lirik have received limited exposure to communicative English activities, making this a critical area of investigation. According to Tarone (1980), communication strategies include avoidance, paraphrase, borrowing, appeal for assistance, and mime. These strategies enable learners to express ideas despite limited language resources. Previous studies also show that the use of communication strategies can improve fluency and speaking performance (Kassem, 2019).

Speaking itself is a complex skill that involves linguistic, cognitive, and social processes simultaneously (Brown & Lee, 2015). It is often assessed through fluency, accuracy, and interaction (Siahaan & Situmeang, 2024), and serves as an indicator of communicative competence (Richards, 2017). However, in EFL contexts, speaking remains challenging due to limited exposure, lack of practice, and psychological factors such as anxiety (Horwitz, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the types of communication strategies used by vocational high school students in speaking activities. This research is expected to provide insights for improving speaking instruction, especially in vocational education contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach supported by quantitative data. A qualitative descriptive design is used to explore and describe

phenomena based on the natural conditions of the research setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). In this study, quantitative data derived from questionnaire scores were used to describe the frequency of each communication strategy, while qualitative interpretation was applied to explain the meaning and pedagogical implications of the findings. This combination allows for a more comprehensive understanding of students' communication strategy use in actual speaking contexts.

The research participants were 17 students from the eleventh-grade TKJ (Computer and Network Engineering) class at SMK Teknologi YPL Lirik. Total sampling was applied given the relatively small population size, ensuring that all members were included as research subjects. The inclusion criteria for participation were: (1) students currently enrolled in the eleventh-grade TKJ program, (2) actively attending English classes during the data collection period, and (3) willing to participate in the study. Students who were absent during data collection were excluded.

Data were gathered through a validated questionnaire instrument. The questionnaire comprised 25 statement items measuring five indicators of speaking communication strategies derived from Tarone's (1980) taxonomy, namely avoidance, paraphrase, borrowing, mime, and appeal for assistance. Each item was rated using a Likert scale, and the data were analyzed using percentage formulas to determine the level of use of each strategy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to analyse the communication strategies used by students in English speaking activities. The research data were obtained through questionnaires administered to the eleventh-grade students of SMK Teknologi YPL Lirik.

The questionnaire instrument consisted of five indicators of communication strategies based on Ellen Tarone theory (1980), namely avoidance, paraphrase, borrowing, mime, and appeal for assistance. The data were analysed using percentage formulas to determine the level of use of each communication strategy.

Table 1: Students' Communication Strategies

No.	Communication Strategies	Total Score	Percentage (%)	Category
1	Avoidance	233	68.52%	Fair Good
2	Paraphrase	444	74.62%	Good
3	Borrowing	289	68.00%	Fair Good
4	Mime	258	75.88%	Good
5	Appeal for Assistance	333	78.35%	Good
Total		1557	73.27%	Good

Based on Table 1, the overall percentage of students' communication strategies reached 73.27%, which is categorized as "Good." This finding indicates that students frequently used communication strategies during speaking activities to maintain interaction and overcome communication difficulties. The result also demonstrates that although students still faced limitations in vocabulary mastery and grammatical competence, they attempted to continue communication by applying various compensatory strategies.

The highest percentage was found in appeal for assistance (78.35%). This result shows that students often asked for help from teachers or classmates when they faced difficulties in expressing ideas in English. Students tended to ask for clarification, vocabulary assistance, pronunciation correction, or confirmation to continue communication. This finding supports Tarone's theory (1980), which states that learners use appeal for assistance to avoid communication breakdown when linguistic resources are limited. However, it is important to interpret this finding critically rather than simply labeling it as positive. The heavy reliance on external assistance suggests that many students have not yet developed sufficient speaking autonomy. In real-life professional settings particularly relevant for TKJ graduates who may need to communicate in English language technical environments immediate assistance from teachers or peers may not always be available. Therefore, while this strategy effectively maintains interaction in classroom contexts, it may also indicate a gap in students' independent communicative competence that requires targeted instructional attention. This finding aligns with Hasbiyati et al. (2022), who found that vocational students in technical programs similarly showed high dependence on interactional support strategies, suggesting that communicative independence remains a persistent challenge in EFL vocational education.

