

Types of Self-Regulation Strategies Predicting Iranian EFL Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Research Paper

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Abstract: Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, the current research explored the predictive role of perceived self-regulation strategies in EFL learners' perceptions of their intercultural communicative competence (ICC). In the quantitative phase, the sample involved 300 Iranian EFL learners, who were requested to complete questionnaires on self-regulated strategies and ICC. Multiple regression and correlation analyses were employed for the analysis of quantitative data. In the qualitative phase, from among the 300 participants, 32 were chosen based on purposive sampling. An open-ended questionnaire was electronically completed by 28 participants, and one-on-one semi-structured interview sessions were held with four of them. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The two datasets were imported into MAXQDA (version 2022) for analysis. The qualitative analysis steps introduced by Gao and Zhang (2020) were followed. The results of the multiple regression analysis showed that motivational and sociocultural-interactive strategies were positive significant predictors of ICC. The result of the qualitative phase revealed that all seven self-regulation strategies were similarly mentioned by the participants as predictors of EFL learners' ICC development. The results are deemed fruitful for enhancing the awareness of EFL learners, teachers, teacher educators, materials developers, and other educational stakeholders.

Keywords: EFL Learners, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Mixed-methods Research, Self-regulation Strategies

Introduction

In an era defined by unprecedented globalization, the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries has become a crucial skill, shaping individual success and societal progress alike. For students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this competence, known as intercultural communicative competence (ICC), is essential for academic and professional success as well as for fostering meaningful connections and contributing to a more interconnected world (Estaji & Tabrizi, 2022; Fantini, 2019; Tagliatalata, 2024). ICC refers to the ability to negotiate meaning and manage misunderstandings that arise from cultural differences (Fantini, 2019). Self-regulation strategies, which enable learners to control their own learning processes, play a key role in the acquisition of such competencies. Self-regulation strategies pertain to a process which is dynamic and convoluted, encompassing different techniques used for regulating, hindering, or launching one's performance or position (Bing et al., 2022). Various self-regulation strategies have been identified in the literature: Emotion Regulation (ER) (Heydarnejad et al., 2022), motivational regulation (Schwinger et al., 2007; Steinmayr et al., 2019), metacognition regulation (Nelson, 1996; Wass et al., 2023), cognitive regulation (Yano & Oishi, 2024), meta-affective regulation (D'Mello et al., 2013; Uzuntiryaki-Kondakci & Kirbulut, 2016), meta-sociocultural-interactive regulation (Nasr-Esfahani et al., 2022), and socio-cultural regulation (Raver, 2004).

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Despite the recognized importance of both ICC and self-regulation strategies (Rezaei et al. 2024), there is a notable gap in the research exploring how these strategies predict ICC, especially among Iranian EFL learners, who face challenges in developing ICC, influenced by their cultural and educational context. In this regard, some studies have examined the development of ICC among Iranian EFL learners, emphasizing the importance of cultural awareness, empathy, and intercultural interactions (Saffarian et al., 2015). Despite the insights provided by these studies, the literature remains limited in its exploration of the specific role of self-regulation strategies in predicting the ICC of Iranian EFL learners. Existing studies have predominantly focused on the general benefits of self-regulation in language learning, without analyzing how different self-regulation strategies may differentially impact the development of ICC (Latifi et al., 2014). This gap is particularly concerning, as these strategies are important in the development of language proficiency and the ability to adapt to diverse cultural contexts (Dörnyei, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000). Moreover, learners who can effectively regulate their own learning processes may be better equipped to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for successful intercultural communication (Derakhshan & Taguchi, 2021). Hence, it seems necessary to study the kinds of self-regulation strategies that better predict Iranian EFL learners' ICC and how these strategies do this.

Literature Review

Intercultural Communicative Competence

The significance of ICC has been widely recognized as a fundamental aspect of L2 education (Iseminger et al., 2020). As the world becomes increasingly globalized, the need for individuals to possess strong ICC skills has become critical for personal, professional, and academic success (Ahmadi Safa & Tofghi, 2021; Morady Moghaddam & Tirnaz, 2022). Not being able to speak an L2, even at a basic level, limits one's ability to think and operate in the world solely within one's native system. This prevents individuals from fully experiencing the valuable intercultural aspects that come with being bilingual and competent in intercultural communication (Zhang & Lütge, 2023). ICC has been conceptualized from different theoretical perspectives. Byram's (1997) model, for instance, argued for components such as knowledge and critical cultural awareness.

Building on Byram's work, Deardorff's (2006) process model of ICC emphasizes the dynamic and developmental nature of this competence. This model, which has also been adopted in the present study, views ICC as a process that begins with an individual's requisite attitudes, such as respect, openness, and curiosity, which then lead to the development of cultural knowledge and essential intercultural skills, ultimately culminating in the attainment of both internal and external outcomes. The concept of knowledge is multifaceted and entails cultural self-awareness, the accumulation of culture-specific information, and the cultivation of linguistic capabilities. In contrast, the notion of skills pertains to the capacity to communicate effectively in cross-cultural interaction. Additionally, attitudes play a critical role in the intercultural domain, with positive and accepting dispositions toward alternate cultures and avoidance of ethnocentric tendencies being paramount (Deardorff, 2020). In the present study, the term ICC is defined in accordance with the conceptualization put forth by Deardorff as ICC components specified in this framework are found to be effectively applicable to L2 instruction and learning domains (Kim & Hubbard, 2007).

