# E-Learn Platform to Teach Legal English for Law Professionals

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**Abstract**
Globalization of trade and economy led to a growing demand all over the world for English for Specific Purposes courses. Conscious of this fact, Algeria has incorporated English for Legal Purposes teaching into tertiary studies. In Algeria, Law students receive ELP course aimed to help them in their studies and future careers. However, at the end of their learning process these students still find linguistic and communication difficulties in situations where English is needed as the course received is no more than teaching specific words and phrases and translating some texts following the traditional Grammar Translation Method. Accordingly, this paper aims to presents the current ELP course situation and to measure students' and teachers' attitudes towards the use of Blended ELP course based on Content Language Integrated Learning model. The course has twofold: to provide students with international legal knowledge and to compare them to the Algerian one, and to expose learners to intensive reading activities and overcome lack of teaching time activities. In this quantitative study, seven teachers were interviewed and fifty seven masters' students were questioned. The results revealed that the students have comprehension difficulties because the time load for reading activities is not sufficient. Concerning informants readiness to use Blended approach, the teachers present negatively the usefulness of such an approach for their students; on the contrary, students show a positive attitude to have additional English reading comprehension activities online, and they demonstrate a high interest to the proposal to support their English course with extra home tasks.
*Keywords:* Blended Learning, CLIL, ELP, Online Based Education

## Introduction

The prevalent use of English as an international language is in constant expansion. This fact is reflected in different fields and various domains where English is considered as a working tool. In order to reach specific objectives, world countries, including Algeria, introduced English courses at all levels of education, and more particularly at the university. At this level, ESP is taught to achieve specific learners' needs, and meet the social requirement. Furthermore, in ESP specific language skills are focused on in order to help the students to acquire English knowledge. For instance, ELP students learn how to decode and comprehend specific types of texts through reading tasks; while learners are exposed to the targeted terminology, language structures, topics and contexts. However, achieving correctness and accuracy in reading authentic complex texts needs considerable teaching time; for this reason, technology is widely used nowadays by ESP practitioners to overcome these difficulties. With the availability of internet, teachers have adopted the blended-learning approach to intensify students' exposure to the language. Even if this teaching approach has already started in some developed countries in the beginning of this century, in Algeria it has not been used yet.

Nowadays, in the Algerian Universities and due to the efforts the Department of English, almost all the faculties have integrated English courses in the learning programme as a compulsory module from the first year of graduation. ELP students study English with a timing length of one hour and a half per week during five years. After finishing their studies, they remain at a low or intermediate level of reading comprehension. Today knowledge is transferred either through printed or digital text. Students in general and ELP learners in particular are required to read texts written in English to achieve academic tasks. Concerning their future professional activities, they will face legal documents that need a specific mastery of the terminology used in addition to an appropriate level of comprehension. But almost all the students have technical difficulties to read correctly because of the inappropriate teaching time devoted to English.

The issue led the researcher to ask for what teaching approach and materials would be appropriate to develop the target students' reading skills through blended learning? and predict that content and language integrated instruction through a blended approach can help ELP students to develop their reading skills by exposing them to intensive reading tasks in their field of study and increasing the teaching time. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to test teachers and students readiness to use the blended approach.

## Literature Review

The spread of technological inventions during the 20th century and especially with the information and communication technologies (ICTs) resulted in an unimaginable extent of different kinds of interactions. To ensure the technological, economic, scientific, cultural and diplomatic exchanges, English imposed itself as a medium of communication, and its position as an imperialist language shifted to the status of language of knowledge embraced officially by more than one hundred countries (Crystal, 1997).

World institutions organise training sessions for their staff with the help of ESP specialists in order to update employees' English proficiency level. Additionally almost all world universities have adopted English as a pedagogical tool for studies or integrated English for Legal Purposes (ELP) in students' curriculum. This module is methodologically and pedagogically based on ESP

teaching and learning approaches and methods. Nevertheless ELP is characterised by some specific features that are not commonly found in other domains.

### Teaching/Learning Legal Language

Legal English is a complex language, which needs a combination of both good basic skills, and legal background. The lawyers and administrators play important roles in managing different affairs related to regulation. They are responsible for people's interests and if there is a language barrier which leads to confusion in the interpretation of meaning, it will be highly risked for the results of the files under study. For that reason, acquiring English specific to legal context is not an easy task to be reached because of the various existing situations that are found in real life. Language specialists being aware of these facts adopted the teaching methodologies according to these facts and have designed courses, specific to this range of the society, known as ELP.

