



**SPEAKING ACQUISITION STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY SENIOR EFL STUDENTS  
OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Adema Azbayeva, 2d year master's student  
Suleyman Demirel University

## Abstract

This study was conducted by the researcher to identify speaking acquisition strategies employed by senior EFL students of secondary schools in overcoming speaking difficulties and their effect on students' speaking performance. It is supposed, that appropriate speaking acquisition strategies employed by EFL students appear to be one of the essential aspects in developing speaking proficiency. The study used qualitative approach in exploring the speaking strategies used by EFL students; furthermore, the research findings revealed the major speaking strategies utilized by EFL students and the effect of these strategies on students' speaking performance. To qualitatively reveal the most successful speaking acquisition strategies to overcome speaking difficulties and to explore the effect of these strategies on EFL students' speaking performance, a representative sample of 30 EFL senior students of secondary school were interviewed. Based on the conducted interview results, it was discovered that EFL students mostly apply cognitive and communication strategies and the findings demonstrated that these strategies effectively influence on students speaking skills. According to the results of interview, it can be summarized that EFL students have their strategies in overcoming the difficulties in speaking skills. Most of the students attend English language courses to improve speaking abilities, try to memorize new English words. The vocabulary accuracy is essential to understand speaking context, sufficiency of vocabulary repertoire encourages EFL students to speak in the target language and to understand other people. Moreover, the students also believe that sufficient speaking practice strengthens their speaking proficiency, the other respondents highlighted that watching, reading and listening authentic materials helped them to overcome speaking difficulties and progressed their speaking skills.

*Keywords:* speaking strategies, speaking problems, speaking difficulties, speaking skills.

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In this age of modernization, English language has progressively become an essential domain of communication, which is demanded throughout the world. As English is an international language, it is used to communicate all over the world, and is the second language in many countries. In Kazakhstan, English is considered as a foreign language, it is not studied as principal means for everyday interactivity as well as the use of it is limited. Even though learning English requires complicated process, it remains in demand for majority people. Speaking is considered as one of the four dominant skills to be acquired in English language learning. Speaking is a productive skill, developing productive skill appears to be more complex than developing comprehensive skill. To cope with the productive skill, EFL student needs to convert the language competence into an actual performance. Patel and Jain (2008) claimed that self-expression and thinking are the principal purpose of language communication. Therefore, language is a means of communication. To acquire a language efficiently, the learner must be able to speak that language. Moreover, English needs to be progressed to enhance learners' communication competence, it is a process where the English learners communicate to state their meaning and their knowledge within the classroom (Bakar et al, 2013). However, Fariadian et al. (2014) stated that comparing with other skills, speaking might be more difficult to acquire. Speaking is complicated skill to be mastered by English language learners. It demands complete perseverance as well as preparedness to speak effectively in the target language. Actually, speaking is a neglected skill, insufficient time is allowed for EFL students in the classroom, teaching curricular speaking activities are found to be uncomfortable for teachers, because teachers' instructions are not responded. The problem, that insufficient number of researches has been conducted on EFL strategies, requires supplementary

investigation. Even though a considerable amount of language teaching methods is applied at schools with a purpose of using English language to interact in real life situations, and developing learners' speaking skills, the outcomes appear to be unsatisfactory. According to Heriansyah (2012, p.31) English learners encounter problems that restrict them to be proficient at speaking; such as insufficient vocabulary, imperfect pronunciation, and grammar inaccuracy. The problem might be associated with the learners themselves, but not with the implemented methods, because the learner is the most significant factor in language learning. To overcome English speaking problems and advance speaking skills, the learners' learning strategies could be applied. Students apply learning strategies to learn themselves and enhance their learning (Oxford, 1990, p. 1). To progress speaking skills, EFL students search conversation partners, ask peer correction, practice some examples of learning strategies. Hereby, it is revealed by Dörnyei (2005) that Language learning strategies are useful tools for effective and intentional learning, and this makes possible significant language learning competency (Dörnyei, 2005). Alternatively, Oxford (1990, p. 8) claims that language learning strategies are the vital contribution for communicative competence development. Therefore, learning strategies can encourage learners to decide a foreign language can be learned effectively, how to become self-sufficient learners. Learning strategies are applied to activate students' involvement, are considered to advance communication competence (Oxford, 1990). Another advantage of learners' learning strategy is self-direction learning, which is significant for students, because they are not supported by the teacher in learning language. In this sense, Oxford (1990) pointed out that self-direction is essential factor in developing ability of a new language. Similarly, Sofyan et al (2015) revealed that learners applied a diversity of learning strategies to enhance their advancement in speaking skills; moreover, each learner applies different language learning strategies according to his level. Correspondingly, it was claimed by Ellis (1986, p.183)

