

Students' Perceptions of Material Relevance and Instructor Feedback in Arabic and English Courses for Constitutional Law

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Abstract

This study examines students' perceptions of English and Arabic language instruction delivered within constitutional law courses, with particular attention to the alignment between course content and disciplinary needs. A mixed-methods design was employed: 153 respondents, selected through purposive sampling, completed a questionnaire, of whom 15 participated in follow-up semi-structured interviews. Questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively, and interview data were analyzed thematically. The analysis revealed a misalignment between the language content delivered and the disciplinary requirements of constitutional law students, as participants reported that instructional materials centered on general-purpose language topics with limited relevance to their field. A second finding concerned the scarcity of instructor feedback, which constrained students' ability to identify weaknesses and improve systematically and may impede the development of competencies central to legal study, including the analysis of legal texts and the appropriate use of legal register. These findings suggest that language curricula for legal disciplines should be designed more closely around students' specific academic and professional needs, and that targeted, discipline-sensitive feedback is an essential component of such provision. The study thus underscores the value of aligning language instruction with the demands of specialized fields to foster meaningful and effective learning.

Keywords: languages; students' perceptions; material relevance; students' needs

Introduction

The effectiveness of language learning in higher education is closely tied to the relevance

of teaching materials to students' academic and professional contexts. Materials function not only as instruments of language instruction but also as bridges between abstract linguistic competence and its application within disciplinary fields. When materials align with students' academic and professional goals, they facilitate comprehension while also fostering motivation, critical engagement, and long-term skill development (Johansen et al., 2023; Lo et al., 2022; Sergis et al., 2018). Conversely, when

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students perceive materials as irrelevant, their engagement diminishes, and the intended learning outcomes are rarely achieved.

This concern becomes more pressing in specialized fields of study, where language use is bound to disciplinary conventions. Law is a case in point: within this discipline, language operates not merely as a medium of communication but as a central element of meaning-making, interpretation, and reasoning. Legal concepts are embedded in texts, arguments, and statutes, so that for law students, mastering the languages of the discipline, whether Arabic, English, or another, entails acquiring the ability to read, analyze, and construct legal arguments. Language materials that fail to engage with this disciplinary specificity therefore risk being perceived as both irrelevant and ineffective.

Material relevance may be defined as the degree to which teaching resources reflect and address students' academic requirements, cognitive levels, and professional expectations (Fălăuș, 2017; Menke & Paesani, 2019). For constitutional law students, highly contextualized materials such as legal case studies, statutory texts, and scholarly articles are more meaningful than generic reading passages or conversational drills. Relevance in this sense operates along three dimensions. Cognitive relevance concerns materials that match students' proficiency levels while challenging them to develop higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. Disciplinary relevance requires materials to connect directly to constitutional law by embedding legal vocabulary, argumentation patterns, and textual genres. Practical relevance, finally, demands that

materials reflect the tasks students are likely to encounter in their academic or professional futures, such as interpreting legislation, presenting legal opinions, or participating in legal debate.

Where these forms of relevance are absent, students commonly report dissatisfaction, low motivation, and difficulty transferring classroom learning to authentic academic tasks. Educational research has well documented this mismatch between student expectations and actual teaching practice. Šarić (2022), for instance, stresses the importance of designing student-centered, discipline-driven foreign language curricula, while Fălăuș (2017) shows that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) materials tailored to professional contexts yield significantly stronger learning outcomes than generic language teaching approaches.

Despite this theoretical recognition, practice in many universities, particularly within Islamic higher education, reveals a persistent gap (Zoghi & Farsi, 2014). Students in constitutional law programs frequently learn Arabic and English through decontextualized materials that emphasize general grammar, everyday vocabulary, or classical texts unrelated to their field. Although such materials may contribute to general proficiency, they do not address the immediate academic needs of students who must engage with legal discourse.

In Arabic courses, for example, students are often exposed to classical grammatical drills or literary passages. Valuable as these are in their own right, they do not necessarily prepare students to interpret the argumentation found in fiqh (jurisprudence) or in modern Sharia-based legislation. English courses, similarly, tend to prioritize general reading

comprehension and conversational practice, leaving students underprepared for tasks such as analyzing constitutional case law or engaging with international legal scholarship. This distance between students' academic realities and the materials presented in class contributes to frustration and disengagement.

This kind of student dissatisfaction is not merely anecdotal; empirical evidence corroborates it. Several studies report that learner performance improves significantly when teaching materials are explicitly aligned with professional and academic contexts (Gürsoy, 2021; Putri et al., 2023; Ruliah et al., 2020). Irrelevant materials, by contrast, create barriers to motivation and reduce students' willingness to invest effort in their studies. For constitutional law students, who already face the dual challenge of mastering complex legal concepts and acquiring two foreign languages, the absence of relevant materials compounds these difficulties.

A further dimension underscoring the importance of material relevance is the development of higher-order thinking skills. Following Bloom's revised taxonomy, language learning should not be confined to the lower-order processes of remembering and understanding. However, it should extend to analysis, evaluation, and creation. In constitutional law, these higher-order skills are indispensable, as students must analyze constitutional provisions, evaluate judicial decisions, and construct coherent legal arguments. Generic materials rarely support the cultivation of such skills; discipline-specific resources, legal case studies, excerpts from constitutions, or records of academic debate

are needed to foster deeper cognitive engagement.

