

INTEGRATION OF LEGAL ENGLISH WITHIN AREA STUDIES FOR LAW STUDENTS IN CHINA

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Abstract. Legal English in China is rapidly evolving from technical language training into an intercultural, area-based pedagogy that prepares law students to navigate cross-border legal systems, cultural meanings, and pragmatic differences in global legal communication. This systematic review explores the reasons why Legal English (ELP programs) could be integrated within Area Studies for Chinese law students. Guided by Byram's Model of Intercultural Competence (ICC) and Deardoff's Process Model, this study thematically analyses 20 scholarly articles to identify emergent themes on the need to teach Legal English, pedagogical models and methods, and their outcomes, assessments, and gaps in this domain. The major findings reveal several dimensions of ELP-based pedagogy, viz., mapping the intercultural competence to communication skills and the interpretive capacity of learners in non-native environments. Hence, the application of Legal English in the Area Studies enabled an increase in overall employability, advocating for task-based frameworks and CLIL programs that showed overlapping objectives within different cultures and disciplines. However, ICC remains mostly self-reported and lacks performance-based scales. In the future, researchers should use longitudinal designs, broader and more diverse disciplinary samples, and triangulated assessment methods that combine performance-based tasks, client interviews, and validated self-report scales to increase the reliability of the study.

Keywords: *legal English, intercultural competence, area studies, CLIL, Chinese legal students*

Introduction

Legal English in China is rapidly transforming as it encourages law school graduates to engage with foreign legal systems, cross-border strategies, and different international scholarships. This required law students in particular to practice legal communication in the English language (often termed Legal English or English for Legal Purposes). This approach not only exposes students to engage in different intercultural practices, adapt to concepts in foreign legal systems, and be open to various institutions, but also help in customisation with the regional language (Wang et al., 2017). This form of combining regional knowledge with linguistic instructions could be integrated within area studies. This will compel students to interpret legal cultures innovatively and also shape the cultural meaning to adapt to various legal micro-environments.

Legal English serves as a "lingua franca" for issuing international contracts and carrying out a contrasting study to promote arbitration, position legal transactions, and demand more than technical expertise. The learners, therefore, must be able to identify concepts that are specific to the system and understand the cultural, political, and regional information that is embedded in the reasoning behind legal systems (Anesa,

2019). Hence, the pragmatic differences must be noticed as evident within the common law versus civil law frameworks. Therefore, Legal English must be treated as a site for interaction between cross-cultural systems, and considered as a discourse that goes beyond vocabulary used for tasks that behave like intercultural legal communication in real time. This is a major transformation in pedagogy that helps in the negotiation of pragmatic differences.

Students report higher levels of motivation and report enhanced perceived usefulness when learning from language is correlated to legal practices and content. Positive outcomes for Legal English and ESP are reflected in the evidence-based literature. For instance, students are intrigued to participate in problem-solving and significantly improve their reading skills while reading legal texts published in English (Contero Urgal, 2019). Moreover, certain skills, such as competence in oral communication, are set as objectives for students to acquire, rather than being assigned certain curricular mandates in Legal English (Contero Urgal, 2019). This indicates that competence in cross-cultural communication is not considered a curricular outcome. Rather, it needs to be guided professionally and integrated evenly within programs to link intercultural legal skills with regional knowledge.

Problem statement

Chinese law programs and curricula have internalised Legal English, as exchange programs with international universities, due to globalisation. Despite having overlapping evidence on Legal English and its ability to induce intercultural competence, there is less evidence that deals with its integration in Area Studies, specifically in the context of Chinese legal students. Investigation of this domain of knowledge will help identify whether it is important for Chinese law students to be aware of the regional aspects (Area Studies) and if it impacts the cross-cultural competence in contrasting law environments. This scoping review maps the assessment outcomes and gaps, while focusing on the need for teaching Legal English in Area Studies, by delineating the pedagogical methods and models. This enables the identification of evidential gaps that evaluate and inform on the curricula in Chinese Legal English education. The research aim is to identify the need for Legal English, the teaching and application of Legal English in China.

