

Identifying Speaking Strategies Used by EFL Students at the Northern Border University

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the type and the frequency of speaking strategies used by EFL students at the Northern Border University (NBU). Descriptive analytical method was used in this study. The study sample included two hundred ninety (290) undergraduate students (males & females). Participants were selected by means of cluster random sampling from the colleges in three clusters (science colleges, health colleges, and humanity colleges). To achieve the study objectives, a self-report questionnaire was used to elicit information about speaking strategies from the study participants. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the present study through using the latest version of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Results revealed that NBU students are not active strategy users. Their overall use of speaking strategies is medium. Significant differences were detected between male and female students in all speaking strategy subcategories in favor of females. In light of the study findings, pedagogical implications as well as some recommendations for needed strategy instruction and suggestions for further research were discussed.

Keywords: learning strategies, speaking skill, EFL

1. Introduction

While trying to express their thoughts orally and have their ideas conveyed properly, EFL students in general encounter several problems and difficulties. In order to overcome such difficulties and hindrances, most of them usually resort to using some tactics and strategies that help them communicate and get their ideas across, in a proper and comprehensible way. Such strategies are represented in every physical or intellectual conduct deliberately chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own learning to speak English (Wahyuni, 2013).

The importance of having knowledge of various speaking strategies, and being able to use them, as claimed by Diaz (2011), is to help learners develop their language improvement in order to encourage actual verbal communication. According to Sun, Zhang and Gray (2016), speaking strategies, likewise, can be viewed as activities and efforts done by students to develop their speaking abilities.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite being a key manifestation of student ability in the target language s/he is attempting to master, speaking ability has not given its due attention in second/foreign language research, especially among Saudi students. In addition, Most EFL students at the Northern Border University have always shown low levels in speaking ability. They always find it difficult to get their messages delivered and to keep communication going on. Their speech in English is usually difficult to follow. This might be due to their inability to use appropriate speaking strategies to help them overcome such speaking difficulties. Hence, this study aims to identify the speaking strategies used by EFL students at the Northern Border University and then, diagnose their needs for speaking strategy instruction.

3. Questions of the Study

The study sought to answer the following question:

- 1) What is the overall use of speaking strategies among undergraduate EFL university students?
- 2) What are the speaking strategy categories most frequently used by male EFL undergraduate university

students?

3) What are the speaking strategy categories most frequently used by female EFL undergraduate university students?

4) Does difference in gender affect student use of speaking strategies?

4. Objectives of the Study

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1) Identify the overall use of speaking strategies among undergraduate EFL university students.

2) Identify the speaking strategy categories most frequently used by male EFL undergraduate university student.

3) Identify the speaking strategy categories most frequently used by female EFL undergraduate university students.

4) Find out if there any effect of gender difference on the use of speaking strategies.

5) Diagnose NBU students' needs for speaking strategy instruction.

6) Draw the attention of EFL/ESL teachers to the importance of incorporating speaking strategy instruction into their classroom teaching.

5. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from the importance of its problem; speaking English in a good and intelligible way is not only classy but enables university graduates to continue studies in the best universities around the world. It widens one's options in job opportunities. It also helps improve one's standard of living. Moreover, speaking English fluently, removes many barriers, including cultural ones. On the other hand, this study is considered a pioneering one. Although there are several learning strategy studies conducted in the Saudi EFL context, no single study, to the best knowledge of this researcher tried to investigate the use of speaking strategies among EFL learners.

6. Literature Review

6.1 Learning Strategies

The notion of learning strategy can be traced back decades ago. Over the past decades, many definitions and classifications of learning strategies have been introduced. According to Oxford (1990, p. 8), learning strategies are "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations". For O'Malley and Chamot (1990) learning strategies are certain thoughts or behaviors used by an individual learner to aid him to understand, acquire or recall new information. Wenden and Rubin (1987) view learning strategies as any sets of processes, steps, tactics, procedures used by the learner for facilitating gaining, storing, recalling, and using information.

