Original Research

Speaking Strategies Use of Students at Leka Nekemte Preparatory School: Grade Eleven in Focus

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Abstract	Article Information
This study explored speaking strategies used by grade 11 students at Leka Nekemte Preparatory School. Survey research design with mixed methods was used. Speaking Strategies Questionnaire (SSQ), containing 36 items was modified from Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and used to obtain data for this research from 108 (57 Male and 51 Female) participants. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version-20. The results show that compensation strategies were the most often used category by the learners, while meta-cognitive strategies ranked last on students preference scale. The study also revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female students in their preferences of strategy categories usage, in which both females and males preferred meta-cognitive strategies the least and compensation strategies the most. The orders of both groups' preferences of the strategies were compensation strategy, memory strategy, social strategy, affective strategy, cognitive strategy and meta-cognitive strategy. This leads to the conclusion that they prefer using direct strategies than indirect strategies. Therefore, to facilitate the learning of speaking skills, teachers are recommended to create awareness about and opportunities for students to use the indirect strategies too.	 ***Corresponding Author:** Rufael Disasa[1] **E-mail:** **Rufittii5@gmail.com**

INTRODUCTION

The goal of teaching a second/foreign language in general and speaking in particular is to get students become communicatively competent so that they can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance. In other words, language learners learn to not only make grammatically correct sentences but also develop the ability to use the language for various communicative purposes (Harmer, 2001).

English as foreign language (EFL) learners are then expected to master English speaking skills as, among others, a means of international communication. Nunan (2000) notes that mastering the art of speaking is the single most important aspect of learning a second and a foreign language; for success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language.

During the last few decades, EFL scholars and teachers have shifted their focus away from the teacher- centred perspective to learner-centred perspective in which learners take on more responsibility for their own learning in order to meet their own individual needs. One of the basic ideas in the learner-centred approach is helping students use language learning strategies (LLS) to make the learning effective and efficient; especially to help the less successful learners improve their learning (Oxford, 1990).

While older studies of language learning strategies, like O'Malley and Chamot (1987) focused on general aspects of language learning, recently, there is a shift of research focus from general to skill specific learning strategies like strategies of learning vocabulary, reading, listening, and writing employed by language learners. This study is also in line with this change.

In English language classroom, speaking is the most often used skill (Brown, 2007) and it is critical for functioning in English where it is medium of instruction. Despite, Haregewain, (2008) observes that currently in Ethiopia, a considerable number of students attending higher institutions and colleges exhibit very low proficiency in speaking English and little ability to use the language accurately. As a result, it is very difficult for the students to succeed in their higher education.

The cause of learner difficulties in learning speaking skills can be attributed to different variables. Among these, language learning scholars like Green and Oxford (1995), Griffiths (2003), Oxford (2003) are drawing attention to 'learning strategies' that learners employ in learning speaking skills as one of the major factors for either success or failure in learning speaking. Their studies point towards a linear pattern; students from different age groups with higher speaking proficiency use more strategies, more frequently than students with lower proficiency.

On the other hand, many researchers have studied and identified variables which could influence the choice and use of speaking strategies. For instance, Najafabadi (2014) has investigated how the use of speaking strategies of Iraninian EFL students is affected by learner specific variables, such as gender and language proficiency level. The focus of current study is also investigating whether gender influences the choice of strategy of learning speaking skills because the findings of studies on gender variable are not consistent (Radwan, 2011; Rahimi, Riazi & Safi, 2008; & Radwan, 2011).

Local researches on learner strategy use have given less attention to learner's speaking strategies use. One of the few studies on speaking strategy is Tsegay (2013) on English speaking strategy use of Kotebe Teachers College students; but this study didn't include gender variable.

Therefore, this study was inspired by the need to generate empirical information on the issue at hand. In this study, an attempt was made to explore the language learning strategies grade eleven students at Leka Nekemte preparatory school employ in learning English speaking skills, and see whether the male and female students differ in their strategy preference. Accordingly, the following research questions were formulated and answered.

