# Home Cultural Attachment and Self-Regulated Strategies among Iranian EFL Learners

Atiyeh Kamyabi Gol

(Corresponding author), Assistant Professor, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

kamyabigol@um.ac.ir

Nahid Royaei

Imam Reza International University, Iran

royaei_nahid@yahoo.com

## Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the probable relationship between self-regulated strategies and home cultural attachment among Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. To achieve the purpose of this study, 90 EFL upper intermediate and advanced levels students (both male and female) were selected according to convenience sampling from different language institutes in Mashhad, Iran. They were asked to complete the 'Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire' and the 'Home Cultural Attachment Scale.' In order to achieve anonymity, each participant was also given a written consent form which elaborated the confidentiality of the obtained data. The findings based on correlation, demonstrate the theoretical expectation of a link between self-regulation and home cultural attachment. In addition, the result of the findings indicated that among the components of self-regulated strategies, 'self-regulation' and 'self-efficacy' have the highest correlations with students' home cultural attachment. Subsequent data from step-wise regression showed that among sub-components of self-regulation, regulation is the best predictor of learners' home cultural attachment. The implications of the research are further discussed with reference to earlier findings.

**Keywords:** Self-Regulation, Self-Efficacy, Home Cultural Attachment, EFL Learners

# 1. Introduction

In our postmodern world today, knowledge of the world's languages and cultures is becoming more vital every day. The most widely cited definition of culture is provided by Tylor (1871) who mentions that in sociology culture is believed to be socially patterned human thought and behavior. Culture involves at least three components: what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce. Thus, mental processes, beliefs, knowledge, and values are parts of culture. Self-regulation is a concept which is derived from a socio cognitive perspective (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2003).

Self-regulation theory is a pervasive theory which has devoted a great deal of attention to itself since it has a significant influence on different aspects of human life such as students' achievement (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990), teaching profession (Yesim, Sunger, & Uzeuntiryaki, 2009), and sport experts (Clearly & Zimmerman, 2001). Zimmerman (2000, P.14, cited in Capa et al., 2009, p.345) defined self-regulation as "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals". In educational context self-regulated learners perform educational tasks with confidence, effort, and resourcefulness (Zimmerman, 1990). Contemporary teacher professional development motivates teachers to learn from their context of teaching (Randi, 2004). Students learning attainment as a source of feedback of teachers' profession is beneficial for self-regulated teachers (Rand, 2004). It is indicated that the more self-regulated the teachers are, the more they are successful in their career (Monshi Toussi, Boori, & Ghanizadeh, 2011).

Generally, we find there are two main areas of culture that are of great importance: the first is home culture which refers to the native culture of the learner and second, is the foreign culture which is the culture of the foreign

language being taught. The relationship between these two cultures plays a vital role in a learner's language learning experience.

The major aim of the present study is to explore the relationship between self-regulated strategies and home cultural attachment among Iranian EFL learners. The researchers of the current study sought out to examine this association on the ground of logical assumption derived from the theoretical framework of both self-regulation, and cultural attachment. People within a culture make sense of the world and apply their experience in a similar vein (Molden & Dweck, 2006). Based on sociocultural learning theory, cultural factors play a significant role in developing learners' self-regulation and this self-regulation is improved in a meaningful and collaborative environment (Butler, 2002). So, it was hypothesized that such a link existed between learners' self-regulated strategies scores and their home cultural attachment.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. Self-regulation

According to Zimmerman "self-regulation (or self-regulated learning) refers to learning that results from students' self-generated thought and behaviors that are systematically oriented toward the attainment of their learning goals" (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2003, p.59). Self-regulated learners choose the apt learning strategies in consistent with the feedback they receive about the effectiveness of their academic performance as well as their skill (Zimmerman, 1990). In self-regulated learning, an individual is viewed as a causal agent in their own environment (Barnard-Brak, Lan, & Paton, 2010). This agentic aspect offers human beings who are self-regulated in learning, to perform both autonomously and causally to have an effect on their results and experiences (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010). From this agentic aspect, the self-regulation of

learning is taken into consideration as supporting self-deterministic dimension (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010).