6.2 Language Learning Strategies

Major differences are found among language learners in strategy use. These differences differentiate successful language learners from their unsuccessful counterparts. Language learners differ not only in the amount of learning strategies they may employ, but also in the types of the strategies used. According to Oxford (1989), "language learning strategies are behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable" (cited in Ellis, 2008, p. 531). Language learning strategies, for Cohen (1998), are procedures consciously selected by learners that might result in taking an action to improve learning or using a second/foreign language, via storing, retaining, retrieving, and applying information about that language. A language learning strategy is an effort done by the learner in order to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language (Tarone, 1983, as cited in Ellis, 2008, p. 530). Initiating a conversation with a native speaker, memorization and inferencing are examples of language learning strategies as claimed by Tarone. For Rubin (1987), language learning strategies are those tactics that contribute to the improvement of the language system constructed by the language learner and can have a direct effect on learning (cited in Bai, 2016, p. 11).

6.3 Features of Language Learning Strategies

'Learning strategies' are sometimes confused or used interchangeably with 'study skills' or 'learning tactics'. However, a learning strategy differs from a learning tactic. Oxford (1990, as cited in Shi, 2017, pp. 25–26) identified twelve main features that distinguish language learning strategies: language learning strategies help learners achieve the main goal of language learning, that is communicative competence. They help learners

become more self-directed or autonomous learners. Learning strategies enlarge the role of language teachers. Learning strategies are problem-oriented. They are specific actions taken by the learners and they involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive one. Learning strategies assist learning, directly and indirectly. They are often conscious not noticeable at all times. Learning strategies are teachable, flexible and are affected by a range of factors.

Based on the views of Chamot (1987, 2004), Oxford (1990) and Ellis (1997), a variety of features of language learning strategies were listed by Xu (2016). These features include: 1) language learning strategies might refer to both specific techniques or behaviors and general tactics taken in order to improve proficiency in a second language; 2) they could be both mental or nonmental or behavioral; 3) language learning strategies are generally employable by learners to overcome a learning problem; 4) using language learning strategies may differ from one learner to another depending of different tasks and problems and on individual differences among learners.

6.4 Classification of Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies have been classified into numerous taxonomies and classifications by several researchers. Some researchers have focused on the way successful learners attempt to learn a second/foreign language and they endeavored to categorize strategies that worked well for those learners and to determine the most effective strategies for learning a language (Ellis, 1997). In so doing, it is assumed that poor and less successful language learners can be taught and trained in those identified effective strategies. In the following section, an overview of the most acknowledged and recognized classifications is given.

According to Rubin (1987), strategies are classified into three main classes: learning strategies, communication strategies and social strategies. Learning strategies include two main types: cognitive learning strategies and metacognitive learning strategies. Among the chief cognitive strategies identified by Rubin are memorizing, predicting, clarification, reasoning monitoring and practice. Similarly, metacognitive learning strategies include strategies used by learners to oversee and regulate language learning. They encompass numerous processes such as self-management, planning, prioritizing and goal setting.

O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, and Kupper (1985) divide learning strategies into three main subclasses: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies refer to those strategies used by learners to plan for and think about the learning processes. On the other hand, cognitive strategies include the direct use of learning techniques such as inference, translation and repetition. Whereas, socio-affective strategies include non-academic strategies related to the social activities and transacting with others.

Oxford (1990) classified learning strategies into two main groups: direct and indirect strategies. Each group consisted of some sub-categories. Direct strategies encompass memory, cognitive, compensation and communication strategies. On the other hand, indirect strategies include metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

6.5 Speaking Strategies

For Tarone (1981) speaking or communication strategies are activities made by second language learner to bridge the gap between his/her linguistic knowledge and that of the target language speaker in genuine communication situations. For López (2011), a speaking strategy is any device used by the learner to solve any communication problem while speaking in the target language. To Wahyuni (2013) speaking strategies are viewed as physical or mental behaviors deliberately taken by learners for regulating their own learning to speak English. Corder (1981) puts it clear that communicative strategies are techniques that help avoiding communication breakdown (cited in Lewandowska, 2019). For Sun, Zhang and Gray (2016) speaking strategies can be viewed as actions and efforts that learners taken to improve their speech. According to Pawlak (2018), second language learners are expected to come across many problems while trying to speak. Such problems can, to some extent, be overcome by skillful dependence on speaking strategies. Pawlak defines speaking strategies as all actions and thoughts willfully employed by learners to develop their speaking skills and to use those skills in actual communication.

