

Bridging Self-Regulated Learning and Translanguaging: Theoretical and Methodological Implications for Research in EMI Law Contexts

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Abstract

This paper explores the framework of self-regulated learning (SRL) by examining its primary psychological foundations, including social cognitive and self-efficacy theories, to emphasize that successful learning requires both the "skill" of strategy use and the "will" of internal motivation. Moving beyond traditional, individualistic views of SRL, it is argued that SRL is a socially situated practice deeply mediated by classroom environment and language choices. In highly cognitively demanding English-Medium-Instruction (EMI) law programs, students face an intense cognitive load that requires exceptional learner agency. This conceptual paper demonstrates that translanguaging, the strategic, fluid use of multiple languages, serves as a vital pedagogical and cognitive scaffold to support student understanding. Ultimately, the analysis connects SRL to translanguaging research in EMI contexts, proposing a novel conceptual framework to show how lecturers' linguistic choices directly shape how students monitor, evaluate, and adapt their learning in complex professional disciplines.

Keywords: EMI, law contexts, self-regulated learning, translanguaging

INTRODUCTION

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is a fundamental psychological construct understood as an active, constructive process through which learners set goals for their learning and subsequently monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behaviour (Pintrich, 2000). SRL is not only a mental ability or an academic skill, but also a self-directive process where learners transform their mental capacities into academic achievement. Within the context of language teaching, SRL is paramount and significantly related to academic success (Zimmerman et al., 1992). Consequently, a substantial body of research has examined SRL from diverse theoretical perspectives, including social cognitive theory, goal orientation theory, motivation theory, and self-efficacy theory. These perspectives have significantly advanced understanding of how learners regulate their cognition, motivation, and behaviours to achieve academic goals.

Despite these theoretical advances, an important limitation remains. Much of the SRL literature has focused primarily on learners' internal cognitive and motivational processes, while comparatively less attention has been paid to how self-regulation is enacted and supported through classroom interaction and pedagogical practices. In particular, existing SRL research provides limited explanations of how language itself functions as a mediational resource that enables learners to plan, monitor, evaluate, and adapt their learning in multilingual educational settings. In light of these findings, there remains a need to move



beyond viewing SRL solely as an individual psychological construct towards understanding it as a socially situated process shaped by instructional environments and language use.

Notably, in the context of English-medium instruction (EMI) law programs, the cognitive load is doubled as students are required to master complex legal concepts and content through an additional language. Unlike other academic fields, legal education is unique due to its heavy reliance on highly complex texts, the rigors of legal argumentation, and the necessity for sophisticated interpretive reasoning. These disciplinary demands, when coupled with the challenge of navigating an additional language, necessitate a high degree of learner agency and strategic regulation. Recent translanguaging research has increasingly demonstrated that the strategic use of learners' full linguistic repertoires can facilitate disciplinary learning in multilingual classrooms. However, much of this literature has primarily examined translanguaging as a pedagogical or linguistic practice, focusing on language choice, classroom interaction, or content comprehension (Curle et al., 2020; Genc et al., 2023; Macaro et al., 2018; Sahan & Rose, 2021). Little attention has been devoted to understanding translanguaging as a regulatory resource that supports learners' self-regulated learning processes, particularly in cognitively demanding disciplinary contexts such as EMI legal education.

Addressing this gap, this paper offers a novel theoretical contribution by reconceptualizing translanguaging as a self-regulatory resource rather than just a comprehension aid. This perspective shifts the focus from viewing translanguaging as a strategy for simplifying language to seeing it as a mediational resource through which students regulate their learning by planning, monitoring, evaluating, and adapting their cognitive and linguistic activities. From this perspective, lecturers' translanguaging practices become not only instructional choices but also pedagogical mechanisms that shape students' opportunities to develop self-regulated learning. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to clarify the concept of SRL under its theoretical foundations, examine how these concepts align with the pedagogical use of translanguaging, and propose theoretical and methodological implications for future research in EMI law settings.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Self-regulated learning (SRL)

