



Research Article

An investigation of students' self-efficacy beliefs and learning strategy use in English language studies at Debre Markos University, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

Inadequate use of language learning strategies (LLSs) and low self-efficacy (SE) beliefs in language learning can hinder learners' ability to develop their language proficiency. The present study, therefore, investigated how D/Markos university Burie campus EFL learners utilize different LLS and evaluated their status of SE belief in learning English and examined the potency of the relationship between these two constructs. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed to conduct the study. Researchers gathered Numerical data from 184 subjects with the help of two standardized questionnaires, while they gained nonnumeric information through interviews with five intentionally chosen participants from different profiles. Systematic random sampling technique was used for the quantitative phase, and purposive sampling for the qualitative phase. Moreover, data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation method and thematic explanation. Accordingly, the results revealed that learners had low SE level (mean = 2.43) and among the subcategories, their SE was highest in reading (mean = 2.66) and lowest in writing (mean = 2.10) skills. Furthermore, participants reported a moderate level of LLS use (M = 2.61). Among the six subcategories of strategies, social strategies were the most frequently used (M = 2.85), whereas affective strategies were the least frequently employed (M = 2.51). Moreover, a statistically significant positive relationship was found between overall SE beliefs and the use of LLSs ($r = .69$, $p < .01$), suggesting that greater use of LLS is associated with stronger SE belief, and vice versa.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The cognitivist field of study in educational psychology brought about a significant shift in language learning and teaching, placing greater attention on learners and the process of learning rather than on teachers and instructional methods (Reiser, 2024). This change shows that most studies in the EFL learning context are from the learner's perspective. It made invaluable effort to make language learners independent and autonomous so as to manage language learning by themselves (Namaziandost et al., 2024). Related to this, researchers have identified some individual learner variables that play a significant role in shaping the learning process and influencing students' success; the more focused ones among these constructs are self-efficacy beliefs and the uses of learning strategies (Xu et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025; Panjie & Velarde, 2025).

According to Bandura (1986, as cited in Moussa, 2023), self-efficacy refers to beliefs of people on their ability to perform particular tasks required to achieve specific goals. It plays a vital role in educational contexts by predicting learners' performance even better than their actual abilities or aptitudes. In connection with this, Meng & Zhang

(2023) explain that the difficulties of students to perform activities successfully are not only because of their inability to perform but also it is because of their inability to believe that they can perform it successfully. That is, people having no self-assurance on their capability belief are fearful; they fail to do activities by themselves. On the other hand, individuals having strong SE beliefs tend to confront obstacles with confidence and determination, interpreting demanding situations as challenges to be resolved rather than threats to be equivocated (Meng & Zhang, 2023; Li & Wang, 2024). Hence, SE constitutes an indispensable element of the learning process and serves as a reliable predictor of students' success. (Xu & Xu, 2025).

Many researchers have explored how much SE influences the process of language learning (Wang et al., 2014), as well as how much learners differ in their levels of SE beliefs (Cancino et al., 2022; Magyar et al. 2022). For instance, Cancino et al.(2022) conducted a study on SE) and LLS use among EFL students in Chilean classrooms. The findings revealed that students demonstrated higher levels of self-efficacy in receptive skills (reading and listening) but lower levels in productive skills (speaking and writing). Similarly, Magyar et al. (2022) found that EFL students use receptive skills more frequently than productive skills and these skills play a decisive role in communication and competency development. According to these authors, students are confident in these skills as these skills require learners only to understand messages rather than to generate language by themselves.

In the same way, language-learning strategies have accepted great attention to the development of students' language competence, for they are directly related to learner autonomy or self-directed (Akmalovna & Ilyashkanovna, 2023). LLSs are emotional and intellectual activities that students perform intentionally and unintentionally in order to monitor the process of their learning (Abuzaid & Griffiths, 2024). They are also defined as particular thoughts or behaviors through which everybody can learn, comprehend or retain new information (Thékes, 2017). As to Domínguez & Juanías (2024), they contribute to the improvement of language systems, which the learner constructs, and they bring a direct change on their learning.

Scholars have categorized LLSs into different groups. Most notably, Halali et al. (2022) categorized them into three primary groups according to their contribution to language learning: direct strategies (cognitive), indirect strategies (metacognitive), and communicative/social strategies. These learning techniques emphasize how learners process, regulate, and apply knowledge to develop their language proficiency. Moreover, Rao (2016) proposed a slightly different classification of these strategies, categorizing them into cognitive, social, study, and coping strategies, whereas Cohen (2014) categorized them based on language skills such as: listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary and translation. As outlined by Oxford (1990), moreover, approaches to mastering a new language may be organized into two overarching clusters: The direct cluster which, memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies involves active engagement in learning, requiring learners to directly process and manipulate linguistic input through deliberate mental effort. However, as these strategies differ in their functions and processing demands, Oxford further characterized the indirect category (metacognitive, affective, and social techniques) as operating without requiring the learner's instant production or direct application of the target language. Instead, they facilitate or support the learning process. This diversity of classifications indicates a lack of consensus regarding the taxonomy of LLSs. Nevertheless, the researchers of this paper adopted Oxford's (1990) taxonomy because it is comprehensive, easy to operationalize, and widely validated across educational and cultural contexts. Its continued relevance has contributed to its enduring influence in LLS research (Griffiths, 2020).

