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The Integration of English in Algerian Higher Education: A Case Study of Legal English in the Law Department at Salhi Ahmed Naama University Centre

KHEDIMI ZAHRA

Khedimi.zahra@cuniv-naama.dz

Salhi Ahmed Naama University Centre, Algeria

Abstract

This article examines perceptions of law students about Legal English module at Salhi Ahmed Naama University Centre within the framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and the growing use of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education. It studies the sociolinguistic landscape and policy framework, and challenges encountered when integrating English into the national education system. This study discusses how law students at Naama University Centre perceive legal English module through the e-learning platform Moodle. It also highlights issues related to infrastructure, educator training, and linguistic readiness. This research uses an online questionnaire to reach law students across different academic levels and specializations. The findings show that Law students at Naama University Centre perceive the Legal English module as valuable for their academic and professional skills, however, its impact is constrained mainly by regional low internet access and the continued dominance of French in real-life legal contexts and job markets.

Key words: Legal English, Algerian universities, Salhi Ahmed Naama University centre, Moodle, ESP, law students

Introduction

In recent years, considerable expansion has been seen in the role of English in Algerian universities, reflecting the increasing need for productive engagement by students with universal academic communities and varied fields of knowledge. Arabic and French have traditionally been the main languages used in Algeria's higher education system. However, the growing importance of English in international legal discourse has changed this (Benrabah, 2007). The spread of the Coronavirus around the world forced several countries to apply lockdown and social distancing measures (Mailizar et al., 2020, p.1). Similarly, Algerian universities have increased the use of online learning platforms in response to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Nadia Ghounane and Hanane Rabahi, 2023, p.1). MOODLE (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) has become a central platform for online education that provides different types of course materials, such as PDFs, PowerPoint slides, videos, quizzes, assignments, forums, and chats, which facilitate the continuity of online education, thereby completing studies and bridging the gap between educators and students digitally.

The integration of English in the Algerian higher education system has progressively extended beyond English language departments to cover fields including science, economics, and law aspiring to enhance students' academic and professional mobility and to bring higher education into line with international academic norms. EMI was used by the Law Department at Naama University Centre to align legal education with global academic and professional standards. For instance, master's students are taught complex legal English terminologies related to criminal, business, administrative, family, and constitutional law. Conversely, license students learn general legal terms related to courts, police stations, and various legal systems.

This research seeks to enhance the global discourse on English as a Medium Instruction (EMI) by examining both qualitative and quantitative data obtained from online questionnaires. It aims to highlight the primary considerations for its effective implementation in Algerian universities, particularly at Salhi Ahmed Naama University Centre. The study specifically focuses on law students at various academic levels (L1, L2, L3, M1, and M2) within the Law Department who are studying an online Legal English module. The researcher has established the following research objectives:

1. To examine the perceptions of students in the Law Department at Salhi Ahmed Naama University Centre concerning the Legal English module they study via Moodle.
2. Identify the salient challenges that limit the effectiveness of the legal English module.

To achieve these research aims, this article aims to answer the following research question: How do law students at Salhi Ahmed Naama University Centre perceive the Legal English module, and what challenges hinder its effectiveness in academic and professional contexts?

English language instruction has begun in Algerian universities with the goal of preparing students for success in a globalized world, strengthening international partnerships, and raising the standard and applicability of education in the country as a whole. In order to make Algerian graduates more competitive in the global labour market, Kamel Baddari, the country's minister

of higher education and scientific research, started a number of discussions with university administrators with the goal of making English the main language of instruction at all Algerian universities, with the exception of language faculties. By modernizing the Algerian university system, the proposed reforms hope to improve its ability to prepare students for effective communication, research projects, and meaningful engagement in international academic partnerships. Nonetheless, there is a shortage of adequate studies on the current status of EMI in Algerian universities so that its implementation at the university level appears to be mostly governed by departmental policy (Naimi Amara ,2025).

