CHALLENGES IN TEACHING LEGAL ENGLISH FOR NON-LAWYER INSTRUCTORS

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Teaching Legal English can be a daunting task for non-lawyer instructors. The language used in legal documents and conversations is often complex, formal, and highly specialized. It requires a deep understanding of the legal system, as well as the ability to explain difficult concepts clearly and accurately. In this article, I will discuss some of the main challenges faced by non-lawyer instructors when teaching Legal English and provide tips on how to overcome them.

1. Understanding Legal Terminology

One of the biggest challenges of teaching Legal English is dealing with the vast amount of legal terminology. Legal vocabulary is not only extensive but also highly specific. Many words and phrases have very precise meanings that are different from their everyday usage [2]. For example, the word ‘consideration’ in contract law does not mean ‘careful thought or attention,’ but rather refers to something of value exchanged between parties to a contract.

To overcome this challenge, it is crucial for non-lawyer instructors to familiarize themselves with common legal terms and their meanings. They should consult specialized legal dictionaries and glossaries, and make use of online resources and textbooks designed for non-lawyers [2]. Additionally, they could consider inviting guest speakers from the legal field or arranging visits to law firms or courts to help students gain exposure to authentic legal language.

2. Explaining Complex Concepts

The legal system is complex and can be difficult to understand even for native speakers. Non-lawyer instructors may find it challenging to explain legal concepts and procedures in a way that is accessible to their students. Moreover, they need to ensure that their explanations are accurate and do not oversimplify the subject matter.

To address this challenge, non-lawyer instructors should break down complex concepts into smaller, more manageable parts. They can use visual aids, such as diagrams or flowcharts, to help students visualize the relationships between different components. It is also important to encourage students to ask questions and seek clarification whenever they do not understand something. Group discussions and role plays can be effective ways for students to explore legal concepts in a more interactive and engaging manner.

3. Adapting to Different Legal Systems

Legal systems vary significantly from one country to another, both in terms of their structure and the specific laws they enforce. Non-lawyer instructors may find it
challenging to teach Legal English when they are not familiar with the legal system of the target language [1].

In such cases, non-lawyer instructors should focus on teaching the language itself rather than the legal content. They can provide general information about the legal system without going into too much detail. It is also important to emphasize that Legal English is an international language used by lawyers and legal professionals around the world, regardless of the legal system they operate in. By exposing students to authentic legal texts, such as contracts or court judgments, non-lawyer instructors can help them develop the necessary skills to understand and use Legal English in a global context.

4. Developing Specialized Skills

Legal English requires a set of specialized skills that go beyond general English proficiency. For example, lawyers need to be able to read and analyze complex legal documents, write concise and precise legal texts, and argue persuasively in court. Teaching these skills can be challenging for non-lawyer instructors who may not have first-hand experience in the legal profession.

To overcome this challenge, non-lawyer instructors should collaborate with legal professionals or seek input from experts in the field. They can invite guest speakers to talk about their experiences as lawyers or judges, or organize mock trials or debates to give students a taste of what it is like to work in the legal profession. Additionally, non-lawyer instructors should make use of authentic legal materials, such as case studies or legal journals, to expose students to real-life examples of legal writing and argumentation [3].

5. Keeping Up with Changes in the Law

The law is constantly evolving, with new statutes and precedents being established on a regular basis. Non-lawyer instructors may find it challenging to stay up to date with changes in the law, especially if they are not actively practicing in the legal field.

To address this challenge, non-lawyer instructors should make use of online resources and professional networks to stay informed about recent developments in the law. They can follow legal news websites or subscribe to legal journals to keep abreast of current issues. It is also important to encourage students to take an active role in their own learning by conducting independent research and staying informed about changes in the legal landscape.

Teaching Legal English can be a rewarding but challenging task for non-lawyer instructors. To overcome these challenges, it is crucial for non-lawyer instructors to familiarize themselves with legal terminology, break down complex concepts, adapt to different legal systems, and develop specialized skills. By addressing these challenges head-on, non-lawyer instructors can help their students gain the necessary language skills to succeed in the legal profession.

References: