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The Role of Metacognitive and Socio-Affective Strategies in Shaping Communicative Competence among EFL University Students

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ABSTRACT

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, communicative competence remains a crucial goal for higher education students. However, the roles of learning strategies—particularly metacognitive and socio-affective strategies in shaping communicative competence are still underexplored. This study aims to examine the predictive relationship between students' use of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies and their overall communicative competence. Employing a quantitative approach with multiple regression analysis, data were collected from 120 EFL university students using standardized questionnaires. The findings revealed that socio-affective strategies significantly predicted students' communicative competence, while metacognitive strategies did not demonstrate a significant effect. The results suggest that emotional regulation, interpersonal interaction, and social support are essential components in enhancing students' ability to communicate effectively in English. This research contributes to applied linguistics and EFL pedagogy by emphasizing the importance of socio-affective dimensions in language learning and advocating for strategy-based instruction in classrooms. In terms of practical contribution, the study offers insights for language educators and curriculum developers to design more holistic and student-centered teaching strategies that promote not only linguistic knowledge but also emotional engagement and communicative confidence among students.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Keywords:
communicative competence; EFL; metacognitive strategy; socio-affective strategy

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INTRODUCTION

In the era of global communication and international collaboration, the ability to use English effectively in real-life situations has become an indispensable skill for university students, particularly in countries where English is taught as a foreign language (Wahyuni & Dewi, 2024; Yeung et al., 2023). While many students in higher education demonstrate grammatical knowledge and lexical proficiency, they often struggle to apply this knowledge effectively in authentic communicative contexts (Armea et al., 2022; Fu et al., 2022; Gupta & Sukamto, 2020; Miller, 2013). This discrepancy underscores the crucial need to cultivate communicative competence, which encompasses not only linguistic skills but also the capacity to manage discourse and navigate the sociocultural nuances of communication (Celce-Murcia, 2007; Abdulrahman & Ayyash, 2019; Leung, 2005).

Communicative competence, as conceptualized by Canale and Swain (1980), is a multidimensional construct that includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies (Celce-Murcia, 2007; Curry, 2024; Smakova, 2019). In the context of English as a Foreign

Language (EFL) learning, communicative competence is crucial because it enables students not only to master language structures but also to use the language effectively and appropriately in real-life situations (Abdulrahman & Ayyash, 2019; Smakova, 2019). Developing communicative competence allows EFL students to participate meaningfully in academic, professional, and social interactions where English is required (Lander & Brown, 1995; Nikolov, 2002; Wierzbicka, 2020). It bridges the gap between linguistic knowledge and practical language use

Despite the theoretical emphasis on communicative competence, EFL instruction in many higher education contexts remains predominantly test-oriented and teacher-centered (Alsowat, 2022; Wang, 2019). This traditional approach often sidelines students' active participation and neglects the development of higher-order learning strategies that are essential for self-regulated and socially aware communication (Crogman & Crogman, 2018; Islam et al., 2022). As a result, students are frequently positioned as passive recipients of knowledge rather than as active participants in their language development. In light of this, it becomes crucial to examine how specific student strategies, particularly metacognitive and socio-affective strategies, contribute to the development of communicative competence among EFL students.

Metacognitive strategies are those employed by students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning processes (Oxford, 2011). These strategies are crucial for fostering student autonomy and promoting deeper engagement with both language input and output. Students who employ metacognitive strategies are more likely to reflect on their language use, adjust their learning behaviors, and seek opportunities to practice meaningful communication (Andriani & Mbato, 2021; Anthonysamy, 2021; Dewi & Premini, 2018; Meinawati et al., 2021; Rivas et al., 2022; Robillos & Bustos, 2022). Meanwhile, socio-affective strategies relate to the ways students manage their emotions, interact with peers, and maintain motivation (Chamot, 2005; McDonough & Maine, 2020). These strategies help students overcome anxiety, build confidence, and actively engage in social interactions, all of which are conducive to language development and effective communication (Razawi et al., 2023).

Several previous studies have emphasized the importance of socio-affective and indirect learning strategies in enhancing students' speaking proficiency in ESL/EFL contexts. Razawi and Mohamad (2024) found that ESL students in a Malaysian university employed various socio-affective strategies, including teamwork, feedback-seeking, and emotional regulation, to enhance speaking motivation and fluency. Although no significant gender differences emerged in speaking motivation, a gender-based difference was found in the strategies used for fluency improvement. Similarly, Razawi et al. (2023) revealed that despite the integration of socio-affective strategies into the curriculum, students still struggled with speaking motivation, though most reported actively using such strategies. No significant gender differences were observed in that study. Sulistyawati et al. (2022) investigated the impact of socio-affective instruction (SAI) and metacognitive awareness during online learning in Indonesia, concluding that while SAI positively influenced both listening and speaking skills, high metacognitive awareness had a more pronounced effect on listening proficiency. Lastly, Nandiah and Muin (2025) explored the use of metacognitive, affective, and social strategies based on Oxford's taxonomy, finding that high levels of these indirect strategies were associated with improved pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, confidence, and overall speaking performance.

Although prior studies have demonstrated the significance of socio-affective and indirect strategies such as metacognitive, affective, and social approaches in enhancing speaking proficiency among ESL/EFL students (Razawi et al., 2023; Sulistyowati et al., 2022; Nandiah & Muin, 2025), most of this research has focused primarily on the general use of these strategies without examining how they relate specifically to the broader dimensions of communicative competence. Additionally, the emphasis has often been on motivation, fluency, or affective factors, with limited attention to how

these strategies impact students' ability to function effectively across all components of communicative competence as defined by Canale and Swain (1980): grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Furthermore, these studies generally did not investigate the influence of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies in a more integrated and comprehensive way, nor did they explore how these strategies contribute to communicative competence in EFL classroom settings.

Another gap in the literature relates to the specific context of EFL higher education in non-Western settings. Although strategy-based instruction has gained prominence in Western educational systems, its implementation and impact in Asian or developing countries remain underexplored (Chen et al., 2023; Shen & Bai, 2024; Su et al., 2023). EFL students in these contexts often face unique challenges, such as large class sizes, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and sociocultural barriers that inhibit oral participation (Malik et al., 2021; Omer, 2024; Shen & Bai, 2024). Understanding how students in these settings deploy strategies to enhance their communicative competence can provide valuable insights for curriculum development and teacher training.

In response to this gap, the present study aims to examine the influence of metacognitive strategies (MS) and socio-affective strategies (SAS) on students' communicative competence (CC), providing a more holistic understanding of how these indirect strategies support the development of meaningful and effective communication in EFL contexts. This study seeks to address the aforementioned gaps by investigating the predictive relationship between metacognitive and socio-affective strategies and communicative competence among EFL university students. By employing a multiple regression design, this research aims to determine the extent to which each strategy type contributes to students' ability to communicate effectively in English. This approach moves beyond simple correlation and provides a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between strategic learning behaviors and communicative outcomes.

The applied significance of this research lies in its potential to inform instructional practices in EFL higher education. If specific learning strategies are identified as significant predictors of communicative competence, educators can design interventions that explicitly target and foster these strategies in the classroom. For example, metacognitive strategy training can be incorporated into language tasks to help students plan and evaluate their language use. Similarly, socio-affective strategy instruction can be integrated through collaborative activities, peer feedback, and reflective journals to promote emotional regulation and social interaction. Such strategy-based instruction aligns with contemporary trends in student-centered pedagogy and supports the development of lifelong learning skills. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the body of research that connects strategic learning theory with frameworks of communicative competence. It provides empirical support for the notion that language learning is not merely a cognitive activity, but also a socially and emotionally mediated process. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of examining student variables within comprehensive models that account for multiple dimensions of language use.

In sum, this research is guided by the belief that fostering communicative competence requires more than teaching vocabulary or grammar. It involves empowering students with the tools to manage their learning and to engage meaningfully with others. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which metacognitive and socio-affective strategies predict EFL university students' communicative competence. Through this investigation, the study seeks to offer insights that can enhance both theoretical understanding and pedagogical application in the field of English language education.

METHOD

This study adopted a quantitative correlational design (Creswell, 2015; Creswell et al., 2003) utilizing multiple linear regression analysis to explore the extent to which metacognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies predict communicative competence among EFL university students. The design aimed to investigate predictive relationships between students' use of learning strategies and their ability to communicate effectively in English.

Participants were undergraduate students enrolled in English-related study programs at a private university in Indonesia. Using purposive sampling, the study selected students in their second or third year who had completed at least two English proficiency-focused courses, ensuring they had adequate exposure to language learning strategies and communicative tasks. A total of 120 students voluntarily participated in the study. Eligibility criteria included full-time enrollment, intermediate English proficiency (B1-B2 based on CEFR self-report or placement test), and consent to participate in the research.