A number of studies have investigated the extent to which learners use LLSs at different contexts (Gahungu, 2007; Santihastuti & Wahjuningsih, 2019; Abraha & Teka, 2017). According to these authors, English language learners are moderate users of LLSs. However, in the use of learning strategy subcategories, they portrayed different findings. For instance, Abraha & Teka (2017) conducted a study on SE beliefs, LLS uses and academic achievement of EFL students at Bahir Dar University and the results revealed that cognitive strategies were most frequently used by EFL students, while social strategies were used with least frequency. On the other hand, Santihastuti & Wahjuningsih's (2019) conducted a study on learning strategies used by EFL students in learning English, and reported that learners of EFL used metacognitive and memory strategies with the high and low frequencies respectively.

Furthermore, most of the research findings in the foreign language context have indicated that the correlation between SE and LLS was positive and substantial. That is to say, learners having strong SE in performing learning activities are also more frequent users of LLSs compared to those who are less efficacious (Abraha & Teka, 2017; Montaña-González & Cancino, 2020; Shirzad et al., 2022; Rusmawaty & Asih, 2023). However, Bonyadi et al.,

(2012) reported no significant relationship between these two variables across gender groups. They attributed this outcome to participants' lack of formal training in LLSs that led them depend primarily on spontaneous and unreflective learning practices. However, the non-significant relationship between these variables may be attributed to several factors, including the dependence on self-report data, the relatively small sample size, environmental and contextual influences, and learners' limited awareness on how to develop their self-efficacy beliefs and effectively employ language learning strategies.

Within the Ethiopian context, research investigating university students' use of LLS and their SE belief remains limited. Most of the studies have focused on selected subcategories, treated the constructs as single dimensions, and investigated them in relation to other variables in different contexts. For instance, Dawit (2008) explored the relationships among sources of SE, students' SE beliefs, and their performance in reading and writing skills. However, the study did not address SE in speaking and listening skills, nor did it examine how students' SE relates to their use of LLS. Likewise, Abraha & Teka (2017) investigated EFL students' LLS use and SE in relation to language achievement. Nevertheless, they treated SE as a single construct and did not examine its specific subcategories or their relationships with students' LLS use, either as a single construct or across its individual subcategories. Despite the importance of these constructs to language learning, EFL learners' levels of SE beliefs and LLS use, particularly across their specific subcategories, and the relationships between them remain largely unexplored in the Ethiopian context. To address this gap, therefore, the present study examined the levels of SE beliefs, the frequency of LLS use and the relationship between them the two constructs as overall and respective subcategories among first-year undergraduate EFL learners.

Thus, the objectives of this study are:

- To assess the SE beliefs of EFL learners at Burie Campus, Debre Markos University
- To investigate the nature and frequency of the EFL learners' LLS use at Burie Campus
- To investigate the relationships between SE beliefs and LLS use among EFL learners.
- To examine the views of EFL learners with different levels of SE and LLS use.

1.2. Conceptual framework of the study

The present study is grounded in the cognitive theory of learning, which posits that learning is shaped by how learners process information, regulate their thinking, and employ strategies to solve problems (Zhang, 2024). According to this theory, SE belief and LLS use are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing, contributing to the improvement of learners' English language proficiency (Shen, 2025). However, although language achievement is an important variable in language learning research, it was beyond the scope of the present study, for previous research has extensively established that an increase in learners' SE belief and LLS use are associated with the enhancement in their language proficiency. Based on the literature review, therefore, the researchers designed the following diagrammatic representation as the research framework of this study.

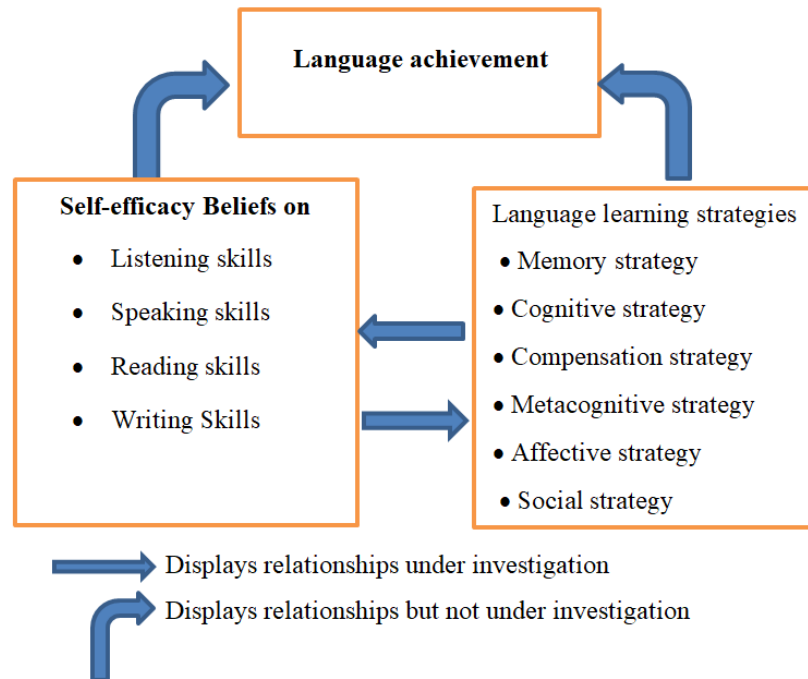


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the study.

