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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Conversation Analysis on the Use of Communication Strategy of Technical Vocational Education and Training Students in Small Group Interaction: Basis in Designing Strategic Competence Enhancement Program**

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**| ABSTRACT**

This study examined the communication strategies used by Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) students during small group interactions through conversation analysis. Specifically, it aimed to identify the represented and underrepresented communication strategies employed by TVET students during conversations and use the findings as the basis for designing a Strategic Competence Enhancement Program. The study utilized a qualitative research design using conversation analysis in examining the interactions of selected TVET students. Data were gathered through recorded small group conversations, which were transcribed and analyzed based on the communication strategies demonstrated by the participants. The findings revealed that the communication strategies among TVET students included the use of all-purpose words, message abandonment, retrieval, self-rephrasing, circumlocution, response: confirm, response expand, asking for clarification, asking for confirmation, and indirect appeal for help. These strategies were frequently observed in sustaining interaction and maintaining the flow of conversation. On the other hand, underrepresented communication strategies included literal translation false friend, literal translation from L3, L1-based foreignizing, L3-based foreignizing, code switching to L3, response repeat, response repair, direct appeal for help, interpretive summary, and own accuracy help, which appeared less frequently during the interactions. Based on the findings, a Strategic Competence Enhancement Program was designed to help improve the communicative competence of TVET students. The study concludes that TVET students employ different communication strategies to manage communication difficulties and maintain mutual understanding during small group discussions. The findings highlight the importance of communication strategies in facilitating effective interaction among participants despite language limitations.

**| KEYWORDS**

Communication Strategy, TVET Students, Conversation Analysis, Direct Strategy, Interactional Strategy, Small Group Interaction, Strategic Competence

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**1. Introduction**

Effective communication skills are essential for academic success and professional development, particularly in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET), where students are expected to communicate effectively in technical and workplace settings. Beyond technical proficiency, TVET students must also demonstrate strong communication skills for teamwork, problem-solving, productivity, and task execution. According to Ismail et al. (2023), TVET graduates should be capable of practicing effective communication in collaborative work, client interactions, and complex professional environments.

In the Philippine context, Mariano and Tantoco (2023) found that although TVET graduates possessed adequate technical skills, many still experienced communication difficulties that affected their workplace performance. This highlights the

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need to strengthen students' communicative competence through the use of communication strategies. Communication strategy, introduced by Selinker (1972) and later developed by Dörnyei and Scott (1997), refers to the techniques used by individuals to overcome communication difficulties and achieve communicative goals. These strategies include clarification requests, confirmation checks, negotiation of meaning, and other interactional techniques that help sustain communication.

Understanding how TVET students use communication strategies during small group interactions is important because these interactions provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, manage turn-taking, and resolve communication breakdowns. Conversation analysis serves as an effective approach in examining these interactions. According to Sidnell and Stivers (2012), conversation analysis allows the systematic examination of interactional features such as turn-taking and repair mechanisms.

Despite the growing interest in communication strategies, studies focusing on TVET contexts remain limited. Mohammed and Ozdamli (2024) emphasized that technical skills are often prioritized over communication development in TVET education. In Southern Isabela College of Arts and Trade (SICAT), preliminary inquiries among TVET instructors revealed communication difficulties among students, including limited vocabulary, low language proficiency, and lack of confidence in speaking.

Thus, this study examined the communication strategies used by TVET students during small group interactions through conversation analysis. Specifically, it identified the represented and underrepresented communication strategies employed by students and used the findings as the basis for designing a Strategic Competence Enhancement Program.

## **2. Literature**

### ***2.1 Status of TVET in the Philippines***

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the Philippines has undergone significant transformation in recent years, driven by the need to address workforce employability and industrial competitiveness. TESDA, as the governing authority, ensures that TVET programs are aligned with industry requirements and national development goals (Edralin & Pastrana, 2023). Employment rates among graduates have shown a positive trajectory, rising from 78.57% in 2021 to 84.72% in 2022, reflecting the growing effectiveness of TVET programs in preparing graduates for the labor market (TESDA, 2023). The demographic profile of enrollees has also shifted notably — college graduates now comprise the largest share of TVET participants, indicating that the programs are increasingly being used for upskilling and reskilling rather than as an alternative to higher education (PIDS, 2023).

Despite these gains, communication skills remain a persistent gap among TVET graduates. A study evaluating graduates of Valenzuela City Polytechnic College from 2015 to 2019 found that while communication skills were identified as highly applicable in the workplace, employers consistently flagged them as an area of weakness (Mariano & Tantoco, 2023). This finding underscores the need for TVET institutions to incorporate intensive and structured communication training within their curricula. TESDA has responded by integrating English language instruction into many training programs, recognizing that communication proficiency is essential not only for local employment but also for the global labor market. Addressing these gaps is critical if TVET is to fulfill its mandate of producing work-ready graduates capable of meeting both domestic and international industry demands.

### ***2.2 Career Paths of TVET Graduates***

TVET graduates in the Philippines find employment across a wide range of industries, including hospitality, healthcare, construction, manufacturing, and information technology. TESDA reported that approximately 77.78% of TVET graduates secured employment within five years from 2019 to 2023, demonstrating the program's capacity to produce job-ready workers (TESDA, 2024). The hands-on, competency-based nature of TVET equips graduates with practical skills that directly match industry needs, making them adaptable across multiple career paths — from skilled trades such as electrical work, plumbing, and welding, to service-oriented roles in hotels, restaurants, and tourism establishments (Generalao et al., 2025).

However, the career advancement of TVET graduates is not without challenges. The National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan (NTESDP) 2018–2022 reported a relatively low employability rate of 65%, attributing this to rapid technological changes and a predominantly supply-driven approach to TVET delivery. Similar concerns have been observed in Malaysia, where TVET graduates were found to lack essential employability skills such as communication, critical thinking, and leadership — competencies highly valued by employers (Bassah & Noor, 2023). Rehman and Mehmood (2014) similarly noted a persistent mismatch between graduate skills and employer expectations, with problem-solving, teamwork, and communication

consistently identified as deficient areas. These findings collectively highlight the importance of embedding soft skills, particularly communication, into TVET programs to ensure graduates are not only technically competent but also professionally prepared for the demands of the modern workplace.