1. What are the overall strategies used by the students of grade eleven at Leka Nekemte Preparatory School in learning speaking skills?
2. What speaking skills learning strategy groups do male and female students of grade eleven at Leka Nekemte Preparatory school prefer and employ?
3. Is there a significant difference in speaking strategies use and preference between male and female students?

Speaking Strategies

An important component of language learning strategy training is that of speaking strategies. Speaking strategies are the conscious steps learners take while doing the initial learning of

speech acts, using the speech act material that has already been learned to some extent, and/or for evaluating the effectiveness of their use. Speaking strategies are crucial because they help foreign language learners "in negotiating meaning where either linguistic structures or sociolinguistic rules are not shared between a second language learner and a speaker of the target language.

Classifications of Speaking Strategies

Though scholars in the field like, O'malley and Chamot, Rubin and others provide different classification schemes, Oxford's classification of language learning strategies encompasses all aspects of strategy use and is the most comprehensive classification to date (Ellis, 1994). It has further been validated by Oxford (1990) through factor analysis measures and has proved to be the most valid classification of language learning strategies. The strategy categories (i.e., cognitive, meta-cognitive, affective, social, memory and compensation) in Oxford's classification will, therefore, form the framework based on which the speaking strategies that is reported by participants in this study will be categorized and analyzed.

The two broad categories of language learning strategies are Direct and Indirect strategies.

Direct Strategies

These strategies directly contribute to learning speaking. They include cognitive, memory and compensation strategies.

Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies which enable learners to understand and produce new language are categorized as direct strategies. They are typically found to be the most popular strategies with the language learners (Oxford, 1990). Cognitive strategies are defined as "the steps, or operations used in problem solving that require direct analysis, transformation or synthesis of learning materials". Compared to memory strategies, the purpose of cognitive strategies is not simply memorization but deeper processing and use of the language

(ibid). They include techniques which enable learners to make their language learning easier and more effective. Thus, there are four types of cognitive strategies, namely "practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, and creating structure for input and output". Oxford creates the acronym PRAC. A) Practicing is the most important type of strategies that includes repeating, formally practicing with sounds and writing systems, recognizing and using formulas and patterns, recombining, and practicing naturally. B) Receiving and sending messages can be used by learners to extracting the new ideas by using a variety of resources for understanding or producing meaning. C) Analyzing and reasoning are concerned with the logical analysis and reasoning as applied to various target language skills. These strategies contain reasoning deductively, analyzing expressions, translating, and transferring. D) Creating structure for input and output combines three ways to create structure, namely taking notes, summarizing, and highlighting.

Memory Strategies

In language learning process, a language learner tries to store or receive new information that he/she is taught in the language classroom or in any other learning context. He/she also needs to remember the language elements such as words or grammar rules he/she has learnt. Hence to cope with these entire related processes, a leaner tends to develop strategies which enable him/her to achieve all the stated objectives. These strategies are said to be memory strategies which help students to store and retrieve information. Some types of these strategies include i) creating mental linkage (e.g. placing new words into a context), and ii) applying images and sounds (e.g. Representing sounds in memory), reviewing well and employing action (ibid). Moreover, memory strategies help learners' link one L2 item or concept with another but do not necessarily involve deep understanding. Various Memory related strategies enable

learners to store and retrieve information in an orderly string (e.g., acronyms), while other techniques create learning and retrieval via sounds (e.g., rhyming), images (e.g., a mental picture of the word itself or the meaning of the word), a combination of sounds and images (e.g., the keyword method), body movement (e.g., total physical response), mechanical means (e.g., flashcards), or location (e.g., on a page or blackboard). Memory strategies are often used for memorizing vocabulary and structures in initial stages of language learning, but that learners need such strategies much less when their arsenal of vocabulary and structures has become larger. More specifically, memory strategies are specific devices used by learners to make mental linkages that will allow new information, most often vocabulary, to enter and remain in long-term memory.

