

Constructing Critical Thinking Scenarios in Online Legal English Classes¹

Construyendo escenarios de pensamiento crítico en clases de inglés legal en línea

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Abstract

This paper reports qualitative research on constructing critical thinking scenarios in online legal English classes at a private university in Colombia. This study aimed to enhance law students' critical thinking skills development in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom through virtual tools by implementing a descriptive case analysis. Data were gathered through a journal, a survey and a focus group. It was demonstrated that when students are trained in critical thinking, they learn to develop specific abilities such as reasoning, making proposals, identifying and solving problems, making inferences, making decisions according to their prior knowledge and the context needs. Furthermore, the strategies contributed to improving students' communication skills in the foreign language.

Keywords: Legal English, Critical thinking, Online English Teaching, Online English Learning, prior knowledge.

Resumen

Este artículo reporta una investigación cualitativa sobre la construcción de escenarios de pensamiento crítico en clases de inglés legal, en línea, en una universidad privada en Colombia. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo mejorar el desarrollo de las habilidades de pensamiento crítico de los estudiantes de derecho en clases de EFL (inglés como lengua extranjera) a través de herramientas virtuales mediante la implementación de un análisis de caso descriptivo. Los datos se recopilaban a través de un diario, una encuesta y un grupo de enfoque. Se demostró que cuando los estudiantes se capacitan en pensamiento crítico, aprenden a desarrollar habilidades específicas como razonar, hacer propuestas, identificar y resolver problemas, hacer inferencias, tomar decisiones de acuerdo con sus conocimientos previos y las necesidades del contexto. Además, las estrategias contribuyeron a mejorar las habilidades comunicativas de los estudiantes, en la lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: Inglés legal; pensamiento crítico, enseñanza de inglés en línea, aprendizaje de inglés en línea, conocimientos previos

Resumo

Este artigo relata uma pesquisa qualitativa sobre a construção de cenários de pensamento crítico em aulas online de inglês jurídico em uma universidade privada na Colômbia. Este estudo teve como objetivo melhorar o desenvolvimento de habilidades de pensamento crítico de estudantes de direito nas aulas de inglês como língua estrangeira, por meio de ferramentas virtuais, implementando uma análise de caso descritiva. Os dados foram coletados por meio de um diário, uma pesquisa e um grupo focal. Mostrou-se que quando os alunos são formados em pensamento crítico, aprendem a desenvolver habilidades específicas como raciocinar, fazer propostas, identificar e resolver problemas, fazer inferências e tomar decisões de acordo com seus conhecimentos prévios e as necessidades do contexto. Além disso, as estratégias contribuíram para melhorar as habilidades comunicativas dos alunos, na língua estrangeira.

Palavras-chave: Inglês Jurídico, pensamento crítico, ensino de inglês online, aprendizado de inglês online, conhecimento prévio.

Introduction

Nowadays, education aims at developing students' critical thinking skills, and EFL teaching and learning scenarios (English as a Foreign Language) are increasingly including methodologies intended to foster the in-tandem development of communicative and critical thinking skills. Vanicheva et al. (2015) assert that “the skill of critical thinking, or ability to make conclusive decisions within a given situation, requires appropriate knowledge of content of the matter in view, which shows the need to align ESP content with the content of the main [...] discipline” (p. 662). In the present paper, the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) content corresponds to Legal English classes oriented in the Law Faculty at Universidad Santo Tomás (hereafter USTA) in Tunja and Villavicencio.

Previous research on ESP conducted nationwide has focused on the development of communicative skills mainly reading (Arias-Rodríguez, 2014; Hernández, 2019). In her study, Arias-Rodríguez (2014) intended to promote reading within a group of law students. She concluded that “reading specialized texts permitted students to enrich their background knowledge and to apply it to their next written assignment and also in subsequent debates or oral reports” (pp. 111-112). Hernández (2019) tackled the issue by implementing Virtual Learning Objects (VLO) and determined that “VLOs serve to promote reading strategies for ESP courses” (p.119).