Three primary instruments were used in this study. The first was a modified version of Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), focusing specifically on metacognitive and socio-affective strategies. The metacognitive subscale included items on planning, monitoring, and evaluating, while the socio-affective subscale covered behaviors such as cooperating with others, asking for clarification, and managing anxiety. The instrument employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never true of me) to 5 (always true of me), with 10 items for metacognitive strategies and 8 for socio-affective strategies. The questionnaire was validated through expert judgment by three TEFL lecturers and pilot-tested with 30 students outside the main sample. Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated high internal consistency, with $\alpha = 0.84$ for the metacognitive subscale and $\alpha = 0.81$ for the socio-affective subscale.

The second instrument was a communicative competence self-assessment scale, adapted from Celce-Murcia (2007) and Brown (2015), which combined dimensions of sociolinguistic and discourse competence. The scale consisted of 12 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all competent) to 5 (highly competent). To enrich the data and provide triangulation, a subset of 30 participants was asked to perform a task-based speaking activity assessed by two independent raters using an analytic rubric aligned with communicative competence indicators. The inter-rater reliability of the rubric, measured with Cohen's kappa, was 0.79, indicating substantial agreement between the raters. Data collection began after obtaining ethical clearance from the university's research ethics committee. Informed consent forms were distributed, explaining the study's objectives, the principles of anonymity and confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. The questionnaires were administered during a scheduled class session and required approximately 30 minutes to complete. The speaking assessments were conducted in a quiet lab environment, with each participant completing the task in about 10 minutes. Their responses were audio-recorded for subsequent analysis and scoring.

All data were analyzed using SPSS version 23. Descriptive statistics such as mean scores and standard deviations were computed to summarize the data (Dewi et al., 2025). Assumptions for multiple regression, namely normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity, were tested using histograms, scatterplots, residual plots, and variance inflation factors (VIF). VIF values below five were deemed acceptable (Davison & Smith, 2018). A multiple regression analysis was then conducted, with communicative competence as the dependent variable and metacognitive and socio-affective strategies as the independent variables. The coefficient of determination (R^2), standardized beta coefficients, and p-values were reported to facilitate interpretation of the model. In addition, the effect size was examined using Cohen's f^2, where 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represented small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to examine the influence of metacognitive strategies (MS) and socio-affective strategies (SAS) on students' communicative competence (CC) in an EFL context. To provide an overview of the participants' use of language learning strategies and communicative competence, descriptive statistics were calculated for metacognitive strategies (MS), socio-affective strategies (SAS), and communicative competence (CC). The mean score for metacognitive strategies was 31.01 out of a possible 50 (SD = 4.22), indicating a moderate to high level of strategy use. Socio-affective strategies showed a mean of 24.95 out of 40 (SD = 3.18), also suggesting moderate engagement with strategies such as anxiety regulation, peer support, and emotional control. Communicative competence scores ranged from 56 to 91, with a mean of 71.19 out of a possible 100 (SD = 7.54), reflecting a generally high level of speaking performance among the participants. These descriptive results provide a preliminary understanding of students' strategic behaviors and language proficiency, supporting further inferential analysis. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Metacognitive Strategies, Socio-affective Strategies, and Communicative Competence

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MS (X1)	120	16.00	23.00	39.00	31.0083	4.21979
SAS (X2)	120	18.00	17.00	35.00	24.9500	3.18043
CC (Y)	120	35.00	56.00	91.00	71.1917	7.54293
Valid N (listwise)	120					

To ensure the validity of the multiple regression analysis, a normality test was conducted on the unstandardized residuals using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) Test. The test summary is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		Unstandardized Residual
N		120
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	7.32531258
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.087
	Positive	.087
	Negative	-.057
Test Statistic		.113
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.087

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
CC (Y) * MS (X1)	Between Groups	(Combined)	1037.145	16	64.822	1.165	.309
		Linearity	67.362	1	67.362	1.210	.274
		Deviation from Linearity	969.784	15	64.652	1.161	.314
	Within Groups		5733.446	103	55.665		
	Total		6770.592	119			

