



Research into Intercultural Communicative Competence: A Model Test

Ali Asghar Ghasemi¹ , Moussa Ahmadian² 

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Corresponding Author(s):

Moussa Ahmadian
Faculty of Arts and Humanities,
Arak University, Iran. Email: m-ahmadian@araku.ac

Edited by:

Jens ALLWOOD
SSKKII, University of Göteborg,
S-412 82 Göteborg, Sweden

Abstract: This study intended to propose a model of intercultural communicative competence integrating international posture, L2 motivational self-system, autonomy, and cognitive learning strategies. To do so, 180 EFL learners in the Iranian EFL context, selected by convenience sampling procedure, participated in the study. The findings, derived from structural equation modeling, showed that the model adequately fits to the data. That was discussed that interest in seeking international affairs and making intercultural friends, desire to bridge the gap between their current and future selves, taking responsibility for learning, and employment of deep/surface learning strategies direct learners to open conversation with the speakers of other ethnicities. Finally, implications for language teachers and policymakers to inspiring learners to be competent in intercultural communication were provided.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence, International Posture, Ideal L2 Self, Autonomy, Cognitive Strategies.

1. Introduction

For decades, the main objective of second/foreign language learning and teaching has focused on developing language learners' communicative competence. With the development of technologies accompanied by the disappearance of borders between nations, individuals have become closely interconnected to each other, which necessitates awareness of each other's cultures and being inter-culturally competent communicators. The aim of language learning instructions has shifted to develop L2 competence both in linguistic knowledge and intercultural communication for successful interactions with speakers from other cultures and backgrounds. Regarding the significant role of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), Bennett, Bennett and Allen (2003) coined "the fluent fool" to characterize the L2 learner who is linguistically fluent but is not familiar enough with the values, norms and cultural dimensions of the language. This shows the prime importance of understanding the nature of ICC and the factors leading to it. To do so, researchers presented their conceptual models of intercultural communication competence and the way this notion evolves (Deardorff, 2006). Given the role of ICC as a key determiner of L2 learning achievement on the one hand and considering the conceptual links between ICC and individual-differences factors, namely motivation and learning strategies (Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013). On the other, this study intends to develop a theoretical model of ICC in EFL contexts and explore the factors that impact one's intercultural communicative competence.

L2 motivation is regarded as a crucial variable related to ICC (Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013). There is evidence to suggest that individuals with high levels of motivation are more likely to enter discourse with speakers of other languages and communicate with people of other cultures and ethnicities. In her model, Arasaratnam (2006) reported a significant relationship between positive attitudes and intercultural communication competence. It was explained that a positive attitude to a culture can be a motivation for language learners to interact with others, which in turn leads to more levels of ICC. Moreover, Ghasemi, Ahmadian, Yazdani & Amerian (2020) developed a model of intercultural communicative competence for Iranian EFL learners using attitudinal (namely international posture and motivational dispositions) and cognitive self-based variables, including L2 self-confidence and self-regulatory learning strategies. They have concluded that learners with a high level of international posture tend to further get engaged in undertaking international jobs and making foreign friends, which in turn leads to bridging the gap between their actual and destined selves by drawing upon metacognitive learning strategies. On the other hand, some research (e.g., (Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013; Öz, 2014) examined the associations between these factors and ICC separately; however, to the best of our knowledge, a few studies, if any, have investigated the simultaneous impacts within a single framework. Modelling these variables can provide a more in-depth insight into the direct and indirect path relationships.

¹Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Arak University, Iran. Email: ghasemi.aliasghar@gmail.com

²Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Arak University, Iran. Email: m-ahmadian@araku.ac

The highly important role of autonomy in improving L2 learning achievement and promoting academic achievement has been considered in L2 studies (Dafei, 2007). Within this context, it was maintained that high-proficient students are more autonomous than low-proficient ones due to their higher degree of capacity to manage their learning processes. The authors went on to suggest that autonomy and learning strategies are correlated with each other in that autonomy is a meaningful predictor of deep processing strategies, which signals the points that autonomous learners tend to use more deep learning strategies such as critical thinking and elaboration and invest more efforts in reaching their goals. The current study aims to explore the role of autonomy and cognitive learning strategies in predicting L2 learners' intercultural willingness to communicate with speakers of other languages. The proposed hypothesized model with positive paths can be seen in Figure 1.

The other variable taken into account in the present study is cognitive engagement, among which rehearsal and elaboration strategies regarded as influential in academic achievement and performance (Weinstein & Mayer 1986) were chosen. Cognitive engagement, commonly known as deep and surface learning strategies, is characterized by strategies such as the rehearsal, recitation of items to be learned, elaboration, critical thinking, and concept integration for deep learning strategies, memorization and reproduction of the learning materials (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). Previous studies have found cognitive strategies as the significant predictors of language mastery (Varasteh, Ghanizadeh & Akbari, 2016), metacognitive self-regulation (Ghasemi & Dowlatabadi, 2018), and academic achievement (Diseth 2011), it seems equally important to see whether the sub-components such as deep/surface learning strategies can affect ICC models.

Inspired by the studies presented above and considering the imperative of achieving a high level of competence for intercultural communication, identifying the contributing factors to learners' ICC seems necessary. Despite the diversity of conceptual models on the nature and constituting components of ICC, further analysis is still needed to provide a more extensive and regional model in the Iranian EFL context. The scarcity of research on the contributing variables to ICC in the Iranian EFL context could lead to confusion over what the very notion of ICC means to different researchers. Therefore, this study intends to explore the extent to which EFL learners' ICC in English is predicted by L2 motivation, attitude to the target community (in particular international posture in the current study), and deep and surface learning strategies.