Self-regulation is a complex concept that even specialists find challenging to define and apply in practice. According to Weinstein and Mayer (as cited in Pintrich, 1988), learning strategies encompass any cognitive or behavioural actions undertaken by learners. In a similar vein, Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) conceptualize learning strategies as goal-oriented actions through which learners acquire knowledge or skills, guided by their sense of purpose and perceived effectiveness. In this sense, self-regulation refers to the process by which learners actively and systematically manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours to achieve their objectives (Flavell & Miller, 1998). Pintrich (2000) conceptualizes SRL as an active and constructive process in which learners set goals, monitor their progress, and regulate their cognition, motivation, and behaviour. Zimmerman (1986) describes SRL as a process through which students deliberately initiate and sustain cognitive and behavioural activities aimed at achieving academic goals. In his earlier work, Zimmerman (1986, 1989) also characterizes self-regulated learners as individuals who are actively engaged in their learning from metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural perspectives. Later, Zimmerman (1998) refines this concept by defining SRL as self-generated thoughts, emotions, and actions directed toward the attainment of academic objectives. He further emphasizes that academic self-regulation should not be understood as a fixed mental ability, such as intelligence, or a discrete academic skill like reading proficiency; instead, it is a self-directed process through which learners transform their mental capacities into effective academic performance (pp. 1–2)

SRL is commonly understood as the integration of both “skill” and “will.” The “skill” component refers to learners’ application of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as planning and organizing their learning, setting goals, monitoring progress, evaluating outcomes, and managing time and resources effectively (Corno, 1986). In contrast, the “will” component relates to learners’ motivational orientations, including their goals, values, and expectations (Garcia, 1995). Consequently, to fully understand SRL, it is important to look beyond a single perspective as it involves the interaction of cognitive, motivational, behavioural, and social processes (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000). Key psychological theories provide a complementary understanding of this construct.

From the social cognitive perspective, SRL develops through reciprocal interactions among personal factors, behaviours, and learning environments (Zimmerman, 2000). Learners acquire regulatory competence progressively through observation, imitation, self-control, and eventually independent self-regulation (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). Within this process, teachers play a critical role by modelling strategic thinking, providing scaffolding, and gradually transferring responsibility for learning to students (Pintrich, 1995). Complementing this perspective, goal orientation theory explains the motivational purposes underlying self-regulation. Learners who adopt mastery goals are more likely to employ diverse learning strategies, engage with challenging tasks, and persist in improving their competence, whereas performance-oriented learners tend to focus primarily on external evaluation and comparison with others (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Greene & Miller, 1996; Nicholls, 1984).

Motivation theory further emphasizes that successful self-regulation depends not only on learners’ strategic competence but also on their willingness to engage in learning activities. While intrinsic motivation encourages learners to participate because of personal interest and meaningful goals, external incentives may also serve as important catalysts for sustaining engagement, particularly when learning tasks are demanding (Garcia, 1995; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Closely related to motivation, self-efficacy theory highlights learners’ beliefs about their capability to organize and execute the actions required to accomplish specific academic tasks (Bandura, 1986, 1993). Students with stronger self-efficacy are generally more willing to employ self-regulatory strategies, persist when encountering difficulties, and adapt their learning behaviours, whereas those with lower efficacy tend to avoid challenging tasks despite possessing comparable knowledge or skills (Bandura, 1993; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

The above perspectives converge on two fundamental principles. Firstly, effective self-regulated learning requires the integration of both “skill,” the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and “will,” the motivational beliefs, goals, and self-efficacy that sustain strategic action (Corno, 1986; Garcia, 1995). Secondly, although SRL originates from learners’ internal regulation, its development is strongly influenced by interactions with teachers, classroom environments, instructional practices, and opportunities for guided participation (Pintrich, 1995; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000). Consequently, self-regulation should be viewed as both an individual and a socially mediated process.