6.6 Classification of Speaking Strategies

Tarone (1981) provided an important, elaborate and distinguished classification of various types of speaking strategies. In this classification, Tarone mentioned some main speaking strategies, which are subdivided into numerous elements under each. The main speaking strategies included: 1) paraphrase; 2) borrowing; and 3) appeal for assistance; 4) mime; 5) avoidance.

Paraphrase or rephrasing an expression by using a different word. This strategy is subdivided into three elements:

approximation, circumlocution and word-coinage. Borrowing is the act of using a word from the speakers' first language or with first language pronunciation. This strategy is subdivided into four elements: language-switch, literal translation.

Appeal for assistance strategy is when the learner chooses to ask for help or for the correct term. In the same vein, mime strategy is when the learners use some nonverbal strategies in place of lexical item. However, avoidance happens when the learner chooses not to talk about certain concepts due to the lack of linguistic knowledge. This strategy is subdivided into two elements: topic avoidance and message abandonment.

In their classification of speaking strategies, Dörnyei and Scott (1995) referred to three main categories of strategies related to four main types of communication problems faced by second/foreign language learners. These three main categories are direct strategies, interactional strategies and indirect strategies. The four main types of communication problems mentioned in Dörnyei and Scott's classification are: 1) resource-deficit problems; 2) own-performance problems; 3) other-performance problems; and 4) processing time pressure problems.

With respect to the first problem, direct strategies include, message abandonment, reduction, replacement, Circumlocution, restructuring and code switching, whereas interactional strategies include appealing for assistance. For to the second problem, direct strategies include self-repair and self-rephrasing and interactional strategies include understanding check and own accuracy check, whereas indirect strategies include verbal strategy markers.

Regarding the third problem, direct strategies include other-repair and interactional strategies include requesting clarification, requesting repetition, requesting confirmation, inference and expressing non-understanding, whereas indirect strategies include only feigning understanding. With respect to the fourth and last problem, indirect strategies include repetition and using fillers.

A recent known classification of speaking strategies is that developed by Nakatani (2006) in his study that tried to develop an oral communication strategy inventory. Nakatani classified speaking strategies into two main groups: strategies for dealing with speaking problems and those for dealing with listening problems. The idea behind this classification is that both speaking and listening are indispensable components for oral communication. Strategies in the first group (strategies for dealing with speaking problems) include social affective strategies, fluency orientation, meaning negotiation while speaking, accuracy-oriented strategies, message reduction and alteration strategies, nonverbal strategies while speaking, message abandonment and attempt to think in English strategies.

Strategies in the second group (strategies for dealing with listening problems) include negotiation for meaning while listening, fluency maintaining strategies, scanning strategies, getting the gist strategies, nonverbal strategies while listening, less active listener strategies and word-oriented strategies.

7. Related Studies

This review of related studies aims at connecting the present study with the work already done in order to attain an overall relevance and purpose. It also aims at giving the reader a chance to appreciate the evidence that has already been collected by previous research in speaking strategies and therefore, helps project the present study in the proper perspective and shows its importance in the whole framework.

The study of Pawlak (2018) aimed at investigating the speaking strategies used by advanced EFL learners in the performance of two communicative tasks. Open-ended questionnaires were used for data collection. Questionnaires were administered to the study group directly after the completion of the two specified communicative tasks. Results revealed fundamental insights into the nature of the speaking strategies. Results also indicated that the communicative goals of each task type affect students' choice of these strategies. The study of Prabawa (2016) aimed at identifying speaking strategies used by Indonesian higher education students. A 21-item questionnaire and 5-item interview were used for data collection from 15 participants. The study result revealed that students use speaking strategies to improve their speaking ability. These strategies included cognitive, metacognitive and compensation strategies.

The study of Sun, Zhang and Gray (2016) attempted to develop an inventory for assessing Chinese as second/foreign language (CSL/CFL) students' speaking strategies. Two independent samples from university second language Chinese students were used in this study. Both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were used. Results of these analyses provided support for a three-factor speaking strategy inventory with good psychometric properties.

Alalawi (2015) carried out a study to explore the use of communication strategies by 60 EFL students at Ibr

College of Technology in Oman. Semi-structured interview together with audio recordings of picture description task were used for data collection. The study results showed a considerable variation of communication strategies used by Omani students. Higher proficiency students made more use of approximation and circumlocution, whereas lower proficiency ones used more avoidance and mother tongue-based strategies.

