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Usage of Oral Communication Strategies (OCSs) among Pakistani ESL Learners at BS Level

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Abstract

In Pakistan, English is taught and learned as a second language and continues to play a vital role in higher education, professional communication, and official dealings. Despite studying English for approximately 12–14 years, many ESL learners still demonstrate limited oral communication competence. One possible explanation for this issue is the insufficient use of Oral Communication Strategies (OCSs), defined as verbal and non-verbal techniques employed to overcome communication difficulties arising from limited linguistic competence.

The present study investigated the extent to which Pakistani ESL learners employ OCSs and examined eight major categories of these strategies: Social-Affective Strategies, Fluency-Oriented Strategies, Negotiation for Meaning While Speaking, Accuracy-Oriented Strategies, Message Reduction and Alteration Strategies, Non-Verbal Strategies While Speaking, Message Abandonment Strategies, and Attempt-to-Think-in-English Strategies.

A total of 1,140 students enrolled in BS and Master's degree programs across ten universities in Pakistan participated in the study. Using a descriptive quantitative research design, data were collected through a self-report survey questionnaire. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 20, and measures including mean, median, mode, and standard deviation were calculated.

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The findings revealed that the overall usage of the 32 selected OCSs fell within the medium utilization category. Furthermore, the eight categories of oral communication strategies were ranked according to their frequency of usage among participants. Based on these findings, recommendations are proposed for language teachers, curriculum planners, material developers, policymakers, and researchers to enhance oral communication competence among Pakistani ESL learners through targeted instruction of oral communication strategies.

Keywords: Oral Communication Strategies; ESL.

Introduction

English Language in Pakistan is a second language that carries a lot of importance because it was a language which used to be an official language along with being the language of higher education and science. The aim of the study of English language is the acquisition of communicative competence among ESL learners through the medium of English language. However, according to the research carried out in this field, it is observed that ESL learners in Pakistan lack proficiency in spoken communication skills even though English has been taught to them for 12 – 14 years as a compulsory subject (Coleman, 2010; Ghani, 2003).

The prime reason for teaching English as L2 is to help the learners learn English as a means of oral communication. But regrettably, the objective of teaching English as L2 is a miserable failure in our educational system. According to Ghani (2003), the poor quality of oral communicative skills of ESL students in Pakistan can be stated as follows: The problem of poor standard of English language in Pakistan is not a new one. It has been observed that most of the students, even after studying English for 7-11 years, are not able to speak or comprehend in English. In Urdu medium schools, there is hardly any student who could speak English fluently (p.111).

English language instruction in Pakistan has largely evolved into a text-oriented teaching activity (Ghani, Mahmood, & Akram, 2008, p. 2). Such an approach has fostered such

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evaluation and assessment practices as give limited attention to the communicative dimension of language learning. Consequently, instructors attempting to create interactive classroom environments often encounter considerable challenges, as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) continues to dominate instructional and assessment procedures. Since examination systems remain heavily dependent on GTM-oriented outcomes, teachers who deviate from this tradition frequently struggle to achieve satisfactory academic results. Oral communication, like other practical competencies such as driving, swimming, typing, or painting, requires systematic skill development. Unfortunately, English is commonly treated as an academic subject rather than a communicative skill (Schofield & Mamuna, 2003, p. 3). Although modifications have been introduced in examination formats and marking procedures over time, substantial progress in developing spoken English competence has remained limited. Traditional emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, and composition alone is insufficient for cultivating effective communicative ability. The development of speaking proficiency is a gradual process, particularly in a second language context, and inadequate employment of Oral Communication Strategies (OCSs) may further hinder this development.