### **2.3 Importance of English to TVET Students**

English proficiency plays a pivotal role in the employability and career advancement of TVET graduates, particularly those entering industries with international exposure such as hospitality, caregiving, and culinary arts. In these fields, English serves as the primary medium for technical manuals, customer interactions, and compliance with international standards, making it not merely an academic subject but a practical workplace tool. Employers have consistently ranked English communication skills among the most valued competencies in job applicants, as it enables professionals to convey ideas effectively, collaborate with diverse teams, and represent their organizations professionally (Jackling & Natoli, 2015). Suhaili and Mohamad (2021) further confirmed that English proficiency ranks among the top five criteria used by recruiters when evaluating fresh graduates, underscoring its critical role in hiring decisions across various industries.

Beyond initial employment, English proficiency is strongly associated with long-term career growth and leadership opportunities. Graduates who can communicate assertively and persuasively in English are more likely to be considered for promotion and managerial positions, as employers value individuals capable of leading discussions, negotiating, and motivating teams (Byrne, 2020; Moore & Morton, 2017). English fluency also contributes positively to organizational image, as employees who communicate well in English enhance their company's professionalism and strengthen relationships with clients and international stakeholders (Eldeen et al., 2018). Furthermore, English serves as the primary language of online learning resources, job portals, and professional development materials, meaning that TVET graduates with strong English skills are better positioned to engage in lifelong learning and adapt to an evolving global workforce (Suhaili et al., 2025). These considerations make a compelling case for the deliberate integration of English language training within TVET programs.

### **2.4 Communicative Skills in TVET**

Communicative competence is increasingly recognized as a core component of workforce readiness for TVET graduates. The ability to clearly articulate technical information, engage in professional interactions, and adapt communication to different workplace contexts directly influences employability outcomes (Ramamurthy et al., 2021). In collaborative work environments — such as construction sites, hospitals, and commercial kitchens — effective communication is not merely an added value but a fundamental requirement for safety, efficiency, and team coordination (Auta & Onwusuru, 2022). Despite its importance, many TVET graduates enter the workforce with insufficient communicative competence, reflecting a gap between the communication demands of industry and the training provided within vocational institutions.

Several factors contribute to this gap. Many TVET students come from linguistically diverse backgrounds and face difficulties communicating in English, the primary medium of technical communication in many programs. Low self-confidence in speaking, limited access to qualified technical communication instructors, and inadequate classroom support further hinder skill development (Ramamurthy et al., 2021). Additionally, students often struggle to transition from the academic communication styles learned in the classroom to the professional discourse expected in workplace settings, which includes technical vocabulary, industry-specific jargon, and interpersonal negotiation skills (Reegård & Debowski, 2020). To address these challenges, researchers and educators have called for the integration of real-world communication tasks, industry partnerships, and explicit communication strategy instruction into TVET curricula, ensuring that graduates are equipped to meet the complex communicative demands of their chosen professions.

### **2.5 Conversation Analysis in Educational Settings**

Conversation Analysis (CA) is a systematic approach to studying human communication, focusing on the detailed examination of naturally occurring talk. Originally rooted in sociology, CA has expanded into linguistics, psychology, and education, offering valuable insights into how people construct and negotiate meaning in interaction (Sidnell & Stivers, 2012). Its three core structural elements — turn-taking, sequence organization, and repair mechanisms — provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how participants manage and coordinate their conversations (Heritage, 2023). Turn-taking governs how speakers alternate in conversation, while sequence organization refers to the arrangement of conversational turns to accomplish social actions such as requests, offers, and explanations. Repair mechanisms, meanwhile, enable participants to identify and resolve breakdowns in communication, whether through self-initiated or other-initiated corrections (Sidnell, 2015).

In educational settings, CA has been applied extensively to study classroom discourse and its implications for learning. Seedhouse (2004) introduced the concept of "interactional architecture," demonstrating how instructional design shapes patterns of student engagement and communication. Walsh (2006) found that teachers' conversational awareness — particularly in managing turn-taking and questioning — significantly influences student participation and learning opportunities. These

insights are especially relevant in TVET environments, where students must develop both technical knowledge and the communicative competence required for professional practice. Heritage (2023) affirmed that CA can reveal how individuals navigate institutional tasks through conversation, making it a powerful tool for understanding and improving communication dynamics in vocational training contexts. By incorporating CA-informed practices into TVET instruction, educators can better support students in developing the interactional skills demanded by their future workplaces.

## **2.6 Communication Strategies**

Communication strategies (CSs) are techniques that language learners employ to overcome linguistic difficulties and maintain effective communication in interaction. Tarone (1980) defined them as mutual attempts between interlocutors to agree on meaning when shared linguistic structures are absent, highlighting their fundamentally collaborative nature. Færch and Kasper (1984) categorized CSs into avoidance strategies — where learners evade topics due to linguistic limitations — and achievement strategies — where learners actively compensate for gaps through circumlocution, approximation, and word-coinage. Building on these earlier frameworks, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) proposed a more comprehensive taxonomy encompassing direct strategies and interactional strategies, broadening the scope to include both individual linguistic problem-solving and collaborative meaning negotiation.

Direct strategies involve internal attempts by the speaker to resolve communication difficulties without seeking help from the interlocutor. These include circumlocution, approximation, message abandonment, message reduction, self-repair, restructuring, and the use of all-purpose words, among others. Interactional strategies, by contrast, are socially oriented and involve engaging the listener in resolving breakdowns through direct or indirect appeals for help, requests for repetition or clarification, comprehension checks, and interpretive summaries (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). Research has consistently shown that proficiency level influences strategy choice — more proficient learners tend to favor achievement strategies, while less proficient learners rely more heavily on avoidance or reduction strategies (Nakatani, 2006). Understanding the range and function of these strategies is essential in TVET contexts, where students must communicate technical content clearly and effectively in both academic and professional settings.

## **2.7 Strategic Competence**

Strategic competence is widely regarded as a central component of communicative competence, defined as the ability to use communication strategies to overcome linguistic, pragmatic, or situational challenges in real interactions. Canale and Swain (1980) originally conceptualized strategic competence as the capacity to manage communication breakdowns, while Bachman (1990) expanded the definition to include both compensatory functions — filling gaps in linguistic knowledge — and enhancement functions — improving the overall effectiveness of communication. Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995) further positioned strategic competence as a mediating component that connects the various dimensions of communicative competence to the demands of actual communication contexts. Bachman and Palmer (1996) refined this further by describing strategic competence as a set of metacognitive components that govern the planning, execution, and assessment of communicative performance.

