An Investigation into the Use of Oral Communication Strategies by Senior Kurdish EFL University Students

Sakar Hussein Mikaeli , Barham Sattar Abdulrahman

Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Sulaimani, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq

Abstract

   The use of Oral Communication Strategies (OCSs) by Senior Kurdish EFL (English as a Foreign Language) university students to overcome communication breakdowns and the thoughts of their instructors in this regard was the center of focus in this study. A thirty-three-item questionnaire was given to the students from different Iraqi Kurdistan Region universities; they were chosen through stratified sampling. Moreover, the instructors' opinions on their students' communication and communication strategies were uncovered through a semi-structured interview. The quantitative data were analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) 26.0 software and thematic analysis was used in analyzing the interviews. The results showed that the Kurdish EFL students employed most of the strategies with different ranges and the most widely used group of strategies were interactional strategies. Furthermore, the t-test outcome suggested that there were not significant relationship between the use of OCSs by male and female students. The results of the study require instructors and curriculum designers to include OCSs in their classes more, directly or indirectly, to guarantee better learning outcomes since the students always attempt to have better oral communication.

1. Introduction

Communication as a process is used to share information, ideas and feelings through employing symbols for sending/receiving messages occurring in a context with some effect and feedback opportunity (Verderber, 1994; Samovar & Mills, 1998; Santon, 2004, Baldwin et al., 2014; DeVito, 2018). In a normal conversation, speech communication happens in an environment with a mixture of conversations of the other speakers and immediate sounds in the environment (Miller et al., 1995). To provide a comprehensive understanding of communication in everyday life, Duck and McMahan (2018) mention seven of its major characteristics as: symbolic, requiring meaning, cultural, relational, involving frames, both presentational and representational, and transaction.

Speaking requires plenty of mental processes that for language learners might not function ideally in the case of language learners who want to have a fluent and accurate speech. Thus, hesitation, break, and other forms of complication can be found in the speech of language learners (Goh& Burns, 2012). In an EFL/ESL (English as a Second Language) context, the concept of communication is connected with a number of issues. Hedge (2000) claims that when language learners do not have sufficient background knowledge, they tend to use strategies called communication strategies. In addition, Corder (1981) defines

communicative strategies as "a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty". By difficulty, he refers to expressing insufficient ability of the target language speaker used in the conversation. To Tarone, communication strategy was two interlocutors attempt to share an agreement on the meaning of certain expression when the intended linguistic and sociolinguistic meaning was not found (1980). Additionally, Grenfell and Harris (1999) point out that communication strategies are instruments owned by learners for making sense of face-to-face conversations and surviving communication breakdowns.

As Corder (1981) emphasizes, communication strategies are employed by all the speakers, native and non-native. Hence, no one can deny that communication strategies are used by Kurdish EFL university students since, as Long (1983) claims, these strategies help them avoiding troubles in conversation and it is obvious that, as Bygate (1987) points out, learners tend to use oral communication strategies when they do not have target language mastery.

The current study aimed at answering the following research questions:

A) What are the OCSs used by Kurdish EFL learners?

B) What are the mostly used strategies?

C) What is the role of gender in using strategies?

D) What are the thoughts of instructors about their students' communication and strategy use?

2. Oral Communication Strategies

The source of academic development of many second and/or foreign language learners can be associated with speaking as it has a positive role in learners' language acquisition (Goh & Burns, 2012). As Perrin and Kleinberger (2017) have explained, the world can be a more predictable and manageable place through a successful communication. On the contrary, misunderstandings accompanied by lacking comprehension might cause well-expected collaborations become complicated if not unworkable.

Through the results of his study, Törnqvist (2008) indicates that oral communication is a vital component of English teaching both for instructors as well as learners. This claim is supported by the fact that nowadays to have the ability of oral self-expression is significant and makes students employ the target language mainly by themselves. Furthermore, Murphy (1991) considers oral communication to be a combination of interrelated processes of language and paying attention to a single section requires focus to others simultaneously. According to Nugroho (2019), communication strategies are one of the main factors in the development process of the speaking skill of learners. Nakatani (2005) believes that strategies of oral communication pay attention to oral interaction and negotiation behavior of interlocutors to cope with breakdowns of communication. As Putri (2013) states, these strategies are thought to have a straightforward impact on the process of communication and second language acquisition through having an open channel between learners for providing input.

