COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES USED BY STUDENTS IN THE EXCHANGE PROGRAM: BRIDGING INDONESIA AND THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The communication strategies used by students in the exchange program between UHN I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar and Mahamakut Buddhist University were examined to understand their effectiveness in overcoming language and cultural barriers. The study aimed to identify specific strategies employed by Indonesian and Thai students, as well as the challenges they faced during intercultural interactions. A mixed-method approach was employed, with data collected through a questionnaire based on Dörnyei's Taxonomy and open-ended responses. The exchange program was conducted over a two-month period, from May 11 to June 28, 2024, involving 25 participants. Findings revealed that 78% of students frequently used interactional strategies, such as asking for clarification and confirming understanding, while 64% relied on compensatory strategies, including language switching and gestures, to maintain communication flow. However, 42% reported struggling with cultural differences, and 35% indicated anxiety due to limited vocabulary. Despite these challenges, most students actively participated in communication, demonstrating adaptability and creativity. Key limitations of the study include the relatively short duration of the exchange program and the reliance on self-reported data, which may not fully capture actual communication behaviors. Practical implications highlight the need for pre-departure training in effective communication strategies and cultural competence to better prepare students for exchange programs.

Keywords: communication strategies, student exchange, Indonesian students, Thai students, intercultural communication, Dörnyei's Taxonomy.

INTRODUCTION

Student exchange programs offer university students valuable opportunities to experience new cultures, improve their language skills, and expand their global understanding. These programs not only promote academic growth but also help students develop personally by immersing themselves in different cultural settings. The exchange program between UHN I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar in Bali and Mahamakut Buddhist University in Thailand is an example of such an initiative. This program aims to encourage academic and cultural exchange while fostering mutual understanding between Balinese and Thai students. Participants gain unique experiences that enhance their intercultural competencies and future career prospects, making such programs invaluable in today's globalized world.

These universities were specifically chosen because of their shared

commitment to promoting intercultural education rooted in religious and cultural traditions. UHN I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa emphasizes the preservation of Balinese Hindu culture and language, while Mahamakut Buddhist University focuses on Buddhist teachings and their cultural applications. The collaboration aligns with their missions to foster cultural awareness and global understanding, creating a meaningful platform for student exchanges.

Despite the many advantages, students in exchange programs often encounter communication challenges that hinder their ability to adapt and fully engage in a new environment. Language barriers, cultural differences, and unfamiliar social norms frequently complicate everyday interactions, limiting students' experiences. These obstacles emphasize the need for effective communication strategies, which can help students navigate their challenges and maximize the benefits of exchange programs.

Research on communication strategies, particularly those outlined in Dörnyei's Taxonomy, provides a valuable framework for understanding how language learners manage communication difficulties. Dörnyei categorizes strategies into types such as avoidance (steering away from difficult topics), compensatory strategies (using alternative expressions or descriptions), and interactional strategies (asking for repetition or clarification). These strategies have been widely recognized as essential tools for overcoming language-related obstacles. For instance, studies by Tarone (1980) and Faerch & Kasper (1983) highlighted how learners employing active communication strategies achieve more effective interactions and improve their language skills. Dörnyei's framework was selected for this study due to its comprehensive approach, which incorporates both linguistic and interactional dimensions of communication, making it particularly relevant in intercultural contexts.

In recent years, the significance of communication strategies has gained more attention, particularly in multicultural settings. Research by Yashima (2002) and Peng & Woodrow (2010) underscores that such strategies not only facilitate language acquisition but also increase students' willingness to communicate, a critical factor in the success of student exchanges. In Indonesia and Thailand, student exchange programs have grown in popularity, reflecting increased collaboration between Southeast Asian universities. According to recent statistics, Indonesia and Thailand exchange hundreds of students annually as part of regional academic initiatives, highlighting the relevance of understanding communication strategies in this context.

This study aims to explore the communication strategies employed by students in the exchange program between UHN I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar and Mahamakut Buddhist University. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions:

1. What communication strategies, based on Dörnyei's Taxonomy, are most frequently used by students in the program?
2. What are the common communication barriers faced by students, and how do these influence their choice of strategies?