Importantly, research has demonstrated that strategic competence is not innate but can be developed through targeted instruction. Maleki (2007) found that explicit strategy training significantly improved the communicative proficiency of Iranian EFL learners, while Nakatani (2006) showed that awareness training positively influenced learners' use of oral communication strategies. Kongsom (2009) similarly confirmed the effectiveness of structured strategy instruction among Thai EFL learners, noting improvements in both strategic competence and overall communicative ability. These findings carry significant implications for TVET education, where students must simultaneously develop technical knowledge and the linguistic strategies needed to communicate professionally. Cohen (2011) emphasized that an integrated instructional approach — one that combines learning strategies with communication strategy training — is particularly necessary in TVET institutions, where occupational and linguistic competencies must be developed in tandem.

## **2.8 Small Group Interactions in TVET**

Small group interactions have emerged as a valuable pedagogical tool in TVET settings, fostering active participation, collaborative learning, and the development of communication skills essential for professional practice. Cohen (1994) established that small group interactions can promote higher-order cognitive processes and academic achievement, provided that the quality of group interaction is carefully managed. In TVET contexts, these interactions mirror the collaborative nature of most technical careers, giving students opportunities to practice both task-specific communication and interpersonal negotiation skills. Studies have confirmed that students who engage in small group activities demonstrate increased confidence in speaking,

higher levels of questioning and responding, and improved overall communicative competence (Puspitasari et al., 2023; Alieksieieva et al., 2022).

The effectiveness of small group interactions in promoting strategic competence has also been well-documented in language learning research. Dobao (2014) found that collaborative small group tasks enabled learners to pool linguistic resources and co-construct knowledge, creating conditions favorable for strategic competence development. Storch (2002) identified four distinct interaction patterns in pair and group work — collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive, and expert/novice — highlighting the complexity of group dynamics and their differential effects on language learning outcomes. Philp, Adams, and Iwashita (2013) further argued that peer interaction in small groups provides unique opportunities for meaning negotiation, language practice, and cooperative problem-solving. These findings suggest that carefully structured small group activities in TVET classrooms can serve as effective vehicles for developing both technical communication skills and the broader strategic competence students need in professional environments.

### **2.9 Strategic Competence Enhancement Programs**

Strategic competence enhancement programs have gained increasing recognition as essential interventions for improving the communicative and professional readiness of TVET students. These programs are designed to equip learners with a repertoire of communication strategies alongside the metacognitive skills needed to deploy them effectively in varied contexts. Faucette (2001) identified a significant gap in existing ESL curricula, noting that explicit instruction in communication strategy use was largely absent from textbooks, pointing to the need for targeted supplementary programs. Research has since confirmed the transformative potential of such programs: Lam (2010) demonstrated that strategy instruction improved both strategy use and communicative performance among ESL students, while Li et al. (2023) found that strategy instruction in EFL settings significantly enhanced learners' ability to overcome communication barriers and sustain active engagement in conversations.

For TVET institutions specifically, strategic competence enhancement programs offer a structured means of addressing the dual demands of technical and communicative development. Integrating these programs into vocational curricula — through task-based learning, role-play, workplace simulations, and peer interaction activities — creates authentic contexts in which students can practice and refine their communication strategies (Virtanen et al., 2008; Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). Qodir et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of evidence-based approaches in program design, advocating for systematic needs identification, targeted training development, and regular evaluation to ensure program relevance and effectiveness. Burchard and Swerdzewski (2009) further reported significant improvements in metacognitive awareness and regulation among students who completed strategic learning courses, underscoring the broader academic and professional benefits of these programs. Taken together, these findings provide strong justification for the integration of strategic competence enhancement programs into TVET education as a means of producing graduates who are not only technically skilled but also communicatively competent and professionally prepared.

### **3. Methodology**

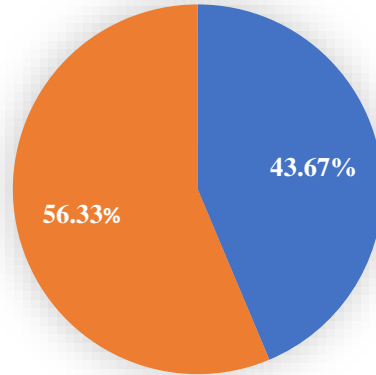
This study employed a qualitative research design using conversation analysis to examine the communication strategies of TVET students during small group interactions. Conversation analysis focuses on the structure and process of social interaction, particularly how meaning is created through language and interaction among participants. The study involved recording, transcribing, and analyzing naturally occurring conversations of TVET students to identify patterns of interaction, clarification requests, topic negotiation, and other communication strategies used to overcome communication difficulties and maintain understanding. The study was conducted at Southern Isabela College of Arts and Trades, a public TVET institution offering various technical and vocational programs. The respondents consisted of 18 second-year students enrolled in the Diploma in Hotel and Restaurant Technology program, selected through purposive sampling because of their relevance to the study's focus on interpersonal communication and public relations. Participants were required to be officially enrolled, willing to participate, and capable of communicating in English or Filipino, while non-HRT students, first-year and graduating students, and those unavailable during data gathering were excluded from the study.

The study utilized a group argumentative discussion on the topic *"What is the most enjoyable and challenging part about writing a business letter?"* to gather data on the communication strategies of TVET students. Interactions were audio-recorded, transcribed using Riverside FM Transcription, and manually checked for accuracy. The data were analyzed using the Communication Strategies Taxonomy of Dörnyei and Scott (1995), deductive coding, and thematic presentation to identify patterns, frequencies, and significant communication strategies, which became the basis for developing a strategic competence enhancement program.

**4. Result**

**4.1 Communication Strategy used in Small Group Interaction**

**Communication Strategy**



■ Direct Strategy      ■ Interactional Strategy

A total of 1,003 communication strategies were identified during the small group interaction. The findings revealed that interactional strategies were more frequently employed, with 565 occurrences (56.33%), compared to direct strategies, which recorded 438 occurrences (43.67%). This indicates that participants relied more on strategies that sustained interaction, encouraged participation, and maintained the flow of communication within the group discussion.

The dominance of interactional strategies supports the findings of Jagzape et al., (2024) who emphasized that small group interactions promote active participation and continuous exchange of ideas among participants. Meanwhile, direct strategies were less frequently utilized since these primarily focus on conveying information in a straightforward manner rather than maintaining collaborative interaction. This finding is consistent with Li (2025), who explained that direct strategies are commonly used to convey intended meaning and resolve communication problems efficiently. Overall, the results suggest that interactional strategies play a more significant role in sustaining effective communication during small group interactions.

