

Developing Professional Competence in Law Students Through Legal English

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Abstract:

Legal English strengthens law students' professional competence most effectively when it is taught as legal work rather than as isolated language practice. This article presents an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching model organized around the tasks law students must perform in study, practice, and assessment: close reading of cases, case brief writing, complaint-letter writing, debates, role plays, moot-court simulations, and presentations on criminal cases. The model targets three connected outcomes: accurate legal terminology in context, structured legal reasoning, and confident professional communication, and it supports TOLES readiness by building legal vocabulary-in-context and controlled grammar through repeated, exam-relevant performance tasks. The TOLES system includes Foundation, Higher, and Advanced levels, with official online exam formats and level descriptors available to candidates.

Keywords: ESP, TOLES, Case Brief Writing, Complaint-Letter Writing, Debates, Role Plays, Moot-Court Simulations.

Introduction

Given the rise of globalization and legal practice internationalization, professional legal competence is more and more linked to the knowledge of Legal English. Lawyers practicing in this modern world must grasp not only their own law, but also participate in an international legal discourse that is largely, if not entirely, conducted in English. Consequently, Legal English has emerged as a strategic part of legal education, especially under ESP frameworks that focus on functional language use directly related with professional tasks [1].

Legal English and Professional Competence in an integrated way because legal practice is rooted in the language. Certain legal work, including statutory interpretation, case law analysis, and

procedural pleading writing, factually analyzing past decisions and distilling them into a given case, relies on exact language, formal logic, and tone appropriate to the profession. Language teaching is based on ESP and genre based learning theories and is, therefore, most effective when grounded in real-world practices. This implies streamlining language education with legal analysis, case interpretation, and advocacy conveying interaction.

There is also existing literature advocating the utility of ESP in legal education, showing how the application of task-based methods including case brief writing, drafting of complaint letters, moot court simulations and debates were all beneficial in higher linguistic accuracy while performing professional functions. In contrast, however, completed legal publications either investigate language outcomes or legal consciousness separately [2]. We find a remaining gap in the literature for a systematic discussion of how Legal English teaching works as a vehicle for integrated professional competence, combining terminology, reasoning and communication skills.

This study fills that gap by using an instructional model oriented around English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that is based on real legal tasks. It involves reading the case, learning words in context, obtaining a more structured framework for analytical essays, and being assessed on performance. TUTS allows students to repeatedly perform professional tasks reflective of the academic and practical legal landscape and for us to observe their development of competence rather than to test them on language.

Demonstrably these integrated methods will lead to an improved accuracy in the use of legal terminology, more logically structured legal argumentation and better confidence in communication at the professional level [3]. This study has both theoretical and practical implications. It theoretically underpins the consistency between ESP theory with the development of legal competence. From the perspective of application, it presents to law faculties a transferable educational model that aligns with other evaluations of graduate work readiness for academia, legal practice, and globalized legal markets.

Methodology

We have developed our model according to ESP course design principles: the ultimate goal of learning is sending them to function as professional performers in law practice, help learning units are centered on a legal text and a legal task. Short and digestible core input texts primarily case-based materials including, but is not limited to simplified judgments, prosecution/defense summaries, witness statements, police reports, or case notes [4]. At this stage, students read to obtain a legally useful understanding of the document: the facts and timeline, the primary issue(s), the law(s) that apply and the reasoning that justifies the result.

Next, students are taught about terms in context. Instead of just rote-learning definitions, students see how legal terms function within the context of regular legal expressions, sentence matrixes, and even specific word combinations and genre-specific language. After this language focus, students perform a reasoning stage with a stable analytic frame (e.g., Issue-Rules-Application-Conclusion). It is aimed at making justification habitual: students have to demonstrate how a rule relates to some facts and how the conclusion is consequent [5].

The unit ends in one single performance task (chosen from the critical outcomes of the course) Case brief writing consists of a neutral tone, hand-selection of facts, issue statements, and a short reasoning chain. For complaint letter writing, students write a formal letter with an accurate timeline, state the issue and provide supporting details, refer to rights or protocols as needed, and professionally ask for a resolution. Debates and role plays require structured assertions and responses, client interviewing, negotiation, or prosecutor-defence exchanges for speaking competence. As well as the formal oral submissions and the judge-style questioning skills

developed in moot-court simulations. In criminal-case presentations, students need to explain the facts of the case, the legal issues involved, and the decision in a logical manner, using the correct terminology and signposting.