The dominant use of appeal for assistance also reflects the collaborative nature of classroom interaction. In the vocational school context, students appeared to feel more comfortable learning through peer and teacher support rather than independently solving linguistic problems. This condition suggests that classroom interaction and teacher guidance have an important role in supporting students' speaking confidence. In addition, students' willingness to ask for help indicates that they were actively engaged in communication instead of remaining silent when difficulties occurred.

However, this finding can also be interpreted critically. Although asking for help is categorized as a positive communication strategy, excessive dependence on assistance may indicate that students have not yet developed sufficient speaking autonomy. Students who rely too much on teachers or peers may experience difficulties when communicating in real-life situations where immediate assistance is unavailable. Therefore, teachers should not only encourage students to ask for help, but also train them to independently use alternative vocabulary, paraphrasing, or contextual guessing strategies.

The second highest strategy was mime (75.88%). Students frequently used gestures, facial expressions, and body movements to support verbal communication. This strategy helped students convey meaning when they lacked vocabulary or grammatical knowledge. In classroom interaction, non-verbal communication became an important tool to maintain fluency and interaction.

The frequent use of mime indicates that students attempted to maximize available resources to ensure successful communication. Non-verbal communication helped students compensate for linguistic weaknesses while maintaining interaction with listeners. This result is consistent with Kongsom (2016), who states that communication strategies function as tools to negotiate meaning and prevent communication breakdown. Gestures and facial expressions can strengthen meaning, reduce misunderstanding, and increase speaking confidence among EFL learners.

From another perspective, the high use of mime strategy may also indicate that students' verbal competence is still relatively limited. Students may prefer gestures because they cannot fully express ideas through spoken English. While mime is useful in maintaining interaction, overreliance on non-verbal communication could limit students' opportunities to develop vocabulary mastery and grammatical accuracy. Consequently, speaking instruction should balance the use of supportive gestures with activities that encourage richer verbal expression.

Paraphrase strategy obtained 74.62%, categorized as "Good." Students attempted to explain ideas using different words or simpler expressions when they did not know the exact vocabulary. This indicates that students had awareness of maintaining communication by modifying language forms. The use of paraphrase reflects students' efforts to negotiate meaning and continue interaction effectively.

This finding suggests that some students had already developed strategic competence in speaking English. Instead of stopping communication completely, they tried to adapt language use to match their current ability. According to Brown and Lee (2015), successful speaking performance requires learners to negotiate meaning and modify language during communication. Therefore, the use of paraphrase demonstrates students' active effort to sustain interaction despite linguistic limitations.

Furthermore, paraphrasing can be considered one of the more productive communication strategies because it encourages learners to think critically about language use. Students who paraphrase are not merely depending on external assistance but are attempting to reconstruct meaning independently. This process may contribute to vocabulary development, fluency improvement, and communicative confidence.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of paraphrase strategy depends on students' vocabulary range and grammatical knowledge. If students possess very limited vocabulary, paraphrasing may become repetitive or unclear. In some cases, students may oversimplify ideas, resulting in incomplete or inaccurate communication. Therefore, teachers should provide speaking activities that gradually expand students' lexical resources and train them to reformulate ideas more effectively.

Meanwhile, avoidance (68.52%) and borrowing (68.00%) were categorized as “Fair Good.” In avoidance strategy, some students preferred to avoid difficult topics or stopped speaking when they lacked vocabulary. This condition indicates that several students still experienced low confidence and linguistic limitations during speaking activities.

The use of avoidance strategy reflects the psychological challenges faced by EFL learners, particularly anxiety and fear of making mistakes. This finding is closely related to Horwitz’s (2017) explanation that language anxiety often reduces learners’ willingness to participate in speaking activities. Students may avoid communication because they are afraid of negative evaluation, incorrect pronunciation, or grammatical errors. Such conditions are common in EFL classrooms where exposure to English is still limited.