Attributional feedback is influential in self-regulated learning since it enhances learners' motivation, their sense of efficacy, and attainment (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2003). Employing strategies is an inseparable component of self-regulated learning because strategies offer learner better management over information processing (Butler, 2002). When applying strategies, self-regulated learners evaluate their outcome related to the kind of strategy (Butler, 2002). The result of a research carried out by Chen and Chau (2013) regarding self-regulated strategies and e-portfolio achievement- "An e-portfolio provides online environment enabling students to set their learning goals and subsequently collect, organize and present digital artifacts to attain those goals" (Hartnell-Young & Morriss, 2007, cited in Cheng & Chau, 2013, p.9)- revealed that five components of learning strategies include elaboration, organization, critical thinking, metacognitive self-regulation, and peer learning had a significant relationship with learners' e-portfolio scores. Effective learners self-assess their task achievement according to task criteria rather than their teacher judgment; they also translate the offered feedback from their teachers, scores, and peers (Butler, 2002).

Zimmerman (2008) offered several techniques for evaluating learners' self-regulated learning online such as computer traces, think-aloud protocols, structured dairies, direct observation, and macro-analytic measure. Self-efficacy is vital for students' achievement (Schunk, 1996). When learners set a goal, they find a sense of efficacy which encourages them to devote more time and effort to achieve their goals (Schunk, 1996).

Pintrich (2004) stated that most self-regulated learning definitions have four general assumptions in common. The first one is the *active, constructive*

*assumption* (italicized in the original paper) that derived from cognitive aspects. In this perspective, learners are expected to construct their own meaning, aims, and techniques from the existing information in their "external" environment and "internal" environment. A second supposition is *the potential for control assumption* (italicized in the original paper). In this matter student can monitor, check, manage, and regulate particular dimensions of their own cognition, motivation, and behavior and some characteristics of their conditions. However, this assumption does not imply that humans can always manage and regulate their cognitive, motivation, and behavior. Some checking and managing is possible.

The *goal, criterion or standards assumption*, (italicized in the original paper), consists of the third assumption. Individuals plan a goal to develop in their learning and then regulate their cognition, motivation, and behavior for achieving their aims. The last general assumption is that self-regulatory activities are *mediators between personal and contextual characteristics and actual achievement and performance* (italicized in the original paper). It offers besides cultural, contextual, individual differences, individuals' self-regulation of their cognitive, motivation and behavior are significant factors in goal achievement. Self-regulated models are significant since they shed light on students individual differences; their conception of themselves as learners have an effect on their proactive efforts to self-regulate studying (Zimmerman, 1998).

There are some psychological perspectives that influence the degree as well as the quality of the self-regulated process that students employ during academic studying such as motivation, method, and time (Zimmerman, 1998).

Butler (2006) defined strategic content learning (SCL) as a valid framework to enhance self-regulated learning. Based on his definition there are

some theoretic assumptions including, first, SCL was derived from the evaluation of self-regulated, strategic performance (Butler, 2002). Second, in SCL teacher and student together find "solutions" to satisfy task requirement (Butler, 2002). Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1990) found that intelligent student applies more particular self-regulated strategies than their normal peers. These strategies include organizing and transforming, self-consequating, seeking peer help, and reviewing notes. These strategies show triadic bidirectional intertwining components of self-regulated learning. Organizing and transforming relate to regulating and adjusting individual processes, self-consequating refers to individuals' performance, and reviewing notes and seeking peer help refer to learners' surrounding. Since teaching profession deals with problem-solving and creativity, it is significant for teachers to get familiar with the notion of self-regulation (Paris & Winograd, 2006).

According to Bandura, (1977) providing students with self-regulatory abilities contributes to their educational achievement as well as increasing lifelong learning (Young, 2005).

## 2.2. The Cultural Dimension of Language Teaching

Language teaching has many different cultural dimensions. Risager (2007) divides these different dimensions into three types including: 1) the content dimension 2) the context dimension and 3) the poetic dimension.

### 2.2.1. The Content Dimension

The content dimension is related to the thematic content of teaching which includes both the cultural and the societal relations that are studied in different

types of text and film. Culture in this sense refers to the target language countries' images the learners are introduced to and interpret (Risager, 2007).

## 2.2.2. The Context Dimension

This dimension is related to the social situations in which the language is used, and it has to do with the sociocultural knowledge that is required in order to use language in an effective way. Culture, in this dimension, refers to the context of language use; which is generally the context found in those countries where the target language is spoken as a first language (Risager, 2007).

