

Investigating Strategies Used by the Teachers of SMK Negeri 1 Labuan and SMK Negeri 3 Palu in Enhancing Students' Speaking Skills

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Abstract

This study examines the teaching strategies employed by English teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Labuan and SMK Negeri 3 Palu to enhance students' speaking skills, addressing persistent challenges such as anxiety, low confidence, and limited vocabulary. The research aims to identify the strategies used, analyze their classroom implementation, and determine the most dominant approaches. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were gathered from five English teachers through interviews, classroom observations, questionnaires, and documentation, and analyzed according to Oxford's taxonomy of language learning strategies: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. The findings indicate that all six categories were applied to varying extents, with social and cognitive strategies most frequently and consistently used, followed by metacognitive and compensation strategies. Memory and affective strategies were employed less often but still contributed meaningfully to instruction. Teachers adapted these strategies to align with students' needs, classroom contexts, and communicative objectives. The study concludes that strategy-based instruction, particularly through social interaction and emotional support significantly improves students' speaking fluency, confidence, and participation. It underscores the importance of combining communicative practice with psychosocial readiness in vocational EFL settings, recommending continuous teacher training, curriculum alignment to foster learner autonomy,

and further research incorporating student perspectives and mixed-method approaches.

Keywords: Teaching Strategies; Speaking Skills; Vocational EFL; Strategy-Based Instruction; Learner Autonomy

INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking is considered both a fundamental and complex skill that directly reflects learners' communicative competence. Among Indonesian students, especially those in vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan – SMK), speaking proficiency is expected not only for academic purposes but also for real-life workplace communication. However, in practice, students at SMK Negeri 1 Labuan and SMK Negeri 3 Palu continue to experience significant challenges in mastering this productive skill. Based on preliminary observations and informal interviews with teachers, many students remain passive in speaking activities, reluctant to express themselves in English, and often show symptoms of anxiety, low confidence, disorganized thoughts, and insufficient vocabulary (Nurhadi et al., 2024). These issues suggest that the instructional strategies currently employed may not be sufficiently responsive to students' communicative needs.

This situation presents a critical issue for EFL instruction in the vocational school context, particularly under the expectations of Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum), which emphasizes student agency, contextual learning, and the development of 21st-century skills—including communication and collaboration. Despite these progressive aims, the gap between curriculum ideals and classroom realities persists. Teachers often struggle to motivate students to speak, and students frequently lack the strategic tools to overcome psychological and linguistic barriers to oral communication (Razawi et al., 2023). It is therefore imperative to examine how teaching strategies can be designed and implemented more effectively to enhance speaking instruction in line with national policy goals.

As a response, researchers in the field of EFL have proposed the integration of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) as a means to empower learners to take control of their learning process and develop communicative competence. One of the most influential

frameworks is Oxford's taxonomy (1990, 2011, 2017), which classifies LLS into six broad categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. These strategies, when properly employed by both teachers and learners, can help reduce anxiety, increase motivation, facilitate vocabulary retention, and enhance overall fluency (Oxford, 2016). However, while the theoretical benefits of Oxford's strategies are well-established globally, empirical evidence on their classroom-level application—especially in Indonesian vocational schools—is limited. Most existing studies focus on general secondary schools or university-level learners and often examine strategies from the students' perspective rather than the teachers' practices.

Several studies provide insight into teaching strategies for speaking skills, such as the work by (Razi et al., 2021) who analyzed junior high school teachers' strategies including reading aloud, repetition drills, and cooperative learning. Kurniawati, 2023 focused on a single question-answer technique due to large class sizes and vocabulary limitations. Su & Lee, 2024 explored affective strategies like self-encouragement in hybrid learning settings. These studies, while informative, highlight a research gap: (1) most were conducted outside vocational school contexts; (2) they applied strategy frameworks only partially or selectively; and (3) few integrated classroom observation with teacher reflections and documentation. Therefore, there is a need for deeper investigation into the comprehensive and contextualized use of Oxford's full taxonomy by vocational school teachers in Indonesia, particularly under the demands of Kurikulum Merdeka.

