

The Effect of Communication Language Anxiety and Prior Learning Experience on Speaking Challenges and Strategies: The Case of Libyan Students in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Intellectual engagement is essential for international students' academic success. However, academic speaking challenges associated with communicative language anxiety and inadequate prior learning experience could impede students' academic communication abilities in foreign universities. Thus, students adopt academic speaking strategies to tackle these factors. Therefore, an explanatory sequential design was utilised to investigate students' academic speaking challenges and strategies used to counter these challenges in foreign universities. An online survey with 223 respondents was conducted, followed by 15 interviews and a focus group discussion. SPSS was used for quantitative data analysis. NVivo analyses of interviews and focus group discussions were performed to generate themes. It was found that communicative language anxiety and prior learning experience significantly affect academic speaking challenges and academic speaking strategies. Thus, stakeholders should consider international students' communication challenges caused by negative prior learning experiences to facilitate their overseas higher education.

Keywords: Academic speaking challenges, academic speaking strategies, communication language anxiety, Prior learning experience

INTRODUCTION

Internationalization has become a significant and desirable trend among higher education institutions. A critical component for the success of this trend is the effectiveness of scholarly communication in English as a medium of instruction contexts. However, interaction among colleagues with diverse educational backgrounds in various academic settings is challenging, especially for international students from EFL backgrounds who have had little prior interaction experience in English. These students often have a limited understanding of English because they have little practical experience with English communication in natural situations, leading to academic speaking challenges (Attrill et al., 2016). As a result, they may lack necessary knowledge, skills in English academic usage, communicative competence, and awareness of language variation for conversing with interlocutors from various educational and social backgrounds.

These challenges often lead to problems related to presenting, participating, and expressing ideas in academic discourse and discussions (Singh, 2019). While students attempt to overcome these problems, some affective factors may impede their success. These factors may include a lack of prior learning experience, embarrassment, and communication language anxiety (Oxford & Ehrman, 1992; Wolf & Phung, 2019). These limitations may result in speaking comprehension problems that impede communicative academic discourse and success. When international students encounter such challenges, they need to resort to specific language learning strategies to enhance communicative competence to overcome them. Academic speaking strategies support learners in demonstrating their understanding and improving their communicative competence, classified into two main categories: direct and indirect strategies (e.g., Oxford, 1990).

Direct Speaking Strategies

Direct speaking strategies refer to learners' mental processing that helps them store and retrieve new information about a new language and include many sub-strategies. For instance, memory-related speaking strategies involve creating mental linkages and placing new words into context through immediate practice. Practicing academic language in a naturalistic setting would improve learners' speaking abilities by combining new language terms and phrases in different ways (O'Malley et al., 1985; Oxford, 1990). Cognitive speaking strategies help learners structure communication activities to improve their speaking abilities through repetition, formally practicing sounds and the writing system, and recognizing and using patterns. Cognitive speaking strategies "can help the students to face a difficult situation in speaking" (Sreen & Ilankumaran, 2019, p. 1045). Lastly, compensatory strategies are used to overcome limitations in speaking, which

include intelligent code-switching to the mother tongue. Using mime gestures involves learners' physical motions or responses by conveying the intended meaning through gestures and circumlocution, which is "a roundabout expression involving several words to describe or explain a single concept" (Oxford, 1990, p. 97).

Indirect Speaking Strategies

Metacognitive speaking strategies consist of planning to learn and evaluating learning. These strategies facilitate learning, which helps the learners concentrate their attention and energies to empower their learning. Other strategies involve directed and selective attention and delaying speech production to focus on speaking. The learner would automatically implement this strategy as it would be dynamically dependent on their level of language communication and comfort to speak. In many cases, the learner would encourage silent speaking or speaking to themselves before speaking with others (Oxford, 1990; Zare, 2012). Other indirect strategies include affective speaking strategies which rely on cooperative processes to achieve goals. Speaking in a new language would usually cause great anxiety; thus, an affective speaking strategy would lower a learner's anxiety and positively influence psychological factors, improving speaking communication competence and learners' understanding (Rubin, 1975). Lastly, social speaking strategies include asking questions, cooperating, and empathizing with others, which are essential to enhance international students' speaking strategies (e.g., Liyanage et al., 2014).

