

## Enhancing the Acquisition of Legal English through Role Play

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### Abstract

*The study focuses on Caspian University students' opinions about the usage of role play as a tool for enhancing legal English vocabulary in ESP class. The participants of this study were 25 undergraduates 2nd year of the "Dream Team" programme of "Adilet" Higher School of Law. The instruments used in this study were Google form open-ended questionnaire and written interview about students' perspectives on the effectiveness of using role play for enhancing Legal English vocabulary in ESP class. The study's findings showed that students commonly understood the advantages and importance of role play in the teaching of legal English vocabulary. The analysis and finding of the collected data revealed that most of the students consider role play and generally games useful and can broaden the language acquisition process, also using active teaching strategies in ESP class can increase students' interest and motivation to further learning of foreign language by feedback, team work and self-reflection. This paper studies the vocabulary proficiency of 2nd year undergraduate students of legal specialties through role play and to understand students' attitudes and progress towards proficiency.*

**Keywords:** ESP, Legal English, Proficiency, Role play, Vocabulary

### Introduction

The linguistic picture in Kazakhstan is unique, which is characterized by sociolinguistic and demographic complexity with more than 125 ethnic groups represented.

The entry of Kazakhstan into the world community, as well as the influence of political, economic, social and cultural globalization on communication in the country, require the role and place of the English language in the social and communicative life of the country and the comprehensive development of its functioning in various fields. Thus, the integration processes taking place in Kazakhstan have led to the dynamic development of the English language, which has affected all areas of activity.

Therefore, English for Specific Purposes is intended for future specialists to form their professional foreign language communicative competence, in order that students can continue their education in a foreign language environment, mastering the profession and carrying out professional activities.

Earlier English for Specific Purposes teachers devoted too little time to teaching vocabulary in the classroom. They taught isolated words on a vocabulary list, had students translate them into the L1, or students learnt vocabulary taken independently from glossaries. Not all the students were the same, however. Only a few of them benefited from this kind of learning vocabulary; for others, it was an overwhelming challenge. Many students had difficulty communicating due to the lack of specialty vocabulary (Khamitova et al., 2019, p.24).

Professional vocabulary is one of the important aspects for any specialist, besides grammar and pronunciation. A good vocabulary and the ability to use and to apply the words correctly and effectively can help easily communicate and to solve issues connecting with professional area. Therefore, a foreign language teacher has an influential role in stimulating students to enhance their vocabulary stock.

Teachers typically prepare materials for their students to enhance their vocabulary by using drills or exercises while teaching vocabulary, but if the teachers continue to use these monotonous methods of learning vocabulary, students might become bored.

Teachers must create lessons that will inspire students, provoke their interest in learning, and help them expand their vocabulary. Students can find a motivating and enjoyable situation when the teacher uses fun activities such as games, movies/ cartoons, and so on. The majority of English teachers deal with passive students who find it difficult or unable to speak in class given the lack of vocabulary or a lack of interest in foreign language classes. Speaking practice in the classroom usually takes the form of drills, in which one teacher or student poses a question and another responds. The focus of asking and answering the question is to show that you can do both. However, it has the potentiality to bore students and demotivate them from attempting to communicate in a foreign language. As a result, in order to improve vocabulary knowledge in the classroom, the instructor should provide students with communicative activities in which they can participate effectively in the teaching and learning process. Applying one of the teaching techniques, such as role play can make practical usage participants' vocabulary skills for communication alive. Role play is an effective method to make the language teaching and learning process more interesting, and enhance the language acquisition in certain area.

Role-playing is interactive education that brings learning to life. Students move around and they feel an emotional tie to the story. It immerses students into history and literature through alternative means beyond the text. Students hear, see, and act the story, increasing their comprehension (Sherrin, 2016, p.15).

By using role play, students feel free to play, improvise and create their idea. Furthermore, since the instructor allows students to explore their activities, many students would be more flexible and inspired to perform their part.

In role play there are many topics available for role play purposes, such as defendant and foreign investigator, policeman and traffic offender, bankruptcy petition, dispute on judge court and so on. According to Jason Anderson, "Role play activities have been a part of language teaching for many years. They are popular with teachers and students alike for several following reasons:

1. They provide the spoken language practice is vital for all language learning;
2. They provide us with opportunity to take our students out of the classroom for a 'test run' of real world language use;
3. They allow student to become someone else for part of the lesson, and thereby to leave behind their inhibitions and worries;
4. They involve an element of play that provides an enjoyable contrast to the course book exercises and helps to develop rapport between students" (Anderson, 2006, p.6).

