Exploring Students' Oral Communication Problems and Strategies in the Intermediate Communication Skill Course

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui permasalahan dan strategi komunikasi yang paling sering digunakan dalam mata kuliah *Intermediate Communication Skill*. Penelitian ini dilakukan di Universitas Negeri Surabaya dengan melibatkan 100 mahasiswa angkatan 2024 yang saat ini sedang menempuh semester kedua. Penelitian ini menggunakan studi kuantitatif deskriptif dengan menggunakan tingkat kepercayaan 95% dan margin kesalahan 7%, melibatkan sampel 100 siswa dari total populasi 234. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner tertutup dan terbuka yang diadopsi berdasarkan taksonomi permasalahan dan strategi komunikasi oleh Dornyei dan Scott (1997). Data dianalisis menggunakan SPSS dengan statistik deskriptif, termasuk rata-rata dan standar deviasi, kemudian didukung oleh respon dari kuesioner terbuka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa sering menghadapi permasalahan yang berkaitan dengan *processing time performance* dan cenderung menggunakan strategi seperti *asking for repetition, use of fillers, and asking for clarification* selama mata kuliah *Intermediate Communication Skill*. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memilih strategi tertentu tergantung pada permasalahan komunikasi yang mereka hadapi. Oleh karena itu, disarankan agar mahasiswa didorong untuk menerapkan strategi yang tepat sesuai dengan permasalahan yang mereka hadapi. Disarankan juga agar dosen memasukkan kegiatan pembelajaran yang lebih bervariasi untuk membantu mahasiswa menggunakan strategi komunikasi secara lebih efektif.

Kata Kunci: *communication problems, communication strategies, intermediate communication skill*

Abstract

This study aims to find out the most common communication problems and strategies used in the Intermediate Communication Skill course. This research was carried out at the State University of Surabaya by involving 100 students from the 2024 cohort who are currently in their second semester. This study employed descriptive quantitative study by using 95% confidence level and 7% margin of error, involving a sample of 100 students out of a total population of 234. The data were collected through closed and open-ended questionnaires adopted based on Dornyei and Scott (1997) taxonomy of communication problems and strategies. The data were analyzed by using SPSS with descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, then supported by the responses from the open-ended questionnaire. The result of the study shows that students often face problems related to processing time performance problem and tend to use strategies such as *asking for repetition, use of fillers, and asking for clarification* during the *Intermediate Communication Skill course*. These findings suggest that students tend to select specific strategies depending on the communication problems they encounter. Therefore, it is recommended that students are encouraged to apply appropriate strategies according to the problems they face. It is also suggested that lecturers incorporate more varied learning activities to help students use communication strategies more effectively.

Keywords: communication problems, communication strategies, intermediate communication skill

INTRODUCTION

Mastering good English communication skills as foreign language learners is not an instant process. Using English fluently requires dedication and consistent practice.

However, English proficiency in Indonesia remains relatively low. In 2024, Indonesia ranked 80th out of 116 countries in Asia with an average score of 468 on the English Proficiency Index (First & English, 2024), while

Indonesian professionals were classified at only the A2 level (Talentics, 2023). These conditions indicate persistent challenges in effective English communication, highlighting the need to examine factors influencing communication skills development.

Communication skills are considered essential skills to master since they allow people to connect globally. A study conducted by Budiyanto et al. (2024) identified communication as a core 21st-century skill, along with teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. Additionally, communication skills play an important role in academic and professional matters. Based on Ulfah (2024), communication apprehension existed across higher-education levels and can hinder their comprehension and academic performance. On the other hand, Aziz (2023) proved that general and oral communication occupy the top two of 18 observed soft skills greatly influencing good employability. In brief, communication skill is vital for effective interaction and academic and professional development.