The novelty of this research lies in its focused application of all six categories of Oxford's learning strategies within a vocational high school setting, assessed from the teachers' perspective, and situated within the current Indonesian curriculum reform. By examining how these strategies are consciously applied by teachers in real-time teaching processes—including lesson planning, classroom delivery, and assessment—this study provides a grounded understanding of strategic instruction in a practical, policy-aligned context.

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in the belief that effective speaking instruction must address both linguistic competence and psychosocial readiness. Language learning strategies help learners manage their own cognition (through planning, practicing, and evaluating), memory (through visualization and categorization), social interaction (through peer support and questioning), and affective states (through anxiety control and

motivation). As Oxford (2017) argued, successful language learners are those who are equipped not just with input but also with strategic awareness and autonomy.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the strategic behaviors of English teachers in teaching speaking at SMK Negeri 1 Labuan and SMK Negeri 3 Palu. Drawing from Oxford's taxonomy, it identifies the types of strategies used, how they are implemented, and the challenges faced by teachers. Ultimately, the study aims to provide practical insights that can inform teacher development programs, improve speaking instruction at vocational schools, and support the broader implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research approach aimed at understanding how English teachers at vocational high schools implement teaching strategies to improve students' speaking skills. The qualitative method was chosen to allow a detailed exploration of teacher behaviors, classroom interactions, and the contextual application of language learning strategies, especially within the structure of Oxford's taxonomy. This approach enabled the researcher to capture rich, contextualized data drawn from real classroom environments at SMK Negeri 1 Labuan and SMK Negeri 3 Palu. The study was conducted over a five-day period, from May 15 to May 19, 2024. These two schools were selected purposively, considering their relevance to vocational education and their implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, which places a strong emphasis on communicative competence. The participants were five English teachers—two from SMK Negeri 1 Labuan and three from SMK Negeri 3 Palu—who were selected using purposive sampling based on their teaching experience and direct involvement in speaking instruction. All teachers had a minimum of four years of classroom experience and held active roles in the English curriculum. To gather comprehensive data, the researcher employed multiple instruments: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, teacher questionnaires, and documentation analysis. The interviews explored the teachers' reasoning, reflections, and experiences in using specific strategies. Observations were used to record real-time strategy implementation, classroom dynamics, and student engagement. Questionnaires provided structured insights into the frequency and types of strategies employed, while lesson plans and teaching materials served as supporting documentation. Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by (Miles & Huberman, 2014) encompassing data condensation,

data display, and conclusion drawing. All interview transcripts and observation notes were coded thematically, with categorization based on Oxford's six strategy types: cognitive, metacognitive, memory, compensation, affective, and social. The credibility of the findings was reinforced through methodological triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing, ensuring that interpretations were consistent, grounded, and representative of participants' actual practices. This methodological framework enabled a holistic and evidence-based understanding of how EFL teachers at vocational schools apply strategic teaching approaches to develop students' speaking competence, aligning both with Oxford's theoretical model and the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum.

RESULTS

Based on the questionnaire responses from five English teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Labuan and SMK Negeri 3 Palu, it was found that a range of teaching strategies based on Oxford's taxonomy were implemented with varying frequency. The most frequently and universally used strategies were cognitive and social strategies, both applied by 100% of the respondents. These were followed by metacognitive and compensation strategies, each used often by 80% of the teachers. Meanwhile, memory and affective strategies were used often by 60% of the teachers. The paragraphs below provide detailed elaboration on each strategy category based on the teachers' responses and reflections.

Cognitive strategies were the most frequently applied, with all five teachers (T01–T05) stating they often used them in speaking classes. These strategies involved mental processes such as repetition, modeling, summarizing, and using structured expressions. Teachers emphasized that cognitive strategies helped students practice speaking in a controlled and guided way. For instance, T01 used repetition drills and job interview simulations to build students' sentence structure and fluency. T02 applied real-life promotional speaking tasks like marketing products, while T03 engaged students in storytelling using pictures and sequencing. T04 implemented vocabulary previews and structured question-answer sessions to enhance student accuracy, and T05 guided students through procedural speaking tasks, such as explaining how to operate tools or demonstrate a service. All teachers reported that these strategies were highly effective in improving students' fluency, vocabulary control, and confidence in delivering organized, meaningful speech, particularly in vocational contexts where real-world communication was emphasized.