2.1 Taxonomies

According to Floyd (2018), there are various taxonomies and divisions of the types of communication strategies since none of the communication strategies can be used suitably within every context. Tarone et al. (1976) classify communication strategies into two major types: overelaboration and avoidance. Meanwhile, Faerch and Kasper (1980) pay much attention to the criteria of problem-orientedness and consciousness to derive at psycholinguistic strategies and communication strategies. They grouped the strategies into formal reduction, functional reduction, and achievement strategies. As to Willems (1987), communication strategies are of two fundamental kinds: reduction (i.e., formal and functional) and achievement (i.e., paralinguistic, inter-lingual and intra-lingual strategies). Dörnyei & Scott's classification which consists of: direct strategies as resource deficit-related

strategies {message abandonment, message reduction, message replacement, circumlocution, approximation}, use of all-purpose words {word-coinage, restructuring, literal translation, foreignizing, code switching}, use of similar-sounding words{mumbling, omission, retrieval, mime}, own-performance problem-related strategies {self-rephrasing, self-repair}, other-performance problem-related strategies and other-repair (1997).

While interactional strategies are resource deficit-related strategies (appeals for help), own-performance problem-related strategies (comprehension check, own-accuracy check), other-performance problem-related strategies (asking for repetition, asking for clarification, asking for confirmation, guessing, expressing non-understanding, interpretive summary, and responses). Finally, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) mentioned indirect strategies such as processing time pressure-related strategies (use of fillers, repetitions), own-performance problem-related strategies (verbal strategy markers), other-performance problem-related strategies (feigning understanding). In their review Dörnyei and Scott provided an inventory of strategic language devices which included the names of 33 strategies with their definitions, example and more detail (1997). This last inventory is adopted and adapted for data collection in the current study.

2.2 Previous Studies

A number of different studies have been conducted regarding communication strategies in various educational contexts. To reveal its significance, the current study reviews four studies: Yaman and Özcan (2015), Maldonado (2016), Nurwahyuningsih et al. (2019), and Daudi (2019).

In their study, Yaman and Özcan (2015) focus on the most common oral communication strategies used by EFL Turkish students. The researchers employ Turkish culture specifically developed Strategy Inventory of Oral Communication (SIOC) which was given to 294 participants (217 female and 77 male) of Mersin University's ELT Department. Beside the strategy type, the impact of language proficiency level and gender are also taken into consideration. SPSS, descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test and also the Mann-Whitney U test, one-way ANOVA Tests are used for data analysis. The results display that the students mainly used negotiation for meaning and compensatory strategies with proficiency having no affective role while gender to be source of great difference. Moreover, to achieve best outcomes in conversations and overcoming communication breakdowns, the study recommends teaching strategies to EFL students.

Through having a descriptive, correlational and cross-sectional study with quantitative and qualitative research methods, Maldonado (2016) focuses on the impact of proficiency level on the use of strategies by Spanish learners of English at Chilean universities. The study depends on three informal conversations outside classroom between 9 selected students (3 male and 6 female) and a native speaker and a post interview to confirm the results and Dörnyei and Körmos' taxonomy (1998) is adapted to evaluate them. The study concludes that lower level students use communication strategies more comparing to higher proficiency level students.

Nurwahyuningsih et al. (2019) have conducted a qualitative descriptive study to investigate the communication strategies used by Indonesian ELT students in advanced speaking classroom activities. For data collection, video and audio recorders are used in observing a 35-student classroom observation and interviewing 4 students; conversational analysis is used for the data obtained from the later tool. The researchers find out that fourteen communication strategies divided in three categories of direct, indirect and interactional strategies are frequently used and some new strategies derived from the context (i.e., fillers, self-repetition, self-repair, codeswitching, and asking for repetition) are also the same. This could be helpful for learners who intend to learn a new language.

Finally, in order to pay much attention to types and frequency of oral communication

strategies, Daudi (2019) has collected 107 responses from Algerian EFL university students using a questionnaire. The quantitative data is collected through adopting Nakatani's 32 items in 8 categories of Inventory of Oral Communication Strategy and analyzed through descriptive statistics. Achievement strategies; accuracy-based strategies, social affective strategies and fluency-oriented strategies are found to be employed to overcome speaking difficulties. In addition, the researcher uses these results to derive at the conclusion about the effect of teaching communication strategies as a part of teaching curriculum to raise EFL learners' awareness.

