Self-regulated smart learning environment, classroom engagement and intercultural communicative competence of EFL students in China

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Abstract

Intercultural communication competency has become one of the essential abilities that Chinese international people should possess. Numerous research studies have been done to improve the communicative abilities of Chinese students. However, there is still a research gap in this field, which is worth studying. The study used the descriptive research design to explore the Chinese college students' self-regulated smart learning environment, classroom engagement, intercultural communicative competence, and their relationship among the cited three variables in language learning. Participants from the Anhui Institute of International Business, totaling 385, were asked to complete the questionnaires. The results reflected that males, international trade majors, and sophomores have better assessments on self-regulated smart learning environment. They are more engaged in classrooms and have good cross-cultural awareness, high recognition, and a correct attitude toward cross-cultural communication ability. However, the majority of participants lack sufficient cross-cultural skills and communication abilities. Results also revealed strong relationships among intercultural communicative competence, classroom engagement, and self-regulated smart learning environments. Moreover, students place high emphasis on service quality in a self-regulated smart learning environment. Hence, a sound system, relevant information, and service quality form the cornerstone of successful learning in a smart learning environment. A language learning program was proposed as an output to increase Chinese EFL learners' international communicative skills.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, self-regulated learning, smart learning environment, classroom engagement, EFL students in China

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1. Introduction

With the rapid development of technology, cultural exchanges, and the need for new situations, online classes are becoming increasingly common. In the new self-regulated smart learning environment, improving students' classroom participation and intercultural communication skills has become an urgent problem many colleges and universities must solve. Byram (2020) explained the significance of intercultural communication and suggested that the cornerstone of "intercultural citizenship" (ICit) is intercultural communicative competence (ICC). In addition to highlighting the value of intercultural competency, Jackson (2019) offers students a framework for developing their skills that will improve their comprehension of the complexity of language and intercultural communication in a variety of international contexts.

The above proponents and statements indicate that this research is necessary. Research on "intercultural communication skills" is relatively limited, and intercultural communication skills are not equivalent to foreign language ability among Chinese students. Although the smart learning environment provides essential support for achieving high learning engagement, in the actual teaching process, students' classroom engagement has not increased significantly as expected. Therefore, the questionnaire survey method was used to collect data based on relevant theories in this research. After description and analysis, the study proposed a language learning program to promote students' classroom engagement and intercultural communicative skills under a self-regulated smart learning environment.

Objectives of the study - This study aimed to examine the connections between EFL students' international communicative competency, classroom engagement, and self-regulated smart learning environments in China. Specifically, the paper sought to describe the demographic profile of the respondents as to sex, major and year level; to determine respondents' experience in self-regulated smart learning environment according to behaviour factor, personal factor, system quality, information quality and service quality; to identify classroom engagement in terms of skills engagement, participation/interaction engagement, emotional engagement and performance engagement; to assess the respondents' intercultural communicative competence as to attitudes, knowledge, awareness and skills; to test the significant differences of the respondents' responses on self-regulated smart learning environment, classroom engagement and intercultural communicative competence when grouped according to sex, major and year level; to test the relationships among self-regulated smart learning environment, classroom engagement and intercultural communicative competence; to propose a language learning program based on the findings of the study.

2. Methods

Research Design - Through the use of a descriptive research design that incorporates findings interpretation, the study sought to identify the main relationships between the self-regulating smart learning environment, classroom engagement, and intercultural communication ability. The researcher attempted to collect data from the participants by utilizing survey questionnaires.

Participants of the study - The study involved first- and second-year students from the Anhui Institute of International Business in the central Chinese province of Anhui, majoring in science and liberal arts. The target institution has around 20,000 first- and second-year students. The Raosoft online sample size calculation yielded a total of 385 respondents. As a result, the intended respondents received a total of 385 questionnaires.