Social strategies were also used consistently by all teachers (100%) across both schools. These strategies involve learning through interaction, including pair work, group discussions, peer feedback, and cooperative tasks. Teachers noted that social strategies helped students feel less pressure when speaking and created a collaborative learning atmosphere. T01 and T04 implemented structured peer interviews and group practice, encouraging students to share feedback and improve through social support. T02 and T05 used group-based speaking projects such as creating advertisements or promoting products, which made learning more fun and relatable. T03 employed group storytelling and dialogue rotation, which encouraged shy students to participate without fear of judgment. Teachers agreed that social strategies were very effective in building a supportive, communicative environment, increasing student participation, and helping learners become more confident and active speakers.

Metacognitive strategies were used often by four out of five teachers (T01, T02, T04, and T05), making up 80% of the responses. These strategies include planning for a task, setting goals, self-monitoring, and evaluating performance. Teachers reported using tools such as speaking outlines, checklists, reflection journals, and performance rubrics. For example, T01 emphasized pre-speaking planning and post-task reflection as part of every speaking assignment. T02 guided students through goal-setting and brainstorming before public speaking, followed by journal writing afterward. T04 taught students how to self-assess and monitor their improvement over time. T05 implemented mind mapping and structured templates to help students prepare for technical presentations. These strategies were said to be highly effective in promoting autonomous learning, organized speech delivery, and greater awareness of individual progress, especially when students engaged in self-reflection after tasks.

Compensation strategies, also used often by 80% of the teachers (T02, T03, T04, and T05), were particularly beneficial for helping students overcome gaps in language knowledge during speaking activities. These strategies included techniques such as using synonyms, gestures, paraphrasing, switching to Indonesian temporarily, or using visual cues when students forgot a word or expression. For instance, T02 trained students to use body language and rephrase their ideas when they got stuck. T03 taught them to guess meaning from context or continue speaking even with limited vocabulary. T04 supported approximation and simplified rewording during mock interviews, and T05 encouraged code-switching and the use of prompts or props to aid in communication. Teachers reported that

compensation strategies allowed students to speak more fluently without stopping, reduce fear of errors, and maintain the flow of communication even when vocabulary or grammar knowledge was limited.

Memory strategies were used often by three out of five teachers (T01, T03, and T05), representing 60% of responses. These strategies are aimed at helping students store and retrieve language, including the use of categorization, association, imagery, and repetition. T01 used mind mapping and categorized vocabulary lists to prepare students for role-play tasks. T03 relied on visual storytelling cards and sequencing activities to help students remember language patterns and narrative structure. T05 used labeled diagrams and posters to assist students in memorizing technical vocabulary related to their field. Although not as universally applied, memory strategies were considered effective in improving students' vocabulary retention and accuracy in speech, especially during structured or descriptive speaking tasks where word recall was essential.

Affective strategies were also used often by three of the five teachers (T01, T02, and T04), while the remaining two teachers (T03 and T05) reported occasional use. These strategies are used to manage emotions, lower anxiety, and increase motivation. T01 created a supportive classroom atmosphere with praise and reassurance, making students feel safe to speak. T02 used games and group competitions to boost enthusiasm and reduce fear of making mistakes. T04 applied relaxation techniques and soft encouragement before presentations to calm nervous students. While affective strategies were not prioritized as much as others, the teachers who used them found them effective in reducing speaking anxiety, building student confidence, and encouraging even the more reserved students to participate in oral communication.

In conclusion, the questionnaire results indicate that all five teachers actively implemented a combination of Oxford's language learning strategies to improve students' speaking skills. Cognitive and social strategies were the most dominantly and consistently applied, followed closely by metacognitive and compensation strategies. Though slightly less frequent, memory and affective strategies still played a significant role, especially in supporting vocabulary recall and emotional readiness. Each teacher adapted these strategies according to classroom needs, student levels, and the communicative goals of vocational education. Overall, these strategies contributed meaningfully to students' improvement in fluency, organization, vocabulary use, and speaking confidence.