In this article, we describe the steps followed to make online Legal English classes scenarios to construct Critical Thinking settings. At USTA law students take two semesters of Legal English as part of their training as future lawyers, and some studies have been conducted to assist students in gaining a domain in Legal English. Rico (2014) examined how movies and TV series contributed to learning Legal English vocabulary. Arias-Rodríguez (2017) conducted a research study aiming to describe the impact of developing students' linguistic competence through listening and reading short stories. Furthermore, critical thinking as a concern to be included into the Legal English classes has been addressed by some studies developed by Arias- Rodríguez et al. (2014), Herreño-Contreras and Huertas (2019) and Herreño-Contreras (2020).

Previous research at USTA on this issue was conducted within face-to-face classes. In the framework of the present research, researchers ventured to make online Legal English classes scenarios to develop critical thinking. To do so, English classes were adjusted to the international standards established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL). In each course, students were able to develop a variety of activities promoting the advance of the four communicative skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). After a diagnosis stage and in-class conversations between the researchers and the law students, it was evidenced that they required more agility and training to analyze legal cases and daily situations from a critical thinking focus, which is necessary in current times, due to the society's needs

and daily life problems. In the Legal English courses, it is assumed that students have acquired most of the English language input, thus, in these semesters students are fostered to develop different skills that are going to contribute to their professional development such as the identification of problems and their solution through their reasoning.

In a diagnosis exercise implemented to law students, the teachers faced students to daily life problems, but they were superficial at the time of making their own analysis and proposing a realistic solution to the problems they were presented; thus, the researchers realized that students required to be trained in the development of specific skills that are necessary under the current circumstances, in terms of communication they needed to gain self-confidence to express their ideas in English, they required agility to analyze the context and set the best solutions to problems according to the context, when they analyzed a case, they only mentioned they agreed or disagreed about the decisions of lawyers or the court because there were mandatory regulations, but they rarely proposed new ways to solve the problems, they did not present strong arguments to defend their viewpoints, they required to develop their critical thinking. In this sense, Legal English classes intended to prompt them to be more analytical and explain in depth different situations that affect today's society.

In order to tackle this issue, the present research sought to create a suitable environment that met the students' needs in terms of developing their critical thinking skills. Bearing in mind the researchers' previous experiences as Legal English teachers at this university, we realized that the identification and analysis of daily life problems are essential for law students as they serve to train them as future lawyers who must be ready to contribute in the construction of a better society.

This research intended to provide more insights on approaches to develop critical thinking skills within ESP classes -in this case Legal English- and also encourage students' communication in the English language. This article aims at sharing the findings that emerged after conducting a qualitative research study, bearing in mind the following research question: How to enhance law students' critical thinking skills development in the Online Legal English classes at USTA? In a general scope, it aimed at promoting students' cognitive skills (interpreting, arguing and proposing) by using legal issues in online ESP classes. Thus, engaging students in using prior knowledge for analyzing daily life legal problems, and motivating students' communicative competence through legal case analysis in English were set as specific objectives.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, the main theories underpinning the study will be explored.

Critical Thinking and Language Teaching

Critical thinking is an important aspect to be developed in education because it leads students to apply research procedures to discern knowledge, for example, making questions and answering from a reasonable point of view and obtaining results based on rational procedures; about it, Wang and Zhenh (2016) state “Critical thinking is purposeful, reasoned, and goal-directed. It is the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions” (p. 1325); besides, The Open University (2008) highlights that critical thinking helps students to synthesize thoughts and analyze theories in a coherent way. Thus, including critical thinking in teaching becomes meaningful because students grow capable of making correlations between class content and their real living context, and subsequently Legal English classes become conducive to learning through practice, observation and analysis.