Such integrated understanding is particularly relevant to EMI law education. It is evident that law students are required to regulate not only their acquisition of sophisticated legal concepts and reasoning but also their comprehension of disciplinary knowledge through English. Such a learning context substantially increases the cognitive demands placed upon learners and requires continuous planning, monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation throughout the learning process. Under these circumstances, effective self-regulation depends not only on learners’ motivation and strategic competence but also on the instructional support available within the classroom.

However, despite acknowledging the importance of learning environments and social interaction, existing SRL theories pay comparatively little attention to the mediating role of language in supporting self-regulation. Language is often treated as part of the learning context rather than as a resource through which learners actively plan, monitor, evaluate, and adapt their learning. Consequently, while existing SRL theories provide a comprehensive explanation of why and how learners regulate their learning, they offer limited insight into how multilingual learners regulate learning through the strategic use of their linguistic resources. This limitation becomes particularly evident in EMI law classrooms, where disciplinary learning and language use are inseparable.

Addressing this theoretical gap requires extending SRL beyond its traditional psychological focus by incorporating insights from translanguaging research. Rather than conceptualizing translanguaging only as a pedagogical strategy to facilitate comprehension, this paper argues that it functions as a mediational resource through which learners regulate cognitive, motivational, and metacognitive processes in multilingual learning environments. Specifically, translanguaging directly sustains the “will” component of SRL, the motivational beliefs and self-efficacy required to engage with challenging material. For instance, when faced with an intricate legal problem, using the L1 to clarify task instructions or core expectations can prevent “avoidance behaviour,” where students might otherwise disengage due to the overwhelming double cognitive load of language and content. By making the task more approachable, translanguaging bolsters students' self-efficacy, encouraging them to persist rather than withdraw from complex disciplinary demands. Reconceptualizing translanguaging in this way provides the theoretical bridge between SRL and multilingual pedagogy, thereby offering a more comprehensive framework for understanding learning regulation in EMI law classrooms.

Translanguaging as a self-regulatory resource in EMI law classrooms

Although major psychological theories provide valuable explanations of how learners regulate their learning, they pay comparatively less attention to the mediational role of language in shaping self-regulation within multilingual classrooms. Recent developments in translanguaging scholarship provide an important theoretical perspective for addressing this limitation by conceptualising language not merely as the medium through which learning occurs, but as a cognitive, social, and pedagogical resource that mediates meaning-making and disciplinary learning (García & Wei, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

Within educational contexts, pedagogical translanguaging refers to the planned and strategic use of learners' full linguistic repertoires to facilitate both content learning and language development (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). Rather than separating languages into independent systems, this perspective recognises multilingual competence as an integrated repertoire that learners flexibly mobilise according to communicative and cognitive demands (García & Wei, 2014). In EMI classrooms, where disciplinary learning and language learning occur simultaneously, translanguaging enables students to negotiate complex concepts without artificially restricting their available linguistic resources. Recent empirical studies further demonstrate that lecturers employ translanguaging strategically to explain disciplinary concepts, scaffold academic discourse, facilitate classroom interaction, and reduce unnecessary cognitive burden while maintaining conceptual complexity (Jia et al., 2023; Trent, 2022).

Viewed through the lens of SRL, translanguaging extends beyond being a pedagogical strategy for improving comprehension. Instead, it can be conceptualised as a self-regulatory resource that supports learners throughout the cyclical process of self-regulation. In the forethought phase, learners may activate prior legal knowledge through their first language, establish learning goals, clarify task expectations, and strengthen self-efficacy before engaging with demanding English legal texts. Such linguistic mediation enables learners to

allocate cognitive resources more strategically, particularly in EMI law classrooms where disciplinary and linguistic demands coexist.