Since communication skills require interaction, learners must develop listening and speaking skills simultaneously. These skills function together in two-way communication, where one person listens while the other speaks (Bhatti & Shaikh, 2021). However, the process of teaching them remains segregated in some institutions. A survey of lecturers in West Java reported that 80% still believe English skills, in their institutions, are still taught in isolation. Meanwhile, 64% of them recommend that English should be taught in an integrated way. Supporting this view, an institution has implemented an integrated approach, employing various classroom activities. Ayuningtyas & Wiyanah (2023) revealed that integrating skills through discussion, simulation, and role-play teaching videos promotes real communication and makes language learning seem more meaningful.

Although listening and speaking skills jointly shape communication together, developing these skills remains challenging for undergraduates. Several studies have explored listening and speaking problems in an English education study program in Surabaya. Firdaus (2019) encountered that listening problems existed in the context of speed of delivery, lack of vocabulary, and lack of practice. Students also often show confusion and struggle to follow speakers' speech. On the other hand, Muharriantan (2019) revealed that some university freshmen experience difficulties during presentations and spontaneous conversations. Additionally, research conducted by Laila & Leliana (2022) found English Department students still frequently mispronounce several aspects of suprasegmental features (stress and intonation) as well as segmental features (consonants and vowels).

These studies emphasize that students encounter problems in listening and speaking skills. As shown earlier by Firdaus (2019), Laila & Leliana (2022), and Muharriantan (2019), it can be considered that listening and speaking skills are often taught separately. In response to these problems, an integrated approach, such as that applied in the Intermediate Communication Skills course, is considered more effective. The course provides a more holistic learning experience by developing students' listening and speaking skills simultaneously in a meaningful context. Therefore, the present study aims to examine students' communication problems and strategies within the context of the *Intermediate Communication Skills course.*

Communication strategy refers to a systematic effort by language learners to overcome language gaps. They help learners in perfecting idea transfer, preventing double meanings, and fixing interlanguage deficiencies through conversation (Arum & Taufiq, 2019; Tarone, 1981). Over time, scholars have proposed various types of communication strategies. Dörnyei & Scott (1997) compared nine taxonomies and identified common underlying patterns. Their analysis indicated communication strategies typically involve altering content, simplifying or omitting topics, expanding the discussion, or manipulating language systems. Based on this synthesis, they proposed a more comprehensive taxonomy that links specific communication problems to their corresponding strategies. Thus, it makes their classification more precise and practical.

Earlier studies have explored communication strategies, showing that learners' strategies differ based on their class type and education level. For instance, a study by Wijayanto & Hastuti (2021) investigated oral communication skill strategies in an English Conversation Class involving beginner-level students (CEFR A1-A2) and found that students primarily used *stalling* or *time-gaining strategies* to maintain communication flow despite limited vocabulary. Similarly, Prawiro et al. (2022) and Saidah et al. (2020) observed that high school debate students also relied on *stalling or time-gaining strategies* to reduce anxiety while sharing ideas. In contrast, Merbawani & Hartono (2024) found that university students with higher English proficiency in an *Intensive Speaking Skill* class relied mostly on *non-verbal means strategies.*

These studies highlight that certain preferences for communication strategies vary depending on the problems faced in each learning context. Therefore, the results may differ when applied to different class settings, especially those involving broader aspects of communication skills classes at the university level. This may also enrich the

literature, particularly on the intermediate-level course, which is still underexplored.

The importance of this communication skill course has gained attention at universities in Surabaya, including UNESA. Recently, Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA) introduced a new course in the English Education Department, namely the Communication Skills course. This course aims to enhance students' proficiency in proper English communication. In general, communication skills courses are divided into three levels: essential, intermediate, and advanced. The uniqueness of this course lies in the integration of two earlier courses, listening skills and speaking skills, with a focus on academic and professional contexts. UNESA was chosen for this study due to its new curriculum that provides students the opportunity to improve their communication skills in a more in-depth and structured manner.

