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THE ROLE OF SIMULATIONS IN DEVELOPING JURISPRUDENCE STUDENTS' SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LESSONS

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Abstract: Sociolinguistic competence is essential for law students who need to use English effectively in social and professional legal contexts. This article explores how simulation-based learning helps law students improve their sociolinguistic competence in English. The article shows how activities such as mock trials, moot courts, and client interviews provide meaningful, hands-on learning. These simulations help students practice real communication, boost motivation, and build important skills like critical thinking and problem-solving. The study highlights how such methods meet the specific language needs of law students and prepare them for their future legal careers.

Introduction

Teaching English to jurisprudence (law) students presents a unique set of challenges and goals. Beyond general language proficiency, these learners must acquire sociolinguistic competence – the ability to use language appropriately in specific social and professional contexts. In the legal field, this means mastering formal registers, specialized terminology, and pragmatic norms (e.g. how to address a judge or negotiate with a client) in English. Traditional lecture-based methods often fall short in providing the practical communication skills required for real-life legal settings. This is where simulation-based learning can play a pivotal role.

Simulation activities create realistic scenarios in which students actively use the language, thereby bridging the gap between classroom learning and professional practiser (Jones & Barrett 2017).

In an educational context, simulations are instructional scenarios that mimic real-world situations, allowing students to learn by doing in a safe environment. Unlike passive learning, simulations fall under experiential learning methods, engaging students as active participants. One definition describes simulation as "an experiential instructional strategy to replicate real incidents, issues, procedures, or skills to produce desirable outcomes". In other words, a simulation creates a realistic but controlled setting where learners must apply their knowledge and skills as if in a real situation. This could range from a simple role-play between two students to a complex mock event with many participants. Importantly, simulations are interactive and often open-ended – students' decisions influence outcomes, mirroring real-life complexity.

It is useful to distinguish simulations from the closely related concept of role-play. In language pedagogy, role-play usually means students adopt characters or personas and interact accordingly. Role-plays and simulations overlap considerably, and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. A distinction is that role-plays emphasize the interpersonal interaction of the characters, while simulations focus on problem-solving within a realistic context (often incorporating role-play as well. For example, a class acting out a meeting where each student has a role is a role-play; if that activity is structured to solve a case or address a scenario with real procedures (court trial, negotiation, etc.), it becomes a simulation. In practice, both aim to immerse students in communicative situations. The key element is authenticity: simulations strive to expose students to language use as close as possible to real life. By doing so, they allow students to experience the language (not just learn about it) – students must choose the right words, tone, and actions as the scenario unfolds, much like in real interactions.

Effective simulations in teaching typically involve three stages: preparation, active participation, and debriefing. In preparation, the instructor sets clear goals and provides students with background context, roles, and instructions. During the simulation, students then actively participate in their assigned roles or tasks, collaborating and communicating to navigate the scenario. Finally, in the debriefing, the class reflects on what happened, discussing both content (e.g. legal issues raised) and language use (e.g. what phrases felt appropriate or not). This reflection phase is crucial for consolidating learning from the simulation experience.

Literature Review

Simulation as a teaching method has been researched and utilized across various disciplines for decades. Early adoption of simulations was seen in fields like business, medicine,

and the social sciences, where complex real-life processes needed to be taught in classroom settings. Over time, a substantial body of research has emerged supporting the effectiveness of simulation-based learning. A recent comprehensive review by Chernikova et al. (2020) analyzed 145 studies on simulations in higher education and found overall positive effects on learning outcomes. This meta-analysis concluded that well-designed simulations can significantly improve students' skills acquisition and knowledge transfer, especially when combined with guided reflection and feedback. Similarly, Hallinger and Wang (2020) mapped the evolution of simulation-based learning from 1965 to 2018 and noted its expansion across disciplines and its alignment with active, student-centered learning paradigms.

