

## The Effects of Learning and Communication Strategies Instruction on Economics Undergraduates' Oral Communication Ability in Thailand

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### Abstract

This study investigates the effects of learning and communication strategies (LACS) instruction on economics students' oral communication ability in Thailand and explores their perceptions toward the instruction. The study involved 23 third-year economics undergraduates at a public university in Thailand who were explicitly taught 13 learning and communication strategies in class. The impacts of the LACS instruction on oral communication ability were assessed by the participants' pre- and post- oral presentation tests, and the perceptions of the participants as well as their strategy use were obtained from students' reflective journals (SRJ), semi-structured focus group interviews, and the teacher's observation notes. The findings reveal that all students' oral presentation test scores significantly improved and confirm that teaching a combination of different LACS could enhance oral communication ability. The qualitative results indicate that all 23 students had positive perceptions of the strategies instruction. Furthermore, it is revealed that strong students used a combination of all three types (cognitive, metacognitive, and affective) of learning strategies (LS) and a communication strategy (CS) of self-repair, while moderate and weak students employed a combination of two types (cognitive and affective) of LS and self-repair. Nonetheless, this study would argue that strong, moderate, and weak students did apply metacognitive strategies, as evidenced by their reflections on their strategy use in the journals and the self-assessment form, but some students were not aware of it. Consequently, future studies should emphasize raising students' awareness of their metacognitive strategy use.

*Keywords:* communication strategies, economics students, learning strategies, oral communication ability, strategy instruction

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## Introduction

Due to the spread of English and improved communication systems in this globalized era, speaking skills have played an important role in communication (Timmis, 2016). It has been claimed that the ability to speak the target language when learning a second language serves as an indicator that learners are competent and know the language (Brown & Yule, 1983). It is, thus, necessary for “teachers to teach students how to speak strategically for effective communication” (Moradi & Talebi, 2014, p.1224).

In the context of Thailand where English is commonly used as a second language in communication, business, education, and tourism, teaching speaking in Thailand presents some challenges. The first challenge lies in the current English proficiency level of Thai students. A data of English proficiency TOEFL test score means shows that the total score mean of Thai test takers was 78 out of 120 points and was lower than those of test takers from six Southeast Asian countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Myanmar (Educational Testing Service, 2017, p.14). With regard to speaking, the score mean of Thai test takers was 19 out of 30, equal to that of Cambodian and Lao test takers, and was the lowest among the six countries (Educational Testing Service, 2017, p.14). The next challenge involves problems that students usually encounter in oral English communication classrooms at Thai universities such as large classes, mixed-ability classes, an overemphasis on group work, and unrealistic dialogs in role plays (Bruner, Singwongsuwat & Radić-Bojanić, 2015). According to the course evaluation in 2016, the university where this research study took place was also faced with difficulties brought about by a large class size and mixed-ability students for oral communication courses. All of these problems hindered the improvement on students’ speaking skills and certainly put pressure on teachers to come up with solutions.

The present study took place in the Oral English Communication for Economics (OECE) course, which was a speaking course for economics junior students at a public university in Thailand. The course is aimed at enabling students to 1) deliver oral presentations on economics-related issues, 2) participate in discussions, informal and formal meetings, and 3) answer questions about the assigned listening materials on economics-related topics.

Several problems in the four areas – 1) teaching and learning, 2) the previous course book, 3) materials available on the market, and 4) assessments – were identified by the economics students, the course instructors, and the course coordinator in the course evaluation in 2016.

Problems regarding teaching and learning stemmed from the fact that students had never formally learned how to deliver a presentation or participate in a meeting in a professional manner before taking the OECE course, and the course book used on the course did not focus on teaching those skills. Therefore, they felt they wanted to learn about these skills more. Secondly, students found that the learning contents in the course book, *Market Leader Intermediate* (Cotton, Falvey, & Kent, 2010), the oral assessments, and the self-study tasks were irrelevant to economics as they all focused on marketing not economics. The irrelevance of the learning contents demotivated students from learning, as they were unable to apply their background knowledge in economics when doing their learning tasks and the oral assessments. The course instructors also reported that they had to do extra work in finding supplementary materials for teaching presentation and meeting

skills, which were not focused on in the course book. Also, teaching mixed-ability classes of more than 27 students, which were considered large classes, was a challenge for all of the instructors because they had to find suitable approaches to help students with different English proficiency levels in large classes to improve their oral communication ability, which refers to the ability to effectively deliver formal presentations and participate in meetings.

