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## A Study on Law Students' Perceptions of the Integration of Legal Terminology in English within ESP Instruction in Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

The increasing globalization of legal practice requires law students to develop strong command of English legal terminology as a key component of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning. This study explores how law students perceive the importance, challenges, and learning strategies related to the integration of English legal terminology in ESP courses at the tertiary level. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with an intrinsic case study design, data were collected from eight law students through semi-structured interviews, participatory classroom observation, and documentation review. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo software. The findings show that students regard mastery of legal terminology as indispensable for understanding international legal materials, succeeding in law related subjects, and preparing for future international legal practice. However, they encounter substantial challenges, including polysemy, pronunciation difficulties, dense legal texts, and limited instructional time. To cope with these obstacles, students employ various strategies such as using digital lexicons and online resources, engaging in peer discussion, participating in legal role-plays, and repeatedly interacting with authentic legal documents. The study also reveals that the perceived effectiveness of ESP courses is closely tied to lecturer engagement, the use of authentic materials, and curriculum design that aligns assessment with real legal tasks. The findings offer important implications for curriculum developers and lecturers in designing ESP Law programs that foster legal English proficiency, critical thinking, and global legal literacy.



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## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary legal profession is increasingly shaped by the forces of globalization, cross-border transactions, and the growing influence of international and regional legal regimes. A substantial proportion of treaties, judicial decisions, model laws, arbitral awards, and scholarly discussions is produced in English, even in contexts where English is not the first language of the participants (Al-Jarf, 2023; Batool Assim Hamid & Sultan, 2022). For law students in non-Anglophone jurisdictions, this reality creates a clear demand: proficiency in English is no longer sufficient at a general level, but must extend to the specialized register of legal English, particularly the accurate and contextually appropriate use of legal terminology. Within higher education, this need is typically addressed through English for Legal Purposes (ELP) or broader English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses designed for law faculties (Chovancová, 2018; Northcott & Brown, 2006).

Despite this recognized importance, many law students report persistent difficulties when engaging with English legal terminology in their coursework. Legal vocabulary is characterized by high levels of abstraction, historical layering, and cross-linguistic influences (e.g., Latin or French loanwords), which may differ substantially from everyday English and from national legal terminology in the students' first language (Hartig, 2016; Pardillos, 2016). Research has shown that even students with relatively strong general English proficiency may struggle to interpret complex legal texts without systematic support in specialized vocabulary and discourse (Poole, 2021; Rahman, 2015). In the Indonesian context, where law students need to navigate both national legal frameworks and international legal sources, mastering English legal terminology is particularly crucial for accessing global legal materials, pursuing advanced study, and competing in international job markets (Hidayati et al., 2023; Iswati & Triastuti, 2021).

Within ESP and ELP scholarship, several strands of research are relevant to the present study. First, there is evidence that domain-specific vocabulary plays a central role in comprehension and professional communication, especially in legal, medical, and technical fields (Dou et al., 2023; Poole, 2021). Second, studies on ESP teaching practices in non-English departments highlight various institutional and pedagogical challenges, such as limited contact hours, lack of authentic materials, and insufficient collaboration between language and subject specialists (Iswati & Triastuti, 2021; Sukying et al., 2023). Third, recent research on technology-enhanced ESP has drawn attention to how digital tools can both support terminology learning and potentially encourage superficial dependence if not pedagogically guided (Constantinou & Papadima-Sophocleous, 2020; Mulyadi et al., 2020). However, much of this literature tends to focus on course design and teacher perspectives, while giving relatively less systematic attention to how law students themselves perceive the integration of English legal terminology within ESP courses and how they construct coping strategies in response to experienced challenges.

This study responds to these gaps by focusing specifically on law students' perceptions of the integration of English legal terminology in ESP courses at a public university. It seeks to capture their linguistic, academic, and affective experiences as they engage with specialized legal English in classroom activities and course assignments. By adopting an

intrinsic case study design, the research aims to offer a detailed, context-sensitive understanding of how students interpret the purposes and demands of legal English, what obstacles they encounter, and how they mobilize individual and collaborative resources to manage these demands (Alam, 2021; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

## **LITERATUR REVIEW**

### **Legal Terminology as the Core of ELP**

A substantial body of scholarship emphasizes that legal terminology is not simply one component of legal English but functions as the organizing core around which comprehension and production are structured (Al-Jarf, 2023; Batool Assim Hamid & Sultan, 2022). Legal texts—such as statutes, contracts, pleadings, and judicial opinions—are highly dense with specialized vocabulary whose meanings are often codified and constrained by legal doctrine. Chovancová (2018) and Northcott and Brown (2006) argue that without a sufficiently rich and accurate repertoire of legal terms, learners struggle to interpret key provisions or construct legally appropriate arguments, even if they have relatively strong general English skills.