RESEARCH MODEL

This study integrates affective variables exploring the academic speaking challenges experienced by international students in foreign universities and their academic speaking strategies to overcome these challenges. The study further explores why such challenges and strategies would occur among international students in foreign countries. Therefore, the research questions of this study are addressed as follows:

1. What academic speaking challenges do international students face while studying in foreign universities?
2. What academic speaking strategies do international students use while studying in foreign universities?
3. What effects do prior learning experience and communication language anxiety have on academic speaking challenges and strategies among international students while studying in foreign universities?

METHOD

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design was carried out in two phases. The first phase consisted of an online questionnaire (for items, see

Appendix A). For the second phase, interviews and a focus group discussion were conducted with participants selected from the survey respondents.

Validity and reliability - Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted for validity and reliability purposes. The pilot study consisted of two phases: 26 participants for the questionnaire and eight informants for the interviews. The pilot questionnaire was prepared in hard copy, scheduled for distribution, and administered in informal settings at various locations and times based on respondents' preferences. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was .904

The participants for the qualitative phase were selected through snowball/chain sampling, which was used to recruit international students who were ready and willing to share their overseas English language experience. The validity of the interview protocol questions (see Appendix B) helped guide the face-to-face interviews to explore the students' academic English challenges and strategies, subsequently providing valuable information for informing the research and improving its design and implementation. The sessions were conducted in Arabic, audio-recorded, transcribed, translated, and submitted to traditional thematic analysis.

In response to the feedback from the pilot, particularly regarding the length of the questionnaire, the instrument was revised and some amendments were made to the questionnaire and interview protocol questions. The items on demographic information were revised for clarity. The number of options for the academic speaking challenges and strategies was reduced. Some protocol question items were added, and some were excluded. The language was revised for clarity and readability to aid participants' comprehension.

Research Population and Sampling Procedures

This study was designed to focus on Libyan students enrolled in Malaysian universities. The Libyan embassy in Malaysia reported that in 2020, 257 Libyan students were enrolled in the Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. programs in five universities in Malaysia: Universiti Malaya, University Putra Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, and Universiti Teknologi Mara. The students from this population voluntarily participated in the two phases of this study. Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects at UPM (JKEUPM-2020-062). Cochran's formula was used, resulting in a sample size of 154 from the total population of 257:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2(.5)(.5)}{(.05)^2} = 384 \quad n = \frac{384}{1 + \frac{384}{257}} = 154$$

Oversampling by 40–50% has also been recommended to compensate for questionnaires that are not returned or have no responses (Salkind, 2012). Thus,

the optimal sample size for the quantitative phase of the study was determined as 216 (i.e., $154 * 0.40 = 62$; $154 + 62 = 216$).

The participants for the qualitative phase of the research involving interviews and focus group discussion were selected using purposive sampling. Snowball/chain sampling was used to recruit international students, who were ready and willing to share potentially sensitive information about their personal language challenge experiences. Nineteen key respondents from the survey were chosen, including 15 informants for individual face-to-face interviews and one focus group discussion (which consists of four informants).

Survey Questionnaire

The adapted instrument comprises items selected from previously published instruments. These sources included Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and Setiyadi's (2016) Language Learning Strategies Questionnaire (LLSQ). Items were also adapted from Evans and Green (2007) for academic speaking challenges, Horwitz et al.'s (1986) for academic language anxiety, and Bennui's (2007) for the prior learning experience. An eight-point Likert scale from 0 'Never' to 7 'Every time' was used for all the questionnaire items (see appendix A).

The questionnaire was distributed via email to 257 international students with the assistance of their embassy in a foreign country. However, only 246 respondents returned the questionnaire, and 223 questionnaires were accepted for the final data analysis with an overall 86% response rate.

Interviews and Focus Group Discussion

Face-to-face interviews, lasting 30–40 minutes each, were conducted with 15 informants. Protocol questions (see appendix B) were prepared based on the questionnaire results and validated through a pilot study discussed above. Four informants participated in the focus group discussion, which was 90 minutes in duration.

Data Analysis

A total of 257 international students responded to the online questionnaire. Exploratory data analysis involved data cleaning and screening to check for missing data, outliers, and normality of the data distribution, resulting in the acceptance of 223 valid responses. SPSS Statistics 25 was used for the descriptive analyses of percentages, mode, and medians for analyzing academic speaking challenges and strategies. NVivo version 10 and manual thematic analysis were used to analyze data gleaned from the 15 interviews and the focus group

discussion. Additionally, sequential triangulation was performed using excerpts, field notes, and member checks to reach data saturation.

RESULTS

The preliminary results from the questionnaire are presented along with a discussion of the outcomes from the interviews and focus group discussion, allowing for a more in-depth explanation of the findings to support conclusions on the participants' experiences with academic speaking challenges and their use of academic speaking strategies to overcome these difficulties.

Academic Speaking Challenges

The descriptive data analysis for academic speaking challenges presented in Table 1 below. For example, students faced the speaking challenges in communicating ideas fluently (18.4%) with (Med=4, Mod=5), and exploring “teaching stuff” and peers' social norms were reported (9.4%) with (Med=3, Mod=2).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Speaking Challenges

Items	Percentage (%)								Med	Mod
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Challenges in communicating ideas fluently	4.0	8.1	17.9	14.8	16.1	18.4	12.1	8.5	4	5
Challenges in speaking accurate academic English	4.5	13.0	14.3	14.3	15.7	15.7	10.8	11.0	4	4
Challenges in using terms related to the field in academic discussions, lectures, and when sharing ideas	5.4	14.8	15.2	13.9	18.4	17.5	9.0	5.8	4	4

Challenges in having academic speaking with the lecturers or supervisors on academic topics or matters	9.0	10.8	17.0	15.7	17.0	15.7	7.2	7.6	3	2
Challenges in having academic speaking with peers on academic topics or matters	7.6	11.7	16.1	21.1	13.5	13.5	9.4	7.2	3	3
Challenges in participating in academic presentations	8.1	12.6	16.1	19.7	18.8	13.0	7.2	4.5	3	3
Challenges in exploring “teaching stuff” and peers’ social norms such as values	6.3	15.7	20.2	19.3	15.2	9.4	8.1	5.8	3	2

Note. Eight-point Likert scale: 0 = Never face this challenge, 1 = Rarely face this challenge, 2 = Occasionally face this challenge, 3 = Sometimes face this challenge, 4 = Frequently face this challenge, 5 = Often face this challenge, 6 = Usually face this challenge, 7 = Every time face this challenge. *Med*=median, *Mod*= Mode

Analysis of qualitative data outcomes provided more depth of understanding of the quantitative research phase. Three main themes were thus identified, confirming the identification of academic speaking challenges experienced by the students.

Lack of language proficiency

Respondents reported difficulty engaging in academic speaking with lecturers or supervisors on academic topics or matters as the greatest speaking comprehension challenge due to their lack of language proficiency. During the interviews, Informant 2 explained that she "faced challenges in academic presentations and effective academic discussion because of lack of English learning experiences in home country". Students' fears and anxiety about failing or encountering embarrassing situations when making mistakes during communication led to a reluctance to engage in academic communication in academic settings.

Lack of content knowledge in the discipline/field of study

Informants provided solid information that lack of knowledge was a "large barrier" between interlocutors and made them feel "confused and less focused" because of "fear and anxiety." (Informant 6). Similarly, Informant 14 provided additional information on the "having challenges in engaging in discussions with colleagues, understanding the academic content, difficulty communicating or expressing ideas about an academic topic." Thus, these students were found to lack content knowledge in the discipline or field of study. This deficiency, like the challenge of understanding the academic content knowledge, was also aligned with their lack of terminology and negative prior English learning experience.

Lack of confidence in communicating orally

The students lacked confidence and suffered from hesitation, fear, and anxiety about being involved in academic discussions because of their lack of Academic English communication skills. For instance, Informant 3 stated:

I had a negative feeling of fear and anxiety from having an academic discussion with the lecturer/supervisor/colleagues due to lack of English language practice and interest in home country education.

Besides, during the focus group discussion, informants expressed and shared similar challenges

Informant16: I studied courses in my country and foreign countries before starting my master's and doctoral studies. Yet, there is anxiety and tension from communicating in the academic discussion.

Informant 19: I really faced serious challenges at the beginning of my study in communicating with the supervisor and discussion in the English language due to anxiety and fear of the language.

Prior Learning Experience & Communication Language Anxiety

The descriptive data analysis for the prior learning experience and communication language anxiety are presented in Table 2 below. Such as, 19.7% of the respondent were strongly agreed with (Med=5, Mod=7) reported international students academic speaking challenges was due to the unavailability of online academic apps in their home country, additionally 14.8% of the respondent were strongly agreed with (Med=4, Mod=3) reported their challenges due to lack of prior academic speaking practice.

Likewise, regarding communication language anxiety, 11.7% with of the respondents with (Med=4, Mod=2) were strongly agreed their academic speaking challenges due to being worried about academic language use in discussions . In addition , 11.7% 8 of respondent with (Med=3, Mod=2) agreed that difficulty in comprehending academic discussions with peers caused them to be anxious at speaking.