2. Methodology

2.1. The research design

The present study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design. This design involved collecting and analyzing quantitative data first, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data to further explain the quantitative findings. To address the first two objectives, a descriptive survey method was employed. to determine students' levels of self-efficacy (SE) beliefs and their use of language learning strategies (LLSs), based on their self-reported responses to the questionnaire.

To address the third objective, the same quantitative dataset was analyzed using a correlational method. The correlational analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between students' self-efficacy beliefs and their use of language learning strategies. Finally, to address the fourth objective, qualitative data obtained through interviews were analyzed thematically. The qualitative findings were used to provide further explanation and interpretation of the quantitative results, thereby complementing the findings obtained from the questionnaire data.

Thus, the study followed a sequential process in which quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data collection and thematic analysis, consistent with the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design.

2.2. Population and Sampling Procedure

The population of the present study consisted of 376 first-year undergraduate students at Debre Markos University, Burie Campus. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula: $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$ where n represents the required sample size, N represents the total population size, and e represents the margin of error, which was set at 0.05 (5%). Accordingly, the required sample size was calculated as follows: $n = 376 / [1 + 376 (0.05)^2] \approx 194$. Thus, 194 students were initially selected to participate in the study. A systematic random sampling technique was employed to select the participants. First, the sampling interval (K) was determined by dividing the total population by the required sample size: $K = N/n = 376/194 \approx 2$. Therefore, every second student in the

sampling frame was selected. To determine the starting point, a simple lottery method was used, and number 1 was randomly selected as the starting point. Consequently, students occupying the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, and subsequent odd-numbered positions in the sampling frame were selected until the required sample size was reached. Of the 194 questionnaires distributed, 10 were not returned. Therefore, 184 participants were included in the final quantitative analysis, representing the valid responses obtained from the selected sample.

In addition, five interviewees were selected purposively from among the students who had completed the questionnaire. In accordance to saturation theory, a relatively small number of interviewees was considered appropriate in the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The interviews were intended to provide an in-depth explanations of the quantitative findings. Moreover, in the principle of saturation, especially in a homogeneous sample, interviews were conducted until they were no longer expected to yield substantially new insights relevant to the research questions. On this basis, five participants were selected for the qualitative phase of this study.

2.3. Data Gathering Instruments

To obtain valuable information from the respondents, researchers used two different questionnaires; the English Language SE Questionnaire (ESEQ), and Inventory of Strategy for Learning a Language (SILL) as data-gathering tools. Besides, they used interviews to corroborate the findings obtained from the quantitative data.

A. English Language Self-efficacy Questionnaire (ESEQ)

The researchers adapted 32 questionnaire items that were used in the study by Wang et al.(2014). In addition to modifying the original items, the researchers developed eight new items, two for each language skill, thereby increasing the total number of items in this study to 40. They were items number 10, 17, 18, 20, 28, 30, 36, and 40. These new items were added to provide additional valuable information for the study. Before being employed in the study, the newly developed items were assessed for validity and reliability using the same procedures applied to the original items. Specifically, the validity of these items was evaluated by experts and subsequently improved based on their feedback, while their reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81.

Furthermore, the researchers revised the terminologies of the original questionnaire and reduced the response scale from a seven-point to five-point Likert scale. These modifications were made to enhance participants' understanding of the items and enable them to provide more relevant and accurate responses.

B. Strategy Inventory for Learning a Language (SILL)

The SILL is an instrument that determines LLSs to a great degree. It was designed by Oxford & Burry-Stock (1995), to assess the frequency with which students at the 'Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California,' employed various language learning strategies. This instrument has been revised and adapted for use in different contexts since then to ensure its relevance and applicability to diverse groups of language learners (Oxford, 2016).

Two separate versions of the SILL were developed. The initial version (SILL 5.1) was consisted of eighty items, assigned for second language learners of English of which English is their first language. The other version was (SILL 7.0) that contained fifty items, prepared to EFL learners who are speaking other native languages. SILL is widely recognized as the only strategy of language learning tool whose dependability and authenticity have been thoroughly examined in different directions (Oxford, 2016). Accordingly, researchers in this study used the second version (SILL 7.0) as the participants were EFL learners. They also developed and added ten new items to the LLS subcategories, increasing the total number of items from 50 to 60. The newly added items were numbers 10, 25, 26, 33, 43, 44, 51, 52, 59, and 60. These items were added to provide additional valuable information for the study. The validity and reliability of the new items were assessed using the same procedures applied to the original items, consequently, their validity was improved based on feedback from the experts, while their reliability was found to be 0.84.