Furthermore, several studies demonstrate a strong association between students' command of legal vocabulary and their academic performance in law-related courses. Hartig (2016) shows how conceptual understanding in legal writing often depends on learners' ability to link definitions, facts, and legal categories through precise terminology. Similarly, Siddiqui et al. (2023) found that courses explicitly designed as English for Legal Purposes (ELP) contribute to more effective engagement with statutes and case law by providing systematic exposure to core terminology and typical discourse patterns. In this sense, legal vocabulary competence can be seen as both an outcome and a vehicle of legal literacy.

Legal terminology also plays a critical role in students' professional identity formation. Students who are able to use legal terms accurately in oral discussion, negotiation, and drafting tend to be perceived as more credible and professionally capable by peers and lecturers (Northcott & Brown, 2006; Poole, 2021). As globalized legal markets increasingly demand cross-border collaboration, the capacity to operate in English legal discourse becomes an important form of symbolic capital that supports career advancement, access to international internships, and participation in transnational legal networks (Dou et al., 2023; Rahman, 2015). For students in non-Anglophone contexts, ELP and ESP courses represent a crucial gateway to developing this capital.

### **Challenges in Acquiring English Legal Terminology**

Despite its centrality, acquiring English legal terminology poses complex challenges that are linguistic, cognitive, and contextual. One recurring issue is polysemy: many legal terms carry multiple, context-dependent meanings that may differ from their everyday use in general English (Hartig, 2016). For example, words such as "consideration," "charge," or "equity" may operate with highly specialized meanings in legal contexts, requiring learners to master conceptual distinctions that cannot be inferred from everyday usage alone. This semantic complexity often results in confusion and misinterpretation, especially when students encounter the same term across different branches of law or in cross-jurisdictional contexts.

Another difficulty arises from the historical layering of legal English, which has been shaped by Latin, French, and other linguistic influences. Pardillos (2016) shows that legal metaphors and historical expressions can obscure meaning for learners unfamiliar with the cultural and doctrinal background of the source language. In many civil-law countries, including Indonesia, students must negotiate not only between their first language and English, but also between national legal terminology and Anglo-American legal concepts, which may not be fully equivalent. This cross-linguistic and cross-system complexity substantially increases the cognitive load of terminology learning.

Pronunciation and orthographic issues further complicate acquisition. Batool Assim Hamid and Sultan (2022) report that students frequently struggle with spelling and pronouncing terms that are similar in form but different in meaning, which can undermine both oral communication and confidence in using legal English. When combined with dense, syntactically complex texts, these linguistic challenges may result in heavy reliance on translation or superficial reading strategies, limiting deeper engagement with legal argumentation (Iswati & Triastuti, 2021; Rahman, 2015).

Contextual and institutional factors also play a significant role. Studies on ESP in non-English departments show that limited contact hours, large class sizes, and restricted access to authentic materials can hinder systematic development of legal vocabulary (Iswati & Triastuti, 2021; Sukying et al., 2023). In many settings, ELP courses are compressed into one or two semesters, leaving insufficient time for repeated exposure, practice, and feedback. Moreover, lecturers may face competing demands and lack opportunities for professional development in ESP methodologies, which can reduce the depth and consistency of terminology instruction (Hidayati et al., 2023; Sukying et al., 2023).

### **Pedagogical and Technological Approaches to Legal Terminology Learning**

In response to these challenges, researchers have proposed a variety of pedagogical approaches to support the acquisition of legal terminology. Task-based and genre-based approaches are among the most prominent. Genre-based pedagogy views legal documents as socially situated texts with recognizable rhetorical moves and conventionalized language patterns. Hakim (2023) and Sumekto (2017) show that collaborative genre-based tasks, such as drafting legal letters or case briefs, can make abstract vocabulary more concrete by embedding it in meaningful communicative purposes. Ferdiansyah (2023) further demonstrates that digital storytelling and collaborative tasks can stimulate learners' engagement with specialized vocabulary in a motivating and context-rich environment.

Task-based learning (TBL) is frequently recommended for ESP because it encourages learners to focus on meaning while using target forms to complete authentic tasks. In the context of ELP, tasks may include negotiating contract clauses, simulating courtroom proceedings, or analyzing case scenarios (Chovancová, 2018; Di Pardo Leon-Henri, 2012). By requiring learners to mobilize legal terminology to achieve communicative goals, TBL can promote deeper processing and better retention of vocabulary. Hidayati et al. (2023) found that project-based learning in ESP classes improved learning outcomes by providing extended, integrated cycles of reading, writing, and speaking around discipline-specific topics.

