

A Systematic Review on Language Learning Strategies for English Speaking Skills in Today's Learning Conditions

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Abstract

The challenge of cultivating effective speaking skills in language learning has garnered considerable attention from researchers, particularly in recent years due to the burgeoning impact of technology on education. This transformative technological landscape has expanded learners' access to diverse resources for enhancing their speaking proficiency. Consequently, a profound necessity has emerged to comprehend the learning strategies harnessed by learners within this evolving educational paradigm. This review rigorously examines the strategies commonly employed in language acquisition, with a specific lens on refining speaking abilities. The study methodically scrutinized articles published between 2019 and 2023, employing the PRISMA 2020 methodology and drawing insights from two extensive databases: ERIC and Google Scholar. The gleaned findings from this comprehensive review unmistakably indicate that among the spectrum of strategies, meta-cognitive and cognitive approaches stand out as the prevailing choices for bolstering speaking prowess. Following closely, compensation and social strategies come into play as prominent contenders. In contrast, memory and affective strategies emerge as relatively less frequented paths embraced by learners in their quest to enhance speaking capabilities. The implications of these insights are profound for educators, as they enable the identification of teaching methods that resonate effectively within the present-day learning milieu. To augment our grasp further, future research endeavours could explore the application of learning strategies beyond the realm of speaking, encompassing other language skills. This holistic exploration would undoubtedly yield significant contributions toward the advancement of language education as a whole.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, English Speaking Skills, Learning Conditions, Communication Skills, Good Language Learner

Introduction

In the context of job hunting, the importance of effective communication skills, especially speaking, has surged (SNA et al., 2022). To nurture individuals with robust speaking abilities, gaining insights into the strategies employed by successful learners has become paramount. Given the diverse nature of language learning strategies among individuals, numerous studies have been conducted to pinpoint these approaches. Researchers have consistently observed that learners who harness effective learning strategies tend to excel in language acquisition (Nanayakkara, 2023). Therefore, having a keen awareness of learning strategies adopted by learners holds significant weight, as this knowledge can profoundly impact teaching methodologies and contribute to the cultivation of "good language learners".

The surrounding environment significantly shapes learners' choice of learning strategies. As teaching methods continue to evolve within the current educational landscape, learners must remain flexible in adjusting to these novel approaches (James et al., 2019). More technology-driven and enhanced techniques have gradually supplanted traditional methods like chalk-and-talk. In technologically enriched environments, digital tools are utilized, offering learners greater flexibility in their learning (Healey, 2018). Integrating relevant technologies into language activities boosts students' self-confidence and motivates them to communicate fluently in English (Azlan et al., 2019). Learners also become more enthusiastic about participating in language learning activities, making technology not only an interesting learning medium but also a motivational tool (Pazilah et al., 2019). Moreover, the skills acquired through experiences with new learning methods have equipped learners to cope with the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic's new learning landscape.

The Covid-19 pandemic has thrust us all into a fresh learning landscape. The abrupt shift from in-person to online education has sparked concerns among educators about the most effective learning strategies embraced by learners. With increased autonomy in their learning, students now have the ability to regulate the pace of their studies. Moreover, learners who benefit from supportive environments tend to excel and grasp concepts more effectively (Doraisamy, 2021). In the absence of a constant physical teacher presence, students take ownership of their own educational journey, fostering a sense of autonomy where they become accountable for their progress (Yunus et al., 2019). This makes it imperative to identify the prevalent learning strategies utilized for speaking skills in this pandemic era.

A thorough literature review was carried out to identify the prevalent language learning strategies for speaking skills, aimed at assisting educators in choosing the most suitable approaches for the present learning environment. A specific research question was formulated to guide this exploration: "What are the most commonly employed language learning strategies by students when acquiring speaking skills?" This question directed the focus of this review towards relevant studies, centering on the utilization of learning strategies in the contemporary learning context. Given the shifts in the educational landscape, the authors assert that examining the most frequently utilized learning strategies in recent times is of utmost importance.

