

## Word Consciousness: Vocabulary Strategies to Promote ESP Students' Interest in Learning Legal English

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### Abstract:

The importance of teaching vocabulary cannot be overestimated. From the general to the technical, words are the building blocks of knowledge. In order to expand students' communicative competence, language teachers should motivate them to learn as many words as possible. In modern society, English for Specific Purposes courses (ESP) is at the heart of every classroom activity including Business English, technical English, scientific English, English for Medical Professionals, Legal English, and English for hospitality and tourism, and a myriad others. There are different notions and beliefs about teaching ESP courses but vocabulary is a core issue. Rich vocabulary stock and comprehension of words are the end product of word consciousness and vocabulary acquisition. The paper aims to expand the awareness about words, vocabulary acquisition, and mastering Legal language terms in ESP. The focus and material of this paper are II year undergraduate Law students, whose participation in this study was completely voluntary, they responded to a questionnaire designed to elicit students' perception of Legal English vocabulary learning strategies and the effect of word consciousness on vocabulary acquisition. The paper has been valued on the basis of student's responses; the data was recorded on Google form, and was, later on, analyzed.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary teaching and learning, word consciousness, vocabulary acquisition, ESP

## 1. Introduction

English is leading language of the business and communication, which shows how important it is to improve all the language macro skills: writing, reading, listening, and speaking. According to Patel and Praveen (2008):

English is the international language. International English is the concept of the English language as a global means of communication in numerous dialects, and also the movement towards an international standard for the language. It is spoken all over the world. This language is mother tongue of nearly 320 million people and another 200 million people use it as second language. So it is very useful to establish international relation for communication purpose and for the exchange of views with different countries of the world. (p. 6)

Vocabulary is the most crucial aspect of achieving fluency in any language. Without knowing correct usage of vocabulary there is no chance to communicate. Learning vocabulary is a challenging process for any student as the lexis of any new language is so complex and varied that it may create a barrier to learning how to use it naturally and correctly. As defined by Decarrico (2007):

Vocabulary learning is central to language acquisition, whether the language is first, second, or foreign. Although vocabulary has not always been recognized as a priority in language teaching, interest in its role in second language (L2) learning has grown rapidly in recent years and specialists now emphasize the need for a systematic and principled approach to vocabulary by both the teacher and the learner. (p.285)

Enriching vocabulary leads to enhancing overall language skills. Students having affluent vocabulary are able to express themselves freely in communicative activities. Moreover, they are able to understand the conversations. In other words, vocabulary mastering should be a target activity in teaching and learning language. This paper attempts to explore the concept of word, word consciousness, vocabulary acquisition, strategies of teaching and learning vocabulary through ESP especially for law students.

## 2. The Concept of Word

The concept of a word can be described in different ways, but a word is properly taught only if close attention is paid to the following three aspects: form, meaning, and usage. The form of a word refers to its spelling, pronunciation, and parts, such as prefix, root, and suffix. The word is one of the most fundamental units of language. It represents a dialectical unity of form and content. Its content or meaning is not identical to that of a concept, but it may reflect human-created notions and is regarded as the form of their existence. As a result, defining a word is one of the most difficult tasks in linguistics, because even the simplest word has many various aspects: a sound form, morphological structure, the ability to occur in different word forms, and the ability to have multiple meanings.

### 3. Word Consciousness

The awareness of words and their meanings is referred to as word consciousness. It's a vital part of the entire process of expanding vocabulary skills and learning the basics of a language. Teachers play a crucial role in developing word consciousness in students by instilling a basic curiosity about words and their meanings. As a result, students develop a large vocabulary that will grow as they become more aware of the words. A large vocabulary refers to a broad understanding of a variety of terms as well as a sophisticated capacity to utilize and understand the language. Word consciousness is an important element in the process of language acquisition and vocabulary building. The more students know about a word, the more likely they are to be able to use it correctly in a variety of contexts. Amsel and Byrnes (2008), pointed out that:

Word learning begins in the early months of the second year (and to some extent for some children the latter months of the first year), but extends to the problems of building vocabulary during the school years and indeed throughout life. (p. 30)

Depth of word knowledge can be defined from two different perspectives: On the one hand, one can consider how well students know a particular word, which is a “word-centered” conceptualization; on the other, we can perceive depth of word knowledge as knowledge about how words relate to each other in the lexical system, which is a “lexicon-based” view (Schmitt, 2010, as cited in Brigitta Dóczy & Judit Kormos, 2015 ).