Technological tools have also transformed the landscape of legal English learning. Constantinou and Papadima-Sophocleous (2020) document how learners use online dictionaries, corpora, and legal databases to check meanings, collocations, and usage examples. Mulyadi et al. (2020) discuss how ESP teachers employ technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) to design blended learning environments that combine face-to-face instruction with online resources. While such tools can support autonomy and provide just-in-time clarification, scholars caution that over-reliance on machine translation or automatic glossing may limit deeper conceptual engagement and long-term retention if not guided by appropriate classroom tasks and reflection (Dou et al., 2023).

At the same time, globalization and intercultural communication demands have pushed ELP programs to integrate not only language but also intercultural competence. Hartig (2016) emphasizes that legal literacy in a second language involves understanding how legal concepts, rhetorical styles, and argumentative strategies are embedded in specific legal traditions. Zakaria and Aziz (2023) and Siddiqui et al. (2023) highlight the importance of needs analysis for professional groups, such as police trainees or law students, to ensure that ESP courses address the communicative demands they actually face in their institutional and cultural context.

### **Research Gaps and Rationale for the Present Study**

A critical reading of the existing literature indicates several gaps that this study aims to address. First, many studies on ELP and legal vocabulary focus on course design, textbook analysis, or teacher-reported challenges (Iswati & Triastuti, 2021; Sukying et al., 2023), while comparatively fewer works provide an in-depth, qualitative account of how law students themselves perceive the integration of English legal terminology within their ESP learning experience. This is especially true in emerging higher education systems where English functions as a foreign language and where national law is based on a legal tradition different from the Anglo-American system.

Second, although there is substantial advocacy for task-based, genre-based, and project-based approaches, there remains a need for empirical studies documenting how students experience these approaches in practice, particularly in terms of their perceived usefulness, difficulty, and impact on confidence (Hidayati et al., 2023; Hakim, 2023). Existing research tends to describe pedagogical models at a conceptual level with less attention to how learners respond to terminology-focused activities, how they develop coping strategies, and how they evaluate the alignment between ESP tasks and their future professional aspirations.

Third, the rapid growth of digital tools and blended learning models in ESP has not always been accompanied by detailed qualitative inquiry into how students appropriate these tools in their own learning trajectories (Constantinou & Papadima-Sophocleous, 2020; Mulyadi et al., 2020). There is limited evidence on how law students combine digital dictionaries, legal databases, peer collaboration, and classroom instruction to construct workable strategies for mastering legal terminology over time.

Finally, while several studies have been conducted in the context of ELP courses in different countries (Al-Jarf, 2023; Siddiqui et al., 2023; Zakaria & Aziz, 2023), relatively few

have examined the specific case of law students in Indonesian universities enrolled in international law programs with explicit ESP/ELP components. This context is important because it involves the intersection of local legal curricula, English-medium or bilingual instruction, and an increasing expectation that graduates will be able to work with international legal sources.

To address these gaps, the present study adopts an intrinsic qualitative case study design (Alam, 2021; Flyvbjerg, 2006), focusing on a group of law students in an international law program. It explores in detail their perceptions of the importance of English legal terminology, the obstacles they face, the strategies they adopt, and their evaluations of current ESP courses. By employing thematic analysis supported by NVivo (Dalkin et al., 2021; Edwards-Jones, 2014; Schreier, 2024), the study aims to produce a nuanced understanding of student experiences that can inform more context-sensitive and student-responsive ESP curriculum development.

## **METHODS**

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how law students perceive the integration of English legal terminology in ESP learning (Rahman, 2015). The qualitative design enabled a detailed examination of students' linguistic, academic, and affective experiences during their engagement with Legal English in higher education, particularly within their ESP/ELP courses (Al-Jarf, 2023).

### **Research Design**

An intrinsic case study design was applied because the primary focus was to understand a specific case in its real context, how a particular group of law students at Universitas Jambi experience and interpret their exposure to English legal terminology (Blum, 2017; Flyvbjerg, 2006). This research was conducted during the 2025–2026 academic year at Universitas Jambi, Indonesia, where the Faculty of Law is currently enhancing policies related to internationalization and the integration of English within selected legal courses (Morgan, 2022). This context was suitable for capturing authentic interactions between students, lecturers, and Legal English materials within a naturally occurring instructional environment.

### **Research Target/Subject**

The participants consisted of eight International Law students selected through purposive sampling based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) active enrollment in the International Law program; (b) currently in their fifth semester or above; (c) prior experience in courses where English legal terminology was explicitly integrated; and (d) voluntary agreement to participate in interviews and observations (Palinkas et al., 2015). These criteria ensured that participants had relevant learning exposure necessary to provide rich, contextually grounded insights.

