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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Legal Case Summaries as Content-Based Instruction Material to Improve Law Students' Reading Comprehension

Putri Anugraheli Ramba Orun[1], Miftahul Jannah[2]
Institut Cinta Tanah Air, Indonesia, STAI DDI Pinrang, Indonesia

putriorun@stihbiak.ac.id[1], ithami181@gmail.com[2]

Kata Kunci:
Ringkasan kasus hukum, pengajaran berbasis konten, pemahaman bacaan, Bahasa Inggris untuk Tujuan Khusus, Bahasa Inggris Hukum

Abstrak

Tujuan utama penelitian ini adalah untuk menguji efektivitas ringkasan kasus hukum sebagai bahan pembelajaran berbasis konten (CBI) dalam meningkatkan kemampuan pemahaman bacaan mahasiswa hukum dalam konteks Bahasa Inggris untuk Tujuan Khusus (ESP). Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan desain pra-uji dan pasca-uji satu kelompok kuasi-eksperimental, yang melibatkan 30 mahasiswa hukum semester dua di Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Hukum Biak-Papua. Selama empat minggu, mahasiswa diajarkan menggunakan ringkasan kasus hukum yang disederhanakan dan diintegrasikan ke dalam pengajaran membaca bahasa Inggris. Sebanyak 20 soal pilihan ganda digunakan untuk menilai pemahaman bacaan sebelum dan sesudah intervensi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan pada nilai rata-rata mahasiswa, dari 47,33 pada pra-uji menjadi 60,33 pada pasca-uji. Uji t sampel berpasangan menghasilkan nilai t sebesar 6,94 dan nilai $p < 0,001$, yang mengkonfirmasi signifikansi statistik dari peningkatan tersebut. Hasil ini mendukung integrasi konten spesifik bidang dalam pengajaran bahasa, sejalan dengan prinsip-prinsip CBI dan ESP, sekaligus menunjukkan bagaimana materi hukum yang disederhanakan membantu mengelola beban kognitif, seperti yang dijelaskan oleh Teori Beban Kognitif (CLT). Secara praktis, pendekatan pengajaran ini memberikan dosen ESP model yang relevan dan efektif untuk mengajar Bahasa Inggris Hukum di lingkungan pendidikan tinggi.

Key Word:
Legal case summaries, content-based instruction, Reading comprehension, English for Specific Purposes, Legal English

Abstract

The primary objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of legal case summaries as content-based instruction (CBI) materials in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of law students in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Conducted using a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design, the research involved 30 second-semester law students at Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Hukum Biak-Papua. Over a four-week period, students were taught using simplified legal case summaries integrated into English reading instruction. A total of 20 multiple-choice items were used to assess reading comprehension before and after the intervention. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' average scores, from 47.33 in the pre-test to 60.33 in the post-test. A paired sample t-test produced a t-value of 6.94 and a p-value < 0.001, confirming the statistical significance of the improvement. These results support the integration of field-specific content in language teaching, in line with CBI and ESP principles, while also demonstrating how simplified legal materials help manage cognitive load, as explained by Cognitive Load Theory (CLT). Practically, this instructional approach provides ESP lecturers with a relevant and effective model for teaching Legal English in higher education settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Legal case summaries are short versions of court decisions. They include the facts, legal problems, judge's thoughts, and final decisions written in simple language. In English for Legal Purposes (ELP) instruction, these materials serve to enhance law students' comprehension of legal texts while simultaneously developing their English reading proficiency. This approach is particularly significant given that English legal texts typically exhibit complexity, dense technical terminology, and require sophisticated analytical skills.

Indonesian law students encounter substantial challenges in English language acquisition, particularly in reading comprehension. They frequently struggle with meaning interpretation, argument construction analysis, and legal terminology comprehension within English legal documents. These difficulties often result in diminished student engagement and motivation. Consequently, there is a critical need for pedagogical approaches that address linguistic challenges while maintaining relevance to legal studies.

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Content-Based Instruction has been long recognized as an effective methodology for teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Basturkmen, 2010). Content-based materials help students get more involved because they feel the material fits their academic and professional needs. Legal case summaries give real examples of how language is used in actual legal practice.

Using legal case summaries as teaching materials also fits with teaching strategies based on understanding context. Students can develop reading skills like skimming, scanning, understanding main ideas, making conclusions, and recognizing legal argument patterns. They also get the chance to learn more legal vocabulary and understand how legal stories are usually structured.

Previous research demonstrates a positive correlation between proficient reading skills and academic competence in disciplinary understanding, including law. Therefore, developing an integrated content-language teaching model is essential. Through legal case summaries adapted to students' linguistic proficiency levels, educators can deliver more targeted, effective, and meaningful learning experiences.

Given these circumstances, this study aims to evaluate the extent to which legal case summaries can enhance law students' English reading proficiency. The study was conducted with 30 second-semester students from the Law Study Program at Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Hukum Biak-Papua. Employing a quasi-experimental design with a quantitative approach, this research seeks to contribute to Legal English pedagogical development in Indonesian law schools.

Several previous studies support using content-based approaches in teaching English for academic and professional purposes. Research conducted in Morocco demonstrated that Content-Based Instruction in ESP legal English courses significantly enhanced students' comprehension and vocabulary acquisition compared to traditional instructional methods. The six-week experiment involving 40 students divided into two groups revealed that the CBI group demonstrated substantially greater improvement in post-treatment assessments compared to the control group utilizing conventional methods.

Northcott's research on legal English instruction emphasized the crucial role of context and cases in legal language learning. This study examined how legal case contexts facilitate students' understanding of language structure and usage within the legal domain. The findings indicated that students learning through authentic cases developed deeper comprehension of practical legal language application and cultivated analytical skills essential for legal practice (2).

Liuolienė & Metiūnienė (2013) did research about the significance of authentic legal English texts versus adapted legal texts in ESP instruction. Their research, published in Santalka journal, examined the advantages and disadvantages of legal text utilization and their efficient implementation in the learning process. Results indicated that during initial stages of legal English acquisition, specifically designed pedagogical materials prove more effective due to their adaptation for particular proficiency levels among law students. However, at advanced levels, authentic texts contribute more substantially to the learning experience.

Kashef, Damavand, & Viyani, (2012) examined the effects of Strategies-Based ESP Instruction (SBI) on reading comprehension among 50 Iranian students (24 males and 26 females). The study employed a pretest design, fifteen-week treatment program, and posttest methodology. Results demonstrated equivalent reading comprehension improvement between male and female students, with male students achieving average scores of 75.5. This research revealed no significant gender-based differences in reading proficiency enhancement through strategy-based ESP approaches.

Gonzalo & Martínez (2018) in their study titled "Developing Reading Comprehension Skills in an ESP Course through a Theme and Task Based Learning Model" found that reading comprehension skills are intrinsically linked to content-based instruction models through Higher Order Thinking Skills development. This qualitative research demonstrated that Theme-Based Learning and Task-Based Language Learning models synergistically enhance reading comprehension abilities. The findings indicated that thematic and task-based approaches significantly increase students' active engagement in the learning process. Based on these research findings, this study attempts to implement legal case summaries within the local context at STIH Biak and assess their impact on reading comprehension among beginning-level law students.

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) represents a pedagogical approach that integrates language skill development with the acquisition of specific academic or professional content knowledge. Within the CBI framework, students acquire language proficiency through materials directly relevant to their disciplinary field of study. This methodology positions language not as an isolated subject, but as an instrumental tool for comprehending concepts within their academic discipline (6). This approach is very suitable for English for Specific Purposes (ESP), including for law students who who require English proficiency within legal contexts.

CBI encourages meaningful learning by establishing connections between linguistic competence and the knowledge base essential for students' academic and professional practice. Stoller (2004) states that using content-based materials in English learning encourages students to think critically and understand concepts

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across languages and fields. In Legal English learning, materials like legal case summaries become the right medium because they contain authentic legal contexts that are adjusted to students' language abilities.