Although avoidance strategy can reduce communication pressure temporarily, excessive use of this strategy may negatively affect speaking development. Students who frequently avoid speaking opportunities may receive less practice, resulting in slower improvement in fluency and confidence. This finding indicates that teachers should create a supportive classroom atmosphere where mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process rather than failure.

Similarly, in borrowing strategy, students often mixed Indonesian words with English expressions to maintain communication. This strategy helped students continue interaction when they could not recall English vocabulary. Borrowing strategy is common among EFL learners because the first language often becomes a practical resource during communication.

The use of borrowing strategy demonstrates that students prioritized message delivery over grammatical perfection. In communicative contexts, this strategy may help maintain interaction and reduce speaking anxiety. However, excessive dependence on the first language may reduce opportunities for students to practice English vocabulary and sentence patterns. If students constantly switch to Indonesian, they may become less motivated to search for alternative English expressions.

The findings demonstrate that communication strategies played an important role in helping students maintain speaking interaction in the EFL classroom. The dominant use of appeal for assistance and mime suggests that students relied heavily on social and non-verbal support when facing communication difficulties. This condition reflects that students were more comfortable using interactive strategies rather than avoiding communication completely.

These findings are relevant to previous studies on communication strategies among EFL learners. Kassem (2019) found that communication strategies contribute positively to speaking fluency because they help learners maintain interaction despite linguistic limitations. Similarly, Rusiana and Sulisty (2018) reported that students commonly use strategies such as asking for help, paraphrasing, and gestures to overcome communication problems during speaking performance.

In the context of vocational education, the findings also reveal several important characteristics. Students in vocational schools often focus more on technical and practical subjects than academic language development. As a result, their exposure to communicative English practice may be relatively limited. This condition may explain why students relied more on interactive support strategies such as appeal for assistance and mime rather than linguistically complex strategies.

Another important point is that communication strategies do not automatically indicate high English proficiency. Students may actively use communication strategies while still experiencing significant linguistic weaknesses. Therefore, communication strategies should be viewed as compensatory tools rather than direct indicators of speaking mastery. Students who frequently use strategies may still need substantial support in vocabulary development, pronunciation, and grammatical competence.

The findings also suggest that communication speaking activities are highly important in EFL classrooms. Classroom activities such as role play, group discussion, presentation, dialogue practice, and problem-solving tasks can provide opportunities for students to practice communication strategies naturally. Through

repeated interaction, students may gradually become more confident and less dependent on avoidance or borrowing strategies.

Overall, the findings indicate that communication strategies functioned as important tools for students in overcoming speaking difficulties and maintaining classroom interaction. The results emphasize that speaking competence is not only determined by linguistic knowledge but also by students' ability to manage communication problems strategically. To help students shift from passive strategies such as avoidance and borrowing toward more independent strategies, teachers can implement several specific interventions. First, structured vocabulary building activities can reduce students' dependency on borrowing Indonesian terms. Second, paraphrase training through guided speaking tasks can encourage students to reformulate ideas using available vocabulary rather than relying on external assistance. Third, graduated role-play activities that simulate real-world TKJ professional contexts such as technical presentations, peer-teaching on networking topics, or simulated customer service dialogues in English can provide meaningful practice that builds both confidence and strategic competence. Therefore, teachers should integrate communication strategy training into speaking instruction to help students become more confident, independent, and communicatively competent English users.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that students used various communication strategies based on Tarone's theory, namely avoidance, paraphrase, borrowing, mime, and appeal for assistance. Overall, the use of communication strategies was categorized as good, indicating that students actively attempted to maintain communication despite their limited English proficiency.

Among the strategies, appeal for assistance was the most frequently used strategy, followed by mime and paraphrase. These findings indicate that students tended to rely on interactive and compensatory strategies to continue communication and express ideas during speaking activities. The use of gestures,

asking for help, and explaining ideas with simpler expressions helped students maintain interaction more effectively in the classroom.

The study also shows that communication strategies play an important role in supporting students' speaking performance in EFL classrooms. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to provide more communicative speaking activities that allow students to practice various communication strategies in meaningful interaction. Future researchers are also suggested to investigate communication strategies in different educational contexts or explore the relationship between communication strategies and students' speaking achievement.

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