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LEXITOONS: AN EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION TO ENHANCE CONTEXTUAL LEGALESE USING COMIC STRIPS

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ABSTRACT

LLD20302 (English for Law) is a compulsory course for Diploma in Law students at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin. It seeks to provide students with fundamental legal terminology and improve their capacity to comprehend and formulate legal documents in diverse legal settings. The course traditionally depends on reading materials, case studies, and group discussions. Nonetheless, these traditional methods have demonstrated restricted efficacy in aiding students to comprehend the contextual use of legal terminology, especially in ways that are visually and practically relevant. Based on the Multimodal Social Semiotics theory, this educational innovation has adopted the concept that learning happens through the interpretation and creation of meaning using multiple semiotic resources, not just linguistics, but also visual, spatial and interactive. LEXITOONS is an educational innovation that examines the utilisation of comic strips as an alternative pedagogical instrument to enhance students' comprehension and application of legal terminology. In total, 80 students enrolled in the Diploma in Law program participated in this study. Data were gathered via academic performance and a survey to investigate students' attitudes towards utilising comics in legal education, followed by evaluations of academic achievement and semi-structured interviews to determine the efficacy of the method. Findings demonstrate that incorporating comics into legal English education improves student interest, understanding, and confidence in utilising legal terminology. The visual storytelling approach enables students to contextualise legal concepts more effectively, enhancing the accessibility and retention of learning. This research advances instructional innovation by advocating for a creative, student-centred methodology in legal education.

Keywords: LEXITOONS, English for Law, Comic Strips, Contextual Legalese, Educational Innovation

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia, a postcolonial nation like Australia, India, and many African countries, faces unique challenges in its legal system due to its history of British colonisation. The legal system operates bilingually in Malay and English, making language proficiency crucial for lawyers (Ahmad Sani & Ahmad Sani, 2024). Legal English, or legalese, is a highly specialised variety of English used in legal contexts. It is dense, formal, and filled with archaic and technical terms, posing significant challenges for Diploma in Law students, especially those for whom English is a second language. Traditional pedagogical methods, often reliant on textbook-centric and lecture-based instruction, have proven insufficient in enhancing students' contextual comprehension and engagement with legal concepts.

Multimodal approaches in language teaching have shown positive outcomes, with students significantly improving their language skills through multimodal tasks (Al-Hajmee, 2023). However, the use of multimodal texts, such as comics, in English for Law education remains underexplored. Comic strips are gaining recognition as valuable tools in education, blending words and images to convey narratives and enhancing student motivation and creativity. While comics have been successfully used in language teaching, their application in legal education, particularly for understanding legal terminology, is limited.

To address these issues, the *LEXITOONS* project was conceptualised under the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) initiative to integrate comic strip storytelling into the legal English curriculum. This initiative explores the efficacy of comics not just as supplementary material but as a central learning strategy to foster deep understanding, vocabulary acquisition, and contextual application of legal terms. Hence, this paper aims to leverage comics to visually convey complex legal information and assess their impact on contextual legalese comprehension for Diploma Law students.

The implications of this study extend beyond legal education, offering innovative teaching methodologies that bridge the gap between intricate legal terminology and comprehensive understanding. Ultimately, it seeks to enhance learning experiences, empower students to master contextual legalese phraseology and improve language proficiency for future legal practitioners.

This project was designed based on the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of using comics on enhancing Diploma Law Students' understanding of contextual legalese comprehension?
2. How do Diploma Law students perceive the use of comic construction in contextual legalese comprehension?

METHODOLOGY

This study employs quantitative research methods to investigate the effects of using comic strips as authentic learning materials in supporting Diploma in Law students' motivation for learning English for Law. Besides the analysis on the students' comic production as the major assessment, researchers also analyse students' academic performances from two different cohorts to measure the effectiveness

of using comics for their contextual legalese comprehension. To complement this, structured surveys were conducted to explore students' perceptions and experiences in greater depth.

The study involved 80 semester 5 Diploma in Law students enrolled in LLD20302: English for Law, all of whom participated in the survey. This study utilised two research instruments. To answer the first research question on effectiveness, both continuous quality improvements (CQI) from the two batches were assessed to see the comparison before and after the implementation of *LEXITOONS*. In addition, to answer the second research objective, a survey questionnaire was employed to examine students' perceptions of the incorporation of comic strips in understanding legalese phraseology, using a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The survey includes Likert-scale questions to measure students' attitudes, preferences, and the perceived effectiveness of comic-based instruction, alongside questions capturing demographic information and prior experiences with legalese learning.

Data collected from the survey were analysed using statistical analysis using SPSS version 28.0 to identify significant differences in students' academic performance and engagement. By employing this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the role of comic-based learning in enhancing students' engagement, motivation, and comprehension of legalese phraseology, ultimately contributing to innovative pedagogical strategies in legal education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ1: The effects of LEXITOONS on students' continuous performances

It is significant to show the comparison data before the intervention to comic and after the intervention of the comics. Hence, for this paper, the researchers presented two datasets from two batches of students enrolling in the Diploma of Law: Session 2021/2022 and Session 2024/2025. Table 1 demonstrates the comparative data between the pre- and post-intervention phases, revealing a notable improvement in student performance following the implementation of *LEXITOONS*.