Oxford (1990) put memory strategies into four: a) creating mental linkages, b) applying images and sounds, c) reviewing well, and d) employing action. Creating mental linkages strategies form the corner stone for the rest of the memory strategies by classifying and reclassifying language material into meaningful units, by associating or elaborating, and by placing new words into a context. Applying images and sounds strategies include using imagery, using key words, semantic mapping, and representing sounds in memory. Reviewing well strategy is done by reviewing carefully in spaced intervals. Employing action includes two ways, namely by using physical response or sensation and by using mechanical techniques. Although memory strategies could easily be viewed as cognitive strategies, their purpose is limited to memorization and involves mostly surface processing.

Compensation Strategies

These are strategies in which learners use some other alternatives to make up for the linguistic deficiencies or overcoming the limitations they face in the process of using or learning the language. This means that learners try to compensate limited knowledge and skills whenever they encounter in short of word or phrase. These strategies include guessing intelligently for instance using clues to guess meaning and overcoming limitations in speaking, for instance, by using body language instead of some missing words or expressions.

Indirect Strategies

These are strategies that enable direct strategies to occur or help learners to use direct strategies in language learning. These are meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies.

Meta-cognitive Strategies

These are strategies that go beyond the cognitive and the way learners manage their own learning process. These types of learning strategies permit the learners to control their own learning. Some of the devices include: planning, organizing, and evaluating progress. They are used to oversee, regulate and self direct language learning. This includes setting up their own learning goals, choosing what and how they want to learn and then, prioritizing what they prefer to learn. Meta-cognitive strategies; therefore, facilitate learners to make self-control to their own learning process. Oxford (1990) categorizes meta-cognitive strategies into three as centring your learning, arranging and planning your learning, and evaluating your learning. Centring your learning helps learners to keep focusing on certain language tasks, activities, skills, or materials. These strategies include activities such as over viewing and linking with already known material; paying attention to specific aspects of the language or situational details; and delaying speech production to focus on listening. Arranging and planning your own learning include strategies in finding out about language learning; organizing; setting goals and objectives; identifying the purpose of language task; planning for a language task; and seeking practice opportunities. Evaluating your own learning is self monitoring such as

identifying errors in understanding or producing new language by evaluating ones progress. Thus, meta cognitive strategies are employed for managing the overall learning process.

Affective Strategies

These strategies enable learners gain control over their emotions, attitudes, motivations and values towards their learning. They include the techniques learners use to lower their anxiety, encouraging themselves as successful language learners when they do better and about feelings, rewarding oneself for good performance, and using deep breathing or positive self-talk, discussion with someone else, etc.

Social Strategies

These strategies contribute to learning indirectly like the former two strategies. They enable learners interact with other people to develop the language. They include techniques such as asking questions, asking for clarification, cooperating with others, for example, with proficient users of the language, and exploring cultural and social norms.

Gender vis-à-vis Speaking Strategies Use

Research findings have indicated that speaking strategy choice is influenced by a number of variables like, level of proficiency, motivation, learning Style age and gender. Many studies have investigated the correlation between speaking strategies use and gender. The results however were not always consistent. For example, Green and Oxford (1995) and Kato (2005) examining groups of EFL students, found that females use more Social and Affective Strategies than males. Ghadessy (1998) also investigated a group of university students in the Hong Kong Baptist University and reported that there were significant gender differences in five of the six categories of LSs, except Memory Strategies.

A couple of studies give evidence of male students' strategy use surpassing female students'. Wharton (2000), for example, demonstrates that male students significantly differed from female students in their strategy use. Male students significantly used more strategies more often than female students did. Similarly, Radwan (2011) reveals differences between male students and female students in their strategy use. Unlike Wharton (2000), however, he demonstrates that the significant differences lay only in the use of social strategies. Other studies reveal no or a less clear distinction between male and female students' strategy use. Dadour and Robbins (1996) demonstrate that there was no difference between male and female students in strategy use. Both sexes used an array of learning strategies to help them develop their speaking skills. This, therefore, implies that there is a need to further investigate the correlation between gender and speaking strategy use of EFL learners.

Materials and Methods

Descriptive survey study design was opted for in this research for it serves the purpose of this research, i.e., describing the existing behaviour. A quantitative approach was adapted because the research depended on gathering and analysing quantitative data.