Overarching research question

What is the need to teach Legal English within Area Studies for Chinese Law Students? The study has been centred around three research questions derived from the main research question: (RQ1): What is the evidences that validate the integration of Legal English with Area Studies for Chinese law students? (RQ2): Which pedagogical models and methods are well-suited for integrating Legal English and Area Studies? (RQ3): How do current assessment practices measure in intercultural gaps and comparative outcomes?

Research significance

This research highlights the importance of Legal English, particularly in the context of China. The rationale for the choice of this study lies in an understanding that teachers and students must be exposed to the rhetorical meaning of English in Area Studies, so that they can internalise texts, keeping the political, social, and regional knowledge in

mind. This not only eases the communication among people belonging to different cultures, but also helps teaching professionals focus on the successful implementation of ICC across curricula. Thus, this special approach in particular shows how the adoption of a second language in the interpretation of texts is useful in understanding the area-specific meanings of words from the perspective of a non-native learner.

Theoretical framework

The theory of Intercultural Competence (ICC) is positioned as a teaching outcome for this study, as Legal English, cultural knowledge, and language overlap with each other. Contextually, two complementary theoretical models frame the basis of this paper, namely Deardoff's Process Model and Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (IC/C). Collectively, these two theoretical models offer a taxonomical approach to the competencies required for assessment and teaching, to serve as a 'process view' on how learners of Legal English within Area Studies are benefited comparatively to those who do not get an exposure to Legal English.

Byram's model

The five savours of the teachable components are interrelated to each other, and comprise the knowledge, attitude, skills for interpretation and relating, skills for discovery and interaction, and critical cultural analysis. According to Byram (1997) judgment is suspended by curiosity, openness, and readiness in terms of learner attitude, while knowledge consists of awareness of institutional practices and social groups, whereby the legal cultures and legal systems play a vital role. Additionally, the ability to relate exemplars from another culture to our own are comprised in relating and interpretation skills, while the acquisition of cultural knowledge and engagement in effective interaction with others consist of skills of discovery and interaction (Byram, 1997). Finally, the power relations and cultural practices are respectively critiqued under critical cultural awareness. Going by Byram's framework, teachable activities in the classrooms such as reflexive tasks, role-plays, text analysis, etc, are linked to language education. This helps in the stabilization of the sub-components of ICC that are targeted within the assessment and the syllabus.

Deardorff's process model

The ICC is described as a developmental process, as framed by Deardorff, as a source of openness, respect, and curiosity, encompassed within the attitude of the learners, that promotes acquiring knowledge and skills. This explains how empathy, frame shifting, and adaptability could be mapped into the external outcomes, which include intercultural behaviour while interacting with others (Deardorff, 2023; Leung et al., 2014). Therefore, both external outcomes, consisting of observed performance in communication, and internal outcomes in perspective-taking and self-concept, could be interpreted by this model. To establish an alignment between assessments and learning activities, the evaluation based on scenarios and self-reports (mixed method assessment) is stressed.

Materials and Methods

Research design

A systematic review approach was selected for this research, based on data collection from empirical evidence from peer reviewed literature. A systematic review offers an idea by summative analysis of the evidence related to the selected domain, belonging to credible sources of information. Following the systematic literature search, the methodological papers focused on Legal English or English for Special Purposes that were searched in the Chinese context were selected for synthesizing the evidence.

Data collection strategy

Three academic databases, viz. Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus were used to conduct the searches. For data collection, certain keywords were selected and combined by the AND/OR technique using Boolean Operators so that the selected articles remain relevant to the topic. For instance: "Legal English" OR "English for Legal Purposes" OR ELP) AND ("intercultural competence" OR "cross-cultural communication") was used to search for relevant papers. For Area studies, the "Legal English" OR "English for Specific Purposes") AND ("Area Studies" OR "regional studies") AND ("law students" OR "legal education") was involved. Finally, to add the Chinese context, "Legal English" OR ELP OR "English for Legal Purposes") AND ("intercultural competence" OR "comparative law") AND (China OR Chinese) was followed.