Although this course emphasizes the importance of communication skills, challenges in its application remain due to the gaps in earlier studies regarding communication problems and strategies. While prior research has examined various courses with certain objectives, research regarding courses with specific levels, such as Intermediate Communication Skills, is still limited (Merbawani & Hartono, 2024; Prawiro et al., 2022; Saidah et al., 2020; Wijayanto & Hastuti, 2021). In fact, this level is crucial to explore since it's considered a transition stage for students in enhancing their communication skills. Additionally, at UNESA, the curriculum now integrates listening and speaking skills into one new subject: The Intermediate Communication Skill course. Moreover, previous research indicated that some students in a university in Surabaya still experience challenges in speaking and listening (Firdaus, 2019; Kushadi, 2021; Muharriantan, 2019).

Therefore, further research is still needed to explore how students utilize specific communication strategies to overcome communication problems in the Intermediate Communication Skill course at UNESA.

This research seeks to address the following questions:
1. What oral communication problems are mostly faced by undergraduate students in the Intermediate Communication Skills course?
2. What oral communication strategies are mostly used by undergraduate students in the Intermediate Communication Skills course?

In summary, this research aims to fill the existing gaps in literature regarding communication problems and strategies in the context of the Intermediate Communication Skills course, thereby contributing to a better understanding of effective approaches to improve English communication skills among undergraduate students.

METHODS

This study employed a *descriptive quantitative design* to explore students' oral communication problems and the strategies they used in the Intermediate Communication Skills course. The research was conducted at Universitas Negeri Surabaya, involving 100 second-semester undergraduate students from the 2024 cohort. Participants were selected using *convenience sampling*, as they were accessible and relevant to the research focus. The sample size was determined based on Cohen & Oxford (2001) approach, which suggested that a *convenience sampling strategy* can use a 95% confidence level and a 7% margin of error.

Data were collected by using a web-based questionnaire distributed through class WhatsApp groups. The questionnaire, created with Google Forms, consisted of 6 demographic questions, 15 Likert-scale items on communication problems, 21 Likert-scale items on communication strategies, and 4 open-ended questions. All question items were set as 'required,' and informed consent was provided at the beginning of the form to ensure ethical compliance.

The instrument was developed based on Dörnyei & Scott (1997) taxonomy of communication strategies and validated through expert judgment. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha showed acceptable internal consistency, with scores of 0.802 for communication problems and 0.74 for communication strategies.

Closed-ended data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. *Descriptive statistics* such as mean and standard deviation were used to rank communication problems and strategies. Responses to *open-ended questions* were analysed using *content analysis* by highlighting repetitive or significant words/phrases that appear in multiple student responses and using them to confirm the data. This technique is suitable for analyzing open-ended responses, as it systematically reduces diverse answers into key issues in a reliable way (Dörnyei, 2003).

This approach ensured valid and reliable results to uncover the patterns and meanings in the way students describe their problems and strategies, particularly in the context of oral communication skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the results of the study regarding the most common oral communication problems faced by students and the strategies they often use to overcome them in the Intermediate Communication Skills course. The study involved 100 students from 10 different classes of the English Education Study Program. The data analysis employed *descriptive statistics* using SPSS and incorporated *open-ended responses* for the confirmation.

The Most Common Oral Communication Problems Faced by Students

The data in Table 1 presents the *descriptive statistics* of four major communication problems. The mean scores show how often students perceive each problem, while the standard deviations reflect variability in students' responses.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics the Most Common Oral Communication Problems Faced by Students

Oral Communication Problem	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Processing Time Performance Problem	100	3.56	0.74
Own Performance Problem	100	3.20	0.62
Other Performance Problem	100	3.20	0.71
Resource Deficit Problem	100	3.01	0.70

The findings reveal that the most common problem faced by students is *processing time performance problems* (M = 3.56, SD = 0.74). This suggests that students often take more time than usual to plan and produce grammatically correct sentences during communication (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Merbawani & Hartono, 2024). This issue can be addressed through processing time pressure strategies, including *the use of fillers, hesitation devices,* and *self-repetitions* (Awang et al., 2019; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997).