In the context of language education, research has shown that simulation activities can enhance communicative competence. For instance, a 2023 study by Zvarych et al. measured the impact of simulations on university students learning a foreign language. The results indicated that the experimental group (who participated in simulations) showed significant improvement in speaking skills and higher motivation compared to a control group. The authors noted that simulations allowed these students to practice various communicative situations, thereby improving their ability to understand and use the language in real time. Another study by Angelini and García-Carbonell (2019) focused on using online simulation games to develop English speaking skills, and it similarly reported notable gains in learners' fluency and confidence (as cited in Zvarych et al., 2023).

Research on simulations has also specifically targeted English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts, such as Legal English for law students. Nhac (2023) conducted an empirical study on law students in Vietnam, examining Simulation-based Activities (SbAs) integrated into a legal English course. The findings were encouraging: students in the simulation-enhanced course outperformed those in traditional classes in various legal English skills (vocabulary, speaking, listening, etc.), and they reported higher motivation and engagement. Other researchers have observed that even short-term simulations can lead to measurable improvements. Phillips (2012), for example, carried out an experimental implementation of "law games" (simulation/role-play exercises for legal scenarios) and found that students in the treatment group demonstrated better performance in vocabulary usage, listening comprehension, and spoken fluency than those taught through conventional methods. These results align with the broader literature showing that simulations can make language learning more effective by contextualizing it in meaningful tasks.

Furthermore, qualitative observations from research highlight additional benefits of simulation-based learning. Students often perceive simulations as enjoyable and memorable,

which contributes to reduced anxiety and greater willingness to communicate in the target language (Razali & Ismail, 2017). Instructors have reported that even quiet or hesitant learners become more participative when engaging in role-plays or simulations, as the "game-like" atmosphere lowers inhibitions and fosters creativity (Shariff et al., 2017). Overall, the accumulated research to date suggests that simulations are a powerful pedagogical tool, capable of enhancing both the outcomes (skills, knowledge) and the process (motivation, engagement) of learning. This evidence base has encouraged educators in language programs to incorporate more simulation and role-playing techniques, especially in courses aiming to develop real-world communication abilities.

Simulations offer numerous benefits for language teaching and learning, which helps explain the positive research findings above.

Simulations provide an opportunity to reproduce various communicative situations that learners are likely to encounter outside the classroom. By interacting in these realistic scenarios, students practice not just isolated language points (grammar or vocabulary) but the holistic skill of communicating meaningfully. For example, a simulation might involve a student acting as a customer and another as a service provider, forcing them to use appropriate greetings, negotiating language, clarifications, and cultural norms as they would in real life. This authenticity helps improve speaking skills and listening comprehension, as students learn to understand and use language in real time. It also accustoms them to varying contexts and interlocutors, adapting their speech to fit formal or informal settings as needed.

One of the most consistently reported benefits of simulation-based learning is increased student motivation. Simulations transform the classroom dynamic from passive reception to active involvement. Learners often find these activities fun, challenging, and relevant, which can boost their enthusiasm for learning the language. Shariff, Ghanizadeh, and Jahedizadeh (2017) noted that simulations raise interest and motivation by making materials more practical compared to traditional methods. Instead of doing repetitive textbook exercises, students in a simulation are solving problems, collaborating, and using their imagination, which sustains attention. The competitive or game-like elements (e.g. a team debate or a mock trial) can further galvanize participation. Motivated learners tend to put in more effort and practice, accelerating their language development.

Through simulations, language learners gain experience in using appropriate language for the context. They must consider not only what to say but how to say it depending on roles and situations. This naturally fosters sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. Learners become sensitive to levels of formality, politeness, humor, or assertiveness as

required. For instance, in a role-play phone call to make a complaint, a student practices being politely assertive; in a simulation of a job interview, they learn the formal register and courteous expressions. By hearing, seeing, and enacting situations, students internalize social language norms better. They also practice strategies like turn-taking, interrupting politely, clarifying misunderstandings, and persuading – all vital real-world communication skills that go beyond grammar. In short, simulations help students bridge the gap between knowing a language and using it appropriately.