Table 1. Questionnaire Strategies Ranked from Highest to Lowest Average Usage Across All Teachers

Rank	Question No.	Strategy Name	Oxford Strategy Category	Strategy Description	Teacher 1 (%)	Teacher 2 (%)	Teacher 3 (%)	Teacher 4 (%)	Teacher 5 (%)	Average Usage (%)
1	Q23	Using Gestures	Social/Affective Strategy	When I can't think of a word, I use gestures.	90%	80%	100%	85%	90%	89%
2	Q14	Conversation Practice	Social Strategy	I ask the student to practice their English by making a conversation.	90%	80%	100%	80%	90%	88%
3	Q38	Encouragement	Affective Strategy	I encourage the students to speak English even when they make mistakes.	90%	80%	95%	75%	90%	86%
4	Q45	Peer Practice	Social Strategy	I ask the students to practice English with other students.	90%	80%	100%	85%	90%	89%
5	Q37	Relaxation Techniques	Affective Strategy	I try to relax the students whenever they feel afraid of using English.	90%	80%	95%	75%	90%	86%
6	Q30	Active Listening	Social Strategy	I pay attention when students are speaking English.	90%	80%	95%	75%	90%	86%

Ra nk	Quest ion No.	Strategy Name	Oxford Strategy Category	Strategy Descrip tion	Teac her 1 (%)	Teac her 2 (%)	Teac her 3 (%)	Teac her 4 (%)	Teac her 5 (%)	Aver age Usag e (%)
7	Q10	Repetition	Cognitive Strategy	I say or write new English words several times while teaching.	90%	80%	95%	75%	85%	85%
8	Q35	Goal Setting	Metacogni tive Strategy	I have clear goals for improvi ng my English skills in teaching speaking .	85%	75%	90%	70%	90%	82%
9	Q36	Reflection	Metacogni tive Strategy	I think about my progress in learning and teaching English.	85%	75%	90%	70%	90%	82%
10	Q39	Rewards	Affective Strategy	I reward the students or treat them when they do well in English.	80%	90%	85%	70%	80%	81%

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The classroom observations confirmed and complemented the questionnaire findings, revealing how each teacher practically implemented their preferred strategies. Teacher 1 was observed frequently using cognitive and social strategies. In one session, the teacher had students repeat vocabulary aloud, use the words in sentences, and then pair up for structured dialogues, showing practical application of Q10, Q13, and Q14. The teacher also made efforts to reduce anxiety by giving praise and encouraging students after errors, reflecting affective strategies like Q37 and Q38. These applications proved highly effective

as students demonstrated improved confidence, increased willingness to participate, and better pronunciation over time.

Teacher 2's application was consistent with their emphasis on memory strategies. They regularly used flashcards and visual prompts during lessons, especially when introducing new vocabulary. The teacher also employed physical gestures and rhyming activities (Q5, Q6, Q23), which helped students associate words with actions or sounds. These strategies were particularly effective for visual and auditory learners, as students were able to recall vocabulary more accurately and apply it in controlled speaking tasks. The simple but focused repetition allowed even low-proficiency learners to engage and speak more fluently over time.

Teacher 3 demonstrated a highly interactive and student-centered classroom. Observations noted extensive group discussions, peer role-plays, and task-based speaking exercises. Strategies like Q14 (conversation), Q45 (peer practice), and Q28 (multiple language use) were clearly visible. The teacher also integrated media, including video clips and audio materials, which stimulated student interest and provided contextual vocabulary exposure. These implementations were notably effective in promoting communicative competence. Students not only spoke more often but did so with greater confidence and spontaneity, even in more complex speaking tasks like storytelling or summarizing a dialogue.

Teacher 4's strategy use was more focused on real-time fluency support, particularly through compensation and social strategies. They encouraged students to use synonyms, gestures, or simplified language when stuck (Q23, Q27), and regularly engaged the class in pair work or spontaneous Q&A sessions. While the structure was looser than other teachers, it helped students feel less pressure, encouraging them to keep speaking even with limited vocabulary. This strategy proved effective, particularly for reluctant speakers, who gradually increased their speaking output by feeling less constrained by grammar or word precision.