CBI also increases learning motivation because students feel that the material they study is relevant to their future needs. As stated by Met (2008), using authentic and field-based materials in CBI classes significantly increases student involvement and learning achievement in universities. This also aligns with research by Orun et al. (2024) which emphasizes the importance of more effective educational strategies to address students' linguistic problems. Their research shows that factors such as lexical, syntactic, and discourse interference, as well as overgeneralization and incomplete application of rules in the target language, significantly affect the quality of students' language comprehension.

By using legal case summaries as teaching materials, students not only enrich their legal vocabulary, but also develop analytical reading skills, understand argument structures, and recognize legal language styles. CBI makes teachers facilitators who guide students to explore legal content while building language competence in an integrated way. Therefore, using legal case summaries in Legal English teaching is a concrete implementation of CBI principles. This material unites mastery of legal content and English language ability in an integrated way in an authentic and relevant learning atmosphere.

Reading comprehension in the legal domain possesses distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from conventional textual analysis. Dou, Chan, & Win (2023) explain that English for Specific Purposes (ESP), including Legal English, has special characteristics where materials and goals are adjusted to learners' specific needs, focusing on language, identified skills, and genres that are most relevant to specific activities that learners need to do. Law students must develop the capacity to identify factual elements in cases, comprehend legal issues under discussion, analyze judicial reasoning, and understand decisions along with their ramifications. Legal case summaries facilitate the gradual development of these competencies through texts that have been simplified while preserving essential components of original legal documents.

Appropriate learning strategies can significantly enhance law students' reading comprehension abilities. Bogaert et al. (2023) identified several reading comprehension strategies, including: (1) overt cognitive strategies that are observable, such as note-taking; (2) covert cognitive strategies that remain unobservable, such as visualization; (3) metacognitive monitoring or comprehension supervision; and (4) evaluative strategies for text assessment. In Legal English instruction, students can practice identifying critical elements including the parties involved, legal issues at stake, judicial rationale, and final determinations. Pre-reading activities that activate existing legal knowledge also enhance students' contextual understanding.

Factors that influence reading comprehension in legal learning include mastery of legal vocabulary, understanding of legal text structure, and analytical thinking ability. Duke et al. (2021) emphasize that developing background knowledge, vocabulary, inferential skills, and comprehension monitoring abilities is crucial for enhancing reading comprehension, particularly for specialized content such as legal texts. Utilizing case summaries adapted to students' proficiency levels facilitates systematic knowledge construction, enabling students to develop cognitive frameworks for how legal information is presented and analyzed.

Therefore, developing reading comprehension through appropriate legal materials gives students opportunities to learn in a focused and meaningful way. This approach not only trains the ability to understand texts, but also introduces students to legal thinking methods they will face in work practice. Through regular and gradual learning, students can build an effective bridge between general English ability and the ability to understand professional legal texts.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) represents a pedagogical approach designed to address the specific linguistic requirements of learners within particular academic disciplines or professional contexts. Dou, Chan, and Win (2023) explain that globalization and international development in language education have inspired a shift from traditional College English learning to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP does not only focus on language structure, but also on the context of language use in real situations at work or study. In this context, law students need English learning that is directed to understand legal terms, legal argument structures, and texts like contracts and court decisions.

ESP theory emphasizes that teaching materials must be adjusted to the context and needs of students. Trujeque-Moreno et al. (2021) state that ESP consists of a needs-based approach, where EFL programs must be developed according to students' current needs in various fields of knowledge and study in university contexts. Needs analysis in ESP aims to collect information about learners and define target situations and ESP learning environments. In Legal English teaching, this means students not only learn general grammar, but also legal terminology and formal language styles typical of legal documents.

Research shows the importance of ESP approaches in increasing motivation and learning relevance. Dou, Chan, and Win emphasize that needs analysis is recognized as a vital characteristic of ESP and is given a comprehensive revisit as an update in ESP development. Needs analysis does not only focus on learners'

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communicative needs, but also on techniques for achieving specific teaching goals. Meanwhile, other research shows that ESP increases students' confidence because teaching materials are considered more relevant and useful for their careers.

In the context of this research, using legal case summaries is a real implementation of the ESP approach. Adapted legal case summaries not only simplify language, but still maintain important legal structure and substance. This allows law students to learn language while deepening their understanding of legal practice, in line with ESP principles that focus on language in context rather than teaching grammar and language structure separately.

Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) was developed by John Sweller in 1988 and emphasizes that human working memory has limited capacity in processing new information (14). Lopez (2024) explains that Sweller emphasizes integrating technology advances with CLT principles to improve learning efficiency, where this theory has developed to include various learning dimensions. In the context of language learning, especially Legal English that involves complex legal texts and technical terminology, excessive cognitive load can hinder students' understanding. Therefore, it is important for educators to design teaching materials that consider students' cognitive capacity so that the learning process takes place effectively.

CLT classifies cognitive load into three types: intrinsic load, extrinsic load, and germane load. Benjamin & Main (2022) explain that intrinsic load relates to the inherent complexity of the subject matter, extrinsic load comes from poorly designed instructional methods, while germane load is the desired mental effort that learners make to form meaningful connections and develop schemas in long-term memory. In legal contexts, intrinsic load relates to the complexity of the material itself, such as long sentence structures and foreign legal terms in legal texts. Extrinsic load emerges from inefficient material presentation, for example using language that is too technical without guidance or supporting context.

Recent research shows developments Hanham & Castro-Alonso (2023) states that cognitive load management has historically focused on the instructor's role, so load management by learners (self-management of cognitive load) is a newer addition to CLT. In Legal English learning, using legal case summaries as teaching materials is one form of applying this theory. Legal case summaries simplify complex information into forms that are easier to understand and relevant to students' needs.

By presenting legal materials in a structured and gradual way, students can focus more on understanding legal concepts and mastering important vocabulary without being burdened by unnecessary language difficulties. Groshell (2023) emphasizes that pre-teaching vocabulary before giving texts that contain those words can reduce cognitive load and improve understanding compared to having to search for the meaning of unknown words while reading. Therefore, legal case summaries help reduce extrinsic load, manage intrinsic load, and simultaneously strengthen germane load that supports long-term learning processes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach to measure the effect of using legal case summaries on law students' reading comprehension abilities in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The quantitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to make objective measurements of learning outcome changes before and after treatment through statistical analysis. The research design used is quasi-experimental type one-group pretest-posttest design, which is a design that compares initial and final conditions in the same group without a control group.

The research subjects consisted of 30 second-semester students from the Law Study Program at the College of Law Sciences Biak-Papua who were taking Legal English courses. Sample selection was done using purposive sampling technique, with the consideration that all participants had never used legal case summaries as teaching materials before, and actively participated in learning from the beginning to the end of the intervention cycle.

The main instrument in this research is a reading comprehension test given twice, as a pre-test and post-test. Both tests consist of 20 multiple choice questions designed to measure students' ability to understand structure, meaning, and important information from English legal texts. The test materials were arranged equally in terms of indicators, topics, and difficulty levels. In addition, researchers also used four simplified legal case summaries, used during learning sessions as the main intervention media.

The research procedure was carried out over six weeks. In the first week, students took a pre-test to measure their initial ability. From the second to fifth weeks, students received learning based on legal case summaries, with one different legal case each week. Activities included reading texts, understanding legal terms, and answering practice questions related to case content. In the sixth week, students took a post-test with the same format and weight. Researchers also recorded student participation through observation during learning.

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Data analysis was conducted through descriptive statistics to find out the average, maximum values, minimum, and standard deviation of pre-test and post-test scores. To find out whether the score differences that occurred were statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was used with the help of SPSS software. The significance criteria was set at $\alpha = 0.05$ level.

This quantitative approach is based on Creswell (2014) view, which states that quantitative approaches are suitable when researchers want to measure treatment effects and compare results through objective numerical analysis. In the context of this research, this method is used to assess empirically how much influence learning based on legal case summaries has on students' reading ability in the Legal English domain.

It is important to note that this study did not involve a control group. The one-group pretest-posttest design was selected due to practical constraints such as class size and ethical considerations related to withholding instructional content. While this design is appropriate for identifying within-group changes, it limits the ability to compare outcomes against a baseline group that did not receive the intervention. Future research may benefit from including a control group for stronger comparative analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Result

This study aimed to investigate the effects of legal case summaries on the reading comprehension abilities of law students within the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction. Thirty second-semester students from the Law Study Program at STIH Biak-Papua served as research participants.

