

LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES ON NATIVE LANGUAGE USAGE IN ENGLISH-FOR-LAW CLASSES AT A VIETNAMESE TERTIARY INSTITUTION

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Abstract. *Recent years have seen a growing tendency to take full advantage of native language, also known as mother tongue (L1) into language teaching and learning, particularly in English-for-Specific-Purposes (ESP) contexts, due to its undeniable benefits affirmed in the existing literature. This study focuses on examining learners' perceptions of the use of first language (L1) in English-for-law classes at a tertiary institution. To achieve its objectives, the study employed a mixed-method approach involving survey questionnaires with 158 students, along with semi structured interviews with nine randomly selected ones. The quantitative results were treated with the support of the SPSS v26.0 while qualitative data obtained from the interview were analyzed for further explanation. The findings revealed learners' positive views on the role of L1 and its use as a way of teaching and learning as well as a scaffolding technique in acquiring legal English. Interestingly, statistically divergence in learners' views was denoted with reference to duration of legal English studying, their level English proficiency and their majors. Such results were expected to contribute to the existing literature of L1 utilization in ESP learning contexts.*

Key words: *English-for-law, learners' perspectives, native language*

1. INTRODUCTION

The integration of native language in English as a second/ foreign language (EFL/EFL) as well as English for specific purposes (ESP) has raised controversy among researchers and educators for the past few decades. Many scholars argued that communicative teaching approach has shifted focus from structure-based learning to meaning-driven education, leaving the use of L1 discouraged while others highlight how traditional priorities, i.e., precision and accuracy are still emphasized. Undeniably, within ESP contexts, specialized language forms the core of the courses, enabling learners to acquire domain-specific skills and knowledge. However, technical jargon often poses challenges for learners, the thoughtful use of L1 to build conceptual understanding is highly necessitated.

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In the case of English for law, a type of ESP in legal fields, the debate around L1 inclusion mirrors broader discussions in language teaching. Proponents of monolingual approaches advocate minimizing L1 use to immerse learners in realistic legal practice scenarios and prioritize knowledge creation through meaningful engagement. They argue that excessive reliance on L1 dilutes the immersive experience of communicating legal English concepts in second language or foreign language (L2/FL). On the other hand, advocates of bilingual approaches highlight L1's utility in facilitating comprehension, particularly when teaching complex legal frameworks and terms (Le, 2011). Brown (2000) asserts that translation into L1 can aid learners, especially those with limited proficiency in English, to grasp specialized concepts and language skills effectively. This is particularly relevant when learners struggle to express themselves or comprehend intricate legal issues. Additionally, several researchers emphasize the necessity of occasional L1 use to address challenging topics, provide detailed instructions, or explain critical contrasts (Pilipović, 2018). In other words, comprehension-based teaching rather than purely communicative strategies can help learners build robust, accurate linguistic and conceptual foundations.

In the existing literature, numerous studies have investigated L1 employment in ESP education, in which scholars such as Brooks-Lewis (2009), Butzkamm (2003), and Tuyen & Van (2019) underline the role of L1 in improving comprehension, leading to the efficient outcomes. Nevertheless, in English for legal purposes, learners' views have been insufficiently addressed whereas learners' needs, interests and preferences are deemed as a keystone in designing and conducting effective ESP courses (Gak, 2016). Therefore, this study focuses on delving into learners' perspectives on their own and their teachers' usage of L1 in English-for-law lessons at a tertiary institution in Vietnam.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Native language use in ESP settings

L1 use has been recognized as a natural, conscious, and immediate means of communication among learners in both EFL/ ESL contexts (Hughes et al., 2006). Various studies have explored this issue, showing that learners, regardless of their proficiency levels, favor L1 usage for better acquisition of English language and knowledge (AlAmir, 2017; AlMoayidi, 2018; Carrió-Pastor & Vallés, 2015; Debreli & Oyman, 2015; Poljaković, 2016). Within the ESP context, particularly for adult learners with varying language proficiency levels, there is a strong inclination to utilize L1 transfer (Brown, 2000), making its use by teachers almost inevitable. L1 usage in ESP classes has drawn considerable attention from scholars and educators worldwide (Xhemaili, 2013; Poljakovic, 2016; Darginviciene & Navickiene, 2015; AlTarawneh & AlMithqal, 2019; Milic et al., 2019; Chirobocea, 2018; Jan, Li & Lin, 2014), whose research revealed its benefits in various aspects.