C. Interview

A semi-structured interview was the third instrument that sought to get general information about EFL students' trust about their capability of performing activities and their experiences of using strategies in English language learning. Researchers selected five students among one hundred eighty four participants who participated in

responding the questionnaires. Profile 1 comprised of students who exhibited high levels of LLS use and SE belief, whereas the second Profile (P2) included participants who obtained low to moderate scores on these constructs. Two of the five interviewees who scored higher ($3.5 \leq M \leq 5.0$) in the two questionnaires and who took part in the interview were assigned under Profile 1. The other three participants whose mean scores for the two questionnaires portrayed less than 3.5 belonged to Profile 2. Since the variables examined in this study were beliefs and strategies, the mean score cut-points developed by Oxford and Stock (1995) were adopted. These cut-points were preferred to alternative classifications because they were specifically designed to assess learners' beliefs and strategy use. Accordingly, the mean scores were interpreted as: 1.00–2.49 = Low, 2.50–3.49 = Moderate, and 3.50–5.00 = High.

The interview items were preplanned but unrestricted questions, which address the responses that each participant gave in the questionnaires. The interview questions were not only to investigate the participants' overall understanding related to the use of learning techniques and their own confidence in performing activities but also they focus on specific responses given by interviewees, and provide different reasons for their answers.

2.4. Validity and reliability of the research tools

The validity of the data collection instruments was evaluated by a Psychology lecturer and two Ph.D. candidates in TEFL at Debre Markos University, Burie Campus. Based on the constructive feedback provided by these experts, the researchers revised some items and removed others to improve the clarity and relevance of the instruments. In addition, since the items were designed to measure the same construct, their internal consistency (reliability) was assessed using Cronbach's alpha in SPSS version 20. Cronbach's alpha value is interpreted as: $> .90$ = excellent, $.80-.89$ = good, $.70-.79$ = acceptable, $.60-.69$ = questionable, $.50-.59$ = poor, and $< .50$ = unacceptable. Based on these criteria, the reliability coefficients of ESEQ and SILL were 0.79 and 0.83, respectively. These findings indicate that the ESEQ demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, while the SILL demonstrated good internal consistency, confirming that both instruments have an acceptable level of reliability for use in the study.

2.5. Data interpretation Techniques

This study aims to examine students' levels of SE beliefs, their uses of LLSs and the relationship between these two concepts. The data obtained from the ESEQ and the ISLL were analyzed descriptively. After the average SE value for all and individual language skills (SE sub categories) were calculated, the final outcomes were organized into levels using the rating scale for beliefs and strategies developed by Oxford & Burry-Stock (1995). Besides, researchers have examined the correlation of students' SE belief with their LLS use. To analyze the correlation first they checked normality of the variables using the Shapiro–Wilk method. The results indicated that the significance value for SE was 0.792, while that of LLS use was 0.742. Since both p-values were greater than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis of normality was not rejected. Therefore, both variables were considered to be normally distributed, and the relationship between them was subsequently analyzed using the Pearson product–moment correlation coefficient. Finally, the qualitative data gained through interviews was analyzed thematically.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

An official letter of cooperation was obtained from the Common Course Department of Debre Markos University, Burie Campus, requesting participants to provide the necessary information for this study. All participants provided informed consent before data collection began. To maintain confidentiality, the data were closed and stored securely. Moreover, participants took part voluntarily and were made aware of their right to withdraw at any time.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Self-efficacy levels of EFL learners

To calculate mean scores, frequencies for each subcategory, average value of overall SE and to determine learners' SE belief levels, participants' responses to the ESEQ were analyzed using descriptive statistics, as indicated in the following table. Table 1 displays frequency of students' SE belief levels arranged in descending order. The mean value for overall SE and across the four language skills fell within the low-to- medium range (1.00–3.49). Thus, participants' overall SE mean was 2.43, with a standard deviation of 0.41. The frequency distribution has indicated that 40.7% participants were at medium level of SE, 17.9 % at high level and 41.3% at low level of SE. This finding shows that participants' overall SE belief was at low level, indicating that they did not perform activities confidently while learning English language. It contrasts with Genc et al.'s (2016) research finding which demonstrated that

Turkish EFL undergraduate students SE level was medium, and Shi (2018a) found that learners' SE belief in learning English was strong. Such discrepancy on the level of SE beliefs may be due to contextual differences.

Table 1. Basic Statistical Analysis of EFL Learners' SE beliefs for each Language Skills (N = 184).

SE for the Language Skills	Mean Score (M)	Standard Deviation	Level	Frequency for Students' SE Level			
				Low N (%)	Medium N (%)	High N (%)	Rank
Reading Skills	2.66	.74	Medium	52(28.3%)	92(50%)	40(21.7%)	1
Listening Skills	2.53	1.4	Medium	63(34.2%)	87(47.3%)	34 (18.5%)	2
Speaking Skills	2.45	.65	Low	90(49%)	68(36.9%)	26(14.1%)	3
Writing Skills	2.1	1.31	Low	87(47.3%)	71(38.6%)	26(14.1%)	4
Overall SE	2.43	.41	Low	76(41.3%)	75(40.8%)	33(17.9%)	—

Note: Low = $1.00 \leq M \leq 2.49$, Medium = $2.50 \leq M \leq 3.49$, High = $3.50 \leq M \leq 5.00$

Oxford & Burry-Stock's (1995) mean score range of responses

As shown in Table 1 above, participants reported comparatively the highest self-efficacy belief in reading skills ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.74$). Regarding frequency distribution, half of the respondents (50%) exhibited a medium level. 21.7% of them high level and 28.3% low level of SE belief. In addition, participants demonstrated a relatively high level of SE in listening skills, which ranked second among SE for the sub-skills. With a mean score of 2.53, about 47.3% of participants have reported that they were at medium level of SE, while 34.2% were at low level and 18.5% at high level of SE in listening. This suggests that although participants were relatively more efficacious in listening skills, a considerable proportion still experienced limited confidence in their listening ability.

