J-Shelves of Indragiri (JSI)
https://ejournal-fkip.unisi.ac.id/shelves
Email: jsipbifkipunisi@gmail.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.61672/jsi.v8i2.3839

November 2026. Vol.8, No.2
e-ISSN. 2721-205X
pp. 218-234

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY PROFILES ACROSS SELF-PERCEIVED SPEAKING LEVELS OF INDONESIAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Article Info

Article History:
Received: 06-10-2026
Revised: 27-10-2026
Accepted: 02-11-2026
Published: 12-11-2026

Keywords:
EFL speaking;
Junior high school;
Language learning strategies;
Learner differences;
Self-perceived speaking

Abstract

Language learning strategies (LLS) may vary across learners, even when they study in the same speaking classroom. Although previous research has documented learners' overall strategy preferences, less is known about whether LLS profiles differ according to self-perceived speaking ability among Indonesian lower-secondary EFL learners. Moreover, overall category-level descriptions may conceal differences in strategy use across learner groups. This study examined differences in LLS profiles among lower, medium, and higher self-perceived speaking groups of Indonesian junior high school EFL students. A focused secondary analysis was conducted using questionnaire data from 104 eighth-grade students at a public junior high school in Tebo Regency, Jambi Province, Indonesia. The analysis covered 28 LLS items based on Oxford's (1990) taxonomy and 15 self-report items measuring speaking skills. Students were classified into three groups using empirical tertile cut points derived from their speaking self-perception scores. Descriptive statistics, Kruskal–Wallis tests, and Spearman rank correlations were used to analyze the data. The descriptive results showed that the lower group reported relatively higher cognitive and affective strategy scores, the medium group reported comparatively higher metacognitive, affective, and social strategy scores, and the higher group reported the highest compensation and memory strategy scores. Compensation was the only LLS category that differed significantly across the three groups ($H = 15.736$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = .136$) and showed the strongest positive association with self-perceived speaking ($\rho = .389$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that students' reported strategy profiles vary according to their self-perceived speaking ability, particularly regarding compensation strategies for maintaining communication when linguistic resources are limited. The findings suggest that differentiated strategy instruction may be more appropriate than a uniform strategy package. Because the measures were self-reported, the group classifications represent relative speaking self-perceptions within this sample rather than standardized speaking proficiency levels.

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking in a foreign language requires learners to mobilize linguistic knowledge while also planning messages, retrieving vocabulary, managing interaction, and regulating the emotional pressure associated with oral performance. These demands can be particularly visible in junior high school classrooms, where opportunities to use English outside formal lessons may be limited. Indonesian research has documented speaking anxiety, hesitation, and concerns about negative evaluation among lower-secondary learners, suggesting that what learners do to manage speaking tasks deserves attention alongside what teachers teach (Perkasa et al., 2022; Sari, 2023).

Language learning strategies (LLS) provide a framework for examining these learner actions. Oxford (1990) classified LLS into memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The categories describe different ways of preparing for, managing, and responding to language-learning demands. In speaking, for example, learners may use memory strategies to retain vocabulary, cognitive strategies to practice language, metacognitive strategies to plan and monitor performance, affective strategies to regulate anxiety, social strategies to seek feedback, and compensation strategies to maintain communication when linguistic resources are incomplete.

Previous research has demonstrated that EFL learners use multiple strategy types, but the dominant pattern varies across contexts and learner groups. Zuhairi and Mistar (2023), for example, identified six strategy groupings among 560 Indonesian university EFL learners and found a significant correlation between overall speaking-strategy use and perceived speaking ability. Nawa (2022), working with high- and low-achieving speaking learners, also reported differences in strategy use across achievement groups and found that higher-achieving learners reported a broader strategic repertoire. Studies in secondary-school settings have likewise documented varied strategy use, although the evidence base remains smaller than that for university populations (Aprisama, 2024).

The existing evidence suggests an important methodological and pedagogical question. If learners with different levels of perceived speaking

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ability do not rely on exactly the same strategic resources, an overall category ranking may conceal meaningful variation within the classroom. A teacher who knows only that affective or memory strategies are highly endorsed at the aggregate level may still not know whether lower- and higher-performing learners rely on those strategies in similar ways. Research that differentiates strategy profiles across learner groups can therefore complement broad descriptive studies by showing where strategic needs and strengths may diverge.