Participants of the Study

The target population of the study was grade eleven students of Leka Nekemte preparatory school. The total number of the students was 340 out of which 161 were female and 179 were male. Of this population, 113 (54 female and 59 male) participants were selected using the lottery system of simple random sampling technique.

Data Collection Instrument

In this study, questionnaire was used for data collection. A self-report speaking strategy questionnaire (SSQ) was adapted from Oxford (1990) Inventory for Language Learners (SILL). The questionnaire elicited the students' self-report on their use of the six category of speaking strategies by responding on a 5- point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (Never or almost never true of me) to 5 (always or almost always

true of me).   The questionnaire items were prepared in English and translated into Oromo language (the student's native and/or first language) in order to make the questions clear for the respondents so that the validity of the responses is insured.

Procedure of Data Analysis

The data gathered through the questionnaire were organised and analysed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive statistics such as means and Standard deviations were computed to see the learners' overall speaking strategies, and an independent samples t- test was computed to compare the means and Standard deviations to explore the type of speaking strategies favoured by male and female learners.

RESULTS

This section presents the result of the data analysis that answers the three research questions: the overall speaking strategies used by the students, the strategies favoured by the gender groups and whether there is significant difference between the groups in strategy use. The interpretation of mean scores of the Likert-scale strategy use were done based on Oxford's (1990) suggestions: 1.00-2.49 as low strategy use, 2.50-3.49 as medium strategy use, and 3.50-5.00 as high strategy use.

Overall Speaking Strategy Use

Over all, there are six subcategories grouped under two major categories of speaking strategies identified by Oxford (1990) supposed to be used by students. The following table shows the descriptive statistics of these strategies use.

Table 1: Learners' Overall Speaking Strategies Use

Main Strategies	Mean	S D	Sub-strategies	Mean	SD
Direct Strategies	2.32	0.082	Memory	2.27	0.066
			Cognitive	1.59	0.299
			Compensation	3.10	0.781
Indirect Strategies	1.70	0.397	Meta-cognitive	1.29	0.614
			Affective	1.75	0.271
			Social	2.06	0.147
Overall mean	2.01	0.285	-	2.01	0.236

Table 1 shows that the mean value of the overall strategy use is 2.01, while the direct strategy use is 2.32 and the mean value of indirect strategies is 1.7 indicating that the learners were low users of the overall strategies and relatively depended more on the direct strategies as compared to the indirect strategies. Among the sub categories of direct strategy, compensation is the most preferred with the mean value of 3.10, and meta-cognitive strategy in the indirect category is the least preferred with the mean value of 1.29.

Use of Speaking Strategies by Gender

The second research question of the study sought answer as to whether the female and male students' choice of the type of speaking strategies differed. To this effect, the questionnaire data was analysed following the adopted strategy category as follows. First, the difference between gender in the overall strategy use, and the significance of the difference, if any, is examined. The following table shows the descriptive statistics of the male and female students strategy use.

Table 2 Gender difference in the overall strategy use

| Strategy | Female | | | | Male | | | |
	N	Mean	SD	Rank	N	Mean	SD	Rank
Direct	51	2.10	.652	1	57	2.54	.476	1
Indirect	51	1.23	.471	2	57	2.19	.559	2
Overall mean		1.66	.565			2.36	.527	

As Table 2 shows, the mean values of the total strategy use for female and male respondents are 1.66 and 2.36 respectively indicating that there is difference between female and male students' strategy use, i.e., though both groups are poor users, male students are better than their female counterparts. The mean values of the direct strategies use for females and males are 2.10 and 2.54, respectively; and the indirect strategies use mean values are 1.23 and 2.19 for female and male students respectively indicating that both group of learners preferred the direct strategies category than the indirect; there is no difference in their preference of the direct/indirect strategies.

To check whether the difference between the two groups of respondents in the direct and indirect strategy use is statistically significant, the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances and the independent sample t-test for equality of means was run.