Learners were also efficacious at third level in speaking skills ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.65$). Among participants, 36.9% were at moderate level, 14.1% of them at high level, and 49% demonstrated a low level of SE in speaking. Moreover, participants' SE belief for writing skills was the lowest, with a mean of 2.1 and $SD = 1.31$. Among them 14.1% of Participants had high level, 38.6% medium level and 47.3 % low level of SE in this skill. Generally, the present study reported that students had low SE belief in learning English language. As a result, they are required to work hard to be efficacious, for research suggests that students with low SE belief have less likely to engage in language tasks so that they cannot manage learning difficulties effectively (Gahungu, 2007).

Although overall SE beliefs in this study was low, participants demonstrated that participants had stronger beliefs in receptive skills than in productive skills, Similar to previous studies (Cancino et al., 2022; Magyar et al., 2022).

3.2. The use of learning strategies in EFL learning context

Researchers calculated average frequencies of participants' overall and subcategory uses of LLSs using statistical descriptions to determine the values of their responses to the SILL questionnaire as shown below.

Table 2. Statistical Description showing EFL Learners use of LLSs (N = 184).

Language- Learning Strategies	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Level	Ranking	Usage Levels		
					Low n(%)	Medium n (%)	High n(%)
Social strategy	2.85	0.34	Medium	1	34(18.5%)	90(48.9%)	60(32.6%)
Cognitive strategy	2.75	.88	Medium	2	26(14.1)	96(52.2%)	62(33.7%)
Compensation strategy	2.74	.89	Medium	3	50(27.2)	102(55.5%)	32(17.3%)
Memory strategy	2.68	.82	Medium	4	38(20.6%)	98(53.3%)	48 (26.1%)
Metacognitive strategy	2.58	.92	Medium	5	34 (18.5 %)	118 (64.1%)	32(17.4%)
Affective strategy	2.51	.93	low	6	108 (58.7%)	40(21.7%)	36(19.6%)
Overall use of LLSs	2.61	.33	Medium		33(17.9%)	112(60.9%)	39(21.2%)

Note: Low = $1.00 \leq M \leq 2.49$, Medium = $2.50 \leq M \leq 3.49$, High = $3.50 \leq M \leq 5.00$

Oxford & Burry-Stock's (1995) mean score range of responses

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of participants' LLS uses, arranged in descending order of the mean and frequency of responses. Based on Oxford and Burry-Stock's (1995) criterion, the average values for overall LLS use and all subcategories fell within the moderate range (2.5–3.49). This depicts that participants used all subcategories

of learning strategies and the strategy as a whole at moderate frequency. Such a finding is also consistent with some previous research findings, which reported the moderate use of LLSs by EFL learners (Gahungu, 2007; Santihastuti & Wahjuningsih, 2019; Abraha & Teka, 2017). However, the mean scores of LLS use for overall or subcategories are closer to low range. It denotes that participants were not using LLSs adequately in learning English language. Furthermore, Table 2 indicates that with a mean of 2.85 (SD= 0.34), social learning strategies were the most frequently used compared to the remaining subcategories. Among respondents, 32.6% were high users while 48.9% of them were moderate users, and 18.5% low users of social strategies. This suggests that students tend to learn more when they interact with their classmates than when they study on their own. It may be because of the course content (communicative English language skills course) given to Ethiopian university first year students, which has strong orientation to interaction and communication among students. This is also consistent with the Montaña-González & Cancino's (2020) findings which revealed that social strategy is the most commonly employed by EFL students at Chilean university. By contrast, there are other research findings which showed another strategy to be most frequently used. According to Abraha & Teka's (2017) study, for example, cognitive strategy was most frequently used by EFL students. Similarly, Santihastuti & Wahjuningsih (2019) identified metacognitive strategy as the most prevalent among EFL students.

In addition, Table 2 shows that cognitive strategies ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.88$) ranked second in the mean frequency. In the present research, 35.7% of participants were high users, 52.2% moderate users, and 14.1% low users of cognitive strategy. Next to cognitive strategy, participants used compensation strategy frequently ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.89$). Its usage falls in medium range, of which 17.3% participants were high users, 55.5% moderate users and 27.2% of them were low users of compensation strategy. In connection, memory strategy ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.82$) was the fourth frequently used cluster of learning strategies. Similar to other learning strategies, its use fell within medium range, of which 26.1% respondents were high users, 53.3% moderate users and 20.6% of them were low users. Next to memory strategy, participants used metacognitive strategy ($M=2.58$, $SD= 0.92$) frequently. Of which 17.4% were high users, 64.1% moderate users and 18.5% low users of it. The least frequently used category in this study was affective strategy ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.93$). Among the participants, 19.6% were high users, 21.7% medium users and 58.7% of them were low users of this strategy. The least use of affective strategy as Oxford (1990) suggests may be because students often fail to use techniques to manage their emotions, attitudes, motivation, and anxiety while learning English.