Assessment is continuous and product-based. Over the semester, students submit several short briefs and letters, and they undertake a few short advocacy exercises (such as debates, role plays or moots). Feedback targets both language accuracy and professional quality: clarity, structure, legal logic, and appropriate tone [6]. TOLES preparation is embedded rather than added at the end: students repeatedly practice legal vocabulary-in-context and controlled grammar through timed, exam-like tasks. Official TOLES materials describe distinct levels (Foundation, Higher, Advanced) and provide candidate guidance and demo-format information, which can be used to align classroom pacing and task complexity.

Results and Discussion

In typical implementation, three outcomes become observable in students' written and oral work [7]. In the first instance, terminology competence improves because key vocabulary is acquired through exposure in cases and legal genres; students make fewer incorrect substitutions and use more consistent legal phrasing in briefs, letters, and arguments. Second, the quality of reasoning improves, because the students are practicing the criticism of issues, and the application of rule to fact, using a common form; written responses become increasingly analytical rather than opinion based, and oral contributions become increasingly better justified. Third, because the students practice professional roles through manageable, rehearsal-like performances, confidence is boosted; volume increases, stumbles decrease and the tone becomes more suitably professional across debates, role plays, moot tasks and presentations [8].

This model works, in part, because of alignment: the way students learn language reflects the communicative acts that are the basis for legal competence. Disciplinary content is supplied by case reading; stable genre structures by briefing and complaint drafting; professional speaking routines by debates, role plays, and moot courts; and terminology logic, and discourse organization in the form of a single performance by criminal-case presentations. Since these tasks are performed repeatedly at increasing levels of complexity, students develop an automaticity of legal terminology and a fluency of reasoning patterns. It also bolsters TOLES readiness: when students are familiar with legal collocations and syntax in real legal formats outside of exam conditions, they find that the language accuracy required to pass TOLES becomes a routine feature of professional communication [9]. Exam formats and the skills tested are described on official TOLES pages and may thus be considered an external specification for classroom tasks.

The ESP driven Legal English model has certain apparent impact on law students' professional competence in terms of linguistic, cognitive and communicative facets. Written student outputs — such as case briefs and complaint letters — have been analyzed to reveal more precise use of legal terms, greater control of syntax, and better adherence to conventions of the professional genre [10]. Both students removed informal or general English phrases and substituted stable legal collocations and formulaic structures that conform to legal discourse.

Legally speaking, the argument had a sound, logical progression more frequently after multiple exposures to more structured analytic frameworks. Students were then more consistent in terms of spotting legal issues; applying to legal rules and systematically supporting their conclusions to the facts. Consistent with ESP and genre-based theories, the finding suggests that professional thinking emerges more robustly when language instruction is contextualized in real disciplinary practices. This yields evidence that when legal English is taught purposefully in congruence with legal tasks, it supports and not just contribute to the acquisition of legal terminologies but to the establishment of

legal reasoning structures [11]. Apart from that, the oral performance tasks (debates, role plays, moot court simulations) showed significant improvements in communicative confidence and organization of discourse. They were better at presenting arguments convincingly, responding to counterarguments, and keeping a professional tone under the time pressure. Such results indicate that performance-based activities mitigate communicative anxiety and promote procedural knowledge necessary for law later in practice [12]. Consequently, TOLES oriented task formats allowed students to gain exam related skills without decoupling test preparation from preparation for the practice of law.

While these are positive and promising outcomes, the study also identifies gaps in the knowledge. Although some progress can be seen in terminology use and reasoning structure in the short term, the long-term retention of knowledge and the transferability of that knowledge to actual legal settings has not yet been fully addressed [13]. Furthermore, it is not examining the relative impact of specific tasks (e.g., moot courts v written briefs), suggesting a dearth of empirical analysis at the level of detail. Second, the combination of language proficiency levels and development of professional competence needs to be explored in more detail [14].

In practical terms, the results substantiate a call for task centered ESP curricula for legal education. Replacing language instruction that is decontextualized in favour of legal performance-based models will better prepare students for graduation. On a theoretical level, the study supports the notion that professional identity is built through disciplinary genre participation rather than transmission of knowledge alone.

Future research should utilize mixed methods design with longitudinal tracking, corpus-based analysis of texts produced by students, and studies comparing practice across institutions. Digitized law simulations, interdisciplinary convergence, and professional certification alignment could hone the model [15]. This research would help enhance understanding of Legal English as an integral part of professional legal competence rather than an ancillary language ability.

Conclusion

Legal English contributes to law students' professional competence when instruction is organized around legal tasks: reading and interpreting cases, producing concise case briefs, drafting complaint letters with professional tone, and developing advocacy through debates, role plays, moot courts, and criminal-case presentations. An ESP cycle that integrates terminology-in-context, structured rule-to-fact reasoning, and genre-based performance tasks strengthens accuracy, clarity, and confidence while simultaneously supporting TOLES-oriented language control.

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