Selection criteria

Inclusion -exclusion criteria

The inclusion-exclusion criteria were followed to screen the scholarly articles. Papers published in English between 2019-2025 were specifically included to increase the timeliness of the study. This ensured that the papers validated by other researchers provided complete information published in English to attract a wider section of readers (Kraus et al., 2022). Papers were specifically focused on the Chinese context and were related to either Legal English, English for Special Purposes, or English Medium Instruction. Because of the vague nature of the titles in some of the papers, the papers were thoroughly read, and the inclusion criteria were applied. Exclusively full-text articles were included in this review. The final stage of selection resulted in the selection of 20 papers in total based on the consensual agreement of all the authors.

The exclusion criteria involved rejecting all the papers published in languages other than English, rejecting the papers that were published before and after the selected time frame to reduce the possibility of including obsolete or too current and unauthenticated evidence, to reject the papers not related to Legal English/English for Special Purposes/Chinese context and to reject articles having only abstracts.

Research design

The research design chosen for this study was thematic analysis. According to Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021), thematic analysis provides enough chances to explore the nuances about a particular topic, offering enough scope to the researcher to answer the research question by synthesizing emergent themes from the major findings of the selected papers. Additionally, the data extracted from the articles could be represented uniquely by thematically analysing the data and mapping it to a specific field, as suggested by Lester et al. (2020). To maintain the credibility and authenticity of

the data, the datasets selected were relevant to the domain. Moreover, the data extracted had broader implications on wider research gaps and acted as persuasive tools for the readers. Therefore, a systematic review composed of thematically analysed data would abolish any risk of duplication and offer augmented analysis of the selected datasets.

In this paper, the thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clark (Byrne, 2022) was followed to analyse the selected set of papers. The commonalities in the datasets were identified and their patterns were enlisted to detect the emergent themes (Need for teaching Legal English, Methods and Pedagogical Models, Assessment, Outcomes and Gaps). The process involved familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themselves, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the interpretive report. Finally defining and naming the themes according to Byrne (2021) helped in generating the report that highlighted the implications of the collected data. The dedicated themes in the literature were tagged using manual colour coding, and the major findings were discussed in detail to answer the overarching research question.

Scientific evaluation

The thematically deduced emergent patterns and the trends in data were processed, whose validity and feasibility were confirmed by the PRISMA guidelines. Costa et al. (2024) suggest this methodology to maintain the quality of the selected studies that have been selected for data analysis. Moreover, the reliability of the secondary data used were tested using the Critical Appraisal Skills (CASP) (Costa et al., 2024). These strategies ensured that heterogeneity is maintained while selecting the studies, such that the findings from the study aligned with the expected outcomes.

Ethical consideration and expected outcomes

The research work maintained all possible ethical principles specific to referencing in the existing studies and acknowledged the authorship of intended intellectual property. The conceptual integrity was maintained, adhering to the most common principle of systematic reviews, and clarity was maintained (Beauchemin et al., 2022). Thus, the abstract was elaborated, and the themes were investigated for underlying reasons, which form the foundation for empirical evidence. Additionally, the data selection was duly reported and clarified, while the accuracy of citations was maintained to ensure that the reported data was consistent throughout the study.

Results and Discussion

Twenty studies were screened from academic databases and thematically analysed and color-coded according to the similarity of pattern. Three broad themes were detected, viz. Need for teaching Legal English, Pedagogical Methods and Models, Outcomes, Assessment, and Gap as depicted in *Table 1*. The data was analysed in terms of author, sample size, aim, major findings, and its implications on the research, and categorised into emergent themes using colour coding in *Table 2*.