3. The Study Instruments

Mackey and Gass (2012) state that questionnaire is the most widely used approach of collecting more data with considerable cost and in a shorter limit of time. To collect the present study data, both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed. The quantitative data is gathered by means of a 33-item Likert scale questionnaire with five options, namely never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always which is given to the students of four different universities of Iraqi Kurdistan region (i.e., University of Sulaimani, Salahaddin University-Erbil, University of Duhok, and University of Halabja). In order to have more accurate data, another instrument is used to support the first one. Hence, the qualitative data is collected through conducting a semi-structured interview with eleven university instructors.

3.1 Participants and Sampling

Population of the quantitative data is 372 senior students and the sample size of 200 participants is chosen; 132 female and 68 male students answer the questionnaire as shown in Table 1. The participants are classified through probability sampling and stratified sampling is used to collect the survey data. For the qualitative part, 11 instructors (i.e., MA and PhD holders) from four public universities in the Iraqi Kurdistan region are interviewed through non-probability, purposive sampling. Using one-

on-one interview, the very well-known research approach of qualitative data collection and telephone interview is used with those instructors who are living far from the researcher (Creswell, 2012).

Table 1: Distribution of the Participants of the Quantitative Data

University	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Sulaimani	16	34	50
Salahaddin-Erbil	17	33	50
Duhok	15	35	50
Halabja	20	30	50
Total	68	132	200
Average	34 %	66 %	100 %

3.2 Reliability and Validity

Although measuring validity is not an easy task, yet for the test of content validity, the tools and items of the study are evaluated by 12 jury members from a number of national and international universities (e.g., Sulaimani, Utah State, Salahaddin-Erbil, Duhok, Al-Hamdaniya, Mosul, Charmo, Diyala, and Newroz). The jurors' comments, suggestions, recommendations, and notes are taken into consideration for the final version of the questionnaire and interview (cf. Kothari, 2004). The questionnaire items are tested for reliability which as "an instrument is the degree of consistency with which it measures whatever it is purported to measure" (Ary et al., 2014, p. 253). The inter-item correlations for internal consistency are analyzed through Chronbach alpha, as shown in Table 2, and the result is 0.807 where 0.80–0.90 is considered highly reliable (Cohen et al., 2018)

Table 2: Reliability of the Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
0.807	33

13	28	39	86	34	13	14.0	19.5	43.0	17.0	6.5
15	32	46	78	35	9	16.0	23.0	39.0	17.5	4.5
16	7	22	56	56	59	3.5	11.0	28.0	28.0	29.5
17	10	24	65	64	37	5.0	12.0	32.5	32	18.5
18	7	37	93	51	12	3.5	18.5	46.5	25.5	6
19	8	19	49	64	60	4	9.5	24.5	32	30

4. Results and Data Analysis

The quantitative part of the study is analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0 for the following: descriptive statistics, frequency, mean, mode, independent T-test. While for the qualitative part thematic analysis is employed. The interviews are transcribed, coded and then the themes and sub-themes were found.

Research Question One: What are the oral communication strategies used by Kurdish EFL learners?

In order to find the OCSs used by Kurdish EFL senior university students, frequency and percentage for each item of the student questionnaire are calculated. CSs used are divided in the three types: direct, interactional, and indirect strategies, as suggested by (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997).

a. Direct Strategies

The results of the frequency given in Table 3 for the direct strategies shows that 88 participants of the study claim their use of message abandonment sometimes, 141 to be using approximation often or always. On the other hand, 31.0% and 23% of the respondents respond with never and rarely for using foreignizing as an oral communication strategy respectively.