Data collection was conducted through two primary phases: a pre-test administered prior to the intervention and a post-test conducted following the implementation of legal case summary-based instruction over a four-week period. The instructional materials comprised four simplified legal case summaries, with students engaging with one distinct summary each week, focusing on legal terminology acquisition, argumentative structure analysis, and content comprehension.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for pre-test and post-test

Statistics	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Average	47.33	60.33
Median	45.00	60.00
Mode	45	60
Highest Score	70	85
Lowest Score	30	25
Standard Deviation	±10.35	±13.00
Number of Respondents	30	30

Based on the descriptive statistics presented above, there was a substantial increase in mean scores from 47.33 in the pre-test to 60.33 in the post-test. The median value also increased from 45 to 60, indicating that the central tendency of the score distribution shifted toward a higher performance category. The mode for both measurements corresponded to the median values, registering 45 in the pre-test and 60 in the post-test, signifying that these scores represented the most frequently occurring values in their respective testing phases.

The maximum score increased from 70 to 85, reflecting the presence of students who achieved substantially higher performance levels following the instructional intervention. However, the minimum score decreased slightly from 30 to 25, suggesting that certain students continued to require additional pedagogical support. The standard deviation increased from ±10.35 to ±13.00, indicating that following the intervention, the range of score variability became more pronounced—with some students demonstrating considerable improvement while others exhibited more moderate development.

Overall, twenty-seven of the thirty participants (90%) demonstrated score improvements from pre-test to post-test. Three students experienced score decreases, although these declines did not significantly impact the overall group performance trend. No students maintained identical scores across both testing phases. This variation demonstrates that the pedagogical approach utilizing legal case summaries had a positive impact on the majority of participants, although its effectiveness remained influenced by individual factors such as learning engagement and test readiness.

To determine whether the difference between pre-test and post-test scores was statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was conducted. The test results are presented in the following table:

Table 2. Paired Sample t-Test

Component	Value
Sample Size (n)	30
Mean Score Difference	13.00
Calculated t-value	6.94

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Degrees of Freedom (df)	29
p-value (Sig. 2-tailed)	< 0.001
Significance Level	0.05
Interpretation	Significant

The statistical analysis revealed a calculated t-value of 6.94 with 29 degrees of freedom (df = 29). The p-value ($p < 0.001$) was substantially below the established significance threshold of 0.05, thereby confirming a statistically significant difference between students' pre-test and post-test performance. These findings demonstrate that legal case summary-based instruction exerted a significant positive effect on reading comprehension improvement within the Legal English context. This empirical evidence provides robust support for the pedagogical efficacy of Content-Based Instruction in English language learning for legal purposes.

Discussion

The research results show a significant improvement in the reading comprehension abilities of law students after participating in learning based on legal case summaries. The students' average scores increased from 47.33 in the pre-test to 60.33 in the post-test, and the statistical test showed a calculated t-value of 6.94 with a p-value < 0.001. This confirms that the difference is statistically significant. These findings support the view that content-based materials, particularly those aligned with students' academic field, can positively affect their language learning outcomes—in this case, their ability to comprehend legal texts in English. The use of legal case summaries has proven effective in bridging students' legal knowledge with their English language skills, making reading comprehension tasks more meaningful, relevant, and goal-oriented.

This improvement is consistent with the principles of Content-Based Instruction (CBI), where language learning is not separated from content learning, but rather developed through the context of specific academic or professional subjects. As emphasized by Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (2003), and supported by Stoller (2004), using field-based materials such as legal case summaries allows students to not only practice language structure but also to understand the language within its academic application. Legal case summaries provide an authentic yet simplified version of legal texts that enable students to interact with real-world content while building their English reading competence. This integration helps learners process texts not just for surface-level understanding, but also for deeper comprehension that includes argument evaluation, inference, and critical thinking within a legal framework.