## 2.2.3. The Poetic Dimension

This dimension is related to the poetics of language; and culture refers to the aesthetic, poetic usage of language in both written and spoken forms (Risager, 2007).

## 2.3. Generic vs. Differential Understanding of Language and Culture

It is important to distinguish between the generic and differential understanding of language and culture. In the generic sense of the idea, language and culture are universal phenomena: language in general and culture in general; it is in this sense that language and culture are inseparable and that language is embedded in the culture. This is the idea in which the knowledge acquired can be generalized and applied across cultures. However, in the differential sense of this understanding of language and culture, the diversity among world languages and world cultures is focused upon. In this sense of the idea, a distinction can be made between a general and a specific level. For example, studies regarding language contact, multilingualism or language teaching, in general, would belong to the general level while studies related to one particular language such

as English, French, etc. would comply with the specific level. In this latter sense of the idea, the acquisition of knowledge and skills are related to the target culture. So, only a particular culture group is focused on (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, & Colby, 1996).

## 2.4. Language and Culture in Language Teaching: The Marriage Metaphor

During the 1980s a metaphor describing the relationship between language and culture received widespread attention in the United States and Europe. Crawford-Lange and Lange (as cited in Risager, 2007, p. 99) analyze this marriage metaphor:

> Although culture and language are in reality 'married,' language curricula respond to them as if they were still only 'engaged,' and this inclusion of cultural content continues to be seen as an issue separate from that of language. The groom is still waiting at the altar.

## 2.5. Language and Identity

Our postcolonial, postmodern world today consists of a wide range of different home cultures. Differences are surely appreciated in our post modern world. As one of its main goals, postcolonialism seeks to preserve the national identity of the individual. By preserving the national identity through the individual's resistance towards the colonizers' physical and mental dominance, an individual's language and home culture will be protected (Davies & Elder, 2004). Anzaldua (as cited in Barak, 2001, pp. 3-4) believes that the colonized live in a *nepantla* state "an in-between state, that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another, when changing from one class, race or sexual position to another, when traveling from the present identity to a new

identity". As Crystal (as cited in Hilmarsson-Dunn, 2006, p. 295) insists: "encapsulated within a language is most of a community's history and a large part of its national identity." According to Bhabha (as cited in McKay and Hornberger, 1996), the colonized have what he calls "Double Consciousness." By "Double Consciousness", he means that the colonized have two different cultures; one being their home culture and the other one the colonizers' culture. They feel as if their current culture is a hybrid of the two cultures. This state brings about a great deal of confusion for the colonized; because they no longer know which culture they belong to.

Patron, 2006 proposes that an individual's identity is shaped by both internal and external factors: "Whilst external factors comprise cultural tradition, custom, environment, atmosphere, location, and climate, she argues the internal factors are less tangible. These can include degrees of comfort with distinctions or ambiguity, extroversion or introversion, cultural mediation skills, and adaptation skills" (p. 78).

It is in postmodernism that we find the term 'linguistic working clothes.' According to Risager (2007), linguistic working clothes actually refers to "the conscious use of the language (the target language) in as close accordance as possible with others' norms in contexts where one is dependent on other people's acceptance e.g., at work" (p. 200). By saying just one or two words, some aspects of one's identity will be revealed to others. Our speech uncovers what groups we belong to: whether it be our age (saying 'wireless' instead of 'radio'), sex (men do not pronounce the 'g' in 'ing' endings such as 'walking' while women do) or even our religion (the pronunciation of 'mass' could determine your religion in England) (Cook, 2001). Mišić Ilić (2004) asserts that in many communities it is possible to tell an individual's origin and class

according to their speech. Firth (as cited in Cook, 2001, p. 175) observes: "it is part of the meaning of an American to sound like one".

It is a general belief that some forms of human contact, such as colonization and also displacement of population, bring about imposition of new ideologies and ways of life. These extreme types of contact can bring about severe alterations, and often the destruction of pre-existing languages and cultures. They create new languages and cultures, but in the meanwhile, they annihilate the previous native ones. Under colonization, the cultural bases of languages are challenged and even shattered, compelling the colonized to adopt and practice the language spoken by the dominant power or any other language that would ensure their survival (Jourdan & Tuite, 2006).