Problems concerning the previous course book consisted of 1) the irrelevance of the content to economics, 2) the insufficient amount of listening and speaking activities that helped students to fully develop their listening and speaking skills for delivering presentations and participating in meetings, and 3) the time constraint, which put pressure on the teachers to cover nine units within seven teaching weeks. As for problems with the materials available on the market, a course book appropriate for economics undergraduates had been thoroughly searched. Unfortunately, none met one of the course's objective, which is aimed at developing students' presentation and meeting skills, and consisted of unit themes relevant to economics. Course books available on the market either concentrated solely on presentation or meeting skills or consisted of economics themes with an emphasis on four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Finally, in terms of the course assessment, the majority of the students felt there were too many oral assessments (six assessments), and the teachers felt the assessments lacked students' involvement in evaluating the performances of themselves and their friends.

In an attempt to solve the aforementioned problems, three major solutions – 1) the development of a new course book, 2) the adjustment of course assessments, and 3) the implementation of the explicit strategy instruction – were implemented on the OECE course in the academic year of 2017. This paper, nonetheless, will focus only on the implementation of the explicit strategy instruction.

One of the promising solutions to tackle challenges pertaining to teaching speaking in Thailand and in the present research context is an implementation of learning and communication strategies instruction. It is especially important that language learners in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context are encouraged to learn strategies, which can help them succeed in second language communication (Jamshidnejad, 2011). Language learning strategies (LLS) are perceived as “tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence,” (Oxford, 1990, p.1). In teaching speaking, it is useful to also integrate and teach communication strategies (CS) because they can facilitate learners in overcoming communication problems, enhancing communication effectiveness, and negotiating meaning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Thus, teaching a combination of these two types of strategies (LS and CS) to EFL learners, and following nine principles for developing oral communication ability, which were adapted from Ginkel and colleagues (2015), could facilitate the learners in preparing for and performing speaking tasks and in evaluating their performances after the tasks as well as help them develop their oral communication ability more effectively. The following sections, which review previous empirical studies, illustrate positive effects of explicit strategy training on students' learning and oral performance.

Based on a rigorous review of literature, different aspects of learning strategies and communication strategies have been explored separately over the past 30 years. In terms of the

topics on learning strategies, some studies have examined the use of learning strategies between high-ability and low-ability students (Gani, Fajrina & Hanifa, 2015; Gerami & Baighlou, 2011). A study by Gani, Fajrina & Hanifa (2015) indicates that strong students used all kinds of learning strategies more than weak students for improving their speaking skills. Also, they employed more learning strategies consciously and appropriately compared to the weak students. In addition, strong students used a wider range of learning strategies than weak students. Furthermore, strong students often employed metacognitive strategies, while weak students used cognitive strategies more (Gerami & Baighlou, 2011). In terms of the impacts of explicit strategy training of learning strategies, some empirical research studies have shown that explicit learning strategy instruction has positive effects on speaking proficiency (Dadour & Robbins, 1996; O'Malley, Chamot et al., 1985). For instance, the findings of O'Malley, Chamot, and colleagues' (1985) study reveal that the post-test scores on speaking were significant with the metacognitive group (Group 1) scoring the highest. This experimental group received a strategy instruction, which combined metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies. Thus, this study suggests that teaching a combination of different learning strategies could enhance oral communication ability. Another interesting study was conducted by Dadour and Robbins (1996). Their findings indicate that the learning strategy instruction significantly affected the students' speaking performance regardless of their English proficiency levels (first- or fourth-year students' proficiency) in the experimental groups, which outperformed the control groups. Also, the experimental groups used strategies more frequently than the control groups.