In terms of interlanguage enhancement, adult learners have the tendency to transfer from L2 to L1 due to their knowledge possessed heavily dependent on L1. Language is a means of expression, thus expressing in L1 is truly safer than in L2 due to their mastery in L1. As stated, adult learners, by virtue of their insufficient knowledge and skills of L2/FL, are frequently incompetent in expressing themselves. Accordingly, they are more likely to experience anxiety, even shame and hesitance to learn for fear of making mistakes. In such situations, language transfer is deemed as a valuable alternative despite its report to produce

both positive and negative effects (Brown, 2000). Irrespective of erroneous utterance, interfering factors are almost certainly not viewed as failures, yet as efforts to try and comprehend a new language rule (Brown, 2000). In the similar vein, Kavaliauskienė (2009) acknowledges that the transfer between L1 and L2, whether perfect or not, is substantial in the process of building and developing the interlanguage. Furthermore, existing literature has shown that translation technique from L2 into L1 is a valuable way of compare and contrast the two language systems, which in turns, benefits language learners (Glušac & Gak, 2023). In other words, scholars agree that L1 enables learners to compare and contrast two language systems, fostering a deeper understanding of specialized language and leading to long-term retention (Darginavičienė & Navickienė, 2015). Darginavičienė and Navickienė (2015) also affirm constructive points of L1 usage in reducing learners' mistakes, thus resulting in better comprehension and more effective learning outcomes. Undeniably, L1 can be utilized for providing direct translation equivalents to learners regarding issues covered, concepts defined or questions for students to clarify vague matters. Additionally, Xhemali's research (2013) states that when seeking the participants' viewpoint, L1 is reported to support them in understanding complicated grammar points or specialized notions, ensuring efficient class time. Likewise, previous studies illustrate that learners instructed in L1 show more effective performance than those receiving only L2 instruction (Latsanyphone & Bouangeune, 2009; Stanojević Gocić, 2016). It is attributed by the evidence that translation as a teaching technique in ESP classes leads to learners' overall comprehension of both content and language (Jerković & Komaromi, in press; Rushwan, 2017). Several researchers even classify translation as the "fifth skill" essential for teaching and learning outcomes in ESP (Janulevičienė & Kavaliauskienė, 2002).

What's more, Nesi (2014) proclaims learners' favor for bilingual dictionaries instead monolingual ones as they are likely to take full advantage of direct transfer or contrastive analysis between two language systems, generating innumerable beneficial impact on language proficiency enhancement. Previous researchers, i.e., Glušac and Milić (2021) and Knežević et al. (2021) pinpoint that the majority of ESP learners express their preference on leveraging bilingual dictionaries instead of monolingual ones to identify direct restatement of unknown terms or concepts, irrespective of their linguistic proficiency level. In particular, as regards teaching specialized terms in ESP, learners are reported to benefit a lot from L1 inclusion, as it is one of the most effective techniques for explaining meanings and forms to learners (Abduh et al., 2022; Rosmaladewi et al., 2020). Research indicates that language-switching to L1 enhances students' ability to comprehend vocabulary meanings and facilitates their overall language acquisition process (Le & Le, 2019; Schmitt, 2000). Prior studies affirm the value of L1 in clarifying difficult terms or abstract concepts, saving time and increasing efficiency in understanding (Afzal, 2013; Mahmutoğlu & Kıcır, 2013; Tajgozari, 2017; Timor, 2012). Similarly, Chirobocea (2018) suggests that L1 or translation can serve as an efficient tool for explaining complex specialized terminology, providing learners with straightforward ways to decipher meanings (Doff, 1988; Nation, 2001). Consequently, students often find it easier to enhance their English proficiency, particularly with specialized vocabulary, phrases, and expressions (Schmitt, 2000).