While preparing classes, it is important that teachers keep in mind the context where students interact; thus, activities and strategies must respond to their academic needs. Astleitner (2011) argues that instructional activities are appropriate to develop critical thinking as well as the instructional context. In this manner, critical thinking is coherent with teaching English to law students in aspects like case analysis, since it motivates students to identify problems in the local context and use all their background knowledge to solve them properly and in line with the field of law. In this regard, Paul and Elder (2007) declare that

Developing critical thinkers is central to the mission of all educational institutions. By ensuring that students learn to think critically and fairly-mindedly, we ensure that students not only master essential subject matter, but become effective citizens, capable of reasoning ethically and acting in the public good. (p. 9)

In this way, the benefits of developing students' critical thinking not only help them to increase their capacity to enhance their knowledge, but also to be accurate while making decisions as a collaborating member in the society. Medina (2012) argues that critical thinking is inherent to human beings, but it must be cultivated in the educational contexts. Besides, Ennis (2011) stated a set of critical thinking dispositions (care that their beliefs be true, care to understand and present a position honestly and clearly and care about every person) and abilities (focus on a question, analyze arguments, ask and answer clarification and/or challenge questions, judge the

credibility of a source, etc.) to be implemented in academic contexts. At this point, it can be assumed that all students should be involved in critical thinking procedures; according to our own experience as English teachers in the law career, law students in particular, should develop this sort of skills due to their contact with the problems of the community which require them to be rational, flexible, creative, and impartial concerning everyday situations.

English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been one of the most important tools for university students because they need to develop their English skills in their own field of study, it assists them in obtaining information based on their professional interests. Anthony (1997) defines ESP as: “The teaching of English used in academic studies or the teaching of English for vocational or professional purposes” (p. 9-10). Thus, this approach was created after 1960 and from that moment, it has evolved in techniques and uses due to its benefits in terms of knowledge acquisition for students and professionals in exercise.

Additionally, ESP has grown around the world in schools and universities as a strategy to develop knowledge and as a special mechanism to research information, keeping in mind that nowadays students and professionals require skills that let them interchange worldwide without barriers. Galina (2016) states that ESP is related to the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language, and as an aim for students to use English in the academic, professional or occupational fields, depending on their needs. In this manner, it has been well received in the academic context because it opens doors especially for those who want to investigate and increase their knowledge.

According to Arias-Rodríguez (2014), ESP becomes interesting for students because they can look for information they need about different subjects in the international magazines, journals, books and databases; furthermore, they can access latest information, this is a key aspect for their learning. On the other hand, it is not an easy job because English teachers do not always have a wide knowledge of specialized information to answer students' doubts as it could be required. Jo McDonough (2010) points out about it: “The teacher's task is potentially more difficult where students are already experts in their fields” (p. 476); there are cases in which teachers have to learn a lot of vocabulary to be able to teach ESP in a specific academic context. All in all, nowadays ESP skill development is quite relevant for students' academic and professional life because this sort of skill allows them to argue, make claims, support ideas, and in general, to communicate in real contexts with strong and sound arguments.

Online English Teaching and Learning

Online English teaching has currently become paramount as in 2020 education took a leap into a more constant virtuality. Compton (2009) has designed a framework of online teaching competences which comprises competences dealing with hardware and software issues along with teaching and pedagogical competences. Similarly, Guichon (2009) hypothesizes three competences in order to handle online classes: 1. Competency of socio-affective regulation, 2. Competency of pedagogical regulation and 3. Competency of multimedia regulation. Consequently, teachers should be able to design and orient engaging online classes as well as providing adequate feedback concerning the learner's needs and performance.

The present research aimed at constructing critical learning scenarios within online legal English classes. To do so, the researchers adopted a socioconstructivist approach which implies the acquisition of new skills in order to foster pedagogical transformations and encourage better online learning and teaching practices (Hampel & Stickler, 2015). In fact, as previously stated, orienting online classes poses a set of challenges that should be handled using strategies suited for online scenarios. In this regard, Sun (2011) emphasizes that even though “an online community can be built through technology, [...] a truly functioning online learning community is much harder to come by” (p. 438).

