

## Two Edges of Sword of Strategy-Based Instruction (SBI) and Implicit Task-Based Instruction (TBI) on EFL Oral Performance

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### Abstract

This pilot study aimed to investigate the effects of two classroom instructions on the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of EFL learners' speaking. The first one involved implicit task-based instruction with meaning-focused pedagogic tasks. The second instruction reduced learners' practice time but complemented it with explicit strategy-based instruction (SBI) to raise their metacognitive awareness in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their speech. Participants in the explicit instruction group learned to practice three specific strategies, while the first group had only more practice opportunities. The study involved 16 English students from a third-tier university in Indonesia. Audio recordings of each participant's oral presentations during the pre-test and the post-test were transcribed and coded for non-parametric analysis. The findings revealed that both instructions had a comparable impact on EFL learners' oral performance by improving complexity but not accuracy and fluency. There was also a possible trade-off effect found in participants' performance. The study findings could provide a basis for EFL teachers to use either explicit strategy instruction or implicit instruction for their speaking class.

**Keywords:** Explicit and implicit instruction, learning strategy, metacognitive awareness, trade-off effect

### INTRODUCTION

Researchers in language learning believe that learning strategies can be associated with second or foreign language proficiency (Ardasheva et al., 2017; Chamot et al., 1999; Cohen et al., 1996; Zhang et al., 2019). Some researchers even argue that successful language learners apply specific learning strategies that could benefit others who are less successful in their learning (Chamot & Harris, 2019). However, evidence regarding the effectiveness of strategy training on language learning is inconsistent (Ardasheva et al., 2017; Hassan et al.,

2005; Plonsky, 2011). Some studies have found stronger effects of strategy training on writing and reading (Alibabae et al., 2014; Hassan et al., 2005), whereas others have found stronger effects on speaking (Plonsky, 2011). Most findings indicate that the effect of strategy training on listening is negligible (Hassan et al., 2005; Plonsky, 2011). Therefore, more research on strategy training instruction is required to quantify research findings regarding the effectiveness of the instruction.

Therefore, this study tried to compare the impact of two instructional approaches: explicit strategy training instruction using Strategy-Based Instruction (SBI) and implicit task-based instruction, as they were applied in EFL classrooms. The study could contribute to research application regarding how to conduct a pilot study to prepare for comprehensive main research and the theory and practice of instructed second language acquisition. Within the concept of learning strategy and its instruction, it is believed that proficient learners may use specific strategies which are different from less proficient learners (Nakatani, 2005). Learning strategies have been categorized into three types: (a) cognitive strategies that deal with tacit behaviors and mental processes during learning; (b) metacognitive strategies that deal with conscious awareness during learning; and (c) socio-affective strategies that deal with interaction and personality traits (Ardasheva et al., 2017). Of these, metacognitive strategies have received the most attention in the strategy training literature (Cerezo et al., 2019), involving planning, monitoring, and evaluation (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

SBI is a learner-centered approach to teaching that systematically applies strategies to language use in the classroom by explicitly incorporating it into the language curriculum (Rubin et al., 2007). The SBI model consists of four phases: (1) awareness-raising, (2) presentation and modeling, (3) multiple practice opportunities, and (4) evaluating and transferring strategies to new tasks (Rubin et al., 2007). The four phases can be implemented comprehensively through the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) developed by Chamot et al. (1999). In the awareness-raising phase, the teacher helps identify learners' current use of learning strategies and the kind of tasks they accomplished using the strategies. In the presentation and modeling phase, the teacher models, names, and explains how to use new strategies to the students. The teacher can also ask the students if they know or use new strategies in their learning. Students are given opportunities to practice the new strategies while performing a specific task during the multiple-practice phase. The teacher also encourages students to apply the strategies independently. Meanwhile, in the evaluating and transferring phase, students are allowed to directly evaluate their strategies use after the task performance and use the results of the evaluation on a new task.