Table 1. Thematic analysis of the dataset.

| No. | Author | Research aim (1 line) | Research design | Sample size | Major findings | Major Theme | Implications for the research |
|-----|--------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Anesa | Conceptualisati | Theoretical/ | n/a | Legal English | Need for | Curriculum |

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|----|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| | (2019) | on of Legal English as a lingua franca and locate pragmatic risks. | conceptual | | behaves like an ELF; pragmatic & cultural mismatches occur in transnational legal talk. | teaching Legal English | should target pragmatic negotiation & intercultural awareness. |
| 2 | Dou et al. (2023) | Reviewing ESP/ELP pedagogical trends and ICC inclusion. | Review article | n/a (review) | ESP broadening to include disciplinary content & intercultural aims. | Pedagogical Methods and Models | Support for content-based and ICC-aware ELP curricula. |
| 3 | Zhou et al. (2024) | Synthesizing evidence on ICC development in undergraduate English instruction in China. | Systematic review | n/a (review) | ICC unevenly embedded; many studies rely on self-report; validated measures are lacking. | Outcomes, Assessment and Gaps | Need validated ICC instruments and curricular embedding. |
| 4 | Piszcz and Sierocka (2020) | Exploring the role of culture in legal language and translator training. | Theoretical / case reflections | n/a | Collaboration between legal experts and ELP teachers improves outcomes. | Need for teaching Legal English | Promote integrated law+language modules. |
| 5 | Hu et al. (2025) | Identifying high-frequency judicial lexical bundles for ELP design. | Corpus analysis | large corpus (tokens) | High-frequency bundles are useful to teach judicial genres. | Pedagogical Methods. | Use corpus-informed materials in Legal English syllabi. |
| 6 | Muravev (2020) | Evaluating emergency online delivery of Legal English (COVID adaptation). | Mixed methods — course evaluation | course cohorts (class-level) | Online/blended delivery is feasible; authentic tasks sustain engagement. | Pedagogical Methods. | Supports blended ELP with simulated intercultural tasks. |
| 7 | Nhac (2023) | Testing classroom interventions to enhance Legal English readiness. | Classroom action research | class cohort (reported in paper) | Scaffolded tasks increased perceived readiness for English legal tasks. | Pedagogical Methods. | Scaffold speaking/writing modules into curricula. |
| 8 | Hu et al. (2023) | Reviewing CLIL adoption in Chinese higher education and implications for content courses. | Systematic/scoping review | n/a (review) | CLIL is growing but needs teacher training and contextual adaptation. | Pedagogical Methods. | CLIL is a viable model to combine Area Studies + Legal English. |
| 9 | Rahman and Hu (2025) | Mapping EMI policy/practice and ICC aim in China & the region. | Comparative review | n/a (review) | EMI often names ICC as a goal but rarely measures outcomes. | Need for teaching Legal English and | |
| 10 | Song and Fan (2024) | Surveying reforms in Chinese legal education and internationalisation. | Historical/policy review | n/a (review) | Expansion of comparative law & English offerings; policy momentum for internationalisation. | Need for teaching Legal English | Strong institutional rationale to integrate Area Studies + Legal English. |
| 11 | Tong et al. (2024) | Describing English-medium LL.B. programmes and employability outcomes. | Programme description / qualitative | programme cohorts (varied) | English-taught programmes reported higher comparative-exposure & employability signals. | Pedagogical Methods. | Model for combining Law content + English instruction. |
| 12 | Goddard (2025) | Advocating for comparative legal linguistics | Theoretical / commentar | n/a | Comparative-legal-linguistics lens enriches both | Need for teaching Legal | Encourage cross-disciplinary modules (law + |

| | | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--|
| | | integration into curricula. | y | | law teaching and ELP design. | English | language). |
| 13 | Zeng and Wang (2024) | Applying corpus findings to prioritise teachable legal terms and tasks. | Corpus-informed classroom study | corpus + classroom participants | Corpus lists helped teachers prioritise vocabulary & task design. | Pedagogical Models and Methods. | Pair corpus lists with Area Studies case comparisons in syllabi. |
| 14 | Muravev (2020) | Using case-method tasks to teach Legal English translation & reasoning. | Classroom case-study | class cohort (reported) | The case method improves analytic translation and comparative reasoning skills. | Pedagogical Models and Methods. | Incorporate real cases & comparative prompts in ELP modules. |
| 15 | Townley (2024) | Testing scaffolded speaking & writing modules for legal genres. | Mixed methods (pre/post) | student cohorts (reported) | Scaffolded modules increased performance and confidence in legal tasks. | Pedagogical Models and Methods. | Include assessed oral & written legal tasks in curriculum |
| 16 | Huang and Fang (2023) | Examining the ICC in EMI programmes in Chinese HEIs. | Review and case studies | varied cases | ICC is a stated objective, but evidence on measured outcomes is limited. | Outcomes, Assessment, and Gaps | Embed explicit ICC objectives and measurable outcomes in ELP. |
| 17 | Sun et al. (2025) | Developing the instruments to assess intercultural competence in higher ed. | Empirical and instrument study | N reported in the paper | Shows measurable ICC variation; recommends mixed assessment. | Outcomes, Assessment and Gaps | Use validated ICC tools in future Legal English + Area Studies evaluations |
| 18 | Alasmarty (2024) | Analyse discourse-organising lexical bundles in legal academic English. | Corpus-discourse analysis | large corpus (tokens) | Identifies bundles that organize legal argumentation, useful for instruction. | Pedagogical Models and Method | Teach discourse bundles to improve legal genre competence. |
| 19 | Lai (2024) | Testing hands-on CLIL methods for vocabulary & procedural knowledge (adjacent discipline). | Classroom experiment | classroom groups (reported) | Hands-on CLIL improved vocabulary retention and procedural knowledge. | Pedagogical Models and Method | Adapt hands-on CLIL for Legal English + Area Studies activities. |
| 20 | Aswathy Prakash and Nair (2024) | Surveying AI opportunities for simulations, drafting, and feedback in legal education. | Conceptual / review (preprint) | n/a | AI tools can support simulated intercultural tasks but require pedagogical alignment. | Outcomes, Assessment and Gaps | Explore AI-supported cross-cultural simulations in ELP courses; design assessment alignment. |

Table 2. Classification of studies under the identified themes.

| Major Theme | Studies Under This Theme |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Need for Teaching Legal English | Goddard (2025); Rahman and Hu (2025); Song and Fan (2024); Piszcz and Sierocka (2020); Anesa (2019) |
| 2. Pedagogical Models and Methods | Hu et al. (2025); Alasmarty (2024); Lai (2024); Tong et al. (2024); Townley (2024); Zeng and Wang (2024); Dou et al. (2023); Hu et al. (2023); Nhac (2023); Muravev (2020) |
| 3. Outcomes, Assessment and Gaps | Rahman and Hu (2025); Sun et al. (2025); Aswathy Prakash and Nair (2024); Zhou et al. (2024) |

Theme 1: Need for teaching legal English

Five out of twenty studies highlight the reason why Legal English needs to be taught and integrated within Area Studies in Chinese law schools. From these studies, it becomes clear that sufficient pedagogical justification is provided against this notion. Firstly, Legal English needs to be taught to go beyond the technical lexis and negotiate