On the other hand in role play students also require learners to use language to understand the meaning, and students also require paying more attention to maintenance of social relationships.

As Gillian Porte Ladousse stated, "Role play belongs to that category of language learning techniques sometimes referred to as low input-high output. This means that teacher –centred presentation phase of the lesson is very short and not at all the same as it would be for a controlled practice drill. After a brief

introduction, the students plunge into an activity in which accomplishing the task is more important than using the exact word, in which fluency predominates over accuracy. Obviously, the language the students use does not come out of a top hat at the wave of a magic wand, and must have been acquired at an earlier stage” (Ladousse,1987, p. 9).

Using role play for the students are given a situation in performing their role play and this approach will be effective if the students confident and cooperative.

Besides, role play train students’ intellectual, social and imagination because role, in which the students involves in problem solving; to encourage negotiation, to develop communication and public speaking skills, etc.

Based on the explanation on the background the writer formulates the problem of the research as follows: “Is role play effective in developing legal vocabulary skills for the students?”

The objective of the study is to find the effectiveness of using role play in improving the students’ legal vocabulary skills.

The study expected to know the effectiveness of using role play in teaching and learning legal vocabulary. Therefore, role play helps to provide knowledge on ways to develop natural ways in legal term in activities and to become more active in classes. This tool probably will be used as a reference for those who want to conduct English classes actively, especially by using involving activities such as playing games, watching YouTube channels, presentations, etc.

## Literature Review

“ESP is a relatively recent branch of English-language teaching (ELT). It originated in the 1960s, driven by an accelerated world economy, itself driven by the increase in the demand for oil and an overall increase in international trade. There was a need to communicate on a global scale to facilitate and participate in this economic surge. English became the language of choice. This led to an increase in international students at universities in English speaking countries. ESP was a response to this need, and its aim was to equip learners with a command of English in an efficient manner by basing courses on what students actually needed rather than teaching the whole language system”, (Woodrow, 2018, p.10).

Giuseppina Scotto di Carlo quotes Dudley-Evans & St John, who distinguished ESP in two subsections, namely English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EOP responds to the needs for English specific professions, such as doctors, lawyers, hotel staff, and other professions. EAP is usually taught to students who need English for their studies in educational institutions, such as universities. EAP can be further divides into English Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP), such as medicine, engineering, and economics, and English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), such as academic listening and writing (Giuseppina Scotto di Carlo, 1987, p. 6).

According to Coxhead, ESP is an umbrella term for areas of specialisation, including English for Academic Purposes, Professional and Occupational Purposes, and English Trades (Coxhead, 2018, p. 14).

“EOP is often classified by whether the area may be classed as professional or vocational. For example, English for legal purposes would be classified as professional, whereas English for tour guides would be classed as vocational”, (Woodrow, 2018, p.9).

Considering ESP teaching strategies students and teachers needs challenges by changing teaching techniques and methods. Teachers and students should be able to choose the most effective methods, strategies, tools, and so on.

I.S.P. Nation particularly mentioned that special vocabularies are made by systematically restricting the range of topics or language uses investigated. It is thus possible to have special vocabularies for speaking, for reading academic texts, for reading newspapers, for reading children's stories, or for letter writing. Technical vocabularies are also kinds of specialized vocabularies. Some specialized vocabularies are made by doing frequency counts using a specialized corpus. Some are made by experts in the field gathering what they consider to be relevant vocabulary (Nation, 2000,p. 24).

I.S.P. Nation emphasized that a word is not fully learned through one meeting with it, even if this meeting involves substantial deliberate teaching. This is because

1. There are numerous things to know about a word, namely its form (spoken, written, and its component affixes and stem), its meaning (underlying concept, particular instantiations, and associations), and its use (collocations, grammatical patterns, and constraints on its use).

2. There are several strands through which knowledge of a word needs to develop, namely through meeting in meaning focused input, through direct study and teaching, through meaning focused production, and through fluency development activities.

3. As we shall see, learners seem to be capable of dealing with only a limited amount of information at a time - too much confuses.

Because of this, we should expect only limited learning from single meetings with a word and should bear this in mind when we plan or carry out those meetings. This means that a small positive step forward in knowledge, such as being told the translation of a word, should not be criticized as being only a partial inadequate representation of the word, but should be seen as a useful step in the cumulative process of learning a particular word.

The effectiveness of the communication and comprehension of word meaning will depend on three major sets of factors - the skill of the teacher, writer, or lecturer, the skill of the learner, and the features of the language involved (Nation, 2000, p. 121-122).