Self-regulation Strategies

Alongside the development of ICC, self-regulation strategies have been recognized as essential for successful language learning. Self-regulation refers to the self-directed processes and strategies that learners employ to manage their thinking, emotions, and behaviors in the pursuit of their learning goals (Heidarzadi, 2022; Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000). Theoretical framework that this study adopted has identified key components of self-regulation, including strategy use, self-evaluation, self-monitoring, and goal setting (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2022) and cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and contextual aspects of self-regulation (Pintrich, 2000). Moreover, various self-regulation strategies

have been identified: cognitive, meta-affective, ER, sociocultural-interactive, motivational, meta-cognitive, and meta-sociocultural-interactive regulation strategies.

Cognitive regulation pertains to the psychological mechanisms utilized by individuals to regulate internal processes of thought, emotion, and behavior for the purpose of achieving specific objectives (Moradi et al., 2022). ER encompasses two components, namely reappraisal and suppression. Reappraisal is an antecedent-focused strategy, taking place at an early stage, and works before the complete generation of emotion response inclinations. In particular, when reappraisal is employed to down-regulate undesirable emotions, it can effectively decrease the behavioral and experiential elements of undesirable emotions. Conversely, suppression is a response-focused strategy, coming to some extent late in the process of emotion generation, and specifically changes the behavioral side of the emotion response inclinations (Noughabi et al., 2022).

Sociocultural-interactive strategies involve the social and cultural aspects of learning, such as interacting with others, seeking feedback, and adapting to different cultural contexts (Habók & Magyar, 2018; Zimmerman, 2000). Motivational regulation refers to the conscious efforts made to initiate, modify, intensify, or uphold the individual's inclination to commence, persevere, and finalize a given learning task (Wolters, 1999). Meta-cognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and regulating one's own cognitive processes (Schunk, 2008). Meta-affective strategies involve the monitoring and regulation of one's own emotions and affective states during learning and task performance for the formulation of proficient coping mechanisms (Bandura et al., 2003). Individuals who possess a higher level of proficiency in meta-affective regulation exhibit superior coping abilities for stress, aptitude for effective communication, and sustained satisfaction in interpersonal relationships (Habók & Magyar, 2018). Meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies refer to the regulation of one's social interactions and cultural context during learning and task performance (Pintrich, 2000).

This study also adopted the model of Oxford (2011), which proposes different language learning strategies and integrates three essential components of language acquisition, encompassing the cognitive, affective, and sociocultural-interactive strategies. The fundamental premise of these strategies lies in the collaborative and interactive learning approach, which fosters efficient communication and encourages learners to engage in meaningful conversations to acquire knowledge and improve their communication skills.

The Relationship Between Self-Regulation Strategies and ICC

Conceptually, self-regulation strategies and ICC are closely linked. Effective self-regulation can facilitate the development of essential ICC skills, such as the ability to adapt to new cultural contexts, manage intercultural interactions, and critically evaluate one's own cultural biases (Dearnorff, 2006). For instance, the self-regulation skill of goal setting can enable learners to identify and work towards specific intercultural learning objectives, while self-monitoring strategies can help them assess their progress and adjust their approaches accordingly. Furthermore, the self-reflection component of self-regulation aligns closely with the critical cultural awareness aspect of ICC, as it encourages learners to critically examine their own cultural assumptions and develop a deeper understanding of diverse cultural perspectives (Byram, 1997). Additionally, employing various self-regulation strategies, like seeking help from others or managing one's emotions, can contribute to the development of interpersonal skills and cultural sensitivity, which are essential for effective intercultural communication.

Despite the conceptual linkages between self-regulation and ICC, empirical research exploring this relationship in the EFL context remains limited. A few studies have investigated this topic in the Iranian EFL context. Amini et al. (2020), for instance, found that Iranian EFL learners' employment of self-regulation strategies, like planning and self-monitoring, positively predicted their ICC. Similarly, Tabrizi and Saeidi (2015) reported that Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy, a key component of self-regulation, was a significant predictor of their ICC. However, it seems necessary to conduct more analyses on the self-regulation strategies that better predict ICC and what Iranian EFL learners think

about them, which are the two main purposes of this study. These objectives urged the researchers to formulate the following research questions:

Research Question One: Which self-regulation strategies better predict Iranian EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence?

Research Question Two: How do Iranian EFL learners' self-regulation strategies predict their L2 intercultural communicative competence?

Methodology

Design of the Study

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that involved an initial quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase to further explain the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This study involved two phases. The former pertained to gathering and analyzing quantitative data, and the second phase encompassed collecting and analyzing qualitative data. The aim of the latter was to complement the results found in the first phase and to see if the qualitative set of data would confirm the quantitative data of this study.

Participants

For the quantitative phase, 300 Iranian EFL learners (81 males and 219 females) with different self-perceived language proficiencies were selected through convenience sampling. They majored in different fields: Teaching English as a Foreign Language (N = 217), Applied Linguistics (N = 44), English Language and Literature (N = 10), and English Translation (N = 29). They were also at different levels of education, including BA (N = 58), MA (N = 194), and PhD (N = 48) students.

