

INTEGRATING CASE LAW INTO LEGAL ENGLISH LESSONS: FOCUS ON INTERNATIONAL JURISDICTIONS

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Abstract

Teaching Legal English to non-native speakers requires innovative methods to bridge linguistic proficiency with legal reasoning. This study explores the integration of case law from international jurisdictions—specifically the International Court of Justice (ICJ), International Criminal Court (ICC), European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and World Trade Organization Dispute Settlement Body (WTO DSB)—into Legal English curricula. By employing case briefs, lexical analysis of judicial terminology (e.g., plaintiff, respondent, jurisdiction, ruling, appeal), and argumentative writing tasks (memoranda and position papers), the approach aims to enhance students' linguistic and analytical skills. A 12-week course was implemented with 20 law students (B2–C1 CEFR levels) at a European university, using qualitative methods including curriculum design, corpus-based lexical analysis, and pre-/post-assessments. Results showed significant improvements: vocabulary accuracy rose from 45% to 82%, reading comprehension of case briefs improved by 25%, and argumentative writing gained clarity and precision. Students reported increased engagement and confidence in discussing international law. Challenges included initial difficulties with judicial texts, addressed through scaffolding. The study suggests that case law integration fosters interdisciplinary learning, preparing students for global legal practice. Future research could explore digital tools for case preparation or broader proficiency ranges. This approach offers a scalable model for Legal English instruction, blending language acquisition with practical legal insight.

Ключевые слова:

Legal English, case law, international jurisdictions, case briefs, judicial terminology, argumentative writing.

Introduction

The globalized legal landscape demands proficiency in Legal English, particularly for professionals engaging with international jurisdictions. Legal English courses, traditionally focused on vocabulary and drafting skills, often lack practical engagement with authentic legal contexts. Integrating case law from international courts—such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), International Criminal Court (ICC), European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and World Trade Organization Dispute Settlement Body (WTO DSB)—offers a dynamic approach to teaching Legal English. This method bridges linguistic competence with substantive legal understanding, equipping students to navigate complex judicial texts and argumentation.

The primary challenge lies in making case law accessible to non-native English speakers while fostering critical thinking and precise use of legal terminology. Terms like plaintiff, respondent, jurisdiction, ruling, and appeal are not merely vocabulary but gateways to understanding legal processes. Additionally, written formats such as memoranda and position papers are essential for mastering argumentative clarity. This study explores how case briefs, lexical analysis, and structured writing tasks enhance Legal English instruction, focusing on international jurisdictions. The research question is: How can case law integration improve linguistic and analytical skills in Legal English classrooms?

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach, combining curriculum design, textual analysis, and classroom experimentation. The methodology unfolds in three stages:

1. Case Selection and Preparation

Cases were selected from four international courts: ICJ (e.g., Whaling in the Antarctic, Australia v. Japan), ICC (e.g., Prosecutor v. Lubanga), ECHR (e.g., Kudrevičius and Others v. Lithuania), and WTO DSB (e.g., US – Shrimp). Criteria included linguistic complexity, relevance to global issues, and availability of public records. Each case was summarized into a one-page case brief, highlighting facts, issues, rulings, and reasoning, adapted to intermediate and advanced Legal English learners (B2–C1 CEFR levels).

2. Lexical and Terminological Analysis

Case briefs were analyzed for key terms (plaintiff, respondent, jurisdiction, ruling, appeal, etc.) using corpus linguistics tools (e.g., AntConc). Frequency and collocation patterns were identified to create glossaries and contextual exercises. Students were tasked with defining terms, matching them to case contexts, and using them in sentences, reinforcing both comprehension and production.

3. Classroom Implementation

A 12-week Legal English course was designed for 20 law students at a European university (ages 20–25, mixed B2–C1 proficiency). The curriculum included:

- Weeks 1–4: Introduction to international courts and case brief reading. Students analyzed one case per court, discussing structure and terminology.
- Weeks 5–8: Lexical workshops, focusing on terminology application in oral debates and short written summaries.
- Weeks 9–12: Argumentative writing tasks, where students drafted memoranda and position papers based on simplified case scenarios (e.g., a hypothetical WTO dispute).

Teaching methods combined lectures, group discussions, and peer reviews. Pre- and post-course assessments measured vocabulary retention, reading comprehension, and writing coherence using rubrics aligned with CEFR descriptors.

Results

The integration of case law yielded measurable improvements across linguistic and analytical domains:

1. Vocabulary Acquisition

Pre-course tests showed 45% accuracy in defining judicial terms (e.g., jurisdiction confused with authority). Post-course tests indicated 82% accuracy, with students correctly applying terms in context (e.g., “The respondent argued lack of jurisdiction”). Collocation exercises improved natural usage, such as pairing ruling with upheld or overturned.

2. Reading Comprehension

Initial case brief readings took students 25–30 minutes with 60% factual recall. By week 12, reading time dropped to 15–20 minutes, with 85% recall. Students identified key elements (facts, issues, rulings) more efficiently, attributing success to structured case briefs and glossary support.