Table 1.: The Comparisons of CQIs Before and After Introducing *LEXITOONS*

Indicator	Before <i>LEXITOONS</i>	After <i>LEXITOONS</i>
MQF Domain	MQF1 & MQF5	MQF3b.v2 & MQF3c.v2
CLOs Evaluated	CLO1 (MQF1), CLO2 (MQF5)	CLO1 (MQF3b.v2), CLO2 (MQF3c.v2)
No. of Students	55 students per CLO	80 students per CLO
Students Scoring $\geq 50\%$ (CLO1)	52	80
Students Scoring $\geq 50\%$ (CLO2)	54	80
Percentage $\geq 50\%$ (CLO1)	94.55%	100%
Percentage $\geq 50\%$ (CLO2)	98.18%	100%

Prior to the intervention, student achievement was already commendable, with 94.55% meeting the 50% benchmark for CLO1 (MQF1) and 98.18% for CLO2 (MQF5). However, the introduction of LEXITOONS resulted in a full 100% of students achieving the passing threshold for both CLO1 and CLO2, now aligned with MQF3b.v2 and MQF3c.v2, respectively. This positive shift suggests that LEXITOONS may have played a significant role in enhancing learners' understanding and engagement. The improvement is particularly impressive considering the increase in the number of students assessed from 55 to 80 per CLO, which demonstrates not only improved outcomes but also the scalability and robustness of the intervention. The fact that every student achieved at least 50% reflects an inclusive and effective teaching strategy that caters to a range of learning needs and proficiencies.

The data also underscores the importance of adopting learner-centred pedagogical innovations in Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) efforts. The significant performance gains observed post-intervention suggest that LEXITOONS can be considered a viable tool for supporting CLO attainment across different MQF domains. In particular, it appears to bridge the gap previously observed in the cognitive domain (MQF1), where a small number of students had fallen short.

Nevertheless, while the outcomes are promising, it is important to interpret the results cautiously. Other contributing factors, such as differences in assessment design, student background knowledge, or teaching styles, may also have influenced the outcomes. To build a more comprehensive understanding of LEXITOONS' effectiveness, future evaluations should incorporate qualitative data such as student feedback and classroom observations, as well as comparisons with other instructional methods.

In summary, the post-intervention results validate the effectiveness of LEXITOONS in fostering student success. The complete attainment of CLOs across a larger student cohort affirms the pedagogical strength of integrating visual storytelling and multimodal learning into higher education practices. Such tools not only improve outcomes but also promote a more inclusive and engaging learning environment that can be sustained and expanded in future curriculum development.

RQ2: Students' Perceptions on the use of comic strips

Students were asked to evaluate their perceptions on comic strips in contextual legalese comprehension based on 10 items understanding complex terminology, learning legal English more engaging and enjoyable, illustrate real life situations, active participations, enhance retention of legal vocabulary and terms, simplification of complex legal concepts, creative approach as learning tool, act as an additional resources to deepen understanding of legal English, improve confidence in discussing legal topics and issues, and incorporating comics benefit students' learning experiences. However, due to space and word limitations for this extended abstract, this paper will focus on item 1 on the benefits of comics to understand complex legal terminology as demonstrated in Figure 1 below.

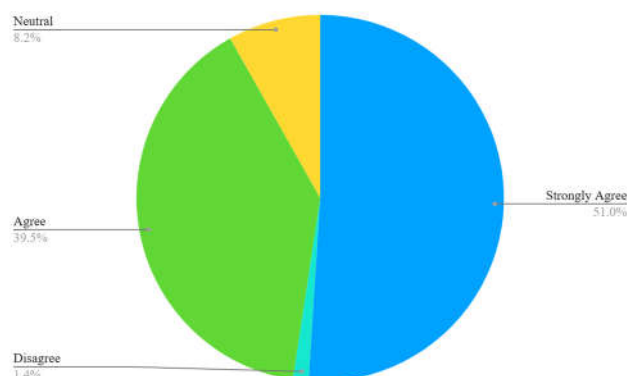


Figure 1.: The benefits of comics to understand complex legal terminology

Based on the comprehension of complex legal phrases, the findings indicate a strong positive perception among students regarding the use of comics in legal education. A significant majority, 51%, strongly agree that comics enhance their understanding of complex legal terms and concepts, while an additional 39.5% agree with the statement. Combined, this shows that 90.5% of the respondents support the use of comics as an effective pedagogical tool for simplifying legal discourse. Such a result suggests that visual storytelling and multimodal learning approaches resonate well with students, likely because they present abstract legal concepts in more relatable and accessible formats (Ali, Otoluwa and Pilongo, 2023).

On the other hand, a small proportion of 8.2% remains neutral, possibly indicating either limited exposure to comic-based materials or a preference for more traditional methods. Only 1.4% disagree, which is negligible and suggests minimal resistance to this form of instruction.

This overwhelming support highlights the pedagogical potential of comics in contexts where students are required to comprehend specialised and technical language, such as legalese. It aligns with the multimodal teaching approach, particularly Multimodal Social Semiotics (Kress, 2010), which posits that information is more effectively processed when presented in both verbal and visual forms. The findings advocate wider adoption of comics or similar visual tools in legal education to bridge comprehension gaps, especially among novice learners or students with a limited background in legal terminology.

CONCLUSION

The *LEXITOONS* project demonstrates that comic strip storytelling is not merely an edutainment tool but a transformative pedagogical strategy in legal education. It fosters not only linguistic and cognitive development but also personal engagement and legal imagination.

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