SCIENCE HUB REVIEW
2026
Volume 1
Issue 5
www.sciencehubreview.uz
ILMIY ELEKTRON JURNAL

DEVELOPING LAW STUDENTS' PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH THROUGH THE INTEGRATION OF BLENDED LEARNING AND CASE-STUDY TECHNOLOGIES

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Abstract

The article examines a methodological framework for developing law students' professional communicative competence in English through the purposeful integration of blended learning and case-study technologies. The central premise is that effective Legal English instruction should connect language learning with the communicative practices of the legal profession rather than treat terminology, grammar and speaking activities as isolated course components. Drawing on scholarship in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), blended learning, genre analysis and experiential learning, the article outlines a three-stage instructional cycle: structured online preparation, collaborative face-to-face case analysis, and digitally supported follow-up with reflection and professional writing. It identifies five interrelated dimensions of competence—linguistic, discourse, pragmatic-sociolinguistic, strategic and professional-practical—and proposes assessment procedures aligned with these dimensions. Particular attention is paid to the selection and adaptation of legal cases, the relationship between online and classroom tasks, and the need to distinguish language assessment from the evaluation of substantive legal knowledge. The framework is conceptual and methodological; its effectiveness must be established through a controlled pedagogical experiment using authentic learner data.

Keywords

Legal English; professional communicative competence; blended learning; case-study technology; English for Specific Purposes; legal discourse; experiential learning; assessment rubric.

1. Introduction

The internationalisation of legal practice has increased the value of professionals who can communicate accurately and appropriately in English. Cross-border transactions, international arbitration, comparative legal research, commercial negotiations and

professional correspondence frequently require lawyers to interpret specialised texts, explain legal positions, question evidence and communicate with clients or colleagues from different linguistic and legal backgrounds. For students enrolled in law programmes, general English proficiency is therefore necessary but insufficient. They also need to use language to perform recognisable professional tasks: summarising a case, identifying legally relevant facts, presenting an argument, advising a client, negotiating a settlement and drafting a concise written opinion.

This requirement creates a specific challenge for Legal English teachers. Students may know grammatical structures and individual legal terms but still struggle to organise an argument, select an appropriate register, qualify a claim or respond strategically when communication breaks down. Instruction consequently needs to move beyond decontextualised vocabulary practice towards purposeful, supported communication in legal settings.

The present article considers how blended learning and case-study technologies can be integrated to address this challenge. The proposed approach is based on the research direction formulated in the dissertation project on improving the methodology for developing law students' professional communicative competence in English. Its contribution lies not in treating either technology as new in itself, but in specifying how the online and face-to-face components can be connected to a coherent sequence of legal communication tasks.

2. Theoretical background and literature review

2.1. Legal English within the ESP framework

English for Specific Purposes is commonly understood as an approach in which course content, language focus and learning activities are determined by learners' academic or occupational needs. Hutchinson and Waters [1] emphasise the centrality of needs analysis and learning-centred course design, while Dudley-Evans and St John [2] describe ESP as a flexible approach shaped by disciplinary contexts, genres and learner purposes. Basturkmen [3] further highlights the importance of identifying the communicative situations in which learners are expected to use the target language. Applied to legal education, these principles mean that a Legal English syllabus should be informed by the

communicative demands of legal study and practice, not simply by a list of technical terms.

Legal communication is also strongly genre-sensitive. Bhatia [4] explains that professional genres are shaped by communicative purposes, institutional conventions and the expectations of their intended audiences. Tiersma [5] discusses the distinctive characteristics of legal language, including specialised vocabulary, conventional formulations and syntactic complexity. Candlin, Bhatia and Jensen [6], in their discussion of legal writing materials for learners of English as an additional language, draw attention to the pedagogical challenge of making professional legal genres accessible without removing their communicative and institutional functions. These contributions support the use of tasks in which students interpret and produce recognisable legal texts rather than practise language forms in isolation.

2.2. Blended learning as an instructional design

Blended learning should not be reduced to the use of digital resources alongside conventional lessons. Garrison and Kanuka [7] associate its potential in higher education with the deliberate integration of online and face-to-face learning experiences. Graham [8] similarly frames blended learning around the combination of classroom-based and computer-mediated instruction. Hrastinski [9] cautions that the term can refer to different arrangements and that researchers should specify what is blended and how the components relate to one another. For Legal English, this distinction is important: uploading a vocabulary list or video does not, by itself, create an integrated learning environment. Online work must prepare students for classroom interaction, and classroom interaction must generate a meaningful follow-up task.