intercultural debates and adopt a pragmatic approach to ELP teaching (Goddard, 2025; Anesa, 2019). Making (comparative) legal linguistics mainstream in legal education. While another study by Piszcz and Sierocka (2020) contributed to this theme, suggesting the benefits for language teachers and legal specialists in terms of collaboration with various global institutes, teaching students from various cultures, and extending into ELP training and translation purposes. In this context, Chinese students focus on the reforms on legal education and internationalization trends, supporting the fact that EMIs name intercultural competence as a major goal, and prepare the students for internships and international jobs, so that they could be visibly more acceptable to foreign universities, faculties, and partners in various job roles (Song and Fan, 2024). Moreover, being an expert in legal English motivates the faculty to deliver professional courses in English, which could be incentivised and recognised, thus providing students with protective instruction, so that they succeed highly during exchange programs. To emphasize the significance of legal English in Area studies specifically, Piszcz and Sierocka (2020) state that the ethics, philosophy, and national culture decide the meaning of legal words, altering their values in various communities, social setups and different relationships. Hence, the importance of teaching Legal English lies in its context. This makes real legal texts (corpora) being translated in their effective form, rather than being translated according to their literal meaning. Goddard (2025) argue that Chinese laws ought to be taught in English, primarily to increase the skills needed for employability. Moreover, regional dispute resolution is a possible reason behind teaching Legal English in Area studies, particularly to overcome the gaps in training that remain in the Chinese Legal Education (Song and Fan, 2024). This offers a new paradigm for scholars based outside China and promotes collaboration between various sectors of academia.

Theme 2: Pedagogical models and methods

Eleven out of 20 studies intersect on three mutual points for the integration of Legal English with Area Studies. The three ways would be using content-and language integration (CLIL/EMI) and programme models, case method and client interviews, and corpus-informed genre and lexical instruction (Zeng and Wang, 2024; Dou et al., 2023). Each of the models has its own ways of supporting teachers and aligning the assessment with classroom practices. The CLIL research is supported by Nhac (2023), who supports that teachers and students both endorse CLIL in Legal English classrooms as learners prioritise in-class writing and presentations to relate the outcomes in language and content. In the Chinese context, the authors emphasize the promising effects of CLIL, reinforcing targeted teacher trainings, quality control of instructions, and localisation of resources (Hu et al., 2023). Hereby, Tong et al. (2024) validate that L.L.B programs prescribe CLIL models to enhance the recruiting and comparative exposure of learners, thus serving as practical strategies for the integration of Legal English in Area Studies for law students in China. Lexical phrases and inventories in Legal English help increase accessibility of legal registers to the learners (Alasmay, 2024; Muravev, 2020). Hu et al. (2025) state that, complementarily, in judicial corpus study indicates towards judicial bundles of high frequency, and suggest corpus-mediated bundles to register, read, and teach strategies in ELP programmes. Finally, the gain of measurable skills could be estimated from case method tasks and customised genre modules.

Scaffolding and analysis of genres enable improved participation from the learners, offer clarity of argumentation in English and powerful transition from oral to writing genres (Townley, 2024). Meanwhile, translation accuracies and comparative reasoning is enhanced with resources for case studies as seen in ELP courses in the pandemic period, particularly by using case simulations and moots (Muravev, 2020). This strategy improves satisfaction in learners and maintains higher levels of engagement. Furthermore, the CLIL method could be used to teach legal topics in an activity-based manner, with significant improvement in using vocabulary and procedural knowledge (Lai, 2024). Thus, large effect sizes of students preferred law being taught in a second language. Finally, Dou et al. (2023) state that ESP looks forward to the acquisition of knowledge to address what learners need to know following need analysis.

Theme 3: Outcomes, assessment and gaps

All four studies out of 20 scholarly articles indicate one major finding that intercultural competence (ICC) is an essential skill for ELP/ ESP programmes, although some inconsistency could be detected in the outcomes. According to Zhou et al. (2024), Legal English in China is used rhetorically by teachers, whereas a lack of standardization is noticed in mostly self-reported instruments. This contributed towards the fact that ELP helps learners develop intercultural skills this showing its fragmented integration into the ICC, and explores the gaps existing the methodology of real-time assessments.