This distinction is especially relevant to compensation strategies. Compensation strategies are designed to help learners sustain communication despite gaps in linguistic knowledge, for example by using synonyms, explanations, examples, gestures, or approximation (Oxford, 1990). Zuhairi and Mistar (2023) found compensation to be the most intensively used strategy group in their university sample and reported a positive correlation between compensation use and perceived speaking skill. Their findings raise a useful question for younger learners: does communication-repair strategy use also distinguish students who perceive their speaking ability differently?

The present article addresses this question through a focused secondary analysis of the quantitative RQ1 dataset in a broader mixed-methods study. The analysis does not repeat the overall category ranking or the qualitative explanation reported elsewhere from the same project. Instead, it uses a different analytical lens: students are grouped according to their self-perceived speaking level, and their LLS profiles are compared statistically. The study therefore asks: How do language learning strategy profiles differ across lower, medium, and higher self-perceived speaking-level groups among Indonesian junior high school EFL students? The practical aim is to identify strategy patterns that may inform differentiated speaking support while avoiding the assumption that one strategy package is equally suitable for all learners.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Learning Strategies in EFL Speaking

Oxford's (1990) taxonomy remains useful for describing learners' strategic actions across different language-learning demands. Memory strategies assist recall and retrieval; cognitive strategies involve practising and manipulating language; compensation strategies help learners communicate despite incomplete linguistic knowledge; metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluation; affective strategies regulate emotion and motivation; and social strategies rely on interaction, clarification, and feedback. The framework does not require learners to use every category at the same level. Rather, it provides a descriptive repertoire through which strategy choices can be examined in relation to context.

Speaking places these categories in immediate and often time-sensitive conditions. Learners may need to retrieve vocabulary rapidly, plan what to say, manage uncertainty, and maintain interaction simultaneously. Indonesian studies have found that learners use combinations of rehearsal, vocabulary development, social interaction, and communication-management strategies in speaking (Muslimin et al., 2022; Felisa et al., 2023; Azizi & Yusuf, 2024). Research on self-regulated learning also suggests that strategic behaviour extends across preparation, performance, and reflection rather than occurring as isolated techniques (Zhang & Wilson, 2023).

Learner Differences and Strategy Profiles

Strategy use can vary with learner characteristics and perceived ability. Nawa (2022) found that high- and low-achieving speaking learners both used the six Oxford categories, but the higher-achieving group reported a broader repertoire. This finding suggests that learner grouping can reveal differences that are less visible in aggregate means. Similarly, the broader literature on language learning strategies has emphasised that strategy choice is shaped by learner characteristics, context, and learning demands rather than by a universally fixed hierarchy (Zhang et al., 2019; Sukying, 2021).

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In the present study, however, the grouping variable is not an externally standardized proficiency test. It is students' self-perceived speaking ability derived from fifteen self-report items covering fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. This distinction is important because self-perception and externally assessed proficiency are related but not identical constructs. The grouping is therefore used as a descriptive lens for identifying strategic profiles, not as a claim that the three groups represent validated proficiency bands.

Compensation Strategies as Communication Repair

Compensation strategies are especially relevant when speaking requires learners to continue despite lexical or structural gaps. Rather than stopping because an exact word is unavailable, learners may paraphrase, use examples, gesture, approximate meaning, or guess from context (Oxford, 1990). Zuhairi and Mistar (2023) reported compensation as the most intensively used strategy group in their Indonesian university sample and found a positive relationship between compensation use and perceived speaking ability. This provides a useful benchmark for examining whether communication-repair strategies are similarly differentiated among younger learners.

The pedagogical relevance of this issue is reinforced by strategy-instruction research. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that explicit attention to language learning strategies can support language achievement and learner autonomy (Wang et al., 2024). The question is not whether teachers should teach a fixed list of strategies, but how strategy awareness can be adapted to learners' needs and existing repertoires. A proficiency-sensitive or perception-sensitive approach may be more responsive than a uniform strategy package.

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RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive-comparative secondary analysis of the quantitative questionnaire data from a broader explanatory sequential mixed-methods study investigating language learning strategies (LLS) and English speaking development among junior high school EFL students. The present analysis focused specifically on differences in LLS profiles across groups defined by students' self-perceived speaking ability. Only the quantitative questionnaire data relevant to this research focus were analyzed; interview, classroom observation, structural equation modeling, and pre-test/post-test results were not used as primary evidence in this article. This analytical focus was established to address a distinct research question using the existing dataset without reproducing the broader mixed-methods analysis.