### **Research Procedure**

The research commenced with the process of securing ethical approval and informed consent from all participants to ensure confidentiality, data protection, and voluntary participation throughout the study (Morgan, 2022). Following this, data collection was carried out through a combination of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The interviews were used to explore students' perceptions of

English legal terminology and the challenges they encountered in learning it, while participatory observations enabled the researcher to closely examine how terminology was introduced, explained, and applied during classroom interactions and learning activities. Additionally, relevant course documents such as syllabi, instructional materials, and student assignments were reviewed to determine how legal English vocabulary was embedded within the curriculum and assessment practices (Dalkin et al., 2021). All data gathered from these different sources were then compiled systematically to support a comprehensive interpretation of students' learning experiences.

### **Instruments and Data Collection Techniques**

Three primary instruments were employed to ensure comprehensive and credible data collection. First, a semi-structured interview protocol was utilized to obtain rich, detailed accounts of students' perceptions, experiences, and coping strategies in learning English legal terminology, while still allowing flexibility for probing emerging issues (Alam, 2021; Schreier, 2024). Second, an observation checklist was used during classroom observations to systematically capture instructional practices, student engagement, and instances in which students sought clarification or demonstrated difficulty with legal terminology. Third, a document analysis framework was implemented to review course syllabi, instructional materials, and student assignments in order to assess the extent to which legal English vocabulary was explicitly integrated into learning objectives and evaluative components.

All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity and accuracy of students' narratives (Edwards-Jones, 2014). Meanwhile, detailed observation field notes were taken during and immediately after class sessions to minimize memory bias and to record naturally occurring interactions. In addition, all relevant course documents were systematically organized and coded to complement and corroborate the primary data. Through the use of these interconnected instruments, the study was able to capture a comprehensive picture of how legal terminology was introduced, practiced, and perceived within the ESP learning environment.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns related to the importance of terminology, learning challenges, coping mechanisms, and evaluations of ESP learning (Schreier, 2024). The analytic steps included familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme refinement, and reporting. ATLAS.ti software was used to organize and code data but did not replace the researcher's interpretive responsibility (Alam, 2021; Dalkin et al., 2021). Rigor and trustworthiness were ensured through data triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and the maintenance of an audit trail documenting procedural and analytic decisions (Janis, 2022; Palinkas et al., 2015).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Findings***

The findings of this study portray a detailed and multi-layered picture of how law students experience, understand, and respond to the integration of English legal terminology in ESP learning. Overall, six major themes emerged from the data: (1) the importance of legal terminology mastery, (2) learning challenges, (3) coping strategies, (4) the impact of terminology mastery on ESP and professional readiness, (5) evaluation of ESP courses, and (6) recommendations for improvement. These themes are deeply

interconnected and reflect both individual efforts and structural conditions within the instructional context.

### **Importance of Legal Terminology Mastery**

The first and most prominent theme concerns students' strong recognition that mastering legal terminology in English is a cornerstone of their academic and professional trajectories. Participants repeatedly stressed that legal English terminology is not an optional extra but a fundamental requirement for serious engagement with law in a global context.

One student summarized this view clearly:

*"mastering legal terminology in English is essential for law students, as many legal concepts are adopted from Anglo-Saxon countries" (P1).*

This statement reveals two important points. First, students are aware that many key legal concepts, doctrines, and procedures they encounter in international law derive from, or are strongly influenced by, Anglo-Saxon legal traditions. Second, they understand that English functions as a bridge language allowing them to connect Indonesian legal education with international jurisprudence.

Students also highlighted the practical benefits of terminology mastery in dealing with authentic texts. As one explained,

*"English legal terms, such as 'contract' and 'litigation,' help us understand international legal materials faster" (P2),*

indicating that having a solid vocabulary base accelerates reading and reduces dependence on constant translation. Another participant emphasized the broader professional dimension:

*"the ability to read and comprehend international documents is a crucial skill for legal professionals today" (P3).*

Taken together, these comments indicate that students clearly link vocabulary mastery with efficiency in academic tasks and competence in professional communication.

The data also show that legal terminology proficiency enhances confidence and participation in legal discourse. Several students noted that once they became more familiar with English legal terms, they felt more comfortable speaking up in class discussions, seminars, or international forums:

*"using English legal terms increases our professional confidence when discussing law in global forums" (P4).*

*"understanding legal terminology allows me to engage in international legal cases and discussions" (P2).*

In their view, terminology is not only a linguistic tool, but also a form of symbolic capital that allows them to present themselves as credible, knowledgeable, and professional.

The relationship between English language skills, legal English, and career advancement was also strongly emphasized. For example, one participant remarked,

*"knowledge of English in law helps students to pursue careers as international lawyers or diplomats" (P3),*

and another added,

*"the widespread use of English in law makes mastering the vocabulary almost a requirement for an advanced legal career" (P4).*

These statements underline how students perceive legal English as a gatekeeper for access to prestigious and international career paths.