During the performance phase, translanguaging supports learners in monitoring comprehension, comparing legal concepts across languages and legal systems, asking clarification questions, organising bilingual notes, and selecting appropriate problem-solving strategies. For example, when encountering the complex Common Law term “consideration” in a contract law lesson, students may use their L1 to contrast it with the concept of “legal basis” or “cause” in their native Civil Law system. By navigating between languages, they can pinpoint the specific legal nuance that “consideration” requires a bargained-for exchange of value, whose meaning might be blurred if they relied only on a dictionary definition in English. These activities correspond closely to the metacognitive and cognitive regulation processes described in SRL theory. Rather than functioning simply as linguistic assistance, translanguaging becomes part of learners’ strategic regulation of disciplinary learning by facilitating continuous monitoring and adaptation of understanding while engaging with specialised legal discourse.

The regulatory function of translanguaging continues during the self-reflection phase. Learners may draw upon multiple linguistic resources to interpret lecturers’ feedback, evaluate their own understanding, identify conceptual misconceptions, and revise subsequent learning strategies. Such reflective use of language enables learners not only to evaluate academic performance but also to develop greater confidence and agency in navigating complex multilingual learning environments.

This perspective shifts translanguaging from a compensatory language-support strategy towards a mediational mechanism embedded within the SRL cycle. Instead of reducing academic rigour, strategic translanguaging helps learners manage the double cognitive load characteristic of EMI legal education by minimising unnecessary linguistic obstacles while preserving engagement with sophisticated legal reasoning. Conceptualising translanguaging as a self-regulatory resource therefore provides the theoretical bridge between educational psychology and multilingual pedagogy that has remained largely implicit in previous research. While SRL explains how learners regulate their learning and translanguaging research explains how multilingual resources facilitate disciplinary learning, integrating these perspectives explains why lecturers’ translanguaging practices can foster learner agency in EMI law classrooms. This integrated perspective establishes the conceptual foundation for the theoretical and methodological implications discussed in the following section.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH ON TRANSLANGUAGING IN EMI LAW CLASSROOMS

Implications for theory

The aforementioned critique has several theoretical implications, which prove to be of great importance in reconceptualizing SRL. Undeniably, it calls for an integration of SRL theory with sociocultural and ecological perspectives. Such integration means that rather than viewing SRL as an internal process supplemented by external factors, future research should conceptualize regulation as emerging from the interaction between learners and their environments. In addition, it highlights the need to incorporate language as a mediational tool in SRL models. The analysis reveals that existing frameworks largely overlook how learners use linguistic resources to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning. Integrating insights from translanguaging theory, therefore, can enrich SRL by accounting for the fluid and strategic use of multiple languages in meaning-making. Last but not least, this perspective challenges the universality of SRL models, suggesting that regulatory processes are likely to vary across disciplines and instructional contexts. For example, SRL in law education, which is characterized by the complexity of legal texts, argumentation, and interpretive reasoning,

may differ fundamentally from SRL in other fields. As a result, disciplines and instructional contexts, as well as other factors, need to be taken into consideration when assessing SRL.

Implication for research on translanguaging in EMI law classrooms

Theoretical alignment

In terms of theoretical alignment, research on translanguaging can be aligned with SRL theory in two ways. Firstly, SRL is treated as a relational, context-bound process (Zimmerman, 1994) while translanguaging can be treated as part of the social environment that influences students' forethought (e.g., goal setting, self-efficacy), performance (e.g., note taking, comprehension monitoring), and self-reflection (e.g., interpreting feedback). Such perspective is in line with Zimmerman's social cognitive model, where SRL is co-constructed through interactions with teachers, peers, and materials. In EMI classrooms, the language of instruction and translanguaging practices become key factors shaping how SRL is scaffolded or constrained. Secondly, from sociocultural and ecological perspectives, translanguaging does not simply add support but reshapes the activities of EMI law classrooms. In this view, the rules and tools (e.g., how and when lecturers code switch) directly affect how students regulate their learning. This resonates with the critical stance that SRL is not just an individual trait but an outcome of how teaching practices, institutional structures, and classroom norms interact.