Teacher 5's observation revealed a blend of structured planning and student reflection. The teacher guided students to set goals for each speaking task and encouraged journal writing about their performance, showcasing clear metacognitive practices (Q35, Q36). Additionally, the teacher used strategies like having students summarize lessons (Q21), and provided consistent feedback and emotional support (Q38, Q39). These methods were effective in helping students take ownership of their learning. Students under Teacher 5's

guidance demonstrated noticeable improvements in fluency and self-monitoring, often correcting their own mistakes and planning their answers before speaking.

Notably, several strategies were observed being applied consistently by multiple teachers, indicating their shared value in teaching speaking. For example, all five teachers implemented Q14 (encouraging students to practice speaking through conversation) either through pair work, dialogue sessions, or group tasks. Similarly, Q13 (using English words in different ways) and Q10 (repetition of new vocabulary) were observed in nearly every classroom, confirming these as foundational cognitive strategies. These strategies were not only commonly used but also clearly effective, as students across classes showed better vocabulary retention, increased fluency, and reduced hesitation. In terms of affective support, Q38 (encouraging students even when they make mistakes) was commonly seen across Teachers 1, 3, and 5, and was effective in creating a psychologically safe learning environment that promoted more frequent participation. Social strategies like Q45 (asking students to practice with peers) and Q44 (providing correction while students speak) were also frequently seen among T01, T03, T04, and T05, contributing to collaborative learning and real-time fluency development.

Overall, the observations aligned well with the questionnaire data, demonstrating that the teachers not only reported these strategies but actively implemented them effectively. Each teacher adapted strategies based on their strengths and classroom contexts, and the consistent success of certain strategies across classrooms underscores their practical value in enhancing students' speaking skills.

This study investigated the teaching strategies employed by English teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Labuan and SMK Negeri 3 Palu to enhance students' speaking skills. The data were collected through questionnaires, classroom observations, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using Oxford's (1990, 2011, 2017) six strategy categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. The findings are presented across four main aspects: (1) types of strategies used; (2) implementation in classroom practices; (3) the most dominant strategies; and (4) challenges encountered.

Tabel 2. Result of Observation with the EFL-Teachers

Stage	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
Opening	Greets students, checks attendance, and asks simple warm-up questions related to the topic.	Greets students, uses a visual aid or flashcard to introduce the day's topic.	Greets students, starts with a short conversation to activate prior knowledge.	Greets students and engages them in a quick icebreaker activity.	Greets students and briefly reviews previous lesson before introducing the new topic.
Opening	Introduces lesson objectives and outlines activities for the session.	Explains topic using visual aids, rhymes, or songs to catch students' attention.	Presents topic and goals through an interactive discussion.	States objectives and uses simple examples to introduce the topic.	Introduces topic with a short reflection or question to connect with students' experiences.
Core Activity	Conducts guided conversation and vocabulary repetition drills in pairs or small groups.	Uses flashcards, rhymes, and role-play activities to reinforce vocabulary and speaking practice.	Organizes group discussions, peer interviews, and summarizing tasks.	Engages students in flexible speaking activities, encouraging synonyms and gestures to fill gaps.	Assigns goal-oriented speaking tasks followed by student reflection and feedback sessions.
Question, Answer & Verification	Asks comprehension questions and provides corrections as needed.	Uses Q&A to check vocabulary understanding and correct pronunciation.	Facilitates peer questioning, circulates to give feedback, and verifies answers collectively.	Invites questions from students and offers clarifications in a supportive manner.	Conducts Q&A sessions followed by peer and self-assessment discussions.
Conclusion	Summarizes key vocabulary and phrases learned; reinforces main points.	Recap lesson highlights using visual prompts and repetition.	Summarizes group discussion results and highlights effective speaking strategies used in class.	Reviews key points and encourages students to keep practicing outside class.	Concludes with reflective feedback and a brief motivational message.
Giving the Assignment	Assigns speaking practice with specific topics for the next session.	Gives vocabulary-based speaking tasks using prepared flashcards or prompts.	Assigns students to prepare a short presentation or dialogue for the next class.	Request students to practice speaking on a familiar topic and record themselves.	Gives reflective journals and prepares the next goals for improvement in speaking.