3.3. Relationships between EFL learners' SE belief and their LLS use

To examine the relationships between students' SE belief and LLS use as a whole or among each subcategory, participants' perceptions to 'ESEQ' and 'SILL' were statistically computed with the help of Pearson Product moment-correlation and the end values are shown in Table 3.

The correlation between participants' overall SE belief and the composite score of LLS use, as shown in Table 3 table, was strong, positive and statistically significant ($r = .69$, $p < .01$). That is, when participants are more efficacious in their command of English, they are also better users of learning strategies and vice versa compared to their counterparts who have low SE beliefs (Abraha & Teka, 2017; Shi, 2018a ; Montaña-González & Cancino, 2020; Panjie & Velarde, 2025). However, This contrasts with Bonyadi et al.'s (2012) research finding which showed that there was no association of SE to LLS use. A possible reason for such inconsistency might be because; participants in this research had less information about the use of LLSs and responded subconsciously, or it might be that of other contextual factors that affected learners' perceptions.

Table 3 further shows the relationships of students' overall SE belief to LLS use subcategories. The results show that SE as a whole has positive and statistically significant relationship at $p < .01$ with cognitive ($r = .79$), memory ($r = .62$), compensation ($r = .66$), and metacognitive ($r = .56$) learning strategies.

As shown in Table 3, overall self-efficacy demonstrated almost very strong relationship with cognitive strategies, strong relationship with memory and compensation strategies including overall LLS composite score ($r = .69$, $p < .01$). That is, participants who have higher SE belief often use cognitive strategies more effectively, and this relationship is strong. However, it does not by itself prove that higher self-efficacy causes better cognitive strategy use or vice versa.

Table 3. Correlation (r) of EFL learners' SE belief with their use of LLS (N=184).

Language Learning Strategies	Overall language skills self-efficacy	Listening Skills Self-Efficacy	Speaking Skills Self-Efficacy	Reading Skills Self-Efficacy	Writing Skills Self-Efficacy
Overall Strategy (r)	.690**	.649**	.521**	.564**	.478**
Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
Number (N)	184	184	184	184	184
Memory Strategy (r)	.615**	.830**	.234	.472**	.417**
Significance (2-tailed)	.001	.001	.118	.001	.004
Number (N)	184	184	184	184	184
Cognitive Strategy (r)	.797**	.722**	.742**	.657**	.487**
Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
Number (N)	184	184	184	184	184
Compens. Strategy (r)	.658**	.586**	.442**	.564**	.493**
Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.002	.000	.000
Number (N)	184	184	184	184	184
Meta cognitive Str. (r)	.561**	.475**	.331*	.497**	.482**
Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.024	.002	.001
Number (N)	184	184	184	184	184
Affective Strategy (r)	.115	.054	.165	.045	.096
Significance (2-tailed)	.449	.722	.174	.765	.529
Number (N)	184	184	184	184	184
Social Strategy (r)	.117	.023	.242	.146	.019
Significance (2-tailed)	.437	.881	.105	.334	.900
Number (N)	184	184	184	184	184

Note: * $P < .05$ (two-tailed)

** $P < .01$ (two-tailed)

r = Pearson correlation coefficient.

Interpretation of r values: 0.00–0.19 = very weak; 0.20–0.39 = weak; 0.40–0.59 = moderate; 0.60–0.79 = strong; 0.80–1.00 = very strong.

Source: Krehbiel (2004) *rule-of-thumb*

The relationship of overall SE and metacognitive strategy ($r = .56$, $p < .01$) was also found to be moderate. However, it was not significantly related to the use of affective and social learning strategies ($p > .05$). The non-significant relationship suggests that SE may not necessarily be associated with learners' use of affective or social strategies. In other words, learners with high self-efficacy do not necessarily use these strategies extensively, while learners with lower self-efficacy may still frequently employ these strategies in their language learning. The reasons for such finding may include, the reliance on self-report data, the relatively small sample size, environmental and contextual factor influences, and learners' limited awareness or understanding of how to effectively employ affective and social strategies in language learning. Thus, the use of these strategies may be influenced by factors other than learners' beliefs about their own capabilities.

Similarly, the relationship of each of the SE belief subcategories with overall LLS use composite score were statistically significant. Among the subcategories, SE for listening skills ($r = .65$, $p < .01$) had strong relationship with the students' use of overall LLSs while the students' SE beliefs in reading ($r = .56$), speaking ($r = .52$), and writing ($r = .48$) skills were moderately related to overall LLS use. This indicates that efficacious learners in listening skills use LLSs more effectively when learning English. In other words, students who were more confident in listening skills employ LLSs when learning English.