Framing EMI law lecturers' translanguaging practices through an SRL lens, accordingly, helps the researcher move beyond a purely linguistic or didactic analysis towards a more sociocognitive, context-sensitive explanation of how teaching and learning are regulated in a high-stakes, content-heavy environment. More specifically, in EMI law classrooms, students are expected to master complex legal content in English, often under heavy cognitive load and exam pressure, which requires them to plan, monitor, and adapt their learning strategies. In such contexts, students may find it more effective to regulate their learning through linguistic resources, making language choice (e.g., translanguaging) an integral part of regulatory activity.

Additionally, translanguaging practices, especially from teachers' positions, can be understood as a form of instructional SRL support to scaffold comprehension, clarify expectations, and guide students' learning. Far from being a neutral language choice, translanguaging becomes a regulatory resource that can either enhance or undermine students' capacity to regulate their own learning. For example, if lecturers use the mother tongue (L1) strategically to explain concepts or provide feedback, they may reduce cognitive overload and assist students' planning and monitoring. Therefore, methodologically and conceptually, the SRL issue grounds the research in a broader question: How does translanguaging in an EMI law classroom shape the conditions under which students can or cannot self-regulate their learning in a high-stakes, linguistically challenging context?

Methodological implications

Viewing translanguaging through the SRL lens has several methodological implications. It is advisable to broaden analytic focus to explore what lecturers think, how they translanguate, and how these practices relate to students' opportunities to regulate learning. For example, interview questions could include "how do lecturers use translanguaging to set learning goals and clarify expectations?" and "how do they use translanguaging to check understanding, prompt reflection, or respond to confusion?" These questions shift the research toward a process-oriented analysis that connects instructors' language choices to the regulatory functions they serve. Specifically, in terms of methodology employed to solve such questions, data analysis should employ a deductive-inductive coding approach. Preliminary codes can be derived from the three phases of the SRL cycle (forethought, performance, reflection), while sub-codes should capture the specific

regulatory functions of translanguaging, such as clarifying legal expectations, sustaining motivational “will”, and scaffolding complex interpretive reasoning. More importantly, both teachers' and students' perspectives prove to be beneficial in triangulating data. It is necessary that researchers compare lecturers' intended regulatory functions, such as using translanguaging to scaffold goal-setting or reduce anxiety, with students' actual regulatory uptake and perceived self-efficacy. By aligning classroom observations with interview data, the analysis can identify whether a lecturer's linguistic choice during the performance phase (e.g., a bilingual explanation of a legal nuance) effectively triggered student comprehension monitoring or if a gap exists between the intended support and the students' regulatory needs. This triangulation helps to show whether and how lecturers' translanguaging practices actually correspond to students' regulatory needs

Strengthening research design

Several aspects of research design can be refined and strengthened based on SRL theoretical grounding and practical relevance. SRL can be used to sharpen the conceptual framing of the research through exploring how translanguaging in EMI law classrooms functions as a regulatory resource that shapes students' capacity to plan, monitor, and adapt their learning in a linguistically demanding setting. This elevates the study from a purely descriptive language use study to a sociocognitive investigation of how teaching practices support or constrain learning regulation. To capture this complexity, a qualitative multiple-case study design is particularly appropriate, as it allows for an in-depth, context-sensitive exploration of the fluid interactions between instructional choices and student regulation. In addition, more nuanced analysis of lecturers' roles can be addressed by integrating SRL concepts, in which lecturers are not only positioned as language users but as regulatory agents whose translanguaging choices either scaffold or fragment students' self-regulated learning. Such a design facilitates the triangulation of real-time classroom observations, capturing actual scaffolding or fragmenting behaviours with semi-structured or stimulated recall interviews to uncover the 'regulatory' intent behind lecturers' linguistic choices. This methodological alignment ensures that the research moves beyond documenting what languages are used to explaining how and why these choices shape the sociocognitive conditions for learning. Research findings can propose concrete recommendations for EMI law teaching through answering the questions, i.e., how to use translanguaging strategically to clarify learning goals, standards, and feedback; how to avoid relying on L1 in ways that inadvertently reduce students' opportunities to practice self-regulated learning in English. Such expected results align with the SRL literature's emphasis on embedding regulatory support into course design rather than treating it as an add-on. Lastly, research can be developed in the way of examining how changes in translanguaging practices are likely to affect students' SRL and content performance, which would bridge research into a more explicitly intervention-oriented SRL research agenda.