The program has garnered positive reception, with university headmasters articulating robust support for the minister's extensive reform approach. Therefore, in order to facilitate this transition, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has implemented some procedures, including the establishment of Intensive Language Teaching Centres at universities (CEIL), such as the one at Salhi Ahmed Naama university centre the university to reinforce the English language proficiency of professors, students, and administrative staff. For Salhi Ahmed Naama university centre, Shakespeare's language has been taught to more than four thousand (4000) students since 2023 in the law department via the online platform Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment), excluding other departments. It was integrated into the Caneva's, and a supplementary module called Legal English was added to their curriculum as an alternative to the module on the French language. English for law students is not just a language for communication; by studying law in English, lawyers, judges, and students can access international legal texts; they can also access the latest legal research and participate in international conferences as it is a common language between parties of different nationalities. Hence, this chapter gives an overview of the policy framework, the sociolinguistic setting, and the larger problems and chances that come with integrating English into Algerian universities.

Algerian Educational Policy and Sociolinguistic Context

After the 2019 national education reform debates and the Ministry's 2022 circular, Algerian universities were told to improve English language education, starting with science, technology, and law (Bouhania, 2022). These changes have set a goal for the Algerian higher education system to stay relevant in the future by following worldwide academic standards. Lecturers and students must now achieve specified standards for English-language courses and instructor ability (B2/C1 level) to get ready for the challenges of a globalized society, where English is becoming the primary language in science, business, and diplomacy. The sociolinguistic situation of Algeria is a product of a complex interplay of historical events and policy decisions. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is used within the context of Algeria's education and governmental institutions as the official language of the state and education.

Tamazight (Berber) has been granted constitutionally as an official language of Algeria. Algeria is mandated to promote and develop its various dialects and to institute an academy for its advancement (Gilbert Grandguillaume, 2004; Salem Chaker, 2018). Algerian Arabic is the primary language used and French remains a legacy of Algeria's colonial past still that is used extensively in the government, institutions, media, and trade. This coexistence has created a stable diglossic multilingual ecosystem that has been characterized as having an underlying

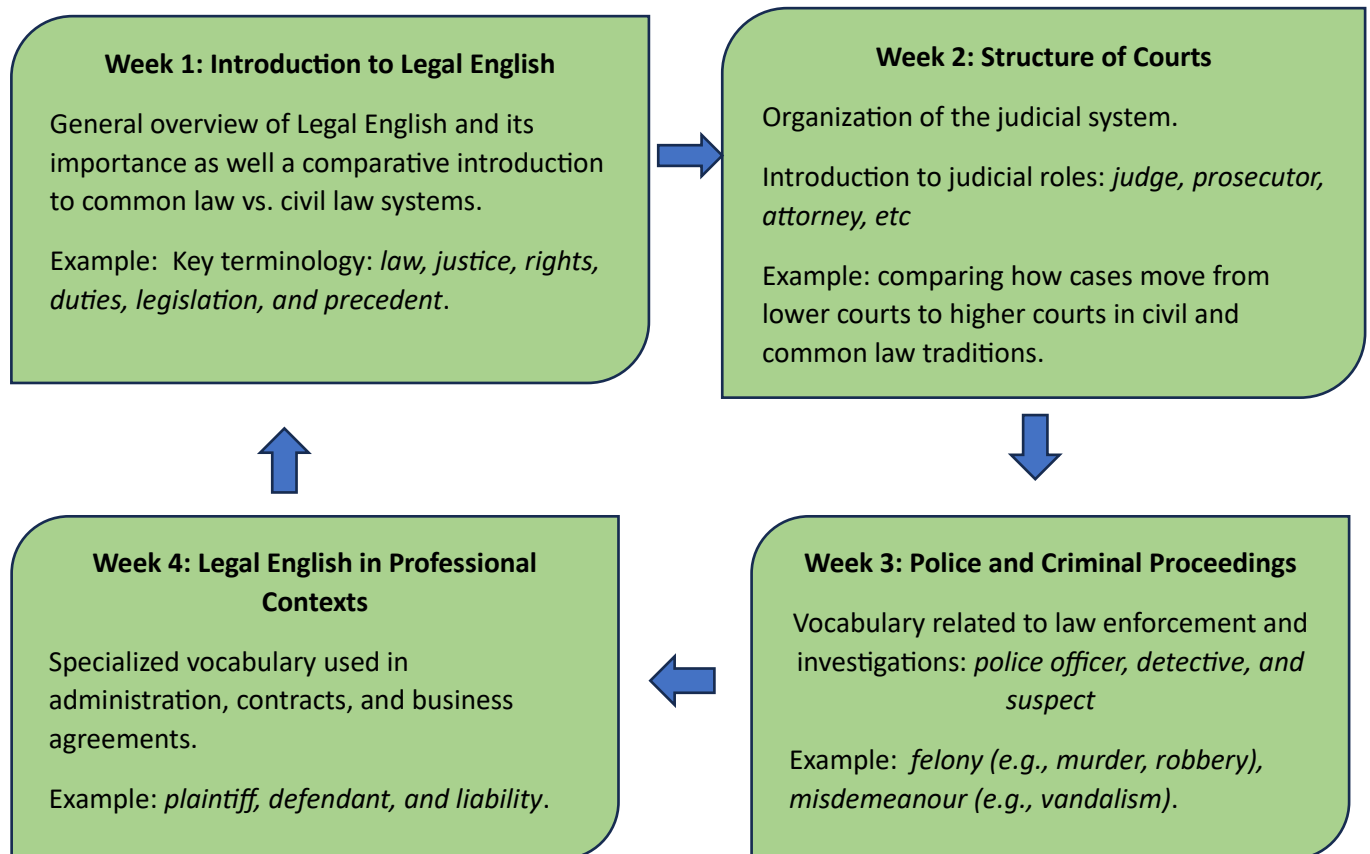
persistent interplay and balance of tensions among the languages used (Benrabah, 2014; Moha Ennaji, 2005).