The study was conducted at a public junior high school in Tebo Regency, Jambi Province, Indonesia. The participants were 104 eighth-grade students enrolled in regular English classes across four classes (8A–8D). The classroom context included speaking activities incorporated into procedure-text learning. The broader research project was conducted over approximately eight weeks, from the second week of January to the first week of March. For the present secondary analysis, all 104 valid responses available in the validated quantitative dataset were retained. No additional participant recruitment or subsampling was undertaken for this article. The analysis was conducted at the group level, and the resulting categories were interpreted as context-specific profiles of self-perceived speaking ability rather than standardized speaking proficiency classifications.

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Quantitative data were collected through a self-report questionnaire comprising items on language learning strategies and perceived speaking skills. The LLS component was developed based on Oxford's (1990) six-category taxonomy and contained 28 items: five memory items, three cognitive items, five compensation items, five metacognitive items, five affective items, and five social items. Responses to the LLS items were recorded on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always), consistent with the questionnaire instructions. The broader quantitative analysis reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .962 for the LLS construct. Students' self-perceived speaking ability was measured using 15 self-report items across three dimensions: fluency, pronunciation, and confidence, with five items for each dimension. For each student, the mean of these 15 items was calculated to produce a composite score representing self-perceived speaking ability. This composite was treated as a measure of students' perceptions of their own speaking skills, not as an externally assessed speaking proficiency score.

To compare LLS profiles across different levels of self-perceived speaking ability, students were assigned to three descriptive groups using cut points informed by the empirical tertiles of the speaking self-perception composite. The lower group consisted of students with composite scores at or below 3.333, the medium group included students with scores above 3.333 and at or below 3.667, and the higher group comprised students with scores above 3.667. This procedure resulted in 49 students in the lower group, 37 in the medium group, and 18 in the higher group. Because the questionnaire scores contained repeated values, the resulting group sizes were not equal. The labels lower, medium, and higher therefore indicate relative positions within this sample and should not be interpreted as standardized proficiency levels.

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Data analysis proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the six LLS category scores within each self-perceived speaking group. Second, Kruskal–Wallis tests were conducted to examine whether the distributions of the six LLS category scores differed across the three independent groups. This non-parametric test was selected for the group comparisons because the measures were derived from ordinal questionnaire responses and the analysis did not rely on parametric assumptions. Epsilon-squared (ε^2) was reported to describe the magnitude of group differences. Third, Spearman's rank-order correlations were calculated to examine the direction and strength of the associations between the continuous speaking self-perception composite and each LLS category. Statistical significance was evaluated at $\alpha = .05$. All analyses were conducted using the validated dataset of 104 students.

The broader study obtained permission from the participating school and secured informed participation from the student respondents. Participant identities were anonymized in the research records. The present article reports only anonymized quantitative questionnaire data and does not present identifiable participant information.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Self-Perceived Speaking-Level Groups

The fifteen-item speaking self-perception composite ranged from 1.00 to 4.00, with an overall mean of 3.433 (SD = 0.465). The empirical tertile procedure produced three groups: 49 students in the lower group, 37 in the medium group, and 18 in the higher group. The mean speaking self-perception was 3.107 in the lower group, 3.632 in the medium group, and 3.907 in the higher group. These values confirm that the grouping procedure produced clearly separated descriptive profiles within the sample, while the labels remain relative rather than standardized proficiency levels.

Table 1: Distribution of students across self-perceived speaking-level groups

Group	Cut point	n	Mean	SD
Lower	≤ 3.333	49	3.107	0.482

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Group	Cut point	n	Mean	SD
Medium	> 3.333–3.667	37	3.632	0.073
Higher	> 3.667	18	3.907	0.112

Different LLS Profiles Across the Three Groups

The descriptive profiles showed meaningful differences in the relative ordering of strategies across the three groups. The lower group showed its highest category means in affective (M = 3.380) and cognitive (M = 3.361) strategies, followed by memory and social strategies. In the medium group, affective (M = 3.557), metacognitive (M = 3.541), and social (M = 3.535) strategies occupied the top positions. In the higher group, compensation (M = 3.667) and memory (M = 3.600) were the most strongly endorsed categories, followed by cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Thus, the broad shape of the strategy profile changed with the students' perceived speaking level instead of showing one identical hierarchy across the sample.