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Across all five teachers, certain patterns emerged in their lesson planning. In the opening stage, all teachers begin by greeting students and setting a positive tone, often incorporating short warm-up or review activities. In the beginning phase, Teachers 2 and 3 tend to use more interactive and visual-based introductions, while Teachers 1, 4, and 5 focus

more on clear explanations and connecting to prior learning. The core activity stage consistently includes interactive speaking practice. Teachers 1, 3, and 4 emphasize conversation and group work, while Teacher 2 integrates creative aids like rhymes and songs, and Teacher 5 combines goal-oriented speaking with reflection. The Q&A and verification stage is universally used to check understanding, though Teachers 3 and 5 also incorporate peer or self-assessment, which adds a metacognitive element.

In the conclusion, all teachers summarize key points, but Teachers 3 and 5 link the summary to strategies for improvement, whereas Teachers 1, 2, and 4 focus on reinforcing content. For assignments, all teachers assign follow-up speaking tasks, but Teacher 5 uniquely incorporates reflective journals, and Teacher 4 includes recording tasks for self-review. Overall, while each teacher has a distinct style, their lesson plans share a structured approach that balances content delivery, student interaction, and reinforcement of speaking skills.

The interviews with the five teachers further reinforced the findings from both the questionnaire and observation. Teachers consistently emphasized that the primary barriers to speaking fluency in their classrooms were student anxiety, limited vocabulary, and lack of confidence. When asked how they addressed these challenges, each teacher described the specific strategies they found most effective. All five teachers revealed that their core objective in teaching speaking is to improve students' ability to communicate effectively in English. However, the way each teacher framed this goal reflected their individual teaching philosophies and classroom realities. The responses revealed a variety of teaching strategies tailored to students' needs, proficiency levels, and classroom environments. Most teachers mentioned using interactive techniques such as pair and group discussions, role-playing, and dialogue-based activities to simulate real-life communication. These activities help students become more comfortable with speaking in front of others and increase their fluency through practice. The teachers reported using a broad range of strategies to enhance speaking skills, including interactive speaking tasks (e.g., group work, role-play), repetition-based vocabulary drills, visual and auditory aids, emotional support techniques, and reflective goal-setting. These methods reflect the teachers' efforts to address students' diverse needs and foster an environment conducive to active, confident, and meaningful speaking development.

Teachers unanimously confirmed they implement strategies aligned with Oxford's classification. Many noted frequent use of cognitive strategies, such as vocabulary repetition,

summarizing, and speaking practice. Metacognitive strategies like lesson reviewing, goal setting, and self-evaluation were also commonly reported, especially by teachers who emphasized student independence. The application of strategies was practical and student-centered, involving routine speaking tasks, reflective exercises, peer collaboration, and supportive classroom interactions. Teachers adapted their methods to the unique dynamics of their students, balancing fluency development with emotional readiness. Teachers commonly cited student-related challenges, such as lack of motivation, fear of speaking, limited vocabulary, and shyness. Classroom management issues, time constraints, and large class sizes also posed difficulties in implementing more personalized strategies. Some teachers found it difficult to ensure equal participation or to monitor individual progress effectively. Despite these obstacles, teachers expressed continued efforts to modify and adapt their methods to suit varying student needs.

Teachers reported mostly positive responses from students when activities were engaging, collaborative, and low-pressure. They observed increased student participation, improved confidence, and more willingness to take risks in speaking when supported with encouragement. In particular, games, group tasks, and visual aids helped students feel more relaxed and interested. Teachers also noted that students appreciate consistent feedback and opportunities for self-expression. Additionally, the combination of encouragement, creativity, and reduced pressure was consistently linked to increased student participation and enjoyment.

Evaluation methods included observation, speaking rubrics, peer and self-assessment, and participation tracking. Teachers listened for fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and confidence during tasks. Some used reflective journals and speaking logs to track growth over time. Feedback was often provided informally during or after activities to help students recognize their strengths and areas to improve. Common among all responses is the use of observation as a primary tool for evaluation. T03 and T05 both emphasized integrating student reflection into the evaluation process, while T01, T02, and T04 relied more heavily on immediate performance during classroom activities. Teachers use a mix of observation, participation tracking, and reflective tools to evaluate speaking progress. While observation is the most common method, some integrate student self-assessment to promote ownership of learning.