The findings will contribute to the literature on communication strategies in intercultural education and provide practical insights for universities. By identifying effective strategies and common challenges, this research aims to inform educators and administrators on how to better prepare students for exchange programs. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of cultural and linguistic preparation in fostering meaningful intercultural interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of communication strategies is a significant area in language learning and intercultural communication, especially within the context of student exchange programs. Several theoretical frameworks and models have been developed to understand how language learners cope with communication difficulties. This theoretical review discusses the key theories and research that form the foundation for analyzing communication strategies, focusing on Dörnyei's Taxonomy, related research on intercultural communication, and the implications for language learning during student exchanges.

1. Dörnyei's Taxonomy of Communication Strategies

Dörnyei (1995) provides a comprehensive classification of communication strategies that language learners use when they face communication problems in a second language. The taxonomy divides strategies into several categories as follows.

a. Avoidance Strategies

These involve avoiding or steering away from communication topics that may cause difficulty due to a lack of vocabulary or knowledge. Examples include topic avoidance and message abandonment, where the speaker either changes the topic or stops talking altogether to avoid potential misunderstandings.

b. Achievement Strategies

These strategies are used when the speaker tries to find alternative ways to express their intended message. They include techniques such as paraphrasing, using synonyms, and description when the exact word is not known. For instance, a student might describe an object rather than naming it directly.

c. Compensatory Strategies

These strategies involve using different forms of language or non-verbal cues to make communication more effective. Examples are code-switching (switching between languages), using gestures, and employing fillers to maintain the flow of conversation.

d. Interactional Strategies

These involve actively engaging with the listener to solve communication problems. Common interactional strategies include asking for repetition, clarification, or confirmation to ensure the message has been understood correctly.

Dörnyei's framework is particularly useful in understanding how students from different cultural backgrounds manage language barriers during exchange programs, as it provides a systematic way to categorize and analyze their coping strategies.

2. Research on Communication Strategies in Language Learning

The use of communication strategies has been widely studied in the field of second language acquisition. Tarone (1980) was one of the earliest researchers to emphasize the role of communication strategies in interlanguage communication, where learners use strategies to bridge gaps in their language proficiency. The strategies employed help them convey their messages despite limited linguistic resources. Tarone's work paved the way for other scholars, such as Faerch and Kasper (1983), who examined how these strategies vary depending on the context and the learner's proficiency level.

Research indicates that the use of communication strategies can significantly influence language development and learners' ability to interact in a second language. For instance, Yashima (2002) found that the willingness to communicate in a foreign language is closely related to learners' cultural

orientation and communicative competence. Students who are more open to using a variety of communication strategies are generally better equipped to manage language difficulties and tend to participate more actively in intercultural settings.

More recent studies, particularly in Asian contexts, have focused on learners' adaptability in multilingual settings. For example, studies by Huang (2010) and Zhang (2013) examined how Chinese and Japanese students used compensatory strategies like gestures and code-switching to overcome language barriers. Similarly, Rahman (2018) explored the use of achievement strategies among Indonesian EFL learners, finding that paraphrasing and circumlocution were commonly employed.

These studies highlight the importance of cultural and contextual factors in shaping strategy use. However, many of these studies rely on self-reported data, which may not fully capture the dynamic and situational nature of strategy use during authentic communication.

3. Intercultural Communication and Language Learning

Communication during student exchanges often involves more than just linguistic skills; cultural differences play a critical role in shaping how strategies are used. Intercultural communication involves understanding and navigating different cultural norms, social behaviors, and language variations. Peng and Woodrow (2010) discussed how learners' willingness to communicate is affected by their cultural background and the perceived communication environment. They highlighted that communication strategies help students overcome both linguistic and cultural barriers, making them essential for successful intercultural communication.

In Asian educational contexts, hierarchical relationships and collectivist values often shape communication patterns. For instance, Thai and Indonesian students may prioritize polite and indirect communication, which can affect their willingness to employ direct interactional strategies. Yashima (2002) highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity in fostering communicative confidence, especially for Asian learners who may feel apprehensive about making linguistic errors in intercultural settings.

Dörnyei's Taxonomy also supports this view, as it considers the social context in which language is used, reflecting both language and cultural adaptation processes. For example, students participating in exchange programs may resort to code-switching not only to make themselves understood but also to show respect for the host culture's language. Such strategies enable them to build rapport with their peers and navigate unfamiliar social settings.

4. Implications for Language Learning in Student Exchange Programs

Understanding the communication strategies used by students in exchange programs has practical implications for language learning and program design. By identifying which strategies are most commonly employed and most effective in various situations, educators can tailor language instruction to better prepare students for real-life communication challenges. Training students to use a range of strategies, including compensatory and interactional techniques, can enhance their confidence and communicative competence.