Table 2. Prior Learning Experience & Communication Language Anxiety

Constructs	Percentage (%)								Med	Mod
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Prior Learning Experience										
Lack of academic online apps in your country.	7.2	10.8	12.1	9.4	12.1	14.8	13.9	19.7	5	7
Lack of prior academic speaking practice	5.8	9.0	11.7	15.7	13.9	13.9	15.2	14.8	4	3
Lack of prior academic listening practice	5.8	9.0	12.6	14.8	13.9	16.1	13.9	13.9	4	5
Lack of prior knowledge of academic English.	10.9	9.9	17.9	15.7	10.3	12.6	9.9	13.0	3	2
Communication Language Anxiety										
Worry toward academic language use in a discussion	5.4	16.1	17.5	9.4	14.8	12.1	13.0	11.7	4	2

about topics or matters.										
Difficulty in understanding academic discussions of the lecturers or supervisor.	9.0	16.6	13.0	15.2	15.7	13.0	9.0	8.5	3	1
Lack of Self-confidence in academic engagement	11.2	18.8	10.3	12.1	15.7	11.2	9.9	10.8	3	1
Difficulty in comprehending academic discussions with peers.	9.4	13.9	18.4	15.7	12.6	11.7	9.9	8.5	3	2

Note: 0 = It is not a reason, 1= Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly disagree, 4= Neutral, 5 = Slightly agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly agree; *Med*= Median; *Mod* = Mode.

The qualitative data provided more depth of understanding of the quantitative research phase. Informants explained negative prior learning experiences were reasons for the communicative language challenges they faced, and they mentioned how they affected their choice of strategies in their attempts to overcome their challenges. Informant 14, for example, said, "the most important reasons for these challenges are lack of the previous education, educational curricula, and interest in the English language..." Informant 9 stated in an interview that "there is a lack of knowledge of academic terminology and how to engage an academic discussion."

Informant 2 further noted a "lack of English language teaching and learning in home country education and interest towards the English language because home country society is not encouraging the mastery of English language." Similarly, students consistently mentioned that they experienced communicative language anxiety. Their responses indicated how their anxiety influenced their choices and implementation of language learning strategies. For example, two interview informants explained how communicative language anxiety negatively affected their communicative performance and their chosen strategy to overcome this challenge:

I faced challenges from my first beginnings in the Master's stage in Malaysia, such as going into an academic debate and discussion. I feel anxious and afraid of making mistakes in a classroom presentation. I memorized terms to overcome these challenges, which helped me reduce my speaking challenges (Informants 2).

Academic Speaking Strategies

The descriptive data analysis for academic speaking strategies presented in Table 3 reports reported international student relying on several strategies such as memory-related (Med=4, Mod=4) cognitive (Med=4, Mod=3) and compensatory (Med=4, Mod=2). Noticeably, social strategy (Med=3, Mod=3) being the least used.

Table 3. Academic Speaking Strategies

Academic Speaking Strategies	Med	Mod
Memory-related	4	4
Cognitive	4	3
Compensatory	4	2
Metacognitive	4	4
Affective	4	4
Social	3	3

Note. Med = Median; Mod = Mode

The results for these constructs support the conclusion that the students preferred self-reliance through their reliance more in a direct speaking strategies (i.e., feeling comfortable relying on themselves) to memorise academic terminologies and to independently employ memory-related and cognitive and compensatory strategies rather than social strategies in improving their academic speaking. This conclusion is further supported by qualitative data gathered through the interviews with the study participants and their focus group discussion. One participant, for example, reported feeling "more comfortable and confident" when memorizing first and then practicing before speaking in academic language presentations and discussions with the support of images.

Memory-Related Speaking Strategies

Memory-related speaking strategies were reported supporting international student speaking. For example 20.6% of the respondent with (Med=5, Mod=6) use images in academic presentations and discussions (for items, see Appendix A).

The qualitative phase of the study revealed interrelationships between cognitive strategies and memory strategies. The participants explained that these

strategies were used to "memorise and repeat academic information" and "follow the discussion and academic meetings." The strategy also involved note-taking in improving memorization when the participants felt necessary.

It was found that the students relied on memory-related strategies due to various factors. Oxford (1990) reported several factors influencing strategy choice, such as degree of awareness, nationality, and the purpose of learning the language. Therefore, due to students' fears and anxiety and their lack of prior knowledge and information of academic speaking, terminologies used in academic discussion and settings, they tended to rely heavily on memorizing, using images and reviewing what they learned and applying that to other academic discussions. Thus, this result indicates that the students had self-recognition of their challenges, which led them to improve their knowledge of academic content and terms.