Regarding the areas of communication strategies, topics on the effects of communication strategy instruction have been popular and studied by several researchers (Dörnyei, 1995; Nakatani, 2005; Paranapiti, 2014). Dörnyei's (1995) study, which examines the teachability of communication strategies at a high school level, reveals that the experimental group had a significant improvement in the quality and quantity of strategy use and in their overall oral performance. In addition, participants in the experimental group had positive attitudes toward the strategy instruction. Nakatani's (2005) research findings indicate that the strategy training group significantly outperformed the control group in their oral proficiency tests. In addition, the strategy training group used longer utterances and more achievement strategies than the control group. In the context of Thailand, effects of communication strategy instruction on English speaking ability of university students have also been investigated (Paranapiti, 2014). Paranapiti's (2014) study results show a positive effect of the explicit communication strategy instruction on undergraduates' speaking ability and reveal that there was a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-test scores, and students had positive attitudes toward the strategy instruction. Nevertheless, the strategy instruction had no effect on the level of students' confidence in speaking as there was no statistically significant difference between pre- and post-strategy instruction.

Despite a wide array of previous studies regarding learning and communication strategies, there are no studies that examine the effects of the instruction of learning strategies in a combination with communication strategies on the development of oral communication ability for economics students, particularly oral presentation skills, in Thailand or in other countries. Thus, the present study attempts to fill in this knowledge gap in the literature by providing new insights into the field of strategy instruction with regard to the effectiveness of the learning and

communication strategies (LACS) instruction in helping learners improve their oral communication ability.

This study was conducted to explore the two aspects of the LACS instruction, including its effects and students' perceptions toward the instruction, based on the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of the LACS instruction on economics students' oral communication ability?
2. What are economics undergraduates' perceptions of the LACS instruction in helping them improve their oral presentation skills?
- 3.

### **Literature Review**

In this section, a number of literature related to designing frameworks of LACS and the LACS instruction as well as principles for developing oral communication ability is presented.

#### ***Communicative Competence***

In the scope of the present study, communicative competence refers to the ability to use spoken language effectively in oral presentations. Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) propose four components – grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence – that contribute to communicative competence.

Grammatical or linguistic competence refers to knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). It enables learners to understand and use English language structures accurately, which lead to fluency (Shumin, 2002). Sociolinguistic competence is the ability to communicate accurately, appropriately to, and acceptably by sociocultural norms and contexts (Goh & Burns, 2012). Discourse competence concerns cohesion and coherence, which help speakers communicate in a meaningful way (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991). Strategic competence is the ability to use language appropriately and to deal with communication and comprehension problems (Shumin, 2002). This competence comes in both forms of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies employed to handle communication breakdowns (Canale & Swain, 1980).

#### ***Learning Strategies (LS)***

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) propose two frameworks for learning strategies (henceforth referred to as LS). The O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) framework consists of three strategy types: 1) metacognitive, 2) cognitive, and 3) social/affective. Strategies categorized as metacognitive would include making plans for one's learning, thinking about one's learning process, monitoring one's learning task, and evaluating one's own learning progress. Cognitive strategies are those where one engages with the content and materials to be learned, for instance, working with it mentally or physically, or using a particular technique to complete a task. Social and affective strategies are those where one learns through the assistance of another or utilizes affective control to accomplish a learning goal.

Oxford (1990) proposes a strategy system for learning strategies, consisting of six strategy types, which are divided into two classes – direct and indirect. Direct strategies directly support learning, which involve memory, cognitive, and compensation. Indirect strategies contribute indirectly to learning, including metacognitive, affective, and social. Direct and indirect strategies

are equally important and support each other. Three strategy types: one direct (cognitive) and two indirect (metacognitive, and affective) learning strategies from Oxford's framework were included in the framework of LACS for instruction in this study. Cognitive strategies enable learners to manipulate the language material. Metacognitive strategies are used for managing the learning process, and finally, affective strategies help learners deal with feelings.

In this study, three types of learning strategies – 1) metacognitive, 2) cognitive, and 3) affective – from the frameworks proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) are included in the framework of learning and communication strategies for instruction on the OECE course. Social strategies are not part of learning strategies in this study but are combined with cooperative strategies in communication strategies to avoid duplication of strategies.

### ***Communication Strategies (CS)***

Communication strategies are divided into two groups – reduction or avoidance and achievement or compensatory strategies (Dörnyei, 1995; Færch & Kasper, 1983). Reduction strategies are those that avoid solving communication difficulties through topic avoidance, message abandonment, and meaning replacement (Dörnyei, 1995; Færch & Kasper, 1983). On the other hand, achievement strategies attempt to tackle the communication problem directly through code switching, intralingual and interlingual transfer, cooperative strategies, and non-linguistic strategies (Færch & Kasper, 1983). Achievement strategies can be subdivided into two categories: non-cooperative strategies and cooperative strategies. Non-cooperative strategies do not require assistance from interlocutors, while cooperative strategies do.