**4.2 Direct Strategy used in Small Group Interaction**

No.	Direct Strategies	Frequency Count	Percentage
1	Message abandonment	56	12.79%
2	Message reduction	18	4.11%
3	Message replacement	21	4.79%
4	Circumlocution	23	5.25%
5	Approximation	7	1.60%
6	Approximation preposition	2	0.46%
7	Use of all-purpose words	186	42.47%
8	Word-coinage	2	0.46%
9	Restructuring	11	2.51%
10	Literal translation from L1	2	0.46%
11	Literal translation of prepositions	2	0.46%
12	Literal translation: false friends	0	0.00%
13	Literal translation from L3	0	0.00%
14	L1-based foreignizing	0	0.00%
15	L3-based foreignizing	0	0.00%
16	Code switching to L3	0	0.00%
17	Use of similar-sounding words	1	0.23%
18	Mumbling	1	0.23%
19	Omission	2	0.46%
20	Retrieval	45	10.27%

21	Self-rephrasing	24	5.48%
22	Question rephrasing	10	2.28%
23	Self-repair	22	5.02%
24	Other-repair	3	0.68%
<b>Total</b>		<b>438</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table presents the direct strategies used in small group interaction, with a total of 438 recorded occurrences. The most frequently used strategy was the use of all-purpose words, which obtained 186 occurrences or 42.47% of the total responses. This was followed by message abandonment with 56 occurrences (12.79%) and retrieval with 45 occurrences (10.27%). Self-rephrasing ranked fourth with 24 occurrences (5.48%), followed by circumlocution with 23 occurrences (5.25%), self-repair with 22 occurrences (5.02%), message replacement with 21 occurrences (4.79%), and message reduction with 18 occurrences (4.11%). In addition, restructuring recorded 11 occurrences (2.51%), question rephrasing obtained 10 occurrences (2.28%), and approximation had 7 occurrences (1.60%). Other-repair was recorded 3 times (0.68%). Meanwhile, approximation preposition, word-coinage, literal translation from L1, literal translation of prepositions, and omission were each used 2 times (0.46%). The least utilized strategies were use of similar-sounding words and mumbling, with only 1 occurrence each (0.23%). On the other hand, literal translation: false friends, literal translation from L3, L1-based foreignizing, L3-based foreignizing, and code switching to L3 were not observed in the participants' responses.

### 4.3 Interactional Strategy used in Small Group Interaction

No.	Interactional Strategies	Frequency Count	Percentage
1	Direct Appeal for Help	7	1.24%
2	Indirect Appeal for Help	28	4.96%
3	Asking for repetition	11	1.95%
4	Asking for clarification	61	10.80%
5	Asking for confirmation	53	9.38%
6	Guessing	23	4.07%
7	Expressing non-understanding	9	1.59%
8	Interpretive Summary	7	1.24%
9	Asking Persistence questions	11	1.95%
10	Comprehension Check	15	2.65%
11	Own-accuracy check	8	1.42%
12	Response: Repeat	7	1.24%
13	Response: Repair	5	0.88%
14	Response: Rephrase	12	2.12%
15	Response: Expand	125	22.12%
16	Response: Confirm	159	28.14%
17	Response: Reject	24	4.25%
<b>Total</b>		<b>565</b>	<b>100%</b>

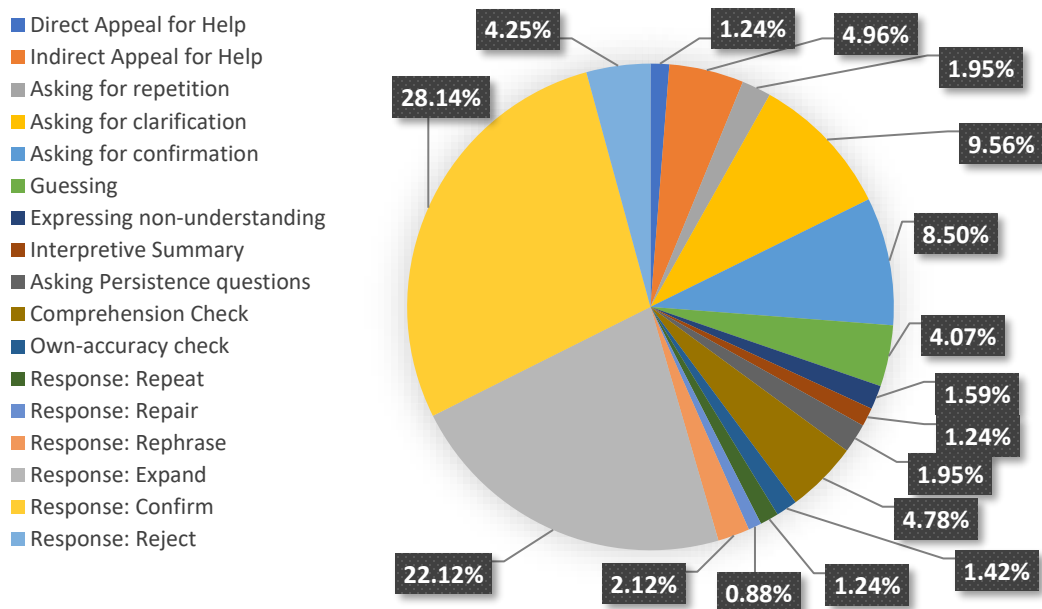
The table presents the interactional strategies used in small group interaction, with a total of 565 recorded occurrences. The most frequently used strategy was response: confirm, which obtained 159 occurrences or 28.14% of the total responses. This was followed by response: expand with 125 occurrences (22.12%), asking for clarification with 61 occurrences (10.80%), and asking for confirmation with 53 occurrences (9.38%). Other commonly used strategies were indirect appeal for help with 28 occurrences (4.96%), response: reject with 24 occurrences (4.25%), and guessing with 23 occurrences (4.07%). Meanwhile, comprehension check recorded 15 occurrences (2.65%), response: rephrase had 12 occurrences (2.12%), and both asking for repetition and asking persistence questions obtained 11 occurrences each (1.95%). Expressing non-understanding was used 9 times (1.59%), while own-accuracy check recorded 8 occurrences (1.42%). Direct appeal for help, interpretive summary, and response: repeat were each recorded 7 times (1.24%). Lastly, the least utilized strategy was response: repair with only 5 occurrences or 0.88% of the total responses.

**4.4 Underrepresented Direct Strategy used in Small Group Interaction**

Direct Strategies
Literal Translation false: friend
Literal Translation from L3
L1-based foreignizing
L2-based foreignizing
Code switching to L3

The table presents the underrepresented direct strategies used in small group interaction. The strategies that were not observed in the participants' responses were literal translation: false friend, literal translation from L3, L1-based foreignizing, L2-based foreignizing, and code switching to L3. These strategies obtained no recorded occurrences throughout the small group interaction.

