

Metacognitive Strategies Employed by Indonesian Senior High School Students to Foster English Speaking Proficiency

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Abstract

Developing English speaking skills remains a persistent challenge for EFL learners in Indonesia, particularly at the secondary school level. This study investigates the metacognitive strategies used by second-grade students at SMA Batik 2 Surakarta, Indonesia, to enhance their English speaking proficiency. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected from 30 students through non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with five purposefully selected informants. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation, and analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings revealed four core metacognitive strategies: self-management, self-monitoring, delayed production, and self-evaluation. Self-management involved resource utilization such as digital dictionaries and Google Translate. Self-monitoring encompassed imitating teacher input and rehearsing pronunciation. Delayed production was characterized by pre-speaking preparation including writing, translating, and memorizing sentences. Self-evaluation involved error detection and self-correction during and after speaking performance. These strategies were found to facilitate planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes critical for autonomous speaking development. However, an over-reliance on translation-mediated strategies was identified, potentially hindering spontaneous oral fluency. The study concludes that metacognitive strategy instruction should be systematically integrated into EFL speaking curricula, with emphasis on balancing technological mediation and authentic communicative practice. Recommendations for pedagogical practice and future research are provided.

Keywords: *Metacognitive strategies, speaking skills, EFL secondary students, language learning strategies, self-regulated learning*

Introduction

English speaking proficiency has been widely recognized as a critical competency in the globalized era, serving not only as a medium of international communication but also as a gatekeeper for academic and professional advancement (Bo et al., 2023; Grain et al., 2022; Hidayat, 2024). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, speaking constitutes one of the most complex and demanding skills to master, as it requires the simultaneous deployment of linguistic, cognitive, and sociolinguistic competencies in real-time interaction (Madiseh et al., 2026; Majidi et al., 2025; Rohmadhani & Febrianti, 2025). Unlike receptive skills such as reading and listening, speaking necessitates spontaneous language processing, rapid lexical retrieval, accurate phonological encoding, and pragmatic appropriateness, all of which impose a significant cognitive load on learners, particularly those with limited exposure to the target language.

In Indonesia, English has been formally designated as the first foreign language and is a compulsory subject at the secondary and tertiary levels of education. Despite its institutional prominence, the outcomes of English language instruction in Indonesian schools have been consistently reported as unsatisfactory, particularly in the domain of oral communication (Sya et al., 2025; Wahyuningsih et al., 2023). A multitude of factors contribute to this underperformance, including large class sizes, limited instructional time, teachers' insufficient oral proficiency, examination-oriented curricula, and students' lack of confidence and motivation (Panggua et al., 2020; Purwati et al., 2023; Setyarini et al., 2020; Suryati et al., 2013). Those constraints create an instructional environment where speaking is often marginalized in favor of grammar and reading comprehension, resulting in students who possess declarative knowledge of English but lack functional communicative ability. Preliminary observations conducted during a two-month internship at SMA Batik 2 Surakarta confirmed this phenomenon, revealing that many students experienced difficulty expressing even simple ideas orally, frequently hesitating, code-switching to Indonesian, or remaining silent when asked to speak in English.

Given these challenges, the role of language learning strategies, defined as specific actions, behaviors, or techniques employed by learners to enhance their own learning becomes paramount (Oxford, 1996). Effective strategy use enables learners to compensate for limited linguistic input, manage their learning processes autonomously, and overcome affective barriers such as anxiety and low self-efficacy. Among the various strategy taxonomies proposed in the literature, O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) tripartite classification into cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies has been widely adopted in second language acquisition research. Metacognitive strategies, which encompass planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own learning processes, are considered higher-order executive skills that regulate and orchestrate other cognitive and affective strategies. Learners who effectively employ metacognitive strategies demonstrate greater self-awareness, intentionality, and adaptability in their learning, attributes closely associated with successful language acquisition (Bunyadzade, 2025; Robillos, 2020; Wang et al., 2023).