In this study, only achievement strategies were selected for the LACS instruction because they allow learners to adhere to the original communicative goal by developing alternative plans to use available resources (Færch & Kasper, 1983). Also, such strategies facilitate learners in developing oral communication ability.

### ***Principles for the Oral Communication Ability Development***

The nine principles in three categories – instruction, language activities, and assessment – for developing students' oral communication ability on the OECE course were adapted from Ginkel and colleagues (2015) and followed. Four principles in instruction ensured that 1) learning objectives were explained to students, 2) the strategy instruction was explicit and followed the three steps in the LACS instructional framework, 3) learning activities were authentic and relevant to economics, and 4) students would receive sufficient scaffolding. Two principles in learning activities ensured that students were provided with opportunities to 1) observe models of their friends or experts for delivering presentations and participating in meetings, and 2) practice their oral presentations and meetings. Three principles in assessment ensured that 1) feedback was explicit and specific, 2) the involvement of peers was encouraged, and 3) self-assessment through watching video clips was implemented.

### ***Framework of LACS for Developing Economics Undergraduates' Oral Communication Ability***

The framework of LACS consists of 13 learning and communication strategies. There are eight learning strategies (LS): 1) getting the idea quickly, 2) note-taking, 3) recognizing and using language exponents, 4) planning for a language task, 5) self-monitoring, 6) self-evaluation, 7)

lowering anxiety, and 8) encouraging yourself. LS 1-3 are cognitive, LS 4-6 are metacognitive, and LS 7-8 are affective learning strategies. These LS were selected from the frameworks of O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990). Although these eight LS could help students prepare for and perform speaking tasks, as well as evaluate their performances, they did not teach students what to do when they encountered communication problems such as misunderstanding, stumbling, or wanting more time to think of what to say. Thus, five communication strategies (CS), including 1) asking for repetition, 2) asking for clarification, 3) asking for confirmation, 4) use of fillers and hesitation devices, and 5) self-repair, were selected from the studies of Dörnyei and Scott (1997) and Nakatani (2005) and added to the framework. In this framework, LS and CS were taught in a combination to help students develop their oral communication ability.

The instruction of 13 LACS was integrated into seven weekly three-hour sessions to help students develop their oral communication ability in an informative presentation and an informal meeting. However, this paper focuses only on students' oral communication ability in an informative presentation. Students were explicitly taught strategies and provided with opportunities to practice the strategies and reflect their usefulness in their reflective journals.

#### ***LACS Instructional Framework***

The LACS instructional framework in this study, which was adapted from Chamot (2004 & 2005), consists of three stages: pre, while, and post. The pre stage includes two components: preparation and presentation. In this stage, the teacher first identified students' current strategies for learning tasks, then presented new strategies, and finally illustrated how to use them to students. In the while stage, which consists of two components: practice and expansion, students were provided with opportunities to practice using different strategies in doing learning activities in the course book and to transfer them to other similar tasks such as the oral assessment tasks. The practice of strategy use was conducted with listening activities and speaking activities that were similar to the oral assessment tasks and the preparation sessions for the oral assessment tasks to promote transferability to new tasks in similar situations. Also, teacher's guidance in the strategy use was gradually removed to encourage students to become autonomous in their strategy use. Finally, in the post stage, which involves two components: self- and teacher assessment, students were encouraged to assess the effectiveness of the strategies they used in assisting them to perform an oral assessment task in their reflective journals. In addition, the teacher evaluated students' use of strategies and impacts on their oral performances in her observation notes.

The framework guided the explicit LACS instruction, which was fully integrated into the regular classroom curriculum of the OECE course and employed when teaching both LS and CS. Also, the strategies were taught explicitly because an empirical study by Dadour and Robbins (1996) shows that this type of instruction enables learners to see new ways of learning and provides them with a structured approach to language tasks. An explicit strategy instruction in this study means an instruction in which learning and communication strategies were presented in strategy boxes in the course book and taught to students on how and when to use them for different learning activities and oral assessment tasks.

## Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in this study to collect data for answering the two research questions. A one-group pre-test post-test design was integrated to examine the effects of the instruction of LACS on oral communication ability of economics students. This design was the most feasible design because one of the researchers was assigned to teach one section of 23 students and the class time of all five sections was the same, on every Wednesdays 1-4 p.m. Consequently, it was not possible to conduct the study with two groups of students. Lacks of random sampling and assignment and a small sample size (23 students) are potential weaknesses of the study, and as a result, the study does not attempt to claim generalizability of the results to the wider population but would rather focus on transferability to similar contexts. Due to these potential weaknesses, a variety of data collection methods were utilized to triangulate the findings.

The sample of the study consisted of 23 economics junior students in one section of the OECE course in the first semester of the 2017 academic year (August-December) at a public university in Thailand. The quantitative data of this study was obtained from the pre- and post-tests of an informative presentation. In each test, students were assigned to deliver a presentation on a topic related to economics. Both the pre- and post-tests and the scoring rubric were checked for the content validity by three experts in language assessment. Furthermore, students' presentations, which were recorded on videos, were rated by two independent teacher raters. Then, the pre- and post-test scores given by the two raters were computed on the SPSS to find inter-rater reliability using Pearson's correlation coefficient. It was revealed that there were significant positive correlations between the pre-test scores of oral communication ability rated by rater 1 and rater 2,  $r(21) = .99$ ,  $p < .001$ , and between the post-test scores rated by rater 1 and rater 2,  $r(21) = .72$ ,  $p < .001$ . In addition, pre- and post-test scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations. Then, a paired-samples  $t$ -test (or dependent-samples  $t$ -test) was conducted to compare the mean scores of oral communication ability in an informative presentation before and after the implementation of the LACS instruction to find out whether there was any significant difference in the mean scores before and after the instruction. Next, inferential statistics of Cohen's  $d$  were calculated to identify whether the effect size was small ( $d = .20$ ), moderate ( $d = .50$ ), or large ( $d = .80$ ) in order to present the effect size. The results of a paired-samples  $t$ -test and Cohen's  $d$  are presented in the *Results and Discussion* section.

The qualitative data, focusing on students' perceptions of the LACS instruction, was obtained from students' reflective journals (SRJ) and semi-structured focus group interviews. Like the pre- and post-tests, questions in the journal and the interview were also validated by two different groups of three experts. Procedures in writing the journal and participating in the interview were clearly explained to the participants before these two activities took place in order to ensure that the participants understood what to do. Regarding the semi-structured focus group interviews, 23 participants were divided into three groups of 7-8 participants (strong, moderate, and weak students) based on their oral ability levels through their mean scores of four oral assessments. This division of interview groups was conducted to ensure homogeneity of interviewees because focus groups are more effective if participants are homogeneous (Dörnyei, 2007). In addition, the teacher's observation notes were employed to investigate students' strategy

use during the pre- and post-tests. Then, the qualitative data from the journals, interviews, and the teacher's notes were analyzed thematically.

## Results and Discussions

The findings of this study, which respond to the two research questions, are divided into two parts: 1) effects of the LACS instruction on oral communication ability and 2) students' perceptions of the LACS instruction.

### Effects of the LACS on Oral Communication Ability

This section responds to the first research question, "What are the effects of the LACS on economics students' oral communication ability?" The result of oral communication ability in the present study was obtained from the pre- and post-tests for an informative presentation.

#### *Pre- and Post-Tests of an Informative Presentation Task*

A paired-samples *t*-test was run on a sample of 23 students to determine whether there was a statistically significant mean difference between the mean scores of oral communication ability before and after the implementation of the LACS instruction. As presented in Table 1, the paired-samples *t*-test showed a statistically significant difference in the pre-test mean scores of oral communication ability ( $M = 6.43$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) and the post-test mean scores ( $M = 7.63$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ );  $t(22) = 5.1$ ,  $p < .001$ . In addition, Cohen's effect value ( $d = 0.89$ ) reveals a large practical significance.

**Table 1. Findings from the pre- and post-tests of an informative presentation task**

	Pre		Post		t	p	d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Informative Presentation	6.43	1.58	7.63	1.08	5.1*	.000	0.89

\* $p < .001$

The gain score of the post-test mean is positive (1.2 points), which indicates that students' oral communication ability improved as a result of the LACS instruction.