**4.5 Underrepresented Interactional Strategy used in Small Group Interaction**



The findings reveal that several interactional strategies were underrepresented during small group interaction. The least utilized strategy was response: repair (0.88%), indicating that participants rarely corrected or repaired misunderstandings during communication. This was followed by response: repeat (1.24%), direct appeal for help (1.24%), and interpretive summary (1.24%), which show that participants seldom repeated responses, directly asked for assistance, or summarized ideas to clarify meaning during discussions. Another underrepresented strategy was own-accuracy check (1.42%), suggesting that learners rarely monitored or evaluated the correctness of their own responses. These low percentages imply that participants had limited use of interactional strategies related to communication repair, clarification, and self-monitoring in small group interaction.

**5. Discussion**

**5.1 Direct Strategy used in Small Group Interaction**

The most frequently used communication strategy observed in the study is the use of all-purpose words, with a frequency count of 186 or 42.47% of the total strategies identified during the small group interactions. This result clearly shows that the participants often rely on general or non-specific words such as "ano", "ganon", and "kwan" when expressing their ideas. They use this strategy for them to continue the conversation even when they cannot recall the exact word they want to use. Instead of stopping or hesitating for a long time, they choose to use these all-purpose words to keep their ideas flowing. This is evident in the following utterance:

**Participant 17:** *so yun yung nakapag kwan, nagiging kwan natin nag enjoy tayo...(So that's what makes us, you know... it becomes something for us—we end up enjoying it.)*

**Participant 11:** *ang kamali is parang maaano yung letter, ayun na...(The mistake is that the letter might, you know, turn out like that... that's it.)*

**Participant 5:** *nagamit mo naman ba yun, nung nakapag kwan na kayo ng immersion? (Were you able to use that when you had already, you know, done your immersion?)*

These examples illustrate how "kwan" and "ano" function flexibly across different grammatical roles — as a noun, verb, adjective, or even proper noun — depending entirely on the context of the conversation. The high frequency of this strategy suggests that TVET students heavily rely on these all-purpose words to maintain the flow of communication despite gaps in their vocabulary, particularly in informal and spontaneous peer interactions where casual language is more natural and comfortable.

The second most frequently used strategy is message abandonment, recorded at 56 occurrences or 12.79% of the total communication strategies observed. This means that in several instances, participants started expressing an idea but were unable to complete it, often stopping mid-sentence. This can be observed in the following utterance.

**Participant 13:** *Okay, next, may we have Jicel. What is the most enjoyable for you?*

**Participant 11:** *walang nakaka enjoy doon. Oh, sabihin natin. Ang nakakaenjoy ay ...ang nakakaenjoy kasi ... bakit wala naman akong business. ((There's nothing enjoyable there. Well, let's just say... what's enjoyable is... what's enjoyable is... why I don't even have a business))*

In here, the speaker repeatedly started and stopped the sentence before ultimately abandoning the original thought and redirecting the conversation entirely. This demonstrates that when TVET students encounter difficulty in organizing words or sentence structure, they tend to drop the message rather than risk producing an incorrect or awkward statement in front of their peers. Despite incomplete utterances, communication does not entirely break down, as shared context and peer interaction often allow the group to still grasp the general idea being expressed.

Next, Retrieval is the third most frequently used communication strategy among TVET students, with a frequency count of 45 or 10.27% of the total observed strategies. This strategy occurs when a speaker attempts to recall a specific word but initially produces incomplete, repeated, or incorrect forms before finally arriving at the correct one. This is evident in the utterance of Participant 12:

**Participant 12:** *you're on your own. wala nang sasalo sayo. and one thing that I have... I have... I have observed in making resumes is that when students or other, or students, kapag wala silang lalagay sa mga experience, they have... they put experience na ginawa nila na hindi naman nila ginawa.(You're on your own—no one will back you up anymore. And one thing that I have... I have... I have observed in making resumes is that when students—or others, or students—don't have anything to put under experience, they... they put experiences that they didn't actually do)*

The repeated phrase "I have..." functions as a thinking space, allowing the speaker to hold the floor while mentally searching for the right words, rather than abandoning the message altogether. This suggests that TVET students are not entirely lacking vocabulary, but are instead experiencing a temporary difficulty in accessing words they already know, and that retrieval can even become a collaborative process when other participants step in to help complete the expression.

Self-rephrasing is the fourth most frequently used strategy, with a frequency of 24 or 5.48% of the overall strategies observed. This strategy happens when a speaker repeats an idea but changes it slightly — adding details, adjusting words, or paraphrasing — to make the message clearer or more complete. This can be observed in the utterance of Participant 15:

**Participant 15:** *if going to write, if you're going to write a business letter, dapat we should know the audience na pagsisendan natin. Yun doon napapasok yung mga language barrier...(If you're going to write a business letter, we should know the audience we're sending it to. That's where language barriers come in—any kind of barrier that might enter the letter should be avoided. We also need to plan and outline our thoughts before writing business letters. This is also where we consider that we can't use jargon in formal business letters. And of course, we also need to seek feedback or have the letter checked if something is missing, needs to be added, or needs to be changed. Since it's a formal business letter, it should be perfect)*

The speaker immediately reformulated an incomplete phrase into a clearer and more complete version without being prompted. This shows that TVET students are not merely concerned with keeping the conversation going, but are also actively working to improve the quality and clarity of their message. Unlike message abandonment, self-rephrasing reflects persistence and a growing awareness of audience, purpose, and effective communication.

Lastly, Circumlocution is the fifth strategy identified, with 23 occurrences or 5.25% of the total interactional strategies observed during the small group interaction. This strategy occurs when a speaker describes or explains a concept using familiar words instead of directly naming it, particularly when the exact term is unavailable. This is evident in the utterance of Participant 4:

**Participant 1:** *pinasa ko lang yung application letter tapos resume (just submitted the application letter and the resume)*  
**Participant 4:** *wala ka ding pinasang kwan... yung papel na finifill upan, wala kang pinasang curriculum vitae ganon (You also didn't submit anything... that form you fill out, you didn't submit a curriculum vitae, like that.)*

The speaker first described the document as "the form you fill out" before eventually recalling the term "curriculum vitae," allowing the listener to understand the intended meaning even before the actual term was mentioned. This demonstrates that circumlocution serves as an effective compensatory strategy for TVET students with limited lexical resources, enabling them to continue speaking and avoid communication breakdown by relying on descriptions, examples, and characteristics of the target concept rather than stopping the conversation entirely.

