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Exploring Metacognitive Strategies' Influence on Communicative Competence among Sixth-Semester EFL Students at Unrika

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ABSTRACT

The aims of this study are to explore the influence of metacognitive strategies on the communicative competence of sixth-semester EFL students at Universitas Riau Kepulauan (Unrika). This qualitative research focuses on how learners plan, monitor, and evaluate their language use—particularly in speaking activities—and how these processes contribute to their ability to communicate effectively in English. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations involving purposively selected participants. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify key patterns in students' metacognitive behaviors and their perceived impact on communicative performance. The findings reveal that students who actively apply metacognitive strategies—such as planning their speech content, monitoring their language during interactions, and reflecting on their performance—demonstrate higher levels of confidence, fluency, and coherence. However, some students encounter difficulties in consistently implementing these strategies, especially in spontaneous speaking situations. The study highlights the importance of integrating metacognitive awareness into EFL instruction to enhance students' overall communicative competence.

Keywords: metacognitive strategies, communicative competence, EFL students

Introduction

Currently, the importance of metacognitive strategies in improving second language proficiency has attracted increasing academic attention, especially in the context of communicative competence among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Communicative competence, defined as the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in social interactions, has become a primary goal in EFL curricula (Celce-Murcia, 2017). However, effective communication in a second language requires not only grammatical knowledge but also self-awareness and self-regulation—areas where metacognitive strategies play a vital role (Teng, 2020).

Metacognitive strategies—such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating language use—are essential components of self-regulated learning that directly influence how learners process, produce, and reflect on their spoken language (Ahmadi & Sadeghi, 2016). These strategies enable students to prepare for speaking tasks by organizing their ideas, monitoring their performance during interactions, and evaluating the success of their communication afterward. Recent studies consistently show that learners who actively engage in metacognitive behavior tend to demonstrate greater fluency, coherence, and confidence when speaking English (Rahimirad & Shams, 2015; Teng & Zhang, 2021).

Although the benefits of using metacognitive strategies have been well documented, many university-level EFL learners still face challenges in consistently applying these strategies, especially in spontaneous or anxiety-inducing speaking situations (Seker & Dincer, 2019). This gap between knowledge and practice highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how students internalize and operationalize metacognitive strategies in real-life speaking contexts.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the influence of metacognitive strategies on the communicative competence of sixth-semester EFL students at the University of Riau Islands (Unrika). This qualitative study investigates how students plan, monitor, and evaluate their spoken language, particularly in academic speaking activities, and how these metacognitive processes shape their overall communicative effectiveness. These findings are expected to contribute to EFL pedagogical practice by emphasizing the integration of metacognitive strategy instruction into a speaking-focused curriculum.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how metacognitive strategies influence the communicative competence of sixth-semester EFL students at Universitas Riau Kepulauan (Unrika). The qualitative approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of students' cognitive processes—specifically how they plan, monitor, and evaluate their language use in speaking activities. A descriptive framework was considered appropriate to capture the complexity and richness of students' experiences without altering the natural learning environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on sixth-semester students from the English Education Department who had demonstrated active engagement in speaking-related academic tasks. A total of ten participants (five male and five female students) were included based on their involvement in academic discussions and proposal

presentations, ensuring that they had sufficient exposure to both speaking tasks and opportunities for metacognitive engagement (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data collection was conducted using two primary techniques: semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their personal reflections regarding the use of metacognitive strategies, including how they prepare for speaking tasks, monitor their performance during interactions, and evaluate their outcomes afterward. Each interview, conducted in a mix of English and Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clarity and participant comfort, lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Meanwhile, classroom observations were carried out during students' proposal seminars and group discussion sessions. Observational focus was placed on visible indicators of metacognitive strategy use, such as the use of outlines or notes (planning), instances of self-correction (monitoring), and follow-up self-reflection (evaluation). Field notes and audio recordings were used to ensure accurate documentation of the participants' behavior and speech performance in authentic learning settings.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which includes familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming, themes, and finally producing the report. Coding was performed manually on both interview transcripts and observation notes to identify recurring patterns related to metacognitive behaviors and their perceived influence on communicative performance. Triangulation was applied by comparing insights from both data sources to enhance credibility, while member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of findings with participants to verify the accuracy and validity of interpretations.

Research procedures adhered to ethical research standards. Informed consent was secured from each participant prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any stage.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study and discusses their implications in light of previous literature on metacognitive strategies and communicative competence in EFL learning. The data from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were analyzed thematically and triangulated to ensure credibility. Three major themes emerged: Patterns of Metacognitive Strategy Use, Influence on Communicative Competence, Challenges in Strategy Application.

Patterns of Metacognitive Strategy Use

The analysis of interviews and classroom observations revealed that all participants actively employed metacognitive strategies during academic speaking activities, which significantly shaped their communicative performance. Students consistently engaged in planning by preparing outlines or notes ahead of their speaking tasks, organizing their main ideas, and anticipating possible questions. This preparation helped them feel more confident and reduced anxiety during presentations and discussions. As they spoke, participants demonstrated active monitoring of their

- language use by self-correcting mistakes, adjusting their speech in response to audience feedback, and carefully managing their vocabulary and grammar. These behaviors were evident through pauses to reformulate sentences and efforts to seek clarification when uncertain. After completing their speaking tasks, students routinely reflected on their performance, identified areas for improvement, and often sought feedback from peers or instructors—particularly following high-stakes academic events such as proposal seminars. These findings reinforce previous research (*Teng, 2020; Ahmadi & Sadeghi, 2016*), which emphasizes that metacognitive planning contributes to improved fluency and reduced speech anxiety. By organizing their thoughts and strategies beforehand, learners were able to approach speaking tasks with greater clarity and structure, thereby enhancing their overall communicative competence.