In 2022, the Algerian government expanded English instruction to the primary school level and from 2023 onwards, a shift toward English in higher education was announced, framing the move as alignment with global trends and competitiveness in science (Algeria Press Service, 2022; Amara, 2023). The use of English as a medium of instruction in some programs and training for doctoral students in English only seems to point to a managed gradual shift rather than the end of French completely. This adds a fourth dimension to Algeria's already complex language landscape (Amara, 202[^]). Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), Tamazight, Algerian Arabic, French, and English are all spoken at the same time. This shows how different languages interact with each other. This is made possible by code-switching, domain-specific specialization where MSA is used for formal areas and French for technical and scientific areas (Benrabah, 2014; Grandguillaume, 2004).

Legal English via Moodle in Salhi Ahmed Naama University Centre

The Salhi Ahmed Naama University Centre, situated in Algeria's southwestern area, considerably influences the transformation of English instruction in the country's higher education framework. Moodle was first used in 2015-2016 and was subsequently updated in the wake of COVID to June 3, 2021 (CSMCNTE-DL-Naama, 2023 as cited in Souleyman Teyebi and Wahida Yaiche, 2024). The concern of the university to improve students' legal English and legal practice skills through educational legal English teaching informs the use of Moodle as a learning platform, as the university seeks to modernize legal education. The course teaches students legal terminologies used in family, business, administrative, constitutional and criminal law such as parliament, custody, plaintiff, defendant, felony, and misdemeanour. Legal concepts are taught through quizzes and simple lessons complemented with visuals to aid practical comprehension. Every week, there is a specific legal topic assigned on which students will work on during their Legal English classes. For example, in the first month of their course, 2nd year license students had the following lessons:

The Integration of English in Algerian Higher Education:



Methods of assessment such evaluation tests and quizzes are incorporated into the Moodle platform. For classroom sessions, law students attend in person once every two weeks for legal debates. Based on Vygotsky's (1978) socio-constructivist theory, this study emphasises the importance of scaffolding, interaction, and collaboration in enhancing students' acquisition of English legal terminologies. Henceforth, Moodle promote learner's autonomy and engagement.

Research Methodology

This section outlines the methodological framework employed to investigate the integration of English in Algerian higher education, with a particular focus on Legal English within the Law Department at Salhi Ahmed Naama University Centre. It describes the research design, participants, data collection tools, procedures, and analytical approach. The case study of this research examines licence and master students' perceptions, challenges, and aspirations about the inclusion of Legal English into higher education curriculum. Purposive and snowball sampling emphasized student experiences to increase engagement. Two hundred sixty-two students (262) student took a part in this study representing a sizable and representative dataset for analysis. The study collected data using a Google Forms-created online questionnaire. Legal English's importance in academic and professional settings, experiences with English language learning resources, and views about its use in legal studies were evaluated in the questionnaire. The questionnaire included both closed-ended questions for quantitative and

comparable data, and open-ended questions for more free expression. While Likert-scale questions for attitudes and perceptions. It was accessible, anonymous, and convenient for individuals to complete the questionnaire online.

Brickman Bhutta (2012, p.1) asserts that online social networks such as Facebook are considered the most appropriate tools for data collection that help the researcher conduct investigations quickly, cheaply, and single-handedly. She argues that social networking platforms and online surveys facilitate survey research more rapidly, cheaply, and with and with less assistance than ever before. The techniques are particularly effective for snowball sampling of hard-to-reach sub-populations. Participants received the questionnaire link via Moodle, the university's main learning management system. The snowball sampling strategy encouraged initial participants to share the link with their colleagues to increase outreach. The poll was open for four months, allowing for feedback. Moreover, a thematic coding approach was utilized for data analysis of open-ended questions to discern reoccurring themes and impressions about the integration on legal English into university curriculum. For research ethics, participation was voluntary, and students were informed about the research's goal as well the confidentiality of their responses, and their choice to withdraw at any moment.

Results

The results show that the majority of participants were second-year License students (43%), followed by Master 1 students (29%). 20% of the students were in their first year of License, and only 5% were in their third year of License. Master 2 students made up the smallest group (3%) which means that most of the responses came from undergraduate students, especially L2 students. Also, 74% of law students say they have an intermediate level of English, which means they can use it for basic tasks but not for reading advanced legal texts. With 22% of participants being beginners, there is a clear need for basic language support. However, with only 4% of learners being advanced, it seems that only a few are ready to handle specialized Legal English which means that there is a clear need for targeted instruction to improve the skills of all students. The findings indicate that the majority of students (81%) reported they had never engaged in English studies at language centres or private course while 19% of them did. This indicates that most students primarily rely on formal university education for their English language learning, with limited exposure to supplementary language instruction.

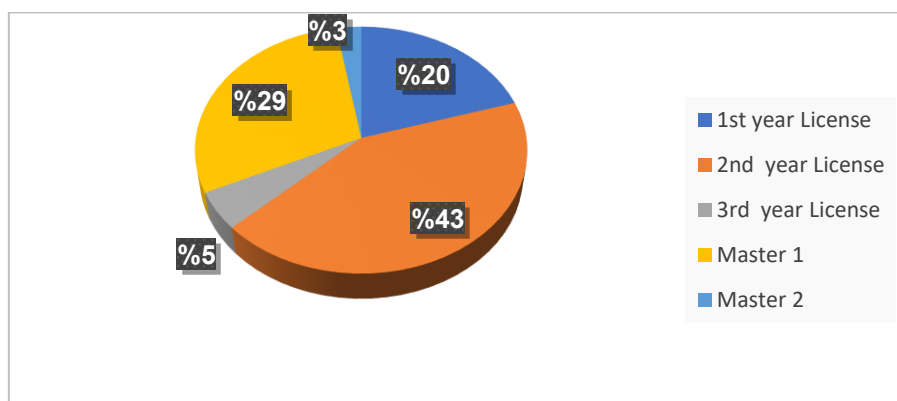


Figure 1: Distribution of Law Students by Level of Study (L1, L2, L3, M1, M2)

The Integration of English in Algerian Higher Education:

Additionally, results show that the use of English outside university is limited, where (53%) stated that they rarely use it, while 37% sometimes use it. Small groups (10%) say they don't use English, and none of them have been reported in particular and still use them. These results indicate that the possibility of English practice in everyday life remains restricted indicating that this could influence the overall dissatisfaction reflected in earlier findings.

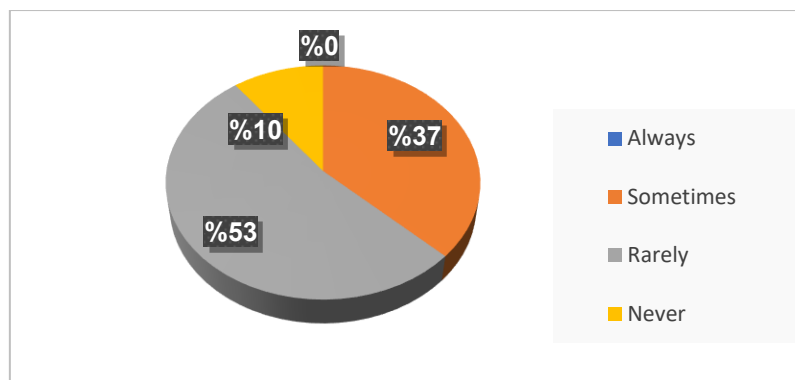


Figure 2: Frequency of English Language Use by Law Students Outside the University

According to (95.5%) of law students the Moodle platform is easy to use, but a small minority said they faced the difficulties that come with it. This suggests that the platform is widely available and practical for most students, but some may always need technical support or additional advice. The data obtained showed common consent among respondents, with 100% of students saying that the legal English module provided via Moodle is effective. In this regard, (77.3%) of participants believe that the legal English module contributes to improving their current English skills, while 22.7% have not received such improvements. This suggests that while modules are considered widely useful, a prominent minority may need additional support or alternative training strategies to improve their skills.

It appears that the Legal English module has made a modest yet significant contribution to students' overall academic advancement, as evidenced by a thematic analysis of their feedback.

Support for this assertion is reflected in several of the following remarks: "I learned words I didn't know before" (e.g., student 6) and "Now I can understand legal words in English" (e.g., student 12), which illustrate that numerous students have enhanced their comprehension of essential legal vocabulary. While students are evidently still operating at an elementary level, the module appears to have stimulated their interest in, augmented their vocabulary related to, and established a foundational understanding of Legal English.

Thematic analysis of students' comments regarding the Moodle platform revealed a set of features that they believed were most helpful such as the accessibility of the course materials, stating that "I can study whenever I want" (e.g., student 14) and "the lessons are always there, I can download them" (e.g., student 5). Other participants admired the flexibility of online learning, stating that "I can repeat the lesson when I don't understand" (e.g., student 31) and "I don't need to be in class to learn" (e.g., student 22, and 67). Some of them stated: "everything is in one place" (e.g., student 9, 73, and 212) and "the platform is simple and organized" (e.g., student 48, 119, and 163). Overall, Moodle was appreciated by students mainly for its

flexibility, accessibility, and organized presentations of the Legal English module, which facilitated learning for novices.

When asked if they preferred in-person instruction over online learning for studying Legal English, students gave contradictory answers. Several learners favoured traditional classroom instruction, stating that "I understand more when I am in class" (e.g., student 21, 177, and 13) and "it is easier to ask the teacher directly" (e.g., student 8). Others, however, recognized the benefits of online education through Moodle, stating that "online is more comfortable and flexible" (e.g., student 27) and "I can study at my own time" (e.g., student 13). These divergent opinions imply that although a lot of novices appreciate the face-to-face interaction and instruction of conventional classroom environments, others are aware of the ease and accessibility provided by online platforms.

Students listed number of vocabulary when asked about the legal terms they had learned from the Legal English Terminology module such as "contract" (e.g., student 3), "judge" (e.g., student 9, 147, and 228), and "court" (e.g., student 15, 63 and 72) were frequently used as examples. Other participants recalled words like "constitution" (e.g., student 27), "crime" (e.g., student 22), and "lawyer" (e.g., student 18). Some also mentioned terms like "legal system" (v e.g., student 31) and "human rights" (e.g., student 36 and 88) that are used in legal contexts. Based on these examples, it looks like this module taught students basic legal terms that they can use to improve their Legal English skills, even though they are still beginners.

In addition, when asked if they use any other apps or programs to learn English, most students said no, citing their primary reliance on university courses. Nonetheless, some students mentioned using apps like Google Translate (e.g., student 19), YouTube (e.g., student 233), and Duolingo (e.g., student 4 and 18). Additionally, some suggested using TikTok videos or Facebook pages to learn basic English vocabulary (e.g., student 25). These answers

demonstrate that although the majority of students do not use additional resources, a small percentage use social media and widely accessible apps to get more practice.

Reviewing the students' answers highlighted a number of challenges with learning legal English. The complicated legal language was always a problem. Many students said it was "too technical and hard to memorize" (e.g., student 14) and "full of new words I never saw before" (e.g., student 32). The absence of prior English proficiency was another theme; some students reported that "my level in English is low, so I could not understand well" (e.g., student 7). A number of students also cited the lack of practice opportunities both within and outside of the classroom, stating that "we only read the lessons but never use English in real situations" (e.g., student 21). Finally, students listed some difficulties related to online education via Moodle including "difficulty concentrating when studying online" (e.g., student 19) and "low internet connection" (e.g., student 45).

Discussion

Law students at Salhi Ahmed Naama University Centre mentioned that Moodle is easy to use and affordable, agreeing that the legal module will help in improving their skills in English. However, the results show that over half of them (53%) do not use English frequently outside

of university and only a few of them were able to memorize and list legal terminologies that learnt via Moodle. There are several reasons for the inconsistency between the knowledge acquired in academic settings and its effective application in real-life contexts.

First, Arabic and French in terms of the main language of Algerian law and control (Mohamed Benrabah, 2014). Law students who work in courts and public facilities must face documents in French rather than English. This makes them think that English is not so important to their careers anytime soon. Second, limited communication of terms can be related to the occurrence of low retention in English for a particular purpose (ESP) when the impact is limited by the academic environment. Thus, ESP students require constant exposure to target vocabulary in critical contexts for assimilation and effective use (Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters, 1987).

Finally, this issue can also be understood using the idea of contextual reliability. Rod Ellis (2003) says that students are more likely to use what they studied in class when tasks are similar to what they do in the real world. Moodle has handy tools such as quizzes, videos, and glossary, but if students should not use English in real-world situations such as comparative legal projects, academic exchanges, etc., they can view legal English as "theoretical knowledge" instead of tools for work. The results of this study show that even though Moodle offers different teaching resources like online chats, PDFs, and videos, students tend not to use them, except during examination periods. This pattern indicates that the issues lie not in the teaching methods or available materials, but in the manner in which students interact with the subject. This indicates that courses with lower coefficients are frequently devalued in comparison to those perceived as more critical for academic achievement.

Nonetheless, low regional internet connectivity in Naama has a direct impact on law students' participation and level of engagement with Moodle-based learning. This continually

complicates Moodle's constant use and access to online resources. They also faced challenges using Moodle, as they had not previously used such digital tools and had insufficient training on it. Hadjeris Fadhila (2020, p.166) justifies "Algerian teachers still lack enough knowledge about the difference between online and face to face teaching as the online teaching culture is totally absent from the training and everyday teaching practices".

Furthermore, there are no officially approved English textbooks for Algerian higher education which makes it difficult for lecturer to plan lessons. Therefore, students who have trouble getting online would benefit from hybrid workshops that combine online and in-person interactions. These sessions would help them get the most out of their digital resources. Offering law students least nationally recognized Legal English certifications could give them formal proof of their legal language skills, making them more likely to get jobs in the global/local legal market.

Finally, using Moodle in legal English classes at Salhi Ahmed Naama University Centre represents a significant progress in aligning with contemporary developments in blended **learning** and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). For future research, it would be helpful to do more studies on law student achievement and success after graduation in order to understand the long-term effects of this program. These studies could look at how digital teaching affects

students' ability to speak and write legal English as well supports them in pursuing employment opportunities and adapting to professional contexts.

Conclusion

This study examined the perceptions of law students at Salhi Ahmed Naama University Centre regarding the impact of the legal English module on their English language proficiency. The case study revealed that students value this module as it helps them improving their academic English, but its effectiveness is hindered by some structural and contextual challenges. Moodle has proven to be an operative platform for hybrid learning, nevertheless, low regional internet connectivity and the insufficient digital training has a direct impact on law students' participation and level of engagement with Moodle-based learning. This continually complicates Moodle's constant use and access to online resources.

The findings also demonstrate that there is a considerable gap between academic preparation and workplace demands. Although the module strengthens their language skills in academic settings, the use of English outside the university remains minimal. In the Algerian job market, French continues to dominate legal and administrative contexts, making the immediate application of English in real-life professional situations less practical. To address these issues, investment in digital infrastructure, standardized teaching materials, and lecturer training is essential. By overcoming these barriers, Algerian universities can improve the delivery of Legal English, ensure more inclusive access to blended learning, and better prepare law students for both academic and professional challenges.

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