In summary, results of the inferential statistics obtained from the paired-samples *t*-test and Cohen's *d* show that there were statistically significant differences between pre- and post-test scores of students' oral communication ability in the informative presentation test. Also, Cohen's effect value indicates a large significance. Thus, it can be concluded that the explicit instruction of LACS has a positive impact on students' oral communication ability regardless of their English proficiency levels as shown in the positive gain score in the post-test. The quantitative result of the present study is in line with those of the studies conducted by O'Malley, Chamot, and colleagues (1985), Dadour and Robins (1996), focusing on LS, and Dörnyei (1995), Nakatani (2005), and Paranapiti (2014), concentrating on CS, which reveal that the strategy instruction

significantly improves students' oral test scores. In addition, the present study's finding confirms that teaching a combination of different LACS could enhance oral communication ability.

### Students' Perceptions of the LACS Instruction

This part answers the second research question, “**What are economics undergraduates' perceptions of the LACS instruction in helping them improve their oral presentation skills?**” Data of students' perceptions were thematically coded and analyzed from 23 students' reflective journals and semi-structured focus group interviews of three groups: Group 1 consisted of weak students (WS), Group 2 moderate students (MS), and Group 3 strong students (SS).

#### *Overall Impressions toward the LACS Instruction*

Perceptions of all 23 students on the LACS instruction were positive. They all reflected in their reflective journals that learning LACS on the OECE course was very useful, regardless of their English proficiency levels, because of the three reasons as follows:

**1) learning LACS helped students prepare and deliver presentations more effectively on this course:**

*SS7: Learning LACS in class helped me prepare for the oral assessments more effectively, especially LS 4 – Planning for a language task, which helped me plan and organize the presentation and select appropriate language exponents.*

**2) learning LACS boosted students' self-confidence:**

*MS4: I think learning LACS had helped me become more confident because I'd learned how to organize the information I'd like to talk about. This had really helped me prepare my speeches better, and I could present the information more confidently.*

**3) students could apply LACS on other courses and in their future work:**

*WS6: I think strategies taught in class were useful, and could be applied in other subjects I studied and my future work.*

The students' comments above show that they had positive attitudes toward the LACS instruction. This finding is similar to the findings of the studies by Dörnyei (1995) and Paranapiti (2014). In addition, their comments accentuated the transferability of LACS explicitly taught on this course to other contexts such as other subjects they took and the future work.

#### *Most Useful Strategies*

When asked to voice their opinions in the interview sessions on the most useful strategies, which they often used to help them perform their oral assessment tasks in the focus group interviews, students in three groups reported that they used different LS.

LS 7 – Lowering anxiety (affective strategy) and LS 2 – Note-taking (cognitive strategy) were the most useful strategies among weak students as shown in the following excerpts:

*WS2: The most useful strategy for me was LS 7 – Lowering anxiety. I tried to take a deep breath and relax by not worrying about anything before taking the oral assessments.*

WS6: *Before taking this course, I wrote my full scripts on an A4 sheet of paper, but now I used LS 2 – Note-taking when preparing my note cards for presentations writing only main ideas in key words in bullet points.*

LS 8 – Encouraging yourself (affective strategy) was the most useful LS among moderate students:

MS4: *I believe the most important thing for speaking well is having confidence. So, the most useful strategy for me was LS 8 – Encouraging yourself, which made me feel more confident knowing that I was in control and I could do it. Actually, this kind of mentality made my speech flow and really increased my confidence level.*

LS 4 – Planning for a language task (metacognitive strategy) was the most useful strategy among strong students:

SS6: *The most useful strategy for me was LS 4, which I used when preparing for every oral assessment and preparing my presentations in other subjects. The strategy reminded me to carefully read what the tasks required, to plan how I'd do the tasks step-by-step, to write scripts, and to plan how I'd handle questions from the audience. Before taking this course, my planning was not this thorough, but after I learned this strategy, I understood the importance of planning and have paid more attention on it.*

### ***Problems Faced by Three Groups of Students and Their Solutions***

While delivering a presentation in the post-test, students encountered different problems as follows:

#### **1) Nervousness**

Regardless of their different English proficiency levels, the majority of students (15 students) in all three groups reported in their journals that they were nervous during the presentation. 12 students further reported that their nervousness made them forget some parts of their scripts.