Table 2: Mean LLS scores by self-perceived speaking-level group

LLS category	Lower (n=49)	Medium (n=37)	Higher (n=18)
Memory	3.331	3.443	3.600
Cognitive	3.361	3.243	3.463
Compensation	3.090	3.378	3.667
Metacognitive	3.241	3.541	3.478
Affective	3.380	3.557	3.511
Social	3.314	3.535	3.456

The lower group's profile suggests greater emphasis on strategies that prepare learners psychologically and linguistically for speaking. Affective and cognitive strategies ranked relatively high, consistent with the demands of managing nervousness while making language resources available. In contrast, the medium group displayed a more balanced profile centred on affective, metacognitive, and social strategies. This pattern suggests greater reported attention to planning, monitoring, emotional regulation, and interaction. The higher group showed a different emphasis: compensation became the most strongly endorsed category, followed by memory. This may indicate that students who perceive themselves as stronger speakers are more comfortable relying on

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real-time strategies that help them maintain communication when perfect linguistic retrieval is not possible.

The changing profile is consistent with the argument that learners' strategy choices are shaped by their perceived needs and learning conditions rather than by a single universal hierarchy (Zhang et al., 2019; Sukying, 2021). It also extends Nawa's (2022) comparison of high- and low-achieving speaking learners. Nawa found that both groups used the six Oxford categories but that higher achievers reported a broader strategic repertoire. The present analysis differs in both population and grouping procedure, but it points in a similar direction: strategic patterns are not necessarily identical across learner groups. The important distinction is that the current study identifies this variation among lower-secondary learners using self-perceived speaking levels, not teacher-awarded speaking scores.

Compensation Strategies Distinguish the Groups

The strongest quantitative evidence for group differentiation came from compensation strategies. The Kruskal–Wallis test showed a statistically significant difference across the three groups ($H = 15.736$, $p < .001$), with $\varepsilon^2 = .136$. This represents the clearest between-group effect in the six-category comparison. The higher group recorded the highest compensation mean ($M = 3.667$), compared with 3.378 in the medium group and 3.090 in the lower group.

Table 3: Kruskal–Wallis tests of LLS differences across self-perceived speaking groups

LLS category	H	p	ε²	Result
Memory	4.210	.122	.022	Not significant
Cognitive	2.455	.293	.005	Not significant
Compensation	15.736	<.001	.136	Significant
Metacognitive	2.330	.312	.003	Not significant
Affective	1.212	.546	.000	Not significant
Social	1.234	.540	.000	Not significant

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The compensation pattern was also visible at the item level. All five compensation items increased across the three groups in descriptive terms. The lower group had means of 3.143 for using a synonym or explanation, 3.082 for giving an example, 3.102 for using gestures, 3.041 for continuing despite unknown words, and 3.082 for guessing meaning while continuing. The corresponding higher-group means were 3.722, 3.667, 3.667, 3.667, and 3.611. The pattern therefore was not driven by a single compensation item; rather, the entire category moved upward as self-perceived speaking level increased.

Table 4: Compensation-strategy item means across self-perceived speaking groups

Compensation item	Lower	Medium	Higher
CP1: synonym/explanation	3.143	3.432	3.722
CP2: example/story	3.082	3.405	3.667
CP3: gesture/facial expression	3.102	3.351	3.667
CP4: continue despite unknown word	3.041	3.378	3.667
CP5: guess meaning and continue	3.082	3.324	3.611

This result is particularly noteworthy because it differs from some aggregate findings in Indonesian EFL research. Zuhairi and Mistar (2023) found compensation strategies to be the most intensively used strategy group among university EFL learners and reported a positive relationship between compensation use and perceived speaking skill. In the present junior high school sample, compensation was not the highest category for the full dataset; however, it was the category that most clearly distinguished students who perceived themselves at different speaking levels. The two findings can therefore be read as complementary: compensation may be important for speaking across contexts, but its relative prominence may become more visible among learners who already feel more capable of managing oral communication.

One plausible interpretation is that communication-repair strategies require a degree of tolerance for imperfect language production. A learner who is willing to paraphrase, gesture, approximate, or keep talking when an exact word is

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unavailable may be more prepared to sustain interaction in real time. By contrast, a learner who is less confident may depend more heavily on preparation before speaking, where vocabulary can be rehearsed and anxiety can be managed in advance. This interpretation is consistent with research that positions communication strategy use as a means of maintaining interaction when linguistic resources are incomplete (Kumar et al., 2023; Zuhairi & Mistar, 2023). Because the present study is cross-sectional and self-reported, however, the result should not be interpreted as evidence that compensation strategies cause higher speaking ability.