Successful online teaching relies heavily on the mastery of the aforementioned competencies, the ability to attain the course's goals, and also an existing balance among the participants involved. Rubin et al. (2013 cited by Montiel-Chamorro, 2018) state that “one characteristic of a successful online course is its capability to create a CoI [Community of Inquiry] where learners, instructors, and learning materials interact to develop knowledge and skills” (p. 22).

In this sense, acquaintance with ICT, training and confidence become indispensable requirements to guarantee technological competences that may influence the way teaching is conducted, and how learners engage in their learning process. Peeraer and Van Petegem (2011) state that “a lack of competence goes together with a lack of confidence” (p. 980). In the online lessons, teachers additionally display their implicit theories. According to Cárdenas-Claros and Oyanedel (2016) “the pedagogical beliefs of both teachers and students seem to be the final frontier for successful technology integration in the language classroom” (p.221), and this is a key factor brought into consideration within this research.

Method

This section is intended to display information concerning the research design, research method, and the procedures followed to collect and manage data.

Context and participants

This study was developed at Universidad Santo Tomás in Tunja (USTA-Tunja) and Villavicencio (USTA- Villavicencio) in Colombia. It offers 5 English courses of general English to all the programs, but in the law career, where this research was conducted, it differs to some extent as there are four courses more. At USTA Tunja, law students take 9 courses, the first five levels are focused on general English, sixth and seventh courses are based on reading comprehension and the last two levels are oriented on legal English. In Villavicencio students enroll in 7 levels of General English, and 2 levels of Legal English in eighth and ninth semesters. Thus, this research was developed within the Legal English courses in both branches: Tunja and Villavicencio due to the fact that topics are totally related with the legal ordinance and students require their prior knowledge (as law students) to analyze the proposed cases. This project was carried out with 62 students, 37 of them belonged to USTA Tunja (25 from Legal English 1 and 12 from Legal English 2) and 25 (Legal English 1) from USTA Villavicencio.

Research design

A descriptive case study was implemented in the development of this study. Yazan (2015) asserts that this method allows the researchers to carry out a detailed observation and analysis of a particular situation in the classroom. In general, all types of case studies can overlap, because they have the following similar aims: (a) to depict the relatively incontrovertible details of the people, place, events, transactions, and processes of the case—a description that others would likely make if they had been there; (b) to give a clear picture of what is happening, without making judgments—an organized and coherent presentation of the phenomenon; and (c) to develop and expand on relevant concepts. A descriptive case study distinguishes itself from other types of case studies by its preoccupation with articulating a descriptive theory.

The present study corresponds to qualitative research. According to MacDonald (2010), qualitative methods contribute to understanding how people interpret their context, as well as their motivations to act. In this sense, this study aims at shedding light on a pedagogical strategy mediated by the analysis of legal problems and the

use of digital tools so as to foster critical thinking within Legal English classes. This descriptive case study was found on students' needs analysis which provided useful data in order to design and execute workshops. As part of the research process, students were advised about the research project and its scope as a necessary step to ensure their informed consent. Then, a pedagogical intervention and data collection were conducted. Finally, data analysis allowed researchers to come up with a set of conclusions and pedagogical implications derived from this research project.

Data collection instruments

Over the course of the present research, data collection was conducted by means of three instruments, namely, a survey, a researcher's journal and a focus group session.

Survey. A survey is conceived as a “research instrument consisting of a set of questions (items) intended to capture responses from respondents in a standardized manner” (Research Methods for the Social Sciences, n.p). The survey consisted of open and closed - ended questions intended to delve into students' perceptions on the class methodology, the legal case analysis approach and whether they considered there was any sort of academic growth in terms of communicative and critical thinking skills. In this sense, “Open-ended survey questions allow respondents to answer in their own words [...] In contrast, closed- ended questions require the respondent to choose from among a given set of response” (Salant & Dillman, 1994; McIntyre, 1999 cited by Glasow, 2005). The survey was administered to identify students' perceptions about the legal English course in general.