Literature Review***Language Learning Strategies***

Language learning strategies are techniques and approaches that individuals employ to enhance their acquisition of a new language. These strategies encompass a range of methods to effectively comprehend, produce, and remember linguistic content. One prominent

framework for understanding language learning strategies was proposed by Rebecca Oxford in her 1990 book "Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know." According to Oxford (1990) categorizes language learning strategies into two groups: "direct strategies," which encompass "memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies," and "indirect strategies," which encompass "metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies." These strategies aid learners in organizing and evaluating their learning process, contributing to a more profound comprehension of their language learning strategies. As learners employ a variety of strategies, teachers must investigate and adapt their teaching approaches to align effectively with learners' individual strategies

Cognitive strategies involve mental processes such as organizing information, summarizing, and making connections to aid in language comprehension and production. Metacognitive strategies focus on the awareness and regulation of one's own learning, including setting goals, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. Social/affective strategies pertain to interactions with others and emotional aspects of language learning, encompassing techniques like seeking feedback and reducing anxiety. For instance, taking notes while listening to a conversation (a cognitive strategy) can help learners retain and process information. Setting specific language learning goals (a metacognitive strategy) enables learners to track their progress and stay motivated. Engaging in conversations with native speakers (a social/affective strategy) helps learners practice and gain confidence in real-life communication.

Research has shown that the application of these strategies can significantly enhance language acquisition and proficiency. However, the effectiveness of strategies can vary based on individual learning styles and the context in which they are applied. Incorporating a diverse set of strategies and adapting them to one's learning preferences can lead to more successful language learning outcomes. Understanding and utilizing a combination of cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective strategies can empower learners to navigate the complexities of language acquisition and become more effective communicators.

In the realm of education, numerous research studies Oflaz (2019); Aziz & Shah (2020); Dorand, (2020); Salam et al (2020); Alfian (2021); Lim et al (2021); Wong et al (2022); Zulkarnain et al (2022) have delved into the exploration of language learning strategies, a topic of enduring significance. However, the changing landscape of learning, characterized by the shift from conventional setups to the integration of technology, has given rise to concerns among educators regarding the language learning strategies adopted by students.

Recognizing the importance of identifying students' language learning strategies, researchers emphasize the necessity for educators to ascertain these strategies before incorporating them into the classroom (Garita, 2021). In the current technology-driven context of online learning, teachers must also pinpoint suitable language learning strategies for this new environment, ensuring their pertinence and efficacy in facilitating language acquisition. The execution of more online learning sessions becomes pivotal in identifying learners' strategies (Sandorova & Betak, 2021). Prior research has suggested that learners who utilize a diverse range of strategies tend to attain higher scores compared to those employing fewer strategies (Dieu, 2023). Moreover, the utilization of learning strategies substantially influences learners' ability to become adept language learners, bestowing upon them the designation of "proficient language learners" (Oxford, 1990).

Speaking Skills

Mastery of speaking skills is often considered the most intricate compared to reading, writing, and listening (Rao, 2019). Proficiency in spoken language necessitates the acquisition of precise grammar and vocabulary usage. Being a skill that involves active engagement with others, it demands ample interaction for refinement (Miranda, 2023). Consequently, learners must dedicate time and effort to cultivate these skills. Particularly in higher education institutions, inadequate speaking proficiency can hinder students' efficacy in professional contexts (Ramamurthy et al., 2021). This underscores the heightened emphasis on nurturing speaking skills among learners within these academic settings.

Given the importance of effective speaking, a range of activities has been introduced to bolster learners' spoken communication abilities and equip them for real-world scenarios. Exercises such as presentations and group discussions are commonly employed to foster practice. Additionally, simulated interviews expose learners to genuine interview situations, ensuring their preparedness for actual job interviews (Rao, 2019). These activities not only underscore the value of speaking skills but also provide learners with a platform to refine their oral proficiency (Rusdin, 2023).

In the cultivation of speaking skills, educators assume multifaceted roles as instructors, facilitators, participants, motivators, and occasional feedback providers (Wael et al., 2018). Their diverse involvement aids learners in acquiring speaking skills more effectively, contributing to the creation of a supportive learning atmosphere.