To illustrate this further, some students expressed difficulties in communication due to a lack of topic mastery and losing words while speaking. Open-ended responses further confirm this. For example, Participant 15 said, "*I worry about making mistakes, so I speak less or take more time to find the right words,"* while Participant 13 mentioned, "*I struggle when I don't know enough about the topic. I start thinking too much, and then it's hard to speak clearly."* This aligns with previous research by Saidah et al. (2020) and Wijayanto & Hastuti (2021), which highlights that students also have difficulty in constructing words, sentence structure, or ideas, resulting them buying time to be able to continue communication smoothly.

Building on the processing time performance issue, the second major problem faced by students is categorized as own-performance problems (M = 3.20, SD = 0.62). This refers to a situation where a person realizes they are making a mistake while speaking due to the lack of

vocabulary and certainty of correctness (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Merbawani & Hartono, 2024). In this study, students displayed awareness of their lack of language competence, which led to saying inaccurate words and reduced speaking fluency. For instance, participant 83 stated, "*Sometimes it is hard for me to speak the word, and I always end up saying it in an incorrect way.*" This also happens in a study conducted by Saidah et al. (2020) where students not only experience communication breakdown when they have limited language sources but also, because of fear of making mistakes, get anxious or even hesitate in speaking English.

Continuing to the next category, the third most common problem faced by students is categorized as *other-performance problems* (M = 3.20, SD = 0.71). This means that students are likely to find difficulties in communication due to their interlocutors (Dörnyei and Scott, 1997). In the present research, communication challenges are not solely caused by the students' performance speech, but also by their interlocutors' performance speech, such as their speaking style, accent, speech speed, and pronunciation clarity. For example, participant 80 noted, "*When someone speaks too fast and uses an accent I rarely recognize.*" This also happens in research by Menggo et al. (2023) where students are not only facing interlocutors' accents and speech that are difficult to understand, but also, they have to deal with the interlocutors' social and cultural backgrounds and even the credibility of the information they have.

Finally, the least communication problem experienced by students is *resource deficit problem* (M = 3.01, SD = 0.70). This refers to the speaker's lack of second language (L2) knowledge that prevents them from delivering the messages clearly, such as limitations in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Kormos and Dörnyei, 1998). However, this problem remains significant for some students in effective communication. Open-ended questionnaire data reveals that many students are still struggling with vocabulary and grammar limitations. Participants noted difficulties in finding the right words, arranging sentences according to rules, and speaking spontaneously without worrying about grammar. Participant 9 explained, "*I have trouble finding the right words in the second language that fit the initial discussion,*" while Participant 87 said, "*I often use terms like 'things' and 'stuff' instead of the real words.*" Research conducted by Arum & Taufiq (2019) suggests this is caused by students' often lacking appropriate vocabulary, grammar mastery, pronunciation skills, English exposure and confidence, resulting in unclear communication.

The Most Common Communication Strategies Used by Students

To address the communication problems, the following table illustrates the most common strategies used by students. Higher mean scores represent more frequent use; meanwhile, standard deviation reflects the variability of students' responses.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of The Most Common Communication Strategies Used by The Students

Oral Communication Strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Asking for repetition (S13)	100	3.90	0.86
Use of fillers (S11)	100	3.86	1.04
Asking for clarification (S14)	100	3.71	0.84
Code switching (S9)	100	3.67	1.03
Asking for confirmation (S15)	100	3.63	0.98
Use of all-purpose words (S5)	100	3.51	0.98
Own-accuracy check (S20)	100	3.36	0.81
Self-repair (S18)	100	3.32	0.86
Circumlocution (S3)	100	3.32	0.91
Comprehension check (S19)	100	3.31	0.85
Approximation (S4)	100	3.31	1.00
Feigning understanding (S17)	100	3.27	0.91
Appeal for help (S10)	100	3.12	0.86
Expressing non-understanding (S16)	100	3.11	0.79
Topic avoidance (S2)	100	3.06	0.95
Other-repair (S12)	100	3.03	1.03
Verbal strategy marker (S21)	100	2.99	0.95
Foreignizing (S8)	100	2.69	0.99
Word-coinage (S6)	100	2.64	0.93
Message abandonment (S1)	100	2.58	0.88
Literal translation (S7)	100	2.52	0.90

To begin with, the most frequently used strategy is *asking for repetition* (M = 3.90, SD = 0.86). Students use this strategy to clarify unclear speech or gain processing time. Participant 78 stated, "*I dealt with that by asking them to repeat the question*." This involves requesting a message's re-utterance for clearer comprehension (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997).