Several studies have investigated the effects of SBI, but only a few looked at the effects on oral language performance (Birjandi & Seifoori, 2009; Cohen et al., 1996; Gunning & Oxford, 2014). For example, Cohen et al. (1996) investigated the effect of SBI on oral communication. They trained learners with preparation, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation for conversational speaking tasks. Pre- to post-test comparisons indicated that not all students improved. In an Asian context, more focus has been on reading and writing. Goh and Taib (2006) also investigated the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy instruction on young ESL learners listening ability in Singapore. The study found a positive relationship between instruction and listening ability. Gu (2007) integrated strategy training into the elementary writing curriculum in Singapore and found that those who received SBI outperformed a control group on both the post-test and the delayed test.

There are three main phases central to metacognitive strategies training: (1) planning, (2) monitoring, and (3) evaluation (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Rubin, 1987). In the planning phase, learners with metacognitive strategies will be able to plan how to approach the task, set out the goals of the task, and decide how to reach them best. According to Little (1996), planning for tasks comprises both prospective and retrospective aspects. Prospective planning determines the conceptual and linguistic requirements of the activity, and retrospective planning is concerned with the success of the performed activity. In the present study, learners were trained in three planning strategies that are considered useful in speaking task completion: problem identification, planning content and planning language. Wenden (1995) explains that problem identification is general planning which enables learners to assess the purpose and expected outcome of the task. Meanwhile, planning content and planning language are part of strategic planning for task performance (Ellis, 2005). Planning content is useful for organizing the ideas for the task, and planning language helps learners prepare to express these ideas well.

In the monitoring phase, learners should be able to examine, regulate, and manage their performance during the task. Some monitoring strategies are (1) comprehension monitoring; (2) production monitoring (checking, verifying, or correcting one's language); (3) auditory monitoring; (4) visual monitoring; (5) styling monitoring; and (6) strategy monitoring (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Production monitoring is a strategy that is particularly relevant to speaking tasks (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Another relevant strategy is strategy monitoring since it is closely related to learners' metacognitive awareness in their strategy use. The effects of training these two strategies on learners' oral performance were highlighted in the present study. Finally, in the evaluation phase, learners self-evaluate the task process that they already performed. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) discuss five evaluation strategies: (1) production evaluation, (2) performance evaluation, (3) ability evaluation, (4) strategy evaluation, and (5) language evaluation. Two of these strategies, *production evaluation*, and *strategies evaluation*, will be adopted in this study to match the selection with the strategies trained in the monitoring phase.

As the proposed study investigated the effects of strategy training on task-based oral performance, a theoretical model of task-based L2 or EFL performance is required. Skehan (2014b) proposes a limited attention capacity model of L2 task performance, which involves trade-offs in the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of learners' L2 production. Skehan (2014) argues that task demands will have differential effects on learners' attention during the performance. Unlike proficient speakers, L2 learners do not have automated access to the vocabulary and grammar they need to express their ideas and thus need to devote attention to what they want to say and how they can say it. Tasks that learners find challenging will thus place simultaneous demands for planning content and language on learners, and, according to Skehan (2014), they cannot do both of these things simultaneously. Skehan (2014) argues that a 'trade-off' effect might occur when L2 or EFL learners perform a speaking task. If they focus on content, learners are likely to draw on largely automated language, which they can produce more fluently and accurately. Alternatively, they may focus on language and experiment with more syntactically complex but less fluent and accurate language. One way or the other, this forced choice results in a breakdown in oral performance.

Explicit SBI training and guided practice in using task-relevant strategies may reduce the L2 production demands on tasks that learners find challenging and improve their ability to perform tasks. In addition, repeated task practice, mostly performed under implicit instruction, also can lessen the production demand because it allows learners to rehearse, modify, and improve their performance. Therefore, the final performance of the task would be better than the first. Hence, this study applied both approaches, explicit SBI, and implicit instruction to improve EFL learners speaking skills through the utilization of speaking tasks.

