

DEVELOPING COMPENSATORY COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH SPEAKING: A DIAGNOSTIC STUDY OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. This study investigates the use of compensatory strategies in English oral communication among undergraduate students and English language teachers. The aim was to assess the level of awareness and application of these strategies in real-life speaking situations. A diagnostic survey was administered to 94 students and 26 teachers from pedagogical and linguistic institutions. The results revealed that while teachers consistently employ a wide range of compensatory strategies such as paraphrasing, simplification, and clarification requests, students tend to use them less frequently and often lack conscious control over their communication process. The findings suggest a clear need to integrate compensatory strategy instruction into language education to enhance learners' communicative competence and confidence. This research contributes to the growing body of studies advocating for strategic competence development as a core component of foreign language instruction.

Keywords: compensatory strategies; strategic competence; English language teaching; oral communication; language education; diagnostic research.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu tadqiqot bakalavriat talabalari hamda ingliz tili o'qituvchilarining ingliz tilidagi og'zaki muloqot jarayonida kompensator strategiyalardan foydalanishini o'rganishga bag'ishlangan. Tadqiqotning maqsadi real nutqiy vaziyatlarda ushbu strategiyalarni qo'llash darajasi va ular haqidagi xabardorlikni aniqlashdan iborat. Shu maqsadda pedagogik va lingvistik ta'lim muassasalarining 94 nafar talabasi hamda 26 nafar o'qituvchisi ishtirokida diagnostik so'rovnomma o'tkazildi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatdiki, o'qituvchilar parafrazlash, soddalashtirish va aniqlashtiruvchi savollar berish kabi turli kompensator strategiyalardan muntazam foydalanadilar. Talabalar esa ushbu strategiyalarni kamroq qo'llaydilar va ko'pincha o'z kommunikativ jarayonlarini ongli ravishda boshqarish ko'nikmasiga yetarli darajada ega emaslar. Tadqiqot natijalari o'qituvchilarning kommunikativ kompetensiyasi va o'ziga bo'lgan ishonchini rivojlantirish maqsadida kompensator strategiyalarni o'qitishni til ta'limi dasturlariga integratsiya qilish zarurligini ko'rsatadi. Mazkur tadqiqot strategik kompetensiyani rivojlantirishni chet tilini o'qitishning muhim tarkibiy qismi sifatida e'tirof etuvchi ilmiy izlanishlar qatorini boyitadi.

Kalit so'zlar: kompensator strategiyalar, strategik kompetensiya, ingliz tilini o'qitish, og'zaki muloqot, til ta'limi, diagnostik tadqiqot.

Аннотация. Данное исследование посвящено изучению использования компенсаторных стратегий в устной коммуникации на английском языке среди студентов бакалавриата и преподавателей английского языка. Целью исследования была оценка уровня осведомлённости о данных стратегиях и их применения в реальных ситуациях устного общения. Диагностический опрос был проведён среди 94 студентов и 26 преподавателей педагогических и лингвистических образовательных учреждений. Результаты показали, что преподаватели регулярно используют широкий спектр компенсаторных стратегий, таких как перефразирование, упрощение высказываний и запрос уточнений, тогда как студенты прибегают к ним значительно реже и часто не обладают осознанным контролем над процессом коммуникации. Полученные данные свидетельствуют о необходимости интеграции обучения компенсаторным стратегиям в систему языкового образования для повышения коммуникативной компетентности и уверенности учащихся. Исследование вносит вклад в расширение научных работ, обосновывающих развитие стратегической компетенции как одного из ключевых компонентов обучения иностранным языкам.

Ключевые слова: компенсаторные стратегии; стратегическая компетенция; преподавание английского языка; устная коммуникация; языковое образование; диагностическое исследование.

Introduction. The development of communicative competence has become a central objective in modern foreign language education, especially in the context of global integration and digital communication. Among its key components, *strategic competence* – and specifically *compensatory strategies* – play a crucial role in maintaining communication when linguistic resources are limited.