With regard to the qualitative phase, from among the total of 300 participants in the quantitative phase, 32 participants were selected on the basis of their own willingness to cooperate. In this phase, an open-ended questionnaire was completed by 28 EFL learners (12 males and 16 females) with different self-perceived language proficiency levels: intermediate (N = 2), upper-intermediate (N = 6), advanced (N = 12), and fluent (N = 8). They were at different levels of education, including BA (N = 6), MA (N = 14), and PhD (N = 8). Regarding their major, 23 participants were studying TEFL, and five were majoring in English Translation. Also, a one-on-one semi-structured interview session was held with four EFL learners selected through purposive sampling. They included two females with an advanced proficiency level and two males, who had a good command of English. One of the females held a B.A., the other one held a PhD, and the two males were PhD students.

Instruments

The Intercultural Communicative Competence Questionnaire (ICCQ)

The present study used the ICCQ, developed and validated by Mirzaei and Forouzandeh (2013), to assess the ICC level of EFL learners. The ICC construct was proposed using the framework of Deardorff (2006), which was informed by the process of Delphi. The ICCQ comprises 22 items designed to assess learners' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Learners rated the items according to a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5). The evaluated knowledge components encompass elements of cultural self-awareness, culture-specific information, understanding of linguistics, as well as sociolinguistic awareness. The skill items assess participants' proficiency in intercultural communication. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire has shown a value of .71, which signifies a satisfactory reliability estimate for the instrument. Its reliability was re-estimated in the context of this study; the result showed an index of .95 ($\alpha = .95$).

The Self-Regulated Foreign Language Learning Strategy Questionnaire (SRFLLSQ)

The SRFLLSQ (Habók & Magyar, 2018) was used to measure the strategies used by the participants to regulate their foreign language learning. This 34-item questionnaire entails multiple dimensions of the strategy domains based on Oxford's (2011) Strategic SRL Model. These domains encompass the sociocultural-interactive, meta-sociocultural-interactive, meta-affective, cognitive, and metacognitive domains. This five-point Likert scale employs a numerical rating system that ranges from 1, indicating a low-frequency occurrence of the trait being measured (Never or almost never true of me), to 5, signifying a high-frequency occurrence of the trait being measured (Always or almost always true of me). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of .84, .76, .79, .88, and .74 were respectively reported for the components of metacognitive, cognitive, meta-affective, meta-sociocultural-interactive, and sociocultural-interactive (Habók & Magyar, 2018). The reliability index of each of the components and the total scale were estimated in the context of this study, which respectively turned out to be: $\alpha = .91$, $\alpha = .89$, $\alpha = .92$, $\alpha = .73$, and $\alpha = .86$. The reliability index of the total scale was $\alpha = .93$.

Motivational Self-Regulation Questionnaire

The Motivational Self-Regulation Questionnaire developed and validated by Wolters (1999), which was used in this study, comprises 25 items, which are scored in accordance with a Likert-type scale with five points, namely 'never', 'seldom', 'sometimes', 'often', and 'always'. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of components of environmental control ($\alpha = .79$), mastery self-talk ($\alpha = .78$), self-consequating ($\alpha = .70$), performance self-talk ($\alpha = .81$), and interest enhancement ($\alpha = .91$) of this questionnaire were reported by Safdari and Maftoon (2016). Nonetheless, its reliability in the context of the current research was re-estimated through Cronbach's alpha: $\alpha = .84$.

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

The ERQ, developed and validated by Gross and John (2003), encompasses 10 items to measure participants' inclination toward regulating their emotions regarding cognitive reappraisal as well as expressive suppression. Learners are supposed to rate the items on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). According to Gross and John (2003), the items are derived in a rational manner and are widely reliable. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of the reappraisal and suppression factors were reported to be .80 and .73, respectively (Gross & John, 2003). The overall reliability coefficient was re-estimated in the context of the present study to be $\alpha = .73$.

The Open-ended Questionnaire

To collect qualitative data in this research, an open-ended questionnaire was designed based on the research objectives. Accordingly, the researchers developed two items and then asked an expert researcher in applied linguistics to evaluate the language transparency and content appropriateness of the items. The expert suggested minor modifications to the items of the instrument. The finalized open-ended questionnaire items are as follows:

1. From your perspective, to what extent does using self-regulation strategies enhance the development of intercultural communicative competence? And why do you think so?
2. Which self-regulation strategies do you think can enhance EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence? And how does it happen?

Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews were run to further explore the role of self-regulation strategies in ICC as perceived by the participants. The same open-ended questionnaire items presented above were used in the interview sessions.

Data Collection Procedures

To obtain quantitative data, a hyperlink to an electronic survey including all the questionnaires of the study, created in Google Forms, was disseminated to the potential participants. The survey was delivered to them via multiple communication platforms such as Telegram, WhatsApp, email, as well as LinkedIn. After clearly describing the objectives of the study, the participants were requested to sign a consent letter demonstrating their voluntary participation in the research. They were assured in the consent letter of the confidentiality of their data and the anonymity of their responses.