Association Between LLS and Self-Perceived Speaking

The correlation analysis reinforced the distinctive role of compensation strategies. Compensation showed the strongest positive association with the speaking self-perception composite ($\rho = .389$, $p < .001$). Memory strategies also showed a weak positive association ($\rho = .231$, $p = .018$). The other four categories did not show statistically significant correlations with the speaking self-perception composite in this sample. The results therefore suggest that not all LLS dimensions are equally connected with how students evaluate their own speaking ability.

Table 5: Spearman correlations between LLS categories and speaking self-perception

LLS category	Spearman ρ	p	Association
Memory	0.231	0.018	Weak positive
Cognitive	-0.027	0.786	Not significant
Compensation	0.389	< .001	Positive; strongest
Metacognitive	0.149	0.132	Not significant
Affective	0.144	0.146	Not significant
Social	0.105	0.290	Not significant

The correlation pattern helps refine the group comparison. The absence of significant associations for affective, social, and metacognitive strategies does not mean that these strategies are unimportant for speaking. Rather, these strategies were relatively high across multiple groups, which may reduce their capacity to distinguish students at different self-perceived speaking levels. Compensation, in contrast, was substantially lower in the lower group and much higher in the higher

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group. A strategy that enables learners to continue communicating despite lexical limitations may therefore be especially informative when differentiating learners who perceive themselves as more or less capable speakers.

This finding also adds nuance to the broader RQ1 literature. The overall dataset shows that students endorse a wide range of strategies, but the present analysis demonstrates that the meaning of a strategy category depends partly on who is using it. Learners at different points in their perceived speaking development may draw on the same strategic repertoire with different emphases. Such differentiation is compatible with the broader strategy literature, which treats learner characteristics, context, and task demands as important influences on strategic choices (Zhang et al., 2019; Sukying, 2021).

Pedagogical Implications

The findings support differentiated strategy instruction in junior high school speaking classes. Lower self-perceived speakers may benefit from structured preparation that combines affective support with manageable cognitive practice. Activities such as vocabulary rehearsal, guided sentence planning, short rehearsal cycles, and positive self-talk can be used before students are asked to perform independently. The purpose is not to label lower students as weak, but to provide entry points that match the strategies they already report using.

For medium-level learners, teachers may expand metacognitive and social strategy use by asking students to set speaking goals, reflect briefly after performance, and use peer feedback. For higher self-perceived speakers, compensation strategies can be strengthened further through communicative tasks in which students must maintain meaning without stopping when a word is missing. Role plays, information-gap activities, and paraphrasing challenges can require learners to explain an unknown word, provide an example, use a gesture, or approximate a message. This type of differentiation is consistent with the view that strategy instruction should expand students' repertoires rather than prescribe one universal strategy package (Wang et al., 2024).

Importantly, the results also caution against equating high endorsement with objective effectiveness. The present data measure self-reported strategy use and

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self-perceived speaking ability at one point in time. Therefore, the pedagogical value of compensation strategies should be tested through instructional research rather than inferred as a causal effect from the present correlations. The contribution of this study is diagnostic: it identifies where strategy profiles differ and where teachers might reasonably provide differentiated opportunities for practice.

Limitations

Three limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study uses self-reported strategy and speaking measures from one public junior high school, so the findings should not be generalized to all Indonesian EFL learners. Second, the three speaking groups are based on self-perception rather than a standardized speaking test; the groups therefore represent relative perception profiles rather than validated proficiency bands. Third, the analysis is cross-sectional and does not establish causal direction between strategy use and speaking ability. Future research should replicate the comparison using independent speaking assessments, larger multi-school samples, and longitudinal or intervention designs.

CONCLUSION

This study examined whether language learning strategy profiles differed across lower, medium, and higher self-perceived speaking-level groups among 104 Indonesian junior high school EFL students. The results showed differentiated profiles rather than one common strategy hierarchy. Lower-level students reported relatively stronger cognitive and affective strategies, the medium group showed stronger metacognitive, affective, and social strategies, and the higher group showed the strongest compensation and memory profiles. Among the six strategy categories, compensation was the only one to differ significantly across groups and the category most strongly associated with self-perceived speaking ability.

The central contribution is therefore not a new ranking of the six Oxford categories, but evidence that the strategic repertoire can look different across

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learners who perceive their speaking ability differently. Compensation strategies, in particular, may represent an important marker of the capacity to sustain communication when linguistic resources are incomplete. For classroom practice, the findings support differentiated strategy awareness in which teachers strengthen preparation and emotional support for students who need them while progressively expanding communication-repair strategies for learners who are ready to sustain more independent interaction.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the participating school, teachers, and students who contributed their time and responses to the broader research project.

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