Learners at intermediate levels (B1-B2) often face breakdowns in speaking due to lexical gaps, grammatical uncertainty, or problems with understanding their interlocutors. In such moments, the ability to compensate – by using synonyms, describing the word, simplifying, asking for clarification, or using body language – becomes vital for successful interaction. Despite their importance, compensatory strategies are often underrepresented in classroom practice, and learners may not develop them consciously. Meanwhile, experienced language users (such as teachers) naturally apply a range of such strategies based on their communication experience and professional background.

This paper presents the findings of a diagnostic study conducted in Uzbekistan, aimed at identifying the differences in the awareness and use of compensatory strategies between English language students and teachers. The participants included 94 undergraduate students and 26 English language teachers, all of whom were engaged in English language and literature teaching or studies. The survey was distributed via a Telegram group comprising students and in-service teachers from pedagogical universities and educational institutions across the country. The findings provide a basis for understanding how strategic competence develops in learners and how it can be systematically supported through instruction.

Literature Review. The concept of *strategic competence* was first introduced by Canale and Swain (1980) as one of the core components of communicative competence, alongside grammatical, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences.[2.27-31] Strategic competence refers to the ability to manage communication breakdowns through verbal and non-verbal strategies. Later refinements by Bachman and Palmer (1996) emphasized the importance of metacognitive strategies in facilitating communication, especially in second language learning contexts.[1.70]

Within strategic competence, *compensatory strategies* play a crucial role in ensuring the continuity of communication when linguistic resources are insufficient. These include strategies such as circumlocution, approximation, self-repair, repetition, simplification, code-switching, and the use of gestures or fillers. According to Dornyei and Scott (1997), these strategies help learners cope with real-time challenges in speaking and are essential for building communicative confidence and fluency.[6.179-188]

Numerous studies have highlighted the role of strategic and compensatory competence in foreign language acquisition. For example, Faerch and Kasper (1983) explored how learners plan, execute, and monitor language production, pointing to the critical function of compensation in the absence of linguistic accuracy.[7.20-60] Similarly, Oxford (1990)

proposed a taxonomy of language learning strategies in which compensation strategies are treated as direct strategies that help learners overcome limitations in linguistic knowledge.[8.37–56] Cohen (1998) also emphasized the importance of distinguishing between language learning strategies and language use strategies, arguing that strategy awareness can support more effective and conscious language performance.[3.4–8]

In addition to international studies, recent national research also highlights the role of language and cultural intuition and compensatory competence in language education. For instance, G.Mahkamova (2023) emphasizes the importance of linguistic and cultural intuition as a foundation for strategic competence.[9]

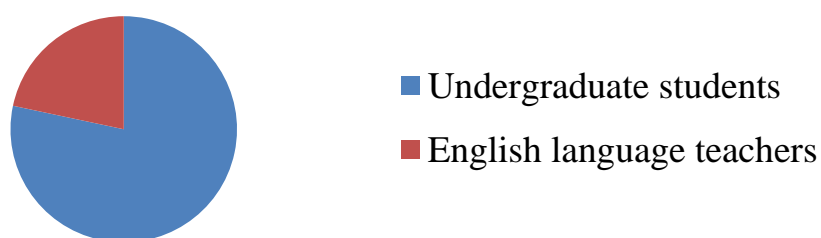
In more recent research, strategic competence has been recognized as a *21st-century skill* vital for global communication, especially in multicultural and multilingual contexts. This has been reflected in modern language education frameworks, including the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which includes strategic competence as part of communicative language ability.[4.5]

In the context of Uzbekistan, the emphasis on communicative competence has become increasingly relevant due to ongoing educational reforms aimed at aligning language education with international standards. However, while much attention has been paid to grammar, vocabulary, and general communicative skills, the systematic development of *compensatory competence* remains underexplored both in classroom practice and academic literature.

