Teaching Law to Non-Law Background Students: Challenges and Strategies

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ABSTRACT: *Many learners view the legal topic as difficult, challenging and tedious inherently. Therefore, something needs to be done to change these perceptions and transform the overview of the learners on this subject. This study aims to discuss the problems faced by students with non-law background in learning the law subject and to recommend strategies for the students to effectively learn the subject. To achieve the objectives, the doctrinal methodology is used by adopting library-based research. In addition, this study is largely based on the writer's experience of teaching law to students with a non-law background in accounting school, UiTM Perak Branch, Tapah Campus. The writers analyzed the challenges and problems arising from teaching law to non-law students also explored effective solutions and strategies to deal with the issues. It is hoped that the recommendations proposed will have an impact on improving the teaching and learning strategies for future non-law students.*
KEYWORDS: *Non-law students, law subject, teaching, challenges, recommendation*

I. INTRODUCTION

Legal education is no longer solely available to law learners. Nowadays, those taking professional courses like accounting, business studies, human resources and public administration are required to study law as set by the professional bodies for accreditation. Thus far, other disciplines learners who are non-law students often find the legal subject as uninteresting and difficult. Negative experience from their seniors and traditional teaching methods of the subject were blamed for these contributing factors. In studying law, non-law students face certain challenges. During their learning process, these students tend to adopt a passive attitude. Students do not see the connection and the relevancy between the content of the subject with their program. Also, as some of the lecturers are using traditional teaching method, some students tend to compare the teaching methodology and criticize because of their advancement in the use of technology. Hence, with regard to the issues discussed earlier, the problems faced by non-law students will be examined and strategies to cope with the problems will be recommended as a solution for the present and future. This paper begins by addressing the challenges in studying law subject by students of non-law background and proposing some strategies to face these challenges.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach where data are collected through library research and employed doctrinal legal research or otherwise known as a methodology of pure legal research. Ali *et al.* (2017) advocated the view that the most common practice used by those doing legal research is doctrinal or library-based research. This concerns the legal theory review and how it has been developed and implemented. This paper adopted a research methodology based on libraries through conceptual analysis and legal doctrinal analysis. Sadland Palmer Olsen (2017), pointed out that legal analysis is often based on analyzing legal issues that arise in one case or a small group of cases. The goal is to try and to ensure the meaning and consistency of the law, based on prior systematization and established legal categories. Doctrinal legal research is a study of a doctrine of law and practice and is largely documentary. The secondary sources for this study include articles in academic journals and online databases. According to Alias (2018), the findings of a study similar to this can be supported by secondary data where researchers are focusing on finding information in sentences rather than numbers through qualitative research.

III.   DISCUSSION

Law is related to many other disciplines such as economics, history, sociology, psychology, and political science as a discipline. The law study also offers sound education for future accounting, trade, banking, engineering, property market, construction, government administration, journalism, and many more careers (Farihana and Amylia Fuziana, 2019). Therefore, the broad generic skills developed by students during their law studies, such as incisive analysis, logical reasoning, creative problem solving, clear communication, and practical negotiation, would be helpful for the students to prepare them for a variety of careers and to generate valuable life skills (Alison and Irene, 2010).

Challenges of studying law subject for Non-Law Students

When non-law students studying law for the first time, generally they feel nervous, and perceive that the subject as an incredibly challenging topic. They often doubt their ability to understand and cope with the topic efficiently. Very often, even though they have been studying the subject on previous semester, they still bring the same perception to the following semester as they fail to see the connection between what they have learnt before and the connection with the lesson they are studying at present. They also fail to understand the relevance of the subject to their future business career. These components generate an atmosphere which decreases the efficiency in learning. The challenges found in this study are the students struggle with the module, the curriculum design, the technique used by the lecturer in teaching the subject as well as terms and registers used in the subject.

i.   The struggle with law subject

Usually, the main objective of law modules for non-law students is to gain fundamental knowledge on how the law operates and how it affects business especially for non-law students dealing with a corporation in future. Vida (2007) concluded based on the forms of student evaluation module and general feedback, students seem to generally struggle with law subjects. They feel overwhelmed by the quantity of reading they need to do and are often uncertain about how to study the topic. This can then lead to additional issues in writing tasks and exams. As a result, the students may obtain low marks, and this frustrate them and the lecturers as well. In contrast, the intention is not to turn non-law students into lawyers, but the main objective of learning the subject is to introduce legal environment for individuals and businesses operating within them. Saian and Mohd Zakuan (2017), determined that such non-law students may not have difficulty learning the subject, but may find it difficult to answer law questions because students are expected to answer examination question in the form of an essay. Under this circumstances, non-law students feel they are struggling with the module of the subject because the burden in reading and memorizing. Also, the method in answering the questions for the subject is different with the technique used in answering questions for other subjects.