In the qualitative phase, a hyperlink to an electronic survey including the demographic information scale and the researcher-made open-ended questionnaire, created in Google Forms, was disseminated to the potential participants. To facilitate the participants' response to the items and enhance the possibility of more detailed explanations, the questionnaire was developed in the participants' L1 (Persian). They were also asked to answer the items in their L1. For the same reason, the one-on-one semi-structured interview sessions were held in Persian. Each interview session took approximately 20 minutes. The interview sessions were recorded and then transcribed for thematic analysis. Subsequently, the responses to the interview and open-ended items were back-translated into English, and an expert checked and confirmed their accuracy. The participants were informed of the definition of self-regulation and the seven self-regulation strategies and ICC as well as the nature of their participation in this study.

Data Analysis

For the first research question, multiple regression analysis was used. As for the second one, the open-ended questionnaire data were saved in Excel format. The interview sessions were transcribed verbatim in Doc format. The two datasets were then imported into MAXQDA (version 2022) for analysis. Thematic analysis of the data was done both deductively and inductively (Berg, 2001) as the researcher coded the sorts of self-regulation strategies based on the categorization of the seven kinds of self-regulation strategies introduced in this research. The qualitative analysis steps introduced by Gao and Zhang (2020), followed in this study, included, first, reading the data several times and resolving structural ambiguities, incorrect spelling, or grammatical inaccuracies in the data; second, creating open codes from the data; third, grouping the codes which were relevant under axial codes (i.e., subthemes or categories); fourth, putting the axial codes which were relevant under selective codes (i.e., themes); and fifth, writing a complete report of the data analysis process and results. Frequency was counted for all codes to better show how many times they were referenced by the participants. To make sure that the codes were accurate, 20% (133 codes) of them were checked by an external coder outside this study who had sufficient expertise in conducting qualitative data analysis. The second coder recommended the first coder to make minor modifications only to five codes, which resulted in an inter-coder agreement coefficient of 96%.

Results

A standard multiple regression analysis was used to answer the first research question. Before so doing, the main assumptions of multiple regression were checked. The correlation analysis presented in Table 1 shows the correlations between various self-regulation strategies and ICC among Iranian EFL learners. The sample size for this analysis was comprised of 296 participants.

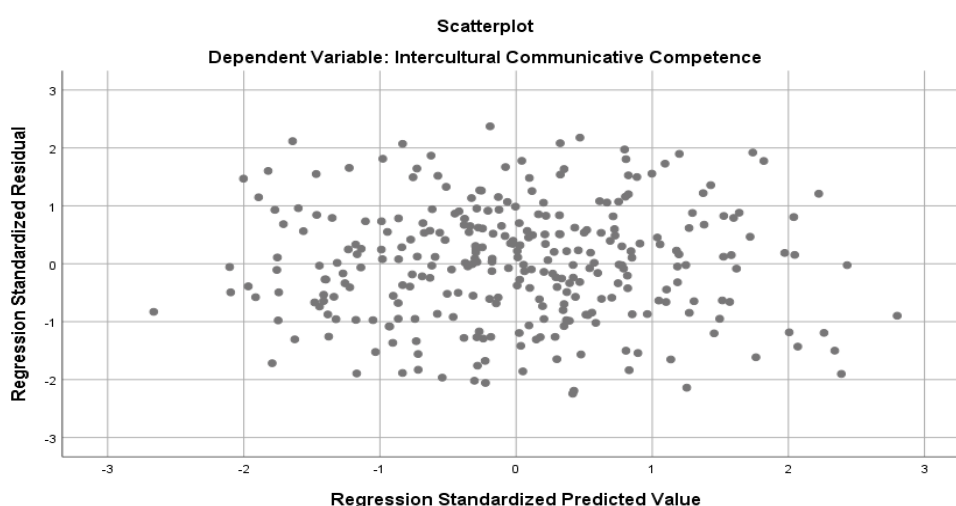
Table 1*Correlations between Self-Regulation Strategies and ICC*

Variables	ICC	ER	Motivational	Meta-cognitive	Cognitive	Meta-affective	Meta-sociocultural-interactive	Sociocultural-interactive
ICC	1.000	.102	.325**	.314**	.263**	.207**	.308**	.322**
ER		1.000	.101	.250**	.295**	.312**	.092	.142*
Motivational			1.000	.506**	.457**	.456**	.445**	.425**
Meta-cognitive				1.000	.508**	.577**	.416**	.431**
Cognitive					1.000	.484**	.362**	.439**
Meta-affective						1.000	.334**	.460**
Meta-sociocultural-interactive							1.000	.455**
Sociocultural-interactive								1.000

Note: Pearson correlation coefficients (r) are shown. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. $N = 296$ for all correlations.

As shown in Table 1, Pearson correlation coefficients revealed that motivational ($r = .325$, $p < .001$), meta-cognitive ($r = .314$, $p < .001$), cognitive ($r = .263$, $p < .001$), meta-affective ($r = .207$, $p < .001$), meta-sociocultural-interactive ($r = .308$, $p < .001$), and sociocultural-interactive ($r = .322$, $p < .001$) self-regulation strategies were significantly positively correlated with ICC. Among these, motivational and sociocultural-interactive self-regulation strategies showed the highest correlation coefficients, suggesting stronger relationships with ICC. ER, although correlated with ICC ($r = .102$), did not reach a level of statistical significance. The correlations between the different self-regulation strategies were also examined. Notably, there were significant correlations among these strategies themselves, indicating that they are not mutually exclusive and might interact in complex ways.

