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**EXAMINING MALAYSIAN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION
STUDENTS' USE OF METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN ORAL
PRESENTATIONS**

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Abstract

Distress, anxiety and nervousness strike second language learners of English immediately when asked to speak the language as speaking involves knowledge and expertise of various skills and abilities. Consequently, this interferes with the process of acquiring speaking skills and impede self-confidence in practising and using the target language. Nevertheless, the right learning strategies: techniques and approaches learners employ in their learning, could boost self-confidence and make learning more enjoyable and effective. A particular learning strategy is metacognitive strategies where learners are conscious of their own knowledge, capabilities, and motivation which occur during planning, organising and monitoring the progress in learning. Learners of English for Professional Communication programme are required to be fluent and proficient in communicating using the target language. Hence, there is a need to gain insight into how these learners apply metacognitive strategies in completing speaking tasks. This quantitative study among 43 professional communication students on how they plan, monitor and evaluate their oral presentations revealed that in ensuring the success of the speaking task, learners focus on preparing and understanding the information needed to deliver to the audience. Learners also are conscious on the method of delivery in orderly steps according to the requirement of the speaking task as experts and knowledgeable individuals assessed the oral presentation.

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1. Introduction

Azis (2019) defined speaking as an activity which involves speakers expressing and sharing information and feelings and exchanging opinions with listeners using verbal and non-verbal cues and expressions. Additionally, to speak successfully, speakers must have the knowledge and the ability to produce words and expressions that cover aspects of comprehension, fluency, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. In other words, speaking encompasses knowledge and expertise of various skills and sub-skills (Sodagari & Dastgoshadeh, 2016) and abilities. Due to that, speaking is considered as the most important aspect of acquiring the language as these skills observe and measure the learner's ability to converse and use the language correctly and appropriately (Nunan, 1991).

Therefore, this potentially contribute to the increase of learners' anxiety and difficulty in becoming proficient in this particular skill. Regardless of the setting, inside or outside the four walls of the classroom, learners experience a lack of confidence when the task requires them to use English verbally (Wael et al., 2018). It was also further reported that this affected learners of English across levels. They believed that a low confidence level stems from limited exposure and a dearth of practice in the English language during the learning process. Hence, in building learners' proficiency and skills in acquiring the second language, the right learning strategies could make learners learn faster and easier and, at the same time, boost their confidence in speaking the target language, which consequently makes learning enjoyable and makes learning progressively effective (Sartika et al., 2019).

Learning strategies are techniques, approaches and actions that learners employ in their learning as they try to recall both linguistic and content areas of information (Wael et al., 2018). With these learning strategies, comprehension, learning process, meaning, and connection are built, strengthened and sustained. They further added that the strategies that influence learning abilities include memorising, practising, preparing before a speaking task or activity, and organising one's learning progress. Oxford (1990) noted that there are a number of learning strategies which consist of direct: memory, cognitive and compensation strategies, as well as indirect strategies, which are metacognitive, affective and social. The awareness of learning strategies and their application help learners to possess extensive knowledge and opportunities to choose preferred strategies, adapt them and conform to the required task (Son & Schwartz, 2002).

2. Problem Statement

Speaking English confidently has continuously been an issue among second language learners. Distress, inner conflicts and struggles are experienced by these learners when performing classroom speaking tasks and conversing in English effectively. Learners also develop misconceptions and have negative perceptions about themselves and their ability in acquiring speaking skills. Consequently, such views discourage them from being persistent, interfere with the process of acquiring the skill, and impede confidence in practising and using the target language. Therefore, learners implement techniques and strategies in helping them to overcome aforementioned difficulties should be explored and examined.

3. Research Questions

The present study examined the use of metacognitive strategies in oral presentation tasks among English for Professional Communication undergraduates in a Malaysian public university. This study answered the following research questions:

- i. What metacognitive strategies are used by professional communication students in planning an oral presentation?
- ii. What metacognitive strategies are used by professional communication students in monitoring an oral presentation?
- iii. What metacognitive strategies are used by professional communication students in evaluating an oral presentation?

4. Purpose of the Study

For learners of the English for Professional Communication programme, they are required to be fluent and proficient to communicate in the English language. Among tasks, activities and assessments, oral presentations are assigned to further strengthen and test learners' language fluency and skills. Thus, there is a need to gain insights into how these learners apply metacognitive strategies specifically, planning, monitoring and evaluating during and after completing these speaking activities.