ii.   Curriculum design

The curriculum of the subject is designed by the faculty and should match with the requirements of the non-law students. Susan (2012), indicated, the dilemma for curriculum design, training and evaluation in business law is to guide a course that is true to the nature and principles of the law discipline yet makes it available, meaningful and relevant to business students who are not going to join the law profession. The justification is contained within professional accreditation standards for accounting students, which require them to study law as an introductory pre-requisite. The course was designed for students with the main objective of exposing them to basic legal principles and terminology and enhancing their ability to read and comprehend legal texts and familiarize them with the general aspects of business law. This is very important for non-law students in future. The faculty is therefore responsible for preparing students as professional stakeholders with the knowledge and skills to collaborate with their team's experts to accomplish their professional goals and to address legal issues (Setapa *et al.*, 2016). The faculty plays an importance role in designing a curriculum subject for the students as a whole.

iii.   Traditional teaching or modern teaching

Techniques of teaching differ from one to another. Some of the lecturers prefer traditional techniques however, some favour the use of technology. Mohd Zakuan *et al.* (2018) describes chalk and chat are part of traditional pedagogy. The educator will provide information and it is hoped that the student will understand the information. Nevertheless, computers have become one of the main instruments in the teaching and learning process in the age of information technology. Technology use has benefits for both students and educator. Some lecturers prefer to use modern law lecture in teaching law subject i.e. online approaches. According to Kehoe *et al.* (2004), online law lectures were used to enhance the learning process and evaluate the perceptions of students, with two main goals being to test a new resource and develop flexible and non-traditional learning. Each of these goals was analyzed and the results were provided. Based on this, the primary issue for many

learners was the absence of a soundtrack that accompanied internet presentations. Jayabalan *et al.* (2018) suggested that the millennials need authenticity and they responded to teaching methodology that is more focused on them as students. Additionally, using pictures as a teaching aid will, therefore, encourage creativity as it provides something for the students to focus on. Consequently, the students' ability to focus is necessary to teach law subject effectively. This circumstance, however, leads to challenges because lecturers might be using the traditional method which is not preferred by the millennials today. But, when the lecturers resort to the online method, some of the students complain of the difficulties in comprehending the lessons.

iv.   Legal language and terms

English is a teaching medium in UiTM. Many subjects, including law, are taught in this language. Sometimes, the legal language or terms of the subject are challenging to the students. J.K.L and M.C.Kong (2014), discussed the first concerns the terminology of the law, the second relates to the complex sentence structures embraced by law lecturer, and the third relates to the tacit norms by which legal language functions (i.e., the true meaning of legal language is seldom explicit). When teaching law, there is a need for both knowledge and skills that the transfer of knowledge revolves around a subject's substance, while skill development requires the use of knowledge to solve a given problem (Chandran *et al.*, 2016). Legal language sometimes can be a jargon to layman. In classroom, law term such as *caveat emptor, bona fide, mala fide, nemo dat quod non habet, sui juris, prima facie* are commonly used for learning purposes. Law lecturer has to play an active role in explaining the meaning of legal terms to avoid misunderstanding and confusion.

Strategies or Recommendations for Non-Law Students Studying Law

Changing the learning methods and reorganizing lectures alone could overcome the problem of learning law encountered by non-law learners when they have to 'move' across disciplines, either by establishing a contextual connection or by generating different learning methods. It is not necessary to perceive lecturers who teach law to business students as substitutes to law school teachers. Furthermore, business students need not and may not be taught law in the same way as students of LL.B (Lisa, 1995). Students with non-law background must have a good experience in studying law which they can use their legal knowledge in the classroom to their workplace in future. This paper then discusses the ideas developed for diploma and undergraduate accounting students mainly through the authors own experience teaching commercial law and company law in UiTM Perak branch, Tapah campus. Here are some suggested strategies for non-law students to help them effectively comprehend the subject.