Table 3 : The Frequency and Percentage of Direct Strategies

| Item No. | Frequency | | | | | Percentage | | | | |
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	46	48	88	15	3	23.0	24.0	44	7.5	1.5
2	12	28	57	69	34	6.0	14.0	28.5	34.5	17.0
3	11	36	80	56	17	5.5	18.0	40	28.0	8.5
4	6	13	40	91	50	3.0	6.5	20	45.5	25.0
5	9	17	80	55	39	4.5	8.5	40	27.5	19.5
6	22	45	77	37	19	11.0	22.5	385	18.5	9.5
7	14	38	85	48	15	7.0	19	42.5	24	7.5
8	32	53	55	45	15	16.0	26.5	27.5	22.5	7.5
9	62	46	50	32	10	31.0	23.0	25.0	16.0	5.0
10	45	55	61	28	11	22.5	27.5	30.5	14.0	5.5
11	37	43	62	42	16	18.5	21.5	31.0	21.0	8.0
12	36	49	66	29	20	18.0	24.5	33.0	14.5	10.0

b. interactional Strategies

Table 4 shows the frequency and percentage of the interactional OCSs used by the participants. According to the results presented, 79 participants claim to be using "asking for clarification" as an OCS often times. Meanwhile, the scores for never and rarely used strategies are between 4.0% and 21.0% for all the interactional strategies.

Table 4: The Frequency and Percentage of Interactional Strategies

| Item No. | Frequency | | | | | Percentage | | | | |
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
14	17	28	77	52	26	8.5	14.0	38.5	26.0	13.0
23	9	29	72	57	33	4.5	14.5	36	28.5	16.5
25	16	42	73	43	26	8.0	21.0	36.5	21.5	13
26	10	19	59	70	42	5.0	9.5	29.5	35	21
27	12	24	53	56	55	6.0	12.0	26.5	28	27.5
28	9	11	48	79	53	4.5	5.5	24.	39.5	26.5
29	11	40	64	73	12	5.5	20.0	32	36.5	6
30	8	32	87	51	22	4.0	16.0	43.5	25.5	11
31	12	31	69	60	28	6.0	15.5	34.5	30	14
32	11	35	62	65	27	5.5	17.5	31	32.5	13.5
33	18	30	93	41	18	9.0	15.0	56.5	20.5	9

c. Indirect Strategies

The third category of strategies used by Kurdish EFL university students is indirect strategies. The following table reveals that 59 of the respondents claim using fillers sometimes and 49 show more usage by answering as always. Nevertheless, only 5.5 % select as never using feigning understanding as a strategy in their oral communication.

Table 5: The Frequency and Percentage of Indirect Strategies

Item no.	Frequency					Percentage				
	Never	Rarely	Sometime	Often	Always	Never	Rarely	Sometime	Often	Always
20	6	23	69	53	49	3	11.5	34.5	26.5	24.5
21	20	50	54	51	25	10	25	27	25.5	12.5
22	11	41	89	39	20	5.5	20.5	44.5	19.5	10
24	15	33	79	50	23	7.5	16.5	39.5	25	11.5

Research Question Two: What are the mostly used strategies?

After calculating the mode for every item of the questionnaire, it is found that there are only one strategy with the mode of "always" and it was self-repair with the mean of 3.69. Meanwhile, the mode often with the given means were chosen for circumlocution: 3.43, approximation: 3.83, non-linguistic strategies: 3.75, guessing: 3.58, asking for repetition: 3.59, asking for clarification: 3.78, indirect appeal for help: 3.18, and interpretive summary: 3.31. The mode of "never" was highlighted in foreignizing only with 2.41 as the mean. Consider the following table 6.

Table 6: Mean and Mode of the OCSs Used by Kurdish EFL University Students

Item No.	OCSs	Mode	Mean
1	Message Abandonment	sometimes	2.41
2	Circumlocution	often	3.43
3	Topic Avoidance	sometimes	3.16
4	Approximation	often	3.83
5	Use of All-purpose Words	sometimes	3.49
6	Word Coinage	sometimes	2.93
7	Message Replacement	sometimes	3.06
8	Literal Translation	sometimes	2.79
9	Foreignizing	never	2.41
10	Code Switching	sometimes	2.53
11	Use of Similar Sounding Words	sometimes	2.79
12	Mumbling	sometimes	2.74
13	Omission	sometimes	2.83
14	Comprehension Check	sometimes	3.21
15	Retrieval	sometimes	2.72
16	Self-Repair	always	3.69
17	Over Explicitness	sometimes	3.47
18	Self-Rephrasing	sometimes	3.12
19	Non-Linguistic Strategies	often	3.75
20	Use of Fillers	sometimes	3.58
21	Self-repetition	sometimes	3.06
22	Feigning Understanding	sometimes	3.08
23	Response Rephrase	sometimes	3.38
24	Verbal strategy markers	sometimes	3.17
25	Direct appeal for help	sometimes	3.11
26	Guessing	often	3.58
27	Asking for repetition	often	3.59
28	Asking for clarification	often	3.78
29	indirect appeal for help	often	3.18
30	Asking for confirmation	sometimes	3.24
31	Expressing non-understanding	sometimes	3.31
32	Interpretive summary	often	3.31
33	Own-accuracy check	sometimes	3.06

Research Question Three: What is the role of gender in using strategies?