In addition, participants' SE belief for listening skills showed very strong, positive and statistically significant relationship with four learning strategies; memory ($r = .83$), cognitive ($r = .72$), compensation ($r = .59$) and metacognitive ($r = .48$) strategies. Among these strategy categories, SE for listening skills showed the strongest relationship with memory strategies and the weakest relationship with metacognitive strategies. However, it did not have significant relationship with affective ($r = .05$) and social ($r = .02$) strategies. Similarly, participants' SE for

speaking skills showed positive and statistically significant relationship with cognitive ($r = .74$), compensation ($r = .44$), and metacognitive ($r = .33$) strategies. Nevertheless, it was not significantly related to memory ($r = .23$), affective ($r = .17$) and social ($r = .24$) strategies. Likewise, the association of EFL learners' SE for reading skills and cognitive learning strategies ($r = .66$, $p < .01$) was strong, positively and statistically significant. It also demonstrated moderate, positive, and significant relationships with compensation ($r = .56$), memory ($r = .47$) and metacognitive ($r = .50$) strategies. However, as with SE for listening and speaking skills, SE for reading skills had no significant relationship with affective ($r = .05$) and social ($r = .15$) strategies. Moreover, students' SE for writing skills demonstrated moderate, positive, and significant relationships with memory ($r = .42$), cognitive ($r = .49$), compensation ($r = .49$) and metacognitive ($r = .48$) strategies. Similar to the other language skills, SE for writing skills did not have significant relationship with affective ($r = .10$) and social ($r = .02$) learning strategies. This means that mean, students who had higher writing self-efficacy did not necessarily use social or affective strategies more frequently, and students with lower writing self-efficacy did not necessarily use them less frequently.

3.4. EFL learners' views on the use of LLSs and SE beliefs

Five interviewees were chosen at random from those who completed the questionnaires for the interview. Participants 1 and 2 were parts of Profile 1 (P1), which portrays participants' most frequent use of LLSs and strongest level of SE beliefs. The remaining three interviewees were grouped under Profile 2(P2), and it was characterized by low and medium levels of the use LLS and beliefs of SE. To answer the research questions comprehensively, the interview presents and recapitulates the key ideas that are observed from the interviews: (a) language learning difficulties, (b) use of strategies for learning, and (c) students' beliefs in their own capabilities

Moreover, participants were interviewed to express their perspectives on challenges they face in learning English. They reflected various perceptions as each of them emphasized differently related to the issue. According to the interviewees, the major challenges were: Lack of enough knowledge of vocabulary, inability to comprehend reading or listening texts and unable to communicate through speaking and writing.

According to the participants, the problems in EFL learning are attributed to extrinsic factors, like having limited English classes, demotivating culture to communicate in non-classroom settings and the lack of opportunities to interact with native English speakers. In this respect, for example, participant 3 stated:

"I think one difficulty is that the time allocated for learning English is very limited. We practice the language skills only in the classroom, and we do not have opportunities to practice English outside the class. I believe that I am weak English learner because I devote only a few hours to learning English; I need to dedicate more time to it."

They also attributed their difficulties to having no exposure to practice English modeling native English speakers even through videos and media. Participant 4 provided an example of this:

"I do not have experience of communicating with English native speakers, watching videos or listening to media broadcasts in English. I practice listening and speaking in English only with my classmates when we do English language activities in the classroom. I think I need to watch English videos, listen to news broadcast in English, and practice the language skills by taking them as role models."

Similarly, participants related their difficulties of learning English to the demotivating culture of the society. Participant 5, who stated the following can be taken as an example for this:

"I do not communicate in English with people outside the classroom because English is not spoken in our community. Even When I want to speak in English with a person whom I know, I feel afraid of people because they may think that I am showing off. In my community, speaking English is considered something that only educated people do, and it is not accepted when used everywhere."

The above responses reveal that the interviewees did not take responsibility for their own learning and instead attributed their poor English language performance to external factors. This problem has also been reflected in the questionnaire when participants respond to the question 'Can you discuss some topics in English with people outside the classroom in which all of you are interested?' Their response was on average under 'rarely do it. On the other

hand, the interviewee from profile 1 (P1) remarked that their class was a place where they learn English language. Participant 1 declared:

“Once I inquired my teacher saying that I wanted to learn how to develop my writing skills, as it was difficult for me. Consequently, the teacher instructed me to choose a topic I knew well and write about it freely, and then to revise the first draft by correcting the grammar and improving the content, which made the activity engaging.”

This Participant was able to take responsibility for his own learning so that he solved his problems by asking his teacher about how to develop his writing skills in English language learning

With regard to LLS use, the interviewees from profile two (P2) reported that they used very limited LLSs. For instance, related to social strategies in learning English Participant 3 shared her views as:

“I use very limited strategies [...] for example, I practice speaking and listening with my peers in the classroom, and it has helped me to some extent. But I do this only sometimes.”

The strategy used by participant 3 is also reflected in their response to the questionnaire. Their report showed that participants involved in this study are better users of social strategies compared to other strategies. This may be because of the English language course (Communicative English language skill) given to them. The activity questions in this course invite students to interact with each other.

On the other hand, participants from profile 1 (P1) used different LLSs with more frequency. For example, Participant 2 stated,

“I use strategies that have helped me improve my English; for instance, taking notes, translating, summarizing, creating mental images, using gesture interacting with peers and asking questions.”

This comment aligns with Oxford's (1990) intention who stated that students who use varieties of LLSs, are more likely to supervise their learning and to develop their learning ability.

Regarding learners' SE beliefs, almost all participants agreed on that productive skills were the most difficult tasks to achieve. For example, from the participants identified as P1, participant 2 illustrated the following:

“I think we should be motivated on practicing the English-speaking and writing skills because many of my classmates speak very badly and fail to write their ideas properly in English. More effort is required to practice and develop these skills [...] maybe the students need to take control of their learning.”