Cognitive Speaking Strategies

Cognitive speaking strategies one of the used strategy by the international students. For example, 18.4% of the respondent with (Med=4, Mod=4) Enhancing their academic speaking by watching English online or T.V. programs (for items, see Appendix A). During the interviews, the informants acknowledged the advantage of watching academic YouTube programs, noting it was "one of the most effective strategies" (Informant 9).

In the focus group discussion, participants explained this strategy as helpful in improving academic speaking and reducing communicative language anxiety. Additionally, they agreed on the advantage of the note-taking strategy to improve their speaking and confidence about their engagement, which also reduced their communicative language anxiety and fears toward speaking and communicating with others in their academic setting, mentioning:

Informant 16: I would prepare notes that facilitate and support my speaking.

Informant 19: I would be very confident when relying on my taken note.

Informant 18: I feel note-taking improved my critical thinking in following up and understanding the content.

Compensatory Speaking Strategies

Compensatory speaking strategies were also reported one of the used strategy. The students were found to rely on using synonyms that they knew to help them in their academic discussions. 16.6 % of the respondents often used this group of strategies with (Med=5, Mod=6) (for items, see Appendix A). From the qualitative phase, informant 15 from the interviews noted that despite prior practice for the academic discussion, she "will rely on the knowledge and terms [she] knows from previous academic classes and discussion". This result indicates that compensation strategies lead learners to gain appropriate linguistic knowledge from the surrounding literary context (e.g., peers, supervisors, academic staff).

Metacognitive Speaking Strategies

The students reported in the study was using metacognitive strategies. For example, 23.8% of the international students were performing academic practice before academic language presentations with (Med=5, Mod=7) (for items, see Appendix A).

The qualitative results revealed participants relied on metacognitive strategies to improve their speaking comprehension while becoming accustomed to the academic discussion in English. For example, Informant 15 reported that she took the responsibility to improve her speaking through self-evaluation and paying attention regarding her speaking:

I have to have prior practice with myself about the class discussion and my meeting with my supervisor as much as I feel I satisfy with how I speak, while I practice, I can notice my mistakes and weakness on delivering a discussion, so I practice again and again until reaching to a good level of academic speech.

During the focus group discussion, students provided information regarding their planning and preparation. For example, participants mentioned the following:

Informant 17: I used a lot to prepare for academic presentations and discussions...

Informant 16: I do the pre-preparation for the discussion and the academic presentation.

Informant 18: Yes, this is a good strategy. I take about a week to prepare and rehearse due to anxiety and fear of presentation.

Metacognitive strategies are powerful and can empower language learners. These strategies are centered on learners' self-awareness of language learning improvement and therefore include planning for tasks, monitoring progress, and paying attention (O'Malley et al., 1985; Oxford, 1992). Thus, these results indicate that these students are autonomous learners who assume responsibility for improving their academic speaking skills.

Affective Speaking Strategies

Affective speaking strategies were reported among the used strategy. As many as 17.0% of the students claimed that they motivated themselves every time to calm down when they became anxious while speaking in academic discussions or presentations with (Med=5, Mod=5) (for items, see Appendix A).

These results correspond to participant responses from the qualitative research phase regarding self-motivation. Informant 4 remarked that when she could not understand the content of a discussion, she would try to get calm and motivate herself to focus and try to guess the meaning "Although I have a prior practice, I feel worried and anxious in any class or discussion, I feel like I cannot say anything, so I try to calm down and motivate myself getting into the discussion and communicate as much as I can".

Similarly, during the focus group discussion, the informants were motivated to improve their language and lower their anxiety by improving their speaking and academic engagement with others in academic settings.

Informant 16: I have to prepare intensively before the class and rely on translation as feel hesitant asking for clarifications.

Informant 19: In my case, I don't feel shame because of my weakness in English, I motivate myself to improve my communication skill by getting into an academic discussion and trying to speak despite my language challenges.

The above results suggest that affective strategies promote a sense of agency and aspiration for facing challenges and obstacles. Additionally, cognitive processing cannot function to improve linguistic proficiency and academic competence without motivation to lower anxiety and increase self-confidence.