that the learner's proficiency is affected by his option of strategy. Afterwards, it was disclosed that the use of considerable diversity of strategies based on students' higher proficiency, and this support learners successfully to accomplish language tasks; conversely, students with lower competency have insufficient strategies; additionally, inappropriate strategies are used, which leads to unsuccessful task fulfillment. (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). This discovery is reinforced by the researchers Gharbavi and Mousavi (2012) showed that the quantity of strategies applied by learners depends on their level. Consequently, Sofyan et al (2015) revealed, some of the learners confirmed that the learning process is impacted by their learning strategies. Conversely, some students supposed that their strategies make insignificant contribution into learning; therefore, they might not have progressed remarkably. The survey conducted by Yuliyastutic (2007) proposes that the communication strategies as avoiding communication, paraphrasing, switching to native language can be adopted and applied by English learners to handle their speaking problems. Recent evidence showed that, to overcome speaking difficulties, learning strategies have been applied by most of the learners (Shen, Ming-yueh & Chiu, Tzu-yen, 2019). Furthermore, speaking English has been practiced by majority of students attending English social activities, and participating in English speech contests. Hanunah (2009) made an effort to disclose EFL students' learning strategies: one of them was to solve this problem by increasing students' speaking skill by practicing English out of class with their friends. Alternatively, Gani, Sofyan & Fajrina, Dian & Hanifa, Rizaldy (2015) stated that vocabulary memorization is one of the one of strategies to overcome the speaking skills problems. This statement was supported by Whute (1986) who added that vocabulary is the word used in language, it empowers students to enhance vocabularies and to speak English effortlessly. Conversely, Syarif Hidayatullah (2017) revealed a significant aspect to overcome difficulties in English speaking: communicative approach that avoids using grammar

and vocabulary and involve students in real communication. However, it was stated that, to apply these activities, students must have an interest in communicating English (Harmer, 2004). Therefore, using games combined with communicative approach should be applied by teachers to motivate and encourage students to develop their speaking skills. Communicative games can be an alternative way to overcome students' speaking skill problems. Additionally, Mamoon Muhsin Alaraj (2017) suggested to repeat listening to each conversation studied in class three times at home, practice retelling simple sentences a day, looking at the mirror give a two-minute presentation twice a week, finally to apply the strategy of avoiding inner translation from native into English, to deal with the lack of self-confidence, correcting three mistakes a day. Sofyan A. Gani Dian Fajrina\* Rizaldy Hanifa have discovered that the use of learning strategies as memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective and social improved students' speaking skills of students. The present study is focused on exploration of successful speaking acquisition strategies employed by EFL students in developing their speaking skills. The extensive knowledge about the speaking acquisition strategies will encourage both EFL teachers and EFL students to discover solutions for the students' difficulties in developing their speaking skills. The research has its significance from the way it attempts to diagnose and to explore these strategies, specifically interviewing both EFL students and EFL teachers with a purpose of deepening in this issue to reveal the actual difficulties encountered by learners. Based on the foregoing, to qualitatively discover and investigate the most effective learning strategies, that might overcome speaking difficulties:

(1) What are the most essential speaking acquisition strategies employed by EFL students to overcome speaking difficulties?

(2) What are the effects of these speaking strategies on students' speaking performance?