Data Gathering Instrument - Information gathering used adopted and modified questionnaire. The first part

of the questionnaire contains the respondents' profiles, including their sex, major, and year level. The second part was the Self-regulated Smart Learning Environment Questionnaire, developed in 2022 based on students' experiences in a smart learning environment by Muhammad Zeeshan Shakir and Yusufu Gambo. The third part was the classroom engagement questionnaire based on the Measure of Traditional Classroom classroom engagement by Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, and Towler (2005). It was derived from The Online Classroom Engagement Scale (OSE) by Dixson (2015). Beliefs about Intercultural Communicative Competence (BICCI), created by Duisembekova (2021), was the source of inspiration for the fourth part of the questionnaire on intercultural communicative competence. There are 73 items in total. A 4-point Likert scale with the options of strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree was used to display the replies.

Data Analysis - All valid survey data points were tallied, coded and statistically analyzed to address the research questions. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was utilized to perform statistical analysis on the data. Quantitative data analysis was done for this investigation. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize the sample's background data and the student's answers to questions about intercultural communicative competence, classroom engagement, and self-regulated smart learning environment learning experience, classroom engagement, and intercultural communicative competence. Pearson correlations analysis was used to examine the relationships between the self-regulated smart learning environment, classroom engagement, and intercultural communicative competence. To ascertain the statistical significance of the sex differences, the self-regulated-sample T-test was employed using a self-regulated smart learning environment, classroom engagement, and intercultural communicative competence.

Ethical Considerations - Personal information about respondents, other than their sex, major, and year level, was not revealed in this study for ethical and confidentiality reasons. Researchers made sure participants had read and comprehended all instructions and study protocols during the course of the trial. The researcher ensured that the respondents voluntarily answer the questionnaires. Furthermore, before the statistics, an ethical assessment is conducted to guarantee the students' rights, and ethical authorization is obtained from the research center at the University of the Lyceum in the Philippines.

3. Results and Discussion

 Table 1

 Summary Table on Self-regulated Smart Learning Environment

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1.Behavior Factor	3.10	Agree	2.5
2.Personal Factor	3.09	Agree	4.5
3.System Quality	3.09	Agree	4.5
4.Information Quality	3.10	Agree	2.5
5.Service Quality	3.13	Agree	1
Composite Mean	3.10	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 1 is a summary table of self-regulated smart learning environment. The composite mean is 3.10, suggesting that the respondents generally agree on the indicators. All five factors influence respondents' learning efficiency and impact the improvement of the respondents' intercultural communicative competence and learning process. Service quality got the first rank with a weighted mean of 3.13. It indicates that the respondents are significantly satisfied with the service quality under the smart learning circumstances. Bhattacharjee (2014) defines the continued use intention of online English course platform users as follows: after users first use the platform to learn, they will choose the platform again when they have other course learning needs.

The table also suggests that besides the external factors like system quality, the students focus on their intrinsic learning motivation, namely behavior factors, and pay great attention to information quality—the more benefits

and improvements users experience, the stronger the perceived usefulness and satisfaction. (Wu & Chen, 2016). The respondents' learning process and improvement of language communication skills are affected by both internal factors like behavior factor and personal factors and external factors such as system quality, information quality as well and service quality of the online platform service. Therefore, actions from various parties are needed to improve students' English competency.

 Table 2

 Summary Table on Classroom Engagement

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Skill Engagement	3.13	Agree	1.5
Emotional Engagement	3.13	Agree	1.5
Interaction/Participation Engagement	3.12	Agree	3
Performance Engagement	3.10	Agree	4
Composite Mean	3.12	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 - 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 - 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 - 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 2 is a summary table on classroom engagement. The composite mean is 3.12, indicating an agreement among the respondents about the importance of classroom engagement. Each of the four variables significantly affects the respondents' learning effect and the learning process of their intercultural communicative competence. The student engagement theory can explain most of the empirical data from earlier studies on how the environment affects students' development, which draws on various psychological, emotional, skill, performance, participation and interaction, and traditional learning theories. As a result, studying student engagement theory can benefit researchers looking into student development and teachers, MOOC recorders, administrators, and designers of online courses in creating more productive learning environments (Heilporn et al., 2021).