Digital Environment

The prevalence of digital platforms has revolutionized communication between educators and learners (Yunus, 2018). This transformation has gradually shifted the paradigm from traditional to contemporary teaching and learning methodologies. Technology has not only infused enjoyment into the learning process but has also sparked motivation among students (Pazilah et al., 2019). An illustrative case is presented in a study by Azlan et al (2019), wherein Instagram was employed as a tool to amplify learners' speaking skills and motivation. The findings substantiated notable enhancements in speaking proficiency. Furthermore, the transformative impact of interactive digital media on language learning strategies was confirmed by Li (2019), facilitating an augmented grasp of conceptual nuances among learners.

In the context of a study conducted in 2018, memory strategies emerged as the predominantly adopted techniques among learners (Wael et al., 2018). Earlier research by Kemala (2014); Gursoy (2010), as referenced by Wael et al (2018), yielded akin outcomes, underscoring the enduring prevalence of memory-based approaches. However, given the evolving learning landscape, it becomes imperative to scrutinize articles on language learning strategies from the preceding five years. This scrutiny is essential to establish whether these strategies have persisted or evolved in response to the changing educational milieu. Unearthing any shifts in learning methodologies will serve to bridge the gap in current research and illuminate the strategies most frequently embraced by learners in recent years.

Methodology

In this meticulous systematic literature review, the researchers employed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 checklist, consisting of 30 distinct items, to ensure a comprehensive and standardized approach. The

review encompassed four well-defined phases: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Phase 1: Identification Phase

At the outset, the study encompassed a thorough examination of scholarly articles through two electronic databases: The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Google Scholar. The chosen time frame for article selection spanned from 2019 to 2023. ERIC, a readily accessible resource, offered a wide-ranging collection of educational research, while Google Scholar granted open access to scholarly literature across various disciplines. The search terms "language learning strategies" and "English speaking skills" were meticulously employed to retrieve relevant materials.

Before initiating the review process, the researchers formulated precise research questions to guide the study's focus. The review concentrated on students' employed learning strategies and their effects on speaking skills, with no geographical constraints on the respondents.

Given the constraints posed by the pandemic and the subsequent limitations in accessing physical materials, the review solely relied on computerized sources. The review incorporated two pivotal steps: initially gathering pertinent articles through the search process and subsequently applying predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ascertain articles for further examination. These criteria were employed to evaluate the quality of prior research, with article selection predicated on alignment with the research question and the significance of their findings. The inclusion criteria primarily centered on subjects directly linked to the specified keywords.

Phase 2: Screening Phase

The screening process encompassed the identification and removal of duplicated entries from both ERIC and Google Scholar. Subsequently, the remaining papers underwent analysis to ascertain their adherence to the researcher's established criteria.

Phase 3: Eligibility Phase

This phase was devoted to including studies that directly addressed the research question, focusing on learning strategies for enhancing speaking skills. Included studies also necessitated alignment with the theoretical framework pertinent to language learning strategies, often referencing influential researchers like (Oxford, 1990; Chamot, 1987). Conversely, studies that deviated from the established theoretical framework were excluded to ensure conceptual coherence. The emphasis lay on a comprehensive examination and discussion of the findings to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the research question.

Phase 4: Exclusion Phase

In the exclusion criteria, articles not aligned with the stipulated parameters and keywords were excluded from consideration. The review's parameters were limited by the English language and the availability of full-text articles. Exclusion was motivated by the irrelevance of certain articles to the research focus, with some studies delving into different learning skills such as listening, reading, or writing, as opposed to speaking skills.

The initial search yielded a total of 38 results from ERIC and 238 from Google Scholar. Upon scrutiny, 80 duplicate studies were identified and removed. Subsequently, a meticulous analysis was conducted on 196 studies, leading to the exclusion of 76 articles due to reasons

such as being dissertations, chapters, review papers, or conference proceedings—materials not directly germane to the research. This refined the pool to 120 full-text articles, which was further narrowed down to 30 papers. These final papers underwent assessment to ascertain their relevance to the study's focus on language learning strategies and English-speaking skills. The complete selection process is visually depicted in Figure 1.