This study aims to contribute to filling that gap by providing empirical evidence from a diagnostic survey conducted among English language teachers and students. It investigates the current state of awareness and use of compensatory strategies, offering practical insights for the integration of such strategies into language instruction in Uzbekistan's higher education system.

Research Methodology. The study involved a total of 120 participants, including 94 undergraduate students and 26 English language teachers. The students were enrolled in the first and second years of study at a pedagogical university, majoring in English language teaching. Their language proficiency levels ranged from B1 to B2 (according to the CEFR). The group of teachers comprised educators from linguistic and non-linguistic universities, secondary schools, and language centres, with teaching experience ranging from 3 to over 20 years.

Distribution of Research Participants

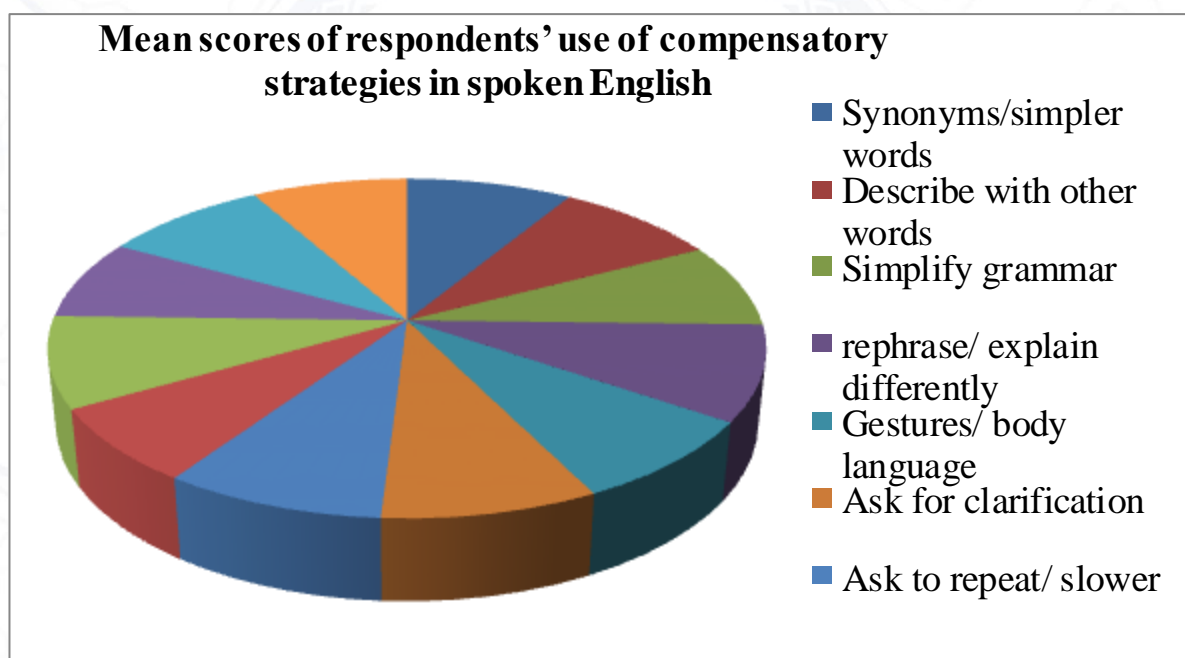


A diagnostic questionnaire was developed to assess the use of compensatory strategies in spoken English. The instrument included 12 closed-ended questions rated on a four-point Likert scale (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Always), as well as one open-ended question designed to elicit qualitative insights into the respondents' approach to overcoming speaking difficulties.

The closed-ended items focused on common compensatory strategies such as: using synonyms or simpler words, paraphrasing, simplifying grammar, rephrasing when not understood, using gestures or body language, asking for clarification or repetition, using fillers to gain thinking time, self-correction, and giving examples when explanations fail.

The questionnaire was administered electronically, and responses were automatically collected in a spreadsheet format.

Analysis and Results. The diagnostic stage of the research revealed considerable differences between students and teachers in their reported use of compensatory strategies.