In this context, ELP teacher role is, first to produce materials and present the language content and course activities in various ways to help and motivate students to learn the target language needed to update their academic or occupational knowledge. Then to determine the language skills needed to carry out specific jobs or studies (West, 1994).On the basis of this idea, researchers developed Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach to develop students content knowledge and English fluency at the same time.

### Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

CLIL, mostly implemented in English (Dalton - Puffer, 2011), refers to learning a subject in a language that is not frequently used by the community and it is viewed as a mixture of both language and subject matter learning (Marsh & Wolff, 2007). Therefore, applying CLIL teaching approach in the ELP context can provide the necessary input in terms of content and language needs simultaneously.

If an attractive subject or relevant academic topic area can provide meaningful context in which students can reach language objectives; in this situation, content serves the language. On the other hand, if language can be used to attain content objectives; in this case, language serves the content. Teaching language and content together is an effective way of developing English language proficiency (Brinton et al., 1989). A number of reasons are advocated by Nordmeyer & Barduhn (2010, p.4) for using a content-based language curriculum:

• It builds on the interests and linguistic needs of learners.
• It increases motivation by using content relevant to learners.
• It incorporates the eventual uses that learners will make of the target language.
• It teaches meaningful language embedded within relevant discourse contexts.
In ESP, it is crucial to identify students' content and language needs in order to design a syllabus that will fulfill their language lacks and content requirements. One of the essential problems for ELP students is to comprehend what they have to read; and it is commonly recommended that "reading exposure is the primary stage of developing language skills" (Krashen, 1989,p. 109).Through reading activities the ELP students will be familiarised with the terminology used in their speciality. Furthermore, reading comprehension tasks must be designed to guide the students to guess the meaning of the text. Here major questions challenge an efficient reading

process: what is the appropriate reading strategy that can be used to ELP students to comprehend legal text?

### *Teaching Reading Strategies*

The commonly suggested reading strategies to be taught are the ones elaborated by the National Capital Language Resource Centre (NCLRC)[1]. In its web document entitled *The Essentials of Language Teaching* it is stated that "effective language instructors[...] help students develop a set of reading strategies and match appropriate strategies to each reading situation" (NCLRC,2007, para. 2). These strategies can help students read more quickly and effectively and include previewing, predicting, skimming and scanning, guessing from context, and paraphrasing. In addition to calling-up his background knowledge in L1, the reader needs to use these strategies when reading because he can gain confidence in his ability to read and comprehend the language. Hence the instructor role, according to the NCLRC, is to help students learn when and how to use reading strategies in several ways.

- By modelling the strategies aloud, talking through the processes of previewing, predicting, skimming and scanning, and paraphrasing. This shows students how the strategies work and how much they can know about a text before they begin to read word by word.
- By allowing time in class for group and individual previewing and predicting activities as preparation for in-class or out-of-class reading. Allocating class time to these activities indicates their importance and value.
- By using cloze (fill in the blank) exercises to review vocabulary items. This helps students learn to guess meaning from context.
- By encouraging students to talk about what strategies they think will help them approach a reading assignment, and then talking after reading about what strategies they actually use. This helps students develop flexibility in their choice of strategies.

(NCLRC, 2007, para. 3)

Regarding the context under investigation, it is important for ELP Algerian students, first, to learn and know how to use the appropriate reading strategies; then, to retrieve their knowledge experience. That is to say, a conscious use of cognitive strategies will motivate them to overcome their reading difficulties, and lead to the use of metacognitive strategies. To reach this objective, students need to be exposed intensively to the target language. However, classroom instruction in ELP context cannot provide the required learning time to help students perform their language competencies. Accordingly new trends in education propose online platforms to assist both teachers and learners fulfil their needs.