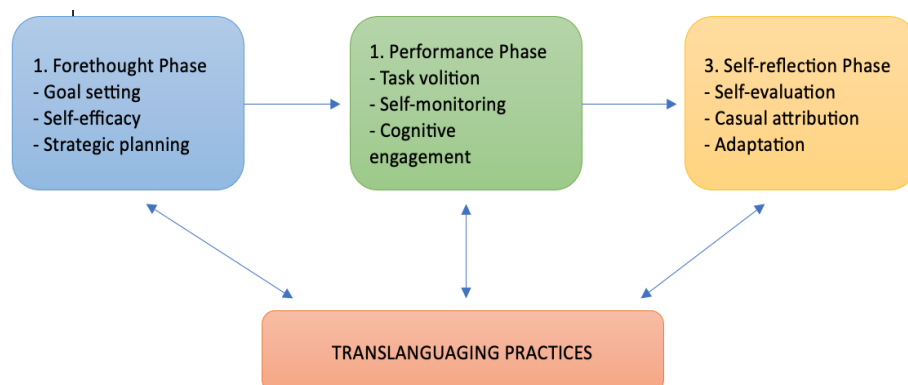


Figure 1. SRL-Translanguaging relationship in EMI law education

More specifically, Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study, which integrates the SRL cycle with translanguaging practices within the high-stakes environment of EMI law classrooms. Central to this framework is the reconceptualization of translanguaging not merely as a linguistic phenomenon, but as a mediational and regulatory resource that supports the "skill" and "will" of legal learners. In the forethought phase, translanguaging serves as a scaffold for goal-setting and enhances students' self-efficacy by allowing them to bridge complex legal concepts between their L1 and English. During the performance phase, it functions as a cognitive strategy to manage the double cognitive load, enabling students to monitor their comprehension through fluid linguistic movement. Finally, in the self-reflection phase, the use of multiple languages provides a broader semiotic repertoire for students to evaluate their progress and adapt their learning strategies for future legal discourse. Overall, the model suggests that when lecturers strategically employ translanguaging, they model self-regulatory behaviours that empower students to transition from passive language learners to active, agentive legal professionals. In general, viewing the research on translanguaging through the lens of SRL enriches understanding of how teaching practices shape students' learning regulation. It also strengthens the methodological design by encouraging the researcher to attend to the regulatory functions of translanguaging practices under which students can or cannot self-regulate their learning in an EMI law classroom.

CONCLUSION

This paper has critically examined foundational theories of SRL, highlighting implications for research on translanguaging in complex learning environments, particularly in multilingual contexts such as EMI classrooms. Theoretically, this review advocates for a reconceptualization of SRL as a socially situated and discursively mediated process. Integrating SRL with sociocultural and ecological perspectives allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how regulation develops through interaction, mediation, and the use of linguistic resources. In particular, recognizing language as a key mediational tool extends existing SRL models and aligns them more closely with the realities of EMI education. Practically, the findings suggest that SRL should not be taught as a set of context-free strategies but rather integrated into disciplinary practices and classroom interactions. Instructional approaches, such as "learning to learn" courses or SRL interventions, need to be sensitive to context, which includes taking students' linguistic repertoires, disciplinary requirements, and institutional constraints into consideration. In EMI settings, it implies that pedagogical approaches, including translanguaging practices, play a crucial role in supporting students' regulation of both content learning and language use.

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