Beyond clarifying interlocutor issues, repetition also functions as a time-gaining strategy, providing affirmation, seeking confirmation, and emphasizing meaning (Awang et al., 2019). While prevalent in this study, its prominence varies across other research, occasionally appearing in specific contexts, such as in the research by Utami (2018), which revealed that teachers used it to assess student understanding rather than due to their own comprehension failure.

The second most common strategy is *use of fillers,* ranked second (M = 3.86, SD = 1.04). In this strategy, students tend to typically buy time to think or just to keep the conversation going despite the language barriers. Participant number 38 stated, "*I always make sounds like 'eumm, eee, aa' because it gives me time to think.*" Similarly, participant number 90 added, "*With uh, um sounds.*" It includes using uncertain words or sounds to bridge pauses and maintain conversational flow despite communication difficulties (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). This matches Prawiro et al. (2022) and Saidah et al. (2020). In the current study, *fillers* were noted during individual presentations, group discussions, and spontaneous speaking, allowing students more time to formulate thoughts and responses. This aligns with prior research by Prawiro et al. (2022) and Saidah et al. (2020), indicating *fillers* provide thinking time, offer quick solutions for vocabulary limitations or grammatical challenges, and reduce anxiety in time-constrained situations like debates.

The third most used strategy is *asking for clarification* (M = 3.71, SD = 0.84). It refers to the situation where the students are frequently asking for explanations in simpler or more familiar language structures (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). This is consistent with research conducted by Utami (2018), which indicated that junior English teacher employed this strategy to bridge communication gaps with students. Given the present study's participants are aspiring English educators engaging in discussions and presentations, their use of this strategy is crucial for effective communication with future interlocutors.

Building on the previously discussed strategies, the fourth most frequently used strategy by students is *code-switching* (M = 3.67, SD = 1.03). This strategy refers to the use of L1 or L3 words in L2 communication due to a lack of linguistic resources (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). Code-switching has been identified in many previous studies. For instance, Prawiro et al. (2022) found it to be the most common strategy used during debates. Similarly, Widiastuti et al. (2021) indicated that students preferred to mix languages to enhance their speech clarity. Furthermore, a study by Hua et al. (2012) shows that this strategy is also mostly used during oral group discussions

by both high-proficiency and low-proficiency international students.

Following this, the fifth most frequently used strategy by students is *asking for confirmation* (M = 3.63, SD = 0.98). This involves students requesting confirmation to ensure they have understood something correctly. While research on this strategy is limited, Utami (2018) found that both junior and senior teachers applied it effectively in classroom communication. This finding is still relevant, as it aims to help students ensure that their understanding is on the right track.

Among the various communication strategies, *all-purpose words* (M = 3.51, SD = 0.98) stands out as the sixth strategy where students employ general or empty words to replace more specific vocabulary that they do not know or cannot recall. Several students reported that they used the easiest words that came to mind when facing communication difficulties in order to keep the conversation going. This strategy also appeared in a study conducted by Prawiro et al. (2022), where some students expressed it by overusing certain expressions such as "*something like that.*"

The seventh strategy commonly employed is the *own-accuracy check* (M = 3.36, SD = 0.81). This strategy requires students checking the accuracy of their own utterances by repeating the same question or statement with a questioning tone (Dörnyei and Scott, 1997). Despite its significance in the communication process, this strategy has not been widely identified, either in previous studies or in the present study.