*Previous studies*

Based on the previous studies, there are various definitions regarding English speaking skill. According to Brown (2004, p. 140) speaking is reciprocal process, it involves producing, information obtaining and transforming. The students learn how to systematize ideas, arrange sentences, and express language in speaking. In addition, the English students learn how to deliver the language meaning in relation to the context. Furthermore, Boonkit (2010) views speaking as one of the significant skills that must be progressed to perform successful communication competence. Indeed, speaking skill is considered as one of the complicated aspects of language learning; hereby acquiring speaking skill appears to be complicated for majority EFL students. Previously, Nunan (1995) mentioned speaking skill as the most significant aspect of foreign language learning, and the success in capability to perform a discussion in the language. Following this, the learners' success in language learning is assessed by their efficient production in spoken ability. Later, it was argued by Nunan (2003) that speaking is a productive skill, which produces oral expressions to transfer the meanings. This occurs while interaction of two or more people; particularly, in EFL classroom, English speaking skill is required for students to motivate their learning activities. Cameron (2001:41) claims that speaking is the functional application of language to convey meanings (Cameron, 2001: 41). English learners use previously experienced resources to formulate the understanding in a foreign language. Similarly, Al Hosni (2014) defined speaking as the activity to use language for expressing meaning. Consequently, Gilakjani (2016) maintained the significance of speaking in students' interaction. Speaking is crucial in supporting the English learners' ability to use the language in the learning process. It is a means of communicating ideas, aimed to encourage learners to interact in English, it should be used in authentic communication both by teachers and students themselves. Along with this, Skandari,

Behjat, and Kargar (2015) have assumed that the major problem encountered by EFL students is the absence of interaction with native speakers.

### *Speaking problems I*

The speaking proficiency is principal for foreign language communication, the importance of speaking has been highlighted for many years; however, some research works revealed that, either EFL learners perceive it demanding to communicate in foreign language. Sawir (2005) discovered that foreign language learners had admitted difficulties while speaking English. Similarly, Hosni (2014) underlined, that EFL students still face speaking difficulties despite the acquired knowledge. Previously, it was stated that learners' factors, teaching strategies, curriculum and environment caused difficulties in speaking (Rababah, 2005). Later, Lukitasari (2008) identified that, the EFL students disclosed speaking difficulties related to vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Eventually, the examination of speaking difficulties discovered three aspects as mother tongue interference, linguistic difference (Hosni, 2014). The EFL students attempted to apply accurate vocabulary, also, they had problems in construction of sentences, which caused the interference of mother tongue. Excepting this, learners experienced a fear of speaking, embarrassment on making mistakes, were anxious about criticism from their peers' side; as a result, speaking was neglected within the classroom, their engagement was passive. Equally, Lin (2013) investigated, that speaking difficulties were also related to vocabulary, insufficiency, anxiety, fear of making mistakes. Sayuri (2016) conducted an investigation of speaking difficulties, the results showed, that EFL students were bewildered to participate in conversation, deliver statements, share opinions in English despite of English practice in each speaking course. Besides, the students also had problems in vocabulary, pronunciation, in the usage of grammar patterns, absence of self-confidence. These discoveries confirm the discoveries of Shayna's (2003), Lukitasari's (2008),



and Lin (2013). However, all above mentioned, is not the single component for effective speaking capability. The other components as communicative competence, linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and conversational skills encourage EFL students to realize the relevance of using the language. Overall, the study indicated both psychological and linguistic difficulties in speaking English. Hence, EFL students experience different problems and difficulties associated with speaking competence. On the contrary, some EFL students have strategies to solve these difficulties, especially the difficulties from the learners' perspectives. Considering the learning strategy definition, White (1999) defines it as the process which is consciously or unconsciously applied by the learner to learn a foreign language. In teaching and learning process, the role of learning strategy is fundamental; it makes learning process successful and systematic. Language learning strategies are employed by most of the EFL students in their learning process. Chamot (1987) believed that learning strategies as techniques, approaches or considered actions employed by students to encourage the target language learning and recollect both linguistic and content information. There are various alternatives of strategies that could be consciously determined by the students to attain their learning goals and using the target language. These strategies assure learners to comprehend efficiently the language. Accordingly, language learning strategies are significant to successfully acquire a foreign language. Additionally, it is indicated by Oxford (1990, p. 8) that the learning speaking strategies are applied by the learners as particular method of making the language learning effortless, self-reliant, transferable and productive. If appropriate strategies are applied by students, the process of acquiring speaking will be improved meaningfully.

