

THE GOALS AND LEARNING STYLES OF LAW STUDENTS IN LEARNING ESP (ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES)

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Abstract: This paper explores the goals and learning styles of law students engaged in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education. It highlights the significance of aligning ESP instruction with students' professional needs and preferred learning methods to enhance engagement, motivation, and overall academic success.

INTRODUCTION

In the globalized legal profession, proficiency in English has become a key asset. Law students increasingly recognize the necessity of mastering English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to access international legal texts, communicate in multilingual legal environments, and pursue global career opportunities. However, effective ESP instruction must consider not only the linguistic demands of the legal field but also the individual goals and learning preferences of the students. This paper examines the motivations of law students for studying ESP and the learning styles they adopt in the process. Law students pursue ESP for various academic and professional objectives. These goals can be classified into several categories. Students often aim to comprehend legal texts in English, such as international treaties, case law, and academic articles. Mastery of legal vocabulary, writing skills, and reading comprehension is essential for academic success, especially for those intending to study or participate in exchange programs abroad. Many law students view ESP as a pathway to international career opportunities. English proficiency is crucial for positions in international law firms, NGOs, diplomatic services, and multinational corporations. These students aim to develop communication skills for legal interviews, client meetings, contract negotiations, and courtroom presentations. For students interested in legal research and academia, English proficiency opens access to international journals and legal databases. Publishing in English allows scholars to reach a global audience and contribute to international legal discourse. Understanding students' learning styles is crucial for designing effective ESP courses. Based on the VARK model (Visual, Auditory, Reading/Writing, and Kinesthetic), law students exhibit a variety of learning preferences. These students prefer diagrams, flowcharts, and visual aids to understand complex legal concepts. They benefit from infographics summarizing legal procedures or court hierarchies. Auditory learners absorb information better through listening. Activities such as mock trials, legal debates, and discussions with native English speakers enhance their learning.

Reading/writing learners

These students thrive when reading legal documents and writing case briefs, summaries, and essays. ESP courses tailored for them include extensive reading materials and writing tasks based on real legal contexts.

Kinesthetic

learners

These learners benefit from hands-on activities such as role-plays, moot court practices, and fieldwork. Simulating legal procedures or writing contracts as group projects aligns well with their active learning style.

To meet the diverse goals and learning styles of law students, ESP instructors should:

Conduct needs analysis at the beginning of the course.

Integrate authentic legal materials.

Offer a variety of tasks to address different learning preferences.

Provide opportunities for collaborative learning and real-world application.

Continuously assess and adapt course content based on student feedback.

English for specific purposes (ESP)

ESP is a branch of English language teaching that focuses on developing specific language skills tailored to the needs of learners in particular fields such as law, medicine, business, or engineering. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define ESP as “an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning.” In the context of law students, ESP helps them acquire the legal terminology, reading skills for legal texts, writing legal documents, and practicing speaking for courtroom or academic purposes. Law students generally have the following goals when learning ESP:

Understanding legal texts: Legal English includes complex vocabulary and formal structures. Students aim to understand legal documents, statutes, and case law in English.

Improving communication skills: To communicate effectively in legal contexts—during debates, courtroom discussions, negotiations, or international conferences.

Academic purposes: For writing research papers, understanding legal theory, or studying abroad in English-speaking institutions.

Career advancement: Legal professionals need English proficiency for international careers or dealing with foreign clients.

Learning styles of law students

Law students, like all learners, have different learning styles. According to Fleming's VARK model, students may prefer:

Visual learners: Prefer using images, charts, and diagrams. They benefit from flowcharts of legal procedures or visual representations of case structures.

Auditory learners: Learn better through listening. Activities like debates, discussions, and lectures work well for them.

Reading/writing learners: Prefer reading legal texts and writing notes, summaries, or case briefs.

Kinesthetic learners: Learn through practice and experience. They benefit from mock trials, role-plays, or simulations.

In the legal field, a combination of styles is often most effective due to the complexity and practicality of legal language.

Needs analysis in ESP for law students

A needs analysis is essential in ESP to identify:

What specific legal English skills the students need.

Whether they are preparing for academic or professional settings.

Their existing level of English.

Their preferred learning methods and styles.

Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) emphasized that ESP should be learner-centered, and needs analysis should guide curriculum design.

Challenges in learning legal english

Complex vocabulary: Legal English contains archaic and Latin terms.

Formal structures: Legal documents often use long and complex sentences.

Cultural differences: Understanding how legal systems differ between countries.

Lack of resources: Sometimes there are limited materials tailored to legal ESP.

Effective teaching strategies for ESP in law

Task-based learning: using real-world legal tasks (e.g., writing contracts, analyzing cases).

Collaborative learning: pair or group work, mock trials.

Authentic materials: using real legal texts, court cases, news articles.

Use of technology: legal English apps, podcasts, or virtual courtroom simulations.

CONCLUSION

The success of ESP programs for law students largely depends on understanding their professional aspirations and accommodating their unique learning styles. A learner-centered approach in curriculum design can foster greater motivation, improve legal English proficiency, and better prepare students for the demands of the global legal profession.

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