5. Research Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach using a Google Forms questionnaire distributed online. The items were adapted from Danuwong's (2006) metacognitive strategies questionnaire. The data collection method used 5-point Likert scale items to measure the three metacognitive strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating a presentation. The instrument consisted of four demographic items (gender, semester of study, faculty, and undergoing course). The other three sections contained ten items on the construct planning strategies, ten items on the construct monitoring strategies, and ten items on the construct evaluating strategies, with the 5-point scale being 1=Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree. Descriptive statistical tests were used to analyse the collected data.

This study intends to measure the metacognitive strategies used by professional communication students in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their presentations. During the data collection, all 43 semester-four and one semester-five undergraduates of the Diploma in English for Professional Communication course at a Malaysian public university were involved in this study. The respondents' demographic is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent demographics (n=44)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	6	13.64
Female	38	86.36
Semester		
Semester 4	43	97.73
Semester 5	1	2.27

Cronbach's alpha coefficient value was used to assess the internal consistency reliability of all the metacognitive strategies constructs. Taber (2018) provided a descriptor for each scale or the alpha (α) value where an α value of > 0.9 is deemed excellent, an α value of > 0.8 is considered strong, an α value of > 0.7 is acceptable, and an α value of > 0.6 is considered acceptable. Table 2 shows that the Cronbach or the coefficient value of each construct is more than 0.8 or 80%, indicating high internal consistency and reliability.

Table 2. Reliability evaluation

Metacognitive strategies Constructs	No. of Items	CA Value
Planning strategies	10	0.855
Monitoring strategies	10	0.905
Evaluating strategies	10	0.920

6. Findings

The questionnaire instrument intended to examine the level of metacognitive strategies used by the respondents was first classified into adapting the strategies specifically for presentation tasks. The respondents' metacognitive strategies are applied in planning (before), monitoring (while), and evaluating (after) a presentation. Since the value of Cronbach alpha calculated for all constructs of metacognitive strategies was greater than 0.80, which denotes strong reliability of the scales, it is evident that the values of the descriptive statistics for the three constructs shown in Table 2 are reliable and valid. Based on the three constructs of metacognitive strategies, the respondents scored the highest in the planning strategies ($M=4.232$, $SD=0.583$), followed by monitoring strategies ($M=4.123$, $SD=0.657$). The lowest score is the evaluating strategies ($M=4.079$, $SD=0.497$), implying that evaluating is not a significant concern in presentation tasks. Table 3 depicts the descriptive analysis of metacognitive strategies instruments.

Table 3. Statistics on metacognitive strategies constructs for all respondents

Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation
Monitoring strategies (while presenting)	4.232	0.583
Evaluating strategies (after presenting)	4.123	0.657
Planning strategies (before presenting)	4.079	0.497

A point worth noting, as shown in Table 4, is that even though planning strategies scored the lowest mean score compared to monitoring and evaluating strategies, there is still the belief of the respondents that they accentuate relating prior knowledge about the content that would benefit them later

during the presentation (M=4.52, SD=0.549). This shows that learners believe that the emphasis on prior knowledge builds their schema for comprehending and preparing the content for the topic. They are also given advanced thoughts on personal comprehension (M=4.25, SD=0.651) and possible information in the presentation materials planning (M=4.25, SD=0.651). They believe planning strategies require researching and reading the information, listing and following specific steps and requirements, and identifying aspects of an oral presentation to be used, including selecting visual aids, suitable attire, the right posture, and body language. However, the lowest mean score in planning strategies (M=3.5, SD=1.023) indicated that deciding in advance on possible distractions is not a significant concern in their planning strategies.

Table 4. Statistics on planning strategies construct for all respondents

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Before presenting in English, I decide on my prior knowledge about the content that would help me later.	4.52	0.549
Before presenting in English, I identify the aspects of information for me to prepare for the presentation.	4.43	0.545
Before presenting in English, I try to figure out what I do in sequence to understand the materials.	4.32	0.639
Before presenting in English, I check in advance my own personal comprehension.	4.25	0.651
Before presenting in English, I think in advance about the possible information in the materials.	4.25	0.651
Before presenting in English, I think in advance about the strategies for me to learn about the materials.	4.2	0.734
Before presenting in English, I identify possible problems that I might face in this task.	3.95	0.776
Before presenting in English, I decide on my own learning objectives.	3.75	0.811
Before presenting in English, I predict the questions that could be asked.	3.61	0.993
Before presenting in English, I decide in advance how to ignore possible distractions (e.g., mental, physical, and environmental).	3.5	1.023

The analysis depicted that the respondents in this study place more focus and prioritise monitoring strategies in their presentation tasks than the other metacognitive strategies. The data illustrates the monitoring strategies construct as a whole, implying that most learners think and reflect on themselves and their speaking abilities during presentations in comparison to before and after completing presentation tasks. The results in Table 5 show that most respondents applied monitoring strategies by questioning themselves if they should have the knowledge for their understanding (M=4.41, SD=0.726) and if they should remember any important information (M=4.41, SD=0.658). This shows that their thoughts revolve around the information they need to remember, the knowledge they need to understand the material and aspects of oral assessment, as well as the process of the presentation. On the other hand, deciding if there is any relation between prior knowledge and the presentation matter (M=4.25, SD=0.615), implying that they tried to seek for connection between what they know and the content during their presentation to be clear on what they are presenting such as internalising the idea for delivery and audience' understanding. Nevertheless, questioning whether any of their predictions made is correct scored the lowest mean (M=3.91, SD=1.007), indicating that confirming predictions is the least applied monitoring strategy while doing their presentations.