### 4. Vocabulary Acquisition and Teaching Vocabulary in ESP

The vocabulary acquisition represents one of the most important aspects of language teaching and learning. ESP students need to understand and apply professional vocabulary in their field. Those who manage to broaden their vocabulary will find no difficulty in accomplishing their tasks. They are motivated to use a foreign language effectively in order to meet social demands such as performing their job adequately, providing quality service and coping with new trends and requirements. When dealing with real work processes which contain a lot of specific terms, it is the teacher’s task to select the appropriate strategies to teach and explain them as clearly as possible to the students. ESP students are aware that the acquisition of specific vocabulary is a fundamental component in the course, especially for those who are advanced learners of English for specific purposes.

Learning professional words is challenging for students because terms of certain area needs special content, techniques and strategies. To reach appropriate usage of vocabulary teaching strategies, an ESP teacher should distinguish types of vocabulary as it needs different focus and treatment, depending on the students’ aims and course content. Teaching words for mere recognition is much easier and less time-consuming than teaching them for production. When dealing with professional texts such as legal documents, students often have no difficulty in understanding them, because legal terminology already well-known, because of term in international usage. The mere fact that a word was taught does not mean that it was learnt. It may take days and even years before students are able to use it in contexts and not in isolation. Another factor to take into account when deciding how many words to teach during a lesson is their learnability. Brown A. (2019), acknowledges that:

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English is now borrowing from other languages with a worldwide range, the number of new borrowed words finding their way into the shared international vocabulary is on a long downward trend. One big reason for this is the success of English as an international language of science, scholarship, business, and many other fields. (p. 143)

In our case Legal terms are usually harder to learn due to loanwords (borrowed words). Specialist in law field use many Latin and French terms. For example: attorney, advocate, sub suo periculo, council, corpus delicti, solicitor, delict, (Latin); judge, property, marriage, possession, chattels, assign enter, voir dire, seisen pur autre vie, cestui que trust (French).

Regarding certain field vocabulary ESP teachers have to implement different strategies of teaching terms and practice them during classes. Carola Surkamp & Britta Viebrock (2018) states that:

The teaching and learning of vocabulary is associated with several important processes: Specific lexical items need to be selected, introduced and explained. Learners need to understand their meaning and integrate the items into their mental lexicon by linking the words with as many lexical fields as possible. (p.145)

Teaching of vocabulary deliberately helps ESP students who may not have basic foreign language skills and can learn from teachers who narrate what they are thinking and doing, and methods how they are learning words. Vocabulary learning strategies play an important role in vocabulary learning. Their significance is reflected practically in all the factors discussed so far. Vocabulary learning strategies activate explicit learning that entails many aspects, such as making conscious efforts to notice new lexical items, selective attending, context-based inferencing and storing into long-term memory (Ellis , 1994, as cited in Višnja Pavicic Takac, 2008, p.17). Another question that arises when discussing the issue of teaching ESP for law students is how much vocabulary should be taught during the ESP course. The truth is that the Legal language is so vast and complex that no course whatsoever will be able to cover it. Therefore, a very important to consider students' needs in which area they like to work in the future. Consequently, ESP teacher has to establish teaching objectives to help obtain successful outcomes. According to researcher's experiences, the following ESP class objectives will help to reach positive learning environment in teaching Legal language:

1. to detect purpose of ESP class for Law students;
2. to elaborate professional competencies by reading legal documents;
3. to explain and practice as much as underlying terms;
4. to apply activities such as watching court procedures, playing games;
5. to provide diagnostic test or interviews for further actions;
6. to categorize legal words according to subject directions (general practice lawyer, corporate lawyer, civil litigation lawyer, medical malpractice lawyer, family lawyer, business lawyer, employment lawyer and so on).

There is no fixed number of new words that should be taught per lesson. The number of words that an ESP teacher will choose to teach his or her students during a lesson is closely related to a number of factors that have a significant impact on vocabulary acquisition. The number of words that must

be taught is inversely proportional to the level of knowledge that teachers want their students to have. In other words, the more aspects students should know about a new word (meaning, spelling, pronunciation, and usage), the more time should be allotted to teaching it, which reduces the number of words taught during a lesson.

## 5. Vocabulary Teaching and Learning Strategies

A vocabulary strategy is a special instructional tool and way of going about directly or explicitly as well as the independent word learning skills require to learn words through indirect and direct vocabulary learning.

Nation (2001, p.352) claimed that vocabulary learning strategies are a part of language learning strategies which in turn are a part of general learning strategies. Nation (2001) suggested three major categories of vocabulary learning strategies:

1. Noticing - giving attention to an items: writing and oral forms of word repeating;
2. Retrieving – recalling previous knowledge from written and spoken form of word, it means we can see it in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.
3. Generating - attaching new aspects of knowledge to what is known through instantiation, word analysis, semantic mapping, and using scales and grids.

According to above mentioned theoretical part of this paper a researcher formulates the following two research questions:

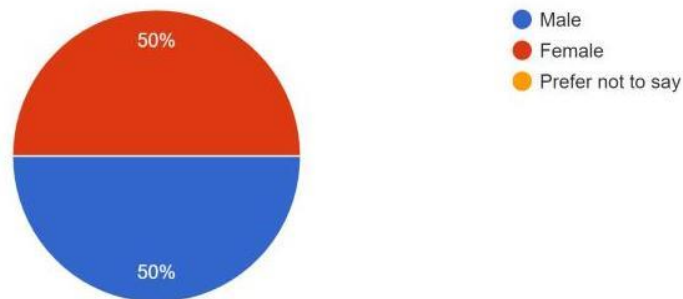
1. What is the students' comprehension towards Legal English vocabulary learning strategies?
2. Which strategy is more relevant in learning Legal English vocabulary?

## 6. Research Methodology

The purpose of this research is to describe research with qualitative design used to investigate the Law students' perception towards Legal English vocabulary learning strategies and effect of word consciousness and vocabulary acquisition. Steven J. Taylor and et al. (2016, p.7) acknowledged that the phrase qualitative methodology refers, in the broadest sense, to research that produces descriptive data - people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior. The students who participated in the research are characterized and the materials used to detect the data are described.

### 6.1 Participants

The objective of this paper is to expand the awareness about word consciousness, vocabulary acquisition through vocabulary learning strategies of Law students. The participants who involved in this research 30 students. There were 30 participants in this study who were 2<sup>nd</sup> year undergraduate students aged between 19 and 24, living in India, and studying Law at various universities. However, due to unexpected circumstances only 16 students responded to the questionnaire (8 male and 8 female, see figure 1).



*Figure 1. Percentage participants' gender*

## 6.2 Research Tool and Data Collection

The instrument that was used to get the data was questionnaire through Google form (Appendix A). The students were given questionnaire to know their vocabulary learning strategies which they used for developing English Legal vocabulary. The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions to identify three main ideas, such as interest, relevance and opinions of students. The questionnaire contains many choices of vocabulary learning strategies. The students were expected to select those that they have used in learning vocabulary. They were also given a blank space for writing the other methods and techniques they may have used for learning legal terms. Since everybody has their own style and method of learning, the selection cannot cover comprehensively. The results obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed by descriptive way according to Google form pie charts.