Social Speaking Strategies

Social speaking strategies were reported as the least used among the students. According to the descriptive statistics, 17% of the respondents participating or presenting in conferences or workshops to improve academic speaking with (Med=4, Mod=4) (for items, see Appendix A). These results were corroborated by the anxiety expressed by informants in the qualitative phase. For example, Informant 5 explained during an interview that she attended "workshops/conferences as a participant more than as a presenter because of fear and anxiety of making mistakes and not performing well." Besides, during the focus group discussion, informants agreed that social strategies might improve their speaking and their academic engagement:

Informant 19: It is better to communicate with other nationalities.

Informant 16: I Prepare my presentations and frequently train in front of peers and friends hlepđ me reduces anxiety and being more confidente.

This research indicates students are not satisfied with social strategies to improve their speaking due to their lack of confidence, fear of cultural differences, and lack of prior practice. By understanding the culture and considering others' feelings, the learners would speak carefully and be able to convey their speech without being misunderstood due to cultural differences.

DISCUSSION

The international students participating in this study reported experiencing academic speaking challenges in foreign higher education institutions. They included the problems of language proficiency, lack of content knowledge in the discipline/field of study, and lack of confidence in communicating orally. Past research on EFL international students who furthered their studies in ESL contexts yielded findings concurrent with what has been reported in the present research (see Attrill et al., 2016; Halali et al., 2021). Lack of cognitive knowledge of the language of instruction that needs to be emphasized through extensive and earlier language learning and practiced due to lack of prior learning experience resulted

in language articulation and practical challenges. For instance, Attrill et al. (2016) reported that international students' prior education experiences raised challenges in their academic speaking which led to poor academic performance. Similarly, Jalleh et al.'s (2021) study conducted among international students in Malaysian universities revealed that international students faced academic speaking challenges due to insufficient English language learning experiences and practice, which raised their anxiety and led to communication apprehension among the students.

The findings for prior learning experiences are consistent with those of several other studies (Dochy, 1988; Horwitz, 1986). Furthermore, the results agree with Dochy's (1988) assessment that "prior knowledge is a potentially important educational variable. Recent and earlier research in educational psychology has shown that this variable could explain 30% to 60%, of the variance in study results" (p. 1). The international students' lack of prior learning experience also led to cognitive inhibition, as characterised by Piaget's cognitive theory (1936) and reported by Yang et al. (2021), which discouraged them from participating in academic discourse. Although the students may have benefited from socially interactive communication strategies, they recognised their limitations and became autonomic in their learning to overcome their communication challenges. Their emphasis thus became focused on memory-related, metacognitive, to improve their English academic skills.

Furthermore, communication language anxiety had essential effects throughout the research with various results and outcomes. These results are corroborated by previous research finding that speaking is a notably anxiety-provoking activity for language learners (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Young, 1992). Furthermore, according to Aida (1994), "It is very likely that people experience anxiety and reluctance in communicating with other people or expressing themselves in a foreign language in which they do not have full competence" (p. 157). Moreover, inadequate communicative competence and communication language anxiety were reported to inhibit the students from joining academic discussions. It was linked with reluctance to implement social strategies due to their fears of becoming involved in awkward or embarrassing situations.

The students' reactions toward their challenges resulted from negative prior learning experience and raising their academic communicative competence are compatible with the concept in the cognitive theory of Piaget (1936), communicative competence by Hymes (1976), and the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982). Communicative competence will be applicable and strong within learners if prior comprehensible input is generated and improved through cognitive awareness. Thus, simultaneous language competence and practice will be more emphasised with the learner throughout long- and short-term memory by restoring and retrieving the required knowledge. Eventually, learner's affective filter will lower, improving their communicative competence. Additionally, a lack of prior practice and language learning would negatively affect the learners' cognitive awareness, resulting in poor communicative competence. The learners would be very anxious and have a higher effective filter that blocks any chance of

comprehensible input. In the same regard, many researchers (e.g., Wu, 2019) reported that international students face challenges in their academic speaking due to a lack of communicative and linguistic competence.

The results on academic speaking strategies revealed the students using a compensation of several strategies consisted of memory-related, cognitive, affective, metacognitive, compensatory, and social speaking strategies to overcome their academic speaking problems in academic contexts. Thus, they preferred self-reliance, and they used images in academic presentations and discussions to support their academic speaking strategies. They also memorize English academic terms and sentences related to the field of study, repeat words or sentences several times to remember them, use a mirror to practice academic presentations or discussions to improve their communication competence. The students also depended to a lesser extent on compensatory cognitive speaking strategies. They rely on using synonyms and gestures or pauses to make up for missing knowledge. They also watch English online/T.V. programs and use note-taking before communicating in academic discourse, which emphasises being autonomous to overcome effects caused by performance anxiety related to inadequate language ability.