Although the efficiency of L1 usage is widely acknowledged, the appropriate extent of its integration depends on various factors, including course content, time constraints, learning objectives, students' preferences, and their language proficiency levels (Gajšt, 2019). Additionally, existing knowledge attributes a crucial role in determining the extent

of L1 inclusion (Darginavičienė & Navickienė, 2015). Kavaliauskienė (2009) notes that students' L1 linguistic competence, learning styles, and abilities further influence this balance. Almoayidi (2018) emphasizes that the learning environment, learner types, and their objectives are critical in deciding the suitability of L1 usage, while Kovačić and Kirinić (2011) stress that judicious use of L1 benefits L2 acquisition. Both monolingual and bilingual approaches may be applied to introduce new knowledge and language to learners. While many instructors advocate for maximizing students' exposure to L2, they still acknowledge the necessity of L1 when teaching ESP. Combining multiple approaches is often more effective than relying on a single method (Day & Krzanowski, 2011). Research by Latsanyphone and Bouangeune (2009) indicates that students taught using both L1 and L2 outperform those instructed exclusively in L2. Similarly, Gajšt (2019) underscores that using both languages help students relate ESP course knowledge to their specific fields, particularly for those with lower proficiency levels.

Conversely, several studies highlight the potential drawbacks of L1 use in ESP courses. Over-reliance on L1 can hinder interaction in English (Kavaliauskienė, 2009) and discourage students from using monolingual resources like English dictionaries (Glušac & Milić, 2020). Almoayidi (2018) warns that extensive L1 usage can reduce essential L2 exposure, impeding students' progress. Mirza et al. (2012) argue that translation-based teaching methods may negatively impact L2 acquisition by limiting comprehensible input, suggesting that minimizing L1 use is often advisable.

Until now, the debate on the optimal L1 use in ESP instruction remains unresolved. While some instructors overlook its benefits, others overuse it. Striking the right balance requires careful consideration of learners' needs and course objectives to achieve effective outcomes. Despite substantial literature on L1 usage in various ESP contexts, there is little research specifically addressing its use in English-for-law teaching and learning contexts. This gap motivated the researchers to undertake this study to delve into students' perceptions of their own and their teachers' use of L1 in English-for-legal-purposes lessons at a Vietnamese tertiary institution.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Participants

76 students (including 55,3% sophomores and 44,7 juniors) majoring in legal English (known as legal English majors) and 82 students (45,1% sophomores and 54,9% juniors) specializing in International trade and business law (herein after referred to as law majors) at a tertiary institution agreed to partake in the survey questionnaire. Yet only nine participants were randomly selected to involve in follow-up semi-structured interview, ensuring that the sample included both legal English and law majors while their self-assessed English proficiency was not taken into consideration.

In terms of English language proficiency, 69,2% students have had more than 12 years studying English, while the rest have been learning English from 9 to 12 years, equipping them with foundational English skills necessary to undertake specialized English-for-law courses. They self-evaluated their English as either proficient (13%), relatively good (26%), average (51%) and poor (10%). Furthermore, both legal English majors and law majors are required to study three basic legal English courses and two advanced legal English courses.

While law majors commence English-for-law classes since the first semester, legal English majors partake ESP subjects when they enter the second year.

With reference to their legal background knowledge, legal English majors and law majors share different features. Legal English majors were only required to study such general foundational subject as Theory of State and Law before entering specialized English courses. Conversely, law majors were instructed to core subjects namely Theory of State and Law, Constitutional law, Civil law, Criminal law and Administrative law in their curriculum before studying legal English.

3.2. Instruments and Data collection procedures

The study employed two sets of self-made research instruments including a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: Part one collected demographic information, while Part two examined students' overall perceptions on L1 use, as well as on their own use and their teachers' use of L1 in English-for-law, i.e legal English classes. After a reliability test (confidence level $\alpha = 0.83-0.91$; Cronbach, 1951), the final version consisted of statements rated on a five-point Likert scale: (1) totally disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) totally agree. The data collected were analyzed using IBM SPSS v.26 to authenticate the interval scales as follows: 1.0–1.80: totally disagree; 1.81–2.60: disagree; 2.61–3.40: neutral; 3.41–4.20: agree; 4.21–5.00: totally agree. To further validate the findings, frequency tests were conducted to identify whether there were significant statistical divergences among students of different level of their English proficiency and their majors.