Influence on Communicative Competence

The study found a clear positive link between the systematic use of metacognitive strategies and multiple facets of communicative competence. Learners who devoted effort to careful pre-task planning and vigilant real-time monitoring produced speech that was noticeably more fluent and coherent, with fewer pauses or hesitations. Their consistent habits of self-evaluation, combined with structured preparation, also fostered a stronger sense of confidence when speaking before an audience. Moreover, ongoing monitoring enabled them to interpret audience reactions and immediately adjust vocabulary, grammar, or delivery, thereby communicating more effectively in dynamic academic settings. This sustained cognitive engagement during speech not only helped them steer around potential breakdowns but—echoing *Rahimirad and Shams (2015)*—stood out as a reliable marker of higher speaking competence.

Challenges in Strategy Application

Despite the overall positive engagement with metacognitive strategies, participants also encountered notable challenges in their application. Many students expressed difficulty in effectively using these strategies during spontaneous or high-pressure speaking situations, where the lack of preparation time often led them to rely on memorized responses rather than actively engaging in planning or monitoring. Additionally, heightened levels of anxiety, especially among those with lower confidence in their English proficiency, frequently interfered with their ability to monitor and evaluate their performance in real time. This emotional barrier occasionally hindered their capacity to make necessary adjustments during speech, limiting the effectiveness of the strategies they had intended to use.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce and expand upon previous research on the role of metacognitive strategies in enhancing communicative competence among EFL learners. In alignment with the work of *Teng (2020)* and *Ahmadi & Sadeghi (2016)*, the results clearly demonstrate that the processes of planning, monitoring, and evaluating play a central role in enabling students to communicate effectively in academic

- speaking contexts. However, the study also reveals that even advanced EFL learners do not automatically or consistently apply these strategies, particularly when faced with spontaneous or high-pressure speaking situations. This suggests a gap between students' theoretical understanding of metacognitive strategies and their ability to apply them in real-time language use.

One significant advancement offered by this study is the emphasis on the integration of metacognitive strategies into classroom practice. Students who engaged systematically in planning, monitoring, and evaluation tended to demonstrate higher levels of fluency, coherence, and confidence, supporting the view that metacognitive awareness is a key driver of communicative competence. Additionally, the study sheds light on the influence of contextual factors—such as task type and anxiety level—on the effectiveness of these strategies. While students performed well in structured, familiar academic settings, their ability to utilize metacognitive strategies often declined when faced with unpredictable or high-stakes speaking situations. This highlights the need for instructional approaches that not only teach metacognitive strategies but also help learners manage anxiety and build flexibility for spontaneous language use.

These findings carry important pedagogical implications. They suggest that EFL speaking instruction should go beyond teaching linguistic content by embedding metacognitive strategy training throughout the curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to model planning and self-monitoring behaviors, promote reflective thinking, and provide students with opportunities to apply these strategies in both rehearsed and impromptu speaking tasks. By doing so, educators can better support learners in bridging the gap between knowledge and practice, ultimately enhancing their communicative effectiveness across diverse academic contexts. A similar emphasis on strategic learning integration has also been observed in broader instructional approaches. For example, Sinaga et al. (2025) highlighted the effectiveness of digital student worksheets based on problem-solving in enhancing learners' critical thinking—showing that structured strategy-based instruction can foster deeper cognitive engagement across learning domains.

The qualitative approach adopted in this study provided a rich and nuanced understanding of how individual learners internalize and apply metacognitive strategies in their speaking practices, offering insights that extend beyond what quantitative measures of language proficiency typically reveal. The findings highlight that the ability to reflect on one's own language use plays a critical role in building communicative confidence, suggesting that cultivating a reflective classroom environment may be just as essential as teaching grammatical accuracy or vocabulary. Ultimately, this research deepens the understanding of metacognitive strategy use among EFL learners by illustrating its concrete impact on communicative competence, while also uncovering the contextual and psychological challenges that can hinder its application. These insights underscore the need for pedagogical interventions that not only teach strategy use explicitly but also support learners in navigating the complexities of real-world academic speaking situations.

▪ **Conclusion**

The study concluded that metacognitive strategies - planning, monitoring and evaluating - significantly improved EFL learners' communicative competence, promoting greater fluency, coherence and confidence. Through qualitative analysis, it was found that consistent strategy use supported effective speaking performance, while self-reflection contributed to communicative confidence. However, students often struggle to apply these strategies in spontaneous or stressful situations due to anxiety and reliance on memorization. This study was limited by its short-term and context-specific design, which involved a small sample from one institution and relied on self-reported data. Future research should involve a larger and more diverse sample to further examine strategy development over time. Pedagogically, these findings highlight the need to explicitly integrate metacognitive strategy training into the English speaking curriculum. Teachers should model and encourage reflective practice while providing varied speaking opportunities. This can help learners apply strategies more effectively and become more confident and adaptive communicators.

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