In our postmodern world today, each person possesses a double identity when it comes to culture:

Most people now develop a bicultural identity, in which part of their identity is rooted in their local culture while another part stems from an awareness of their relation to the global culture. Through the media, especially television but increasingly the Internet, young people in diverse countries develop a global identity that gives them a sense of belonging to a worldwide culture and includes an awareness of the events, practices, styles and information that are part of the global culture (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 97).

To the researchers' best knowledge no study has been done to date explore the probable relationship between learners' home cultural attachment and the pattern of self-regulated strategies. Furthermore, this study investigates the best predictor of home cultural attachment among sub-capabilities of self-regulated strategies. Therefore the current study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners home cultural attachment scores and their use of self-regulated strategies?
2. Among the sub-components of self-regulated strategies, which of them is the best predictor of students' home cultural attachment?

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1. Participants

A total of 90 EFL students (N=90) took part in this research. The majorities of these participants were graduates or were students in different branches of English, 28 had BA or were students of BA in English teaching, 39 had BA in English literature, 23 had BA or were students of BA in English translation. Thirty-four students were male, and 56 students were female. Their age varied from 23 to 49 years old. All of the participants were students in upper intermediate and advanced levels.

## 3.2.1. Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ)

To measure students' self-regulated strategy use, they were given the MSLQ designed and validated by Pintrich and DeGroot, 1999. The test compromises 44 items which are classified into two main categories; the motivated beliefs include three subcategories: self-efficacy (9 items), intrinsic value (9 items), and test anxiety (4items). The self-regulated learning strategies encompass two subcategories: cognitive strategy use (13 items) and self-regulation (9items). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .82.

### 3.2.2. Home Cultural Attachment Scale (HCAS)

For evaluating students' dependence on their culture, home cultural attachment questionnaire designed and validated by Shahsavandi, Ghonsooly and Kamyabi Gol, 2008 was applied. This questionnaire includes 39 items. It has six components: linguistic-cultural matters and beliefs (8 items), foreign language and field of study (6 items), movies (5 items), literature and literary figures (6 items), linguistic and cultural imperialism (10 items), customs and cultural heritage (4 items). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .70.

### 3.3. Procedure

The process of data collection was carried out for 10 weeks. The participants were given the MSLQ and HCAS to fill in for 30 minutes. In order to analyze the data, the researchers applied SPSS 20 software. To explore whether there were any correlation among HCAS and self-regulated learning strategies Pearson-product moment correlation was employed. At the end, by applying step-wise regression, the researchers found out which subcomponent of self-regulation was the best predictor of students' home cultural attachment.

## 4. Results

In order to determine whether a relationship exists between participants' home cultural attachment and their self-regulated learning strategies they use, a bivariate correlation was performed. The result demonstrated a moderately significant positive correlation between these two variables ($r = .357$, $p < 0.01$).

### Table1. *Correlation*

| SR total | HCA total | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| .357[**] | 1 | Pearson Correlation | |
| .001 | | Sig. (2-tailed) | HCA total |
| 90 | 90 | N | |
| 1 | .357[**] | Pearson Correlation | |
| | .001 | Sig. (2-tailed) | SR total |
| 90 | 90 | N | |

Moreover, among the sub-components of self-regulation, regulation and self-efficacy have the highest correlation with learners' home cultural attachment respectively (r=.395, p<0.01, r=.216, p<0.05).

### Table 2. *Correlations*

| | | C total | regulation |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .397[**] |
| Ctotal | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 90 | 90 |
| | Pearson Correlation | .397[**] | 1 |
| regulation | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 90 | 90 |

### Table 3. *Correlations*

| | | C total | efficacy |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .216[*] |
| ctotal | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .041 |
| | N | 90 | 90 |
| | Pearson Correlation | .216[*] | 1 |
| efficacy | Sig. (2-tailed) | .041 | |
| | N | 90 | 90 |

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

To further analyze the data, the researchers conducted the regression analysis with a Stepwise method. The results revealed that which subscales of MSLQ

were best predictors of learners' home cultural attachment. The best predictor was regulation that could predict home cultural attachment (adjusted $R^2$= 0.14, p<0.5) indicating that students who scored high in regulatory strategies depend more on their native culture.