WS5: *I got nervous during the post-test, and it made me forget some parts of my script.*

#### **2) Other problems**

Besides anxiety, other problems students experienced included the following:

##### **3.1 Lack of fluency in giving a presentation:**

WS1: *I wasn't prepared well enough, so I wasn't fluent when presenting the information.*

##### **3.2 Ineffective use of body language:**

MS6: *My body language was not effective during the presentation.*

##### **3.3 Some difficulty with pronouncing some words:**

SS7: *I felt I didn't pronounce some words clearly.*

##### **3.4 Fast pacing:**

SS1: *I spoke a bit too fast during the presentation.*

Some of these problems were spotted by the students during their self-assessment on their performances through watching the video clips.

### ***Three Approaches to Solving Problems***

Three approaches to tackle problems were employed. First, some students applied strategies taught on the course. Second, a few students used other strategies they discovered, and finally, some students did not use any strategy to solve their problems, but instead made future plans for improvement.

#### **1) Strategies Used as Solutions**

In order to tackle the anxiety problem, two affective LS: LS 7 – Lowering anxiety through deep breathing and LS 8 – Encouraging yourself through saying positive statements to themselves were employed. 10 students from three groups (2 weak, 4 moderate, and 4 strong students) used LS 7, making it the most frequently used strategy to deal with anxiety. Interestingly, three students (1 weak and 2 strong students) used LS 7 in a combination with LS 8, and only one moderate student applied LS 8.

Besides affective LS, LS 5 – Production monitoring, a metacognitive LS, was applied by a strong student who had difficulty with word pronunciations:

*SS7: When I felt I didn't pronounce some words clearly, I tried to self-monitor which words I had difficulty pronouncing so that after the post-test I could practice pronouncing them more.*

In addition to LS, one moderate student reported her use of CS 5 – Self-repair, reflecting that she self corrected the parts she stumbled:

*MS4: Whenever I said something wrong, I corrected myself by restating the whole sentences again to make sure other people understand what I wanted to say.*

Noticeably, only one student reported the use of a CS in her journal. However, the teacher's observation notes showed that CS 5 was also employed by other three students (WS1, MS7, and SS8) in the three groups, and no one used CS 4 – Use of fillers and hesitation devices during the post-test. The reason that those students did not report their use of CS 5 in their journals might be because they were not aware that they were using this strategy during the test. In this instance, the teacher's observation notes could prove useful in providing additional information that students forgot to mention. Furthermore, the teacher's notes indicated that the frequency of the CS 5 use was higher in the pre-test than the post-test, which could be implied that students might be more nervous giving a presentation for the first time on this course and might not be well-prepared. Thus, they tended to trip more often. Nonetheless, the use of CS 1-3 is not reported in this paper because they are cooperative strategies, which could not be used by the students in a one-way communication task like an informative presentation in the pre- and post-tests where there was no Q&A session. Besides CS 5, the teacher's notes showed that students in all three groups used LS 3 – Using language exponents about delivering a presentation more in the post-test than in the pre-test.

## 2) Emergence of New Strategies

Apart from using LS 7 and 8 to handle their nervousness during the presentation, three students used other strategies, which were not introduced in the classroom. The first two strategies that two students, one weak and one moderate, used had to do with interacting with the audience:

*WS5: I asked the audience questions to calm myself down to gain time to recall the main points he wanted to talk about.*

*MS4: Maintaining eye contact whenever I forgot my script and was nervous made me feel calmer and showed that I was still with the audience. Also, it helped me recall the main points more quickly.*

The other strategy had to do with a tool:

*SS3: I found a technique for reducing anxiety on the Internet, which recommended using an aromatic inhalant. So, I tried to sniff it before taking the oral assessments, and it worked very well for me. It really calmed me down and helped me concentrate better.*

## 3) Future Plans for Improvement

Future plans that the students wrote in their journals involved rehearsals. Two weak students reflected in their journals that they felt they did not deliver a presentation fluently in the post-test. This kind of problem could not be solved instantly during the presentation. Therefore, the students wrote their future plans to improve their fluency as follows:

*WS1: I didn't use any strategy, but I know I need to prepare my presentation well in advance and rehearse it more frequently.*

*WS6: I realized that I needed to rehearse more, especially with my friend so that she could give me feedback for improvement.*

One moderate student, who noticed that his body language was not very effective during the presentation, planned to practice speaking in front of a mirror to observe and work on his body language.