Significance of the Study

Interest in English language education and the use of English as a medium of instruction remains exceptionally strong in Pakistan. As Shamim (2011) observed, “English is the passport to success and upward social mobility and English is the key to national progress” (p. 2). The Pakistani people place immense value to learning the English language. This is since they realize the importance of the English language not only at a national but also at an international level. The importance of English is mentioned below by a former education minister of Pakistan:

Because our future economy depends upon the growth of IT sector, it can be stated very evidently that we know the significance of increasing the use of English language. It is a

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necessity for the masses, and as such, it is the responsibility of the government to meet this necessity (Jalal, 2004, P.24).

Within the education system, socio-economic system and political system of Pakistan, advantages are mostly linked to the level of use of ESL. According to Mansoor (2003), the current status of ESL in Pakistan is that “Pakistanis see English as an international business language and the only language that will allow them to communicate internationally and conduct business with people from all over the world” (p. 38). Therefore, education system of Pakistan is built on the teaching of English as a compulsory subject in order to get the required ESL proficiency as a gateway to national and international business and job market.

Statement of the Problem

In Pakistan’s education sector, the teaching of English lacks oral skills. When one teaches any language, it involves four skills which include: listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. In the history of English Second Language (ESL) teaching, the issue of teaching English in Pakistan has always been concerned with reading and writing skills. It is therefore understandable that listening and speaking skills have always been neglected in many years now. However, language experts state that when teaching any language as L2, all the four skills need to be treated equally. Unfortunately, this has never been the practice in Pakistan’s English language teaching, which puts much more emphasis on reading and writing than listening and speaking.

English education in Pakistan’s educational system is not being provided properly. The performance of Pakistani ESL learners both at secondary school and university levels is found to be very poor in terms of oral communication skills. As noted by Shamim (2011), “The existing level of proficiency in English language of the school and university graduates is inadequate relative to the popular demand for English in Pakistan.” (p. 6). Similarly, Mushtaq (2014) provided some insights on the issue related to the low

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proficiency of ESL learners from Pakistan in terms of oral communicative competence, stating that "In the case of Pakistani learners, they lack the ability to communicate effectively. The Pakistani speakers of the English language are also facing many difficulties in oral communication." (p. 278). Therefore, this study is meant to aid and support oral communication skill in ESL context in Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. What is the overall level of use of OCSs among BS students in Pakistan?
2. What is the level of use of 8 types of OCSs among BS students in Pakistan?
3. What is the comparative level of use of 8 types of OCSs among BS students in Pakistan?

Research Methodology

The current study was descriptive in its type and survey research design was adopted for finding out answers to the relevant issues raised. Survey research design was used with the help of survey questionnaire in order to obtain the information required to find out the frequency of using OCSs and eight categories of OCSs.

Population

All the students who were pursuing their education at the university level in Pakistan formed the population of this current study.

Sample

The sample for this research was selected using the random sampling method, which comprised:

There are 10 universities, with 5 being from Punjab, 2 from Sindh, 1 from the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 1 from Baluchistan, and 1 from Islamabad. There are 6 departments from each university. There will be 20 students from each department.

Tool of Research

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A self-reported survey questionnaire developed from Oral Communication Strategies Inventory (OCSI) developed by Nakatani (2006) was adopted for gathering the necessary data from the sample.

Analysis of Data

The analysis was done using the statistical software named SPSS version 20. The process of data analysis included the use of descriptive statistics like mean, mode, median and standard deviation. Some of the survey questionnaires received from the respondents, were incomplete, filled with a non-serious behavior and were invalid. Such questionnaires were excluded from the data analysis. Therefore, 1140 respondents were considered the true sample for this study.

In descriptive statistical analysis, numbers can be used for representation of the responses of the participants. In descriptive statistics, mean scores of OCSs used against each survey questionnaire items were found. The scale of OCSs was determined using the 5-point Likert scale with values ranging from 1 to 5. While interpreting the results during data analysis, a mean score that is found between the range $M=1.0$ to 2.4 represents low usage of OCSs, whereas a mean score range between $M=2.5-3.4$ represents medium usage of OCSs, and a mean score between $M=3.5-5.0$ indicates high usage of OCSs. High weightage is given to highest number values for high usage category of respondents over low usage category of respondents.