### *Online-Based Education*

World Wide Web technologies have attracted educational specialists' attention very early. Internet offers an opportunity to expand the learning environment outside classroom walls and various applications of World Wide Web technologies in academic settings have been studied and tested. The results led to the emergence of different definitions of online-based education (OBE). After a review of literature, it seems that Khan's (1997, p. 6) definition includes the major elements of OBE, when he states that it is "a hypermedia-based instructional programme that utilizes the resources of the World Wide Web to create a meaningful learning environment where learning is

fostered and supported.", i.e., OBE is a teaching programme implemented through internet aiming at improving students' abilities. In many ways teaching in an online environment is much like teaching in any other formal educational context; the difference lies in specific components that are used in online teaching as the use of content development, multimedia component, computers and storage devices, internet tools, authoring programmes, servers, browsers and other applications (Khan,1997). All these components are indispensable characteristics of the OBE learning environments because a course designer needs both content and technological resources to implement online activities. Components, also serve as tools to the emergence of OBE features. In this vein, Khan (1997) states that "features are characteristics of WBI programme contributed by those components" (p.6).

Literature distinguishes two feature categories in an OBE design relying on the level of technical and pedagogical importance. Khan (1997, p. 8) explains that there are key and additional features. The former one are considered as base characteristics of the OBE system and inherent to the Web such as interactivity, multimedia, open system, online search, electronic publishing, cross cultural interaction, device-distance-time independency, globally accessibility, etc. OBE can provide a flexible teaching and learning environment because the contents can be extended beyond those prepared by instructors and shared to the outside world. Furthermore, in OBE projects course designer can adapt contents to match each individual student according to his or her goals and previous knowledge. Hence, learners have more autonomy in making decisions regarding their learning.

Concerning additional features, their effectiveness depends on the quality of OBE design for instance convenience, easiness of use, online support, authenticity, cost-effectiveness, collaborative learning, online evaluation, virtual cultures etc. It is important to devise appropriately the course according to students' competencies. Learners in OBE learn collaboratively as well as individually, they share information and seek for clarifications through continuous interaction, that is why, an easy access and use of online support is essential for an effective learning.

To sum up, components can contribute to one or more features, for example emails as a web component can provide interactivity between students and teachers. Features as device, distance and time independency are facilitated by internet (component). Students enrolled in an online course can study by using any computer device, anywhere and in anytime. These learning advantages presented by OBE environment lead researchers to adapt university programmes according to students' needs and wants.

Though, even if a great development is achieved in order to facilitate the use of technologies for educational purposes, learners are still frustrated with problems in OBE as Technical problems, inadequate feedback, overwhelming messages, lack of navigational skills, conversation domination, and physical tiredness (Driscoll, 2002). Subsequently, the designer has the responsibility to overcome these constraints since OBE learners need both traditional and new skills to be successful. Hence, it is implied that the role of the teacher in blended environment goes beyond the classroom walls. The next part deals with the new tasks that should be performed by the teacher.

In OBE the role of the teacher goes beyond the design of materials and involves active participation because he has to master additional skills in technology to deal with a new teaching environment (time and space separation), and to use new teaching strategies. Nowadays many researchers focus on identifying and defining the role of online instructors; according to Berge (1995), online instructor characteristics are grouped under four categories: pedagogical, social, managerial and technical. These roles are considered as basics for the 21$^{st}$ century teacher; however, the literature agrees that it is not an easy task. Online instructors need more time, as they play many additional roles. Berge (1995) adds that "not all of these roles need to be carried out in their entirety by the same person. In fact, it may be rare that they are" (p.2). The time requisite in the OBE to teach specific language and content is much more than that spent in a traditional educational context.

**The Study**
This study concerns Master's students enrolled in the academic year 2016/2017 at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Faculty of Law and Politics, Tlemcen University. A questionnaire was designed and administered to the students which are specialised in general relations and communication, general politics, and diplomacy and international exchange. A total number of fifty seven (57) students out of one hundred and ninety three (193) students were dealt with.

The teachers are concerned with this study in order to give their points of view, through a structured interview, on students' English language needs and the use of new technologies in their context. The subject specialist teachers' number in the Faculty is one hundred and six, seven among them teach English. One informant involved in the study is a full-time teacher in the Faculty with a long teaching experience. He is specialised in international law and political relations and in charge of the legal English terminology course for post graduate students, in the Department of Law and administrative sciences, without receiving any prior specific training. The other informants are part time teachers in the Faculty specialized in ESP, TEFL, and translation.

*Data Analysis and Discussion*
The teachers' interview and the students' questionnaire reveal interesting facts regarding the current ELP course situation.