Social strategy usually plays an important role in improving language proficiency, providing "increased interaction and more empathetic understanding" (Alhaysony, 2017, p. 20). However, in the present study, social strategy was used the least frequently, lending support to the conclusion that the self-reliance strategy outweighed the socialization strategy as an option for improving speaking comprehension. The reason was perhaps associated with the students' social inhibitions regarding unfamiliar cultural differences, language distance, and fear of appearing to have lower communicative competence than interlocutors. Students are thus reluctant to employ social strategies, arguably due to effective factors (Lee et al., 2015). These students do have tolerance for their challenges; however, they tend not to explicitly introduce their challenges to others in an academic setting through interaction.

Apart from that, international students' communicative language anxiety and prior learning experience results indicate that both academic speaking challenges and academic speaking strategies are essential factors affecting learners' speaking communicative competence abilities. The findings support the argument that prior learning experience "is a potentially important educational variable" (Dochy, 1988, p. 1) and that communicative language anxiety plays an important role in the linguistic processing of information (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). This result also agrees with previous research that found relations between inadequate levels of academic speaking skills and learner anxiety (Fathi et al., 2020; Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1992). This finding thus provides a valuable perspective on the role of academic speaking strategies in reducing anxiety levels among EFL learners in academic situations.

However, it is essential to note that these findings are inconsistent with the study by Yunus & Singh (2019), which reported that this strategy was one of the most frequently used among internationals "to build up learners' independence and autonomy towards promoting lifelong learning" (p. 210). Thus, this result

indicated that these students continue thinking of their challenges and how to overcome them by monitoring their performance and reviewing their strategies. Additionally, they take more responsibility for improving their academic speaking challenges, resulting in being autonomous learners. Similarly, metacognitive strategies are used more frequently by independent learners. It has a direct influence on improving learners' communicative competence, which would lower learners' anxiety.

Among academic speaking strategies, it is important to observe others in the academic setting who are experts or native speakers of the language to improve and recognize the required communicative competence in the academic setting. As reported by Bojović (2020), cognitive strategies are "helpful in enabling learners at the higher levels of communicative language anxiety not to get blocked and to continue the interaction" (p. 195). Thus, this result indicates that cognitive speaking strategies helped learners to understand how to use and communicate in English by putting more emphasis on lowering anxiety

As this research demonstrates the effective use of a mixed-method approach, it is recommended similar research be carried out on students in other locations such as the U.S. and U.K. to identify the similarities and differences among internationals. Finally, more research is needed on the factors that affect learning challenges and their associated mediating strategies.

In conclusion, the research revealed the importance of supporting international students to reduce their communicative language anxiety, improve their communicative competence and reduce the role of their negative prior learning experiences that affect their academic speaking challenges and strategies. Accordingly, pre-sessional English programs for overseas international students in host institutions should be revamped. The findings also indicate that prior learning experiences, challenges, strategies, and others (e.g., emotional states) (Amiryousefi, 2017), may affect language learning processes. Though the findings are surprising, they may be interpreted with caution because they cannot be generalizable to other international students enrolled in Malaysian universities who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

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Appendix A: Quantitative result for academic speaking strategies

Strategies	Percentage (%)									Me d	Mod
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
<i>Memory-Related</i>											
Supporting my speaking with the use of images in academic presentations and discussions.	2.7	5.4	9.1	13.0	13.0	16.6	20.6	18.4	5	6	
Memorizing academic English terms and sentences related to the field of study.	5.4	4.5	8.5	16.6	13.0	13.9	16.6	21.1	5	7	
I speak a word or a sentence several times to remember it.	3.6	5.8	13.0	13.5	13.9	16.6	12.1	21.5	4	7	
Using mirror to practice academic presentations or discussion.	18.4	11.2	9.0	12.6	11.2	15.7	8.1	13.9	3	0	
<i>Cognitive</i>											
Enhancing academic speaking by	4.0	6.7	10.3	14.8	18.4	15.7	13.9	16.1	4	4	

watching English online/TV programs.										
Explaining what I want to share in academic discussion in many different ways.	2.7	6.7	13.0	15.2	24.7	15.7	13.0	9.0	4	4
Using note taking before responding orally to questions.	7.6	8.1	15.7	13.9	17.0	16.6	10.8	10.3	4	4
Structuring academic English sentences with the assistance of the mother tongue, Arabic.	11.7	12.6	9.0	14.3	14.3	13.9	11.7	12.6	4	3
<i>Compensatory</i>										
Using synonyms that I know to help me in my academic discussion.	4.5	5.4	11.7	10.8	15.7	16.6	20.2	15.2	5	6
Using gestures or pauses to make up for missing knowledge	5.8	8.1	3.5	13.5	15.7	15.2	13.0	15.2	4	4