Table 3: Significance of Difference in Direct and Indirect Strategy Use between the groups

| Sub-Scales | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | |
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Direct	400.444	0.000	-10.006	106	0.000	0.67
Indirect	2.699	.002	-.004	106	.03	-.06495
Overall	3.180	.0047	-.859	106	0.748	-.04566

In Table 3, the Levene's Test for equality of variance for male and female group shows the sig. value for overall strategy is .0047, for direct strategies is 0.000 and for the indirect strategies is 0.002. These sig. values are less than .05. Thus, the variances were assumed to be different. In the t-test for equality of means, the t-values for the overall strategy, direct and the indirect strategies are -.859, -10.006 (p=0.000) and -.004 (p= .03) respectively. The p values are less than .05 indicating that difference between females and males in the use of all cases is statistically different.

Females' and Males' Preferences of the six sub-categories of Speaking Strategies
As shown in 4 below, the mean scores indicate that there are differences between the two groups in their use of each sub category. However, the rank order of the sub categories shows that there is no difference between the two groups in their preference of the strategy categories. Compensation Strategy is the top

preference for both groups with the mean score of 3.22 and 2.98 for the male and the female strategies and Meta-cognitive strategies are ranked from 2nd to 6th respectively.

group respectively. Memory strategies, social strategies, Affective strategies, cognitive

Table 4: Rank order of the six sub-categories of Strategies used by the Female and Male Learners

Female				Male		
Sub-category	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
Memory	1.94	.500	2	2.60	.186	2
Cognitive	1.13	.325	5	2.05	.225	5
Compensation	3.22	.612	1	2.98	.476	1
Meta-cognitive	1.06	.012	6	1.53	.498	6
Affective	1.18	.385	4	2.32	.469	4
Social	1.45	.503	3	2.55	.476	3

Further analysis was also carried out to see if the differences in the mean values between the two groups in their use of the six strategy sub categories are significant difference.

Table 5 Significance of difference in the six sub categories of strategy use between the groups

Strategy Categories	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Memory	267.939	.000	-19.627	106	.000	-1.396
Cognitive	6.183	.014	-17.509	106	.000	-.935
Compensation	9.100	.003	-11.212	106	.000	-1.176
Meta-cognitive	1957.728	.000	-8.296	106	.000	-.579
Affective	11.960	.001	-11.702	106	.000	-1.139
Social	4.807	0.31	-12.911	106	.000	-1.216

The results of the analysis displayed in the Table 5 shows the sig. values in the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances for all the six sub categories are less than .05. Therefore, it can be assumed that the variances were not equal. In addition, the t-values in the t-test for equality of means are also less than 0.05 for all the six sub-categories. Thus, it can be concluded that the difference in the use of all the six sub-categories of strategies for females and males is statistically significant.

DISCUSSION
The focus of this study was to explore students' use of speaking strategies and to detect the relationship between gender and speaking strategies use. The study generated three

significant findings. First, the result of the analysis revealed that the mean value of the participants' overall strategy use is 2.01 which indicates that generally they are poor users of speaking strategies regardless of gender difference as labelled by Oxford (1990). The mean values of the direct strategy use and indirect strategy use, 2.32 and 1.72 respectively also shows that they depend on the direct strategies and that they mainly depend on the compensation strategy from the direct strategy category, and rarely preferred the meta-cognitive Strategies, with mean values 3.10 and 1.29 respectively. This indicates that the participants relay on the direct strategies particularly the compensation ones implying that they are poor at consciously

planning, monitoring and evaluating their use of speaking strategies including the management of their emotion and affection. In addition, the relatively higher use of compensation strategies may reflect learners attempt to reduce communication breakdowns because of poor language ability, particularly, inadequate repertoire of vocabulary and expressions.

However, this result is not in line with some study findings, but agrees with others. For instance, it is inconsistent with Aslan (2009) study that reported that the participants were good at indirect strategies than direct strategies; and Ahmadi and Mahmoodi's (2012) study, which reported that meta-cognitive strategies were the most used category by the learners. The least favoured strategies by the participants in this study were meta-cognitive strategy, and this is in line with some studies, e.g., Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) that reported meta-cognitive strategies as the least preferred category. The possible reason for these discrepancies could be the learning environment and the cultural background of the learners.