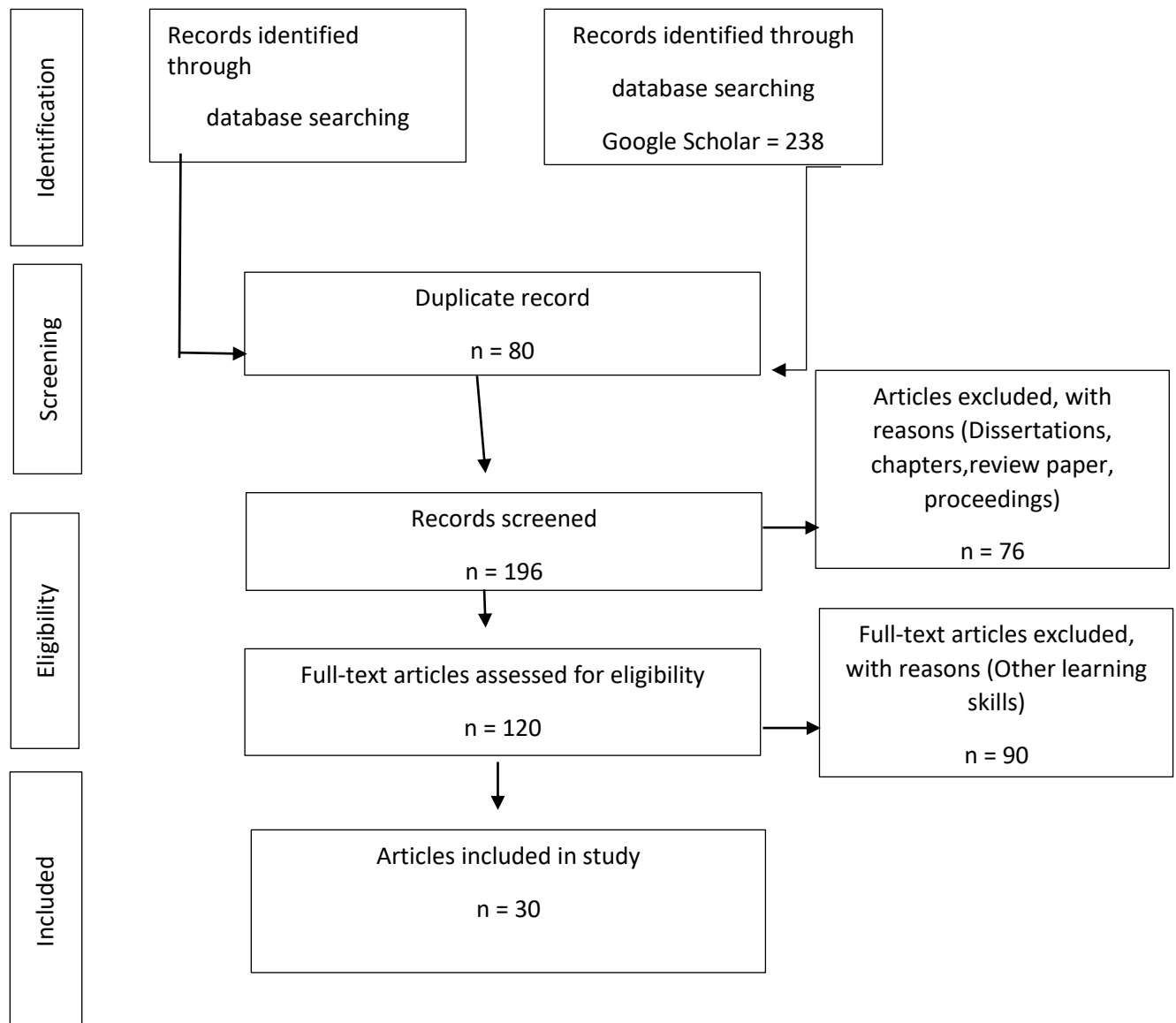


Figure 1. The Process of Research Article Selection

In the systematic of the studies, the primary objective centered around a meticulous analysis of the strategies harnessed to cultivate effective speaking skills. The keyword choice during the search process was intentionally honed to retrieve studies exclusively concerned with techniques geared towards augmenting speaking proficiency. From the compilation of search outcomes, a precise tally of 30 articles was singled out for comprehensive scrutiny. This curated selection of articles delved extensively into an array of language learning strategies harnessed by learners, thereby unveiling a rich tapestry of diverse methodologies observed across the spectrum of studies.