Journal. This instrument was used by researchers in order to register their classroom observations in a structured journal form, to record meaningful aspects that emerged from the process of teaching and learning English in a legal course and to obtain written registers about students' performance during the development of the workshops. According to Annink (2017), “The research journal is a tool for observing, questioning, critiquing, synthesizing, and acting” (n.p). Altrichter and Holly (2005) mention some key elements of a research journal, such as: data obtained from various sources, supporting information (photographs, videos), contextual information, researcher's insights and subsequent ideas or action plans. In this case, the researcher's journal was complemented by the class videos as all the classes were given by means of web video conferencing applications (Zoom and Google meet).

Focus Group. “In a focus group discussion, researchers adopt the role of a “facilitator” or a “moderator.” In this setting, the researcher facilitates or moderates a group discussion between participants and not between the researcher and the participants” (Nyumba et al., 2018, p.21). Besides, “the key aspect of focus groups is the interactions between participants as a way of collecting qualitative data that would not emerge using other methods” (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 104). When the pedagogical intervention concluded, students were asked to participate in a focus group session to discuss their academic experiences and emotions in a deeper way. The present project was conducted within three different Legal English courses, thus, three focus group sessions were carried out, thus, a set of predetermined interview questions were used to gather information.

Pedagogical intervention

The pedagogical intervention of the present research took 4 months and consisted of 4 workshops that were implemented with three different groups of Legal English (two in USTA Tunja and one in USTA Villavicencio). Every workshop was designed in order to attain the following objectives: to promote students’ cognitive skills (interpreting, arguing and proposing), to link prior knowledge to analyze legal cases in English, and to apply different reading strategies to understand legal cases, spread legal vocabulary and share possible solutions orally and in a written way. The workshops’ topics covered various law branches such as family law, public law, criminal law and constitutional law. Thus, in the Legal English classes, students discussed on issues related to child support, homicide, indigenous communities and the violation of their human rights, the environmental detriment and its correlation with health problems as well as discrimination and the right to free personality development.

The aforementioned topics were selected by students themselves as in the first stage of the pedagogical intervention they were requested to gather information of a case that should be treated in class according to their knowledge and experience. They created videos summarizing the main facts of the case, and afterward the whole class was expected to watch the videos and vote. Thus, students voted to select the most interesting cases, and based on the voting results, researchers designed four workshops to be carried out within the Legal English classes.

Workshops comprised five stages intended to foster the development of specific skills. The first stage was devoted to introducing vocabulary related to the workshop’s topic so as to allow students to become acquainted with legal terminology. As for the second stage, it usually consisted of a speaking activity derived from a set of guiding questions on the class core topic. The third stage intended to engage students in the case analysis itself. To do so, students were presented the case by means of a video and a summary. In this stage, they firstly approached the case and discussed some initial ideas

and insights, which served as the starting point to conduct more in-depth research on the issue. During the fourth stage, students were expected to work collaboratively and gather more information on the case and even resort to jurisprudence and normative in order to have a big picture of it. Finally, in the last stage they were requested to use digital tools to share their insights. Thus, they designed infographics, flipbooks, mind maps to display their insights on the legal case. Law students from Tunja prepared and performed a hearing in English as a final product. In this task they played specific roles such as: the judge, the lawyers, the witnesses, among others. Besides, they followed the stages established in a real hearing, presented the legal documents with proofs and finally, they provided the best legal solutions assuming a critical position and providing strong arguments supported by the Colombian Law.

Data Analysis

Ground theory approach was used in order to analyze the gathered information as it allows to organize the information in a systematic way. According to Chong and Yeo (2015), Grounded theory is suitable for analyzing social processes or social life phenomena, especially when there is not theory about it, besides it is appropriate for studying specific moments or situations in education. Thus, in the current study, information was collected through the use of three research instruments in order to validate the findings by the use of triangulation. Jensen (2008) defines triangulation as “Seek out multiple sources of data and use multiple data- gathering techniques”. (p. 139). In this study, this process was evidenced because the information was gathered in different ways. Afterward, information was gathered, classified and coded from the three Legal English groups, identifying similarities and differences, some main categories were established and explained in order to answer the research questions stated at the beginning of the project.