Research Question No. 1

What is the overall level of use of OCSs among BS students in Pakistan?

Table 1: In total usage of Oral Communication Strategies (OCS's)

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N	1140
Mean	3.41
Median	3.00
Mode	3
Std. Deviation	.601

Table 1 summarizes the overall utilization of Oral Communication Strategies (OCSs) among the respondents. The analysis was based on responses to 32 questionnaire items measured through a five-point Likert scale. The obtained mean score was 3.41, while the median value was 3, indicating that a substantial proportion of participants selected responses around the midpoint of the scale. The calculated standard deviation of 0.601 demonstrates a relatively narrow range of responses, suggesting that participants exhibited comparable patterns in their use of communication strategies. Overall, the findings indicate that the respondents employed OCSs at a moderate level according to the established interpretation criteria.

Research Question No. 2

What is the level of use of 8 types of OCSs among BS students in Pakistan?

Table 2: Use of Social Affective (SA OCSs)

N	1140
Mean	3.81
Median	4.00
Mode	4
Std. Deviation	.828

Table 2 represents the extent of SA OCSs usage. Respondents were presented with 6 questions regarding their experience with SA OCSs and were asked to rate their level on 5-point Likert scale. As per Social affective OCSs, 1140 respondents scored average mark of 3.81, while the median value is 4; thus, it may be concluded that most respondents received marks 4. Standard deviation from the average mark was determined as 0.828; it reflects the average level of score increase/decrease relative to the average

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mark. The value of standard deviation was very low, meaning that there was very little variation in responses; thus, the sample was characterized by high correspondence in the extent of SA OCSs usage.

Table3: Use of Fluency Oriented (FO OCSs)

N	1140
Mean	3.79
Median	4.00
Mode	4
Std. Deviation	.823

Table 3 provides the total utilization of FO OCSs. The respondents were asked a total of 6 questions relating to FO OCSs. Each question was measured on a scale of 1-5. After presenting the fluency-oriented OCSs to the respondents, they obtained mean score of 3.79 and mode 4. This suggests that a good number of respondents scored 4. The standard deviation from the average score was recorded as 0.823, indicating the average upward or downward deviation from the average. The deviation score was quite low, suggesting that there was minimal variation among respondents' scores. Hence, the sample had very similar levels of usage of the OCSs. From the results, the usage level of FO OCSs fell within the high level of adoption range (M=3.5-5.0).

Table 4: Use Negotiation for Meaning While Speaking Strategies (NMS OCSs)

N	1140
Mean	3.81
Median	4.00
Mode	4
Std. Deviation	.967

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Table 4 illustrates the respondents' usage of Negotiation for Meaning While Speaking (NMS) Oral Communication Strategies. Data for this category were obtained from four questionnaire items assessed through a five-point Likert scale. The analysis of responses from 1,140 participants produced a mean score of 3.81 and a median value of 4, indicating a generally positive tendency toward the use of these strategies. The standard deviation was recorded at 0.967, reflecting a relatively limited dispersion of responses around the mean. This pattern suggests that participants demonstrated comparable levels of usage of NMS strategies. Based on the predetermined interpretation scale, the use of NMS OCSs can be categorized as high (M = 3.5–5.0).

Table 5: Use of Accuracy Oriented (AO OCSs)

N	1140
Mean	3.78
Median	4.00
Mode	4
Std. Deviation	.805

Table 5 represents the overall usage of AO OCSs. In order to measure the use of AO OCSs, five questions related to AO OCSs were asked from the participants and the answers were measured on the basis of five-point Likert scale. As for the Accuracy Oriented OCSs, a total of 1140 respondents attained a mean score of 3.78 and median score of 4. This suggests that most of the respondents attained a score of four. The SD from the mean score was found to be 0.805 which means the deviation above and below the mean score. The value of standard deviation was quite less which indicates that there was not much variability in the data. This implies that the sample used for research had a quite similar level of AO OCS usage.