Closely related, the eighth strategy is *self-repair* (M = 3.32, SD = 0.86). It refers to a strategy in which students independently correct their speech upon realizing a mistake. This behavior reflects students' awareness and their efforts to maintain accuracy during communication. This finding aligns with studies by Bhatti & Shaikh (2021) as well as Hua et al. (2012), which also identified this strategy in university-level communication.

Similarly, *circumlocution* ranks as the ninth strategy (M = 3.32, SD = 0.91), which is where students describe or illustrate a word when they are unable to recall it. This strategy's effectiveness is supported by studies from Arum & Taufiq (2019), Prawiro et al. (2022), and Widiastuti et al. (2021), who found that this strategy was used by explaining the target vocabulary using descriptive language.

Regarding the tenth strategy, *comprehension checks* (M = 3.31, SD = 0.85) involve students asking questions to ensure that their interlocutor understands and is able to follow their communication. (Dörnyei and Scott, 1997). Although this strategy was not explicitly found in prior studies, its presence in this research indicates that this

strategy may be minimally used or not consciously recognized.

The study also identified *approximation* (M = 3.31, SD = 1.00) as a frequently employed strategy that involves using alternative words instead of the exact words in the target language. In the present research, students used synonyms closest to the target word they intended to express. This strategy reflects their resourcefulness in conveying meaning while keeping the interaction despite the vocabulary gaps. In contrast to the present research, a study conducted by Prawiro et al. (2022) shows that approximation is placed at the second top of the list of all strategies used by students. Taken together, this strategy suggests students adopting alternative vocabulary with the nearest semantic feature to convey their arguments in debate class.

The twelfth strategy is *feigning understanding* (M = 3.27, SD = 0.91). This strategy refers to situations in which students try to continue the conversation despite not understanding something by pretending as if they understand (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). This strategy is also not found in many other studies, probably because it occurs subtly and is not easily observed by both researchers and by the students themselves.

Continuing, the thirteenth strategy, *appeals for help* (M = 3.12, SD = 0.86), signifies students seeking assistance from others when they encounter communication gaps. They may directly inquire about words they lack or use gestures to communicate their needs. This aligns with Prawiro et al. (2022), which showed that students appealed for help from their group members through direct or indirect body language.

The fourteenth involves *expressing non-understanding* (M = 3.11, SD = 0.79). This is characterized by students signaling their lack of comprehension through body language, gestures, mime, or facial expressions. Studies such as Merbawani & Hartono (2024) have similarly indicated that non-verbal elements are used to convey their comprehensibility issues.

Another notable strategy observed among students involves *topic avoidance* (M = 3.06, SD = 0.95). This refers to the urge to reduce the existing topic or leave the topic unfinished in a discussion. In this study, it was found that some students tended to switch the topic they had more mastery of, let the others talk first, and use other information to answer. This strategy used in few occasions such as Arum & Taufiq (2019), where the target participants, on a certain topic, stop talking and smile and move on to the next sentence avoiding the topic. Prawiro et al. (2022) confirmed that target participants avoided topics containing their language difficulties.

The sixteenth strategy, *other-repair* (M = 3.03, SD = 1.03), refers to the student's efforts to encourage the

interlocutor to repeat or clarify a speech, usually because the student has difficulty understanding or wants to buy time. This strategy reflects students' awareness of the importance of maintaining continuity and clarity of communication, especially when they feel unsure of what they hear. Although it may seem simple, this strategy is instrumental in helping students stay engaged in conversations despite language limitations.

The data also highlights the limited use of *verbal strategy marker* (M = 2.99, SD = 0.95). This strategy refers to situations where they use verbal marker phrases to indicate that they are not conveying the message perfectly (Dörnyei and Scott, 1997). Its rarity in previous studies may signal students' preference for more effective communication methods to avoid unnecessary emphasis on their uncertain vocabulary.

Compared with the other dominant strategies, *foreignizing* (M = 2.69, SD = 0.99) was seldom applied as the eighteenth strategy. This strategy involves using a word from the first or third language and modifying it second language's phonological or morphological patterns (Dörnyei and Scott, 1997). This strategy was rarely used and did not appear explicitly in the present study. Similarly, Prawiro et al. (2022) found that this strategy appeared in the form of pronouncing Indonesian words using English pronunciation. In a study conducted by Merbawani & Hartono (2024), this strategy was also classified as one of the least used by students.