ESP vocabulary is considered in study with various types, such as general, academic, subject-specific, technical, semi-technical and others. According to Steven A. Stahl and William E. Nagy a comprehensive approach to promoting vocabulary growth has three main parts: teaching specific words, increasing students' exposure to rich oral and written language, and increasing students' generative word knowledge (i.e., their awareness and interest in words, and their ability to make effective use of context, word parts, and definitions) (Stahl and Nagy, 2006, p. 61). Academicians - teachers, trainers, lectures, tutors, etc., or professionals - lawyers, photographers, journalist, etc. have certain knowledge about specific vocabulary and how to use them correctly. Therefore, the vocabulary selection should be focused on students' needs on base of their fields of future specialization. Both learners and teachers must be conscious of learning and teaching methods in order to produce effective results in ESP vocabulary (both general and technical) learning and usage.

In our case, the leading source of mastering legal vocabulary is official documents, sections of law, agreements, testimonies, acts and so on. H. Basturkmen points out that one of the key characteristics of

ESP is that teachers and course developers value the use of authentic texts and tasks. The term ‘authentic’ denotes that the texts were written for purposes other than language teaching and learning. For example, should we be developing a course for financial accountants, we would probably try to include texts written by accountants and those in related financial sectors. Authentic texts play an important role in demonstrating ‘real’ language use (Basturkmen, 2010, p. 63).

Dr. Helen Gubby, barrister highlights that a non-native speaker could be very proficient in ordinary English and still be lost for words in a legal discussion. Even a native English speaker may find legal English quite inaccessible if he has no legal training. This is because legal English is a professional language and uses certain words and expressions that are totally outside the experience of a layperson (Gubby, 2016, p. 9).

Professional vocabulary is considered as a substantial element in procuring of occupational skills. Considering works connected with ESP, vocabulary teaching and learning strategies we can say that not only enhancing vocabulary skills are important, but also right usage of words is significant. Therefore very relevant to choose a method and techniques, which gathers all factors such as speaking, reading, writing, listening and so on facilitating in advantageous way. Taking to accounts researchers’ suggestions I came to a conclusion that using games have a positive effect on enhancing vocabulary skills, namely right usage, memorization, strong speaking abilities, also games have a psychological effect like self-confidence, teamwork, the spirit of competition, urge, motivation, etc.

The aim of this study was to find answers to the following research questions, all of which were asked from the perspective of ESP students:

1. What is the relevance of role play in learning professional vocabulary?
2. How far does role play effectively help to memorize new vocabulary?
3. What are students’ opinions/ reactions about using role play for enhancing Legal English vocabulary?

### Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been derived from the research questions:

1. Role play is one of the active teaching strategies that help students to personalize their learning by allowing them to schedule, organize, and track their own activities.
2. Combination of students into groups involving to play the role in the performance arises cooperation among students. Performance is result of the whole group; therefore, all students try to understand thoroughly.
3. Role play shows that using is not completely effective in teaching and learning professional vocabulary.

### Methodology

To achieve our purpose, we focused on the perception and attitudes of our students as well as what students gained through their learning with role play. The strategy entails playing a role-playing game in ESP classes to see how students responded to this form of learning legal English vocabulary.

Applying and observation of role play will take around two weeks. For collecting data we will use the research tools, like the semi - structured interview (10 questions long) and open ended questionnaire (10 questions long).

To see if role play can be used to help students feel more relaxed and engaged in knowing a new vocabulary in ESP classes.

## Participants

This study was undertaken in Caspian University (further CU), Almaty, Kazakhstan. CU was founded in 1992. CU is a multidisciplinary private university).CU's goal is to help young people in their search of success and excellence.CU aspires to build students with an understanding of mission, intellectual capacity, and leadership, as well as the competence and responsibility to maintain learning and serving others throughout their lives. CU offers courses in 4 languages such as Kazakh, Russian, English and Chinese. CU provides training in 18undergraduate programs, 6 graduate programs, 2 Ph D programs and MBA. CU has 3 Higher Schools, 1 Academy and 1 Institute:

1. “Adilet” Higher School of Law;
2. Higher School of Economics and Management;
3. Higher School of Humanities;
4. Academy of Constructing, Architecture and Design;
5. Institute of Oil and Gas, Geology and IT.