Moriam (2005)'s study investigated the differences in the use of EFL speaking strategies by university students in both Japan and Bangladesh. A speaking strategy questionnaire was used for measuring participants' strategy use. The study participants were 165 EFL-majors (102 Japanese & 63 Bangladeshi). Bangladeshi students reported using cognitive and interpersonal strategies more frequently than Japanese learners did. In addition, Japanese female students reported using more cognitive strategies than males. Conversely, no gender differences were detected among Bangladeshi learners.

The study of Salehi, Ebrahimi, Sattar and Shojaee (2015) aimed at investigating if there any relationship between learner autonomy and the use of coping strategies and success in speaking classes. Study participants were 50 students from a language institute in Iran. Data were collected by means of a self-report questionnaire, which was distributed, to the study participants. Results obtained from data analysis revealed that students with high speaking grades outperformed their counterparts with low speaking grades in using speaking strategies for coping with speaking problems. Likewise, students with low speaking grades seemed less autonomous if compared to their counterparts with high speaking grades.

The study of Mistar and Umamah (2014) was conducted to identify the differences in the use of speaking strategies by Indonesian EFL male and female students, and to identify the contribution of using speaking strategies on the students' speaking ability. Results of the study revealed that difference in gender leads to substantial effects on the degree of the intensity of strategy use.

Wahyuni (2013) investigated second language speaking strategies used by Indonesian EFL students. It was intended to identify the type of strategies students use regarding second language and speaking proficiency. It was also aimed at investigating gender differences in using these strategies and the reason behind their use. A mixed method approach was used in this study. Data collected by means of quantitative methods included questionnaires, second language proficiency scores and speaking grades of students, whereas data collected via qualitative methods included speaking learning diaries and student interviews. Results of the study revealed that Indonesian students used a variety of speaking strategies. As regards strategy use with respect to learner factors, the study revealed a significant correlation between second language proficiency and students' overall use of speaking strategies. It also revealed that students' use of affective strategies is significantly affected by gender as well as second language speaking proficiency. Results also indicated that students find pleasure in using these strategies and that they use them confidently because of their usefulness for them.

The study conducted by Diaz (2011) aimed at analyzing the 8th and 12th grade students' speaking awareness of strategies to speak in English. It used the inventory of the strategies of oral communication, authored by Nakatani (2006). One hundred and eight Chilean students coming from both public, half-public and private schools constituted the sample of this study. Results revealed that students in grade eight reported having wider acquaintance of speaking strategies than their counterparts in grade 12, whereas, awareness of speaking strategies among primary and secondary school learners does not differ according to the school.

Cabayasa and Baetiong (2010) examined the use of speaking strategies by high school students. The study participants were seventy sophomores at a public school. A 19-item speaking strategy checklist was used in observing and interviewing study participants. Results revealed that participants use speaking strategies in the following order: metacognitive, social/affective, and compensation strategies.

López (2011)'s study examined the speaking strategies used by EFL students studying for a BA in five public Mexican universities. A self-report questionnaire was given to the study participants to elicit information about their use of strategies while speaking in English. Results of data analysis showed that the most used strategies by study participants were: using rephrasing or substitutes for words they do not know; asking for repetition; and asking for message explanation. Results also indicated that while there is an extensive variety of strategies in use, students lean towards selecting strategies consistent with their proficiency levels.

8. Material and Method

8.1 Population and Sample

The study population comprised all undergraduate students registering for the academic year 2019–2020 at the Northern Border University. Cluster random sampling was used to select participants of this study. This was achieved through stages: the first stage involved the division of the university into three clusters (science

colleges, health colleges, and humanity colleges).

The second stage involved selecting two colleges to represent each cluster. The third stage involved using simple random sampling to select a number of students from the last levels in each of the selected colleges. Students at final levels were preferred to participate in this study as they are supposed to have had better chances of learning English than their colleagues have in recent levels.

A random sample of 404 students, both male and female, was selected from the last levels in each of the six selected colleges. Upon excluding questionnaires with missing data, and questionnaires coming from participants who rated their responses in an improper way, two hundred ninety (290) questionnaire data entered for final analysis, with 233 males and 57 females.