*Speaking acquisition strategies*

Several researches have conducted studies related to the efforts in overcoming speaking problems faced by EFL learners. According to Nurhanifa and Widayanti (2012) cited in Heriyansyah (2012) examined the efforts of EFL students in overcoming speaking problems, their study revealed that the students made efforts to solve problems by practicing English inside and outside the classroom, to use dictionary to find unknown words and to check their pronunciation. Although the evidence, that several studies discovered the speaking difficulties experienced by EFL students, the students employ language learning strategies to overcome these difficulties and to advance their communicative competence. Speaking strategies are intended, and employed by students to understand, to learn, and to remember the target language (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Moreover, learning strategies can progress the language acquisition and overcome speaking problems in learning (Dina & Ghadeer, 2014; Sayuri, 2016; Yang, 2014). To perform language competence, EFL learners must effectively employ speaking strategies. Learning strategies are classified into three groups (Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Rubin (1987, as cited in Zare, 2012, p. 164). Three major groups: learning strategies, communication strategies, and social strategies. Cognitive strategies comprise: memorizing, clarification, practice, and monitoring. Metacognitive strategies include: setting goals, planning and self-management. Communication strategies: engaging in a conversation; these strategies employed by learners to overcome communication difficulties. Furthermore, Yang (2014) proposed productive strategies to develop EFL students' speaking skills: listening to authentic materials; reading lectures in English on interesting topics and try to take notes; native speaker's accent imitation; English practice with friends on a regular basis. Gani, Fajrina and Hanifa (2015) revealed that EFL students employed the memorization strategy in order to enhance vocabulary; moreover, watching English

movies with subtitles, finding the meaning of a new word in a dictionary helped to memorize the words. It has been discovered, that EFL learners practiced the new vocabulary in daily life (Gani, Fajrina & Hanifa, 2015). Alternatively, the research findings of Mamoon et.al (2017) indicated, that to acquire new vocabulary two strategies had been applied by EFL learners: 1. The application of instant vocabulary and frequently used words; learning five words a day. 2. Vocabulary observation, that constraint speaking fluency; learn three words a day. Inadequate vocabulary knowledge can prevent students from expressing their ideas through speaking; therefore, the above-mentioned strategy seems to be significant for overcoming the vocabulary obstacle in speaking. Moreover, Gani, Fajrina & Hanifa (2015) added that EFL students memorized the new vocabulary by predicting the meanings based on the reading context; also, they learned some new words communicating with friends in social media, by reading books, and listening to music. Furthermore, it was supported in the investigation by Mamoon et.al (2017) that EFL students found listening practice strategy to be effective; particularly, repeating listening comprehension at home; additionally, to use the back-chaining technique, to retell sentences, to present in front of the mirror at home. The further research findings demonstrated that successful EFL students used mother tongue (Shen, Ming-yueh & Chiu, Tzu-yen., 2019). Contrastingly, Razmjoo and Ardekani (2011) claimed that only few numbers of EFL students applied mother tongue, because it might be applied for translation, which makes speaking ineffective. It is reasonable, as learners may concentrate their attention on the process of translation, which creates speaking difficulties; furthermore, it has been revealed another strategy employed by EFL learners: body language use, which supported their speaking competently (Razmjoo and Ardekani, 2011). Gani, Fajrina & Hanifa (2015) demonstrated that learners employed different strategies to enhance grammar knowledge: memorizing tenses, grammar patterns, English speaking practice with classmates and native

speakers; Another study by Nurdini (2018) discovered that students employed communication strategies to enhance their speaking proficiency: message neglect, compensatory strategies (non-linguistic means, literal translation, code switching, appeal for help), and time-gaining strategies. It was summarized by Ddeubel (2009) that some speaking strategies can strengthen EFL students' speaking performance. Particularly, managing the psychological factor: the students should feel themselves relaxed; emphasis on performance, teacher' focus on the objective of learning; supporting motivational environment; providing interesting topics; teacher's encouragement of students. Furthermore, it has been revealed that the students tried to overcome difficulties in speaking by practicing the target language with teachers and classmates, by using dictionaries to know the translation and pronunciation of words (Nurhanifa & Widayanti, 2012 as cited in Heriansyah, 2012). Additionally, they were mentioned the strategies employed by EFL students like organizing English clubs, doing grammar exercises, memorizing new words, listening to authentic materials, watching English programs, reading books, attending English language courses (Heriansyah, 2012). Based on conducted investigations, it can be considered that the EFL learners employ different learning strategies to overcome difficulties in speaking, to develop speaking ability, to perform the effective communication competence. Gharbavi, Mousavi and Pei-Shi (2012) identified that the quantity of used strategies depends on the learners' level. Oxford (1990) also claimed that the language learning strategies must be consciously, relevantly, intentionally and regularly applied by EFL learners consciously, appropriately, purposefully and frequently.