## **5.2 Interactional Strategy used in Small Group Interaction**

The most frequently used interactional strategy among the TVET students is Response: Confirm, which constitutes 159 occurrences or 28.14% of the total interactional strategies observed during the small group interaction. This result clearly indicates that participants often express confirming responses, agreement, or acknowledgement of the statements made by their peers. This is evident in the following exchange:

**Participant 14:** *so ang ibig mong sabihin ate na kung maaari bawal gumamit ng mga jargon, tama? (So what you mean, is that if possible, we shouldn't use jargon. Is that right?)*  
**Participant 12:** *oo (yes)*

Participant 14 reformulated an idea and asked "so ang ibig mong sabihin ate na kung maaari bawal gumamit ng mga jargon, tama?" to which Participant 12 simply responded "oo," confirming that the interpretation was accurate and preventing any potential misunderstanding before the conversation proceeded. This demonstrates that TVET students naturally gravitate toward confirming and acknowledging one another's statements as a primary mode of engagement during small group

discussions, as confirmation responses serve as feedback mechanisms that show the active engagement of the listener, help maintain conversational flow, and reassure the speaker that their message has been understood and accepted by the group.

Response: Expand is the second most frequently used interactional strategy, recorded at 125 occurrences or 22.12% of the total strategies observed. This result implies that TVET students tend to go beyond short answers and instead elaborate or add more information to their responses, which is an indicator of communicative engagement. This can be observed in the interaction:

**Participant 3:** *nag interview ba kayo? (Did you do an interview?)*

**Participant 5:** *oo nag interview pa kami(Yes, we also did an interview.)*

**Participant 2:** *ang saamin naman via zoom din tapos mag question yung president naming. Yung president naming ng section, siya yung parang head, head na sinabihan nung teacher naming na maginterview sa amin. Tapos dapat masagot mo oral. Kasi parang yun na din yung work mo para matanggap ka.(For us, it was also via Zoom, and then our class president asked questions. Our section president is like the head—our teacher instructed him to interview us. Then you're supposed to answer orally, because that's already like your job requirement to get accepted.)*

Participant 3 asked "nag interview ba kayo?" and while Participant 5 briefly confirmed with "oo nag interview pa kami," it was Participant 2 who expanded the response by explaining that the interview was conducted via Zoom, that the section president served as the interviewer upon the instruction of the teacher, and that answers had to be given orally as part of the requirement for acceptance. This demonstrates that expanding a response goes beyond merely answering a question, as it involves providing specific details, examples, and additional information to ensure that the message is fully understood, while also helping sustain the flow of interaction and facilitate the co-construction of shared understanding among the group.

Asking for Clarification is the third most frequently observed interactional strategy among TVET students, recorded at 54 occurrences or 9.56% of the total instances observed during the small group interaction. This result shows that TVET students actively asked questions to make messages clearer during their discussions rather than disengaging when something was unclear. This can be observed in the interaction:

**Participant 3:** *tsaka bawal na siya magsinungaling sa mga business letter 9And you're not allowed to lie in business letters anymore.)*

**Participant 4:** *magkakaroon ka ba ng ano doon?(Will there be any consequence for that?)*

**Participant 3:** *ng kaso? (A case?)*

**Participant 4:** *oo (yes)*

**Participant 2:** *or wala naman?(Or none at all)*

**Participant 5:** *wala naman (none)*

**Participant 4:** *parang if ever na may pinaggayahan ka ganun, hindi ba papasok yung sa plagiarism?(Like if ever you copied something, wouldn't that fall under plagiarism?)*

Participant 3 stated that lying is not allowed in business letters, prompting Participant 4 to ask indirectly "magkakaroon ka ba ng ano doon?" using the vague word "ano" to signal confusion without directly admitting it, followed by Participant 2 further asking "or wala naman?" to seek additional clarification, and Participant 4 eventually asking whether copying content could be considered plagiarism to verify understanding. This shows that TVET students managed communication difficulties in a socially acceptable way by using indirect questions to request help without openly admitting confusion, allowing them to seek clarification while maintaining harmony and keeping the discussion flowing naturally.

Asking for Confirmation is the fourth most frequently observed interactional strategy, with 48 occurrences or 8.50% of the total interactional strategies recorded during the small group interaction. This result indicates that TVET students regularly used confirmation-seeking questions to verify information before accepting it as correct, particularly when they already had an idea but were unsure of its accuracy. This is evident in the following interaction:

**Participant 8:** *Sa alam ko, ang business permit is permit. Sa business letters is yung nagkoconvey ka na may business ka...(As far as I know, a business permit is a permit. In business letters, it's where you convey that you have a business...)*

**Participant 9:** *Kahit yung business mo lang is sari-sari store?(Even if your business is just a sari-sari store?)*

**Participant 8:** *Oo. Kailangan din natin (Yes. We still need it.)*

**Participant 10:** *At payagan ka nila, payagan nila na mag-business ganon.(And they will allow you—they will permit you to run a business like that.)*

Participant 8 explained that a business permit is needed even for running a business, prompting Participant 9 to ask "Kahit yung business mo lang is sari-sari store?" to verify whether the idea applied even to a small-scale business, to which Participant 8 confirmed with "Oo. Kailangan din natin," allowing Participant 9 to confidently accept the information. This demonstrates that asking for confirmation is an efficient and practical interactional strategy that allows TVET students to check the accuracy of their understanding, co-construct meaning with peers, and reduce the risk of accepting incorrect information, all while maintaining active and smooth participation in the discussion.

Indirect Appeal for Help is the fifth interactional strategy identified among TVET students, with a frequency of 28 occurrences or 4.96% of the total strategies observed during the small group interaction. This strategy allows TVET students to seek assistance without explicitly asking for it, as the speaker leaves the utterance incomplete or provides clues that signal to others that help may be needed. This is clearly illustrated in the interaction:

**Participant 15:** *the most enjoyable part naman in business letter is yung professionalism  
How you...how you communicate with your uhm (The most enjoyable part of a business letter is the professionalism—how you... how you communicate with your, uhm...)*

**Participant 16:** *partnership*

**Participant 15:** *yes, with your partnership or in organization in general...(Yes, with your partnership or with the organization in general...)*

Participant 15 was explaining the enjoyable part of writing a business letter but hesitated mid-sentence with "how you communicate with your uhm," leaving the utterance incomplete, which signaled to Participant 16 to supply the missing word "partnership," after which Participant 15 confirmed and continued the statement. This demonstrates that TVET students strategically managed lexical gaps by relying on peers to complete their message without the need for an explicit request, reflecting a cooperative communicative behavior where participants naturally respond to signals of difficulty and assist one another in maintaining the flow of interaction.