Findings and Discussion

In this section findings derived from the present study will be explained:

First category: Legal Vocabulary Acquaintance and Influences in Students' Performance

One of the purposes of this study was to motivate Law students to use and apply ESP within classrooms, as an innovative pedagogical tool in the use of digital environments in order to help them construct critical thinking scenarios in their legal English classes. Thus, students could express meaningful experiences through the

analysis of legal cases. “Well teacher, the English classes were nice and I felt motivated to learn because it was a mixed process of English and legal topics. I like the digital tools you gave us in the workshops” (Student 26, Focus group T, 02.06.2021).

This category refers to how this procedure lets them improve their communication in English. We observed that most students showed a positive attitude during the development of each workshop and were able to spread legal expressions when they were interpreting, analyzing and discussing legal cases in English. One of the participants said: “At the beginning, it was difficult to understand vocabulary, but the workshops helped me to learn a lot of expressions of law” (student 11, Focus group T, 04.06.2021).

ESP is a branch of the process of teaching English as a foreign language that aims at teaching the necessary contents in order to help learners perform in specific contexts. In university atmospheres, the necessity to learn another language is increasingly demanding, teachers have great challenges when implementing ESP in their areas of study. Bearing in mind that, one student expressed that “In the school we learn basic English but, in the university, we must face new content in English and for me it was nice to learn English of my career because it is very important for my profession and with legal cases, I understood better” (student 23, focus group T, 04.06.2021).

Students felt very well when they realized they could develop hearings in English, using legal vocabulary. They recognized that learning ESP allowed them to access new knowledge, academic information, participation in international events, scientific journals, among others. The implementation of ESP in the workshops was designed exclusively to meet the students’ specific needs and foster the importance of speaking another language in diverse contexts such as political, economic, social and cultural. Furthermore, teachers benefited because they learned new things from Law students. One of the researchers mentioned: “Students’ mood and attitude towards the class tended to change when they made their presentations. In fact, they made great analyses of the cases and me as a teacher learned a lot from them” (Entry- Research Journal 3, 20.04. 2021). Likewise, another entry refers to the students’ progress in terms of analysis and meaningful use of legal background knowledge: “In the session devoted to socializing students’ insights on the case, students displayed a good performance in terms of the analysis of the case, juridic implications and provision of a verdict according to their knowledge and expertise” (Entry-Research Journal 3, 18.05.2021)

In the samples above, it was evident how Law students began to understand that learning ESP is necessary in their professional life and we can summarize that the workshops contributed to strengthening students’ English level. In conclusion, this research was relevant because it contributed to the training of competent professionals in the area of English as a foreign language, participants were able to play specific roles in different contexts as future lawyers in which they found suitable solutions concerning several legal problems.

Legal case analysis as a EFL methodology

Methodologies in EFL are expanded and adapted according to the students' needs as well as the teaching situations. For example, through the use of technologies, depending on students' fields of knowledge (ESP), or focused on the development of specific skills such as critical thinking. Studies done by Bilová (2016) reports that the use of legal cases improve students' interest and motivation in class work; additionally, through this research, it was possible to show some benefits like the appropriation of legal expressions and the development of critical thinking skills that helped students reinforce their legal knowledge acquisition and English language use (EFL).

Likewise, the development of this research highlights the use of legal cases as a meaningful experience for teachers and students. Thus, one of the students points out: "Well, teacher, I liked the English classes because we studied legal aspects, and the English class focused on legal English; thus, that is very interesting for us, I liked the use of legal cases a lot" (student 16, Focus group T, 14.05.2021). Additionally; about the use of legal cases as the main material, one of the researchers remarked: "Students showed a positive interest in the development of the workshop. Something positive is that the use of real law cases motivated students to search for more information about it. That search was especially done in the news" (Research Journal 2, 13.04.2021). The use of real materials -real cases- was a fundamental strategy to motivate language learning. Students not only checked the information taken to class like the videos and readings, but also had to search for extra information about the cases in order to obtain more tools to discuss, analyze and propose their own interpretations and verdicts as required in each case analysis. According to studies done by Huda (2017), there is a positive attitude on the part of students and teachers about the use of real materials because the topics and materials motivate language use, acquisition and retention of knowledge through practice and class discussion.