Table 6: Use of Message Reduction and Alteration (MRA OCSs)

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N	1140
Mean	3.68
Median	4.00
Mode	4
Std. Deviation	.873

Table 6 reveals the total usage level of MRA OCSs. The three questions were put to the respondent regarding MRA OCSs and these were rated through 5 point Likert scale. The mean score of Message Reduction and Alteration OCSs for the sample respondents was 3.68, while the median was 4. It shows that the most of the respondents have given their rating four. The SD of the mean is 0.873. Standard deviation gives the difference in score from the mean. The standard deviation score is very low which indicates that there is hardly any variation in the scores obtained by the respondents. Therefore, sample had very similar level of usage.

Table 7: Application of Non-Verbal Techniques When Speaking (NSSs OCSs)

N	1140
Mean	3.60
Median	4.00
Mode	4
Std. Deviation	1.065

Table 7 gives the total use of NSS OCSs. The participants in the survey were presented with two questions regarding NSS OCSs, each based on a five-point Likert scale. When answering Nonverbal Strategies While Speaking OCSs, 1140 participants achieved an average score of 3.60, while their median was 4, suggesting that the majority of them achieved 4. The standard deviation of the mean score was 1.065, implying that there was an average variation from the mean. The standard deviation was small, implying that there was no much variation in answers. It suggests that the participants were almost the same in terms of level of use. The result implied high level of use (M=3.5-5.0).

Table 8: Use of Message Abandonment (MA OCSs)

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N	1140
Mean	3.43
Median	3.00
Mode	3
Std. Deviation	.819

The usage rate for MA OCSs is described in Table 8. The questions used in the research for this category consisted of 4 questions, where each was based on the five-point Likert scale. As per the Message Abandonment OCSs usage, 1140 respondents provided the mean score of 3.43 with median value as 3. This implies that the majority of respondents provided score of 3. The standard deviation was 0.819 from the mean score, indicating average up or down scores from the mean. The standard deviation was quite small, indicating low variation in responses. This implies that the level of usage is quite similar in case of the sample respondents.

Table 9: Usage of Attempt-to-Think-in-English Communication Strategies (ATE OCSs)

N	1140
Mean	3.40
Median	3.00
Mode	4
Std. Deviation	1.059

Table 9 reflects the extent of usage of ATE OCSs as a whole. The two items regarding ATE OCSs were rated according to a five-point Likert scale. According to the item ATE OCSs”, a total of 1140 respondents achieved an average score of 3.40 and a median of 3. This indicates that the majority of respondents scored 4. Standard deviation from the average score was achieved at 1.059. This figure reflected the amount of deviation upwards or downwards from the average score. The value for standard deviation was low, which reflected consistency in the responses, implying that the sample was consistent regarding the level of usage. This reflected that the use of ATE OCSs could be categorized under the medium range (M=2.5-3.4).