In addition, this study reinforces the role of reading comprehension theory, particularly as it applies to higher education contexts. De-la-Peña and Luque-Rojas (2021) highlight that reading comprehension at the university level requires more than just literal understanding; it includes reasoning, inference-making, and synthesizing information. The legal case summaries used in this study supported students in practicing those higher-order skills by providing cases that required them to identify issues, evaluate legal arguments, and formulate conclusions. This is also supported by Bogaert et al. (2023), who underscore the importance of reading strategies such as evaluation, note-taking, and self-monitoring in strengthening reading performance. Throughout the learning process, students were exposed to these strategies, either implicitly or explicitly, which may have contributed to their overall improvement.

From an ESP perspective, the legal case summaries align closely with the specific needs of law students who must not only understand general English, but also legal vocabulary, logic, and style. Dou, Chan, and Win (2023) argue that ESP programs should be needs-based and rooted in the language that learners are expected to use in real academic or professional contexts. The use of simplified, adapted legal texts in this study allows students to become familiar with authentic legal structures while reducing linguistic complexity. This contributes to both increased motivation and learning relevance, as students are likely to perceive the material as useful for their future legal careers.

From a cognitive point of view, this improvement can also be interpreted through the lens of Cognitive Load Theory (CLT). Legal texts are known to be cognitively demanding due to their complex syntax, abstract reasoning, and technical terminology. According to Benjamin and Main (2022), reducing intrinsic and extraneous load while maximizing germane load can enhance learning efficiency. By using legal case summaries, the instructional materials helped reduce unnecessary cognitive burdens and allowed students to focus on meaningful mental processing. This aligns with Groshell (2022) and Hanham (2023), who argue that cognitive preparation such as pre-teaching key terms or simplifying task demands—can improve learners' ability to process new and complex information. In this study, the use of pre-selected cases with familiar themes and guided discussion activities allowed students to build legal and linguistic schemas simultaneously, supporting both language acquisition and legal understanding.

Although the overall results indicate success, the presence of students who experienced decreased or stagnant performance suggests the need for a more nuanced understanding of individual differences. In contrast

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to the 27 students (90%) who showed clear progress, three students had lower scores in the post-test compared to their pre-test. This finding suggests that learning outcomes may also be affected by personal factors such as concentration, attendance, motivation, and readiness to engage with the material. For example, students who were passive in classroom discussions or lacked basic legal vocabulary may have struggled more, even with simplified materials. These variations remind us that while content-based instruction is generally effective, its success still depends on how it is delivered and how students individually respond to the approach. Teachers may need to implement additional support, such as differentiated instruction, closer monitoring, or formative feedback, especially for students who require more time or scaffolding.

In summary, the discussion of findings from this study aligns with previous literature in supporting the integration of content and language learning in ESP instruction. Legal case summaries have demonstrated not only their utility in improving students' reading comprehension but also their potential to foster the development of critical legal thinking through language. By combining contextual relevance, manageable cognitive demands, and authentic disciplinary content, this approach offers a promising model for improving Legal English learning at the undergraduate level.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that using legal case summaries significantly improves law students' reading comprehension abilities in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning. The average score increased from 47.33 on the pre-test to 60.33 on the post-test, and the paired sample t-test result ($t = 6.94$; $p < 0.001$) provides strong empirical evidence that content-based learning using legal texts is effective in enhancing students' reading skills. The learning approach implemented through Content-Based Instruction (CBI), adapted to the legal field using simplified case summaries, allows students to simultaneously acquire knowledge of language structure and legal content. This dual focus not only improves comprehension of authentic legal materials but also reduces unnecessary cognitive load, as described in Cognitive Load Theory, enabling students to process information more meaningfully and effectively. Overall, this study demonstrates that integrating field-specific content with language learning materials can effectively address both the academic and practical needs of law students. Therefore, the use of legal case summaries is a promising strategy for teaching Legal English at the higher education level, especially in law programs that require students to understand and analyze English-language legal texts and In practical terms, ESP instructors can adapt this instructional model by selecting simplified content relevant to their students' professional fields, thereby enhancing both engagement and comprehension in language classrooms.

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