This is to mean, interviewee 2 highlighted the absence of a strategic approach, which may contribute to his classmates continued difficulties of speaking and writing in English.

In relation to the factors that help students enhance their SE, the interviewees identified as Profile 2, considered themselves unproductive learners and believed that enhancing their use of learning strategies would improve their self-efficacy. They explained that they could improve their self-efficacy by watching English TV shows (a cognitive strategy), by interacting with peers (social strategy) and by writing a diary in English (affective strategy). Therefore to help students enhance their language proficiency therefore, teachers can select short, level-appropriate English-language clips and provide specific tasks, such as identifying key vocabulary, summarizing the content, or answering comprehension questions. They can also organize pair and small-group activities, including role-plays, information-gap tasks, and peer discussions, to provide opportunities for meaningful interaction and collaborative learning. In addition, teachers can encourage students to maintain short English learning diaries in which they reflect on their learning experiences, challenges, emotions, and progress. They can also provide encouraging and specific feedback to help students recognize their achievements, reflect on their progress, and gradually strengthen their self-efficacy.

To summarize, the results of qualitative data showed that participants of Profile 1 viewed themselves as they are high users of LLS and are at strong level of SE belief. As a result, they appeared to be more capable of dealing with

learning difficulties compared to participants of P2. Thus, the interviewee responses (qualitative data) have also reflected that there is a match with the quantitative data findings.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The major outcomes of this study revealed that participants perceived themselves as they are at low level of SE, though they regarded themselves as more self-efficacious on receptive skills than on productive skills. It implies that participants mostly fail to be engaged in language activities and they were unable to handle challenges they face when learning English. Therefore, teachers as educational experts should take responsibility for enhancing students' SE beliefs by integrating self-efficacy instructions into their lessons or through ongoing evaluation, supportive framework and positive reinforcement (Moussa, 2023)

In addition, participants were proved to be moderate users of language learning strategies, though their usage is closer to the low range and varied from strategy to strategy. This suggests that participants have limitations in the use of LLSs during English language learning. Despite these limitations, students in this study used social strategies most frequently whereas they employed affective strategies with the least frequency. However, as each strategy has its own contribution to learning, integrating all types of strategy instructions into lessons and enhancing students' positive emotions, motivations and attitudes towards learning English is recommended (Shi, 2018a). With regard to EFL teachers, curriculum designers and institutional policymakers in Ethiopia should give due attention to developing mechanisms in the teaching of SE beliefs and LLSs. For example, teachers can explicitly teach students different language learning strategies, begin with manageable language tasks and gradually increase their difficulty, and provide feedback that emphasizes effort, strategy use, progress, and improvement. They can also encourage students to observe classmates demonstrating effective language learning strategies and discuss how they approach language tasks. In addition, teachers themselves should be trained through programs like professional development on how self-efficacy and strategy use can be addressed to students. Similarly, curriculum designers can make strategy instruction and self-efficacy development explicit curriculum objectives rather than leaving them entirely for individual teachers. This would ensure that opportunities to develop students' strategic competence and confidence are systematically incorporated into language instruction.

Furthermore, a positive and significant link of learners' SE belief to their learning strategy use displays that respondents who had strong SE belief utilized a wide range of LLSs. When the relationship across the subcategories of these two constructs is examined, participants' SE belief as a whole was substantially related to four learning strategy subcategories (cognitive, compensation, memory, and metacognitive), but the relationships were insignificant with social and affective strategies. The strongest relationship was observed between the students' overall SE belief and the use of one of the LLS subcategories; cognitive strategy, while the relationship it had with affective strategies was the weakest. Similarly, participants' overall LLS use showed the strongest relationship with SE for listening skills, while it showed the weakest relationship with writing skills.

The responses from the interviewees also confirmed that participants' confidence in their language skills was very low and their use of LLSs was limited. This was mainly reflected by interviewees of profile 2, who represented most of the participants. They were found to have low or moderate SE belief and were low or moderate users of LLS in the questionnaires.

In light of these findings, the present study has its own contribution to the existing literature as it is useful for understanding SE beliefs and LLS use in English language learning among students. Thus, EFL learners are expected to be aware of their gaps in these areas and take measures for the betterment of their learning. More importantly, the relevant stakeholders are responsible to work diligently in identifying and addressing the challenges resulted from students' low level of SE beliefs and inadequate use of strategies in learning English language.

5. Limitations of the study

Several limitations of the present study should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, results may not provide a complete picture of students' usage of learning strategies or their levels of self-efficacy, as the data were collected mainly through self-administered questionnaires. The reliability and validity of such data depend largely on participants' honesty, willingness, and ability to respond accurately to each item. Future studies could strengthen the findings by incorporating additional data collection methods, such as think-aloud protocols, learner diaries, self-regulated learning measures, and other contemporary research instruments. Second, although correlational analysis

can identify relationships between variables, it does not establish causal links or determine the direction of influence between them. In addition, as the sample was from a restricted geographical area, generalizability of the findings to undergraduate students of other universities may be impossible. Finally, students' use of LLSs and their SE beliefs may be affected by factors such as first language, gender, ethnicity, educational background, culture and learning context. Therefore, future research should examine how these and other demographic variables affect the use of LLSs and the level of SE beliefs among learners from diverse backgrounds.

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