The linearity test aims to determine whether the relationship between metacognitive strategies and communicative competence is linear. From the ANOVA table above, the linearity significance value (Sig.) is 0.274, which is greater than 0.05. This suggests that there is no significant deviation from linearity, and the assumption of a linear relationship is satisfied. Additionally, the deviation from linearity also shows a significance value of 0.314, which is also greater than 0.05. This further supports the conclusion that there is no significant non-linear component in the relationship. Therefore, the relationship between metacognitive strategies and communicative competence can be considered linear, and it is appropriate to use multiple linear regression analysis in the next stage of analysis. Well-prepared tables and or figures must be a significant feature of this section, because they convey the major observations to readers. A linearity test was also conducted to examine the relationship between Socio-affective Strategies (X2) and Communicative Competence (Y). The results of the ANOVA are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Linearity test of Socio-affective strategies and communicative competence

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
CC (Y) * SAS (X2)	Between Groups	(Combined)	905.807	14	64.700	1.158	.318
		Linearity	326.757	1	326.757	5.850	.017
		Deviation from Linearity	579.050	13	44.542	.797	.661
	Within Groups		5864.785	105	55.855		
	Total		6770.592	119			

The linearity significance value between socio-affective strategies and communicative competence is 0.017, which is less than 0.05. This result suggests a significant linear relationship between the two variables. In other words, as socio-affective strategies increase, communicative competence tends to change in a consistent linear pattern. Furthermore, the deviation from linearity has a significance value of 0.661, which is greater than 0.05, suggesting that non-linear patterns are not significant in this relationship. This supports the conclusion that the relationship between socio-affective strategies and communicative competence is appropriately linear. Hence, the data meet the assumption of linearity, and the variable socio-affective strategies can be validly included as an independent variable in the multiple regression analysis. To determine whether the variance of the residuals is constant across levels of the independent variables (metacognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies), a Glejser test was performed. The test involves regressing the absolute residuals (Abs_RES) on the independent variables and examining the significance of the regression model. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 5. Heteroscedasticity (Glejser Test)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	12.693	2	6.347	.362	.697[b]
	Residual	2052.213	117	17.540		
	Total	2064.907	119			

The significance value (Sig.) of 0.697 is greater than 0.05, indicating that the regression model predicting the absolute residuals is not significant. This suggests that there is no heteroscedasticity in the data, meaning that the residual variances are constant (homoscedastic) across the range of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies. Therefore, the assumption of homoscedasticity is met, and the use of multiple linear regression for further analysis is considered statistically appropriate. Multicollinearity was examined to ensure that the independent variables, Metacognitive Strategies

(X1) and Socio-affective Strategies (X2), do not exhibit high intercorrelation, which could distort the regression results. The model summary is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Multicollinearity test

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.889	.790	.767	7.38766	1.683

R Square = 0.790 indicates that the combination of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies explains 79% of the variance in Communicative Competence (Y). This reflects a strong model fit. Since the Adjusted R-squared is slightly lower than the R-squared and the Durbin-Watson value is 1.683 (close to 2), there is no immediate indication of problematic multicollinearity or autocorrelation. To examine the influence of metacognitive strategies (MS) and socio-affective strategies (SAS) on communicative competence (CC), a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The regression results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Linear Regression Results

Predictor	B (Unstandardized)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized)	t	Sig. (p-value)
(Constant)	54.349	7.347	—	7.398	.000
MS (X1)	0.163	0.164	0.090	0.992	.323
SAS (X2)	0.463	0.217	0.192	2.129	.035

The coefficient for metacognitive strategies (B = 0.163, p = 0.323) indicates a positive but not statistically significant relationship with communicative competence. This suggests that increases in metacognitive strategies do not significantly predict changes in communicative competence. Meanwhile, the coefficient for socio-affective strategies (B = 0.463, p = 0.035) is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, implying that socio-affective strategies have a meaningful positive impact on communicative competence. Specifically, for every one-point increase in SAS, communicative competence is predicted to increase by 0.463 points, holding other variables constant. These findings partially support the research hypotheses. While socio-affective strategies significantly predict communicative competence, metacognitive strategies do not show a significant influence within the model. The results of the multiple regression analysis offer meaningful insights into the predictive roles of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies on the communicative competence of EFL students in higher education contexts.

First, the analysis revealed that socio-affective strategies significantly predicted students' communicative competence. This finding supports the notion that emotional and interpersonal regulation play a vital role in language development, particularly in the development of communicative competence (Razawi et al., 2023). Socio-affective strategies, such as encouraging oneself, cooperating with peers, reducing anxiety, and taking emotional control, may enhance students' willingness to communicate, improve interactional fluency, and help students adapt better to the sociocultural dynamics of real-world communication. This aligns with findings from previous research that emphasize the importance of affective and social engagement in successful language performance (Nandiah & Muin, 2025; Razawi & Mohamad, 2024; Sulistyawati et al., 2022).