Participants were 25 undergraduates 2<sup>nd</sup> year of “Dream Team” programme of “Adilet” Higher School of Law. The students’ aged between 20 and 22 with different language-learning background. “Caspian Dream Team” is a unique absolutely tuition free undergraduate program in the preparation “Law” specialities. Undergraduate programs are released trilingual specialists: Kazakh, Russian and English. Students can receive legal English, Russian, and Kazakh languages instruction for 5-6 hours per week. Furthermore, students can travel abroad once a year to improve their foreign language skills and have the opportunity to take educational modules at foreign universities.

## Procedures

The students' questionnaire (Appendix 1) was conducted online using Google Forms. Google Forms is simple and quick to use since it enables respondents to answer at any time and from any location with an internet connection. The purpose of the questionnaire and how to complete it were explained to the students who took part. Since the questions took some thinking, each participant was expected to spend at least 30 minutes on the questionnaire. Students answered the questions online over the course of two days. The answers were then examined by the researcher.

The written interview (Appendix 2) was conducted in English languages via email during a 5 day workweek. For the interview, each student set aside 30 minutes.

## Results

The study's findings show that teaching specific vocabulary through role play is effective. Students believe that in order to understand legal documents, interact and give public speeches in their professional sphere, and write business letters; students must have as much vocabulary as possible. Students are sure that using role play can describe an object or to make a story, which helps master them, and reading many legal texts enriches students' professional vocabulary. The lack of an English-speaking environment, according to participants, is the key reason students have trouble learning and using vocabulary; students learn new words in class, but they don't have the ability to use them outside of class. Students argue that language teachers lack confidence, creativeness, and training in using specific vocabulary teaching strategies. Students agree that learning vocabulary through games is useful and enjoyable; they think that role play helps better understand terms in usage and improve listening skills by playing scenes. According to the feedbacks, the most effective ways and tools are using terms to describe a situation, making a short stories or discussions, using role play, watching courtroom movies and so on.

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Pictures illustrating Role play "Family court case" with the students of "Caspian Dream Team" programme

## Discussion of Study Results

Regarding the first research question, the results of the present study show that students agreed to use role play in ESP class as vocabulary enhancing activity. It also shows that Law students are aware of the differences between ESP and general English courses, and that they are aware that general English alone will not suffice to meet their professional needs, and that they will have some very unique English requirements. The traditional teaching methods and techniques draw students' attention to mechanistic aspects of language learning and language use, like memorizing, recitation, where students passive – learners and curriculum is teacher-centred. Foreign language teachers should be mindful that training students how to learn foreign language mechanisms is not enough; they must also establish methods and techniques for connecting these structures to their communicative roles in practical applications.

Role play may encourage the ESP teacher in creating situations in which students are expected to provide information, discuss meaning, or speak freely so that they are actively engaged in the use of language.

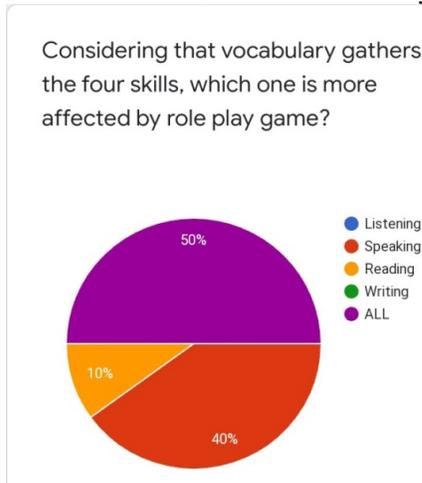
The results of Research Question 2 show that role play can supply more conventional drills for fast memorization of professional vocabulary, which mainly give repeated practice of new term through playing, applying certain role. During role play verbal explanations and different kinds of imitated cases from the courtroom focusing on specific patterns, such as using professional terms and jargons/ slangs draw students' attention on mechanistic aspects of memorization news words and their appropriate usage.

Regarding the third research question, the results of the present study illustrate that students have not mentioned improving writing and reading skills (Figure 1), but they are considered improving the range

of professional vocabulary through reading, listening and speaking. ESP students believe that role play reduces students' fear of public speaking in English, although students considered that learning specialized vocabulary depends on preparation, organization of activity, the careful arrangement of roles.

**Figure 1**

Pie Chart shows the view of students on efficiency of using role.



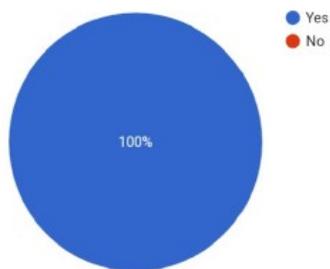
Generally, using role play technique is effective and useful way of strengthening professional vocabulary usage. The results of the questionnaire and interviews show that role play is a very powerful way to teach ESP. The role play makes class more exciting and interesting because it assists passive students by offering an outlet for students who have trouble conversing to express themselves. In addition, role play is a great challenge.