*Students' comprehension difficulties*
According to the results provided by the respondents, more than half of the students (55%) evaluate their level in reading English texts as beginner, i.e., they could just identify words and sentence elements and structures and no more than that. While 43% of students stated that, in addition to vocabulary they could also interpret the general idea of the text, in other words they consider themselves having an intermediate level. An exception is made for one informant who considered himself of an advanced level with the ability to identify, interpret and analyse the linguistic, contextual and discoursal elements of the text.

Regarding the nature of their reading difficulties, data were gathered at three language levels: the phonological, the syntactic, and the lexical levels. Nearly half of the students (50.87%) stated to have difficulties to match words with their sounds/pronunciation. 38, 59% informants reported

that they had a problem at the syntactic level; they added that they did not understand the grammatical relationship between sentences. Concerning lexical difficulties, it should be noted that some students ticked more than one answer. First, 61,42% students reported that when reading they could not understand word meanings. 33.33% of them ticked that they did not know what the text was about in general. Finally, 73,68% students stated to have a difficulty to know the meaning of some sentences. We deduce from informants' arguments, the existence of difficulties at all language levels.

### English Course Content
The content of the English course is inappropriate to ELP students' study needs, because it focuses mainly on general English activities or provides business terminology or translation. The content provided cannot be considered as a source for legal vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, except for some broad lines no ELP syllabus is provided by the Department.
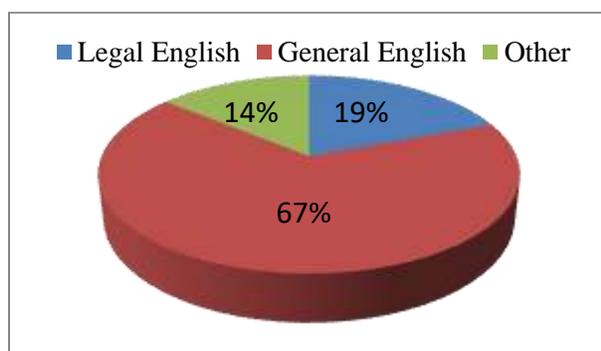


*Figure 1*. **English course content**

Concerning the extent to which students are satisfied with the reading topics dealt with, it appears from their answers that the percentage of students who seem to be interested in the provided topics represents 53,15%. However, 46.84% are not satisfied because, according to them, the topics are not related to the other modules, or are not motivating, or are difficult to comprehend.

### The Reading Frequency in the Classroom
In addition, the data obtained from teachers' answers revealed that the English course in general and the reading activities in particular are not instructed with the same time distribution. Some teachers devote half an hour in each lecture, others an hour and a half or even three hours for each didactic unit, and a teacher emphasizes all his sessions on text comprehension, that is, the time allocated to reading activities is not the same for all the students.

43.83% of students asserted that they read the text with their teachers twice; while, others (33.33%) stated that they read it only once. Regarding self-reading, 52,63% of students responded that their teacher asked them to read the same text twice; whereas, twenty-one informants (36,84%) said that broadly speaking they were ordered to read the text only once. The answers are summarized in the table 1:

**Table 1.** *The reading frequency in the classroom*

| Reading Frequency of the same text / Types of reading | Once | | Twice | | Three Times | | More | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | AF | RF | AF | RF | AF | RF | AF | RF |
| With the teacher | 19 | 33,33% | 25 | 43,85% | 6 | 10,52% | 7 | 12,28% |
| Self-reading | 21 | 36,84% | 30 | 52,63% | 3 | 5,26% | 3 | 5,26% |

The students' questionnaire also shows that informants are aware of the inadequacy of the time allocated to the English course with their learning needs. They maintain that the English course time load is not sufficient to deal with more texts, to vary the genres, to increase the frequency of text reading in class, and to augment the number of reading tasks. In addition, they do not receive reading homework assignments to overcome the lack of time, i.e., they are not intensively exposed to English texts.

Finally, even if the students see that the English course can complete the content modules, they maintain that they do not like the English course in general (38%) or that they are not interested by the provided reading topics in particular (36,84%) because they have a problem of comprehension. The results obtained also show an unbalanced use of the reading strategies. All teachers emphasize mainly inferring the meaning from context, skimming, scanning and vocabulary acquisition, and only 2 out of 7 teachers activate students' background knowledge.