Figure 1 displays a scatterplot of the standardized predicted values as well as standardized residuals for ICC, illustrating the distribution of residuals in the regression model.

Figure 1*The Standardized Predicted Values and Standardized Residuals for ICC*

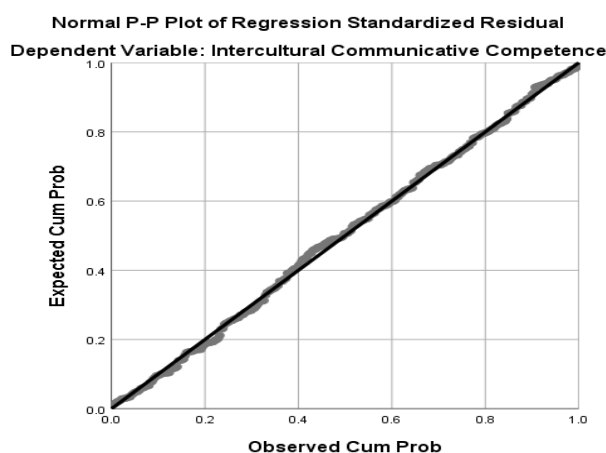
As illustrated in Figure 1, the residuals appear to be randomly distributed around the horizontal axis (which represents a residual value of zero), without any distinct patterns or funnel shapes. This pattern suggests that the assumptions of homoscedasticity and linearity are reasonably met. The spread of

residuals also indicates that the variance of error terms is consistent across all levels of predicted values, which is a desirable characteristic in a regression model.

The following figure shows the Normal P-P Plot of the standardized residuals from the regression analysis of ICC. The P-P Plot is utilized to assess the normality of the residuals, which is a key assumption of linear regression.

Figure 2

The Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual for ICC



As presented in Figure 2, the diagonal line represents the expected cumulative distribution of residuals if they were perfectly normally distributed. The points represent the observed cumulative probabilities of the standardized residuals from the regression model. A close alignment of the points with the diagonal line suggests that the residuals follow a normal distribution. In this plot, the points closely follow the diagonal line, which indicates that the assumption of normality is not violated. This finding supported the appropriateness of using linear regression techniques for the data set and suggests that the parameter estimates and statistical tests are likely to be reliable. Meanwhile, the assumptions of homoscedasticity and normality were met, indicating a robust model fit.

The regression analysis (Table 2) assessed the predictive power of various self-regulation strategies on ICC among Iranian EFL learners.

Table 2

Summary of the Regression Model of Self-Regulation Strategies Predicting ICC

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.421	.178	.158	18.444

According to Table 2, the model included predictors such as sociocultural-interactive, ER, motivational, meta-sociocultural-interactive, cognitive, meta-affective, and meta-cognitive self-regulation strategies. The results indicated that the model achieved an R (Multiple Correlation Coefficient) of .421, suggesting a moderate relationship between the combined self-regulation strategies and ICC. The R Square value was .178, implying that 17.8% of the variance in ICC could be explained by the model. After adjusting for the number of predictors, the Adjusted R Square was .158, indicating that 15.8% of the variance in the dependent variable was accounted for by the model. The ANOVA results (Table 3) showed that this model was statistically significant.

Table 3*ANOVA for the Regression Model of Self-Regulation Strategies Predicting ICC*

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	21166.596	7	3023.799	8.888	.000
	Residual	97976.158	288	340.195		
	Total	119142.753	295			

Dependent Variable: ICC
 Predictors: (Constant), Sociocultural-interactive , ER, Motivational, Meta-sociocultural-interactive , Cognitive , Meta-affective , Meta-cognitive

Table 4 shows the regression coefficients predicting ICC among Iranian EFL learners.

Table 4*Regression Coefficients for Predicting ICC*

Predictor	B	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.682		.062	.950		
ER	.069	.033	.570	.569	.859	1.164
Motivational	.270	.150	2.204	.028	.613	1.632
Meta-cognitive	.387	.139	1.906	.058	.537	1.862
Cognitive	.152	.041	.602	.547	.608	1.644
Meta-affective	-.208	-.087	-1.207	.229	.555	1.802
Meta-sociocultural-interactive	.539	.121	1.880	.061	.691	1.447
Sociocultural-interactive	.756	.160	2.403	.017	.642	1.557

Note: B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; Beta = Standardized regression coefficient; CI = Confidence Interval; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor.

In Table 4, motivational ($B = .270$, $t = 2.204$, $p = .028$) and sociocultural-interactive ($B = .756$, $t = 2.403$, $p = .017$) strategies emerged as significant predictors of ICC, indicating their positive influence on the outcome variable. While meta-cognitive ($B = .387$, $t = 1.906$, $p = .058$) and meta-sociocultural-interactive ($B = .539$, $t = 1.880$, $p = .061$) strategies approached significance, suggesting potential impacts. ER, cognitive, and meta-affective strategies did not significantly predict ICC. The coefficients, along with standard errors, standardized Beta values, and t-statistics are detailed with the collinearity diagnostics indicating no significant multicollinearity concerns (all VIF values < 2). These show the differential role of self-regulation strategies in predicting the ICC of Iranian EFL learners.

To summarize the findings for this research question, the regression analysis revealed that while meta-cognitive and meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies approached significance, suggesting potential predictive power, other strategies (i.e., ER, cognitive, and meta-affective strategies) did not show a significant predictive relationship.