The present research intended to apply strategies that really motivate students to work in class, participate and be able to develop teamwork. As a result, Legal English classes made them feel committed and engaged. In this sense, one of them remarked: "The class was very dynamic, we were able to analyze cases and express ourselves freely according to our own understanding" (student 6, Focus group T, 14.05.2021).

Students' perceptions about the legal English classes showed that they felt comfortable, not only because they could analyze topics of their own career, but also because the dynamic of the activities allowed them to express their points of view. Besides, they could develop teamwork which enriched their understanding and capacity to acquire arguments to defend their position and support their own analysis about the different legal cases.

Case Analysis as a Way to Foster Critical Thinking Skills

The present research was conducted with Law students enrolled in Legal English classes. Within their law classes, they were familiar with case analysis as an approach to examine legal cases and come up with plausible courses of action or solutions. Researchers implemented case analysis as a methodology to orient Legal English classes. The analysis of Legal cases contributed to foster critical thinking skills, which in the framework of this research adhered to Ennis' taxonomy of critical thinking. Ennis (2011) outlined a set of critical thinking dispositions and abilities. Ideal critical thinkers “care that their beliefs be true and that their decisions be justified [...] care to understand and present a position honestly and clearly [...] and care about every person” (pp.1-2). Furthermore, ideal critical thinker has the ability to focus on a question, analyze arguments, challenge questions, judge the credibility of a source, observe, and judge observation reports, deduce, and judge deduction, make material inferences, make and judge value judgments, define terms and judge definitions, attribute unstated assumption, consider and reason from premises, reasons, assumptions, positions, and other propositions with which they disagree or about which they are in doubt, without letting the disagreement or doubt interfere with their thinking, integrate the dispositions and other abilities in making and defending a decision. (Ennis, 2011, pp-2-4)

In this regard, students pondered the relevance of case analysis and mentioned that “For me it is important to use cases because after graduation that will be the challenge we are going to face” (student 3, Focus group V, 25.05.2021). Similarly, another student asserted that “The experience of analyzing real cases in the Legal English class also encourages us to really investigate what happened with that case. When we analyze fictitious examples, our own beliefs and ideas are involved, and we may be wrong” (student 8, Focus group V, 01.06.2021). Roell (2019) highlights that

Case studies can be tailored to different language levels and teaching situations, such as English for specific purposes (ESP) or content-based learning (language acquisition combined with the study of a subject matter) [...] The more complex the case is, the more specific the knowledge and the more specialized the language students will need. (p. 25)

Case analysis suits Legal English classes because it allows learners to tune their communicative skills in foreign language while they are delving into real examples of legal problems. Thus, they may resort to their legal background knowledge to tackle the issue, and attempt to communicate their ideas and insights by means of the foreign language. In this regard, one student stated that “background knowledge was vital when we were searching information about the case because we already know legal terminology in Spanish that a person who doesn't study law, usually ignores” (student

1, Focus group V, 25.05.2021). Likewise, another student declared that “the topics to be discussed were not really new, the novelty lied on transferring the legal knowledge into English” (student 6, Focus group V, 01.06.2021). Concerning the development of critical thinking skills, Kuimova (2010) refers to the advantages of implementing the case analysis within the EFL classroom. Case analysis contributes to develop and raise critical thinking (application/synthesis/evaluation) and reflective learning in the learner; develop problem solving skills; improve the student’s organizational skills – as case studies are sometimes very dense in information, the key is to condense this information into logical sections and organize them so that a clear picture of the problem/issue can be understood; get you thinking and brainstorming; connect theory and practice; teach students that there may not be one«right» answer, after all; encourage attention to and self-consciousness about assumptions and conceptions; reflect the contextual, situated, complex nature of knowledge; get students to be active, not passive[...]. (n.p)

In this respect, students tended to correlate criticality with knowledge. Thus, one student stated that “As we are about to graduate, we hold a more optimal criterion as lawyers, and it differs from non-lawyers” (student 8, Focus group V, 01.06.2021). In conclusion, the present research confirms that case study is a suitable methodology to be applied within EFL settings, and its contributions transcend the development of communicative skills in foreign language as it may foster thinking, organization and collaboration skills.