Using gestures to share ideas and thoughts during a discussion in academic contexts.	6.7	10.3	13.5	13.9	17.5	15.7	9.9	12.6	4	4
Learning academic terms by using them in academic sentences related to academic topics or matters.	8.5	9.9	16.1	11.7	17.0	12.6	12.1	12.1	4.1	4

Metacognitive

Having academic practice before academic presentations.	1.3	7.2	10.3	12.6	18.4	12.1	14.3	23.8	5	7
I try to evaluate my utterances after speaking in academic discussions or matters.	3.1	7.2	10.3	14.3	17.0	21.5	13.9	12.6	4	5
I try to correct the mistakes that I	3.6	6.7	11.2	15.7	18.4	22.4	13.0	9.0	4	5

produce orally during discussions in academic contexts.										
Using silent discussion "talk to myself" to improve academic speaking.	5.4	8.5	18.4	13.5	15.7	19.7	9.0	9.9	4	5
<i>Affective</i>										
Trying to calm down myself when I become anxious while speaking in academic discussions or presentations.	5.4	4.9	11.2	11.7	15.7	17.0	17.0	17.0	5	5
Motivate myself to take every opportunity to speak to other educators or scholars speaking English.	2.2	6.3	12.1	15.7	12.6	19.7	16.1	15.2	4	5
Motivating myself to speak in an academic	6.7	5.8	10.8	16.1	11.2	20.6	11.2	16.6	4	5

context even though I lack speaking proficiency .										
Rewarding myself for when I speak academical ly about the content or matters in academic discussion.	3. 9	10 .8	13 .5	15 .2	13.9	16.1	7.6	9.0	3	5
Trying to calm down myself when I become anxious while speaking in academic discussions or presentatio ns.	5. 4	4. 9	11 .2	11 .7	15.7	17.0	17.0	17. 0	5	5

Social

Participatin g or presenting in conference s or workshops to improve academic speaking.	9. 0	9. 4	11 .7	14. 8	17.9	14.8	11. 2	11.2	4	4
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Clarifying with supervisor/lecturer about the related ambiguous academic terms to improve academic speaking.	5.8	11.2	4.8	18.8	16.6	13.0	9.9	9.9	3	3
Practicing with peers for the academic presentations.	10.3	10.3	15.7	14.3	13.0	12.6	10.8	13.	4	2
Practicing with the supervisor for the academic presentations.	13.9	9.9	12.1	14.3	16.6	12.6	12.1	8.5	3	4
Exploring (teaching stuff and peers) social norms such as values.	11.2	11.7	17.5	17.9	15.2	7.2	10.	9.0	3	3
I ask somebody to correct me when I talk during a discussion in academic contexts.	20.2	17.5	13.5	12.6	11.2	9.4	8.5	7.2	2	0

Note: 0 = Never use this strategy, 1 = Rarely use this strategy, 2 = Occasionally use this strategy, 3 = Sometimes use this strategy, 4 = Frequently use this strategy,

5 = Often use this strategy, 6 = Usually use this strategy, 7 = Every time use this strategy; *Med*= Median; *Mod* = Mode.

Appendix B: Interview protocol questions

1. How did you find studying abroad? Why and how? "Illustration with examples".
2. How do you find studying abroad in foreign country such as Malaysian universities? Why and how?
3. How do you find studying abroad in foreign country at universities where English as a medium of instruction? Why and how?
4. Do you face any challenges in academic communication with your peer, supervisors, or lecturers in discussions or presentations about academic subject or matters? why or why not, and how?
5. Do you try to overcome your academic communication challenges that you face with your peer, supervisors, or lecturers in discussions or presentations about academic subject or matters? Why, why not, and how?
6. Do you have certain academic communication strategies that help you in your speaking with your peer, supervisors, or lecturers in discussions or presentations about academic subject or matters? Why, why not, and how?
7. Are you satisfy with your academic communication strategies in overcoming your academic communication challenges with your peer, supervisors, or lecturers in discussions or presentations about academic subject or matters? why, why not, how?
8. What would you suggest for internatinal students who are planning to study abroad and in foreign country? Why and how?