In contrast, metacognitive strategies did not significantly predict communicative competence, despite their established role in supporting autonomous and strategic language learning. This may be due to several factors. One possibility is that although students may plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, these internal processes do not automatically translate into communicative fluency or pragmatic competence unless they are accompanied by real communicative practice and social

interaction (Koran, 2016; Laughlin et al., 2015). In line with Andriani and Mbato (2021) and Chamot (2005), metacognitive strategies are crucial for goal-setting and task management, but their effect may be indirect or moderated by other factors, such as motivation, language exposure, or interactional opportunities in the classroom.

Additionally, the insignificant result for metacognitive strategies might indicate a gap between strategic awareness and performance. Students may be aware of how to manage their learning, but they may not consistently apply these strategies in communicative tasks, or they may need more explicit training in how to integrate them into communicative use. This suggests the need for pedagogical interventions that not only foster strategic thinking but also link it directly to communicative goals, for example, through task-based or project-based language instruction. The significant influence of socio-affective strategies also highlights the affective dimension of communicative competence, reinforcing the framework of Canale and Swain (1980), where sociolinguistic appropriateness and discourse management are deeply tied to students' emotional states and interactional sensitivity. Students who feel comfortable and confident in their learning environment are more likely to engage actively in communication, seek clarification, and sustain conversations—key components of communicative competence.

To sum up, the findings suggest that while both cognitive and affective strategies are essential, socio-affective strategies may play a more direct and observable role in communicative performance. These results contribute to a growing body of evidence advocating for more holistic and student-centered approaches in EFL instruction, which take into account not only cognitive and linguistic factors but also students' emotional and interpersonal needs. The findings of this study carry several important implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy, particularly in higher education settings where communicative competence is a central goal of language instruction.

First, the significant contribution of socio-affective strategies to students' communicative competence suggests that emotional and interpersonal dimensions should be actively addressed in classroom instruction. Teachers should foster a supportive and low-anxiety learning environment where students feel safe to take risks in speaking and interacting in English. Activities that promote cooperation, empathy, and peer support, such as pair work, group discussions, peer feedback, and role-plays, should be regularly incorporated. Moreover, strategies such as self-encouragement, positive self-talk, and stress management can be explicitly taught to help students regulate their emotional states during communication. Second, although metacognitive strategies did not demonstrate a significant predictive value in this study, their role in fostering student autonomy and long-term language success should not be overlooked. Educators are encouraged to provide students with training on how to plan, monitor, and evaluate their language use, especially within communicative contexts. For example, before a speaking task, students can be guided to set goals (e.g., "use three new expressions"), monitor their performance during the activity, and reflect afterward on what went well and what could be improved. Embedding these strategies into communicative tasks could help bridge the gap between internal strategic knowledge and external language performance.

Furthermore, curriculum designers should consider integrating strategy-based instruction that includes both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. Language learning strategies should not be treated as isolated skills but embedded into authentic communicative contexts. This aligns with task-based language teaching (TBLT), where students are engaged in meaningful language use, and strategy instruction is contextualized and purposeful.

CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the relationship between metacognitive and socio-affective learning strategies and communicative competence among EFL students in higher education. The results

revealed that socio-affective strategies significantly contributed to the development of students' communicative competence, whereas metacognitive strategies did not yield a statistically significant predictive value. These findings support the idea that emotional and interpersonal regulation play a crucial role in language use, especially in communicative contexts. The research contributes to the field of language learning by highlighting the importance of integrating socio-affective elements into classroom practices and curriculum design. It provides empirical support for a more comprehensive understanding of communicative competence, one that acknowledges not only linguistic and strategic components but also the affective and social dimensions of language performance. Importantly, the practical impact of these findings lies in guiding educators to design more responsive and inclusive teaching approaches, such as incorporating peer collaboration, emotional support strategies, and self-reflection activities, that can enhance student engagement and promote real-world language use. As such, this study enriches the ongoing discourse in applied linguistics and EFL pedagogy by advocating for strategy-based instruction that includes emotional engagement, peer collaboration, and self-regulation, thereby paving the way for more inclusive, effective, and student-centered language teaching practices.

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