Conclusions

After the application of this research project, we could see that communicative and critical thinking skills (Ennis' taxonomy of critical thinking) were fostered using the legal case analysis approach to teach Legal English online. Through workshops designed by the researchers, students were guided to learn and use legal terminology, reflect on current issues by answering some ice breaking questions, differentiate the parts of a legal case and how they are interrelated, and useful to conduct the legal case analysis. Furthermore, they engaged in collaborative activities intended to foster the use of prior legal knowledge, the assessment and exchange of suitable information to come to some conclusions concerning the given case. In this sense, academic activities like the use of real case analysis for teaching may be included as part of the daily teaching in Legal English. As it was previously mentioned they allowed students to use their prior knowledge as a way to express their ideas, additionally, they motivate students to solve real life problems and develop abilities of arguing in specific fields of law.

In regard to Online English teaching, Guichon (2009) emphasizes three teaching and pedagogical competences, namely, 1. Competency of socio-affective regulation, 2. Competency of pedagogical regulation and 3. Competency of multimedia regulation. Over the course of the present research project, researchers were able to work as a team in order to design Legal English classes and develop a pedagogical proposal intended to contribute to the in-tandem development of communicative and critical thinking skills. In relation to the first competency defined as "the capacity to establish a relationship with a learner or a group of learners, to maintain it despite distance, and to eventually build a learning community" (Guichon, 2009, p 169), we as researchers advanced in terms of solving students questions and learning predicaments within the online classes, however, there is still too much to do in order to build up real learning communities which transcend the enrollment for just one or two semesters. As for the Competency of pedagogical regulation which consists of "proposing clear and concise instructions, providing positive and negative feedback and deploying an array of strategies to facilitate second-language learning" (Guichon, 2009, p.169), we must express that it was the core of designing suitable workshops to orient Legal English classes and provide a clear class agenda for students to become acquainted with each lesson's objectives and steps. Finally, concerning Competency of multimedia regulation that "encompasses both the multimedia literacy and the computer-mediated communication literacy" (Guichon, 2009, p.170). We, as English teachers and the students as well, are still on the path to becoming more familiar with all the advantages derived from the implementation of online platforms, applications and websites. Over the course of the pedagogical intervention and aligned to the university guidelines, we conducted online classes by means of Google meet or zoom, and used Moodle as the platform to assign classwork. Furthermore, students developed some assignments using applications such as Canva, Flipsnack and Flipgrid.

Concerning the students' performance, their needs count when making decisions

about legal cases in order to find a correct solution. The Law students achieved their main goal, which was to prepare and perform a hearing in English, including legal vocabulary, support from the Colombian Law, legal background knowledge, analysis of real legal cases, among others. This was possible because they were internally motivated, their critical thoughts were heard by the teacher-researchers when they made decisions about issues they wanted to address.

Although this study was successful, there were some limitations related to the use of some digital tools, for some students it was difficult to access to the Internet when they had to attend to virtual classes, so they were lost about the activities they had to develop but they were willing to find the way to present tasks on time. Lack of time was also a limitation for participants because they had to assume other duties in their several subjects, so they asked teachers to provide extra time for the development of the activities. Finally, in some learners, it was not easy to work in groups because of the schedule each one had, thus, during the English classes, it was relevant to assign time and create breakout rooms to give students the chance to communicate and achieve their academic goals.

This project is available to be worked in other areas of study in EFL as further research because not only Law students have the necessity to explore skills about interpreting, arguing and proposing. Nowadays, students from different majors should be motivated to have a critical thinking development and the opportunity to learn how to solve problems from their field of knowledge.

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