The study can be regarded as unique in employing the most recent L2 motivation theory, attitudinal, cognitive and behavioural variables on ICC. Regarding the scant theoretical and empirical research conducted on ICC research in the L2 context, the current study would lead to a deeper understanding of the ICC and the contributing subcomponents by proving a regional model.

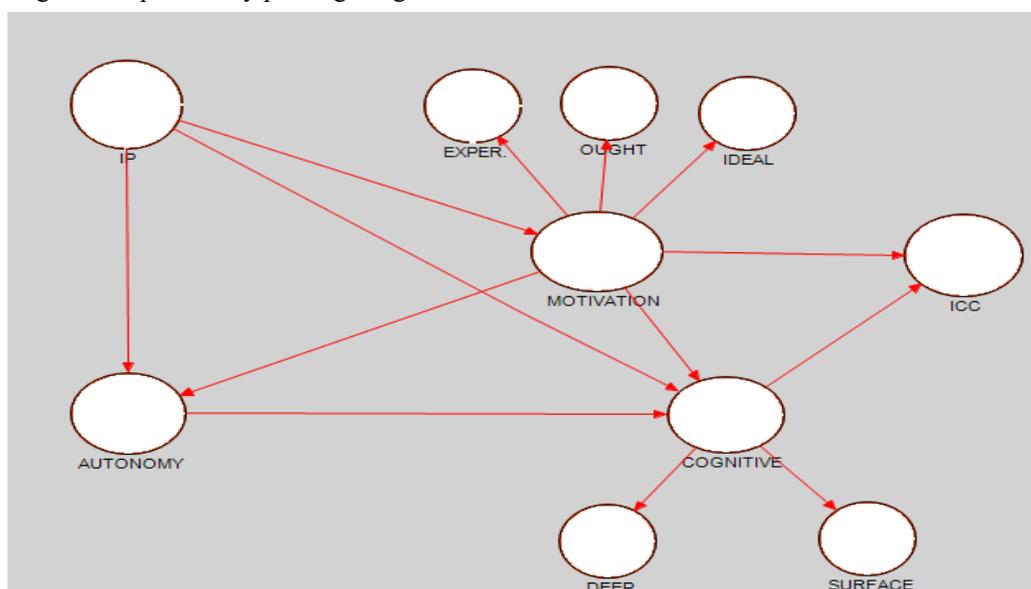


Figure 1. The proposed model of ICC

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

A better understanding of ICC seems to entail the definition of Intercultural Competence (IC) by Meyer (1991) as “the ability of a person to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes, and expectations representatives of foreign cultures.” To link the IC-related concepts to foreign language curriculum, Byram (1997) revised the concept and integrated the communicative aspects to conceptualize his model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). In his study, ICC was viewed as “the ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one’s own” (Byram, 2000). Wiseman (2002) defined ICC as “the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures”. Adding more emphasis, in the same line, a number of conceptual models have been proposed to provide a better picture of the nature of ICC and the contributing components, among which Byram’s (1997) model of ICC and Arasaratnam’s (2006) integrated model of intercultural communicative competence (IMICC) could grasp more

attention from researchers. The most widely used model of ICC was proposed by Byram (1997), which includes five related knowledge or *Savoirs*. The first *savoir* concerns the teaching of cultural facts and processes. The second *savoir* (*savoir comprendre*) entails the ability to interpret texts and events, while the third *savoir*, *savoir être*, regards the ability of language learners to suspend between two cultures of own and others. The fourth, *savoir apprendre*, is referred the ability to put new things into practice of real life. Finally, *savoir s'engager* is related to the ability of learners to critically evaluate cultural beliefs and take a critical look at them. The IMICC consists of five components: empathy, motivation, global attitude, interaction involvement, and intercultural experience. Sensation seeking was added to IMICC in the later studies done by Arasaratnam and her co-workers.

In a study to test a previously developed model of ICC, Arasaratnam, Banerjee and Dembek (2011) found a positive relationship between sensation seeking and ICC. They argued that individuals with higher sensation seeking are more motivated to look for more opportunities for interaction and have more experiences in their intercultural contact with people of other ethnicities and cultures, leading to higher ICC. Having developed a localized measure of ICC, Mirzaei and Frouzandeh (2013) reported positive correlations between motivation to learn an L2 and ICC, arguing that L2-motivated learners are more willing to interact with the members of other communities and have more curiosity and audacity to increase their ICC. Studies have also revealed that ideal L2 self with the mediating role of gender can promote learners' intercultural awareness and sensitivity, which ultimately leads to more ICC (Öz, Demirezen & Pourfeiz, 2015). In another study, Mostafae Alaei and Nosrati (2018) found a significant interrelationship between language teachers' ICC and their intercultural sensitivity. Sobkowiak (2017) indicated that autonomous learning has a positive impact on L2 learners' ICC, believing that giving learners control over various aspects of the learning process can contribute to the effective development of their ICC. The literature offers support for the following hypothesis:

H1: *The proposed model is appropriate for the EFL learner population.*

2.2. Motivation

From the 1990s onwards, the focus of motivational research shifted from social-psychological to cognitive aspects and then to socio-dynamic aspects (Dörnyei, 2005). For a long time, Gardner's (1985) theory of L2 motivation and Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) were the popular means of interpreting people's motivation. L2 motivation has gained theoretical momentum with the introduction of Dörnyei's (2005) L2 motivational self-system by building upon the Self-discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1998) and Markus and Nurius's (1986) Possible Selves Theory. The purpose behind the Dörnyei's (2005) framework was to conceptualize L2 motivation as language learners' identification with their future selves. This model has three elements: 1) the Ideal L2 self, which is "the L2-specific facet of one's ideal self", 2) the Ought-to L2 self, the language-related attributes that "one believes one ought to possess in order to meet expectations of others and avoid possible negative outcomes", and 3) the L2 learning experiences, which are "situation-specific motives related to the immediate language learning environment and experience" (Dörnyei & Ushioda 2009: 29). The fundamental hypothesis of the L2 motivational self-system is that language learners become motivated by feeling the discrepancy between their current and future selves.

The L2 Motivational Self System has already been tested empirically in a range of EFL contexts, including the following. Ueki and Takeuchi (2013) conducted a study to provide a clearer image of L2 learners' ideal L2 self, the factors affecting L2 learners' vision of ideal L2 selves and the interrelationship between motivation and autonomy by a multi-group structural equation modelling. It was discussed that the learners with higher ideal L2 selves have more potential for imagining the current and ideal L2 selves, which motivates them to exert more effort on learning L2. This was also argued that motivational factors could promote L2 learning autonomy. In another study, attitudes to their foreign language and the components of the L2 motivational self-system were found to be significant contributors to the EFL learners' motivation (Islam, Lamb & Chambers, 2013). Among the contextual factors, L2 learners' international posture, the families' roles, and cultural interests were revealed as the significant factors leading to the intended learning effort. The findings lent further noticeable support to the validity of the L2 motivational self-system.

Huang, Hsu, and Chen's (2015) study on Taiwanese language learners' motivational dispositions revealed that the self-guide dimensions (ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self) are closely correlated to each other. Research has shown that motivation indirectly exerted influences on L2WTC through the mediational role of self-perceived communication competence and apprehension, implicating that motivation can be significantly effective in increasing language learners' proficiency level and helping them get more engaged in communicating with speakers of other languages. Besides, a strong correlation between integrativeness and ideal L2 self was identified, displaying that the more learners are aware of their future selves and visualize themselves interacting in L2 with others, the more they are motivated to put effort into learning English (Öz et al. 2015). In addition, previous studies showed that learners' emotions and their future L2 selves are associated with each other in that learners' ought-to selves/others accounted for extrinsic motivation. Learners' ideal L2 selves represented the most intrinsic type of motivation, such as individuals' wishes, desires and hoped to learn an L2. Finally, ought-to L2 self/own was described as externally imposed obligations and duties to learn an L2 for their personal meaning and values (Teimouri, 2017). L2 learning experiences, among the elements of the L2 motivational self-system, have been found to have the strongest relation with motivated learning behaviour (Csizér & Kormos, 2009). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: *L2 motivational self-system will be positively and directly related to ICC.*

H3: *L2 motivational self-system will be positively and indirectly related to ICC.*

2.3. International Posture (IP)

The motivation behind the arrival of international posture is because of the criticisms cast on the construct of integrativeness for those language learners who find it difficult to identify with any L2 community (Dörnyei, 2005). Studies have shown that in some foreign language learning contexts, instrumental motivation is equally or more important than integrative motivation (Dörnyei, 1990). Dörnyei (1990) remarked that “effective predispositions towards the target language community are unlikely to explain a greater proportion of the variance in language attainment” (p.49). Yashima (2002) conducted a study on Japanese EFL learners to explore their reasons for language learning. The findings showed that identification with the L2 community is among the least important motivational factors. Yashima (2002) contended that in the Japanese EFL context, it is difficult for learners to identify with any target community, implying that Gardner’s integrative orientation is problematic. This was called *international posture* and defined as “interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to study or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners, and, one hopes, openness or non-ethnocentric attitude towards different cultures, among others” (Yashima, 2002; Alhusban & Alshehri, 2022). Yashima (2002) defined the concept to include the following components: 1. intergroup approach tendency; 2. interest in international vocation and activities; 3. interest in foreign affairs; and 4. interest in international occupation or activities.

Research has shown the significant role of international posture in improving L2 learning outcomes. Yashima and Zenk-Nishide’s (2008) study have shown that abroad-studying learners achieve a higher level of international posture, i.e., a stronger tendency for making international friends and engagement in international affairs and careers, and also are more interested in starting communications in and out of learning classrooms in L2. In addition, Yashima (2009) attributed it to the fact that IP “theoretically and operationally captures both integrativeness and instrumentality” (p.157). Also, the most significant correlation was shown between international posture and future possible selves, in this sense that interest in foreign affairs and the tendency to have international friends’ direct learners to reduce the current states and their future selves by visualizing an ideal L2 self (Ghonsooly, Khajavy & Asadpour, 2012; Yashima, 2009). In another study, the ought-to L2 self was found a strong predictor of international posture, while IP was identified as a noticeable contributor to the ideal L2 self (Munezane, 2013). Kormos and Csizér’s (2014) work reported on the positive impact of IP on language learners’ autonomous use of technologies. Further, Peng (2015) conducted a study to investigate the relationships between international posture, L2 anxiety, L2 willingness to communicate and the components of the L2 motivational self-system. The findings revealed that the ideal L2 self is predicted by the ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experiences and is directly influenced by international posture. The results also showed that L2 learning experiences have significantly positive impacts on international posture. The literature thus offers support for the following hypothesis:

H4: *International posture will be positively and indirectly related to ICC.*

2.4. Autonomy

Holec’s (1979) definition of autonomy was the most prevalently cited one in language learning education (Benson 2013). He defined it as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning,” and according to it, an autonomous learner needs to “hold the responsibility for all their decisions concerning all aspects of his learning” (p. 3). An autonomous learner is expected to be able to determine the objectives, plan, select materials, and monitor and evaluate his learning. Bergen’s (1990) and Dam’s (1995) definition highlights the social aspect of learning and is more concentrated on each learner’s uniqueness with respect to his/her unique combination of knowledge and past experiences, which leads to different viewpoints on learning and different outcomes. Despite the numerous definitions posed on the nature of autonomy, Benson (2013) remarked that three major points regarding autonomy remain unchanged: 1. Learners have a tendency to naturally control their learning, 2. Learners are capable of developing autonomy, and 3. Autonomous learning is a more effective way to learn a language compared to non-autonomous learning. Littlewood (1999) made a distinction between proactive and reactive autonomy in the education field. Proactive autonomy “which affirms learner’s individuality and sets up directions which they themselves have partially created”, is different from reactive autonomy “which does not create its own direction but one’s direction has been initiated, enables learners to organize the resources autonomously in order to reach their goal”.

Previous studies indicated that autonomy is an important factor in influencing L2 learners’ achievement. Dafei (2007) found a positive association between language learners’ autonomy and English proficiency in that highly proficient language learners are more autonomous than low-proficient ones, mainly due to the fact that higher language proficiency helps learners become more confident of their abilities to learn English and are mostly aware of self-planning and self-reflection, which in turn can improve their autonomy. In the same vein, it was also reported that the incorporation of metacognitive self-regulation strategies and goal-setting logbooks could improve language learners’ level of autonomy (Klimas, 2017). Mojoudi and Tabatabaei’s (2014) study showed that learners’ autonomy and self-efficacy are significantly correlated to each other in a way that when learners feel efficacious enough to achieve a task, their self-confidence and, consequently, their autonomy get promoted.

Studies have also revealed that autonomous language learners are more likely to employ self-regulatory strategies for achieving L2 tasks (Kormos & Csizér, 2014). It was additionally found that autonomy was a meaningful predictor of deep processing strategies such as critical thinking and elaboration, and indirectly motivation and self-regulated learning can lead to academic mastery (León, Núñez & Liew, 2015). Therefore, we can hypothesize the following:

H5: *Autonomy will be positively and indirectly related to ICC.*

2.5. Cognitive Learning Strategies

Previous studies have shown that the ways that learners cognitively get engaged in academic tasks can determine the degree of success. Cognitive engagement is often conceptualized as deep and surface learning strategies (Fredricks et al 2004). Distinguishing the differences between individuals in processing input and received information, Marton and Säljö (1976) were the first to introduce the concepts of deep and surface learning strategies. Based upon their dichotomy, the learners who take deep learning strategies intend to understand the interlocutors' meaning and integrate it into their already-established knowledge and individual experiences and generalize the learned concepts to other settings and situations (Phan & Deo, 2007). Deep learning strategies are characterized by a questioning of alternatives, raising additional questions, and exploration of newly learned content's application limits.

On the contrary, learners may adopt surface learning strategies when their aim is to understand information without any further analysis to link it in-depth to the existing knowledge (Murphy & Tyler, 2005). Surface learning strategies are featured by rote memorization of facts and isolated sets of data, and mechanical substitutions in formulas. The orientation, either deep or surface, depends on the learners' motive. Commonly, the deep/surface learning strategy is interchangeably replaced with the deep/surface learning approach (Sankaran & Bui, 2001).

Studies also indicated that students' employment of deep learning strategies (e.g. organizing, evaluating, elaborating, integrating information, etc.) leads to meaningful learning and better academic outcomes (Pressley & Harris, 2006). Research has also shown that the goal-mastery approach contributed to the use of both deep and surface learning (Wolters, 2004). The study by Varasteh et al. (2016) showed that deep learning strategies is significantly and positively influenced by task value and ambiguity tolerance, while it exerts positive impacts on self-regulation. In another study, also, it was revealed that cognitive engagement leads to more uses of self-regulation and better language performance (Ghasemi & Dowlatabadi, 2018). Therefore, we can have the following hypothesis:

H6: *Cognitive learning strategies will be positively related to ICC.*

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and Procedures

The participants of the current study were 180 English-language majoring students (20-24 years old), who were selected from five universities in Iran through a convenience sampling procedure. The participants were selected from junior students in Iranian state universities who were expected to be upper-intermediate and were homogenized by including only those at the BA level. The current research was done according to ethical standards provided by American Psychological Association (APA, 2010). The targeted universities were approached, and permission to conduct the research was also obtained. Also, the researchers were present during the data collection sessions to explain the procedure for completing the questionnaire. The teachers in these universities were contacted and informed of the research purposes and procedures. The prospective participants were informed that their participation was entirely optional and voluntary and that their personal information would be confidential in any case. The whole questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete during four training sessions to decrease the chance of error. Moreover, data collection and analyses were done on anonymous data.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. L2 Motivation Self System

Ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience, as the components of the L2 Motivation Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), have been measured separately and collectively to measure language learners' motivation. Ideal L2 self was operationalized by six items used in Ryan (2009) ($\alpha = 0.76$). These items elicit the participants' perceived L2-specific ideal selves. Ought-to L2 self was measured by six items adopted from Papi (2010) ($\alpha = 0.75$). This scale measures the participants' sense of duties or obligations in their pursuit of L2-specific attributes. Another six items from Papi (2010) were used to measure L2 learning experience ($\alpha = 0.83$).