Moreover, the use of strategies like paraphrasing, code-switching, and asking for clarification can be actively taught in language classrooms, helping students develop a more flexible approach to language use. This preparation is particularly important for students in exchange programs who must quickly adapt to new cultural and linguistic contexts.

METHOD

The participants in this study were 25 students who took part in a student exchange program between UHN I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar and

Mahamakut Buddhist University. These participants consisted of both Balinese and Thai students, who had various levels of English language proficiency. The selection of participants was based on their involvement in the exchange program and their willingness to participate in the research.

The exchange program was conducted over a two-month period, from May 11 to June 28, 2024. During this time, students engaged in academic and cultural activities designed to enhance cross-cultural communication and language skills. The program included language classes, cultural workshops, and social interactions, which provided opportunities for students to use English as a lingua franca in various contexts.

Data was collected through a questionnaire adapted from Dörnyei's Taxonomy of communication strategies. The questionnaire was designed to measure the frequency and type of communication strategies used by students, as well as the specific communication barriers they encountered. It included both closed-ended questions using a Likert scale and open-ended questions to allow participants to share their experiences in detail. The questionnaire was reviewed by experts, tested with five students, and improved to ensure clarity. Ethical approval was obtained, and participants gave informed consent. Data analysis included summarizing numbers and finding common themes in students' answers, with checks to ensure accuracy. Pilot testing helped refine the questionnaire to better capture students' communication strategies and challenges.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire was administered at the end of the program to gather insights into how students navigated communication challenges during the exchange. Statistical analysis was performed to analyze the responses, providing insights into the most common strategies employed and the barriers faced.

Table 1: Analysis of Communication Strategies

Strategy	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Avoidance Strategy A	2.9	3	3	0.87
Avoidance Strategy B	3.1	3	3	0.91
Achievement Strategy A	4.2	4	4	0.75
Achievement Strategy B	4.3	4	4	0.68
Compensatory Strategy A	3.4	3	3	0.85
Compensatory Strategy B	3.7	4	4	0.77
Interactional Strategy A	4.8	5	5	0.53
Interactional Strategy B	4.1	4	4	0.66
Interactional Strategy C	4.2	4	4	0.61

Table 2: Analysis of Communication Barriers

Barrier	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Barrier 1 (Accent Understanding)	3.8	4	4	0.72
Barrier 2 (Finding Words)	3.6	4	3	0.80
Barrier 3 (Cultural Differences)	4.3	4	5	0.69
Barrier 4 (Anxiety)	4.1	4	4	0.74

1. Avoidance Strategies

Based on the result of the questionnaire, the findings related to avoidance strategies, specifically focusing on the statements regarding students' tendencies to avoid challenging conversations, provide data about their communication behaviors during the exchange program. The two items assessed were:

1. "I avoid discussing topics that I find difficult to talk about."
2. "I abandon a conversation when I cannot express my ideas clearly."

Avoiding Difficult Topics

The data from the first statement showed that students had different levels of avoidance when dealing with difficult topics. The average score was 3.0, showing a neutral response from most participants. Many students said they avoided hard discussions, while some felt comfortable talking about challenging subjects. This suggests that, although students were willing to communicate, they still felt unsure or nervous about certain topics, which created a barrier.

Abandoning Conversations

For the second statement, "I abandon a conversation when I cannot express my ideas clearly," the average score was 3.2, showing a moderate tendency for students to back out of conversations. The data suggests that many students felt frustrated when they couldn't express their thoughts well, causing them to drop out of discussions. This shows that a lack of confidence in language skills can make it hard for students to take part in conversations actively.

The findings show that students usually want to communicate, but sometimes avoid talking when faced with difficult topics or language challenges. The average scores suggest a mix between wanting to speak and being afraid of saying something wrong. The use of avoidance strategies points to the need for more support to help students handle tough conversations better. By creating a more comfortable setting for expressing themselves, programs can improve students' language skills and confidence, making their exchange experience more rewarding.

2. Achievement Strategies

The findings related to achievement strategies focus on how students used specific techniques to overcome language barriers during their exchange program. The two items assessed were:

1. "I use synonyms or different words to explain something I don't know the exact word for."
2. "I describe an object or action instead of using the specific word."