Regarding the second question, based on the analysis of interview and open-ended questionnaire data, two themes were generated, namely “the extent to which using self-regulation strategies can enhance ICC in EFL learners” and “the self-regulation strategies that can enhance ICC in EFL learners”. With regard to the former, from among the 32 participants in the qualitative phase, none referred to the ineffective role of self-regulation strategies in ICC. Four participants provided no relevant response to this question. Three participants acknowledged that self-regulation strategies can enhance ICC *to some extent*, while the majority of the learners ($N = 25$) admitted that self-regulation strategies can enhance ICC in EFL learners *to a great extent*. This group of participants gave various reasons in support of their perspective as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5*Reasons for the Influence of Self-regulation Strategies on ICC Development*

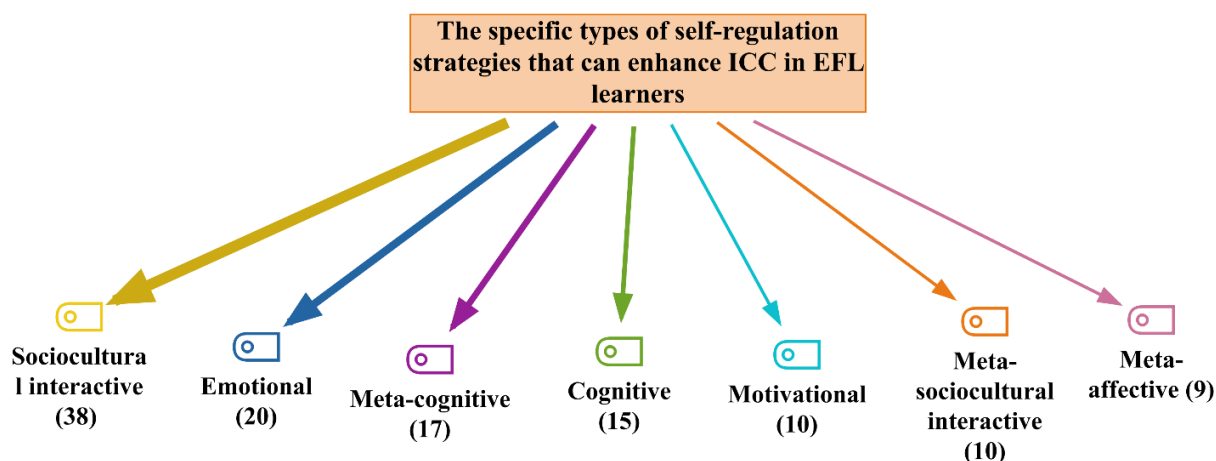
Code System	Code Frequency
Facilitating making more effective intercultural communications	14
Being integral to ICC development	10

Helping to better understand norms of another culture	8
Helping in preventing/handling intercultural misunderstandings	7
Facilitating comprehension/handling of intercultural differences	4
Making learning more autonomous	1
Increasing linguistic competence	1
Preventing breakdowns in communication	1
Paying attention to verbal/nonverbal aspects of L1 and L2 cultures	1
Increasing sociocultural knowledge	1
Facilitating tolerance of intercultural ambiguities	1
Facilitating evaluation of one's ICC level	1
Preventing language erosion in learners	1

According to the table, the participants produced 13 different categories of reasons why they thought self-regulation strategies could greatly enhance ICC. The four most frequent ones include their role in facilitating more effective intercultural communication, self-regulation strategies being integral to ICC development, helping to better understand the norms of another culture, and helping in preventing/handling intercultural misunderstandings. One participant (P3) stated that ICC gives English language learners the impression that they need to use specific self-regulation strategies in order to achieve intercultural communication in different environments. Figure 3 portrays the self-regulation strategies that the participants deemed influential in fostering their ICC.

Figure 3

Self-regulation Strategies that can Enhance ICC Development from EFL Learners' Perspective



With regard to the second theme, as portrayed in Figure 3, from EFL learners' point of view, all seven self-regulation strategies could enhance ICC, with the sociocultural-interactive, emotional, and meta-cognitive self-regulation strategies potentially playing the most important role. Furthermore, the participants referred to different reasons for why they thought (a) particular type(s) of self-regulation strategies could enhance ICC in EFL learners, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

The Ways in Which Self-regulation Strategies Can Enhance ICC Development

Category and Code System	Code Frequency
Sociocultural-interactive	38
Making more/effective intercultural interactions/communications	23
Gaining knowledge of intercultural differences/similarities	24
Observing normative conduct in intercultural communication	12
Learning norms/beliefs of another culture	9
Avoiding/Handling intercultural misunderstandings in communication	8
Understanding the importance of and evaluating one's ICC level	3
Increasing awareness of the role of intercultural factors in communication	4