Many simulations are built around tasks or problems that need resolution (e.g. resolving a business dispute, planning an event, or negotiating an agreement). As students engage with these scenarios, they exercise critical thinking and decision-making skills in the target language. Instead of just recalling memorized phrases, they must think on their feet in the foreign language, which strengthens their cognitive processing in that language. Simulations often require creativity as well – for example, if a storyline takes an unexpected turn, students must improvise a solution using the language resources they have. This problem-solving element keeps learners mentally active and can deepen their understanding of content (subject matter) alongside language. Especially for advanced learners, this leads to more nuanced expression and ability to articulate complex ideas in the second language.

An often overlooked benefit of simulation exercises is the development of soft skills like teamwork, leadership, time management, and empathy. Because simulations frequently involve group interaction, students learn to work together towards a common goal, negotiate roles, and manage time constraints. Communication skills in a broad sense are honed – not only linguistic accuracy but also body language, listening to others, and responding appropriately. In a simulation, every student typically has a role to play, which helps ensure even participation and can build confidence in shy learners. Research has observed that such activities naturally foster group-work and organizational skills alongside language practice. Moreover, by taking on different perspectives (e.g. a student may play a role contrary to their real opinion), they develop empathy and the ability to see a situation from multiple angles – a valuable skill in any communication.

Simulations create a safe space where mistakes are learning opportunities with no real-world consequences. Students can attempt to use new vocabulary or complex grammatical structures during a simulation without fear of dire repercussions if they make an error. For example, forgetting a legal term in a mock trial does not result in an actual lost case; instead, it highlights a gap to be addressed in class. This safety allows learners to experiment with language, push their limits, and receive constructive feedback in the debriefing. In fields like

healthcare training, this aspect is crucial (e.g. practicing procedures on a mannequin so no patient is harmed. In language teaching, the analogy holds: students can practice socially delicate interactions (persuading, apologizing, disagreeing) in English during a simulation, so that in real life they will be prepared to do it correctly. The supportive atmosphere of a well-facilitated simulation reduces performance anxiety and builds students' self-assurance.

In summary, simulations in language teaching encapsulate many elements of best practice in education: they are learner-centered, promote active use of language, integrate cognitive and social skills, and make learning enjoyable. By turning knowledge into practice, simulations help students move from knowing about the language to actually using the language effectively. These benefits accrue to language learners in general, but as the next section discusses, they are particularly pertinent for law students who must attain high sociolinguistic competence in professional English.

Materials and Methods

For students of jurisprudence (law), developing sociolinguistic competence in English is crucial. Legal professionals operate in contexts that demand a very precise and contextually appropriate use of language. This includes using formal registers, adhering to protocols of address and courtesy (e.g. saying "Your Honor" to a judge), mastering technical legal terms (legal jargon), and employing persuasive rhetoric. Achieving competence in these areas is not just a matter of learning vocabulary or grammar; it involves practicing the social use of the language in scenarios that mirror real legal interactions. Simulations are ideally suited to meet this need.

In a typical English for Law (Legal English) course, students might learn terminology and read legal texts. While this builds linguistic competence, it might not ensure they can use the language appropriately in context. Simulations, such as a mock court hearing or a client interview role-play, allow law students to experience the communicative demands of legal settings first-hand. By acting out the role of a lawyer, a client, or a judge, students must choose language appropriate to that role. For instance, a student playing a lawyer giving advice to a client will practice explaining legal concepts in plain English, using a polite and reassuring tone. Another student acting as a prosecutor in a moot court will practice a more formal and assertive style, using terms of art and respectful address to the bench. These experiences build sociolinguistic competence by ingraining a sense of what is appropriate or effective in different legal communicative acts.

Sociolinguistic competence is closely related to pragmatic competence – knowing how to perform functions like requesting, questioning, or persuading in a socially acceptable way.

For law students, pragmatic competence might include how to negotiate a plea, how to question a witness politely but firmly, or how to draft a contractual clause with the right level of formality. Almazova and Sheredekina (2022) emphasize that pragmatic competence – "knowledge about how a foreign language is used appropriately in a legal context" – is a key component of a law student's communicative ability. Their study used a case-method simulation approach (having students work through simulated legal cases) to train this competence, and found it effective. The strength of the case simulation method was its twofold goal: it gave students legal knowledge and simultaneously stimulated them to be effective communicators in legal scenarios. In other words, through simulations of legal cases, students learned the content and how to communicate that content suitably – precisely the integration sociolinguistic competence requires.

Legal English has been described as complex and challenging to learn (Kamolidinovna, 2021, as cited in Nhac, 2023). It involves archaic terms (e.g. hereby, heretofore), very specific vocabulary (e.g. plaintiff, affidavit), and often lengthy, formal sentence structures. Law students must not only understand these features but learn when to use them (versus when not to – e.g. knowing how to simplify language for a jury). Simulations compel students to actively use legal English. For instance, a courtroom role-play will naturally prompt students to use formal legal phrases and object using formulaic expressions ("Objection, Your Honor, relevance."). Research by Amirbayeva (2021) found that such courtroom role-playing helped learners acquire legal English vocabulary through the act of researching and reading case materials, and importantly, it drew their attention to using those terms in the appropriate context. This resulted in improved retention of terminology and better spoken fluency when discussing legal matters. In essence, simulations serve as a rehearsal space for the unique discourse of the legal world.

Legal professionals need a blend of language skills and other professional skills – writing clearly, speaking persuasively, listening attentively, and thinking critically under pressure. Simulation activities allow law students to integrate these skills. Mykytiuk (2013) observed that a simulated legal trial in class was beneficial for nurturing students' language of oral advocacy, including making persuasive arguments and employing proper argumentation strategies. Students practicing a mock trial were not only learning to speak; they were learning to argue like lawyers. Likewise, participating in a moot court (a simulated appellate court argument) gives students practice in legal reasoning and responding spontaneously to judges' questions. Zarić and Cecille (2003) noted that moot court exercises provide opportunities for students to draft legal arguments and then present them orally, which builds confidence in public speaking, logical reasoning, and even legal writing. All these are elements of

communicative competence in the legal domain. By simulating them, students become more "practice-ready." They can enter internships or professional training having already experienced some of the communicative tasks required. This is a strong argument for including simulations: it aligns academic training with the expectations of the labour market, which seeks law graduates who can communicate effectively from day one.

Another reason to use simulations for jurisprudence students is that it transforms typically dry, theoretical lessons into interactive sessions. Traditional law instruction often centres on reading cases and theoretical discussions, which, while important, may not actively engage students in using English. Simulations complement this by adding a practical dimension where students speak and act. Daly and Higgins (2011) noted that using communicative techniques like simulations in legal teaching increased interaction between learners and raised motivation (as cited in Nhac, 2023). Law students often have analytical minds; simulations challenge them to apply that analysis in real-time communication. This can deepen their understanding of legal content as well. For example, a simulation of contract negotiation requires understanding contract law and how to clearly articulate and modify terms in conversation. The interactive nature of simulations means students receive immediate feedback from peers' reactions and outcomes of the scenario, which can solidify both language and content learning.

In summary, jurisprudence students stand to gain significantly from simulation-based activities. By including simulations in English lessons for law students, educators can directly target the sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies that these students need. Simulations make the learning of Legal English relevant, contextual, and active, ensuring that students not only know legal language and norms but can deploy them adeptly in the appropriate contexts. Considering the high stakes of miscommunication in legal settings, providing this kind of practice is an investment in the students' future professional success.

When designing simulations for jurisprudence students, it is important to choose scenarios that closely align with the communicative situations they will face in their legal careers. Fortunately, many simulation formats have been successfully used in legal education and ESP courses. Below are several types of simulations advised for use in English lessons for law students, along with their educational benefits:

Client Consultation (Lawyer–Client Interview)

In this role-play, one student acts as a lawyer and another as a client (they can later swap roles). The "client" is given a set of facts about a legal problem, and the "lawyer" must interview the client and offer advice. This simulation trains students in pragmatic language skills like

asking appropriate questions, showing empathy, explaining legal terms in plain language, and giving recommendations. It reflects real tasks such as initial consultations at a law office. Students learn to balance formality with approachability – a key sociolinguistic skill when dealing with clients. They also expand legal vocabulary in context (for example, discussing a tenancy dispute or an accident case and using relevant terms correctly).