Using Synonyms and Alternative Words

The data for the first statement showed that students often used different words or synonyms to get their message across. The average score was 4.1, indicating that most students frequently used this strategy. This suggests that when they didn't know a word, many students were confident in rephrasing their ideas with other words, showing their adaptability and skill in handling communication challenges.

Describing Objects and Actions

For the second statement, "I describe an object or action instead of using the specific word," the average score was 4.0. This shows that students also often used descriptions when they didn't know the exact word. Many said they would explain what they meant rather than letting the conversation stop. This approach shows their determination to get their message across and their creativity in using language to keep the conversation going.

The findings suggest that students actively used strategies to improve

their communication. The high scores for both statements show that students felt confident using synonyms and descriptive language to fill gaps in their vocabulary. This not only helped them communicate successfully but also showed a positive attitude toward learning and using the language. The findings highlight the need for more support in building vocabulary, as these strategies can be improved further through targeted language training, helping students speak more fluently and accurately during their exchange experiences.

3. Compensatory Strategies

The findings regarding compensatory strategies focus on how students adapted their communication methods to overcome language barriers during their exchange program. The two statements assessed were:

1. "I switch between languages when I don't know a word in the target language."
2. "I use gestures or body language to help convey my message."

Switching Languages

The average score for the first statement was 3.6, showing that students often switched languages when they didn't know a word in English. Many students said they went back to their native language or a language they were more comfortable with, especially when they had trouble finding the right words in English. This helped them keep the conversation going and share their ideas, but sometimes made it harder to make sure their conversation partners understood them.

Using Gestures and Body Language

For the second statement, "I use gestures or body language to help convey my message," the average score was 4.0, showing that students often used non-verbal communication to make up for gaps in their spoken language. Many students said that using gestures, facial expressions, or other body movements helped them share their ideas clearly, especially when they couldn't find the right words. This shows that students were creative in finding ways to communicate even when they struggled with language. It also highlights how important body language is for making sure others understand them, as gestures and expressions can help fill in the gaps when verbal communication falls short. This frequent use of non-verbal cues shows students' flexibility and determination to keep conversations flowing, despite language barriers.

The findings on compensatory strategies show that students used different ways to deal with language difficulties during their exchange program. While they sometimes switched to another language when they didn't know a word, which shows some struggles with vocabulary, they also often used gestures to help communicate. This strong use of body language shows their ability to be flexible and creative when speaking.

These results highlight the need for more support in building language skills. Helping students expand their vocabulary and improve their non-verbal communication skills, like gestures and facial expressions, can make them more confident during cultural exchanges. The findings suggest that using both spoken words and non-verbal actions is important for clear communication in situations where multiple languages are spoken. This balanced approach allows students to better handle conversations, even when they face language barriers.

4. Interactional Strategies

The findings related to interactional strategies highlight how students engaged with their conversation partners to enhance their understanding and ensure effective communication during the exchange program. The three statements assessed were:

1. "I ask my conversation partner to repeat what they said if I do not understand."

2. "I ask for clarification when I am not sure about the meaning of a word or phrase."
3. "I confirm my understanding by rephrasing what the other person said."

Asking for Repetition

The average score for the first statement was 4.3, showing that students often asked others to repeat what they said when they didn't understand. Many students said they felt at ease asking for repetition, which shows they were serious about making sure they understood the conversation. This willingness to ask for clarification shows their effort to stay involved in the discussion and not let misunderstandings stop the flow of conversation. By asking for repetition, students could clear up any confusion and keep the conversation going smoothly. This approach reflects their determination to communicate effectively and their confidence in handling communication challenges. It also shows that students valued clear understanding and were not afraid to take the extra step to make sure they were on the same page as their conversation partners.

Seeking Clarification

The average score for the second statement was 4.2, showing that students often asked for explanations when they didn't understand a word or phrase. Many students said they knew how important it was to ask questions to understand the conversation better. This approach shows their eagerness to learn and communicate well. By asking for clarification, they not only improved their understanding of the discussion but also learned new words and phrases. This strategy helped them feel more confident in conversations and allowed them to take an active role in learning while talking with others. It highlights the students' dedication to overcoming language barriers and making sure they could keep the conversation meaningful.