2.3. Case-study learning and professional communication

Case-study learning provides a context in which students use language to investigate a problem, evaluate information and justify a decision. Herreid [10] identifies the educational value of well-designed cases that engage learners in problem-solving and evidence-based discussion. Kolb’s experiential learning model [11] offers a complementary perspective by connecting concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. In a Legal English lesson, students

can encounter a case, reflect on its facts, formulate a position and test that position through discussion or role-play.

Research specifically concerned with law students has examined the potential of legal cases for developing pragmatic and communicative abilities. Almazova and Sheredekina [12] address the development of law students' pragmatic competence through legal cases in an ESP course. Arias Rodríguez and Roberto Flórez [13] discuss the use of legal cases to support cognitive and communicative competences in English classes. Ruzibaeva [14] considers case studies in ESP teaching at Tashkent State University of Law. These studies support the relevance of case-based Legal English instruction. The methodological question pursued here is narrower: how can case analysis be systematically linked to online preparation, classroom interaction and post-lesson professional writing within one instructional cycle?

3. The methodological rationale for integration

The proposed integration rests on the complementary functions of the two technologies. Blended learning organises the learning environment, timing and sequence of activities; case-study technology supplies a professionally meaningful communicative problem. Their combination is educationally productive only when each stage has a clear purpose and produces evidence needed in the next stage. The online component should not duplicate the classroom lesson, and the classroom component should not be limited to checking online answers. Instead, preparation should reduce avoidable linguistic and informational barriers so that face-to-face time can be devoted to reasoning, interaction and feedback.

3.1. Target competence and its dimensions

In this article, professional communicative competence in English is treated as the integrated ability to use linguistic resources, discourse conventions and interactional strategies to complete communication tasks in legal contexts. It is not equivalent to legal expertise: students may be required to analyse a simplified legal problem, but the language teacher's principal concern is whether they can communicate their analysis clearly, appropriately and coherently. Five dimensions are proposed:

• Linguistic competence: grammatical control, lexical range, pronunciation and accurate, context-sensitive use of legal terminology.

• Discourse competence: coherent organisation of spoken and written contributions, logical sequencing, cohesion, argument structure and awareness of genre conventions.

• Pragmatic-sociolinguistic competence: adaptation of language to the audience, communicative purpose, institutional role, degree of formality and intercultural context.

• Strategic competence: clarification, paraphrasing, checking understanding, reformulation, turn management and other strategies that sustain communication.

• Professional-practical competence: identifying the communicative purpose, selecting relevant facts, presenting a reasoned position and producing an appropriate task-related outcome in English.

These dimensions are interdependent. For example, a student may know the relevant terminology but fail to persuade an audience if the argument is poorly structured or the register is inappropriate. Conversely, effective strategic communication can help a learner maintain an exchange despite gaps in vocabulary. Instruction and assessment should therefore consider the overall performance as well as its component features.

3.2. Principles for designing the integrated cycle

The model is guided by several principles. Needs orientation requires tasks to reflect the academic and professional communication demands of law students. Authenticity requires cases and texts to resemble legal situations while remaining appropriate to learners' language level. Sequencing requires each online task to prepare for a defined classroom activity and each classroom activity to lead to a follow-up product. Scaffolding requires linguistic support—such as phrase banks, model texts, glossaries and planning templates—to be gradually reduced as learner independence increases. Interaction requires students to explain, question, negotiate and respond, rather than merely divide written work among group members. Finally, constructive alignment requires learning outcomes, teaching activities and assessment criteria to measure the same target abilities.

The model also recognises that legal systems and terminology are not always directly comparable. When a case involves concepts from a particular jurisdiction, the teacher should identify that context and avoid presenting approximate translations as exact legal

equivalents. Authentic materials may be shortened or linguistically adapted for teaching purposes, but their origin and the nature of the adaptation should be acknowledged.