 Table 3

 Summary Table on Intercultural Communicative Competence

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Attitudes	3.22	Agree	1
Knowledge	3.12	Agree	4
Awareness	3.19	Agree	2
Skills	3.13	Agree	3
Composite Mean	3.17	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 3 is a summary table of respondents' evaluation of intercultural communicative competence. The composite mean value is 3.17, which suggests that the respondents generally agree the depictions of the four indicators in the table. With a mean value of 3.22, "attitudes" had the highest value of all the items mentioned. This indicates that students view cross-cultural communication positively, are more conscious of cultural variety, and understand the value of cross-cultural competency. Byram (2020) integrated cultural identification and understanding in his conceptual definition of intercultural communicative competence and strongly emphasized language. He proposed an intercultural communication competency model with five components: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other elements. He highlighted elements like social context and nonverbal communication to define intercultural communicative competency clearly.

Following "attitude" closely, "awareness" got a weighted mean value of 3.19. This indicates that the students are aware of both their own culture and the cultures of other nations. Chen (2014) stated that an effective interculturalist possesses both cultural self-knowledge and cultural awareness to decrease the ambiguity and uncertainty inherent in cross-cultural contact. Studies on the importance of developing cultural awareness have been published in the literature on multiple occasions (Adler et al., 2018). "Skills" received a lower value of 3.13 compared to the other items, and "Knowledge" received the lowest value of 3.12 out of the four indicators. Compared with attitude and awareness, students still need to gain the information and abilities necessary to navigate other cultures. According to the research, there are three primary causes behind the outcome.

 Table 4

 Relationship Between Self-regulated Smart Learning Environment and Classroom Engagement

Behavior Factor	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Skill Engagement	.759**	0.000	Highly Significant
Emotional Engagement	.681**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction/Participation Engagement	.677**	0.000	Highly Significant
Performance Engagement	.643**	0.000	Highly Significant
Personal Factor			
Skill Engagement	.706**	0.000	Highly Significant
Emotional Engagement	.676**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction/Participation Engagement	.679**	0.000	Highly Significant
Performance Engagement	.627**	0.000	Highly Significant
System Quality			
Skill Engagement	.755**	0.000	Highly Significant
Emotional Engagement	.712**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction/Participation Engagement	.735**	0.000	Highly Significant
Performance Engagement	.616**	0.000	Highly Significant
Information Quality			
Skill Engagement	.773**	0.000	Highly Significant
Emotional Engagement	.760**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction/Participation Engagement	.751**	0.000	Highly Significant
Performance Engagement	.658**	0.000	Highly Significant
Service Quality			
Skill Engagement	.778**	0.000	Highly Significant
Emotional Engagement	.757**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction/Participation Engagement	.721**	0.000	Highly Significant
Performance Engagement	.669**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

Table 4 illustrates that a self-regulated smart learning environment and student involvement are highly significant. The calculated r-values show a strong direct association, and the resulting p-values were below the alpha level. The data indicates a significant correlation between the two variables and demonstrates that the quality of the SRL environment impacts student involvement in the classroom. Students will be more satisfied with the use of the smart teaching environment and will participate in class more actively if the system, information, and service quality are all greater. Manganello et al. (2019) assessed the efficacy of the self-regulated web-based learning platform. The study's findings showed that students were engaged in and actively learning. They also suggested web-based SRL platforms could aid students' skill development and active learning. The evaluation results were helpful, but the study needed a theoretical model to offer a perspective on interpreting the data.

Table 5 illustrates the highly significant correlation between intercultural communication competency and a self-regulated smart learning environment. The computed r-values show a strong direct correlation, and the resulting p-values were below the alpha threshold. This shows that there was a strong correlation between the two and that the quality of the SRL environment had an impact on students' competence. Students' excitement for learning, their ability to communicate across cultural boundaries, and the system's quality and information are all positively connected with how happy they are with the smart learning environment.

Peng (2021) investigated college students' online self-regulation about blended learning using survey tools from the Effectiveness of Learning English (EOLE) and Online Self-Regulated English Learning (OSEL). The findings also highlight how vital goal-setting, environment structuring, and learner self-evaluation are to the success of English language instruction. The results showed that these variables might be used to interpret how well language learners picked up the language. In order to find out how SRL strategies-focused online pre-graduate courses affected students' academic success and self-regulation, Alkhasawnh and Alqahtani (2019) conducted a study. The results illustrated that the online course and SRL treatments significantly impact students' academic performance and self-regulation.