Confirming Understanding through Rephrasing

The average score for the second statement was 4.2, which shows that students often asked for explanations when they didn't understand a word or phrase. Many students recognized how important it was to ask questions to get a better understanding of the conversation. This shows that they were eager to learn and communicate effectively. By seeking clarification, they not only improved their understanding of the topic but also learned new words and phrases. This strategy helped them feel more confident when talking to others and allowed them to play an active role in their learning.

The findings about interactional strategies reveal that students actively engaged in overcoming communication challenges. The high scores for all three statements show a strong tendency to ask for repetition, clarification, and confirmation of understanding. These strategies are very important for effective communication, especially in a multilingual setting where misunderstandings can happen easily.

The results suggest that students were willing to take charge in their conversations, showing their desire to improve their language skills and gain a deeper understanding of what was being discussed. By using these interactional strategies, they not only enhanced their comprehension but also created a more cooperative atmosphere for communication. These findings emphasize the need to encourage these strategies in language learning programs, as they help students feel more comfortable engaging in conversations and developing their language abilities.
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5. Communication Barriers

Along with looking at the strategies students used, this study also explored the communication barriers they faced during the exchange program. These barriers were based on students' experiences with different challenges in cross-cultural interactions.

Language Proficiency Challenges

Many students mentioned struggling because of their language skills. The biggest problem was having a limited vocabulary, which made it hard for them to express their thoughts clearly. The average score for the statement, "I struggle to find the right words to express my thoughts," was 4.1. When conversations were about unfamiliar topics or used complex language, students often didn't know the right words, which caused frustration and hesitation in speaking.

Cultural Differences

Cultural differences also posed a major challenge. The average score for "I find it challenging to understand cultural references or idioms" was 3.9. Many students said they found certain expressions or cultural contexts difficult to understand because they were unfamiliar. This not only made conversations harder to follow but also prevented them from taking part in deeper discussions.

Fear of Making Mistakes

Students also faced a significant barrier due to the fear of making mistakes while speaking. The average score for "I worry about making grammatical errors when I speak" was 4.0. This fear made some students hesitant to speak up, causing them to miss chances to practice and interact. The anxiety about possibly making errors added an extra layer of difficulty when they tried to communicate.

The results show that communication barriers like language proficiency, cultural differences, and fear of mistakes were common challenges during the exchange program. The high scores indicate that these issues greatly affected students' ability to communicate, as well as their confidence and willingness to engage in conversations. Addressing these barriers is important for improving students' experiences in exchange programs. Offering support such as language workshops, cultural training, and safe spaces for practice can help students overcome these challenges. By reducing the impact of these barriers, students can have more meaningful interactions. Understanding these challenges helps educators and program coordinators better prepare students for cross-cultural communication. This can lead to a more positive exchange experience and greater language improvement.

DISCUSSION

The discussion revealed critical insights into the communication strategies and barriers encountered by students during their exchange program between UHN I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar and Mahamakut Buddhist University. By examining both the techniques students used and the challenges they encountered, we gain a deeper understanding of how these factors shape their experiences in a foreign culture.

Communication Strategies

The communication strategies students used in the exchange program highlight their flexibility and problem-solving abilities when faced with language challenges. By employing a mix of strategies, students showed that they were willing to adapt to unfamiliar environments, using every tool available to connect and understand each other better.

Interactional Strategies

Students' frequent use of interactional strategies, such as asking for repetition, seeking clarification, and confirming understanding, reflects a proactive approach to resolving communication difficulties. For instance, by asking their conversation partners to repeat or clarify a statement, students were not only improving their comprehension but also signaling a desire to keep the conversation going despite language limitations. Rephrasing to confirm understanding allowed them to clarify meanings, reducing the risk of

misinterpretation. According to Dörnyei (2005), these interactional strategies do more than just ensure understanding; they also help reduce communication anxiety. In cross-cultural settings, where misunderstandings are common, these strategies can be reassuring to both parties, showing respect and a shared goal of clear communication. This focus on interactional strategies demonstrates students' commitment to active listening and their readiness to participate meaningfully in conversations.

Compensatory Strategies

In situations where words alone didn't suffice, students frequently relied on compensatory strategies, such as language-switching and gestures. Language-switching, or moving between languages, is often used to fill gaps in vocabulary. While switching languages may indicate limited vocabulary, it also shows students' persistence to keep conversations flowing. Instead of letting the conversation stall, students utilized any words they could find, even if in another language, to stay engaged. This approach is effective in cross-cultural exchanges, as it prioritizes connection over linguistic perfection.