An independent-sample t-test is conducted Tables 7 and 8 to compare the use of oral communication strategies for male and female respondents. "t-test is used to discover whether there are statistically significant differences between the means of two groups" (Cohen et al., 2018). There is a significant difference (t= -0.021, df= 198, two-tailed p= 0.983) in the score for Male (M= 98.073, SD= 12.216) and female (M= 98.113, SD= 12.665). The magnitude of difference in the means (mean difference= -0.040, 95%CI: -3.724 to 3.643) is not significant.

Table 7: Gender Group Statistics for Male and Female Participants

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total	Male	68	98.0735	12.21611	1.48142
	Female	132	98.1136	12.66518	1.10236

Table 8: Independent Sample T-test for Gender Difference in Using Strategies.

		Independent Samples Test							
		-test for Equality of Means							
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper
Total	Equal variance assumed	0.167	0.683	0.022	198	0.98	-0.0401	1.868	-3.7241	3.64386
	Equal variance not assumed			0.022	39.8	0.98	-0.0401	1.847	-3.6909	3.61070

Research Question Four: What are the thoughts of instructors about their students' communication and strategy use?

As it is shown in Table 9, all of the interviewed instructors (i.e., n.11) claim that communication is important to the students.

L8: *I believe it is very, very important for the students to be able to communicate in the target language that they're actually learning. That's why for me, in my classes, it is a must. It's because learning doesn't happen unless they understand what's going on or what I'm actually talking about what I'm explaining because we are obliged to do all the explanation in English because we teach English so we have to do it all in the target language. So if the students don't understand and cannot communicate in the target language, then this will be a very problematic barrier in front of learning the second language.*

72.7% of the instructors state that they do not have enough time to practice communication in the classroom and they use alternative strategy and techniques to overcome this problem.

L 2: *One of them is distributing students in groups. And when I ask for who wants to participate, I don't oblige them at the beginning. Those who try to say something at that. After that, I ask some other students to*

participate. So sometimes I bring some exercises that they're interested in. For example, I say, we follow this book, but sometimes I asked in which exercise are you interested in? I try to bring that topic because in this way, the students will be more motivated to participate in the class with us.

L 10: *Actually, sometimes I take time from those students who are good and give that time to those who are not that good. So yes, we don't have enough time but we just try to actually compensate, taking from the time of good students and giving it to other poor students.*

Concerning the students' attempts to improve their language ability, the majority of the instructors (i.e., 9 out of 11) have a positive perspective in this regard.

L5: *I could say yes, because I can see the differences and the improvement of their English. If I compare the same students at the beginning of the year, and the same student in the beginning, at the end of the year, I can say, yes, they try to, to improve their proficiencies in all levels.*

Yet only 18.18% of the instructors claim that their students do not try as much as required. This indicates that they have a negative perspectives towards their students' ability of improvement.

L4: *They're passive. But in general, I can say they're passive. Like, if the instructor does not urge them, or let's say, force them to talk, or if the instructor is not too serious, students want to just to sit back and wait for the class time to pass and without participation, actually, they need. So they need strict regulations, strict monitoring, and actually it's the responsibility of the instructor to make them participate in the classroom. That's the fact. Even the smart, clever students who have good language ability they refuse to speak and participate in classroom communication.*

Generally speaking, the Kurdish EFL university instructors' responses to the need for teaching communication strategies is positive with different approaches of direct and indirect each suggested by almost half of the participants.