Results

Having successfully navigated through the systematic four-step methodology, a precise compilation of 30 articles was extracted, each intricately interwoven with the themes of "language learning strategies" and "English speaking skills." Among the plethora of identified language learning strategies, a distinct pattern emerged, wherein meta-cognitive strategies stood at the forefront, boasting the highest prevalence. This was followed in close succession by cognitive strategies, underlining their substantial significance in the acquisition of English speaking prowess. The landscape of language learning strategies further showcased the judicious utilization of compensation strategies, duly acknowledged for their contributory role. Williams and Garcia (2020), compensation strategies are crucial for enhancing English speaking skills among learners. These strategies serve as effective tools to manage language difficulties, leading to smoother and more fluent communication as practical aids for learners to bridge language barriers and strengthen their English speaking abilities. This insight deepens our comprehension of language acquisition processes and provides valuable guidance for both educators and learners

Additionally, the inquiry revealed the presence of social strategies, further corroborating the multifaceted nature of strategic language acquisition. In contrast, the terrain of memory strategies and affective strategies appeared relatively sparse, indicating their relatively limited adoption within the discerned array of approaches. A comprehensive tabulation of these illuminating findings is thoughtfully laid out in Table 1

Table 1

The Learning Strategies Used by Learners

No.	Authors	Study Design	Learning Strategies					
			Direct			Indirect		
			MS	CS	CPS	MCS	AS	SS
1.	Muslimin,2019	QL	√		√	√		
2.	Naa'im & Hashim,2019	QN						√
3.	Pertiwi & Suwartono,2019	QL					√	
4.	Wahyuni,2019	MM			√	√		
5.	Sitompul et al.,2019	QN				√		
6.	Adi et al.,2019	QL				√		
7.	Istiqomah et al.,2019	QL				√		√
8.	Khumhom & Taylor,2019	QN				√		
9.	Syamaun et al.,2019	QL		√				
10.	Kurnia,2019	MM		√		√		
10.	Syafryadin et al.,2020	QN			√			
11.	Marpaung & Widyanotono,2020	QN		√	√			
12.	Basalama et al.,2020	MM		√		√		√
13.	Lestari & Wahyudin,2020	QN			√	√		√
14.	Lestari & Fatimah,2020	QN				√		
15.	Taheri et al.,2020	MM		√	√		√	
16.	Masbironotni & Fajaryani,2020	QL		√		√		
17.	Aziz & Shah,2020	QN		√		√	√	
18.	Dorand,2020	MM	√	√	√	√		√
19.	Salam et al.,2020	QL		√	√			

20.	Rianto,2020	QN				√		
21.	Citra & Zainil,2021	QL		√		√	√	
22.	Alfian,2021	QL		√		√		
23.	Emily John et al.,2021	QN	√			√		
24.	Lim et al.,2021	QN	√	√				
25.	Wong et al., 2022	QN			√	√		
26.	Zulkarnain et al.,2022	QN		√	√		√	
27.	Al-Hawamleh et al.,2022	QL		√		√		√
28.	Rayati et al.,2022	MM		√	√	√	√	√
29.	Zou,2022	MM		√	√	√	√	√
30.	Blanka et al.,2023	MM	√			√	√	√

CS= Cognitive Strategies, MCS= Meta-cognitive Strategies, SS= Social Strategies, MS= Memory Strategies, CPS= Compensation Strategies, AS= Affective Strategies, QN= Quantitative, QL= Qualitative, MM= Mixed method

As depicted in Figure 2, which encapsulates data gathered from searches spanning 2019 to 2023, an illustrative portrayal emerges concerning the prevalence of language learning strategies adopted to enhance speaking proficiency. The presented pie chart serves as a visual conduit to discern the distribution of these strategies. Notably, the preeminent contender is the domain of meta-cognitive strategies, commanding the lion's share at 31% of usage. In close succession, cognitive strategies secure a substantial 22%, while compensation strategies make a significant contribution at 17%. Social strategies carve out a notable presence with 12%, followed by affective strategies at 11%, and memory strategies anchoring the distribution with 7%.