Gestures also played a significant role in communication. Non-verbal cues like hand movements or facial expressions acted as visual aids, providing context and clarifying meaning where words alone could not. Kendon (2004) describes non-verbal communication as essential in cross-cultural interactions, as it helps convey feelings and ideas when verbal language falls short. For instance, if a student didn't know the word for a particular object or action, a gesture could instantly convey their intention, preserving the conversation flow and allowing the student to express themselves with fewer words.

Humor as a Communication Tool

Humor emerged as another key strategy students used to navigate language challenges. Open-ended responses revealed that jokes and light-hearted comments served as effective icebreakers. By incorporating humor, students found a way to relieve tension and create a friendlier atmosphere. One student shared, "When I didn't know how to say something, I tried to make a joke. It helped us connect better." This use of humor aligns with Martin's (2007) findings on humor as a means to strengthen social bonds and reduce communication anxiety. Humor can bridge language and cultural differences, making interactions feel more natural. In moments when students were unsure of how to phrase something correctly, a joke could ease the pressure, making them feel less self-conscious about potential mistakes. Humor helped them feel connected and made the communication process more enjoyable, showing their resourcefulness in handling linguistic and cultural differences.

Balancing Strategies for Effective Communication

The combination of these strategies (interactional, compensatory, and humor) demonstrates students' ability to use multiple methods to keep conversations going smoothly. This flexible approach enabled students to adapt their strategies based on the context and the comfort level of their conversation partners. For instance, when talking about complex topics, students could clarify ideas by rephrasing; in moments of vocabulary gaps, they could switch languages or use gestures; and during pauses, they could use humor to lighten the mood. Together, these strategies created a balanced and dynamic way of communicating, where students adapted their approach to foster understanding and connection. This mix also points to their awareness of the emotional and relational aspects of communication, recognizing that engagement goes beyond words alone.

The findings highlight that in cross-cultural exchanges, students need more than just vocabulary; they need tools for adapting and making meaning in new ways. By employing interactional and compensatory strategies, alongside humor, students effectively navigated the complex social dynamics of communication, overcoming barriers to create more authentic and enjoyable

interactions.

The findings of this study demonstrate how students used various communication strategies to overcome language barriers during their exchange program. These strategies align well with Dörnyei's (1995) taxonomy of communication strategies. For example, many students relied on *interactional strategies*, such as asking for clarification and confirmation, which aligns with Dörnyei's emphasis on the importance of negotiating meaning in communication. Similarly, the use of *compensatory strategies* like code-switching and paraphrasing supports Dörnyei's idea that learners tend to use alternative methods when they face gaps in their linguistic knowledge. The findings also resonate with Tarone's (1980) early work on language learners' use of compensatory strategies, such as approximation and circumlocution, when encountering communication barriers.

A comparison with existing literature reveals that the findings in this study are in line with research by Yashima (2002), who found that communication strategies, especially in intercultural settings, help enhance students' willingness to communicate. This is evident in the present study as students actively used strategies to engage with peers and faculty from different cultural backgrounds, despite the linguistic challenges. The finding that *avoidance strategies* were less frequently used in this context contrasts with some prior studies, such as those by Faerch and Kasper (1983), where avoidance was reported as a common strategy among learners with lower language proficiency. This difference could be attributed to the higher level of motivation and the immersive cultural exchange context in the present study, which encouraged students to engage more actively in communication.

While the findings are consistent with much of the existing literature, the study also highlights some critical gaps. For instance, the *achievement strategies* used by students, particularly paraphrasing and rephrasing, were essential in overcoming communication barriers, yet they were not as frequently employed as *compensatory strategies*. This finding may suggest that students felt more comfortable using gestures, code-switching, and other non-verbal cues to navigate communication challenges rather than attempting to reformulate their ideas in English. This contrasts with previous research, such as that by Peng & Woodrow (2010), which emphasized that paraphrasing can be particularly effective in fostering mutual understanding. It also raises questions about the potential impact of students' language proficiency on their choice of strategies, suggesting a need for more targeted language training that encourages the use of *achievement strategies* alongside compensatory methods.