Secondly, the result of this study indicated that the two groups of participants significantly differ in their use of the overall strategy use, the two major strategy categories as well as the six sub categories: the t-values in the t-test for equality of means are also less than 0.05 for all the six sub-categories. A close inspection of Table 4 above also indicates that the male group is better users of the strategy categories except for the compensation one. The mean values of the strategy use for the male group are greater than that of the female group except for the compensation strategy which is 3.22 and 2.98 for female and male groups respectively. In addition, it shows that the male students are medium users of three of the strategy categories namely memory, compensation and social with respective mean values of 2.60, 2.98 and 2.55; while the female students are medium users of only one

category, compensation, with mean value of 3.22.

The findings of the relationship between gender and the overall speaking strategy use in the present study is partially inconsistent with other many studies e.g., Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006); Li (2005); Radwan (2011); Rahimi, Riazi and Saif (2008) and Wahyuni (2013) which reported that there is no significant difference between males and females in the use of the overall speaking strategies though there were significant differences in some specific strategy categories. Regarding the use of some particular strategy subcategories, Wen and Wang's (1996) report which states that females' superiority to their male counter parts in the use of memory strategies is inconsistent with the finding of the present study in which males exceeded the females in their use of memory strategies. In addition, in Salahshour et al (2013) study males were reported to use Cognitive strategies more than their females counter parts. Moreover, the finding of this study is incompatible with Hong-Nam & Leavell (2006); Green and Oxford (1995); Tam (2013) and Zeynali (2012) which reported that female learners tend to use social strategies more than male learners. However, it agrees with the result of Radwan's (2011) research, which reported males use social strategies more than females because of the cultural background of the students. In the case of the present study, the reason which accounts for the reluctance of female participants to make cooperation with others may be related to the gender-related culture of the society.

Lastly, the ranking of the six sub categories of the strategies revealed no difference between the male and female group in their preference of the strategies, regardless of the extent of their use. For both the female and the male group of respondents, the compensation strategy is ranked top followed by memory, social, Affective, cognitive and meta-cognitive sub categories subsequently.

This indicates that the participants focus on covering their lack of linguistic knowledge and skills, and memorizing what they know rather than planning and monitoring their learning. It also shows that the practical move they make towards the learning is not strategically effective and efficient, meaning they are less planned and organised, clear about what to do to learn better and efficiently.

The result of this study is contrary to Ahmadi and Mahmoodi's (2012) study, which reported that meta-cognitive strategies were the most, used category by the learners. The least favoured strategies by the participants in this study were meta-cognitive strategy, and this is in line with some studies, e.g., Tam (2013) that reported meta-cognitive strategies as the least preferred category. Moreover, consistent with the result of this study, (Ahmadi & Mahmoodi's, 2012) finding revealed that Cognitive strategies were the least applied strategy categories by males and females. The possible reason for these discrepancies could be the learning environment and the cultural background of the learners. Moreover, social strategies were the third strategy category to be preferred by both females and males.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to find out the participants' speaking strategy use; and whether the strategy use is affected by gender. The findings of this study evidenced that the participants of the study are generally low users of speaking strategy, and they mainly depend on the compensation strategy. It also showed that though they are poor users, the male participants are better than the females in their use of all the six sub categories of the strategies. Both groups of the participants' top preference is the compensation strategy while the cognitive and meta cognitive strategy groups are the least. This shows that the participants focus on compensate for the lack of knowledge and skills needed for

communication; are not planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning.

This situation needs attention of the English language teachers. They need to direct students' attention towards the kind of strategies they need use and which to prioritize. Teachers should raise learners' awareness of the functions and usefulness of learning strategies so that they become encouraged to select and use strategies that are more appropriate in their speaking skills learning. Further research is also needed to check which the model of strategy instruction fits the situation to improve the students awareness and skill of deploying strategy to learn speaking with as minimum effort as possible.

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