The most students will agree that role play leads careful thinking, acting like in real life circumstances. The use of role play motivates students and instils in them a positive attitude toward learning professional vocabulary.

**Figure 2**

Pie Chart illustrates students' opinion towards the use of role play

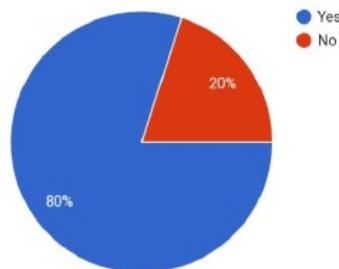
Do you see language role play game as enjoyable method ?



**Figure 3**

Pie Chart shows how much role play motivate students

Do you think role play game is motivated to use the language?



The limitation of this study is only to discuss the effectiveness of role play in strengthening of usage of legal English vocabulary.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Using games to teach and learn vocabulary is an important and engaging method that can be used in any classroom. The aim of paper was to understand the effectiveness of using role play in strengthening usage of legal vocabulary. Role play simultaneously gives the opportunity to develop not only vocabulary stock, also to develop public speaking skills, which is important for specialties as lawyers.

The findings of this study indicate that role plays are used not only for entertainment, but also for useful language practice and analysis.

The hypothesis of the study is approved that role play is an effective and useful strategy in learning professional vocabulary.

Professional language is a combination of skills where listening, writing, grammar and speaking has specific requirements, fixed language standards, usage area. Most learners have problems with vocabulary usage, because legal language is like other specific areas that have its own features, most legal terms make students confused, because their meanings usually have another sense in everyday life.

The teachers should be aware of their student difficulties of mastering professional vocabulary and they should find suitable strategies or methods in order to help them to enhance and strengthen their language proficiency level. Therefore the teachers have to apply role play in teaching ESP for making students highly motivated to participate in the classroom. Relying on the results of the study we recommend the following:

- to create an enjoyable environment in order make their students actively to participate in classroom activities;
- to motivate students to use as much as possible new professional terms;
- to develop and examine using/ applying games as classroom tool of learning foreign language;
- to stimulate students to speak English in or outside of the classroom by using words from professional area;
- to work jointly with students about class activities;
- to take rightly students' language mistakes, they will learn from their mistakes;
- to plan and design a manner of introducing role play properly, wisely planned classroom activities is one of the teaching strategies, which give opportunity to curry good classroom management.

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## Appendix 1

### Students' Questionnaire (Google form)

**Dear student,**

Hope you all are safe and doing great!

Kindly take 30 minutes to fill up this Google form to help me understand your feedback on role of role play in ESP class.

The following questionnaire is a part of study that deals with role play and their impact on the professional vocabulary mastering. Your answers will be of great help for our study.

**Thank you in advance !!!**

E-mail address:

Full name:

Age:

Gender:

Designation:

Name of the Institution (School/College/University) Write Full Name, no abbreviations:

Place of the Institution with address:

Contact number (Whatsapp No.):

1. Do you think role plays motivated to master an English in higher level ?Yes/ No -why?
2. Do you present new words in every ESP class? Yes / No
3. Do you have problems with using new words ? Yes / No
4. What kind of difficulties you face in learning legal English words?
6. How do you see the efficiency of role play in ESP class?
7. Have teachers ever tried to change the usual technique of teaching ESP? Yes/No How?
8. Do you believe in the use of language games for presenting vocabulary?why?
9. Do you see language role play as enjoyable method?
10. Considering that vocabulary gathers the four skills, which one is more affected by roleplay ? Listening/speaking/reading/writing

**Thank you !!!**

## Appendix 2

### Students' interview

**Good day, dear Student,**

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

Kindly take **30 minutes** to answer on this questions\*.

**Thank you in advance !!!**

1. For you, is legal vocabulary important in learning English? Why?
2. What are the main problems you face in learning legal vocabulary through role play?
3. Usually, what are the techniques teachers use in the class for mastering professional vocabulary?
4. How was your feeling when taking part in a role play in ESP class?
5. In what ways did the role play useful for you?
6. Were you aware that you were learning something through the role play?
7. Do you want the technique of role play / language games to be applied in teaching professional vocabulary?
8. How often do you want to be used role play in ESP class?
9. What according to your experience are the disadvantages of using games?
10. Any suggestions for improvement ESP class.

**Thank you !!!**

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