The semi-structured interview questions for randomly selected students were conducted to get in-depth information relating to the L1 use in English-for-legal -purposes classes. The recorded interviews were transcribed and cross-checked with notes to gain deeper insight of learners' perspectives on the L1 employment and reasons behind. Data concerning the similar issues were interpreted with the combination of both qualitative and quantitative source of information.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Learners' views on their own L1 usage in English-for-law classes

As regards the questions seeking learners' general perspectives on L1 usage, the data revealed that 42% of the participants "always" or "usually" employed L1 while 32% of them sometimes used it, the rest (26%) chose to use it "rarely" in legal English lessons. It is not surprisingly as at this University, only-English policy is not applied in English classes. Understandably, the majority of the participants (62%) considered such usual L1 use as rational when necessary whereas a relatively low number of them admitted over-using L1 on specific circumstances where it should be avoided. The sequencing survey results indicated that most of the learners acknowledged the necessity of their own use of L1 to take notes of as well as to translate what teachers said during class ($M=3.67$; $SD=.857$; $M=3.45$; $SD=.932$). A statistically significant difference in mean scores was observed between sophomores and juniors ($M=4.01$, and $M=2.95$, respectively) when investigating whether students of different generations share similar use of L1, indicating that the lower generation students made use of L1 for note-taking in class much more

than their later generation colleagues. On the other hand, no statistically significant divergence was reported with reference to students' L1 use to translate what teacher said between second-year and third-year, which means that both generations of students tried to improve comprehension by translating into L1 what the teacher said. Similar results were experienced between the two groups as regards using L1 to communicate with peers in class and to express themselves competently, when it receives high rate of agreement among the surveyed students (M=4.01; SD=.765; M=4.12; SD=.905). Variety of reasons are shown in the semi-structured interview.

"I often use L1 to take notes or translate a text, even what the teacher said for the purpose of improving my comprehension and retention of knowledge. Usually, I find note-takings in Vietnamese quicker and efficient than in English" – S#4

The aforementioned opinion is that of several participants. However, one student did not report using L1 as he believed he was proficient enough in English.

"L1 use is my priority when communicating with my friends as it is much quicker and devoid of miscomprehension. However, it also depends on each situation where English is used, or combination of both English and Vietnamese is acceptable" is the sharing viewpoint of S#1.

"Vietnamese is not forbidden in English classes, so I usually use Vietnamese to communicate with my class-mates. Sometimes when I think that I cannot express myself adequately in English, I resort to Vietnamese as an alternative with my teacher's permission." – S#9

Especially, in respect of acquiring new legal English terms, a strong approval was observed regarding the statement that L1 utilization was beneficial (M=4.23; SD=.567). This statistic was supported by in-depth responses.

"I find it easier to acquire and retain new legal English terms if I know Vietnamese equivalents" – S#2

As expected, a majority of participants disagreed with the statement that they never used Vietnamese translations in English for law classes (M=2.27; SD=.819). This indicates a strong preference among learners to know Vietnamese equivalents or translations of legal language. When encountering unfamiliar legal language in English, students prioritized asking their teachers for clarification in the mother tongue (M=4.14; SD=.597). Online translation tools, such as Google Translate, were the second most favored resource for negotiating the meaning of unknown legal concepts (M=3.84; SD=1.029). Regarding dictionary use, students preferred bilingual dictionaries over monolingual ones to understand the meanings of unfamiliar notions (M=3.82; SD=.871 versus M=3.55; SD=1.132). However, researching and reading Vietnamese documents to identify the meanings of legal knowledge was less favored strategy, as reflected by their low mean values (M=2.47, SD=1.050; M).

Table 1 Anova results for the learners' views on differences of L1 use among legal English majors and law majors

	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.*
Law majors	.03072	.0531	.000
Legal English majors	-.0146	.0601	.970

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As illustrated in table 1, a statistically significant difference is seen between legal English majors and law majors' L1 use, which is shown by Sig. level. The finding means that legal English majors show a stricter view in favor of L1 use in English-for-law classes than law majors. Insufficient background knowledge of law of legal English majors can constitute one of the reasons of legal English majors' insistence on more L1 use in the classroom, which is indicated in subsequent semi-structured interviews.