8.2 Instrument of the Study

After a through review of literature on learning strategies, in general (Ellis, 1997; Rubin, 1987; O'Malley et al., 1985; Oxford, 1990), and the several proposed taxonomies of speaking strategies, in particular (Tarone, 1981; Dörnyei & Scott, 1995; Nakatani, 2006), a 23-item questionnaire, was prepared for investigating Northern Border University students' use of speaking strategies. The questionnaire uses a five-point Likert scale system ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = never or almost never true of me, 2 = generally not true of me, 3 = somewhat true of me, 4 = generally true of me, and 5 = always or almost always true of me). The maximum score on this scale is 115 whereas the minimum score is 23.

In this questionnaire, the student was asked to choose the option that really describes him/her, regarding the speaking strategies, s/he uses when facing speaking difficulties. The questionnaire, in its final form, consisted of six parts: message reduction and adjustment strategies (items 1–5), meaning negotiation strategies (items 6–9), message abandonment strategies (items 10–12), social-affective strategies (items 13–19), attempting to think in English strategies (items 20–21), and nonverbal strategies (items 22–23).

To identify students' levels of speaking strategy use in this study, a criterion prepared by Oxford (1990) that has been widely field-tested in previous strategy research was used. Thus, students' responses to this Questionnaire were judged according to the following judgment criterion:

Table 1. The criterion for judging the responses of the study participants

| Mean | Strategy Use |
|-------------|--------------|
| (1.00–1.49) | Very Low |
| (1.50–2.49) | Low |
| (2.50–3.49) | Medium |
| (3.50–4.49) | High |
| (4.50–5.00) | Very High |

8.3 Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire's validity was assessed by showing it to a panel of experts who made their comments concerning the format, stating of items, suitability to the study participants and how far the questionnaire's items actually measure what the researcher intends to measure. The questionnaire's reliability was calculated by Cronbach (1951)'s alpha. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the 23 items was found 0.81. This indicates that the questionnaire enjoys a reasonable internal consistency.

9. Findings

This section presents the findings attained after data analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the present study through using the latest version of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS).

9.1 Answer to the First Question

As mentioned before, the first question of the study asked: '*what is the overall use of speaking strategies among undergraduate EFL university students?*' In answering this question, participants' overall use of speaking strategies is presented:

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for each subcategory of the speaking strategy questionnaire

| Speaking strategies | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Min | Max | Level | Rank |
|---|-----|--------|----------------|-------|-------|--------|------|
| Message Reduction and Adjustment Strategies | 291 | 2.9381 | 0.3265 | 9.00 | 22.00 | medium | 5 |
| Meaning Negotiation Strategies | 291 | 3.0799 | 0.3144 | 12.00 | 19.00 | medium | 2 |
| Message Abandonment Strategies | 291 | 3.0215 | 0.2698 | 9.00 | 15.00 | medium | 4 |
| Social-Affective Strategies | 291 | 2.1091 | 0.1658 | 11.00 | 29.00 | Low | 6 |
| Attempting to Think in English Strategies | 291 | 3.0688 | 0.3332 | 6.00 | 9.00 | medium | 3 |
| Nonverbal Strategies | 291 | 3.3746 | 0.3452 | 4.00 | 8.00 | medium | 1 |
| Overall Use | 291 | 2.9021 | 0.3653 | 59.00 | 91.00 | medium | |

Table 2 shows that the frequency level of speaking strategy use among Northern Border University students (both males & females) is generally medium with an obtained mean score of 2.9021 and with standard deviation of 0.3653. This means that Northern border University students are not active strategy users as their use of learning strategies is occasional. The table shows that students used a variety of speaking strategies with Nonverbal Strategies being the most frequently used and with the social-affective strategies, being the least frequently used. The strategy subcategories were used in the following order: nonverbal strategies; meaning negotiation strategies; attempting to think in English strategies; message abandonment strategies; message reduction and adjustment strategies; and social-affective strategies.

The table also shows that participants' frequency level of implementing nonverbal strategies is medium and it came at the first rank with an obtained mean score of 3.3746 and with standard deviation of 0.3452. However, this table shows that participants' frequency level of implementing social-affective strategies is low and it ranked sixth and last with an obtained mean score of 2.1091 and with standard deviation of 0.1658.