It was hypothesized that both instructions would be able to improve participants' oral performance. The explicit instruction was considered to be able to create a better improvement because this group had been allowed to experience a series of strategy training instructions. Hence, this study was focused on investigating three research focus: the effects of implicit instruction, the effects of explicit strategy-based instruction, and the different effects between implicit instruction and explicit strategy-based instruction on L2 learners' oral performance.

## METHOD

This pilot study used an experimental design involving two groups of students who received two different treatments. The first one was the implicit group with implicit instruction and practice activity. The other was the explicit group who received metacognitive strategies training in explicit instruction. The study was conducted on five consecutive days. Two days were used for pre-test and post-test, while the other three days were for instruction. The participants in this pilot study were students at a three-year vocational university, which is a second or third-tier university within the population of tertiary-level English students in Indonesia. Twenty students from two intact classes were invited to join the study, and all of them agreed to involve. These students were in their third semester at the university. Ten students from one class were chosen to be in the explicit group, while ten others from the other class were in the implicit group. However, when the study started, only seven students from the explicit group showed up. Meanwhile, the implicit group had nine.

Both groups were provided with an identical set of speaking tasks. The tasks were focused on the *News Presenting* topic as one core topic to be mastered by students. The tasks assigned participants to report news stories in the form of one-minute monologic oral presentations. Both groups gave and completed three tasks during every lesson or training time in the study. The first one was an input-based listening task, the second was an output-based reading task, and the third was an output-based listening task. The presentation was based on a YouTube news video. Apart from the task materials, metacognitive strategies training materials specifically designed for the explicit group were also prepared. The strategies training was based on the CALLA model. The strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluation used in the study were problem identification, production monitoring, and evaluation monitoring.

The pre-test and post-test materials were also in the form of one-minute monologic news reports. The stories for the tests were not ones that learners summarized in class, but they were similar regarding length and difficulty. The topics of the news events for these tests were similar to those given for the training session. The complete list of materials and topics used in this study can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Topics and Materials for Pilot Study

Day	Activity	Strategies Material	News Topic
1	Pre-test	None	Terror Incidents in Indonesia
2	Instruction	Problem identification	Terrorist Attacks
3	Instruction	Production monitoring	Flight Accidents
4	Instruction	Production evaluation	Accidents at Sea
5	Post-test	None	Natural Disaster in Indonesia

The study was conducted over five consecutive days in a language laboratory in the uatversity. The study was begun with the pre-test on Day 1, in which both groups received the same test. The topic of the pre-test was *Terror Incident in Indonesia*. The pre-test lasted for 45 minutes and consisted of 30 minutes of preparation and 15 minutes of presentation. The preparation time was started by watching a two-minute news video session and individual planning. The post-test, which was administered on Day 5, also used the same method but with a different topic, *Natural Disasters in Indonesia*.

The respective treatment, which took three days, was started on Day 2 and finished on Day 4. Each day consisted of one meeting discussing a different topic: *Terrorist Attacks, Flight Accidents, and Accidents at Sea*. A two-hour lesson was given to them in every meeting. There were three sessions concluded in each of the 2-hour lessons: introduction, planning and practice, and performance (task recording). Participants in both groups completed one identical task in each session. Both groups received the same instruction in the introduction and performance sessions but not in the planning and practice. In general, the introduction session took about 30 minutes, the planning and practice 75 minutes, and the performance took 15 minutes.

In the planning and practice session, the explicit group was given the CALLA training, which consists of four phases: (1) awareness raising, (2) presentation and modelling, (3) multiple practice opportunity, and (4) evaluating and transferring. The first phase was used to identify students' learning strategies through a discussion. In the second phase, the students were given one example of learning strategy and the way to apply it. They were then asked to apply the strategy into a task during the third phase. Finally, the students evaluated their strategy use and apply it to another task in the fourth phase.

All of the audio recording data of students' oral performances were first transcribed verbatim following the procedures of Foster et al., (2000) for the transcription of oral L2 discourse into Analysis of Speech Units (AS-unit). AS-unit is syntactic for the spoken language, which is defined as "a single speaker's utterance consisting of an independent clause, or sub-clausal unit, together with any subordinate clause(s) associated with either" (Foster et al., 2000, p. 365). The analysis used AS-unit to measure each student's oral performance's complexity, accuracy, and fluency. In measuring syntactic complexity, subordination was calculated as standard s-nodes per AS-unit measures (Foster et al., 2000).