Gaining sociolinguistic knowledge	1
Receiving feedback from others in communication	1
Being the most useful strategy for ICC development	1
The integrity of language and culture necessitates these strategies	1
Learning the perspectives of others by making intercultural communications	1
Travelling to the L2 country	1
Used in confrontation with L2 speakers in different contexts	1
Used in reading L2 instructional materials	1
Used in arranging/applying L2 discourse structures	1
Analyzing different discourses in international societies	1
Attending to body language/dressing codes portrayed in L2 instruction materials	1
Talking about different instructional subjects	1
Emotional	20
Managing/Controlling emotions effectively	9
Managing negative emotions	6
Predicting emotional reactions in communication	2
Controlling emotions when decoding verbal/non-verbal symbols	1
Meta-cognitive	17
Helping to respect intercultural differences	2
Helping to identify with which groups/in what context communication occurs	2
Enhancing the intercultural perspective of learners	1
Helping to face different perspectives during the learning process	1
Enabling better comprehension of L1 and L2 values/beliefs	1
Cognitive	15
Recognizing the situation/context of communication	3
Memory and learning are important to ICC	1
Concentrating on learning	1
Enhancing the intercultural perspective of learners	1
Identifying how to communicate meaning	1
Identifying the discourse at hand for making effective communication	1
Motivational	10
Integrative motivation enhances willingness to communicate with native speakers	3
Being motivated to use self-regulating strategies in intercultural communications	3
Being willing to learn about another culture	2
Being motivated to communicate with people of other cultures	1
Having the commitment to learning	1
Thinking positively	1
Willingness to migrate to the L2 country	1
Being motivated to do trial and error in different situations	1
Identifying one's motivation for making communication	1
Meta-sociocultural-interactive	10
Preventing cultural unawareness and shallow cultural insight	1
Meta-affective	9
Resulting in positive interaction among individuals	1
Increasing mutual respect among intercultural communicators	1
Helping to improve intercultural communication	1
Helping to better comprehend emotions of oneself and others	1
Improving one's ability to empathize with others	1

The table shows 19 reasons why sociocultural-interactive self-regulation techniques were perceived to improve ICC. They argued that the most common sociocultural-interactive self-regulation strategies were facilitating more/effective intercultural interactions/communications, learning about intercultural differences/similarities, and observing normative intercultural communication. They suggested four

reasons why ER techniques may improve ICC, with *managing/controlling emotions successfully*, *managing negative emotions*, and *predicting emotional reactions in communication*, being the most common. Participants also gave five categories of reasons with similar frequency for why meta-cognitive methods enhanced ICC. They found that meta-cognitive self-regulation strategies help learners *respect intercultural differences*, *identify with which groups/in what context communication occurs*, *improve intercultural perspective*, *face different perspectives during learning*, and *better understand L1 and L2 values/beliefs*. The participants suggested six categories of reasons why cognitive methods may improve ICC. They noted that *memory and learning are important to ICC*, *such strategies promote recognizing the situation/context of communication*, *concentrating on learning*, *enhancing learners' intercultural perspective*, *identifying how to communicate meaning*, and *identifying the discourse at hand for effective communication*.

They listed nine categories of reasons why motivational strategies might improve ICC. They believed integrative motivation increased *willingness to communicate with native speakers*, *use self-regulating strategies in intercultural communications*, and *learn about another culture*. As to the usefulness of meta-sociocultural interactive strategies, they gave only one reason, explaining that the *employment of such strategies prevents cultural unawareness and shallow cultural insight*. Finally, the participants listed five reasons with the same frequencies for why meta-affective strategies may improve ICC. They mentioned that using meta-affective strategies results in *positive interaction among individuals*, *increases mutual respect among intercultural communicators*, *helps to improve intercultural communication*, *helps to better comprehend emotions of oneself and others*, and *improves one's ability to empathize with others*.

All in all, the quantitative analysis indicated the significant predictive role of motivational and sociocultural-interactive strategies in ICC. Additionally, the qualitative analysis revealed the participants' perspective on the important role of all seven kinds of self-regulation strategies in predicting ICC.

Discussion

The findings of the first research question showed that except for ER, all kinds of self-regulation strategies were positively and significantly correlated with the participants' ICC perceptions. Furthermore, of the seven kinds of self-regulation strategies, the motivational and sociocultural-interactive strategies were positive significant predictors of ICC. This finding partially supports Byram's (1997) argument that discourse, sociolinguistic, linguistic competencies, and social skills are integral to ICC. As Deardorff (2020) posits, ICC involves the attitudes, skills, and knowledge components necessary for interacting with those who possess different cultural backgrounds or identities. Therefore, it is no surprise that for having effective interactions with interlocutors from other cultural backgrounds, L2 learners resort to interactive self-regulation strategies, thus supporting the correlation between interactive self-regulation strategies and ICC in the present research undertaking.

Furthermore, regarding the prediction of ICC by the different self-regulation strategies, meta-cognitive and meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies approached significance, indicating their potential role. These are, somehow, consistent with the findings of De Backer et al. (2022), who reported that the employment of meta-cognitive strategies is effective for improving a learner factor, namely collaborative understanding of the learning content. The predictive role of meta-cognitive strategies in ICC in the current study is also in congruence with Ghasemi et al. (2020), who argued that international posture plays a crucial role in determining ICC, primarily through its mediating effect on the ideal L2 self and meta-cognitive strategies. Additionally, in conjunction with the potential role of meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies in ICC in the current study, Imahori and Lanigan (1989) argued for the role of respect and interaction management in ICC development.