i.   Reading the textbook, notes and preparedness for class

The key to success in law subject is not only by reading and briefing cases, going to class and taking notes and outlining course material. To rely solely on the above without testing one's knowledge creates the same fluency and illusions of competence as re-reading. Smarter law learning requires students to read and briefcase, to prepare for class and engage in retrieval and self-testing immediately to assess their understanding of the material. Learning smarter law requires elaboration (Jennifer and Regan, 2018). Due to the student's potential relevance to the professional practice of business graduates, problem-based learning tutorials should be adopted for law courses offered in business schools. Building on the concern and understanding of learners, the strategy taken is to design factual legal issues that are connected in some manner to the discipline of the learners. Besides, lecture notes can support weaker non-law students struggling to understand key legal terms, concepts and principles. A comprehensive textbook should still be used in this instance to improve deeper learning and achieve outcomes of high-quality learning (Kanchana and Yen Low, 2014). A successful key for non-law students is to always be prepared and ready for the class. Reading the textbook, notes or any materials related to the topic can help students to understand the lesson better.

ii.   Avoiding the mobile phones for non-academic purposes

In today's atmosphere, the smartphones become an integral part of human's life and everyone is using it on a daily basis for texting, calling, playing games, updating the status on social media, reading online news and becoming the main tools in everything. However, the use of cell phones for social media or other non-academic activities in the classroom could present a danger to teaching (Jessica *et al.,* 2018). It is found based on the accessible literature that learners use mobile phones strongly, distracting teaching and learning. Students also use their mobile phones to create disturbances (Naciye and Tugba, 2015). However, addiction to the smartphone cannot be ignored. Kristy *et al.,* (2009) in their findings of the research project show that most learners have an intention to use the system, not only concerning their present legal topic but also about future topics. In law subject, a smartphone can be used for discussions especially the WhatApps group. The lecturer can guide the students in their enquiry by giving the topic to read before the class begins. It is highly recommended that the lecturer uses mobile phones during the tutorial class especially using *Kahoot!* Game. This helps to make the lesson more interesting and gives a more meaningful two-ways communications in the

classroom. The lecturer can monitor the quiz pace and whether or not the participant has adequate time to answer the question before progressing to the next question. According to Dellos (2015), questions must be shown on the screen of their gadget together with the answers that can be selected by the students. The use of smartphone in a classroom for assessment, searching and reading additional notes for the topic can lead to a more interesting lesson and at the end of the day, it can aid to deter the students from using their phone for non-academic purposes.

iii. Class participation

Class participation is very important for the educator to gauge the students' understanding of the lesson being taught. Ai Lin *et al.*, (2018) explains the use of technology has been demonstrated to promote education and to improve training. Fostering and improving education through the use of laptops, smartphones and tablets has increased the interest and active participation of learners in classrooms. The students' understanding of important ideas were evaluated during the course with the usual in-class implementation issues of the instructor and mid- and end-of-term examinations. Nevertheless, the students' increased class participation and more critically reflective attitude to the controversy were great improvements to the course as they enabled the instructor to identify faster and easier what it was that students did not understand and provide assistance (Susanna, 2005). Students who participate in class have to study the material well enough before sharing it with their peers. Therefore, they will learn from each other and consequently will improve the relationship between students and the students and lecturer.

iv. Forming a study group

A study group is a selected group of individuals who meet regularly to discuss related study fields. Elizabeth (2016), concludes, since the beginning of the structured study groupings, each student has maintained development in learning and communication. It was remarkable to see students scaffolding each other with very different backgrounds but very similar social experiences and making room not only for their success but for the success of others as well. Coyle (2017) discussed study groups should offer support and reduce pressure. All members in a study group must be ready with a few questions, and the conversation will run from there. Students gain a lot of benefits from studying in a group. Studying in a group will promote debates and discussions. This will create an interactive and fun environment. Therefore, it is urged that non-law students to form a study group and learn together for success in learning the subject.

IV. CONCLUSION

Students with non-law background normally perceive the legal subject as being difficult, challenging and tedious. Therefore, an effective teaching methodology is required to change these perceptions. Furthermore, among the common problems faced by non-law students in studying law subjects are they feel burdened by the quantity of reading they have to do. The language barriers worsen the problems. In the early stage, the faculty is facing dilemma in designing a sound curriculum to teach the subject. Thus, the faculty has to balance the objective of exposing the non-law students to basic legal principles and ensure it is meaningful and relevant to them who are not going to join the law profession. Also, there are battles between the traditional technique with the current information technology modern mode of teaching. In this study, the writers explore effective recommendations and strategies to deal with the above issues. Despite the dependence on the information technology students are still required to read law textbook, notes and be prepared for class. This is because, through class participation, students will be able to exchange ideas with their peers and lecturers. Studying in a group also makes the learning process more fun and interactive. It is hoped that the recommendation proposed in this study will have a major impact on improving the teaching and learning methodology for future non-law students.

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