*Table 4.* Stepwise Regression Analysis Predicting Regulation Strategies

| $B$ | SE estimate | Adjusted $R^2$ | $R^2$ | R | Predictor |
|------|-------------|----------------|-------|-------|------------|
| .397 | 9.07596 | 0.148 | 0.158 | 0.397 | Regulation |

## 5. Discussion

Consistent with the hypothesized relationship between students' self-regulation and their home cultural attachment, the researchers' findings demonstrated a significant correlation between students' self-regulated strategies and home cultural attachment. This is compatible with theoretical and empirical research that center on the role of individual differences in academic performance. For example, Ghanizadeh and Mirzaee (2012) found the significant relationship between EFL learners' critical thinking and self-regulated strategies.

Rahimi and Sahragard (2007) believe that teaching a language is more than just teaching structures and codes and in fact, it involves teaching communication. They assert that since language and culture are interwoven, any teacher who uses authentic texts in their classroom is actually exposing the students to some explicit and at times even implicit cultural norms and values. Crystal (2000) believes local languages are very valuable in that they "promote community cohesion and vitality, foster pride in a culture, and give a community (and thus a workforce) self-confidence" (p.31).

Many scholars such as Mansoor (2002), Asraf (1996) and Hilmarsson-Dunn (2006) believe the best way to prevent deculturation in language learners

is to publish and utilize local materials. They think native authors should create materials for pedagogical purposes. They feel a new type of language material that can assist language learners in using English for functional purposes should be produced. Mansoor (2002) argues that by using the local materials, which incorporate the cultural values of the learners, the learners will experience a more successful language leaning and cultural alienation, which is when one devalues or abandons one's own culture or cultural background, will not take place. McKay (as cited in Wilson, 2005, p. 7) also feels that the presentation of culture in EFL materials must move away from center countries. "Course materials should be tailored to allow learners to express their culture and beliefs in English".

Cultural diversity has a great impact on preserving the identity of a nation or individual. Keniston (1998) sees cultural diversity as:

> A society – or a world – that contains and supports many distinct cultures, each with its own particular strengths and weaknesses, its own language and educational system, and its own capacity to instill in its members a sense of identity-based on rootedness in their culture. (p. 142)

The significant relationship between self-efficacy which can be defined as the individuals' beliefs in their capabilities and talents to achieve a particular task (Bandura, 1986) and home cultural attachment supports the previous researches that Socialization experiences have significant effects on learners' sense of efficacy as well as their self-regulated performances (DiBenedetto & Bembenutty, 2013). Also, it is sensible that in families when parents pay more attention to their children, increase their confidences and provide facilities to their needs, these children have more positive beliefs about their own talents, and they show more attempts to get fruitful academic achievements.

The second question of the present study pointed to which components of MSLQ have the highest correlation with home cultural attachment. The result of the findings reveals that regulation has the highest correlation with home cultural attachment. The educational system of our country moves towards the more consistency between syllabus design and social norms, so it was sensible to say that how much students pay more attention and concerns about the materials they study, they find more motivation and self-efficacy to achieve their goals. This is compatible with the pervious study that learners' conceptions of learning context and their personal motivational orientations and beliefs about learning are correlated with cognitive involvement and academic achievement (Nolen, 1988, cited in Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). From a social point of view, students' particular self-regulated strategies to attain a goal play a role on teachers' building instructional strategies Ghanizadeh (2011) and "to adjust to the ever more frequent curricular revisions required by the fast pace of technological and cultural change" (Delfino, Dettori, & Persico, 2010, cited in Ghanizadeh, 2011, p.213).

The results of the current study lead to several implications. First, promoting EFL teachers' awareness of cultural norms and values contribute to learners' language achievement and avoids linguistic imperialism.

Sussman (as cited in Patron, 2006, p. 55) believes that when an individual is immersed in a new cultural context where there is a difference between the two cultures regarding behavior and thought, awareness of the profound influence of one's culture on behavior begins to grow and as a result, a new social identity status emerges which in the end strengthens one's identification with the home culture.

Lin (2009) suggested that L2 curriculum should respect students' mother cultural identities and should also encourage learners to be aware of their own

cultural values and beliefs since through this appreciation and respect toward their home culture, the learners can develop their second or foreign language learning achievement more successfully. Sowden (2007) recommended teachers to be conscious of both their students' culture and also the culture which they present in their academic setting.

Also, Future researches may also explore the effect of factors such as gender, age, and English background on the development of these constructs.

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