4. The three-stage integrated instructional model

4.1. Stage I: online preparation before the lesson

The pre-class stage is intended to activate prior knowledge and equip students with the language needed for meaningful case discussion. The teacher selects a short case extract, factual scenario or professional document connected with the lesson outcome. Students complete a sequence of focused tasks: (a) previewing a limited set of key legal and general academic terms; (b) reading or viewing the case materials; (c) distinguishing facts, claims and missing information; (d) answering comprehension questions; and (e) submitting one initial question or identifying the central issue. A short online quiz or shared response document can provide diagnostic information about students' readiness.

The amount of online work should be proportionate to the learning objective. Excessive pre-class reading may overload students and reduce the time available for interaction. Materials should therefore be concise, accessible on commonly available devices and accompanied by clear instructions. Where students have different levels of English proficiency, optional support may include a bilingual glossary, audio recording, sentence frames or a simplified version of the case. Such support should enable participation without removing the cognitive challenge of the task.

4.2. Stage II: face-to-face case analysis and interaction

Classroom time is devoted to collaborative interpretation and professional communication. The teacher briefly clarifies points identified through the online diagnostic activity, then organises students into pairs or small groups. Students identify the parties and relevant facts, formulate the legal or practical issue, distinguish evidence from assumptions, consider possible responses and prepare a justified position. The teacher may assign roles such as client, legal adviser, claimant, respondent, mediator or judge, depending on the communicative objective and the complexity of the case.

The case can lead to a client consultation, negotiation, mediation, structured debate, oral case presentation or simulated hearing. Each format should require identifiable language functions. For example, client consultation involves asking open and follow-up

questions, clarifying a client's account and explaining options in accessible language. Negotiation requires proposing terms, making concessions, expressing disagreement diplomatically and summarising areas of agreement. An oral case presentation requires signposting, distinguishing facts from interpretation and supporting claims with reasons.

The teacher's role is that of facilitator and language adviser. Rather than interrupting every error, the teacher can record recurring language problems, provide brief feedback at appropriate moments and invite students to reformulate unclear statements. Peer feedback may focus on whether the argument was understandable, whether the speaker responded to questions and whether the register suited the assigned role. The teacher should ensure that participation is distributed and that group work results in genuine exchange rather than parallel monologues.

4.3. Stage III: online consolidation and reflective follow-up

After the lesson, students convert oral reasoning into an individual or collaborative written product. Depending on the course outcome, this may be a case summary, short legal opinion, client email, memorandum, negotiation record or reflective commentary. Students may also review another group's proposal and provide feedback against a shared checklist. The teacher responds to selected language features and task completion, making explicit the relationship between the oral discussion and the conventions of the written genre.

Reflection completes the cycle. Students identify one communicative strength, one difficulty and one specific action for improvement. The teacher uses this information, together with quiz results and classroom observation, to plan the next lesson. Thus, the cycle is iterative: evidence from the follow-up stage informs subsequent case selection, language support and grouping decisions.

5. Case selection, assessment and implementation conditions

5.1. Criteria for selecting and adapting legal cases

A case should be selected because it elicits the target communication, not merely because it contains legal terminology. The following criteria are recommended: relevance to the students' legal studies; clarity of the communicative problem; sufficiency of facts for analysis; an appropriate level of linguistic and conceptual difficulty; potential for more

than one defensible response; and suitability for the planned genre or interaction. Cases may be drawn from publicly available materials, teacher-written scenarios or adapted professional texts. If a source text is simplified, the teacher should preserve the central issue and disclose the adaptation. Cases involving unfamiliar legal systems should include concise contextual notes.

5.2. Assessment framework

Assessment should gather evidence across the learning cycle rather than rely on a single end-of-unit language test. A practical assessment package may combine an online terminology and comprehension quiz, observation of group interaction, an oral case presentation or role-play, a written professional text and a short reflection. The same analytic criteria should be communicated to students before the task so that assessment supports learning as well as records performance.

A four-level rubric may be used for each of the five competence dimensions. The descriptors should be task-specific and observable. For example, at a developing level, a student may present relevant information but rely heavily on prompts and produce an uneven argument; at a competent level, the student may organise a clear position, use key terminology with generally appropriate control and respond to routine questions; at a more advanced level, the student may qualify claims, adapt register flexibly, handle unexpected questions and produce a coherent professional text. The descriptors must be calibrated to the learners' course level rather than treated as universal proficiency labels.