*Readiness to Use Blended Approach*
Regarding informants' attitudes towards the use of a blended approach, the gathered information from teachers and students' answers are not identical. The teachers disapprove the idea, and stated that it is not possible to use this approach; this may show that they are not ready to use it. According to them, various constraints and limitations exist and play a negative role to the feasibility of the blended approach in their context: Absence of conditions, lack of technological materials, students' internet inaccessibility, reticence from a new teaching/learning environment, and students' lack of technological skills are the main arguments advocated.

Unlike teachers, students demonstrate an interest to support their English course with online activities. In addition, they stated to have personal computers and to have an easy access to the net as they are daily users leading to assume that the requirements to establish a blended learning environment exist in the present situation. From students' answers, we can deduce that the technological materials are available to experiment a blended course. This will also allow ELP students to be exposed to intensive reading activities and overcome lack of teaching time.

**Blended ELP Course Pre-requisite**
This study revealed that the ELP students need to develop their reading skill. It was also noticed that they have to increase their learning time. Thus, this paper recommends a blended approach to overcome these difficulties. Therefore, the role of the teacher should be readapted to the current

situation, i.e., an ESP practitioner specialised in teaching ELP and instructing his lectures both in the classroom and online. The following pedagogical suggestions can overcome the noticed issues.

### ELP Teacher Role

Informants declared that neither the lectures nor the activities are programmed and prepared in accordance with a prescribed syllabus. Accordingly, the ELP teacher major role is to design a syllabus and learning activities. However, he needs to be aware of the students' needs which constitute a major source of information for his course design and for choosing the appropriate teaching methodology. Second, as an ESP teacher, he has to organize his course, to set learning objectives, to establish a positive learning environment in the classroom, and to evaluate students' progress. Then, when teaching legal English the teacher has to provide a comprehensible content input; therefore, he is required to possess an important corpus of legal terminology and knowledge that helps him to cope with the new teaching situation.

In addition, as already stated, the online teacher has to master additional skills in technology to deal with in this new teaching environment and to use new teaching strategies. Besides, his pedagogical and managerial roles he has to integrate his students into the virtual social environment and to choose and perhaps design an appropriate computing programme that supports the learning goals and helps students to become competent users.

The above mentioned roles are considered as basics for the ELP online teacher; however, it is not an easy task. The time required teaching specific language and content using blended approach is much longer than that spent in a traditional educational context. That is why it is important to train ELP teacher to manage and perform his roles according to students' necessities, lacks and wants.

### Content Selection

In education the content is mainly represented in the topic and the text selected for pedagogical purposes. This selection is of central significance in the course design process. Therefore, it is necessary to choose topics that belong to students' specialty taking into consideration subject specialists' suggestions and learners' needs in materials design. These topics can be related to the British and American legal systems, international laws, administrative laws and human rights. Furthermore, when the students have needs to study the language, as such they have a tendency to be less motivated to learn it. However, they will be more interested in learning English as an interesting activity if they deal with topics closely associated to their field of study. Accordingly, the more narrowly and explicitly a topic is related to their area of concern, the more they will be motivated to work on and to deal with the language content presented.

Subsequent to the selection of the suitable topics that will be used for the didactic units, the ELP teacher will have to select the appropriate texts for reading practice, by providing the ones which reflect real life situations. To ensure course efficiency, authentic texts are intensively motivating and helpful. The students should be exposed as widely as possible to legal discourse from the beginning. The selected texts should include a variety of text genres that the students are likely to become familiar with and produce for academic or professional purposes. These resources are available in diverse printed or electronic sources related to the students' field of speciality such

as specialised journals and articles, academic textbooks, magazines and newspapers written in the target language by native or non-native speakers. By using authentic texts, the students will be able to identify the most and widely used specific vocabulary and grammatical structures applied in English.

To sum up, authentic texts can be implemented or simplified if the teacher feels that this would develop a pedagogic value. However, such materials have to be set up for learners' needs and requirements purposes, be prominently interesting, able to generate a lot of practical and interesting classroom activities and readable by the target students.

## Techniques for Teaching Reading in the ELP Classroom

The aim of the language teacher is to help his learners to communicate effectively in the target situation. In the case of reading, this means helping students to use reading strategies to maximize their comprehension of text and identify relevant information. Different techniques can be suggested to fulfill this goal.