L3: *What I prefer is that the instructor should include these strategies in his or her teaching directly or indirectly because the instructor is a good model for the students. So I prefer that the teaching of strategies should be indirect should be included in instructors' teaching.*

Table 9: Number of Reference and Percentage of Interview Themes and Subthemes

Themes/ Subthemes		References	Percentage
Communication is important		11	100%
Students' needs	considered	10	90.9%
	not considered	1	9.1%
Proficiency deference challenges		11	100%
Time	is enough	3	27.3
	is not enough	8	72.7
Students' attempts to improve	they try	9	81.8
	they do not try	2	18.2
Teaching CSs	Directly	5	45.5
	indirectly	5	45.5
	to some extent	1	9.2

5. Discussions

As presented in the results, Kurdish EFL university students reported using various communication strategies in their spoken performance. All of the direct strategies are reported to be used by half or even more of the participants except for forignising. Kurdish EFL learners use these direct strategies for getting the meaning as they are self-contained and adaptable. The second category of strategies is interactional strategies, which has the least number of negative answers and all of its strategies are claimed to be used. These strategies are employed to arrive at shared meaning between the speaker and interlocutors. Mutual understanding is aimed to be achieved and breakdown in communication is to be avoided by all means that is why it mainly focuses on problem solving. Lastly indirect strategies used are use of fillers, self-repetition, feigning understanding and verbal strategy markers. Here the Kurdish EFL learners work hand in hand with their interlocutors to hold a successful conversation.

The results show that interactional strategies (e.g., Comprehension check, Response rephrase, Direct appeal for help, Guessing, Asking for repetition, Asking for clarification, Indirect appeal for help, Asking for confirmation, Expressing non-understanding, Interpretive summary and Own-accuracy check) as a category is used mostly by Kurdish EFL senior students (cf. López,2011; Nurwahyuningsih et al., 2019). Furthermore, indirect strategies have the most used respond before direct strategies. The reason behind that could be attributed to the fact that indirect strategies help in gaining the speaker more time to think of what to say and how to say it. Concerning each individual strategy, one can see that approximation, asking for confirmation, and using fillers are the most used strategies. Because in Kurdish community how others perceive you is of high consideration. Kurdish EFL learners try their best to talk in a way that is understood by their partners and do their part in keeping the conversation from any breakdowns.

The results of the independent sample T-test revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female Kurdish EFL university students in the use of OCSs. These results agree with the findings of the instructors' interview in which most of them stated that they had not noticed such a difference between male and female students (Demir, 2018; Huang, 2010). This could be due various reasons such as equal chance of self-expression to both genders, mental and social changes in terms what is expected to be achieved by the students which is regardless of their gender. On the other hand, these results of gender as a point of difference in the case of

OCSs is tackled by many researchers, Berryman-Fink et al. (1993), Mirzaei and Heidari, (2012) and Yaman and Özcan (2015), among many others, state that such difference between male and females exist.

Although all the instructors who took part in this study support the importance of communication and confirm that they try their best to meet the needs of their students to communicate in the class, yet the majority claim that they do not have enough time to allow students to take part in oral discussions they are interested in. They also state that having different proficiency levels in the same class is challenging and requires more class time. The instructors also mention some of the strategies their students use while speaking. All the instructors agree on the need of familiarizing students with OCSs meanwhile they have different views on whether they should be taught directly or included in other class materials and indirectly (cf. Dornyei, 1995; Frymier,2005; Nakatani, 2005; Lam, 2006; Kaivanpanah & Yamouty, 2009; Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011; Bui & Intaraprasert, 2013; Rabab'ah, 2015; Kongsom, 2016; Dewi et al., 2018; Demir et al.,2018; Khalid & Abbas, 2018; Abdelati, 2019; Douadi, 2019; Nurwahyuningsih et al., 2019).

6. Conclusions

Building on the study results and discussion, one can confirm that Kurdish EFL university students use many different communication strategies for escaping issues and difficulties they have in their language usage while speaking. The strategies used by them are of three categories: direct, interactional and indirect. However, it is also found that interactional strategies are used the most as compared to the others. The use of these strategies varies depending on the gender of the speaker. In Kurdish EFL context, at the university level, gender is not a point of difference in strategy use. Female and male Kurdish EFL learners reported using OCSs with the same frequency.

The interviewed instructors shed light on various issues concerning students share in communication. They confirmed the importance of students' participation in communication activities and their positive attempts towards improvement. Although they assured considering the needs of their students, they mentioned challenges they face as lack of time and having mixed proficiency level classes. And after all, to overcome those challenges it is suggested that teaching CSs should be incorporated in EFL classrooms in departments of English in the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

7. Recommendations

1. Providing enough time to speaking and conversation classes can improve the students communication since they are given much time to practice English inside the classroom.