In the current study, ER, cognitive, and meta-affective self-regulation strategies were not found as significant predictors of ICC. This is not in alignment with Haregu et al.'s (2024) argument that ICC requires cognitive, affective, social, and behavioral skills to bring about effective communication among interlocutors from diverse cultures. This inconsistency might be a result of factors such as

contextual differences. Moreover, in some cultural situations or communication circumstances, people may be able to accomplish successful intercultural exchange via alternate methods that may not only depend on a whole range of cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral skills.

The second research question attempted to qualitatively address how Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of the employment of self-regulation strategies could predict their perceived ICC. In this regard, two themes were generated. The first one was that using self-regulation strategies could enhance ICC in EFL learners to a great extent. Previous research has also stressed the importance of self-regulation in the development of ICC (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2019). As the participants noted, self-regulation strategies enable learners to actively manage their learning and communication processes, which is essential for navigating the complexities of intercultural interactions. These have been supported by previous studies as well (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). These researchers have highlighted how self-regulatory mechanisms help individuals develop the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to engage in successful intercultural exchanges.

The second theme was that all seven self-regulation strategies could enhance ICC, with the sociocultural-interactive, emotional, and meta-cognitive self-regulation strategies potentially playing the most important role. With regard to the first one, sociocultural-interactive, they reported that these strategies could help individuals avoid any misunderstanding, and better understand the effect of cultural elements on language and communication. Studies have shown that the ability to participate in sociocultural-interactive self-regulation is essential for successful intercultural communication. Deardorff (2006) found that the capacity to adapt communication styles and modify behavior based on the cultural environment was important in ICC development. Through the utilization of sociocultural-interactive self-regulation strategies, EFL learners can enhance their comprehension and adeptness in the social and cultural subtleties of the language they are studying. This, in turn, facilitates more effective and prosperous intercultural interactions.

The second one, emotional strategies, was believed to help them deal with the control and management of learners' emotions. Furthermore, proficient intercultural communication often necessitates the capacity to manage one's emotional reactions to cultural disparities and difficulties. Matsumoto et al. (2008) established that persons possessing superior emotional self-regulation abilities had more proficiency in controlling their emotional responses in international scenarios, thereby improving their ICC. The third one, metacognitive strategies, was viewed by the participants as an important factor in better understanding their own and others' cultural beliefs. Research has shown that metacognitive self-regulation mechanisms are important in the development of ICC. Dörrenbächer-Ulrich (2021) revealed that EFL learners who used metacognitive methods had elevated levels of ICC. Through the practice of metacognitive self-regulation, EFL learners may get a deeper understanding of their own cultural biases, recognize areas in which they can improve, and adjust their communication tactics to increase their ability to interact effectively across cultures.

Conclusion and Implications

This study attempted to analyze the self-regulation strategies which better predict Iranian EFL learners' ICC, and how Iranian EFL learners' self-regulation strategies predict their L2 ICC. Regarding its first objective, the multiple regression analysis showed that motivational and sociocultural-interactive strategies were positive significant predictors of ICC, and the predictive power of meta-cognitive and meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies approached significance. As for the second objective, all seven self-regulation strategies were mentioned by the participants as predictors of EFL learners' ICC development.

Although it is not possible to make generalizations about the whole population of EFL learners across the world based on this single study done with a group of only 300 EFL learners in Iran, some conclusions can be drawn based on the findings. It was found that among the seven strategies being positively related to ICC, only motivational and sociocultural-interactive strategies were positive, significant predictors of ICC. Therefore, it can be concluded that Iranian EFL learners' more employment of motivational and sociocultural-interactive strategies can help them develop higher

levels of ICC. The findings of the thematic analysis revealed that from the point of view of the majority of Iranian EFL learners in the qualitative phase, employment of the seven self-regulation strategies could greatly enhance ICC. They gave a wide range of reasons explaining the particular ways in which each type of motivational, cognitive, meta-cognitive, ER, meta-affective, sociocultural-interactive, and meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies could influence ICC. By drawing on these outcomes, first, it can be concluded that Iranian EFL learners have a good view of the multidimensional nature of self-regulation strategies and can make a distinction between the various types of such strategies.

With regard to the implications of the study, since the findings indicate that motivational and sociocultural-interactive self-regulation strategies are significant positive predictors of ICC, EFL instructors should put greater emphasis on reinforcing these strategies in their teaching practices. This could involve designing lessons and activities that encourage learners to maintain motivation, actively engage in intercultural interactions, and develop cultural awareness. Moreover, while the predictive power of metacognitive and meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies was not as strong, the results suggest these strategies still warrant attention. EFL teachers could incorporate explicit instruction and practice opportunities to help learners develop metacognitive awareness and the ability to monitor and regulate their sociocultural-interactive behaviors. Regarding the practical implications of the research, the results stress the vitality of equipping EFL teachers with the knowledge and skills to effectively foster self-regulation strategies in their classrooms. Teacher training programs and professional development opportunities should incorporate components focused on understanding and implementing self-regulation strategy instruction. Moreover, curriculum developers should consider incorporating self-regulation strategy training as an integral part of EFL programs. This could involve creating instructional materials, resources, and activities that explicitly target the development of various self-regulation strategies.

It has to be acknowledged that this study was done within the cultural, linguistic, and educational context of Iran. This may limit the generalizability of the results to other national or regional settings. Further research might explore the relationship between self-regulation strategies and ICC in different cultural and educational contexts, both within Iran and in other countries, to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

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