## 7. Findings

Student's questionnaire:

### 7.1 Hobby

Through the questionnaire to the paper aimed to know if students have passion about certain things. Therefore I started my questionnaire with a simple question like "Hobby" where students can open up themselves and respond freely. Also, main idea of implementing this question was to know their skill sets which demonstrate personal development, leadership qualities, interest in law profession and so on. According to students' response we can see the following interest areas (Table 1.):

*Table 1. Students' interest areas*

S1	Reading books
S2	Playing cricket
S3	Using mobile
S4	Sleeping.....
S5	Dancing, Cooking and News reading



S6	Reading religious books, cooking, spending time with old-age people and children
S7	Reading books dance singing
S8	Playing games
S9	Watching K-drama (Korean)
S10	Foodie
S11	Watching anime
S12	Playing games
S13	Playing Cricket
S14	Reading books
S15	Playing basketball and watching anime
S16	Reading books

### 7.2 Do you have a regular study habit of learning/ memorizing Legal English terms?

- A) Yes – 56.3% (9 students)  
 B) No – 18.8% (3 students)  
 C) Maybe – 25% (4 students)

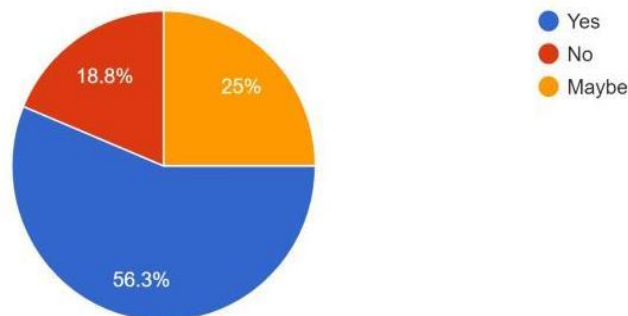
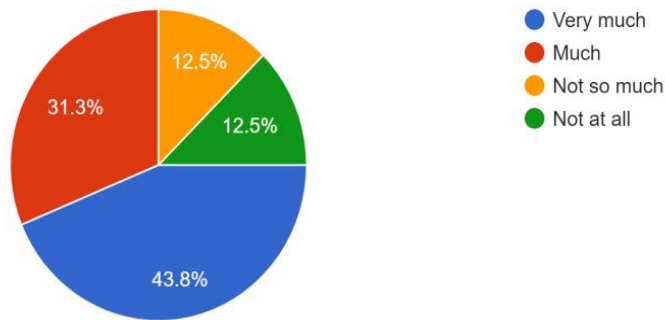


Figure 2: regular study habit of learning/ memorizing Legal English

According to the figure 2, 56.3% students had answered “Yes”, it means that students who chose Law as their future career option paid attention on learning Legal words, they felt that specific language are necessary to study regularly. However, 18.8 % of students had answered “No”, these students didn’t prefer to learn and memorize legal terms regularly, because they believe in professional language memorized during classes. 25% students had answered “ Maybe”, here we can see that participants have doubts about a regular habit of learning and memorizing specific terms, they believe terms should be learned naturally. Each person has their own perspective of learning styles.

**7.3 Do you have an enthusiasm in learning Legal English vocabulary?**

- A) Very much (7 students)
- B) Much (5 students)
- C) Not so much (2 students)
- D) Not at all (2 students)

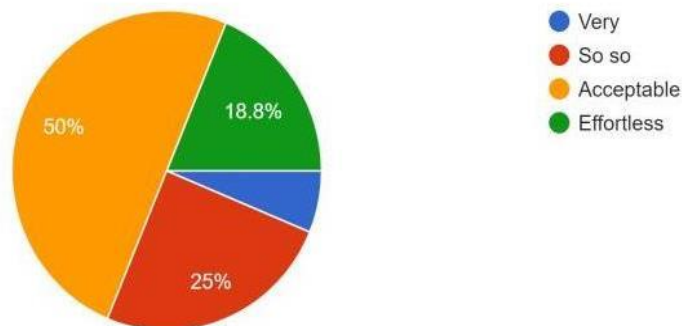


*Figure 3. Enthusiasm in learning Legal English vocabulary*

Based on the figure 3, 43.8% students had answered “Very much”, they have passion to learn Legal language terms. In addition, there were only 2 students answered “Not so much” and 2 students answered “Not at all” in accordance with these answers we cannot say that students lack interest. Generally, the students preferred to learn Legal English vocabulary.