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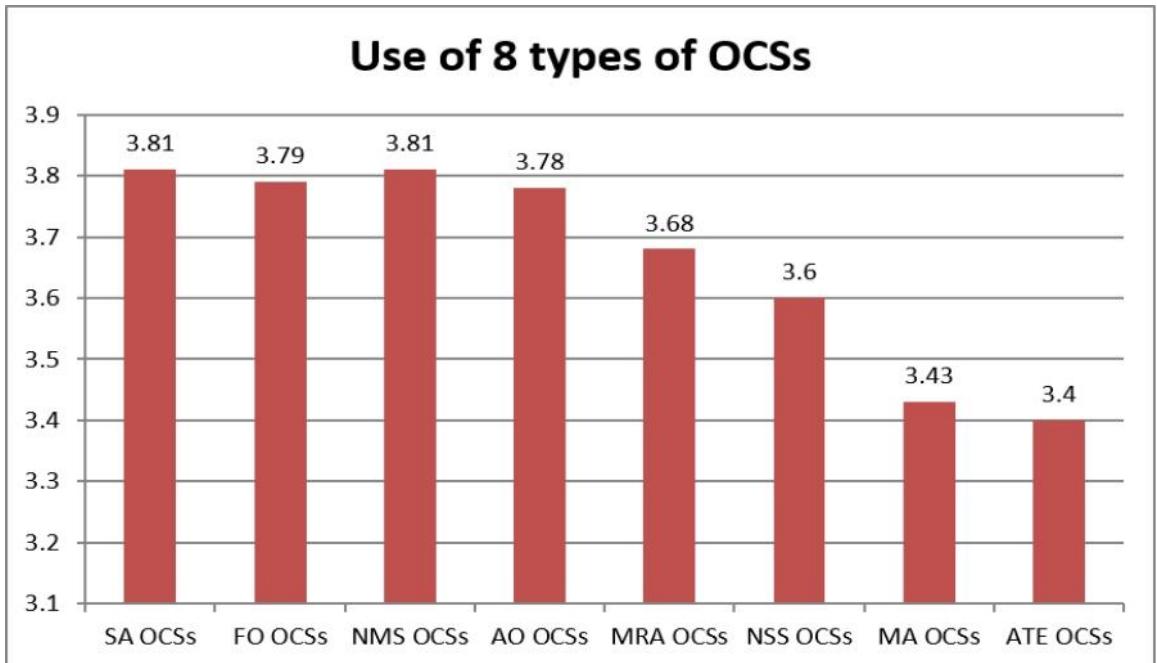
Research Question No. 3

What is the comparative level of use of 8 types of OCSs among BS students in Pakistan?

Table 10: Ranking 8 different kinds of OCSs based on their usage as per the values of mean score

Sr. No	Name of OCSs	Mean	Ranking
1.	SA OCSs	3.81	1
2.	NMS OCSs	3.81	1
3.	FO OCSs	3.79	2
4.	AO OCSs	3.78	3
5.	MRA OCSs	3.68	4
6.	NSS OCSs	3.60	5
7.	MA OCSs	3.43	6
8.	ATE OCSs	3.40	7

Table 10 presents a comparative overview of the eight categories of Oral Communication Strategies based on their respective mean scores. The findings indicate that Social-Affective (SA) OCSs and Negotiation for Meaning While Speaking (NMS) OCSs demonstrated the highest level of utilization among the respondents, each attaining a mean score of 3.81. Fluency-Oriented (FO) OCSs followed 2nd position with a mean value of 3.79, while Accuracy-Oriented (AO) OCSs recorded a mean score of 3.78 and got 3rd position. Message Reduction and Alteration (MRA) OCSs occupied the 4th position with a mean of 3.68. Nonverbal Strategies While Speaking (NSS) OCSs achieved 5th position with a mean score of 3.60. Message Abandonment (MA) OCSs and Attempt-to-Think-in-English (ATE) OCSs exhibited comparatively lower mean values of 3.43 and 3.40, respectively and obtained 6th and 7th position respectively. Overall, the results reveal variations in the preference and frequency of strategy use among the different categories of OCSs. The graph below shows the same results.



Graph 1: Ranking of 8 different kinds of OCSs based on their usage as per the values of mean score

Discussion on Findings:

Research Question 1

Based on the result from the study, it was determined that all levels of Oral Communication Strategies OCSs fall under the category of medium usage level ($M = 2.5 - 3.4$).

Research Question 2

The findings indicated that the usage of SA OCSs ($M = 3.81$) is high ($M = 3.5-5.0$).

The findings revealed that the usage of FO OCSs ($M = 3.79$) is high ($M = 3.5-5.0$).

The findings revealed that the usage of NMS OCSs ($M = 3.81$) is high ($M = 3.5-5.0$).

The findings revealed that the usage of AO OCSs ($M = 3.78$) is high ($M = 3.5-5.0$).