A growing body of empirical research has examined the role of metacognitive strategies in second language speaking development. Muslimin (2025) conducted a research at an Indonesian university and found that they routinely applied planning, monitoring, and evaluation strategies to structure their speaking practice and regulate their progress. Riwayatiningsih et al. (2025) identified four principal metacognitive strategies, selective attention, planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation, employed by a successful EFL learner in Indonesia. Similarly, Ortega-Ruipérez (2022), in a study of English department students, reported that metacognitive strategies ranked second in frequency after memory strategies, indicating their perceived importance among tertiary learners. Laura et al. (2020), Dita (2020), and Yaumi (2021) further contributed to this body of knowledge by documenting the challenges students face in speaking and the strategies they employ to overcome them in various Indonesian educational settings (Friatin & Triastuti, 2026; Leong et al., 2023; Wulandari et al., 2021).

Despite these valuable contributions, a critical gap persists in the literature. The majority of extant studies have focused on university students or highly proficient adult learners (Friatin & Triastuti, 2026; Leong et al., 2023; Wulandari et al., 2021), leaving the strategy use patterns of mainstream secondary school students underexplored. Furthermore, many studies have adopted a broad focus encompassing multiple strategy categories without providing an in-depth, qualitative examination of how specific metacognitive strategies are actually deployed in authentic classroom contexts (Dewi et al., 2026; Fono & Zohar, 2025; Judy Shih & Huang, 2022). High school students represent a distinct population with unique developmental, cognitive, and motivational characteristics that may differentially influence their strategy preferences and implementation. Understanding these patterns is essential for designing age-appropriate pedagogical interventions that foster learner autonomy at earlier stages of EFL development.

A preliminary study conducted by the researcher during a two-month internship at SMA Batik 2 Surakarta provided the initial impetus for the present investigation. A screening questionnaire comprising statements representing cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies was administered to 30 second-grade students. The results indicated that metacognitive strategy items received the highest mean endorsement scores. Classroom observations corroborated this finding, revealing that students engaged in behaviors such as pre-speaking note-taking, using digital translation tools to verify vocabulary, and self-correcting their pronunciation during practice activities. These observations suggested that metacognitive strategies were the dominant strategy type employed by this population and warranted further systematic investigation.

Drawing on the discussed theoretical and empirical foundations, the present study addresses the following research question: How do second-grade students at SMA Batik 2 Surakarta apply metacognitive strategies to develop their English speaking skills? The objective is to provide a rich, contextually grounded description of the specific metacognitive strategies employed, the manner of their application, and the functions they serve in students' speaking development. By focusing on a specific secondary school context using a qualitative case study approach, this research aims to contribute nuanced insights to the language learning strategy literature and offer evidence-based recommendations for EFL pedagogy in Indonesian high schools.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive case study design, which is particularly appropriate for investigating complex educational phenomena within their real-life context. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to explore not merely the frequency of strategy use, but the processes, meanings, and contextual factors shaping how students apply metacognitive strategies in their natural classroom setting. Case study design allows for the in-depth, multi-faceted exploration of a bounded system, in this instance, one cohort of second-grade students at a single secondary school, using multiple sources of evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This methodological choice aligns with the interpretive epistemological stance underpinning the study, which posits that educational reality is socially constructed and must be understood from the participants' emic perspectives.

The participants were drawn from one intact class of second-grade social science students at SMA Batik 2 Surakarta. Five students were purposefully selected as key informants for in-depth interviews. Purposive sampling, specifically maximum variation sampling, was employed to ensure diversity in terms of gender, English proficiency levels (as reported by the classroom teacher), and self-reported frequency of metacognitive strategy use based on the questionnaire. The five selected informants included three female and two male students representing a range of proficiency from low-intermediate to upper-intermediate.