**7.4 Do you think the Law words are baffling?**

- A) Very (1 student)
- B) So so (4 students)
- C) Acceptable (8 students)
- D) Effortless (3 students)



*Figure 4. Students' feedback about Law words*



Figure 4 indicates that 50% students had answered “Acceptable”, students believe that learning Legal English vocabulary is not difficult, it means they do learn new words without facing any challenge. 25 % students who don’t learn new words every day had chosen the answer “ So so” because they are considering Legal words not so difficult, nevertheless 18.8 % students had answered “ Effortless” which shows that students are learning Legal words along with common words.

### 7.5 Do you pay attention to the examples when you look up a law term in a dictionary?

A) Yes (13 students)

B) No (3 students)

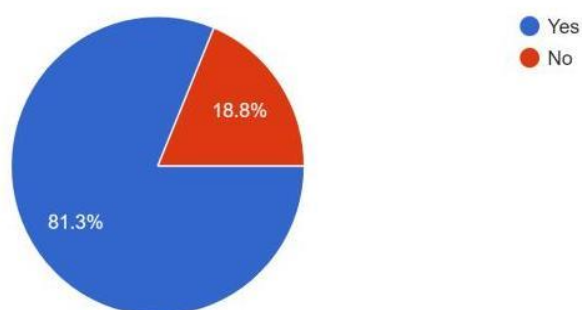


Figure 5. Checking examples of law term in a dictionary

Figure 5 shows that 81.3 % students had answered “ Yes” , they do think that not only terms are important as well as to put them into practice is important too. Especially, given examples in dictionaries.

### 7.6 Do you write a new vocabulary several times for memorizing?

A) Yes (6 students)

B) No (1 student)

C) Sometimes (9 students)

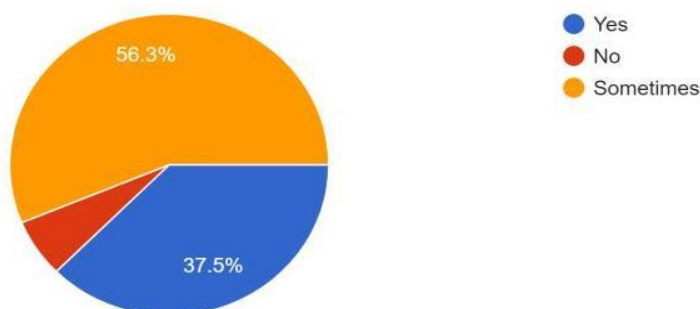
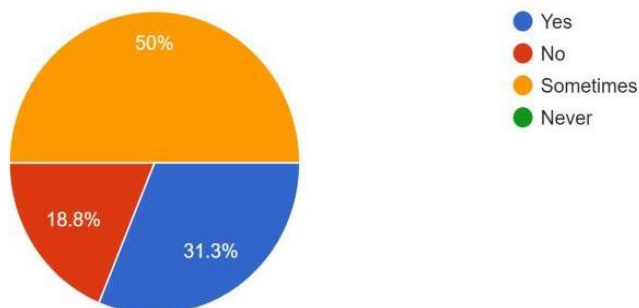


Figure 6. Writing a new vocabulary several times for memorizing

Figure 6 represents the number of students using rewriting new vocabulary as a strategy for better memorization. 56.3% students had responded “ Sometimes”, they do not feel the need to write them several times for memorizing a new vocabulary, because students think it needs certain time, but 37.5% students had answered “Yes according to this answer students consider to write a new vocabulary several times is useful.

### 7.7 Do you use legal English words in everyday communication and writing?

- A) Yes (5 students)
- B) No (3 students)
- C) Sometimes (8 students)
- D) Never (0 students)



*Figure 7. Using legal English words in everyday communication*

Figure 7 demonstrates the number of students using Legal English words in communication and writing. As we can see only 31.3 % students had answered “Yes” and 50% students “ Sometimes”, students just read legal materials and use Legal English during classes and for communication with teacher , they don’t really use it in their everyday life. And 18.8% students had responded that they do not use Legal English terminology in every day. According to them they use plain words to explain meaning of words in communication and writing.