This revealing data undeniably points out a dominant pattern: a considerable number of learners distinctly favor employing meta-cognitive strategies as their primary method to improve their speaking abilities. On the other hand, the utilization of memory strategies as potent means to enhance speaking proficiency seems to be notably less prominent when contrasted with alternative strategies.

Figure 2. The percentage of the most used language learning strategies



Findings

This section delved into the primary language learning strategies adopted to enhance speaking skills, encompassing metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, social strategies, memory strategies, and affective strategies.

Metacognitive Strategies Used in Learning Speaking Skills

From the pool of 30 reviewed articles, a consistent trend emerged, wherein 22 articles identified metacognitive strategies as the prevailing choice among language learners seeking to improve their speaking abilities. Notable examples include Muslimin (2019); Wahyuni (2019); Sitompul et al (2019); Istiqomah et al (2019), among others. These strategies empower learners to self-monitor their learning process, plan, organize, and set goals, and are linked to successful language acquisition (Wahyuni, 2019; Lestari & Fatimah, 2020). Notably, meta-cognitive strategies offer learners independence by fostering self-awareness and enabling effective organization (Adi et al., 2019).

Cognitive Strategies Used in Learning Speaking Skills

The second most prominent group of strategies observed in the review centered around cognitive strategies, with 16 out of 30 articles emphasizing their utilization. Alfian (2021); Aziz & Shah (2020); Kurnia (2019), among others, provided insight into learners employing cognitive strategies. This approach often involves imitation, repetition, and practicing with sounds, contributing to improved pronunciation and vocabulary expansion (Blanka et al., 2023; Marpaung & Widyanotero, 2020).

Compensation Strategies Used in Learning Speaking Skills

Highlighted by 12 out of 30 articles, compensation strategies garnered attention for their role in enhancing speaking proficiency. Notable examples include (Dorand, 2020; Marpaung & Widyanotero, 2020; Wong et al., 2022). Compensation strategies aid learners in overcoming language barriers by resorting to gestures, miming, or synonyms when encountering challenges, thus enabling effective message conveyance (Syafryadin et al., 2020; Wahyuni, 2019).

Social Strategies Used in Learning Speaking Skills

Social strategies emerged as the focus in 9 out of 30 articles, showcasing their prevalence in improving speaking skills. Examples include (Basalama et al., 2020; Istiqomah et al., 2019; Al-Hawamleh et al., 2022). These strategies thrive, particularly in technology-integrated learning environments, as learners engage in activities like role-playing to enhance their spoken English (Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020). Although less favored in some contexts, these strategies provide opportunities for practice and interaction (Blanka et al., 2023).

Affective Strategies Used in Learning Speaking Skills

Affective strategies, comparatively less prominent, were explored in 8 out of 30 articles. Notable references include (Aziz & Shah, 2020; Pertiwi & Suwartono, 2019). These strategies, tied to learners' emotional states, were less emphasized due to their link with proficiency levels (Zou, 2022). Learners often found solace in sharing feelings and using music as an anxiety-relief mechanism (Zou, 2022).

Memory Strategies Used in Learning Speaking Skills

Among the strategies, memory strategies emerged as the least frequently employed, with 6 out of 30 articles discussing their usage. Noteworthy examples include (Dorand, 2020; Blank et al., 2023). Memory strategies were often linked to learner proficiency, yet certain studies, such as Wael et al.'s research, highlighted their usage among specific learner groups (Blanka et al., 2023). These strategies involve creating visual associations and mental imagery to enhance speaking performance (Blanka et al., 2023).