Parliamentary Debate

This is a group simulation where students debate a policy or legal issue in a format akin to a parliament. Typically, four students can form a group: one acting as the proposer of a motion (supporter), one as the opposer, one as the Speaker (moderator), and one as a time-keeper to enforce limits. The group is given a contentious topic (e.g. "This house would ban capital punishment") and must conduct a mini debate in class. This simulation is excellent for practicing persuasive language and formal debate etiquette. Students learn to formulate arguments, use rhetorical devices, and interject with phrases like "Point of information" – all in English. The format encourages quick thinking and polite turn-taking. It also exposes students to a legislative register of English (words like "the honorable member," "motion," "yield the floor"), enriching their sociolinguistic range.

Press Conference or Political Interview ("Political Nightmare" Role-Play)

In this activity, students simulate an interview scenario involving a panel of journalists and a public official (e.g., a government minister or a company spokesperson. Some students take on the role of aggressive journalists asking tough questions, while another student (or students) play the politicians or officials responding. This role-play develops the ability to handle challenging questions on the spot and to maintain politeness and credibility under pressure. Law students benefit because it mirrors press interactions that lawyers or politicians might have, requiring them to choose words carefully, avoid admissions, or make clarifications diplomatically. It practices a more spontaneous form of formal English, and fosters listening skills (students must respond directly to what is asked, often needing to "think on their feet").

Legal Consulting Presentation

In this simulation, a small team of students acts as legal consultants hired by a client (the rest of the class or the instructor can act as the client). The team must deliver a presentation with their legal analysis or solution to the client's case or issue. For example, a team might present the steps for a company to comply with a new law. They stand in front of the class (the "client") and speak, using slides or visuals if appropriate, and then take questions from the audience. This task builds formal presentation skills in English – organizing a talk, using signposting language ("First, let us outline…"), speaking clearly and confidently – which

are crucial for many legal settings (court arguments, academic moot presentations, etc.). It also encourages mastery of content because students must research the legal matter to give a "cutting-edge" briefing. The Q&A session afterward is valuable for practicing how to think linguistically on the spot and respond to unforeseen queries in a professional tone.

Panel Discussion or Legal Talk Show

Similar to a consulting presentation, a panel discussion involves multiple students discussing a legal topic in front of the class, but in a more interactive format. Each student on the panel assumes a role (e.g., different stakeholders or experts in a legal debate). A moderator (another student or teacher) guides the discussion with questions. For instance, a panel might discuss "privacy rights in the digital age," with one student as a civil liberties advocate, another as a tech company lawyer, another as a government official, etc. This simulation encourages students to deeply engage with a topic and practice extended discourse – expressing opinions, agreeing or disagreeing politely, and building on others' points. It mimics TV talk shows or expert panels, which is a realistic genre of legal communication (think of expert testimonies or symposiums). Linguistically, it helps with turn-taking signals ("I'd like to add..."), polite disagreement ("I see your point, however..."), and adapting to a semi-formal register that is neither casual nor strictly courtroom-formal.

Mock Trial

A mock trial is a simulation of a courtroom trial. Students are assigned roles such as attorneys (prosecutors, defence counsel), witnesses, judge, jury, etc. They are given a case scenario (often a summary of facts and legal charges) and must carry out a simplified trial from start to finish. This involves opening statements, direct and cross-examination of witnesses, perhaps evidence presentation, and closing arguments, followed by a verdict. Mock trials are a staple of legal education because they encapsulate a wide array of skills: constructing arguments, public speaking, thinking on one's feet, and knowledge of legal procedure. In English lessons, conducting a mock trial provides rich language practice: students use formal legal English (addressing the court, objecting, etc.), question forms for examination ("Is it not true that...?"), and persuasive oratory. They also learn courtroom etiquette and the special phraseology involved (for example, how to swear in a witness or how to formally address the jury). As an educational benefit, mock trials engage students in collaborative storytelling – they have to work together to present a coherent case – and in doing so, they internalize both legal concepts and the language to express them. Students often report that such simulations are memorable highlights of their courses, boosting their confidence dramatically in using English in public settings.