The mean scores presented in the chart provide an overall picture of how frequently respondents used different compensatory strategies in spoken English. The responses were calculated on a four-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "Never" and 4 represented "Always". Therefore, higher mean scores indicate more frequent and consistent use of a particular strategy. Overall, the results show that the respondents demonstrated a relatively active use of compensatory strategies, as most mean scores were above 3.00. This suggests that the participants generally relied on different communicative techniques to overcome difficulties during spoken interaction. The highest mean score was observed for rephrasing or explaining differently when the interlocutor did not understand the message. This indicates that rephrasing is one of the most commonly used and effective strategies among the respondents. It also shows that participants tend to maintain communication by modifying their message rather than abandoning it.

The use of synonyms or simpler words also received a high mean score. This result demonstrates that respondents often compensate for lexical gaps by choosing alternative vocabulary. Similarly, switching from complex phrases to simpler words was frequently used, which confirms that lexical simplification plays an important role in maintaining fluency and communicative continuity. These findings suggest that participants are more confident in using word-level compensatory strategies than more complex pragmatic or interactional strategies. The results also show relatively high mean scores for self-correction, asking for repetition or slower speech, and describing an unknown word through other words. These strategies indicate a certain level of strategic awareness, as respondents try to repair communication problems and continue speaking despite linguistic limitations. Such strategies are especially important for learners at intermediate proficiency levels, where difficulties with vocabulary, grammar, and spontaneous speech production are common.

However, the lowest mean score was recorded for the use of fillers such as “Let me think” or “Well” to gain time while speaking. This suggests that respondents use this pragmatic strategy less frequently than other compensatory strategies. The relatively low score may indicate that learners are not sufficiently trained to use fillers naturally and appropriately in spoken English. Instead of using fillers to maintain interaction, some learners may pause, stop speaking, or switch to their native language when they experience difficulty. The strategy of giving examples or telling a short story also showed a comparatively lower mean score. This may suggest that respondents are less likely to expand their message when they cannot explain an idea directly. In other words, they may prefer simplification and rephrasing rather than elaboration. This finding is important because giving examples is a valuable compensatory strategy that helps speakers make their ideas clearer and more understandable.

In general, the results reveal that respondents use several compensatory strategies, especially those connected with simplification, synonym use, rephrasing, and self-correction. At the same time, the lower scores for fillers and elaboration strategies show that some aspects of strategic competence require further development. These findings confirm the need to integrate compensatory strategy training into English language instruction. Systematic practice of such strategies can help students become more confident, flexible, and autonomous speakers in real communicative situations.

The open-ended responses supported these quantitative findings: teachers often described using a range of strategies intuitively or based on their teaching experience, while students frequently mentioned switching to their native language or pausing communication when unsure, indicating a gap in strategic training.

In summary, the data highlight a clear need to explicitly integrate compensatory strategies into classroom instruction. While some strategies may develop naturally through exposure, many require focused awareness-raising and guided practice. Bridging this gap

is essential for building students' strategic competence and fostering confident, autonomous language users.

Conclusion. This study explored the use and awareness of compensatory strategies among English language students and teachers in Uzbekistan. The results of the diagnostic questionnaire revealed a significant disparity between the two groups. While teachers regularly employed a broad range of compensatory techniques – such as paraphrasing, using simpler language, or asking for clarification – students used such strategies inconsistently or remained unaware of their potential in overcoming communication barriers. The findings underscore the need to incorporate explicit instruction and practice of compensatory strategies into language curricula. Teachers should not only model these strategies but also encourage students to reflect on and develop their own repertoire of techniques to handle communication breakdowns. Doing so will support the development of learners' strategic competence, increase their confidence in speaking, and ultimately enhance their overall communicative ability.

This research contributes to the theoretical and practical understanding of compensatory competence as an essential component of foreign language teaching. Future studies could extend this work by designing and testing specific classroom interventions aimed at improving compensatory strategy use at various proficiency levels.

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