Subordination was gotten from the number of clauses divided by the number of AS-unit in pruned transcription. In investigating accuracy, the number of errors produced by learners was divided by the number of words that they produced in pruned discourse (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Meanwhile, to measure fluency, one sub-constructs, speech rate, was coded (de Jong et al., 2013). Speed rate was measured as syllables per second in pruned

discourse (Kormos & Dénes, 2004), which was operationalized as the total number of syllables divided by total times (duration, in seconds) taken to produce the syllables. The statistical analysis software SPSS 25.0 was used, and a series of Multivariate tests were applied to all measures. The alpha for reaching statistical significance was set at 0.05.

### FINDING AND DISCUSSION

To visualize any potential improvements experienced by both groups at the end of the study, Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 show the gain of each group in complexity, accuracy, and fluency from pre-test to post-test.

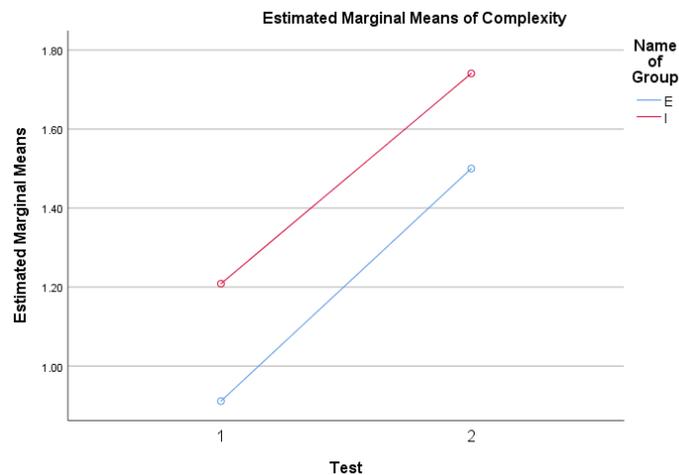


Figure 1. Profile plot for complexity

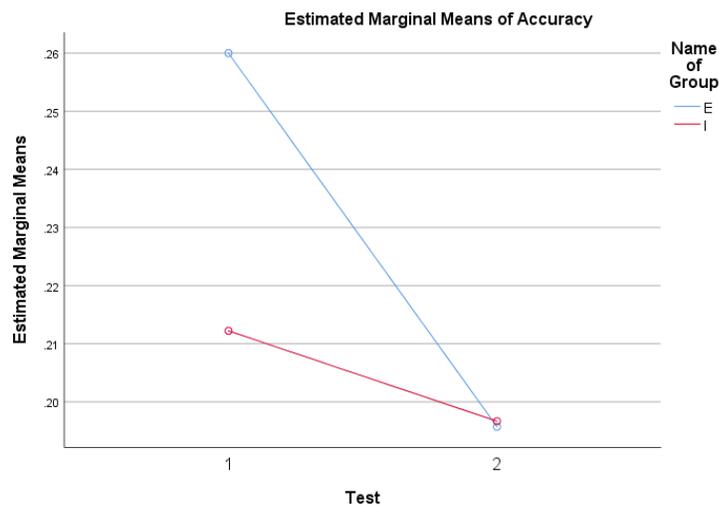


Figure 2. Profile plots for accuracy

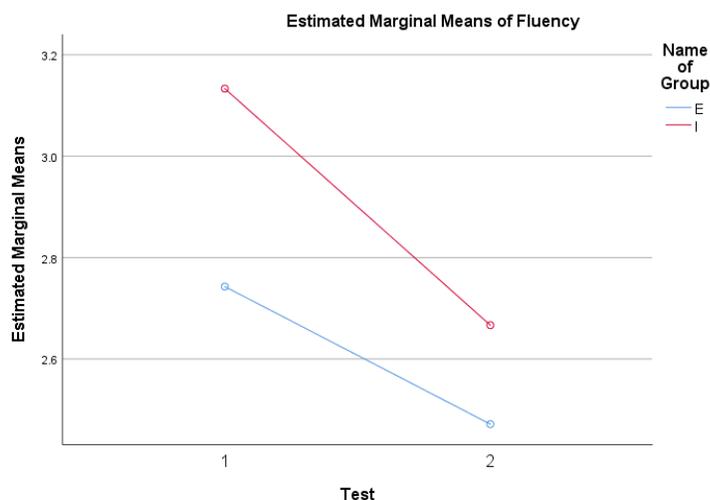


Figure 3. Profile plot for fluency

The three figures indicate that both groups had a comparable trend of gains. The improvement can only be seen in complexity, while accuracy and fluency experienced a deterioration since the mean scores decreased from pre-test to post-test. For further analysis, Table 2 shows pairwise comparison results between the explicit and implicit groups in the pre-test and post-test conditions.

Table 2. Pairwise Comparisons results of groups and tests

Measure			Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<b>Between Groups</b>							
Fluency	E	I	-0.29	0.27	0.29	-0.86	0.28
	I	E	0.29	0.27	0.29	-0.28	0.86
Accuracy	E	I	0.02	0.03	0.41	-0.04	0.08
	I	E	-0.02	0.03	0.41	-0.08	0.04
Complexity	E	I	-.269*	0.11	0.03	-0.51	-0.03
	I	E	.269*	0.11	0.03	0.03	0.51
<b>Between Tests</b>							
Fluency	1	2	.369*	0.17	0.04	0.01	0.73