Table 5. Statistics on monitoring strategies construct for all respondents

	Mean	Std. Deviation
While presenting in English, I ask myself if I should have the knowledge for understanding.	4.41	0.726
While presenting in English, I ask myself if I should remember any important information.	4.41	0.658
While presenting in English, I ask myself if I am doing the right steps.	4.39	0.655
While presenting in English, I ask myself if I am paying attention to important details within the content.	4.3	0.795
While presenting in English, I decide if there is any relation to my prior knowledge on the matter.	4.25	0.615
While presenting in English, I ask myself if the information I have in the reading is linked with other subjects I know.	4.23	0.803
While presenting in English, I check my understanding of the topic, sentences, or body paragraphs from time to time.	4.2	0.795
While presenting in English, I ask myself if I am using appropriate techniques for the task.	4.18	0.815
While presenting in English, I ask myself about my progress.	4.05	0.963
While presenting in English, I ask myself if any predictions I made are correct.	3.91	1.007

The results in Table 6 indicate that the respondents evaluate their experience to consider if or how they can reapply similar strategies they applied in their presentation in other disciplines or subject areas ($M=4.36$, $SD=0.75$) and given thought on any new knowledge, information, or skills they have learned ($M=4.34$, $SD=0.805$). This signifies that learners think of extending the strategies used in presentation class to other subject areas and feel that skills acquired in this class are applicable and relevant to other disciplines or subject areas. This deems possible as presentation serves as a form of assessment apart from written assessments. In addition, deciding on whether there is any change based on the newly acquired knowledge or information to what is already known ($M=4.02$, $SD=0.876$) reflected that learners committed after their presentation to identify new knowledge, information, and skills that they have learned or gathered. However, evaluation through self-questioning whether they can summarise either mentally, orally, written, or graphically what they have learned is the least evaluation strategy applied by the respondents ($M=3.93$, $SD=0.974$).

Table 6. Statistics on evaluating strategies construct for all respondent

	Mean	Std. Deviation
After completing my presentation in English, I consider if/ how I can reapply the same strategies but in the same situations in other disciplines/ subject areas.	4.36	0.75
After completing my presentation in English, I think of any new knowledge/ information/ skills I have learnt.	4.34	0.805
After completing my presentation in English, I think about if there were other strategies that may help me in the task.	4.32	0.771
After completing my presentation in English, I think if I should do the same for the next task for the same subject.	4.18	0.657
After completing my presentation in English, I evaluate if the newly acquired knowledge/ information is useful for my future learning.	4.18	0.756
After completing my presentation in English, I decide if there is any change based on the newly acquired knowledge/information to what I already know.	4.02	0.876

After completing my presentation in English, I check if I have met my goals..	4	0.988
After completing my presentation in English, I judge if any of my predictions or guesses that I made earlier are correct.	3.95	1.099
After completing my presentation in English, I decide on the suitability of the strategies taken to achieve the objectives.	3.93	0.846
After completing my presentation in English, I ask myself if I am able to summarise what I have learned (mentally, orally, written, or graphically).	3.93	0.974

7. Conclusions

This study has revealed the respondents' adaptation of metacognitive strategies for presentation tasks, where most of them focused more on monitoring strategies than evaluating and planning strategies. They have a strong focus on the information needed to deliver to the audience. Furthermore, the emphasis on preparing the materials and process of preparing for the presentation includes planning the series of points, visual aids, props, and even time requirements. The respondents are highly concerned about having the right steps, process, and procedure when presenting. In other words, they need to ensure that their presentation includes specific components in an orderly fashion, for example, introduction, points, elaboration from reliable sources and examples, and concluding presentation. The findings demonstrate that the respondents are conscious and reflective, similar to Sodagari and Dastgoshadeh (2016) and Azis (2019) study, as they are engaged in their thoughts, information memorised, audience's eye contact and presence, voice projection, body language and postures, and visual aids used and become more active and aware of their presentation as they are being assessed by experts or by more knowledgeable individuals.

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