 Table 5

 Relationship Between Self-regulated Smart Learning Environment and Intercultural Communicative Competence

Behavior Factor	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Attitudes	.519**	0.000	Highly Significant
Knowledge	.674**	0.000	Highly Significant
Awareness	.580**	0.000	Highly Significant
Skills	.629**	0.000	Highly Significant
Personal Factor			
Attitudes	.505**	0.000	Highly Significant
Knowledge	.677**	0.000	Highly Significant
Awareness	.588**	0.000	Highly Significant
Skills	.651**	0.000	Highly Significant
System Quality			Highly Significant
Attitudes	.559**	0.000	Highly Significant
Knowledge	.703**	0.000	Highly Significant
Awareness	.623**	0.000	Highly Significant
Skills	.703**	0.000	Highly Significant
Information Quality			
Attitudes	.606**	0.000	Highly Significant
Knowledge	.727**	0.000	Highly Significant
Awareness	.639**	0.000	Highly Significant
Skills	.688**	0.000	Highly Significant
Service Quality			
Attitudes	.629**	0.000	Highly Significant
Knowledge	.713**	0.000	Highly Significant
Awareness	.645**	0.000	Highly Significant
Skills	.677**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

 Table 6

 Relationship Between Classroom Engagement and Intercultural Communicative Competence

Skill Engagement	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Attitudes	.619**	0.000	Highly Significant
Knowledge	.752**	0.000	Highly Significant
Awareness	.680**	0.000	Highly Significant
Skills	.729**	0.000	Highly Significant
Emotional Engagement			
Attitudes	.635**	0.000	Highly Significant
Knowledge	.791**	0.000	Highly Significant
Awareness	.696**	0.000	Highly Significant
Skills	.740**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction/Participation Engagement			
Attitudes	.642**	0.000	Highly Significant
Knowledge	.810**	0.000	Highly Significant
Awareness	.720**	0.000	Highly Significant
Skills	.770**	0.000	Highly Significant
Performance Engagement			
Attitudes	.607**	0.000	Highly Significant
Knowledge	.738**	0.000	Highly Significant
Awareness	.654**	0.000	Highly Significant
Skills	.681**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

The relationship between intercultural communication competence and classroom participation is seen in Table 6. The calculated r-values show a high degree of direct connection, and the p-values that were obtained were below the alpha threshold. This indicates that a strong association exists and suggests that students' competence increases with their level of engagement. Scholars Akbari et al. (2016) examined the relationship between student involvement and English language learning in a college English course in 2016. They found a strong, positive relationship with each other through their investigation. In general, students' English values will rise with increased engagement. Liu (2023) also proposed that intercultural communication and student engagement are highly correlated. The study found that the interactive communicative nature of teaching activities and evaluation, the diversity of new media, and process monitoring are the three dimensions of solutions to the problem of English

intercultural competency training in the self-regulated intelligent learning environment.

Table 7Proposed Language Learning Program to Enhance Self-regulated Smart Learning Environment, Students Engagement, and Intercultural Communicative Competence for Chinese EFL Students

Engagement, and in	1	Stratagias/		
Key Result Area	Objectives	Strategies/ Activities	Success Indicator	Persons Involved
Self-regulated smart	To improve system	- School-enterprise cooperation and		English teachers;
learning environment		facilitate smart learning systems in school		College and
	learning	computers.	upgrading of the	university
1.1 system quality	environment.	-Schools take actions to build more		authorities;
		friendly, interactive and high-quality	training system.	Students;
1.2 personal factor		learning platforms to promote effective		System
		learning.		developers.
		-Test system performance in advance;		
			90% of the service	
		information and enhance the stability,	information can be	
		timeliness and responsiveness of the		English teachers;
	students' personal	operating system.		College and
	factors such as self-			university
		upgrading on training classrooms.		authorities;
	efficiency and so on			Students;
		Track and investigate system service		System
	language	quality regularly.		developers.
			90% of students can	
		the system to students on a regular basis.	improve their	
	smart learning environment		language skills and	T 1' 1 4 1
				English teachers;
		Learning self-efficiency and confidence training courses"		College and
		-Arrange rich and colorful training courses		university authorities;
		in school professional training classrooms.		Students;
		Teachers strengthen guidance and		System
		monitoring of students to assist students in		developers.
		better online learning.		ac verepers.
		-Conduct case study to learn from		
		successful learning examples.		
2. Classroom	To guide students to	English communication ability	90 percent of	English teachers;
engagement	be brave enough to	improvement Forum	students are	Students;
		Invite professional English teachers or	0 0	Lecturers.
			forums and get	
2.1 performance	interaction.	about the strategies on English	much knowledge	
engagement		communication to promote students'	from the forums;	
		performance engagement.		
		Offer rich resources, such as instructional		
		videos or learning materials to help		
		students achieve their learning goals.		
		-Teachers set up group cooperation		
		activities in class. Such as role plays, discussion sessions, speeches, oral	90 percent of	
		interpretation and so on to establish		English teachers;
				Students;
		performance;	method and be more	,
			engaged in small	
			classes.	
		teaching		
		Teachers use the latest teaching methods		
	To improve		90 percent of	
			teachers get much	
	course design	such as English songs, short videos, and		English teachers;
		English drama imitation shows	*	Students;
	improve students'		competitions and be	
	performance	Teacher digital competency training	more competent in	
	engagement	Conduct offline teacher digital	smart learning and	
			teaching environment.	
		semester.		