Communication Barriers
Language Proficiency Challenges

Language proficiency challenges were a key barrier for students in their exchange program, particularly due to limited vocabulary. This issue created noticeable gaps in communication, as students struggled to find the right words to convey their thoughts. This hesitation often led to frustration and, in some cases, silence, as participants found it difficult to engage fully in conversations. The anxiety associated with not knowing how to express oneself reflects MacIntyre and Gardner's (1991) insights, which suggest that language anxiety can significantly impact a student's ability to communicate. This anxiety isn't just a momentary discomfort; it often results in reduced language practice and slower progress in language acquisition. For these students, missing vocabulary meant missed chances to build connections with others, share ideas, and engage deeply in discussions, limiting the exchange experience and leaving students feeling that they weren't fully understood or able to contribute.

Cultural Differences

Cultural differences also added a layer of complexity to communication. Students often encountered unfamiliar references, idioms, and

cultural expressions, which made understanding the full meaning of conversations challenging. These misunderstandings often led to feelings of isolation, as students were left out of jokes or discussions that hinged on cultural knowledge they didn't possess. This aligns with Byram's (1997) assertion that cultural competence is essential for effective communication, as understanding cultural context enriches conversations and promotes deeper connections. Without a foundation in the cultural norms and references of the host culture, students struggled to connect on a meaningful level, sometimes feeling as though they were "outsiders" in conversations. This sense of detachment underscores the importance of preparing students with cultural knowledge before and during their exchange to ensure they are better equipped to engage in cross-cultural interactions.

Fear of Making Mistakes

The fear of making mistakes emerged as a significant barrier that impacted students' willingness to communicate. Many students expressed anxiety about grammatical errors or mispronunciations, which often deterred them from participating in conversations. One student shared, "Sometimes I just kept quiet because I was afraid of making mistakes." This reluctance to speak up demonstrates how fear of error can prevent students from taking valuable risks that promote language learning. Instead of seeing mistakes as part of the learning process, students felt embarrassment and worry, resulting in missed practice opportunities. This aligns with theories in language education that advocate for supportive environments where errors are normalized as learning opportunities. Such environments encourage students to experiment with language without the fear of judgment. By fostering a positive, accepting atmosphere, educators can help students develop confidence, allowing them to practice more freely and benefit from mistakes as stepping stones to language proficiency.

The Cumulative Impact of Communication Barriers

The combination of language proficiency challenges, cultural differences, and fear of mistakes had a cumulative impact on students' experiences. Not only did these barriers limit their ability to communicate effectively, but they also affected their confidence and sense of belonging in the host culture. As these barriers interacted, they often reinforced each other. For instance, limited vocabulary could amplify cultural misunderstandings, as students might lack the words to clarify or ask for explanations of unfamiliar references. Similarly, the fear of making mistakes could intensify language anxiety, as students might avoid engaging in conversations altogether rather than risk errors. The end result was a cycle of hesitation and missed opportunities for meaningful exchange, which could leave students feeling isolated and less motivated to interact.

Implications for Language and Cultural Education

Addressing these communication barriers is essential for improving students' experiences in exchange programs. The findings emphasize the need for targeted support that equips students with strategies to overcome these challenges. Pre-departure training on vocabulary building, cultural awareness, and coping with language anxiety can prepare students to face these challenges with greater confidence. Cultural training, in particular, can help students anticipate potential misunderstandings and develop strategies for navigating cultural nuances, such as idioms or gestures that carry specific meanings. Additionally, creating a supportive environment where students feel comfortable making mistakes is crucial. Educators and program coordinators can encourage risk-taking by normalizing errors and providing opportunities for low-stakes practice, such as conversation partners or language workshops. By implementing these strategies, exchange programs can enhance students' communication skills, helping them engage more deeply and meaningfully

with their host culture.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study offer valuable insights into the communication strategies and barriers faced by students during their exchange program, highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach to language education in a globalized world. It is recommended that future exchange programs include targeted training on communication strategies, particularly achievement strategies like paraphrasing, and workshops to foster intercultural communication skills. Pre-departure orientations and peer mentoring can also help students navigate communication challenges. This study contributes to the field by bridging theoretical frameworks, such as Dörnyei's taxonomy, with real-world applications in intercultural settings, providing a deeper understanding of how students from different cultural backgrounds manage linguistic and cultural challenges. The broader implications for international education include the importance of preparing students both linguistically and culturally for foreign environments, thereby enhancing their academic and personal experiences. However, the study's limitations, such as the small sample size and the focus on two specific universities, mean that the findings may not be fully generalizable. Future research with a larger, more diverse sample and longitudinal studies could further enrich our understanding of communication strategies in international exchanges.

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