### 7.8 Please specify the methods you used in Learning of Legal English Vocabulary:

- 1) Listening and reading political news, i.e. learning through certain context; (6 students)
- 2) Using websites/channels for lawyers, such as <https://superlawyer.in/>; <https://www.youtube.com/user/RainmakerIndia>; <https://www.legal500.com/>, and so on; (0 students)
- 3) Collecting list of legal terms; (1 student)
- 4) Learning a new word in a sentence;
- 5) Reading English Legal books, magazines;
- 6) Using a bilingual and monolingual dictionaries;
- 7) Learn by rote legal vocabulary (memorizing);
- 8) Studying the spelling of terms;
- 9) Studying the synonyms, antonyms of the word ;

10) Classifying words, such as types of crimes: cyber-crimes (online predation, computer hacking, fraud), white-collar crimes (intellectual property theft and piracy, mortgage fraud, money laundering); organized crime (extortion, human trafficking, and bribery/sports bribery); property crimes (arson, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, burglary); types of agreements: partnership agreement, property and/or equipment lease, bilateral agreement and so on.

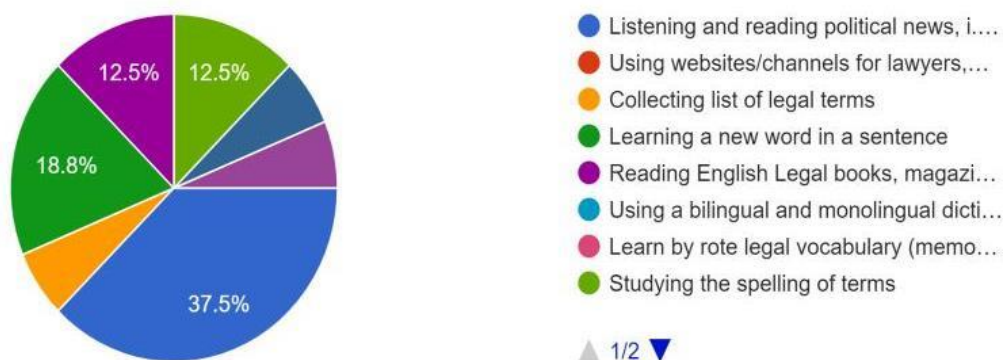


Figure 8. Methods used to learn legal English

Figure 8 shows which method students use / prefer for improving Legal English Vocabulary. In this pie chart we can see what kind of methods students use in learning vocabulary outside the classroom however 37.5 % students marked the option “Listening and reading political news, i.e. learning through certain context”. Students prefer to learn new vocabulary through listening and reading political news, i.e. learning through certain context which is available everywhere, such as social media, TV, and various types’ websites and channels. In this way they can listen, read, and visually see.

### 7.9 Please write down any other strategies that you used but which are not listed on the questionnaire (maximum 2 sentences):

In this open-ended question students shared with own strategies which they use for enhancing English Legal Vocabulary, so here I would like to demonstrate some of them:

*S1. I am watching many English series and anime, I learned some of the words and improved my accent.*

*S2. Reading and writing the stories in English which makes us to improve the skills.*

*S3. Newspapers, YouTube, magazines.*

According to the above responses, we can see that most of students are motivated and have interest to listen, to watch, to read for improving language skills.