Assessment dimension	Observable indicators	Possible evidence
Linguistic	Accuracy, range, terminology, intelligibility	Quiz; oral and written work
Discourse	Coherence, cohesion, argument structure, genre	Presentation; memorandum
Pragmatic	Audience awareness, register, role-appropriate language	Consultation; negotiation
Strategic	Clarification, paraphrase, turn management, repair	Observed interaction
Professional-practical	Relevant facts, justified position, task completion	Case analysis; written opinion

To improve reliability, assessors should use shared descriptors and, where feasible, jointly score a sample of student performances before formal assessment. If more than one teacher evaluates oral or written work, discrepancies should be discussed and the

rubric refined. Language performance and the correctness of specialist legal analysis should be reported separately when the course is taught by a language teacher without responsibility for assessing substantive law.

5.3. Conditions for implementation

Successful implementation depends on more than platform access. Teachers need time to select or develop suitable cases, align tasks with learning outcomes and prepare concise digital materials. Students need clear guidance on online participation, deadlines and expected outputs. Institutional support may include stable internet access, an accessible learning platform and opportunities for language teachers to consult law subject specialists. Digital tools should remain subordinate to pedagogical purpose: a simple shared document may be more effective than a complex platform if it supports the intended interaction reliably.

Potential limitations should also be anticipated. Unequal access to devices, inconsistent pre-class preparation, different levels of legal knowledge and students' reluctance to speak may affect participation. These risks can be reduced through low-bandwidth materials, flexible access windows, short readiness checks, carefully structured roles and explicit language scaffolds. The teacher should also avoid overloading a single case with too many linguistic and legal objectives.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The proposed framework provides a rationale for connecting the organisation of blended learning with the professional focus of case-study instruction. Its principal methodological feature is the continuity between individual preparation, collaborative legal communication and post-lesson production. Online preparation gives students time to become familiar with essential information and language; classroom case analysis creates a reason to use that language to question, explain and negotiate; and the follow-up task consolidates oral work in a written or reflective form. The sequence is therefore more than a combination of delivery modes: it is an aligned progression from preparation to performance and reflection.

The framework also clarifies the intended construct of professional communicative competence. Legal English teaching should address linguistic accuracy, discourse

organisation, pragmatic appropriateness and strategic interaction while retaining a clear connection to the professional purpose of the task. This multidimensional view has implications for course design. Teachers should select cases according to the communication they are expected to elicit, provide language support that enables participation, and assess performance through observable criteria. In particular, the ability to use legal terminology should be evaluated in context rather than as isolated recall.

The article has a conceptual and methodological scope. It does not report the results of a completed pedagogical experiment, and no claims of statistically verified effectiveness are made. The next research stage should examine the model empirically in a defined law-student cohort. Such a study should include a needs analysis, clearly specified learning outcomes, comparable experimental and control conditions, pre- and post-intervention measures, transparent assessment rubrics and appropriate statistical analysis. The number and characteristics of participants, the duration of the intervention and the instruments used should be reported in sufficient detail to permit evaluation and, where possible, replication.

In conclusion, the integration of blended learning and case-study technologies offers a coherent methodological route for developing law students' professional communicative competence in English. Its value depends on purposeful sequencing, professionally relevant cases, appropriate scaffolding and aligned assessment. When these conditions are met, Legal English instruction can move beyond the transmission of terminology towards supported participation in the communicative practices that students are likely to encounter in legal education and professional settings.

Glossary

Blended learning – A deliberately designed combination of face-to-face instruction and online learning activities.

Case-study technology – A teaching approach in which learners analyse a contextualised problem, evaluate evidence and justify possible decisions.

Legal English – English used in legal study and practice, including specialised terminology, genres and professional interaction.

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) – Language teaching shaped by learners' specific academic or occupational needs.

Professional communicative competence – The integrated ability to use language appropriately and effectively to complete professional communication tasks.

Legal discourse – Spoken or written communication shaped by legal purposes, institutions, genres and conventions.

Pragmatic-sociolinguistic competence – The ability to adapt language to audience, purpose, role, register and social context.

Scaffolding – Temporary linguistic or procedural support that enables learners to perform tasks with increasing independence.

Analytic rubric – An assessment instrument that evaluates performance through separate criteria and explicit descriptors.

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