### **5.3 Underrepresented Direct Strategy used in Small Group Interaction**

Literal Translation: False Friends was not observed in any of the TVET student conversations, recording a total frequency of zero throughout the entire duration of the interaction. This indicates that none of the participants relied on translating words from L1 into similar-looking L2 words that carry different meanings. While no direct utterance demonstrates this strategy, its complete absence in the data is itself a significant finding, as it suggests that the participants did not make assumptions about L2 word meanings based on their resemblance to L1 words. This can be attributed to the collaborative nature of the interaction, where TVET students actively supported one another in constructing and clarifying meaning, reducing the likelihood of false friend errors from surfacing. Additionally, their natural use of Taglish or code-switching allowed them to simply choose the more familiar or appropriate term from either language, rather than forcing a direct translation that could lead to incorrect meanings.

Literal Translation from L3 was likewise absent in the conversations of TVET students, with zero occurrences recorded throughout the interaction. This indicates that none of the learners brought words or sentence structures from a third language into the discussion. While no utterance illustrates this strategy, its absence reveals that the participants found their use of Filipino and English sufficient to express all their ideas during the task. Since TVET students could freely switch between Filipino and

English through Taglish, there was no communicative gap that required drawing from a third language. Furthermore, their preference for interactional strategies such as clarification, confirmation, and circumlocution suggests that they resolved communication difficulties through peer interaction rather than by drawing from another linguistic system, keeping the discussion clear and mutually intelligible for all participants.

L1-Based Foreignizing was not observed in any of the recorded conversations of the TVET students, resulting in zero occurrences in the data. This indicates that none of the learners attempted to modify a Filipino word to resemble English pronunciation or structure in order to express their ideas. While no sample utterance illustrates this strategy, its absence reflects a deliberate communicative choice rather than a linguistic limitation, as the participants consistently favored safer and more reliable strategies such as clarification, confirmation, and circumlocution instead of approximating unfamiliar forms. The widespread use of Taglish made foreignizing unnecessary, since participants could simply choose the corresponding word from either language without needing to modify or invent new forms. The formal academic context of the task — centered on business letter writing — also likely prompted participants to be more cautious and deliberate in their language choices, further discouraging the use of riskier approximation strategies.

L3-Based Foreignizing did not appear in any of the recorded conversations, recording zero occurrences throughout the entire interaction. This means that none of the participants attempted to modify a third language word to resemble English during their discussions. While no direct utterance demonstrates this strategy, its absence is explained by the communicative sufficiency of Taglish, which already provided the participants with enough linguistic resources to express their ideas without needing to draw from a third language. Since an L3 is typically limited to classroom exposure and has not been sufficiently internalized for spontaneous use among TVET students, modifying an L3 word to resemble English would have demanded considerable cognitive effort with little guarantee of mutual comprehension. Rather than taking this risk, participants consistently turned to interaction-based strategies such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, and circumlocution, reflecting a practical communicative judgment that prioritized clarity and mutual intelligibility over individual approximation.

Code-Switching to L3 was not observed in the conversations of TVET students, resulting in zero occurrences in the data. This indicates that none of the participants inserted words or expressions from a third language into their communication, limiting their linguistic resources entirely to Filipino and English throughout the interaction. While no sample utterance illustrates this strategy, its absence highlights that the shared use of Filipino and English through Taglish already provided a flexible and effective means of expressing ideas, making the introduction of a third language unnecessary. The formal academic nature of the task, which centered on business letter writing, also guided participants to limit their language choices to the most relevant and appropriate codes for the context. Furthermore, the collaborative structure of the interaction allowed participants to address communication difficulties through peer support — such as clarification requests and confirmation checks — rather than extending their linguistic repertoire beyond L1 and L2.

#### 5.4 Underrepresented Interactional Strategy used in Small Group Interaction

Response: Repeat is the least used Interactional strategy observed in the study, with only 7 occurrences or 1.24% of the total strategies used throughout the interaction. This strategy happens when a speaker echoes what has just been said — usually after a clarification or correction — to show understanding or acknowledgement. This is evident in the following interaction:

**Participant 5:** *Wala pala experience. (So you didn't really have experience)*

**Participant 4:** *Bale-bale experience. (So basically, no experience.)*

**Participant 2:** *Tapos hindi naman pala pasado. Gano'n ay. (Then it didn't pass after all. Like that)*

**Participant 3:** *hindi naman pala pasado. (It didn't pass after all.)*

Participant 2 shared that a resume did not pass, to which Participant 3 simply echoed "*hindi naman pala pasado*," mirroring the exact statement without adding any new idea or deeper explanation. This demonstrates that while Response: Repeat confirms that the listener is following the conversation, it does not introduce new information or extend the discussion in any meaningful way. The very low frequency of this strategy reflects that TVET students prefer more active and idea-driven ways of responding, naturally gravitating toward strategies that allow them to express themselves, contribute ideas, and keep the conversation moving forward rather than simply echoing what has already been said.

Response: Repair is among the strategies with the lowest frequency in the study, with only 5 occurrences or 0.88% of the total communication strategies observed. This strategy refers to other-initiated self-repair, where one speaker signals a problem and the original speaker then corrects or adjusts the statement. This is evident in the interaction:

**Participant 14:** *Dapat formal yung tone ng letter kasi pang ano yun...(The tone of the letter should be formal because it's for something...)*

**Participant 13:** *Pang ano?(For what?)*

**Participant 14:** *Pang business, formal na letter.(for business—it's a formal letter)*

Participant 14 left a sentence unfinished by saying "pang ano yun," prompting Participant 13 to ask "Pang ano?" to signal that the message was unclear, after which Participant 14 immediately repaired the response by completing and clarifying the original statement with "Pang business, formal na letter." This shows that repair was not self-initiated but triggered by another speaker, demonstrating that learners are responsive to signals from peers and willing to clarify their message when prompted. The very low frequency of this strategy suggests that TVET students prioritize smooth and continuous conversation over explicit correction, using repair only when it is truly necessary for understanding rather than as a regular part of their interaction.