3.2.2. Language autonomy

Autonomous learning behaviour scales to gain insights into learners' independent use of learning resources were used in this study ($\alpha: .68$) (Kormos & Csizér, 2014). This evaluates the learners' general capacity to exercise control over learning resources. The questionnaire consists of 7 items which assess language learners' general capacity to exercise control over learning resources.

3.2.3. Intercultural communicative competence Questionnaire

The intercultural communicative competence questionnaire (ICCQ), which was developed by Mirzaei and Ferozandeh (2013), was used to measure the participants' ICC. Drawn upon Deardorff's (2006) large-scale

investigation, the questionnaire includes 22 statements to measure participants' cultural self-awareness, linguistic knowledge, socio-linguistic awareness, ability to communicate across cultures, and openness to different cultures (Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013). An acceptable internal consistency of .75 was obtained for the current study.

3.2.4. International posture

This construct was measured using Yashima et al.'s (2004) study. The questionnaire includes four main categories: Interest in Foreign Affairs, Interest in International Vocation or Activities, Intergroup Approach-Avoidance Tendency, and Intercultural Friendship Orientation in English Learning by 13 items. The internal consistency ($\alpha = .79$) was calculated for this variable.

3.2.5. Cognitive learning strategies

Two principal kinds of learning strategies were used in this study. The first is surface learning strategies which involve reciting or naming items from a list to be learned. These strategies are best used for simple tasks and activation of information in working memory (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia & McKeachie, 1995). The second type assesses deep cognitive engagement, which is considered to help students store information in long-term memory by building internal connections between items to be learned (Pintrich et al 1995; Carballal-Broome & Pinillos, 2022). Elaboration strategies include paraphrasing, summarizing, creating analogies, and generative notetaking. This section, drawn from motivated strategies for learning strategies (MSLQ), includes 10 items with $\alpha = 0.76$.

3.3. Data Analysis

The obtained information was first checked for normal distribution by SPSS 24 software before using PLS-SEM. Descriptive statistics were used to display the mean scores and the standard deviations of the variables (i.e., international posture, L2 motivational self-system, autonomy, deep/surface learning strategies and ICC). Listwise deletion, which indicates that a case was deleted if missing values were observed on any of the variables for that case, was used for screening the missing data. Then, structural equation modelling (SEM) was conducted using SmartPLS2 to establish and evaluate a conceptual model, including both observed and latent variables. Measurement and structural models were run to calculate the indicators of reliability, validity, and fitness of the proposed model (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt 2014; Ahmad et al., 2023).

4. Results

Hulland (1999) proposes two stages of measurement and a structural model for analyzing the data by partial least squares procedure.

The results obtained for the measurement sub-model validate the choice of most of the indicators made except for items that were lower than 0.4; therefore, they were omitted following Bagozzi and Yi's (1988) criterion. Cronbach's alpha exceeds the standard criterion of 0.7 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), which confirms the reliability of all the constructs used in the current study. Similarly, the other measurement of reliability, the composite reliability, was over 0.75 for all the variables. The values of convergent validity (AVE) also exceeded 0.4, following Fornell and Larcker (1981). Table 1 distinctly illustrates the values that are quite acceptable within the range.

Table 1: Values of the measurement model

	AVE	Composite Reliability	R Square	Cronbach's Alpha
Autonomy	0.482160	0.903740	0.376684	0.856696
Cognitive	0.475794	0.912262	0.5240203	0.879443
Deep	0.501301	0.781986	0.838776	0.748069
Exper.	0.529268	0.906605	0.520256	0.797569
ICC	0.496330	0.850308	0.318845	0.781472
Ideal	0.588314	0.917665	0.871985	0.864383
IP	0.547113	0.871572		0.814119
L2MSS	0.510576	0.873630	0.362988	0.828045
Ought-To	0.460196	0.837287	0.763990	0.712370
Surface	0.507763	0.878916	0.905017	0.793137

Source: Calculated by the author.

Likewise, furthermore, the proposed model complies with discriminant validity (Table 2) since the correlations between the two variables have been lower than the relevant AVE (Fornell & Larcker 1981).