Engagement with authentic legal texts was also viewed as a turning point in their learning. Students felt that working with real contracts, judgments, and treaties made terminology concrete and contextually meaningful. One commented,

*"I find that legal terminology mastery speeds up comprehension of journals and international agreements" (P7),*

while another pointed out that

*"being proficient in legal English has long-term benefits for career progression, especially when dealing with international clients" (P6).*

Another student explained that

*"the integration of authentic English legal texts such as contracts or judgments—makes our studies much more relevant and practical" (P5).*

This highlights that students appreciate when learning materials reflect actual professional discourse rather than artificial or oversimplified examples.

Finally, many participants viewed terminology mastery as part of lifelong professional development, not a one-time learning objective. They recognized that law and language evolve, requiring ongoing updating of terminology and conceptual knowledge, and saw their ESP experience as the foundation for continuous learning and international networking.

### **Learning Challenges**

Despite acknowledging the importance of legal terminology, students reported facing a wide range of linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and structural challenges in mastering it. A core difficulty is the inherent polysemy of many legal terms. One student explained,

*"one of my difficulties is that some legal terms have multiple meanings, leading to confusion" (P1).*

This polysemy demands that students analyze context carefully and develop sophisticated interpretive skills. Another student mentioned:

*"I find it difficult to memorize terms that have broad or ambiguous definitions" (P1),*

indicating that vague or context-dependent terms are especially hard to internalize and recall accurately.

Spelling and pronunciation issues further intensify the learning burden. Students noted confusion arising from English words that look similar but sound different or have different legal meanings. One observed,

*"I often struggle with writing, especially with words that are spelled similarly but pronounced differently" (P2).*

This complicates both written production and oral performance, and may cause anxiety in speaking situations. Complex, dense academic texts also posed significant difficulties. For example, a participant stated,

*"reading and understanding academic legal texts in English is particularly tough without translation aids" (P2).*

This reliance on dictionaries, glossaries, or translation tools suggests that many students still lack the fluency needed to process complex legal texts independently.

Cultural and linguistic diversity adds another layer of complexity. Differences in legal systems and traditions mean that some English legal concepts do not map neatly onto Indonesian law. One student remarked,

*"cultural differences in law between Indonesia and other countries can make terminology hard to understand"* (P3).

Others pointed to historical influences:

*"sometimes, the legal vocabulary mixes with Dutch and French, making it even more confusing for beginners"* (P6).

These comments highlight that legal English is not only a foreign language, but also carries the weight of multiple legal histories, which can be bewildering for learners without sufficient background knowledge.

Students also mentioned limitations in their general English proficiency as a constraint. As one admitted,

*"my basic English skills are sometimes insufficient for grasping complex legal concepts"* (P4).

Listening comprehension was especially problematic, as indicated by:

*"listening comprehension is especially challenging when people speak with various English accents"* (P5).

This reveals that learners need both general and specialized language support.

Finally, structural and institutional constraints were widely reported. Students felt that the time allocated for ESP or legal English courses was too limited relative to the complexity of the content. One summarized this as,

*"limited teaching time and material depth make it hard to master legal vocabulary in just one semester"* (P7).

Combined with a lack of supplementary materials and practice opportunities, these factors often forced students into self-directed learning without adequate institutional support.

### **Coping Strategies**

In response to these challenges, students developed a rich repertoire of coping strategies that draw on technology, multimodal resources, peer collaboration, experiential learning, and independent study.

A widely used strategy is the reliance on digital tools to resolve vocabulary problems quickly. One student explained,

*"I often use Google Translate and online law dictionaries to clarify confusing terminology"* (P1),

showing that online translators and legal dictionaries function as immediate, portable support tools. Other students mentioned using websites and legal databases to check usage and examples. These tools act as on-demand glossaries, helping students maintain the flow of reading and avoid getting stuck.

Another important set of strategies involves multimodal input. Students frequently reported that exposure to audiovisual legal content helped them become familiar with pronunciation, rhythm, and usage in context. As one put it,

*"watching films and videos in English helps me get used to legal expressions and pronunciation"* (P2).

By listening to different speakers, accents, and registers, students gradually developed a more intuitive sense of legal English discourse than could be obtained from written texts alone.

Social and peer learning were also central. Students emphasized that working with classmates was crucial in clarifying misunderstandings and reinforcing knowledge. As one noted,

*"group discussion and peer collaboration are effective in clarifying misunderstood words or concepts"* (P3).

Another added that,

*"I frequently ask for help from lecturers and classmates to fully grasp unfamiliar vocabulary"* (P4).

These comments show that terminology learning is not only an individual cognitive process, but also a collective endeavor shaped through negotiation of meaning and shared problem-solving.