Strategies combining interaction, emotional support, and practical communication practice are most effective for vocational students. These methods foster both fluency and confidence, ensuring that speaking skills are developed in a relevant and supportive context.

In most documented lessons, teachers began by greeting students warmly, checking attendance, and introducing the topic using either a short conversation, visual aids, or a review of the previous lesson. Teacher 2 frequently used flashcards and songs in the opening to stimulate interest, while Teacher 3 often initiated small group discussions to activate prior knowledge. Across all teachers, the documentation showed a heavy emphasis on interactive speaking practice. Common strategies included pair and group discussions, role-plays, and guided dialogues. Teacher 1 often combined repetition drills with vocabulary exercises, Teacher 3 favored peer interviews and summarizing tasks, while Teacher 4 used flexible speaking activities encouraging gestures and synonyms. Teacher 5's records highlighted goal-oriented tasks combined with reflection sessions.

Documentation confirmed that Q&A sessions were a staple in all teachers' lessons. Teachers checked comprehension through targeted questions, encouraged peer questioning, and provided corrections or clarifications. Teachers 3 and 5 uniquely incorporated peer and self-assessment as part of the verification stage, enhancing students' metacognitive awareness. Each teacher concluded lessons by summarizing key vocabulary or expressions and encouraging continued practice outside class. Teacher 5 often assigned reflective journals, while Teacher 4 sometimes required students to record themselves speaking on a topic. Teacher 2's documented assignments often involved practicing with visual prompts or flashcards.

The documentation aligns with the questionnaire findings, showing that the most frequently applied strategies across all teachers are conversation practice, the use of gestures, and encouragement. These approaches, supported by both social and affective strategies from Oxford's taxonomy, consistently appear in lesson plans, teaching records, and observed classroom interactions.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that English teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Labuan and SMK Negeri 3 Palu employed a variety of language learning strategies to enhance students' speaking performance. Notably, social and affective strategies emerged as the most

dominant and frequently applied across teaching stages. This section presents a detailed analysis of the results, compares them with current literature, explores the implications of the findings, and outlines the limitations of the study.

The results suggest that teachers purposefully integrated Oxford's six categories of language learning strategies, but prioritized social and affective strategies. Social strategies, such as pair and group work, peer correction, and questioning, allowed students to engage in meaningful communication, which facilitated speaking fluency in a low-anxiety environment. This reflects recent findings by (Y. Li et al., 2024) who emphasized that collaborative speaking activities reduce learner inhibition and promote confidence.

Affective strategies, including encouragement, humor, and praise, were employed to build students' self-confidence and reduce their fear of making mistakes—key factors in increasing oral participation (Camacho Carvajal, 2025; Husnaini et al., 2024). Teachers recognized the emotional dimension of speaking instruction, especially in vocational settings where students often have low English proficiency and confidence.

Cognitive strategies, such as repetition, summarizing, and vocabulary drills, were used moderately to reinforce linguistic forms. Metacognitive strategies—goal setting, lesson planning, and post-task reflection—were present but less frequent, aligning with findings by (Pahrizal et al., 2025) who noted that many teachers lacked structured training in fostering learner autonomy through metacognitive practices. Compensation strategies (e.g., paraphrasing, using gestures) appeared occasionally in spontaneous speaking tasks, while memory strategies were the least utilized, possibly due to time limitations or misconceptions about their relevance to speaking.

This study's findings support numerous contemporary studies on EFL speaking instruction and strategy-based teaching. (Abduvalixojayeva, 2025; Makhamatmuratovna, 2024) found that social interaction plays a central role in promoting speaking fluency in secondary schools. Another study also found that The application of strategies may offer a whole range of new opportunities for language teachers to extend their students' speaking skills in a fun and engaging ways (Atik, 2006; Zargaryan & Arakelyan, 2019). Similarly, recent research by (Namaziandost et al., 2024; Yan & Li, 2024) confirmed that affective strategies—especially teacher praise and emotional support—significantly contribute to increased learner confidence and reduced anxiety.