	2	1	-.369*	0.17	0.04	-0.73	-0.01
Accuracy	1	2	.040*	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.06
	2	1	-.040*	0.01	0.00	-0.06	-0.02
Complexity	1	2	-.561*	0.11	0.00	-0.80	-0.32
	2	1	.561*	0.11	0.00	0.32	0.80

As can be seen from Table 2, both groups experienced some improvement from the pre-test to the post-test in all three measures. The improvements reached a statistically

significant level that ranged from  $p < 0.01$  for accuracy and complexity to  $p = 0.04$  for fluency. However, no significant differences are found when the improvement between groups is compared. The multivariate result, as shown in Table 3, confirmed the result that each group gained a statistically significant improvement from the pre-test to the post-test ( $p < 0.01$ ). The observed power of the improvement test was also acceptable ( $> 0.80$ ). Again, improvement between groups was found insignificant ( $P = 0.24$ ).

Table 3. The multivariate result of groups and tests

Within-Subjects Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Test	Pillai's Trace	0.74	11.64c	3.00	12.00	0.00	0.74	34.93	0.99
	Wilks' Lambda	0.26	11.64c	3.00	12.00	0.00	0.74	34.93	0.99
Test * Group	Pillai's Trace	0.29	1.63c	3.00	12.00	0.24	0.29	4.88	0.32
	Wilks' Lambda	0.71	1.63c	3.00	12.00	0.24	0.29	4.88	0.32

To discuss the findings in regard to the first research focus, the effect of Implicit instruction on learners' oral performance, the results showed that the implicit group appeared to have a significant improvement in their oral performance in terms of the complexity of their speech. This result is in line with several previous studies (e.g., Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Ferrari, 2012) that found instruction could improve learners' complexity. It seemed that learners paid more attention to the content of their speech by trying to make the speech more complex. It also seemed that more practice opportunities given to them were used to revise the content and language used for the speech. This attention to complexity also seemed to make learners ignore the accuracy and fluency of the speech.