*MS6: For the future oral assessments, I plan on using techniques I've learned in class and on practicing my speech in front of a mirror to improve my body language.*

Finally, one strong student, who noticed that he spoke a bit too fast, planned to reduce his speed and to rehearse with a friend for feedback.

*SS1: After I had watched my performance on the video, I realized I spoke quite fast, so next time I'll slow down and use pauses to make my presentation more effective. Also, I'll rehearse my presentation with my friend in order to get his feedback on my performance."*

Their journal excerpts show that all these four students realized the importance of rehearsals, and thus, planned to rehearse their presentations in front of a mirror or with their friends in order to get some feedback for improvement.

### ***Other Qualitative Findings on Students' Use of LS***

The students' journals revealed that the majority of strong students (5 students) used a combination of different LS for performing the post-test task. Four students employed all three types of cognitive (LS 3 – Recognizing and using language exponents), metacognitive (LS 4 – Planning for a language task and LS 5 – Self-monitoring), and affective (LS 7 – Lowering anxiety and LS 8 – Encouraging yourself) LS. In addition, moderate and weak students applied only cognitive (LS 1 – Getting the idea quickly and LS 3) and affective (LS 7 and 8) LS, with an exception with one moderate student who also applied LS 4 (metacognitive). This particular finding aligns with the result of the study by Gani, Fajrina & Hanifa (2015) in that strong students used a wider range and all kinds of learning strategies more than weak students for improving their speaking skills. Also, it supports the finding of Gerami and Baighlou's (2011) study in that strong students usually applied metacognitive strategies whereas weak students employed cognitive strategies more.

Although none of the students reported their use of LS 5 – Self-monitoring concerning strategy monitoring and LS 6 Self-evaluation regarding ability evaluation, their reflection in the journals and feedback in the self-assessment forms clearly illustrated that these two strategies had been implemented by all three groups of students. However, the quality of their reflection and self-assessment varied. The majority of strong and moderate students wrote thorough and comprehensive reflections and feedback, whereas the majority of weak students wrote only a few comments and sometimes did not elaborate much. As a result, this study would argue that strong, moderate, and weak students did apply metacognitive strategies, but the quality of their metacognitive output, which showed through their reflections and feedback in the journals and the self-assessment forms, varied depending on their reflection ability.

To summarize, interview scripts and students' journals indicate that students knew what to do to solve problems and were capable of solving the problems they encountered while delivering a presentation. Most of the students used LACS they had been taught in class, while others used strategies they discovered. Those who did not use any strategy to solve problems at least wrote their plans for improvement.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigates the effects of LACS instruction on economics students' oral communication ability in Thailand. The findings indicate that the students who received explicit LACS instruction significantly improved their oral presentation test scores. The qualitative data analysis reveals that all 23 students had positive perceptions of the LACS instruction. They found that learning LACS in class was useful because such strategies could be applied on the OECE course and in other subjects when they had to prepare and deliver presentations and could be used when working in the future. Furthermore, students' reports in their reflective journals and self-assessment forms show that strong students used a combination of all three types (cognitive, metacognitive, and affective) of LS and CS 5 – Self-repair, while moderate and weak students employed a combination of two types (cognitive and affective) of LS and CS 5. Nonetheless, their ability to monitor the learning tasks, to reflect on their strategy use, to plan for future improvement, and to evaluate how well they had performed indicate that strong, moderate, and weak students, in fact, applied metacognitive LS without realizing it.

### Recommendations for Further Studies

The present study was conducted with only one group of a small number of participants within a short period of time. Thus, future studies could be conducted with two groups of a larger number of participants to compare the impacts of explicit strategy instruction on the experimental group. In addition, future studies could emphasize raising students' awareness of their metacognitive LS use to greatly benefit from them. Furthermore, future studies could conduct a delayed post-test to examine whether the positive effects of the strategy instruction on the students' oral communication ability could be retained over a period of time after the treatment. Equally interesting, future studies could investigate the extent to which the selected LACS in this study are transferrable to other courses the participants will take in the future.

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