Focusing on the perspectives of teachers in English Medium Instruction and the documentation of programs, teaching Legal English appears as a pedagogical strategy that emphasizes reflexivity, rather than being critical of international conferences and texts (Huang and Fang, 2023). Therefore, ICC is termed as a goal, although the detailed outcomes centred around inter-cultural awareness need to be assessed via multi-method techniques (Huang and Fang, 2023). This mapping induced differences in assessment strategies adopted across several disciplines, including Area Studies this showing how ICC frameworks are tied to teacher trainings. Simultaneously, Sun et al. (2025) report that a gap in measurement accompanies the validation and design of an ICC framework in the context of professional training. The domains of competence could be differentiated considering behavioural, emotional, and cognitive aspects as shown by multi-dimensional instruments (Sun et al., 2025). Moreover, ICC is measured in different ways to show how they help in problem-solving in real life in comparison to the self-rating on the same. Sun et al. (2025) further state that students' performance on the objective test is lower than their original skills. This difference suggests that there is a significant lack of trustworthy evidence in teaching evaluation.

Finally, Aswathy Prakash and Nair (2024) propose that automated feedback generated by AI and AI-mediated simulations offer environments suitable for tasks in real time that are scalable and promote enriched data on performance for ICC. For instance, cross-jurisdictional negotiations and simulated client interviews demand adequate pedagogical alignment and validation, which is why ICC constructs are to be mapped to the simulation. This needs credible evaluation by mixed-method techniques, such as combining learner reflection with human ratings and automated logs. Finally, professional advancements to integrate the ICC framework in teaching strategies are reasoned by teachers who believe in language training for professional growth (Aswathy Prakash and Nair, 2024). However, there is a need for considering multiple

components of ICC instruments to rate the scenario-based performance, and align the instructional objectives explicitly with the design assessments.

RQ1: What evidence justifies integrating Legal English with Area Studies for Chinese law students?

Theme 1 answers this sub-question in particular, arguing that Legal English needs to be embedded within the culture and regional legal knowledge, which cannot be prepared as an isolated lexicon. It rather needs to assign significant meaning to the textual words. The major findings from the data show that policy drivers such as internalization of law curricula, reasons based on theory such as cultural and legal concepts, as well as needs of programs and employers in cross-border practices, comparative law readiness, etc. Precisely, the use of Legal English in Area Studies needs to be situated as a practical yet necessary strategy to emphasize law graduates who can communicate across cross-jurisdictional legal matters. The studies in recent times validate this finding. According to Zhou et al. (2022) internalisation of curricula is targeted routinely by the programs in Legal English and ESP in China. This strategy bridges the gap between professional and academic practices. Similarly, the practices issued by ESP must be reformed to respond to internalisation of curricula in China (Anqi et al., 2024), which highlights the demand for need analysis and content-based modules to render relevance and employability to language teaching (subject-specific). However, evidences warn of certain limitations. The quality of training in teachers is often differential, while preparation across students for linguistics and institutional readiness is considerably different. Simply Zhou et al. (2022) states that the label of integrated Legal English does not ensure deep learning outcomes and intercultural learning. Likewise, Anqi et al. (2024) shows that staff development, regional resources, and rigorous analysis are required to avoid surface-level integration. Therefore, the data claims that not just integration but teacher assessment and readiness, and operationalization into the curriculum, are significant.

RQ2: Which pedagogical models and methods are well-suited for integrating Legal English and Area Studies?