"I think in order to learn legal English efficiently, one needs to hold adequate language and law content knowledge. Yet, in my case, as a legal English major, my legal background knowledge is insufficient, thus understanding and acquiring legal English is challenging. L1 inclusion thereby is of the utmost importance." – S#7.

4.2. Learners' views on their teachers' use of L1 in English-for-law classes

Relating to teachers' uses of L1 in legal English classes, the participants reported their teachers' L1 use in class for different purposes, including giving instructions, providing further explanation, translation equivalents or even class-management. In each situation, learners expressed their various level of favor of L1 use in English-for-law lessons. Notably, a strong agreement was observed regarding the statement of teachers' usage of L1 in explaining new legal terms, as reflected by a high mean value ($M=4.32$; $SD=.1018$). Such statistic does not mean that learners expected to be provided new legal English terminology in English only yet in both English and Vietnamese ($M=4.11$; $SD=.893$). The data further demonstrated neutral attitudes towards the sole use of either English or Vietnamese in explaining new legal English terms ($M=3.01$, $SD=.767$; $M=3.13$, $SD=.692$, respectively). However, a significant number of learners agreed that using L1 to instruct legal English terms helped them easily connect the language with the content ($M=4.33$; $SD=.624$), thereby aiding retention. Conversely, students found it harder to retain legal terminology when definitions were provided exclusively in English ($M=3.02$; $SD=.1012$). Interestingly, learners disagreed with the notion that Vietnamese translations hindered their ability to acquire legal concepts in English ($M=2.25$; $SD=.1115$). Instead, they believed that such translations contributed to better acquisition of the terminology ($M=4.06$; $SD=.863$). Regarding the amount of L1 used by teachers, opinions were divided. While a majority of students disapproved of excessive Vietnamese explanations all the time ($M=2.37$; $SD=.989$), they held neutral views on the need for Vietnamese equivalents or translation being provided only for difficult legal notions ($M=3.06$; $SD=.1017$). This highlights the mixed expectations among learners regarding how teachers should approach new legal concepts.

In addition to preference of teachers' L1 use for explaining new terms, the participants also expected their teachers to use L1 to compare and contrast two legal cultures, legal systems ($M=3.98$, $SD=.873$), which proved their important roles in acquiring language. As noted, languages and cultures are not separated, instead, they have a reciprocal relationship. Especially in legal fields, legal systems are distinctive, legal language is different, accordingly. Providing reasons for the choice, followed-up interview revealed,

"When we study legal English, or English for legal purposes, there are numerous concepts that cannot be found in Vietnamese. Such concepts are related to English or American legal cultures. Thus, we want our teachers to provide legal background, of course in Vietnamese, to contrast the legal systems. By this way, we can understand the deeper meaning of language" – S#5.

Sharing similar viewpoints, S#3 affirmed that,

“I would like my teacher to provide contrast analysis of legal systems, legal language in Vietnamese, helping me follow lessons easier”.

Many students disagreed that L1 usage reduces their interest in acquiring legal English, shown by low mean score (M=2.53, SD=.762). In contrast, the flexible employment between L1 and English is advisory, especially in the context of legal English classes where specialized English language is considered challenging. To some extent, using L1 in legal English classes as a teaching medium is one way to motivate learners to acquire legal English (M=3.42; SD=.748).

“Sometimes, I feel demotivated in legal English classes due to the complexity of language, which makes me find it extremely difficult to understand. In such a case, teacher’s L1 use solves the problem, leading to my comprehension and acquisition in a much easier way.”

“I would like my teachers to apply bilingual approach in instructing legal English for me to grasp knowledge easily” – S#6

In terms of teaching grammar, most of the students disagreed with the statement that the teachers usually use L1 to explain grammar (M=2.12, SD=.883). Providing reasons for this, S#5 manifested,

“Understandably, grammar rules in English-for-law classes which are nearly the same rules in general English classes, are not too challenging. My teachers often use English to revise that knowledge and only use Vietnamese for the points which are new and complicated.”