Experiential learning, especially simulations and role-plays, emerged as a key strategy for consolidating terminology in active use. One participant stated,

*"practicing through legal case simulation, especially role-play, builds my confidence using legal English"* (P5).

By enacting roles such as lawyers, judges, or clients, students could use legal terminology in realistic interaction, linking words to communicative goals and professional identities. Another strategy was regular engagement with authentic legal documents:

*"reviewing authentic legal texts, such as contracts and judgments, to become familiar with real-world vocabulary"* (P6).

This gave them exposure to how terms are phrased and structured in real contracts, judgments, and statutes.

Independent study also played an important role. One student explained,

*"independent reading about legal terms, combined with note-sharing among classmates, supports deeper understanding"* (P7).

By creating shared glossaries and exchanging notes, students collectively built a knowledge base that could be revisited and refined.

Students also reflected on curricular and structural supports that could make these strategies more effective. They expressed a desire for more class meetings and better integration of legal terminology across the curriculum:

*"more class meetings and continuous curriculum integration would improve our mastery over time"* (P1),

and suggested that

*"collaborative learning methods, like group assignments or presentations, encourage active use of legal terminology" (P2).*

Finally, they emphasized the importance of using new terms repeatedly in different tasks:

*"I use practical exercises and try to apply new terms in my assignments to reinforce memory and understanding" (P3).*

This demonstrates students' awareness of the need for repeated retrieval and meaningful use to secure long-term retention.

### **Impact of Terminology Mastery on ESP**

Students' accounts show that mastering legal terminology has a profound and multifaceted impact on their academic performance, self-confidence, and readiness for international legal practice. One student explicitly stated,

*"mastery of English legal terminology boosts our readiness for international legal practice" (P1),*

highlighting that terminology is perceived as a foundational competence rather than a peripheral skill. With strong vocabulary, students feel more capable of handling complex texts, participating in debates, and working across jurisdictions.

The psychological dimension is also important. Another participant observed,

*"it raises our confidence to participate in global discussions and legal analysis" (P2),*

underscoring that vocabulary mastery affects not only comprehension but also the willingness to contribute and take intellectual risks. Students increasingly saw themselves as legitimate participants in global legal discourse, moving from passive recipients to active contributors.

The learning environment itself plays a crucial role in enabling this impact. Students identified effective ESP Law classes as those that used authentic legal texts and cases:

*"Effective ESP Law classes make learning relevant, especially when integrating actual legal texts and cases" (P3).*

They also pointed to the critical influence of instructors:

*"the perceived effectiveness of ESP Law lessons depends largely on the instructor's engagement and approach" (P4).*

Engaged, well-prepared lecturers with clear explanations and interactive methods were viewed as catalysts for terminology mastery.

Interactive teaching styles were particularly valued. One student reflected,

*"more discussion-based and interactive teaching makes terminological learning much clearer" (P5),*

and another pointed out,

*"real-life case studies and practical assignments are more beneficial than just theoretical instruction" (P6).*

These expressions show that students consider learning most effective when it combines conceptual explanation with realistic, practice-oriented tasks.

Structural factors such as course design and materials also shape the impact of ESP learning. A participant noted,

*"the quality of course materials and well structured lessons significantly impact vocabulary acquisition" (P7),*

while others argued for continuous learning:

*"continuous and focused learning of legal English is needed throughout multiple semesters" (P1).*

Students saw sustained, progressive exposure as necessary to develop and maintain high levels of legal English competence.

Active use in class was crucial for consolidating learning:

*"The opportunity to practice and present using legal English in class directly strengthens legal communication skills" (P2).*

Students also called for more collaborative models and authentic materials to support real-world application:

*"more collaborative models and authentic English legal texts for study" (P3).*

Together, these comments indicate that vocabulary mastery is both a product of and a contributor to a robust ESP ecosystem that combines authentic input, interactive pedagogy, and progressive curriculum design.

### **Evaluation of ESP Course**

Students provided a nuanced evaluation of their ESP Law courses, identifying both strengths and areas needing improvement. A central message was that lecturer quality is critical. They repeatedly affirmed that

*"the effectiveness of ESP Law classes depends greatly on the lecturer's discipline and teaching methods" (P1).*

When lecturers were well-prepared, used varied methods, and showed enthusiasm, students felt more motivated, engaged, and able to cope with difficult terminology. Conversely, lack of clarity or monotonous delivery hindered learning.

Curriculum content and progression were also scrutinized. Several participants commented that

*"some classes lack depth, often providing only the basics, which leaves students needing more advanced material" (P2).*

This suggests that while introductory coverage is helpful, students expect a gradual move toward more complex language and texts that reflect real legal practice. Without this, their growth may stagnate.