This finding is similar to the 'trade-off effect' theory, which states that aspects of speech that receive enough attention will reach optimal performance while the others with less or limited attention will deteriorate (Skehan, 2014a). Thus, it might be concluded that for learners within the context of the study, implicit instruction could have an effect on the complexity of learners' oral performance. In regard to the second research focus, the explicit group showed similar results. The explicit instruction under the SBI also seemed to have a better impact on the complexity than the accuracy and fluency of their speech. In fact, there were also visible declines in accuracy and fluency, as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3. Although most of the previous studies under the SBI approach did not use CAF measures, most of those studies found a link between the SBI and learners' improvement in general speaking proficiency (e.g., Chou, 2017; Kim & Ventura, 2013; Sarafianou & Gavriilidou, 2015). Therefore, the result of this present study supports those previous SBI studies in a particular aspect of oral performance because learners in this study were able to improve the complexity of their speech after being trained with the SBI. It is safe to assume that training learners explicitly to use specific strategies in planning the content of their speech and make some evaluations and revisions with repeated practice could impact the complexity of the speech.

In light of the third research focus, different effects between the SBI explicit instruction and implicit instruction, the present study found that both instructional approaches had a comparable effect on learners within the context of the study. These findings, to some extent, corroborate previous studies' findings (e.g., Andrews, 2007; Marzuki, 2021; Wang, 2014), which conclude that explicit and implicit instruction would give different benefits to EFL learners. Both instructions could improve learners' complexity at the expense of accuracy and fluency. The only difference between both groups was in accuracy, in which the implicit group experienced more decline than the explicit group. However, this decline is negligible and cannot be discussed further in relation to the instructional effect. To the author's knowledge, the present study is the only one that attempts to compare the effect of both instructional conditions on the EFL context. Therefore, comparing the results of the present study with others is impossible.

The present study also found evidence of trade-off effects in both groups of study, indicating that EFL learners tend to prioritize by focusing more on improving the complexity of the speech when instructed either by explicit strategy training or implicit instruction. EFL learners have capacity limitations in their language repertoire; therefore, they have to divide their attentional resources between all the processes required to perform a speaking task or make a speech, like selecting the input, processing effective information, and preparing the response. Usually, some related areas of performance such as linguistic complexity, accuracy, and fluency will compete with each other. The performative aspect, which gains more attention, will reach optimal performance while others that do not become flawed (Skehan, 1998, 2009). The present study's results indicated that explicit and implicit instruction when equipped with a degree of planning time and repeated practice. However, the result showed an insignificant difference between groups' oral performance despite the gain that could switch learners' attention to the complexity of their speech. As a result, the accuracy and fluency of the speech are neglected. Some efforts are required to make both instructional approaches able to improve the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of their speech. These efforts will become the recommendation for future studies.

Based on the results, it is believed that two main reasons could become the cause are the duration of the training and the speaking tasks being employed. The explicit group trained three metacognitive strategies during three lessons within three days consecutively. Perhaps the result would be more successful if they were given more opportunities and time to practice different topics. Oxford (1990) suggests that learners must be provided with plenty of time to practice their learning strategies. Future studies are recommended to have a longer study duration employing more practice opportunities for learners.

## **CONCLUSION**

Both instructions were predicted to have an impact on improving learners' oral performance. In addition, explicit instruction was considered to give a better impact since learners in this group had been given the opportunity to experience a series of strategy training instructions. However, the findings revealed that explicit and implicit instruction seemed to have comparable effects on learners' oral performance. In terms of how to conduct a comprehensive pilot study, the findings of the study could contribute to research application regarding how to conduct a pilot study as a means to prepare for comprehensive main research and the theory and practice of instructed second language acquisition. In

addition, by employing the suggestions stated in the discussion, the study could improve teaching practices by providing choices for teachers on whether to use explicit or implicit instruction in L2 speaking classes and better understand the specific instructional objectives that might be achieved.

However, this study had some limitations that could also be a recommendation for future studies with similar contexts. This study involved a limited number of participants and instructional meetings. More participants would present more robust results for a quantitative study, therefore future studies are suggested to employ this. Meanwhile, the limited number of instructional meetings would limit participants' opportunity to have practice sessions within the classroom. This limitation could hinder their language development, especially the development of the language skill being learned. For this reason, it is suggested that future studies should consider applying more instructional meetings.

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