Data were collected over a period of six weeks using three complementary techniques to enable methodological triangulation. First, non-participant classroom observations were conducted during four English speaking sessions. The researcher assumed the role of a passive observer, seated at the back of the classroom, and recorded field notes using a structured observation protocol focusing on students' strategy-related behaviors such as use of reference materials, peer collaboration, note-taking, rehearsal, and self-correction. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes. Observational data provided a contextualized account of how strategies were enacted in real time during teaching-learning activities.

semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with the five selected informants, each lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to allow students to express their thoughts freely and without linguistic constraints. An interview guide comprising 15 open-ended questions was developed based on the preliminary questionnaire results and observational findings. Questions explored students' awareness of their speaking difficulties, the specific strategies they used before, during, and after speaking tasks, the rationale behind their strategy choices, and their perceptions of strategy effectiveness. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The transcriptions were subsequently translated into English for reporting purposes, with back-translation checks performed to ensure accuracy.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2018), consisting of four iterative stages. The first stage, data collection, involved the systematic gathering and organization of all raw data including observation field notes and interview transcripts. The second stage, data reduction, entailed selecting, focusing, simplifying, and abstracting the raw data through an initial coding process. Open codes were generated inductively from the data, then grouped into categories

based on the four metacognitive strategy dimensions derived from O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) framework: self-management, self-monitoring, delayed production, and self-evaluation. The third stage, data display, involved organizing the reduced data into narrative text, matrices, and conceptual networks to facilitate pattern identification and interpretation. The fourth stage, conclusion drawing and verification, involved interpreting the patterns, drawing conclusions.

The research adhered to established ethical principles for research involving human participants. All students and their parents/guardians provided written informed consent before data collection commenced. Participants were assured of their voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and the confidentiality and anonymity of their data. Pseudonyms are used throughout this report to protect participants' identities. The researcher also remained mindful of the inherent power dynamics in the teacher-researcher relationship and consistently reinforced the message that participation status would not affect students' academic evaluation.

Results

The findings are organized around the four metacognitive strategies that emerged from the data analysis: self-management, self-monitoring, delayed production, and self-evaluation. Each strategy is described in turn, with supporting evidence drawn from observational and interview data, and illustrated with representative excerpts from student interviews.

Self-management

In the context of this study, self-management emerged as the most prevalent metacognitive strategy and encompassed three interrelated behaviors: resource exploitation, preparatory planning, and environmental structuring. Resource exploitation involved students' strategic use of digital tools to support their speaking preparation. Classroom observations revealed that during pair-work conversation tasks, a substantial number of students consistently used their smartphones to access Google Translate and English-Indonesian dictionary applications such as U-Dictionary and Kamusku. Students looked up unfamiliar vocabulary, checked the phonetic transcription of words, and listened to the audio pronunciation feature before attempting to produce utterances. Interview data provided deeper insight into the resource exploitation dimension. One female student explained her process:

"I always write down the difficult words first, then I check them one by one on Google Translate to hear the pronunciation. Sometimes I repeat the pronunciation several times until I feel confident." (Student 1)

"I use the dictionary application to find synonyms and also to check whether my grammar is correct. Actually, I have two applications on my phone; one is for translation, the other is specifically for grammar checking." (Student 2)

Preparatory planning involved students organizing and sequencing their learning activities before speaking tasks. Observations documented that before presenting a dialogue in front of the class, students huddled with their partners, reviewed their written scripts, and conducted multiple rehearsals. Some students were observed reading their lines aloud softly while checking their phones, suggesting an iterative

process of planning, checking, and refining. One male student described this mental sequencing:

"Usually, I first read the whole sentence, then I identify which words I don't know. After that, I look them up, then I practice the sentence, then I check again with my friend." (Student 4)

Environmental structuring, the third dimension of self-management, concerned students' efforts to create a supportive interpersonal learning atmosphere. Several students mentioned that they preferred practicing with friends who were patient and willing to provide corrective feedback. One student stated:

"I feel more comfortable practicing with my close friend because she doesn't laugh when I make mistakes. We help each other. If she makes an error, I correct her; if I make an error, she corrects me. That way, we both improve." (Student 3)

Self-monitoring

Classroom observations confirmed this pattern. During an observed lesson, the teacher provided oral feedback to students after a pair presentation, correcting grammatical errors and offering alternative expressions. Students were seen nodding, repeating the teacher's corrections sotto voce, and jotting down notes. One informant articulated this monitoring process as a deliberate attention-allocation strategy:

"When the teacher explains, I pay full attention. I listen to how she pronounces words, what vocabulary she uses. Then, when it's my turn to speak, I try to copy her. I try to sound like her because I know she speaks correctly." (Student 3)

Peer- and self-repetition constituted the second dimension of self-monitoring. During pair practice, students frequently repeated phrases multiple times, often with visible self-consciousness, pausing and restarting when dissatisfied with their pronunciation. One male student described this as a process of auditory self-checking:

"When I hear myself, sometimes I realize, 'Ah, that doesn't sound right.' Then I repeat it again. If I'm still not sure, I check on Google. I don't just accept the first try; I want to make sure it's correct before the real presentation." (Student 5)

"My partner and I, we listen to each other carefully. When one of us says something that sounds strange, the other will stop and say, 'Wait, check that word again.' So we monitor each other, not just ourselves." (Student 1)

Delayed Production

In this study, delayed production manifested in a structured, multi-step process encompassing writing, translating, memorizing, and rehearsing before oral production. Interview data illuminated the rationale behind this delayed production approach. A female informant explained:

"If I speak directly without writing first, I get confused. Many words fail to come out. My mind goes blank. So what I do is, I write everything I want to say first. After it's written, I memorize it, then I practice saying it. Only when I've memorized it smoothly do I feel ready to speak in front." (Student 4)

Another male student highlighted the function of translation within the delayed production sequence:

"I write the sentences in Indonesian first, what I really want to say from my heart. Then I translate to English using the app. Then I memorize the translation. If I skip the writing step, my English is messy; I cannot express my actual thoughts." (Student 5)

The data further revealed that students held positive perceptions regarding the efficacy of delayed production. They believed that this strategy reduced speaking anxiety, increased confidence, and minimized the likelihood of embarrassing errors when performing publicly. One student remarked:

"If I'm prepared, I don't feel nervous. It's only when I have to speak spontaneously that my heart beats fast and I forget things. But if I have it memorized, I feel in control." (Student 2)

Self-evaluation

The qualitative data from observations and interviews provided evidence of self-evaluative behaviors among certain students. During classroom activities, some students were observed checking their own pronunciation by reconfirming with dictionary applications after speaking, often looking at their phones and then repeating the word with a corrected pronunciation. In one observed instance, a student completed a sentence, paused, frowned, said "eh, sorry, salah tadi" (eh, sorry, that was wrong), and then reproduced the sentence with a corrected grammatical structure.

Interview data provided deeper insight into the self-evaluation process. One female informant described her approach:

"After I speak, I replay it in my mind. I ask myself, 'Was that correct? Was the grammar right? Did I use the right word?' If I realize I made a mistake, I try to correct it immediately if I'm still speaking, or I make a mental note for next time." (Student 3)

Another student described a more externalized form of self-evaluation involving teacher feedback integration:

"When the teacher corrects me, I don't just accept it and move on. I think about it, why was my sentence wrong? Then I try to make a new sentence using the correct form to make sure I really understand. I test myself." (Student 1)

A male student, however, admitted to a lower engagement with self-evaluation, which may be representative of the broader cohort:

"Usually, I'm just happy when the speaking is finished! I don't really think much about whether it was right or wrong, unless the teacher specifically points it out. Maybe I should do that more." (Student 4)

This spectrum of self-evaluative engagement, from systematic reflection to passive reliance on external correction, indicates variability in metacognitive maturity among the learners. One female informant described her evaluative process:

"After I speak, I replay it in my mind. I ask myself, 'Was that correct? Was the grammar right? Did I use the right word?' If I realize I made a mistake, I try to correct it immediately if I'm still speaking, or I make a mental note for next time. For me, it's about constant improvement, not just doing the task and forgetting about it." (Student 3)

A male student further elaborated on how he integrated peer feedback into self-evaluation:

"My friend sometimes tells me, 'You pronounced this word incorrectly earlier.' At first, I didn't always check that kind of feedback. But now I do, I go back and look it up to verify. So I don't just rely on my own judgment; I use my friend's comments as a trigger to evaluate myself."
(Student 5)

Discussion

This study set out to explore how second-grade students at SMA Batik 2 Surakarta apply metacognitive strategies to develop their English speaking skills. The findings demonstrate that students do employ a range of metacognitive strategies, self-management, self-monitoring, delayed production, and self-evaluation, each serving distinct functions in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation phases of speaking development. These results both corroborate and extend the existing literature on language learning strategies, particularly within the underexplored Indonesian senior high school context.

Self-management as Foundational Strategy. The high prevalence of self-management strategies resonates with findings from Muslimin (2025) Wahyuningsih et al. (2023), who documented similar self-management behaviors among Indonesian EFL learners at tertiary and vocational levels, respectively. The present study contributes novel evidence that secondary school students, despite their relatively lower proficiency and metacognitive maturity, also proactively structure their learning environment, particularly through digital tool use. **Self-monitoring and the Role of Teacher Modeling.** The finding that students actively monitored their production by imitating the teacher's language aligns with Schmidt's (2012) which posits that conscious attention to linguistic input is a prerequisite for acquisition. The teacher's oral output served as a salient model for phonological, lexical, and grammatical standards against which students evaluated their own output. This finding underscores the critical role of teacher quality in EFL contexts

Delayed Production: Adaptive Scaffold or Limiting Habit? Delayed production emerged as the most elaborate multi-step strategy, involving writing, translating, memorizing, and rehearsing. This finding is partially consistent with research by Wahyuningsih et al. (2023) and Wang et al. (2023), who reported that secondary students frequently used memorization and note-taking to manage speaking demands. From a metacognitive perspective, delayed production serves as a planning mechanism that reduces cognitive load during oral performance and functions as an affective buffer against speaking anxiety, a significant concern for many EFL learners (Rajendran et al., 2025).

Self-evaluation as Underdeveloped Metacognitive Skill. The present study's interview data indicates that systematic self-evaluation, including self-correction and reflection on performance, is less established among these secondary school learners compared to planning and monitoring strategies. This pattern aligns with developmental models of metacognition (Schaeffner et al., 2020; Veenman, 2017), which suggest that evaluation skills mature later than planning and monitoring skills. It may also reflect an educational culture in which assessment is perceived as the teacher's exclusive prerogative, with limited opportunities for learner self-assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2009). The profile of the one student (Student 3) who demonstrated systematic self-evaluative practices, including mental replay, error analysis, and self-testing, can serve as a developmental benchmark, illustrating what metacognitively

mature self-evaluation looks like in this age group. This finding highlights the urgent need for explicit instruction and scaffolding of self-evaluation skills in secondary EFL classrooms.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study examined the metacognitive strategies employed by second-grade students at SMA Batik 2 Surakarta to develop their English speaking skills. The findings underscore that students, despite facing considerable linguistic and affective challenges, possess a repertoire of metacognitive strategies that enable them to plan, monitor, and evaluate their speaking development. However, the data also reveal imbalances in strategy use: a heavy reliance on translation-mediated delayed production and an underdeveloped capacity for spontaneous self-evaluation. These imbalances suggest specific areas where pedagogical intervention can strengthen students' metacognitive toolkit and promote more balanced, autonomous speaking development.

The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. As a single-site case study conducted in one private senior high school in Central Java, Indonesia, the contextual nature of the setting limits the transferability of the results to other educational contexts. In addition, the study relied primarily on self-reported interview data, which may be affected by social desirability bias and participants' limited self-awareness. Although the sample of five informants allowed for in-depth qualitative exploration, it restricted the diversity of perspectives represented. Furthermore, the absence of an objective measure of speaking proficiency prevented the examination of the relationship between metacognitive strategy use and actual speaking performance. Future research should involve multiple research sites, larger and more diverse participant samples, alternative data collection methods, and objective proficiency assessments to provide more comprehensive and generalizable evidence.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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