Students recognized the value of collaboration, but stressed that its success depends on student motivation and group dynamics. One noted that

*"class discussions and group work are useful, but only when classmates are motivated and cooperative" (P3).*

This indicates that collaborative tasks need careful structuring, clear roles, and lecturer monitoring to ensure equal participation and productive interaction.

The demand for practical and experiential learning also surfaced clearly. Students recommended,

*"more practical exercises such as role-playing court cases could make lessons more relevant" (P4),*

linking experiential activities to deeper understanding and better retention. However, they expressed concern that,

*"the limited number of sessions each semester is insufficient to master legal English skills" (P5).*

They felt the schedule constrained the extent to which practice and feedback could be built into courses.

The dynamic between teacher and students was viewed as a shared responsibility for classroom effectiveness:

*"active students and teachers contribute significantly to classroom effectiveness" (P6).*

However, problems arose when instructions and assessment expectations were not clearly communicated:

*"evaluation is hampered when unclear instructions are given by lecturers" (P7).*

This underlines the importance of transparent criteria, detailed rubrics, and explicit guidance on how legal English will be evaluated.

Students also emphasized the importance of access to authentic materials. They believed that

*"direct exposure to authentic legal documents helps students better understand terminology" (P2).*

In the absence of sufficient institutional support, some were forced to rely heavily on independent study due to limited resources:

*"independent study... due to classroom limitations and lack of support materials" (P4).*

While independent learning can be beneficial, students clearly felt that the institution should provide stronger resource support and structured guidance.

Overall, they acknowledged some progress in integrating legal terminology into everyday lessons but maintained that more work is needed:

*"integration of legal terminology into everyday lessons has made some improvement, but further focus is needed" (P7).*

They called for a systematic, spiral approach that revisits core terminology across multiple courses and levels.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

Based on their experiences, students provided concrete recommendations for improving ESP Law instruction. A frequently emphasized proposal was extending and restructuring the curriculum:

*"ESP Law curriculum should include more meeting hours and be extended across several semesters" (P1).*

They argued that sustained exposure and spaced practice are essential to move beyond superficial understanding toward deep, flexible mastery.

They also stressed the importance of lecturer presence and feedback. One student suggested that

*"lecturers should be more active and available to provide feedback and support during lessons" (P4),*

and added that

*"lecturers should provide systematic guidance and motivation to enhance classroom participation" (P4).*

Students thus expect not only content delivery but also formative feedback, encouragement, and explicit participation structures such as turn-taking systems, assigned roles, or rubric-based speaking tasks.

Authenticity of content was another key recommendation. Students proposed that

*"authentic legal texts, such as actual contracts and court judgments, should be used for classroom exercises" (P5).*

They also called for assignments that promote collaborative and experiential learning:

*"class assignments should promote collaborative learning through group discussions or role-playing" (P3)*

and

*"students should have regular opportunities to practice legal English in simulated professional situations" (P3).*

These comments point towards a praxis-oriented model of ESP, where language learning is embedded in realistic legal activities.

Students further recommended that grammar and language work be tied more explicitly to legal contexts. One affirmed that

*"grammar materials should be improved and made more relevant to legal contexts" (P2),*

and insisted,

*"the curriculum must be designed to focus more directly on legal English skills, not just general English" (P3).*

They seek specialized training in genres such as pleadings, memoranda, contracts, and opinions—each with distinctive rhetorical moves and lexical patterns.

Regarding resources and assessment, students advocated that

*"the use of supplementary resources, such as online dictionaries and journals, should be encouraged" (P7),*

and insisted that

*"assessment should include practical tasks that mirror real-world legal work, such as drafting and presenting."*

They also reiterated that

*"the curriculum must be designed to focus more directly on legal English skills, not just general English" (P3)*

and

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*"ESP Law curriculum should include more meeting hours and be extended across several semesters" (P1).*

In short, students envision a coherent, long-term, performance-based curriculum that focuses explicitly on legal English and aligns learning activities, materials, and assessments with real professional demands..

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study contribute a rich and detailed understanding of how law students perceive the role, challenges, and pedagogy of legal English within ESP programs. At the core, students' voices clearly affirm that legal terminology mastery is central to their academic success and future professional identity. Their statements show that they conceptualize legal English not as an isolated language subject, but as an integral part of becoming competent, credible legal practitioners in a globalized environment. Comments such as "mastery of English legal terminology boosts our readiness for international legal practice" (P1) and "knowledge of English in law helps students to pursue careers as international lawyers or diplomats" (P3) underscore this orientation toward international employability and global legal literacy.