Theme 2 signifies the importance of four variants of convergent models prevalent in the classrooms, viz. Scaffolded genre modules, CLIL or content-based integration, case-method or simulations, and corpus-informed lexical/genre instruction. The dataset highlights basic improvements in task performance, enhanced confidence, and demands collaboration between teachers and alignment between the assessments. Teachers are able to utilise high-utility vocabulary and collocations with the help of corpus-informed resources. This increases awareness of the precision of domain writing assignments and genre awareness. For instance, data-driven learning proposed by Lusta et al. (2023) states that focused genre tasks could be easily designed by the teachers and improve the lexical accuracy in the learners simultaneously. However, Ma et al. (2024) states that scaffolding and teacher training are essential in the successful incorporation of corpus technology within classrooms, for university teachers to effectively use this technique. On the other hand, multimodal approaches also act as strong evidential support. CLIL interventions have been observed to be effective for procedural knowledge and positive outcomes in content and language gains (Lee, 2024). This is synchronous with Lai (2024), who points out the idea of role plays, simulations, and hands-on activities in legal assignments, strengthening the hold both on the discipline and the language. Hereby, Sierocka (2022) states that online ELP platforms consisting of coordinated moot formats and cas simulations promote sustained engagement and positive responses

from the learners. Collectively, each of the four models has measurable gains despite the scope for localisation of resources, assessment, and teacher readiness.

RQ3: How do current assessments practices measure in intercultural gaps and comparative outcomes

ICC, although claimed as an objective, is seldom measured with performance-based instruments. Most of the studies cited thus suggest on triangulated assessments for the development of instruments, specific to scenario-based tasks and rubrics. This shortfall is validated by Richter et al. (2023), which state that the psychometric quality across different measures shows a higher range of variability in cross-cultural competence instruments, showing that several tools do not offer adequate validity for comparative claims. Whereas ICC models that are comparatively newly developed offer psychometric properties for self-reported aspects (Ertay and Gilanlioglu, 2024). However, these instruments lack measures for behavioural outcomes and do not take an account any forms of external behaviour. This is validated by Deardorff (2023), who validates that self-reported competence is overestimated in relation to the observed performance, while rubric-based simulations, cross-jurisdictional negotiations, and client interviews help capture the "external outcomes" in a better way. Explaining more simply, both Byram and Deardorff posit ICC as a tool that allows learners to showcase what they know and how they are meant to behave. However, the gaps in curricular outcomes are explained by these theoretical models. The perceived knowledge and attitudes are missed in terms of external behaviors if they solely focus on self-reports. Hence, the solution as proposed by Byram's *savoirs* mentioning that legal systems should consider both critical cultural awareness and interpretive skills in interaction, where observable behavior could be linked to the internal outcomes (Byram, 1997). Overall, there is a significant gap in outcomes, specifically in supported triangulation of data that both align with Deardorff's external outcomes and Byram's *savoirs*.

Conclusion

This systematic review reflects the reasons underlying the integration of Legal English within Area Studies for Chinese law students. Upon thematic analysis of 20 scholarly articles, various legislative and conceptual reasons emerge behind the integration and their impact on pedagogy. For instance, EMI programmes and CLIL models are effective in providing genre instructions, scaffolding the genre modules, and generating corpus-informed vocabulary. However, there is a significant gap that dampens the supportive evidence in favour of ICC, as most of the studies show bias towards the exclusion of performance-based indicators that are not usually observed. Rather, they show reliance on short-term indicators, validated by both the models by Byram and Deardorff. Therefore, the curriculum must be coupled with robust, triangulated assessments and integrated pedagogy to sustain intercultural competence and move away from rhetorical aims.

Limitations and future recommendations

The breadth of this study has been prioritised over critical appraisal, which includes heterogeneous evidence in the dataset, impacting the methodological quality of this review. Moreover, the selected window for publication and bias towards publication in English might have omitted significant information related to this topic, and excluded data relevant to ICC in Area Studies. Moreover, the generalisability of this study was

limited due to the presence of context-specific samples and small cohort sizes in the papers. In the future, researchers must adopt triangulated assessment and combine client interviews with validated self-reported scales to increase the credibility of the data. Moreover, the courses across different disciplines must be prioritized for this study, and longitudinal research designs must be adopted to check the durability of the gains in ICC. Finally, AI-based simulations could be potentially included as tools for assessment, thus enabling independent validation and alignment in international pedagogical contexts.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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