Table 2: Cross-loading correlations

	Autonomy	Cog.	Deep	Exper	ICC	Ideal	IP	L2MSS	Ought-to	Surface
Autonomy	1.00000									
Cog.	0.58681	1.00000								
Deep	0.63259	0.61475	1.00000							
Exper.	0.60604	0.69664	0.58177	1.00000						
ICC	0.45156	0.45174	0.57456	0.68741	1.00000					

Ideal	0.65670	0.43980	0.46848	0.46781	0.45469	1.00000				
IP	0.58234	0.58105	0.60984	0.52911	0.55641	0.54246	1.00000			
L2MSS	0.50553	0.48747	0.52302	0.50175	0.51601	0.53380	0.602485	1.00000		
Ought-to	0.42491	0.40897	0.46815	0.27387	0.53767	0.43923	0.533654	0.57406	1.00000	
Surface	0.60920	0.55125	0.66786	0.67986	0.41027	0.41234	0.547202	0.45336	0.77191	1.0000

Source: Calculated by the author

The measurement model with the coefficient of the variable can be seen in Figure 2. As can be clearly seen, the model shows the explanatory power of endogenous variables to predict the variances of the endogenous variables.

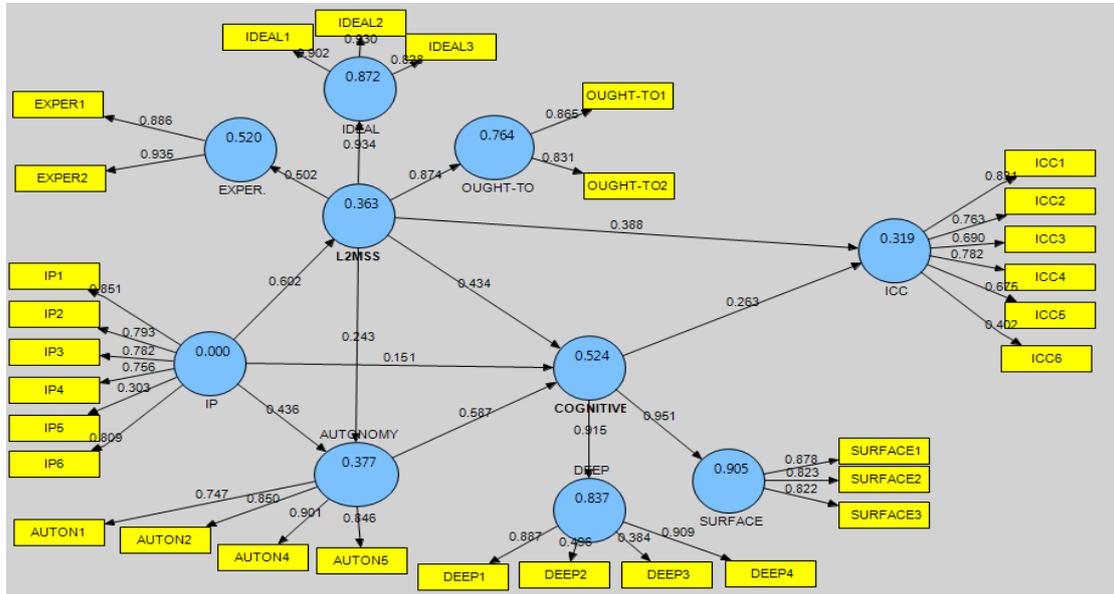


Figure 2. Factor loadings of latent unobserved variables

Concerning the structural sub-model, Table 1 indicates the R^2 coefficients of the regressions of the latent variables, which are significant (exceeding 0.3) for all the variables (Hair et al 2014). The values show that the exogenous variables have strong explanatory power to predict the variances of endogenous ones. To measure it, the authors used resampling (bootstrapping) to measure the t-value for each path. As is presented in Figure 3, all the coefficients are highly significant (p -value < 0.05).

The other key measure, effect size (f^2), which SmartPLS2 provides researchers with is to determine the impacts of exogenous constructs when omitted from the circle of the model. To do this, the statistical procedure was run just for the constructs which are simultaneously affected by at least two independent variables. The measures calculated for cognitive learning strategies as well as autonomy were .46 and .41 respectively, signifying the large effects of exogenous variables.

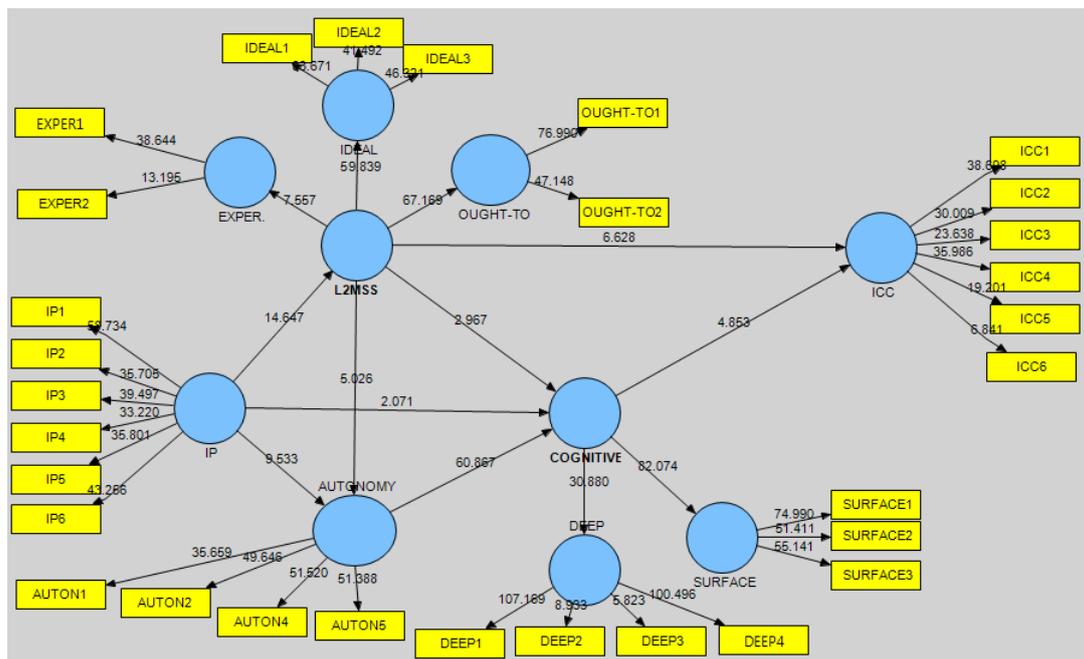


Figure 3. Path coefficients of latent variables

The Q^2 values are positive for all the endogenous structural variables, as provided in Table 3. This confirms that the model has a satisfactory goodness of fit.

Table 3: Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value

Total	1-SSE/SSO
Autonomy	0.195031
Cognitive	0.211661
Deep	0.187254
Experience	0.263785
ICC	0.132971
Ideal	0.392715
L2MSS	0.389894
Ought-to	0.161520
Surface	0.137413

Source: Calculated by the author

The last statistical procedure run in the study was goodness of fit (GoF). The GoF of the present research is 0.47, indicating a good index to confirm the model (Wetzels, Odekerken-Schroder & van Oppen, 2009). Therefore, the developed model has exhibited adequate fit to the data, as represented by the GoF criterion.

5. Discussion

The present study explored the interrelations among intercultural communicative competence, L2 motivation, autonomy, cognitive learning strategies, and international posture. Within the Iranian EFL context, based upon the former provided research in the literature, a model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) was proposed (Figure 1) and tested. The findings are in agreement with the previous studies that motivation facilitates intercultural communicative competence (Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013), attitude is positively related to ICC (Arasaratnam, 2006; Deardorff, 2006), and when considering ICC, both autonomy and cognitive learning strategies play mediational roles (Ghasemi et al. 2020).

Addressing the impact of individual differences and self variables, the proposed model shows an acceptable fit to the data, which lends support for the relationships between international posture, L2 motivation, autonomy, cognitive (deep/surface) learning strategies and intercultural communication competence (H1). The data analysis revealed that L2 motivation ($\beta = .388$) is first with a moderate difference to autonomy ($\beta = .311$, indirect path coefficient), signifying that motivation was the strongest predictor in the current study. Therefore, this can be regarded an appropriate model of ICC for EFL learners, particularly in the Iranian context. This finding can be justified in the light that learners with positive attitudes to the L2 target communities and interest in getting to know people from different cultures and ethnicities are more motivated to reduce the gap they feel between their current and ideal selves. Having a clearer image of the distance between the present and destined selves directs learners to further employ learning strategies and exert more effort to deal with problems when communicating in an L2 language, thereby having a more intercultural communicative competence level. L2 learners' tendency to participate in international affairs, the vision of future self-guides and taking responsibility for the L2 learning act as an incentive for regulating their strategies and as an impetus for guiding them to invest more attempts to effectively communicate with L2 individuals. The findings are in line with the proposed theories to date, which have incorporated motivational, cognitive, and skills elements in ICC models (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). The findings are also consistent with those of Ghasemi et al. (2020), in which positive attitudes to the target culture and attempts to reduce the gap between actual and destined selves have been found as the significant predictors of ICC variances.

The statistical modelling offered support for the direct relationship between L2 motivational self-system and ICC (H2). The finding shows that language learners with vivid imaginations of the gap between their actual and ideal selves are more motivated to look for opportunities to interact with people from other cultures. Also, that can be argued that learners' desire to achieve the necessary attributes for having a higher level of language and also experiencing encouragement and positive feedback from others would direct learners to be open to people of other languages and ethnicities, which would lead to higher ICC. The results are consistent with Mirzaei and Forouzandeh (2013), and Öz (2014), which add more evidence to the proposed close relationship between L2 motivation and ICC (e.g., Deardorff 2006).

In addition, the results show support for the indirect relationship between motivation and ICC when mediated by autonomy and cognitive learning strategies (H3). The findings suggest that an L2 motivated learner, as a result of receiving promising feedback or vision of his/her ideal self, is more inclined to take responsibility for his learning and be "an active interpreter of new information in terms of what s/he already and uniquely knows" (Bergen, 1990; Dam 1995). Autonomous learners would be more expected to be able to determine objectives, plan, select materials, and monitor and evaluate their learning. The direct path from autonomy to cognitive learning strategies and then to the ICC model implies that autonomous learners are more likely to take cognitive learning strategies, namely deep learning process, critical thinking, elaboration, and the rehearsal to exercise more control

over their learning and enhance their performance when communicating in an L2 language conversation with speakers of other cultures (H5). This mirrors the findings concerning the explanatory power of motivation and L2 autonomy on language proficiency and academic mastery (León, Núñez & Liew, 2015). Similarly, Sobkowiak (2017) indicated that autonomous learning has a positive impact on L2 learners' ICC, believing that giving learners control over various aspects of the learning process can contribute to the effective development of their ICC.