3. Writing Skills

Memoranda and position papers showed progressive improvement. Early drafts lacked clarity in argumentation (e.g., vague claims like “The court was wrong”). Final submissions demonstrated structured arguments, citing case facts and using terms accurately (e.g., “The plaintiff’s claim fails due to insufficient evidence, per ECHR precedent”). Peer reviews highlighted 70% of final drafts as “clear and persuasive” versus 20% initially.

4. Student Feedback

Surveys indicated 90% of students found case-based lessons engaging, with 80% reporting increased confidence in discussing international law. Challenges included initial difficulty with judicial reasoning and dense texts, mitigated by scaffolding (e.g., glossaries, guided questions).

Discussion

The results confirm that integrating case law from international jurisdictions into Legal English lessons significantly enhances linguistic precision and legal reasoning, offering a robust alternative to traditional vocabulary-driven curricula. Case briefs serve as critical scaffolding, transforming dense judicial texts into accessible learning materials while preserving authentic language. For example, the Whaling in the Antarctic case (ICJ) not only introduced terms like sovereignty and jurisdiction but also sparked discussions on environmental law, making lessons interdisciplinary. Similarly, the Lubanga case (ICC) enriched vocabulary with war crimes and prosecution, grounding abstract terms in real-world accountability debates. ECHR's Kudrevičius case illuminated human rights terminology (violation, remedy), while WTO's US – Shrimp case clarified trade-specific language (tariff, dispute settlement), broadening students' legal horizons. Lexical analysis, supported by tools like AntConc, proved instrumental in contextualizing terminology. Unlike rote memorization, analyzing collocations (e.g., ruling upheld versus ruling overturned) helped students avoid common errors, such as misusing appeal as a verb or noun. This aligns with Bhatia's (2017) genre analysis, which emphasizes context-driven language use in professional settings. Argumentative writing tasks—memoranda and position papers—further mirrored professional practices, fostering skills akin to those required in international law firms or tribunals. The progression from vague claims to evidence-based arguments reflect Swales' (1990) notion of discourse community competence, where students adopt the rhetorical norms of legal professionals. Compared to traditional Legal English curricula, which often prioritize static texts like contracts or statutes, case law integration promotes dynamic engagement with judicial reasoning. Contracts teach drafting precision but rarely encourage critical analysis of precedent or policy implications, as seen in ICJ or ECHR judgments. Similarly, statute-based lessons focus on interpretation but lack the narrative richness of cases, which blend facts, law, and argumentation. This approach also contrasts with simulation-based methods, like moot courts, which, while interactive, demand advanced proficiency and may overwhelm B2 learners. Case briefs, by contrast, offer controlled complexity,

scalable to mixed-proficiency groups. The interdisciplinary nature of international case law adds further value. Students not only learned terms but also grappled with global issues—environmental protection (ICJ), human rights (ECHR), trade equity (WTO), and criminal justice (ICC). This aligns with Northcott and Brown's (2006) advocacy for integrating substantive law into language instruction, enhancing motivation and relevance. For instance, discussing US – Shrimp prompted debates on environmental versus economic priorities, deepening students' investment in Legal English as a tool for global dialogue. However, limitations persist. Preparing case briefs is time-intensive, requiring instructors to balance linguistic simplification with legal accuracy. Simplified briefs risk omitting nuances—e.g., the Lubanga case's procedural complexities—which could skew students' understanding of ICC processes. Instructor expertise is another constraint; not all Legal English teachers are trained in international law, potentially limiting case selection or discussion depth. Student feedback highlighted initial struggles with judicial reasoning, suggesting a steeper learning curve than anticipated, even with scaffolding like glossaries or guided questions. Contextual factors also warrant consideration. The study's European setting, with students familiar with ECHR frameworks, may have eased engagement with human rights cases. Replicating this in regions less exposed to international courts (e.g., parts of Asia or Africa) might require additional cultural or legal contextualization.

Proficiency levels pose another variable; while B2–C1 students thrived, A2–B1 learners might find case briefs daunting, necessitating further simplification. Future research could address these gaps. Digital tools, such as AI-driven case summarizers or interactive glossaries, could reduce preparation time while enhancing accessibility. Comparative studies across proficiency levels or regions could clarify the approach's scalability. Additionally, exploring multimodal learning—integrating podcasts or court hearing videos—might enrich engagement, particularly for auditory learners. Long-term studies could assess whether case-based training translates to professional success, such as improved performance in international law internships. This approach

holds transformative potential beyond academia. Professional training programs could adopt case briefs to upskill lawyers navigating cross-border disputes. Self-study platforms could incorporate simplified ICJ or WTO cases, democratizing access to Legal English. By embedding language in authentic legal contexts, educators can cultivate not only linguistic fluency but also the critical thinking required for 21st-century global practice.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that integrating case law from international jurisdictions into Legal English lessons significantly enhances students' linguistic and analytical capabilities. By leveraging case briefs, lexical analysis, and argumentative writing, the approach transforms abstract legal terminology into practical tools for understanding global judicial processes. Improvements in vocabulary retention, reading efficiency, and writing clarity underscore its efficacy, while student engagement highlights its appeal. Despite challenges like preparation time, the method offers a robust framework for Legal English education, adaptable to diverse contexts. Educators are encouraged to adopt case-based teaching to prepare students for the demands of international legal practice, fostering both language mastery and critical thinking. Continued exploration of technology and varied learner profiles will further refine this approach.

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