	-Conduct online teacher training, so teachers understand the latest technology and teaching methodsTeachers' online competition		
be brave enough to speak and communicate to peers, teachers, or foreigners; to improve intercultural	-Set up an English corner with a weekly or monthly English speaking opportunities, such as story telling, personal experience sharing, overseas travelling sharing and friends making on a regular basis. -Provide a supportive and encouraging	to communicate	English teachers; Students; international students.
To improve the communicative knowledge of students with the guidance of relevant activities.	foreign judges to give suggestions to students and help students overcome stage fright. Cross cultural knowledge prize competition: Organize two cross-cultural knowledge competitions every semester to increase students' cross-cultural knowledge storage and improve their cross-cultural communication skills.	ability has improved through the contest. 90 percent of students are excited to answer questions and accumulate some intercultural knowledge.	School leaders; English teachers; Students; international students. English teachers; Students; international students.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings revealed seven points. First, there were more female students than male students. The distribution of respondents among the five majors is about equal, with a slightly higher number of marketing and international trade majors than the other three majors. Second, all five indicators—behavior factor, personal factor, system quality, information quality, and service quality—were accepted by the respondents. Students place the highest emphasis on service quality in a self-regulated smart learning environment besides personal factors. Thus, sound systems, information, and service quality form the cornerstone of a successful smart learning environment. Third, interaction/participation engagement and performance engagement in the smart learning environment were comparatively weaker than those of skills and emotional engagement. Fourth, participants had excellent crosscultural awareness, high recognition, and a correct attitude toward cross-cultural communication ability. However, the majority of participants lack sufficient cross-cultural skills and communication abilities. Fifth, males, international trade majors, and sophomores have better assessments of self-regulated smart learning environments. They are more engaged in classrooms and have higher recognition and evaluation of intercultural communicative competence. Sixth, self-regulated smart learning environment, classroom engagement, and intercultural communicative competence were all highly correlated. This implies that the better the self-regulated smart learning environment, the more the students are engaged in the classroom and the more competent the students are. Last, a language learning program was proposed to improve the students' classroom engagement under the self-regulated

smart learning environment, thus improving Chinese EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence.

Some recommendations are proposed. First, online course designers may design relevant and interesting materials or courses to stimulate students' critical thinking. Encourage students to consider their multicultural communication skills while giving the teacher vital information. This could make students more self-conscious learners. Second, teachers may take intercultural communication knowledge into account when designing lectures or compiling teaching materials in addition to providing students with methodical guidance on improving their communication skills. Third, learners may improve their communicative capability by self-regulating their learning strategies, learning process, self-reflection, self-monitoring, and cooperating actively with teachers and peers. Fourth, future researchers may increase the number and variety of respondents by looking into more students from various majors and institutions to compare the differences in terms of major and sex in the self-regulated smart learning environment, classroom participation, and intercultural communicative competence. Last, a proposed language learning program may be implemented to enhance the system quality of a self-regulated smart learning environment, students' performance engagement, and intercultural communicative knowledge for Chinese EFL students.

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