The findings revealed that the usage of MRA OCSs ($M = 3.68$) is high ($M = 3.5-5.0$).

The findings revealed that the usage of NSS OCSs ($M = 3.60$) is high ($M = 3.5-5.0$).

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The findings revealed that the usage of MA OCSs ($M = 3.43$) is medium ($M = 2.5-3.4$).

The findings revealed that the usage of ATE OCSs ($M = 3.40$) is medium ($M = 2.5-3$).

Research Question 3

From the findings obtained from the study, it is evident that among the eight categories OCSs, the SA OCSs and NMS were found to be ranked first based on their usage by the respondents with an average value of 3.81. The FO OCSs were ranked second based on their usage by the respondents with an average value of 3.79. The AO OCSs were ranked third based on their usage by the respondents with an average value of 3.78. The MRA OCSs were ranked fourth based on their usage by the respondents with an average value of 3.68. The NSS OCSs were ranked fifth based on their usage by the respondents with an average value of 3.60. The MA OCSs were ranked sixth based on their usage by the respondents with an average value of 3.43. The ATE OCSs were ranked seventh based on their usage by the respondents with an average value of 3.40.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

1. The respondents have stated that they use OCSs and there are eight different kinds of OCSs. Around fifty percent of the respondents from the ESL learners sample were observed to use OCSs in a low and medium frequency, while the rest of the respondents from the other fifty percent sample used OCSs at high frequency. On the basis of conclusions, it is recommended that all the respondents must be assisted in shifting themselves from the domains of 'low' and 'medium' frequency to the domain of 'high' frequency of usage.
2. The material writers or developers could follow the results of this research while preparing text books for teaching and training of OCSs and 8 different types of OCSs. The results of this research have provided ranking to all 8 different types of OCSs on the basis of use by the students. In all 8 types of OCSs, the following has been found at number one and two position respectively; SA OCSs and NMS OCSs; second; FO

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- OCSs; third; AO OCSs; fourth; MRA OCSs; fifth; NSS OCSs; sixth; MA OCSs; seventh; and last but not the least, ATE OCSs. All 8 different types of OCSs could be arranged in textbooks in the order of their ranking for early to higher level classes etc.
3. Oral skills in English language are important part that needs to be considered when evaluating students' ability to speak English. Some marks need to be allocated to the oral skills in the scheme of study in English second language, which may range from minimum 10 marks to maximum 30 marks. Scheme of study or marks division can be made in accordance with the eight types of OCSs. This will enable the ESL teachers and ESL learners to develop their oral skills in English. With the help of OCSs and eight types of OCSs, they can demonstrate their competency in oral skills in English language and get good results in exams with enhanced oral skills and ESL communication.
 4. The government of Pakistan must make efforts for providing educational institutes with the language laboratory. Such laboratories must contain necessary software, computers, internet connectivity, etc. for teaching the language. Language laboratories will provide an interactive environment to the learners which will help teach OCS in a better manner. It will not only enhance the usage of OCS and eight different types of OCSs but also the usage of ESL for verbal communication.

Limitations of the study and Research Gap

1. The proposed research can adopt a research methodology involving experiments relating to the usage of OCS as well as for syllabus development because of the usefulness of the information gathered regarding OCSs which would prove beneficial in designing the whole module related to the teaching and training of OCS.
2. Keeping in view the aspect of assessment, further studies could be conducted in order to devise a proper evaluation system based on exercise/questions which would assess

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ESL learners' expertise in using OCSs. Marks scheme could be devised for this purpose too.

3. There are two parts of OCSI (Nakatani, 2006), and altogether there are 58 coping strategies. The first one is comprised of 32 coping strategies for handling speaking problems, while the second includes 26 strategies for dealing with listening problems. This study deals only with the problems related to speaking and therefore, the listening strategies that were not focused can be a focus for future research as a research program could be initiated which will deal with listening problems.

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