The complexity of the challenges they describe—polysemy, accent variation, historical layering of vocabulary, cultural differences in legal systems, and structural limitations in teaching time—confirms that legal English is a high-demand domain requiring specialized pedagogical approaches. Students' confusion over multiple meanings and abstract definitions, as illustrated by P1 and P2, highlights the need for instruction that goes beyond dictionary-level definitions and engages learners in contextual analysis, case-based explanation, and critical comparison of jurisdictions. Difficulties in listening and pronunciation (P2, P5) also show that oral skills must be systematically developed alongside reading and writing to prepare students for real-time legal communication.

At the same time, learners' coping strategies demonstrate a high degree of agency, adaptability, and resourcefulness. Their intensive use of digital tools (P1, P8), combined with multimodal exposure (P2), peer collaboration (P3, P4), simulations and role-plays (P5), and engagement with authentic texts (P6), aligns closely with contemporary best practices in ESP pedagogy that emphasize learner autonomy, task-based and genre-based instruction, and the integration of authentic materials. These strategies—especially when supported by structured guidance—foster deeper processing, richer context-building, and stronger retention of terminology.

The interplay between individual strategies and institutional structures is particularly important. While students are proactive, they also clearly indicate that their efforts must be supported by coherent curriculum design, adequate teaching time, and high-quality resources. Their evaluations of ESP courses highlight that teacher engagement, clarity, and methodological variety are crucial for transforming difficult content into accessible and meaningful learning. This places ESP lecturers and curriculum designers at the center of any improvement efforts. Professional development for lecturers, collaboration between language and law specialists, and institutional investment in English-medium legal resources emerge as key priorities.

Students' recommendations point towards a vision of ESP Law that is longitudinal, performance-based, and practice-oriented. They do not see legal English as a one-semester support course but as a multi-semester trajectory integrated with their legal training. Their calls for more contact hours, cumulative curriculum integration, authentic texts, simulations, and practical assessment tasks reflect a sophisticated understanding of what is required to

move from passive recognition of terms to active, accurate, and contextually appropriate use in real legal tasks. In other words, they are asking for ESP programs that are designed not only to help them pass exams, but to function effectively in workplaces where legal English is the norm.

In theoretical terms, the findings resonate with views of ESP as needs-driven, context-sensitive, and discipline-specific. Students' emphasis on alignment between course content and future professional demands supports the principle that ESP curricula should be grounded in careful needs analysis and informed by genuine communicative situations. Their experiences also illustrate that mastering legal terminology is inseparable from developing critical thinking, intercultural awareness, and professional identity, as they interpret legal language across jurisdictions and cultures.

Overall, the study shows that when legal English is taught as an integrated, authentic, and interactive component of legal education, it has the potential to significantly enhance students' academic outcomes, confidence, and employability. However, realizing this potential requires systematic changes: extending ESP Law across semesters, embedding legal English in core law courses, strengthening lecturer capacity, and providing structured opportunities for students to apply their knowledge in realistic tasks. By centering student perceptions, this research offers pedagogically actionable insights that can guide faculties of law in designing ESP programs that are more responsive, rigorous, and relevant to the demands of contemporary legal practice.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has shown that law students in an international law program perceive English legal terminology as a central pillar of their academic development and professional preparation. They recognize that the ability to understand and use specialized legal vocabulary is essential for engaging with international legal materials, succeeding in law-related coursework, and pursuing careers in global legal environments. At the same time, they face substantial linguistic and institutional challenges, including polysemy, complex text structures, pronunciation difficulties, and limited instructional time.

Students respond to these challenges through a combination of technology-supported learning, peer collaboration, experiential activities, and independent engagement with authentic legal texts. Their accounts reveal that the perceived effectiveness of ESP–Law courses depends heavily on lecturer engagement, the use of authentic materials, and the degree to which learning activities and assessments reflect real legal tasks.

The findings carry important implications for ESP curriculum developers and educators. Legal English should be treated not merely as vocabulary enrichment but as the foundation for developing global legal literacy, critical thinking, and intercultural competence. This calls for integrated, multi-semester programs that combine authentic materials, interactive and genre-based tasks, and continuous feedback mechanisms. By incorporating student perspectives into curriculum design, law faculties can better align ESP offerings with the realities of international legal practice and support students in building the linguistic and professional competencies needed to thrive in an increasingly interconnected legal landscape.

Future research could extend this study by including multiple institutions, comparing student and teacher perspectives, or integrating mixed methods to explore the relationship between perceived challenges and measurable learning outcomes.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Ahmad Ridha formulated the research idea, designed the methodology, analyzed the data, and drafted the initial manuscript. Bunga Ayu Wulandari managed data collection and contributed to project coordination. Robi Soma provided technical support, software management, and data visualization. Muhammad Fauzan supervised the research process, guided the manuscript revisions, and secured funding. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript and share responsibility for its content

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funding sponsors had no role in the selection of the research topic, study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, manuscript preparation, or the decision to publish the findings.

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