9.2 Answer to the Second Question

As mentioned before, the second question of the study asked: 'What are the speaking strategy categories most frequently used by male EFL undergraduate university students?' In answering this question, male overall use of speaking strategies is presented:

9.2.1 Males' Overall Use of Speaking Strategies

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for each subcategory of the speaking strategy questionnaire

| Speaking Strategies | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Min | Max | Level | Rank |
|---|-----|--------|----------------|-------|-------|--------|------|
| Message Reduction and Adjustment Strategies | 234 | 2.8598 | 0.2368 | 9.00 | 22.00 | medium | 5 |
| Meaning Negotiation Strategies | 234 | 3.0075 | 0.2854 | 12.00 | 19.00 | medium | 3 |
| Message Abandonment Strategies | 234 | 3.0215 | 0.1689 | 11.00 | 15.00 | medium | 2 |
| Social-Affective Strategies | 234 | 1.8065 | 0.2547 | 11.00 | 15.00 | Low | 6 |
| Attempting to Think in English Strategies | 234 | 3.0000 | 0.2967 | 6.00 | 6.00 | medium | 4 |
| Nonverbal Strategies | 234 | 3.3718 | 0.3117 | 4.00 | 8.00 | medium | 1 |
| Overall Use | 234 | 2.7984 | 0.2564 | 59.00 | 83.00 | medium | |

Table 3 shows that the frequency level of speaking strategy use among male students is generally medium with an obtained mean score of 2.7984 and with standard deviation of 0.2564. The table shows that males' frequency level of implementing nonverbal strategies is medium and it came at the first rank with an obtained mean score of 3.3718 and with standard deviation of 0.3117. However, this table shows that participants' frequency level of implementing social-affective strategies is low and it ranked sixth and last with an obtained mean score of 1.8065 and with standard deviation of 0.2547.

9.3 Answer to the Third Question

As mentioned before, the third question of the study asked: 'What are the speaking strategy categories most frequently used by female EFL undergraduate university students?' In answering this question, female overall use of speaking strategies is presented:

9.3.1 Females' Overall Use of Speaking Strategies

Table 4. Means and standard deviations for each subcategory of the speaking strategy questionnaire

| Speaking Strategies | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Min | Max | Level | Rank |
|---|----|--------|----------------|-------|-------|--------|------|
| Message Reduction and Adjustment Strategies | 57 | 3.2596 | 0.2345 | 11.00 | 20.00 | medium | 5 |
| Meaning Negotiation Strategies | 57 | 3.3772 | 0.3122 | 12.00 | 17.00 | medium | 2 |
| Message Abandonment Strategies | 57 | 3.2632 | 0.3254 | 9.00 | 14.00 | medium | 4 |
| Social-Affective Strategies | 57 | 3.3509 | 0.3337 | 21.00 | 29.00 | medium | 3 |
| Attempting to Think in English Strategies | 57 | 3.3509 | 0.2876 | 6.00 | 9.00 | medium | 3 |
| Nonverbal Strategies | 57 | 3.3861 | 0.3664 | 5.00 | 8.00 | medium | 1 |
| Overall Use | 57 | 3.3272 | 0.3951 | 68.00 | 91.00 | medium | |

Table 4 shows that the frequency level of speaking strategy use among female students is generally medium with an obtained mean score of 3.3272 and with standard deviation of 0.3951. The table shows that females' frequency level of implementing nonverbal strategies is medium and it came at the first rank with an obtained mean score of 3.3861 and with standard deviation of 0.3664. In addition, this table shows that females' frequency level of implementing message reduction and adjustment strategies is also medium and it ranked fifth and last with an obtained mean score of 3.2596 and with standard deviation of 0.2345.

9.4 Answer to the Fourth Question

The Fourth question of the study asked: 'Does difference in gender affect student use of speaking strategies?' Independent samples t-test was used to identify the differences between male and female students in the use of speaking strategies.