This study, however, ranked *word coinage* (M = 2.64, SD = 0.93) among the least frequently used strategies. This suggests that students rarely attempt to create new L2 words by applying assumed language rules. This finding is consistent with Hua et al. (2012), who observed the communication strategy used by international high-proficiency and low-proficiency students in oral group discussions, placing *word coinage* at the bottom of the list of all strategies used. Similarly, Prawiro et al. (2022) found that learners tend to use this strategy only when there is no other option to save the communication by producing words with similar meanings despite grammatical inaccuracies. These results indicate that students may avoid word coinage because it carries a higher risk of misunderstanding.

Less frequently observed among participants is *message abandonment* (M = 2.58, SD = 0.88), which refers to situations where learners stop or abandon a message, either to change the topic. This finding aligns with Meigouni & Shirkhani (2020), who found low use of this strategy. One possible explanation relates to learners' self-efficacy and anxiety levels. When encouraged to express their ideas, students may prefer to continue doing their best in communicating rather than abandon their message. Similarly, in the present study, students were

encouraged to express their ideas based on various topics, such as describing spatial information, delivering persuasive speeches, and discussing problems and solutions. These tasks would probably motivate them to persist in conveying ideas clearly instead of giving up in the middle of the communication.

Closing the list of strategies, *literal translation* (M = 2.52, SD = 0.90) demonstrated the smallest presence among the students. In some cases, students rely on translating some words or entire sentences directly from their first language (L1) to the target language (L2) due to their limited vocabulary or unfamiliarity with natural sentence structures in English. These findings align with Prawiro et al. (2022), who reported that students avoided literal translation in debate contexts because they had time for topic and argument preparation. In such settings, students tended to memorize their notes rather than producing spontaneous language during the debate. In contrast, the present study reflects more spontaneous communication, which literal translation may perceive as ineffective. Literal translation often leads to unnatural expressions, which result in unclear communication. As a consequence, students may prefer alternative strategies that allow smoother interaction.

This study has several limitations, particularly the theoretical framework and participants' responses. Some open-ended questionnaire responses did not relate to the predetermined problems and strategies categories. This suggests that students may experience communication experiences beyond the existing classification being observed. Therefore, further research is recommended to adopt more comprehensive classifications of communication problems and strategies to better capture learners' experiences.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that students solve communication problems by using certain communication strategies in the Intermediate Communication Skills course. Based on the findings, the most common problem experienced by students is the processing time performance problem. In this regard, students are likely to have difficulty processing communication quickly and tend to take a longer time to respond or express their thoughts.

In response to these difficulties, students tend to use these top three strategies: asking for repetition, the use of fillers, and asking for clarification. These strategies are commonly used when students request their interlocutors to repeat unclear messages, use fillers or hesitation markers to maintain conversation flow, and ask for further explanation when language structures are unfamiliar or difficult to understand. Taken together, these findings

suggest that students apply communication strategies to manage the challenges they encounter in The Intermediate Communication Skill course.

Building on these findings and limitations, further research could explore deeper into communication problems and strategies through qualitative approaches or mixed methods. This study also opens opportunities for future research to involve other course levels, such as Essential Communication Skills and Advanced Communication skills, which were beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, examining students' communication behavior in real learning situations would provide deeper insights into how strategies are applied in practice.

In addition to theoretical insights, this study is expected to provide practical implications for key stakeholders, including students, lecturers, and curriculum developers. At the student level, these findings can raise awareness of their communication difficulties and encourage the use of effective strategies. Form a teaching perspective, the results can support lecturers in designing varied learning activities that align strategies with their challenges. From an instructional standpoint, these findings can serve as a useful reference for improving the Intermediate Communication Skills course by integrating relevant strategies into instructional materials.

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