Moot Court

A moot court is another legal simulation, distinct from a mock trial in that it simulates an appellate court hearing rather than a trial. In a moot court, there is no jury or witness testimony; instead, students work in teams to argue a legal appeal in front of a panel of judges (which could be played by instructors or other students). Each team represents a side (appellant vs. respondent) in a case and prepares legal briefs and oral arguments. During the simulation, the teams take turns presenting their oral arguments, and the judges interrupt with questions, just as in a real appellate hearing. Moot courts are highly beneficial for advanced law students' language development: they require mastery of formal legal rhetoric, the ability to think critically in English (answering complex legal questions on the fly), and an understanding of subtle sociolinguistic cues like deference and decorum. Students must be precise and persuasive, using phrases such as "May it please the court…" and structuring arguments logically. According to Ringel (2004) and others, moot court encourages students to apply law to facts and defend their interpretation, which is a cognitively demanding task in a foreign language. As cited earlier, engaging in moot courts has been shown to improve law students' confidence in public speaking, logical argumentation, and professional writing. It's an ideal capstone simulation for legal English training, bringing together all facets of communicative competence in a high-level task.

Each of these simulation types can be tailored to the proficiency level of the students and the specific curriculum goals. For instance, if students are at intermediate English level, a simpler mock trial with more basic language can be used; for advanced students, complex cases and stricter adherence to real legal procedures can be introduced. It's also possible to combine simulation formats or run them sequentially (e.g., do a client interview that leads into a negotiation simulation, then into a contract drafting based on the outcome). The common thread is that these activities immerse jurisprudence students in realistic communicative roles requiring appropriate use of English.

To implement these effectively, teachers should ensure adequate preparation time. Pre-teaching key vocabulary or courtroom phrases, for example, can make the simulation run smoother. Likewise, debriefing after the simulation is vital: instructors can correct serious language errors, highlight useful expressions that emerged, and let students reflect on what felt natural or challenging in communicating. With well-planned simulations, law students practice English in context, develop sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills, and often have a lot of fun in the process – making the learning experience both effective and enjoyable.

Conclusion

Simulation-based learning stands out as a powerful approach to developing communicative competence, particularly sociolinguistic competence, in jurisprudence students learning English. By faithfully imitating the professional contexts these students will enter, simulations make the learning experience relevant and immersive. We have seen that simulations in teaching are essentially about bringing the real world into the classroom – engaging students in authentic tasks rather than abstract exercises. Decades of research and practice have shown that this engagement leads to better retention of language skills, higher student motivation, and improved ability to transfer classroom learning to real-life use.

For law students, whose future careers will depend on precise and appropriate language use, simulation activities are not just beneficial but perhaps indispensable. Traditional methods can teach terminology and rules; simulations can install pragmatic know-how – the when, how, and why of language in context. A student who has argued a case in a mock trial or negotiated a deal in a role-play will approach actual legal communications with much greater confidence and competence than one who has only read about such interactions. The simulations function as a form of rehearsal for the myriad sociolinguistic challenges of legal practice, from persuading a courtroom to comforting a client.

In implementing simulations, educators should strive to make them as inclusive and constructive as possible. Clear objectives, supportive facilitation, and thorough debriefing help maximize learning outcomes. It is also important to align simulations with course goals – in this case, ensuring they target the language functions and social skills that law students need. When done well, simulation-based lessons can transform a legal English classroom into a dynamic environment where students are not just learners of English, but young professionals using English. They learn from each other, not just from the instructor, by collaboratively creating the learning experience. This student-centred, experiential approach ultimately produces graduates who are better prepared for the communicative realities of their profession.

In conclusion, the role of simulations in developing jurisprudence students' sociolinguistic competence is both impactful and well-founded in pedagogical theory. Simulations bridge the gap between knowing a language and performing in that language within specific cultural and professional norms. For a broader educational audience, the take-home message is clear: if we want students to truly be competent communicators, we must give them opportunities to practice communication in conditions that simulate the real world. For law students in English lessons, this means moot courts, mock negotiations, interviews, and more. Embracing these methods heralds a shift from rote learning to learning by doing,

equipping future jurists with not only legal knowledge but the communicative agility to use it effectively on the global stage.

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