Table 5. "t" value, standard deviations and means of the responses of the study participants to the questionnaire's items in each subcategory of the speaking strategy questionnaire

| No | Variables | Gender | N. | Mean | Std. Deviation | "t" | Sig. |
|----|---|--------|-----|---------|----------------|---------|-------|
| 1 | Message Reduction and Adjustment Strategies | male | 234 | 14.2991 | 1.87491 | 7.159- | 0.001 |
| | | female | 57 | 16.2982 | 1.95453 | | |
| 2 | Meaning Negotiation Strategies | male | 234 | 12.0299 | .45760 | 12.939- | 0.001 |
| | | female | 57 | 13.5088 | 1.48952 | | |
| 3 | Message Abandonment Strategies | male | 234 | 9.7895 | .68572 | 24.429 | 0.001 |
| | | female | 57 | 12.6453 | 1.12974 | | |
| 4 | Social-Affective Strategies | male | 234 | 12.6453 | .68572 | 58.674- | 0.001 |
| | | female | 57 | 23.4561 | 2.46454 | | |
| 5 | Attempting to Think in English Strategies | male | 234 | 6.0000 | .00000 | 13.144- | 0.001 |
| | | female | 57 | 6.7018 | .82299 | | |
| 6 | Nonverbal Strategies | male | 234 | 6.7436 | .82508 | 0.236- | 0.813 |
| | | female | 57 | 6.7719 | .75634 | | |
| 7 | Overall Use | male | 234 | 64.3632 | 2.64828 | 24.077- | 0.001 |
| | | female | 57 | 76.5263 | 5.58411 | | |

As shown in Table 5, except for Nonverbal Strategies, significant differences are detected between male and female students in all speaking strategy subcategories in favor of females. There are statistically significant differences between male and female students' use of message reduction and adjustment strategies, meaning negotiation strategies, message abandonment strategies, social-affective strategies, and attempting to think in English strategies. The differences are in the favor of female students.

There are statistically significant differences between male and female students in the overall use of speaking strategies in favor of the female students. Female students got a higher mean 76.5263 than that obtained by males 64.3632. The result of the t-test shows that t-value = 24.077 and the difference is significant at 0.001 level.

10. Discussion

As revealed by the findings of this study, Northern border University students are medium strategy users. However, they reported using different categories of speaking strategies with nonverbal strategies being the most

frequently used and with the social-affective strategies, being the least frequently used. These findings are in line with those of many previous studies carried out investigate the use of speaking strategies by EFL/ESL learners (Cabayasa & Baetiong, 2010; López, 2011; Rahmadeni, Amri, & Adnan, 2013; Wahyuni, 2013; Mistar & Umamah, 2014; Alalawi, 2015; Moriam, 2005; Thaha & Saifuddin, 2015; Prabawa, 2016). These studies yielded a considerable variation across the range of speaking strategies used by participants in different contexts: the study of Cabayasa and Baetiong (2010) revealed that participants used speaking strategies in this order of preference: metacognitive, social/affective, and compensation strategies. López (2011)'s study showed that students in public Mexican universities use rephrasing or substitutes for words they do not know at the first place followed by asking for repetition and asking for message explanation strategies.

In the same vein, the study of Rahmadeni, Amri and Adnan (2013) indicated that Indonesian Junior high school students prefer to use metacognitive speaking strategies whereas memory strategies came at the last place for them. Wahyuni (2013)'s study revealed Indonesian EFL tertiary students used a wide range of strategies covering six strategy groups but favoring metacognitive speaking strategies. Mistar and Umamah (2014) concluded that resources-based strategies were found to be the most used strategies by senior high school EFL learners in Indonesia, while self-improvement strategies were the least applied ones in learning speaking skill. Alalawi (2015)'s study showed that Omani higher proficiency EFL learners use more approximation and circumlocution strategies, while lower proficiency learners use more avoidance strategies. The results obtained by the study of Moriam (2005) revealed that and Bangladeshi university students use cognitive and interpersonal speaking strategies more than Japanese does. Thaha and Saifuddin (2015)'s study showed that EFL successful students at IAIN Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi use cognitive, compensation, metacognitive and social strategies in their speaking while unsuccessful students use memory, metacognitive, and affective strategies. Prabawa (2016)'s study indicated that Indonesian tertiary students prefer using cognitive, metacognitive and compensation strategies in improving their speaking skill.

The overall unsatisfactory level of speaking strategy use shown by the Northern Border University students might be attributed to their general low level in English language. Supporting this, Alrabai (2016), puts it clear that in spite of the huge efforts exerted by Saudi government in order to improve EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia, students' proficiency in English remains unsatisfactory and are not up to the levels required. For this, Saudi learners have often been labelled as low achievers in English. Furthermore, Alzahrani (2019) adds that speaking is a difficult skill for Arab EFL learners in general, and Saudis are not exception. They encounter many problems in practicing speaking in English. In addition, teaching EFL speaking has always been a demanding task for Arab teachers of English for a host of reasons, the most important of which is that English in Arab countries is not widely used in everyday interactions.