2. To overcome the communication failure, Departments of English at Iraqi Kurdistan Region universities can assess the students' proficiency level and divide them into groups according to what they perform during the assessment process. This enhances their ability and helps the instructors in selecting communication topics, exercise, etc.

3. Departments of English should reform and/or update their curricula in accordance with the students' needs.

4. Teachers who teach speaking and/or conversation should inform their students about OCSs and teach them in a practical way. This makes the students more familiar with the strategies and helps them to overcome the challenges they face in their oral communication.

8. Pedagogical Implications

1. This study can be used by English departments in the Iraqi Kurdistan region to reform their curricula and materials used in communication/conversation classes.

2. It can be used by instructors to do speaking activities in accordance with different types of OCSs.

3. The study can also help EFL learners get to know OCSs, its types and uses.

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Appendix A : Students' Questionnaire Items of Oral Communication Strategies

Item No.	Item
1.	When I do not know how to say something, I leave it unfinished.
2.	I explain, describe, or give examples of the object/ action of which I do not know its English form.
3.	I shorten my message or avoid certain topics when lacking linguistic resources to convey the meaning I intend to.
4.	I use a word or term which is similar in meaning to the word I want to say.
5.	When I do not know a particular word I try to use a general lexical item (thing, do, make, stuff, etc.) instead.
6.	I make up a new word from an existing word by using English word formation rules.
7.	When I have to say something and do not have the capability of structuring the message, I devise a different structure.
8.	When I need an expression or idiom and do not know the way to say it in English, I translate a Kurdish expression word-for-word.
9.	I use Kurdish words with English pronunciations when I don't know the English word I need.
10.	When I do not know a word or group of words in English, I use Kurdish words with their Kurdish pronunciation.
11.	I use a word which sounds similar to the word I want to say.
12.	When I am unsure about a word or a part of it I mumble it or say it very quietly.
13.	When I do not know a word, I carry on the conversation as if I had said it.
14.	I ask my interlocutor (classmate, teacher, etc.) questions to check whether or not s/he can understand what I say.
15.	Sometimes, I say a number of incorrect or incomplete words to help me remember the word I need.
16.	When I figure out that what I said was incorrect, I correct it instantly.
17.	I use more words than needed just to make the meaning clear.
18.	I repeat a term not as it is rather by adding something or paraphrasing it.
19.	I use hand gestures or/and facial expressions to make the meaning clear.
20.	When I need extra time to say a word in English, I use some expressions (you know, I mean, etc.) to save time and keep the conversation going.
21.	I repeat a word or group of words immediately after saying them.
22.	Sometimes I do not understand but pretend to be just to keep the conversation going.
23.	I rephrase what I said when the person I talk to does not get the meaning.
24.	I use phrases that clearly tell I am not sure about what I am going to say or have said is exactly called in English.
25.	When I do not know how to say something in English, I ask my interlocutor to help me with it.
26.	I guess the meaning of what I hear.
27.	When I do not hear or understand something in English, I ask for repetition.
28.	When the person I talk to says something unclear or new to me, I ask for explanation.
29.	I try to make my interlocutor help me with the meaning without asking for help directly.
30.	Through repeating what I have heard I try to confirm it.
31.	When the meaning is unfamiliar or unclear to me, I tell my interlocutor that I did not understand.
32.	I paraphrase what I have heard to check whether I understood correctly.
33.	I verify whether something I said was correct by asking direct questions or saying it with a question intonation.

Appendix B : Instructors' Interview

1. To what extent do you consider it necessary for your students to be able to communicate effectively in the target language?
2. To what extent do you consider the needs of your students for communicating orally in the target language?
3. When teaching a class in which the students' proficiency levels are not uniform, how do you accommodate for differences in oral proficiency levels among your students?
4. How do you manage to give your students enough time to take part in oral discussions they are interested in?
5. What do you think of / how do you evaluate students' attempts to improve their oral communication skills?
6. If you agree with the claim that students should be taught communication strategies, why do you think so?
7. Do you find any difference between male and female students' oral communication? Could you shed more light?
8. What do students usually do when they do not have enough linguistic resources to convey their message?
9. What do the students do when they do not understand their interlocutor?
10. When students do not know how to say something in English, what do they do?