Table 2 Learners’ attitudes towards L1 usage

Paired Differences								
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence interval of the difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1:	-.872	1.517	.123	-1.113	-.629	-7.025	123	.000

Table 2 depicts the value of Sig.(2-tailed) = 0.000, less than 0.05, denoting that the presumption that duration of legal English studying has no effect on the L1 is wrong. Obviously, a notable discrepancy between the viewpoints of learners experiencing legal English for shorter period of time and those studying it for longer is illustrated through statistics -1.103 và -0.619. In other words, learners when commencing legal English have a tendency to use and expect to be instructed in L1 much more than peers learning legal English for a longer duration. Follow-up responses reveal,

“When beginning learning legal English, I felt overwhelmed because of its distinctive features. Its meaning and its usage are quite different from “plain English”, English that I use every day. Usually, I do not know whether I understand the concept correctly or not. Therefore, I always expect my teachers to provide Vietnamese translation/ equivalents.” – S#8

“At first, I find it extremely challenging and try to translate all the materials in Vietnamese for better comprehension. Gradually, I become familiar to legal English, understand them quickly and of course, it is not necessary to find Vietnamese equivalents for all. Yet, difficult concepts need L1 explanation after all” – S#5

Table 3 The correlation of L1 usage, learners' language proficiency and legal background knowledge

Coefficients							
	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity statistics	
	B	Std. Error				Tolerance	VIF
L1 usage	2.216	.242		8.847	.000		
English proficiency	.251	.055	.352	4.389	.000	.911	1.067
Legal background knowledge	.273	.063	.369	3.813	.000	.617	1.518

Table 3 indicates the correlation effects among three variables: learners' views on L1 usage, their English proficiency and legal background knowledge. Clearly, the Sig. values are less than 0.05, three valid variables included in the linear regression model, are correlated from one side. The coefficients ViF reached below 2, meaning that there is no multicollinearity. Additionally, the higher statistic of Beta standardized coefficients than 0.0 specifies one-sided impact of the independent variable on the dependent variables. Of the two, the correlation between learners' views on L1 usage and legal background knowledge is stronger shown by higher beta value (B=.369) than that between learners' views on L1 usage and English proficiency, with B=.352. Consequently, it can be seen that legal background knowledge has had greater effect on learners' views on L1 usage. Specifically, legal English majors expressed a stronger preference for L1 usage compared to law majors. This preference could be attributed to legal English majors' limited background knowledge of law, leading to higher expectations for Vietnamese translations for better and deeper understanding. Its complexity is undeniable, legal English, therefore, requires not only learners' language competence but background knowledge of law, as well.

On the other hand, when comparing learners' perceptions based on their self-assessed general English proficiency, the post-hoc analysis revealed that students with "average" and "poor" self-assessed level of English proficient, felt that their English proficiency was insufficient to effectively legal English without L1 use. Conversely, higher-level students, especially those who self-evaluated their English as "proficient" or "relatively good" rated the English approach as more beneficial for acquiring legal English, though they did not abandon the use of L1.

5. DISCUSSION

Overall, there is a broadly positive perception among learners that L1 should be encouraged in English-for-law classes. Survey questionnaire statistics and ANOVA test correlations confirm that students regard L1 use as rational and beneficial in English-for-law classes. These findings align with previous studies conducted in diverse settings (Glusac et al., 2023; Hall & Cook, 2013b; La, 2022; Mahmutoglu & Kicir, 2013; Timor, 2012), which highlight that learners' L1 is a critical factor in promoting ESP learning and acquisition.

For their own use, learners employ L1 for note-takings and translation of what the teachers said as well as for communication in classes. The statistics relating to different cohorts indicate that the lower-year students take the advantages of L1 for taking notes

more than upper-year ones. This finding is compatible with Glusac et al., (2023) but contrasts with the statistics in terms of L1 use in translating and interacting in class. The results of interviews also confirm that both sophomores and juniors, regardless of their majors, address translation as a recommended practice activity to enhance their knowledge comprehension in class and at home as well. Such suggestions have been clamored for its essential teaching and learning technique in previous studies (e.g., Jerković & Komaromi, in press; Rushwan, 2017; Stanojević Gocić, 2016).