### 7.10 What are your main purposes behind learning Legal English?

A) Career (4 students)

B) Self-development (4 students)

C) Personal interest (6 students)

D) Flexibility in professional area (2 students)

E) Translation purposes (0 students)

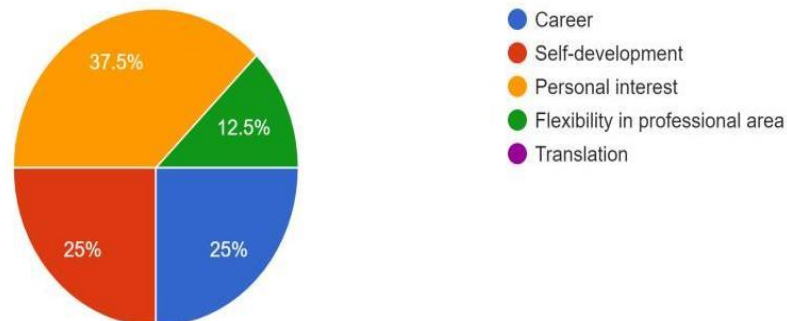


Figure 9. Students' main purposes behind learning Legal English

Figure 9 shows that 37.5% students had answered "Personal interest", undoubtedly correct usage of words are one of the most relevant tools of the future lawyers. Firstly, improving a foreign language skills should be personal prioritize and interest, it means those students who focusing on bright career have to challenge themselves. Generally, in this question I expressed my interest for what students are learning Legal English for my future research.

#### 7. 11 What qualifications should ESP teachers have for teaching English Legal language?

A) General Language Teacher (6 students)

B) Retired lawyer, who knows English (2 students)

C) Lawyer with qualification language teacher (5 students)

D) A PhD scholar, who is working/ investigating research in Legal English Language area (3 students)

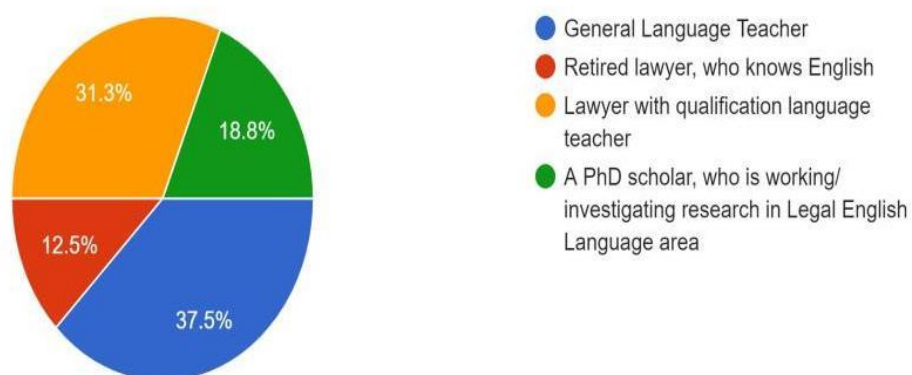


Figure 10. Qualifications that ESP teachers should have

Figure 10 demonstrates the opinions of students about what qualification ESP teachers should have for teaching English Legal Language. As we can see, 37.5% students had answered “General teacher” and 31.3% students “Lawyer with qualification language teacher”.

It's just students' desire to receive ESP class from teachers with specific qualifications, however most value of percentage is “General language teacher”, assuredly general teacher can teach in professional way any specific field, just he or she needs the adaptability to change from being a general language teacher to being a teacher in English for a specific purposes.

## 8. Discussion

**Research question No. 1:** What is the students' comprehension towards Legal English vocabulary learning strategies?

Based on the responses of students, it is clear that most of students are confident, and the vocabulary learning strategies depends on students purposes. These responses reflect that Law students are keen to develop Legal vocabulary knowledge and to expand its usage. Overall, students have a wide range of abilities to reach proficiency in Legal career. Nevertheless, they do understand that achieving proficiency in the field of Legal terminology is impossible without the basic language skills in English too.

**Research question No. 2:** Which strategy is more relevant in learning Legal English vocabulary?

According to the students' responses does not exist exact strategy in learning Legal English vocabulary, however students require a wide range of strategies of teaching and independent learning. ESP teachers or general language teachers should aim to involve students in intentional and incidental vocabulary learning activities, which should combine reading legal documents, reflection on the meaning of terms and the correct usage of them, and being engaged in various language activities.