In terms of cognitive strategies, (Namaziandost et al., 2024) emphasized that while such strategies help with vocabulary retention and grammatical accuracy, they must be supported by active speaking opportunities. The limited use of memory strategies found in this study aligns with (Basher et al., 2025), who argue that rote memorization is often seen as outdated in communicative classrooms, despite its benefits when combined with meaningful output tasks.

The moderate application of metacognitive strategies reflects the broader challenge in Indonesian vocational schools of cultivating learner self-direction. Research by (Huang, 2023; M. Li & Yuan, 2022; Uştuk & De Costa, 2021) has called for more teacher training to embed metacognitive reflection into EFL instruction.

Overall, the results validate Oxford's (2017) proposition that language learning strategies must be tailored to learners' needs and instructional contexts. While her taxonomy remains widely applicable, recent literature highlights that effective strategy use depends on teacher awareness, contextual adaptation, and learner readiness (M. Li & Yuan, 2022; Plass & Pawar, 2020).

Pedagogically, the findings emphasize the need for ongoing teacher development programs focused on strategic instruction, especially in affective and metacognitive domains. Teachers should receive practical training on how to help students become emotionally resilient and cognitively aware language learners.

In line with the Kurikulum Merdeka, which promotes student agency and contextualized learning, the integration of strategy-based instruction is critical. Schools and policymakers should provide structural support—such as reduced class sizes, longer class hours, and reflective teaching materials—to facilitate the use of a wider range of strategies.

Moreover, the study suggests a need for explicit student strategy training, as recommended by Latif et al. (2021), to encourage learners to apply strategies beyond the classroom. This would ensure that speaking development is continuous, personalized, and goal-oriented. Despite yielding insightful findings, this study has certain limitations. First, the sample size was limited to five teachers from two schools in Central Sulawesi, which restricts the generalizability of the results. Future research could involve a broader range of schools and regions to identify strategy use patterns at the national level.

Second, while classroom observations captured real-time strategy use, they were limited in number and scope due to time constraints. This may have led to the omission of

less visible strategies, especially in larger class settings. Additionally, the study did not examine students' perspectives on strategy effectiveness—an area which could enrich understanding of how strategies impact learning from the learners' point of view. Lastly, no standardized measure of speaking proficiency was used to assess the direct impact of the strategies. A mixed-method design incorporating pre- and post-tests could provide stronger evidence of effectiveness in future studies.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the language learning strategies used by English teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Labuan and SMK Negeri 3 Palu in enhancing students' speaking skills. Based on the analysis of classroom observations, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation, it was found that all six categories of strategies proposed by Oxford—memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social—were employed to varying degrees. Among these, social and affective strategies emerged as the most dominant and consistently used across different stages of instruction. Teachers frequently encouraged students to work in pairs or groups, promoted peer correction, and created a positive emotional environment to build learners' confidence and reduce speaking anxiety. While cognitive and metacognitive strategies were applied to support language accuracy and reflection, memory strategies were rarely implemented, mainly due to time constraints and a greater focus on communicative fluency. The findings contribute to the growing body of research on strategy-based speaking instruction in vocational education, particularly in Indonesian EFL contexts. They reinforce the significance of affective and social engagement in language learning and highlight the adaptive capacity of teachers in tailoring strategies to suit learners' needs, lesson objectives, and institutional contexts. Moreover, the study emphasizes the relevance of integrating emotional support and learner autonomy into speaking pedagogy—an area that remains underexplored in many secondary-level settings.

Future research is recommended to expand the sample size across different regions and school types to enhance generalizability. Incorporating students' perspectives would also offer valuable insights into how learners perceive and benefit from the strategies used by their teachers. Additionally, a mixed-method design combining qualitative data with quantitative measures of speaking performance (e.g., pre-tests and post-tests) is suggested to more robustly evaluate the impact of specific strategies on students' oral proficiency.

Longitudinal studies may further reveal how sustained strategic instruction influences learners' speaking development over time.

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