### *Methodology*

To qualitatively reveal the most successful speaking acquisition strategies to overcome speaking difficulties and to explore the effect of these strategies on EFL students' speaking performance, a representative sample of 30 EFL senior students of secondary school was interviewed.

### *Data collection and analysis*

In an attempt to gain reliable results, the researcher used qualitative approach. The data was analyzed through face-to-face interviews. The researcher outlined the results obtained from interviews into interview transcript, translated into English and performed in the form of narration. The researcher also considered ethical aspects of the study.

### *The Interviews*

The fundamental information for this research was obtained from important source of interactive communication and significant method – interview.

### *Interviews Results*

Regarding the first research question, (1) What are the most essential speaking acquisition strategies employed by EFL students to overcome speaking difficulties? The following dominant speaking strategies were suggested by students to overcome speaking incompetency:

1. Extracurricular activities: English clubs, debates, attending English language courses.
2. Using authentic materials: watching videos in English, reading, writing blogs.
3. Speaking practice outside the school environment.
4. Learning vocabulary: five words a day.

Examples: One student suggested, “I attend English language courses as individual lessons help me to better understand grammar structures and practice my English, this helps to cope with difficulties in speaking”.

Another student added: “Me speaking practice is better in this year comparing to last year, as I began to take extra English lessons in language center”

A third student claimed: “I go to language center it helped me to improve my English, at before I had problems in speaking English, because in the class we had insufficient time to practice”

A fourth student proposed: “I overcome speaking difficulties through practicing with my peers outside the classroom”.

A fifth student: “Practicing English with native speakers helps me to develop my speaking abilities, I noticed some good changes”.

A sixth student: “Before I had problems with vocabulary range, now I try to learn three or five words in a day, I stick new words on the paper, this strategy helps me to cope with speaking difficulties”.

A seventh student: “I use the strategies like watching movies with subtitles, sometime I read books in English and then retell them to my friend”

An eighth student: “I watch TV programs in English, listen to the news in English and try to discuss them with my family members who speaks English”.

Based on the results of interview, it can be summarized that EFL students have their strategies in overcoming the difficulties in speaking skills. Most of the students attend English language courses to improve speaking abilities, try to memorize new English words. The vocabulary accuracy is essential to understand speaking context, sufficiency of vocabulary repertoire encourages EFL students to speak in the target language and to understand other people.

Moreover, the students also believe that sufficient speaking practice strengthens their speaking proficiency, the other respondents highlighted that watching, reading and listening authentic materials helped them to overcome speaking difficulties and progressed their speaking skills.

To answer the second question, the responses of EFL students were analyzed, the findings demonstrated that the effect of speaking strategies applied by students positively affected on their speaking performance.

(2) What are the effects of these speaking strategies on students' speaking performance?

One of the respondents stated: "The strategies used by me helped me to cope with speaking difficulties, I became more confident in speaking English". Another student "The employed strategies really helped me to improve my speaking practice"; The third student mentioned "a lot of practice enhanced my speaking abilities"; the fourth students "my strategy of learning several words in a day positively affected on my speaking skills, I can express myself freely, as know more words"; the fifth student: "I tried to read more books, watch movies in English, and this effectively reflected on my speaking practice". Overall, it can be concluded that the use of speaking acquisition strategies by EFL learners effectively results on their speaking performance.

*Conclusion*

In summary, previous studies conducted by various researches demonstrated that the EFL students mostly applied metacognitive, cognitive, social and communication learning strategies in speaking (Gani, Fajrina & Hanifa, 2015; Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Rubin, 1987 as cited in Zare, 2012). The findings of current study revealed that four speaking strategies were employed by EFL students of secondary schools in solving their speaking difficulties, these strategies correlate with the findings of some previous studies (Gani, Fajrina & Hanifa, 2015; Nurhanifa and Widayanti (2012) cited in Heriyansyah (2012; Yang, 2014). The most

common speaking acquisition strategies employed by EFL students were attending English language courses, organizing extra curriculum activities, memorizing new words, practicing the target language outside the classroom and using authentic materials. It was also discovered that above mentioned speaking strategies enhanced EFL students' speaking proficiency.



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