Language acquisition is a process which requires time and effort. Effective mastering of foreign language, including professional language, comes from combination of effective syllabus, teachers' experience, learners' enthusiasm, and teaching methods, techniques and strategies. Considering the above mentioned concepts and discussions, we can acknowledge that vocabulary is learnt through repeating, memorizing and practicing. In the first instance, teachers should promote word consciousness in the classroom by considering the use of different activities such as images, conversations, short movies, and word games. Any activities which will be implemented in the classroom should provide opportunities to see, listen, pronounce, speak and use words. We all know that each ESP class is different, learners have various needs and reasons for studying, they pursue specific goals and these factors put high demands on the teachers, whose main task is to identify those needs and design a suitable course.

## 9. Conclusion

Teaching and learning vocabulary, particularly professional vocabulary, is a challenging process. If this process is successful, ESP students will have no trouble participating in social activities or future careers. Without a doubt, vocabulary is an essential component of any teaching curriculum,

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and it must be taught not only in a systematic manner, but also on a regular basis. It is critical that ESP teachers select vocabulary to teach based on the students' needs and proficiency level. Both teachers and students should be aware that words are not learned in a single instance, but rather through repeated exposure to them, namely reading, memorizing, and practicing inside and outside classroom setup, and so on.

### 10. Limitation

This study has been conducted to find out the thoughts of students about learning Legal English language. Despite the findings of the research which derived from the responses of questionnaire, further improvements can be made in future studies. This study may be conducted with participation of large amount of students. In order to enhance the study other data collection tools such as survey, interview for teachers and students have been carried out. Also, the future studies may examine ESP teachers' perspectives on teaching methods and techniques they use inside the classrooms.

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## Appendix

### Students' questionnaire

**Good day dear Student,**

I would be thankful for you if you answer my questions that will help me to collect information in teaching and learning way to accomplish a study on the influence of vocabulary teaching strategies on mastering and strengthening Legal English vocabulary usage.

Kindly take **40 minutes** to answer on these questions\*.

**Thank you in advance!!!**

1. Hobby
  2. Do you have a regular study habit of learning/ memorizing Legal English terms?
    - A) Yes
    - B) No
    - C) Maybe
  3. Do you have an enthusiasm in learning Legal English vocabulary?
    - A) Very much
    - B) Much
    - C) Not so much
    - D) Not at all
  4. Do you think the Law words are baffling?
    - A) Very
    - B) So so
    - C) Acceptable
    - D) Effortless
  5. Do you pay attention to the examples when you look up a law term in a dictionary?
    - A) Yes
    - B) No
  6. Do you write a new vocabulary several times for memorizing?
    - A) Yes
    - B) No
    - C) Sometimes
  7. Do you use a legal English words in everyday communication and writing?
    - A) Yes
    - B) No
    - C) Sometimes
-



D) Never

8. Please specify the methods you used in Learning of Legal English Vocabulary.

- 1) Listening and reading political news, i.e. learning through certain context;
- 2) Using websites/channels for lawyers, such as <https://superlawyer.in/>; <https://www.youtube.com/user/RainmakerIndia>; <https://www.legal500.com/>; <https://www.legal500.com/>, and so on;
- 3) Collecting list of legal terms;
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- 7) Learn by rote legal vocabulary (memorizing);
- 8) Studying the spelling of terms;
- 9) Studying the synonyms, antonyms of the word ;
- 10) Classifying words, such as types of crimes: cyber-crimes (online predation, computer hacking, fraud), white-collar crimes (intellectual property theft and piracy, mortgage fraud, money laundering); organized crime (extortion, human trafficking, bribery /sports bribery); property crimes (arson, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, burglary); types of agreements: partnership agreement, property and/or equipment lease, bilateral agreement and so on.

9. Please write down any other strategies that you used but which are not listed on the questionnaire (maximum 2 sentences):

10. What are the main purpose for you in learning Legal English is?

- A) Career
- B) Self-development
- C) Personal interest
- D) Flexibility in professional area
- E) Translation purposes

11. What qualifications should ESP teachers have for teaching English Legal language?

- A) General Language Teacher
- B) Retired lawyer, who knows English
- C) Lawyer with qualification language teacher
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