Concerning the learners' self-reported general English proficiency level, the findings confirm that this variable is at every likelihood to greatly influence L1 use. Specifically, learners, either of "poor", "average", "relatively good" or even "proficient" level of English acknowledge L1 use in legal English classes. This finding is similar to Stanojević Gocić, (2016), Jerković and Komaromi (in press), and Rushwan (2017) who highlight the pedagogical potential of L1 equivalents among students of different proficiency levels. The aforementioned data is also in line with Mahmoud's study (2006), which claims that the use of L1 is popular among advanced learners. On the other hand, in this research, L1 proves to be at a more frequent use among students with "poor" language knowledge than advanced learners. Hughes et al., (2006) explain that a strong dependence on L1 among the lower learners' English proficiency means more tendency to resort to L1 usage in attempting to comprehend what they are instructed and express themselves adequately. Similarly, statistically significant difference is observed between legal English majors and law majors when the prior show their preference for L1 inclusion more than the latter partly due to their distinct legal background knowledge.

As regards learners' views on their teachers' L1 usage, both qualitative and quantitative data illustrate that teachers leverage L1 for various purposes, most commonly as a scaffolding technique, i.e., either as providing instructions, or offering, explaining translation equivalents of new specific legal English matters, as affirmed as essential by Milić et al. (2018). Also, students of less experience divulge that their teachers use L1 as a scaffolding device aiming at improving comprehension more than their more experienced peers. On top of that, the majority of students favor using their mother tongue when dealing with new legal terms or domains. Evidence from learners' response suggests that allowing them to struggle with translating terms on their own is likely to enhance their long-term memory retention. In particular, ambiguous or complex terms are seen as better understood by learners with the aid of their mother tongue (Hall & Cook, 2013b; La, 2022). This is especially significant in legal terminology, which often includes features tied to complicated specific legal and cultural contexts. Differences in legal regulations, practices, and terminology across countries create challenges for language learners. Using only-English to explain these cultural and systemic differences can be unclear, particularly for learners with limited English proficiency or without prior background knowledge. Larson-Freeman (2000) supports this perspective, noting that the meaning of a word extends beyond dictionary definitions and varies according to cultural and contextual communication. Thus, the importance of L1 is emphasized when dealing with culturally specific legal terms, ensuring learners gain a clearer understanding of these differences. Another significant finding concerns teachers' contrast analysis of legal systems, legal cultures and the provision of supplementary information. This supports Takac's (2008) assertion that comparison between English and L1 language, cultures is a highly effective strategy for analyzing, comparing, and clarifying meanings to avoid misunderstandings. These techniques not only help learners grasp the meanings of legal

concepts but also enable them to use them effectively in communication, reading, listening, and writing (Le & Le, 2019).

In the current study, L1 employment is preferred for its clarity and efficiency. Learners find L1 usage essential for connecting their legal background knowledge to legal English knowledge. A key finding is that learners prefer teaching methods that combine both English and Vietnamese over methods relying solely on one language. In other words, the L1 inclusion is highly recommended as frequent as the students denote that over-use of L1 in translating legal concepts may sometimes cause confusion due to non-equivalent meanings between the two languages. Teachers are therefore advised to integrate both English and Vietnamese judiciously, for instance, by presenting key language knowledge in English and asking students to translate them into Vietnamese. In both approaches, clarifying the basic meaning and language use in contexts is prioritized.

6. CONCLUSION

This study highlights learners' perceptions of L1 usage in English-for-law classes. The findings align with prior studies, suggesting that learners consider L1 usage as reasonable when necessary and support teachers' L1 use as a scaffolding technique, mostly to provide equivalents or clarifications for new legal English concept. Basically, the results of this current study proclaim that from learners' view, both learners and lecturers leverage L1 for pedagogical, linguistic and even affective benefits to promote legal English learning. A balanced use of English and Vietnamese is recommended to help learners bridge their legal background knowledge with legal English language.

The empirical findings of this study contribute to the limited literature on the L1 use in legal English teaching and learning, a special type of ESP. However, the study is not without limitations. First, the small scale of participants from a single tertiary institution restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Second, the lack of research instruments to measure the practical effects of native language usage on learners' acquisition and enhancement of legal English is a limitation. Future research should aim to address these gaps.

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