Additionally, three paths were drawn to indirectly link international posture to ICC when mediated by motivation, autonomy and cognitive learning strategies (H4). The results could be explained with reference to the point that international posture activates L2 learners' self-guides and motivates them to make a mental image of being proficient language users in the target L2 community. Mental imagery would lead learners to make more efforts to discover the norms of L2 learners' culture when communicating with them. Also, the reason for the relationship between international posture and autonomy may lie in the intrinsic feature of international posture. Interested in seeking and interacting with international friends, as an example, directs learners to learn "a way of being in the world" (Breen & Mann 1997:134). So, they would practice critical reflection on their learning and take more independent actions to improve language mastery. It is likely that autonomous L2 learners own more capacity to improve their competence for intercultural communication with other individuals. This conforms to the previous studies, which found a positive relationship between IP, motivation, and autonomy (Littlewood, 1999; Peng, 2015; Yashima, 2009). Furthermore, the results of the present research are congruent with the study performed by Ghasemi et al. (2020), which has ascribed the positive association between international posture and ICC to the strong desires of internationally oriented learners to make intercultural friendships and international affairs.

Cognitive learning strategies have been identified as significantly related to ICC for the language learner population (H6). A possible explanation for this direct relation is that motivated and autonomous L2 learners are more expected to employ cognitive strategies to pull information together, take a more active role in processing information, relate ideas to each other, critically analyze the new knowledge, and integrate new ideas to the existing ones, which help learners cope with difficulties and uncertainties when communicating interculturally; this would optimize their learning mastery. The strong effect of deep and surface learning strategies corroborates the previous findings regarding the influence of learning strategies, in general, on learners' competence in intercultural communication. Similar findings were reported in empirical studies such as Bernard (2004), and Pressley and Harris (2006) in which the use of cognitive strategies was found conducive to better learning mastery and proficiency.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The current study provides some substantial findings on the relation between L2 motivation, international posture, cognitive learning strategies, autonomy, and intercultural communicative competence in the Iranian EFL context. Educationalists and theorists in EFL contexts, in particular in Iran, have come to the idea that having international relationships with foreign countries is quite inevitable, and this can be met by knowing and respecting others' cultures to appropriately interact and effectively communicate with them. This can justify the importance of empowering Iranian language learners' intercultural communicative competence in a world where globalization seems to be going forward at more pace than before. Overall, the results have demonstrated that the L2 learners who are interested in seeking international jobs and also making friends with people of other cultures are expected to practice more autonomy in their learning and make more efforts in achieving competence for interacting with people of target communities, thus having greater ICC. Also, the research contributes to the literature that motivation both directly and indirectly (through the mediating roles of autonomy and metacognitive strategies) is a strong predictor of ICC. A possible explanation was that the learners with clearer mental imagery of their destined selves and desire for achieving L2 attributes are likely to have a purposeful and attainable learning process by taking more responsibility and cognitive engagement in the learning process, which in turn would lead to ICC achievement. This conforms to the empirical studies of Peng (2015) and Öz (2014), where IP, motivation and ICC were indicated to be significantly related to each other.

The findings have significant implications for language teachers to help their learners develop their learners' competence when faced with people of different cultures and ethnicities. Teachers and instructors are recommended to know that in the EFL contexts in which individuals lack close contacts with people of other cultures, enriching the learners' attitudes to the L2 cultures and making them interested in intercultural affairs (by TVs, news, movies, etc.) would motivate them to develop their competence for intercultural communication. Also, teachers ought to know that giving more voice to students for classroom management and instructional intercultural-oriented tasks can help them take more responsibility for their learning. Integration of challenging socio-cultural tasks and incorporation of intercultural aspects such as greeting, apologizing, requesting, complaining, and so on in discursive and comparison methods can enrich learners' understanding of different cultures and develop their intercultural communicative competence. Policymakers also need to know that promoting language learners' level of ICC entails teachers with a high level of ICC, as discussed by Saricoban and Öz (2014). It has been argued that teachers familiar with the L2 cultures are potentially more capable of improving their learners' intercultural communicative competence (Sercu, Mendez Garcia & Prieto, 2004). Therefore, teacher trainers and educational managers can incorporate intercultural topics in their training courses and provide the student-teachers with the techniques for teaching cultural aspects.

The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of some limitations. The first might entail the use of quantitative techniques to obtain the required data. The use of qualitative methods such as interviews and observations or mixed methods would provide more in-depth insights regarding the language learners' ICC. Second, two aspects of cognitive learning strategies, namely deep and surface ones, have been employed in the current research, which can limit generalizing the findings to other aspects. Thus, further research can include critical thinking or elaboration strategies to investigate the potential relationships with ICC. The use of a convenience sampling procedure among the Iranian EFL learners would make it difficult to generalize the findings to other contexts. Therefore, interested researchers are recommended to replicate the study on learners of different ethnicities and cultures.

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About the Authors

Ali Asghar Ghasemi is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of English Language and Literature at Arak University, Iran. His fields of interest are Psycholinguistics, Individual Differences in SLA, and Language Testing.

Mosa Ahmadian is currently an associate professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Arak University, Iran. His fields of interest are Psycholinguistics and Instructed SLA, TEFL, Critical Discourse Analysis, Translation Studies, and Literature, on which he has published and presented many papers in (inter)national journals and conferences. He runs courses on translation, English Literature, and Applied Linguistics for BA and MA students and courses on Psycholinguistics, FLA, and SLA studies for PhD candidates. He has carried out a number of research projects on Translatology, Textology and Intertextuality. He has supervised a great number of MA and PhD theses relating to his fields of study.

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