Direct Appeal for Help is among the least used strategies in the study, with a frequency count of 7 or 1.24% of the total strategies observed during the interaction. This strategy occurs when the speaker openly and explicitly asks for assistance from peers when they encounter difficulty in recalling a specific word, rather than hinting at it indirectly. This is clearly illustrated in the following utterance:

**Participant 16:** *Para makipag-deal sa business mo na ipromote. Siyempre pag malalaking kumpanya, napaka-hustle and crucial kapag ganoon kapag... may usapan silang bayad at rules. Ano ng tawag doon pre?(So you can make deals for your business that you want to promote. Of course, for big companies, it's very hectic and crucial when there are discussions about payment and rules. What do you call that?)*

**Participant 18:** *agreement o contract yun (An agreement or a contract.)*

After participant 16 described a business arrangement involving payment and rules, directly asked "Ano ng tawag doon pre?" — openly requesting help from peers to supply the missing term, to which Participant 18 immediately responded with "agreement o contract yun," allowing the conversation to continue smoothly. This demonstrates that direct appeal for help is used only when other strategies are no longer sufficient to complete the message, as TVET students tend to first attempt circumlocution, all-purpose words, or retrieval before resorting to explicitly asking for assistance, making direct appeal a last resort rather than a first option in their communicative behavior.

Interpretive Summary is another less frequently used strategy in the study, with a frequency count of 7 or 1.24% of all strategies observed. This strategy occurs when a speaker paraphrases or restates the idea of another speaker and extends the message to verify whether it was understood correctly. This can be observed in the following interaction:

**Participant 12:** *one of the challenging is not to use... is to use words correctly, yung mga jargons, yung terminologies in a business. because there are business that use other words but then differ meaning sa ibang profession.(One of the challenges is using words correctly—like jargon and business terminologies—because there are businesses that use certain words, but their meanings differ in other professions)*

**Participant 14:** *so ang ibig mong sabihin ate na kung maaari bawal gumamit ng mga jargon, tama?(So what you mean, Ate, is that if possible, we shouldn't use jargon. Is that right?)*

**Participant 12:** *oo (yes)*

Participant 12 explained the difficulty of using jargon and terminologies correctly in business writing, to which Participant 14 rephrased the idea into a simpler and more direct statement by saying "*so ang ibig mong sabihin ate na kung maaari bawal gumamit ng mga jargon, tama?*" — reformulating the message in their own words and seeking confirmation with "*tama?*" to ensure the meaning was accurately understood. This shows that while TVET students are capable of understanding each other's ideas, they do not consistently produce full interpretive summaries, often settling for partial or generalized restatements instead, as the cognitive complexity of paraphrasing and restructuring ideas makes this strategy less likely to appear spontaneously in natural interaction.

Own Accuracy Check has a low occurrence in the study, with only 8 instances or 1.42% of the total communication strategies observed. This strategy occurs when the speaker checks the accuracy of their own utterance by appending a confirmation-seeking question, signaling uncertainty about whether what was said is correct. This is evident in the utterance of Participant 7:

**Participant 7:** *uhm...For me is... yung business letter is uhm paggawa ng uhm letter sa isang business. Tama ba?*

Participant 7 provided a definition but immediately questioned its correctness by appending "*Tama ba?*" at the end, with the hesitation marker "*uhm*" further indicating uncertainty while seeking validation from the group before continuing. This shows that while the strategy reflects a degree of self-monitoring and linguistic awareness, its low frequency can be attributed to TVET students prioritizing fluency and the delivery of meaning over the monitoring of accuracy during spontaneous interaction, relying instead on the group to collectively negotiate and verify understanding rather than individually checking the correctness of their own utterances.

#### 5.4 Strategic Competence Enhancement Program

The Strategic Competence Enhancement Program (SCEP) was developed based on the findings of the study, which revealed that TVET students showed notably low or zero frequency in the use of certain direct strategies — specifically literal translation through false friends, literal translation from L3, L1-based foreignizing, L3-based foreignizing, and code-switching to L3 — as well as interactional strategies such as response repeat, response repair, direct appeal for help, interpretive summary, and own accuracy check, indicating a gap in their strategic competence in managing communication breakdowns and sustaining meaningful interaction. Designed in line with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the program consists of two instructional modules that provide learners with guided and practice-oriented opportunities to develop their strategic competence. Module 1, titled *Lost Words, No Problem!: Smart Ways to Express Ideas Using Direct Communication Strategies* addresses the zero frequency areas in direct strategies through activities such as identifying false friends, transforming local words into English-like expressions, and engaging in short conversations. Module 2, titled *Keep the Talk Going!: Powerful Interactional Strategies for Better Conversations*, focuses on the low-frequency interactional strategies through repetition drills, repair exercises, guided dialogues, and peer support tasks. Together, both modules move learners from understanding to application, equipping them with the strategies needed to sustain interaction, confirm understanding, and communicate more effectively in real-life contexts.

#### 6. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that TVET students are active and resourceful communicators who employ a wide range of direct and interactional strategies to navigate the challenges of small group interaction. Among the direct strategies, the use of all-purpose words emerged as the most dominant, reflecting how deeply embedded Filipino filler words such as "ano," "kwan," and "ganon" are in the everyday communicative behavior of TVET learners, serving not merely as fillers but as linguistically flexible tools that carry meaning across different grammatical roles. Message abandonment, retrieval, self-rephrasing, and circumlocution further illustrate that these learners are not passive communicators — rather, they are constantly negotiating meaning, searching for words, and reshaping their ideas in order to sustain interaction despite their limited vocabulary. On the interactional side, the dominance of Response: Confirm and Response: Expand highlights that TVET students are naturally inclined toward collaborative and cooperative communication, consistently acknowledging the contributions of their peers and building upon them to co-construct shared understanding. Asking for clarification, asking for confirmation, and indirect appeal for help further demonstrate that these learners actively manage comprehension and meaning-making within the group without disrupting the natural flow of conversation.

However, the complete absence of literal translation strategies, L1-based and L3-based foreignizing, and code-switching to L3, alongside the minimal use of response repeat, response repair, direct appeal for help, interpretive summary, and own accuracy check, points to significant gaps in the strategic repertoire of TVET students. These gaps suggest that while learners are capable of keeping conversations going, they struggle with more cognitively demanding strategies that require self-monitoring, explicit repair, and deeper reformulation of ideas — competencies that are essential in professional and academic communication contexts. This is particularly significant for TVET students, whose career paths demand not only technical knowledge but also the ability to communicate clearly, accurately, and confidently in real-world workplace settings.

These findings collectively underscore the urgent need for deliberate and structured instruction in strategic communication among TVET learners. The Strategic Competence Enhancement Program (SCEP), developed in direct response to these gaps, represents a meaningful step toward equipping learners with the tools they need to sustain interaction, manage communication breakdowns, and engage more effectively with others. Ultimately, this study affirms that communication strategy use is not merely a linguistic concern but a critical dimension of learner development — one that shapes how TVET students present themselves, connect with others, and thrive in the professional world they are preparing to enter.

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