ELP teacher should focus on both the process and the product of reading. It is important to develop students' awareness of the reading process and reading strategies by asking them to think about how they read in Arabic or in French. Teacher also helps his students to practice the full repertoire of reading strategies by using authentic reading tasks. He has the responsibility to guide his students to learn to read and vice-versa by providing interesting reading materials. Furthermore, students should be conscious of what they are doing while they complete reading assignments in class or at home. Doing so, students can develop their abilities to handle interactive situations they may encounter beyond the classroom.

The effective reader is the student who knows how to use strategies before, during, and after reading, .i.e., teaching reading strategies is an integral part of the use of reading activities. Before reading, the tasks are prepared according to the purpose of reading and the needed linguistic or background knowledge. During and after reading, students comprehension should be monitored by examining their predictions and content guesses, by defining what is important to understand, and by rereading to check comprehension. After reading students are assessed; first, their comprehension is evaluated according to a specific task or area, and then the appropriateness of the used strategies is verified.

## E-learn Platforms to Teach ELP Reading

Nowadays, the computer is a significant part of the learner's daily life. "It is, by now, inevitable that methods of teaching and learning should include E-learning components that are based on the computer environment and include proper preparation for the 21st century which requires a "new pedagogy""(Martin & Madigan, 2006,p. 201). The latter requires appropriate tools available and easy to manage for the teacher.

E-learn platforms as Moodle were created to combine online and face to face instructions. They have become very popular among teachers around the world as teaching tools. There are many ways to use Moodle. It can be used to conduct full online courses, or simply to augment face-to-face courses (known as blended learning). Many institutions use it as their platform where we can find all the necessary information such as Tlemcen University web site *(*www.univ-

tlemcen.dz/). Moodle has also features that allow it to be used for large numbers of users. Furthermore, many activities such as forums, databases, and wikis are considered by the students as fashionable. This can help them to build collaborative communities of learning around their subject matter. Moreover, Moodle can be used as a way to deliver content to students and assess learning using assignments or quizzes. All these features, and more specifically the last one, provide strong arguments to use Moodle platform as an open source to deliver blended ELP reading course through Tlemcen University web site. However, what are the main didactic and pedagogical advantages when using Moodle? The next part will try to answer this question.According to Race (2008), Moodle is designed to support a style of learning called Social Constructionism. This style of learning is interactive. "Learning is interactive when learners are actively engaged in a variety of activities, and along with their peers and teacher, they are co-constructors of knowledge." (Chamberlain &Vrasidas, 2001, p. 79). People learn best when they interact with the learning material and interact with the teacher or other students about the material. Race (2008) maintains that Moodle does not require the teacher to use the social constructionist method for his course. However, it best supports this method. For example, with Moodle platform the teacher can add course material that a student reads, but does not interact with.

Race (2008) also adds that as Moodle supports interaction and exploration, students' learning process will often be non-linear. Nevertheless, Moodle has few features for imposing a specific order upon a course. Teachers need to manually enroll the student in each part of the course. If the teacher wants to impose that kind of linear course, he needs to place his students into controlled groups that are authorized to view and perform the target tasks.

It is also important to mention that Moodle offers a variety of different activities from giving information via testing to final evaluation. Dudeney & Hockly (2007) see a big advantage mainly in the fact that in such a form of course everything is done in one place. Using blended courses leads to simplifying lesson preparation and saving time. The online tutor can control students' activities and see the amount of time they have spent online or what documents and forums they have accessed. In our case, i.e., Algerian ELP students, the LMD system imposes that during an academic year they should perform approximately 80 to 90 hours for personal work (Art 7 of Order No. 137 of 20 June 2009); thus, it is an interesting tool to assess, evaluate and grade our students.

In addition to the above pedagogical solutions that have been suggested to fulfill students' needs and to stimulate their motivation for learning English, it important to programme at least two sessions of one hour and a half per week to reach a certain degree of course efficiency.

**Conclusion**

This study investigated ELP teaching situation at Tlemcen University (Algeria) and explored students' and teachers' attitudes towards the use of Blended course. The results revealed that the students are not competent in comprehending legal text. In addition, they stated that they are eager to support their English course with extra hours. Accordingly, Blended learning approach can help to overcome lack of teaching time and to expose ELP students to additional reading activities. This recommendation should be the subject for further and in depth investigation in which both

academicians and ministry officials would take part in order to generalize the idea across all the Algerian universities.

**Footnotes**

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