In summary, the diverse landscape of language learning strategies for enhancing speaking skills encompasses a variety of approaches. Metacognitive and cognitive strategies stand out as leading choices, while compensation, social, affective, and memory strategies also play roles in learners' pursuit of speaking proficiency.

Discussion

The language learning strategies introduced by Oxford (1990) have demonstrated prevalence across the majority of conducted studies, as evidenced by works such as (Alfan, 2021; Aziz & Shah, 2020; Dorand, 2020; Oflaz, 2019; Salam et al., 2020). In the context of language acquisition, the classification of "language learning strategies" serves as a compass to identify the tactics employed by learners (Oxford, 1990). Learners who engage in a diverse spectrum of language learning strategies, encompassing metacognitive, social, and memory approaches, tend to excel as language learners, especially when they can adeptly select the most suitable strategies for specific situations. This consequently leads to the inference that students who employ a broader array of strategies in language learning frequently attain elevated levels of academic accomplishment (Oflaz, 2019).

To foster the success of fellow learners, it becomes imperative to scrutinize the attributes of effective language learners, a notion put forth by (Rubin, 1975). Learners who prioritize metacognitive strategies as their primary language acquisition methodology showcase heightened motivation and possess the capacity to autonomously regulate their learning journey (Hromalik & Koszalka, 2018). This self-directed mode of learning empowers students to take an active and independent stance in their educational voyage, affording them the flexibility to learn at their own pace and convenience (Abdelouahed, 2019; Sandorova & Betak, 2021).

Subsequently, assessing the language learning strategies embraced by students within the contemporary educational milieu takes on paramount significance, offering valuable insights into how modern language learners are embracing languages with the backing of cutting-edge technologies. This understanding is pivotal for aligning pedagogical methodologies with the present-day learning panorama.

The infusion of technology into the learning domain, coupled with the transition to online educational platforms, has yielded fresh perspectives on learning strategies in recent times (Healey, 2018). Given the necessity for learners to be primed for the swiftly evolving demands of the dynamic workplace, there emerges an urgent mandate to refine skills and familiarity with these emergent technologies (Ramamurthy et al., 2021).

The findings derived from this review cast a spotlight on the integration of technology and online learning into language education over recent years. For instance, the deployment of platforms like Facebook has emerged as a conduit through which learners engage cognitive

strategies for language acquisition—a trend not documented in earlier studies due to the limited usage of Facebook at that juncture. In the realm of affective strategies, Dorand (2020) observed the employment of Information and Communication Technology to alleviate language learning anxiety among learners, thereby encouraging more extensive practice.

In the realm of metacognitive strategies, the online learning landscape has amplified learner independence, granting them the ability to autonomously regulate their learning trajectory (Blanka et al., 2023). Consequently, the advent of this new learning environment has realigned the utilization of learning strategies compared to previous years, reflecting an essential adaptation to the evolving educational terrain.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review focuses on learning strategies for speaking skills within a contemporary learning environment. The authors highlight the necessity of bridging the gap in understanding language learning strategies in recent years. Based on the research question, both meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies emerged as frequently employed techniques in enhancing speaking skills. In contrast to previous studies, memory strategies have become more prevalent among learners.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the impact of the new learning environment, which fosters greater learner independence in the acquisition of speaking skills. Learners who employ meta-cognitive strategies exhibit high motivation and possess the ability to self-regulate their learning process. They operate with increased autonomy within the language learning journey, enabling them to study at their preferred pace and ultimately achieve success as language learners.

This systematic literature review focuses on learning strategies for speaking skills within a contemporary learning environment. The authors highlight the necessity of bridging the gap in understanding language learning strategies in recent years. Based on the research question, both meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies emerged as frequently employed techniques in enhancing speaking skills. In contrast to previous studies, memory strategies have become more prevalent among learners.

Moreover, the findings highlight the profound impact of the new learning environment in cultivating greater learner independence for speaking skills acquisition. Learners who employ meta-cognitive strategies demonstrate a high level of motivation and possess the ability to self-regulate their learning process. They function with enhanced autonomy throughout their language learning journey, enabling them to learn at their own pace and ultimately attain success as language learners.

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