Findings also revealed that female students outperformed males in the overall use of speaking strategies. These findings confirm those attained by many studies, conducted to investigate general learning strategy use in the Saudi context (Alrefay & Koura, 2010; Alhaisoni, 2012; Alhaysony, 2012; Alhaysony, 2017). The results of Alrefay and Koura, (2010)'s study indicated that there were significant differences in the frequency of the language learning strategies used in favor of female students over males. Alhaisoni (2012) concluded that female students tend to use overall language learning strategies more often than males. The results of Alhaysony (2012)'s study also showed that females use all the strategies examined more frequently than males. Moreover, the study of Alhaysony (2017) revealed that female students used more language learning strategies than male students, though the difference was not significant.

These findings are also compatible with those of many studies conducted in other contexts than the Saudi one (Cajkler & Thornton, 1999; Zeynali, 2012; Kayaoğlu, 2012). According to Cajkler and Thornton (1999), the UK and Italian girls are more active strategy users than boys. They reported using learning strategies more regularly than boys did. The findings of Zeynali (2012)'s study reported considerable gender differences among Iranian students in their use of learning strategies in general. Girls tendered to use overall language learning strategies more often than boys did. For Kayaoğlu (2012), Turkish females reported higher strategy use of the five main strategy categories than their male counterparts.

Generally, female students in Saudi Arabia, from an academic point of view, are keener to learn than males. This viewpoint is supported by the conclusion reached by the study of Ali, Shamsan, Guduru and Yemmela (2019) that female students' perception towards English learning is far more positive than their male counterparts. This learning keenness and positivity towards English learning leads them to make every effort to use available learning strategies.

11. Conclusion

Motivated by shortage in speaking strategy research in the Saudi context, this study investigated the type and the frequency of speaking strategies used by NBU EFL students. A 23-item, 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire was used for data collection. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for item analysis. Results revealed that NBU undergraduate EFL students are not active strategy users as their overall use of speaking strategies is medium. Results also revealed that NBU students use different categories of speaking strategies with nonverbal strategies being the most frequently used and with the social-affective strategies, being the least frequently used. Significant differences were found between male and female students in all speaking strategy subcategories in favor of females. In light of these findings, educational implications as well as some recommendations for needed strategy instruction and suggestions for further research are discussed. Nevertheless, in considering the findings of this study, some limitations should be taken into consideration. Firstly, not all EFL learners at the NBU were included in this study. Secondly, some participants dealt with the questionnaire carelessly and rated their responses in an improper way. Thirdly, methodological triangulation was not accomplished in this study because of using only a questionnaire. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to all EFL students in Saudi Arabia.

12. Implications

The overall strategy uses of the study participants, which proved medium, indicates that those students are not adequately aware of the effective speaking learning strategies that can be used to overcome speaking problems. It is essential, therefore, for EFL language instructors, to help raise the awareness of those students of the wide range of speaking strategies that can be employed in practicing speaking. EFL curricula, especially in beginners' levels, should put extra emphasis on developing EFL students' strategic competence perhaps through the incorporation of direct instruction of speaking strategies. In addition, independent learning opportunities should be provided to EFL students, through which they might gain more confidence towards becoming strategic and more autonomous learners. Moreover, since female students, in this study, proved more active strategy users than males, EFL instructors of male students need to revise their teaching techniques, and their classroom management styles in order to provide their students with more relaxed opportunities for trying various speaking strategies according to their preferred learning styles. Most importantly, EFL instructor's extensively played role as being a dominant figure in the classroom should be changed to being facilitator, encourager and organizer of learning opportunities, especially in a speaking class as it is the only opportunity for practicing speaking in English.

13. Recommendations for Further Research

As there is an unmistakable paucity of speaking strategy research in the Arabic context, in general, and the Saudi one, in particular, further descriptive research, is badly needed to identify factors affecting the choice and use of speaking strategies among EFL students. More research is also needed to investigate practical classroom-based approaches of enhancing EFL students' strategic competence. In addition, further experimental and quasi-experimental research is needed for assessing the effectiveness of learning strategy instruction. Furthermore, research is also needed to compare the differential effects of the different types of speaking strategies.

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