Embedding legal content within language instruction also accords with the principles of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which holds that language is most effectively acquired when taught through meaningful subject matter. Integrating constitutional law content into Arabic and English courses may therefore enhance linguistic proficiency while simultaneously reinforcing students' disciplinary understanding, a dual benefit that Goris et al. (2019) identify as central to the CLIL approach.

While a considerable body of research has addressed general language learning in higher education, comparatively few studies have examined the specific experiences of constitutional law students negotiating Arabic and English simultaneously. This dual-language requirement is distinctive: Arabic provides access to Islamic legal sources, whereas English opens the way to global constitutional debate and international legal scholarship. The interplay between the two creates challenges that existing curricula have yet to address adequately. The present study therefore examines students' perceptions of English and Arabic language instruction delivered within constitutional law courses, with particular attention to the alignment between course content and disciplinary needs. It seeks to identify where current provision falls short of students' academic requirements and to consider what such findings imply for the design of language curricula in legal disciplines.

Method

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design in order to examine students' perceptions of Arabic and English language learning within the constitutional law study program. A quantitative survey phase established broad patterns of student experience, after which a qualitative interview phase explored those patterns in greater depth and accounted for the perceptions expressed in the questionnaire responses.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, a strategy appropriate for identifying individuals who possess direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2009). Eligibility was restricted to students enrolled in the constitutional law study program who had either completed or were currently taking the relevant Arabic and English courses. A total of 153 students met these criteria and completed the questionnaire. Of these, 15 respondents took part in follow-up interviews.

Two instruments were used. The first was a structured questionnaire, administered online via Google Forms, designed to elicit responses concerning the perceived relevance of course materials to disciplinary needs and the adequacy of instructor feedback. The second was a semi-structured interview guide, developed from preliminary questionnaire results, which allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences, attitudes, and difficulties while permitting the interviewer to pursue lines of inquiry as they emerged (Brannen, 2023; Flinders, 1997).

Data were collected in two stages. The questionnaire was distributed to eligible students and remained open for 2 weeks. Once responses were compiled and reviewed, interviews were arranged with participants who indicated their willingness to take part in a further discussion. Each interview was conducted in Bahasa, lasted approximately 10-15 minutes, and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent, then transcribed verbatim.

Analysis followed the two-phase design. Questionnaire responses were analyzed descriptively, with frequencies and percentages calculated for each item in order to establish the distribution of student perceptions across the sample. Interview transcripts were then analyzed thematically through repeated reading, initial coding, and grouping codes into broader categories to derive recurring themes. The qualitative findings were then read alongside the survey results so that the interview data could explain and contextualize the patterns identified in the quantitative phase.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Students' perceptions of Arabic and English language instruction in the constitutional law program centered consistently on a single concern: the gap between what the courses delivered and what their discipline required. This concern surfaced across both courses examined, though it manifested differently in each. It was accompanied by two further issues, the calibration of material difficulty and the availability of instructor feedback—that

participants understood as bearing on the same underlying misalignment.

In the Qiraah wa Kitabah course, intended to develop Arabic reading and writing skills, 88 respondents judged the topics provided by lecturers to be unsuitable and irrelevant to the academic needs of constitutional law students. Participants described the Arabic texts and exercises as disconnected from their legal studies, and several reported feeling disoriented as they tried to reconcile the course content with the competencies required in their primary field. Respondents further described the materials as monotonous, noting that the absence of variety, combined with the absence of any explicit link between the texts and their application in constitutional law, left them bored and reluctant to engage. Several expressed the view that their effort to understand the material yielded no return.

Difficulty constituted a second obstacle in the same course, and one that participants related directly to the relevance problem. Ninety-eight respondents found the Arabic materials hard to comprehend, attributing this to an insufficient foundation in the language. Participants reported that the references selected by lecturers presupposed a mastery of Arabic grammar and vocabulary that many of them did not possess. The heterogeneity of the cohort compounded this difficulty: students entering from general secondary schools were disadvantaged relative to those from Arabic-medium backgrounds, and the former reported expending considerable additional effort to keep pace, frequently relying on more proficient peers for assistance. Participants also observed that instructional methods did not accommodate the range of learning styles in

the classroom, and that some students consequently struggled to follow lessons yet hesitated to ask questions, citing low confidence and limited rapport with lecturers and classmates.

Respondents also acknowledged their own limited initiative in seeking supplementary materials. Although Arabic-language resources are readily accessible, participants reported that they seldom pursued them without encouragement or monitoring from lecturers and therefore felt no obligation to extend their study beyond the classroom. Participants also indicated that their incomplete understanding discouraged them from recommending materials to peers or to students in junior cohorts, resulting in successive intakes encountering the same difficulties. Asked what would improve the course, participants called for materials adjusted to their academic needs and to their actual proficiency levels, references selected with that proficiency in mind, a wider repertoire of teaching methods responsive to varied learning styles, and tasks that were demanding yet accessible across ability levels.

Comparable perceptions of misalignment arose in the Reading Text on Islamic Law course, though here the pattern took a more revealing form. A total of 110 respondents reported that the materials were too elementary and bore no direct relation to constitutional law, indicating a divergence between the content delivered and the objectives students had anticipated. Participants described the course as presenting general content in Arabic and English with little reference to legal discourse or discipline-specific terminology. Several expressed frustrations at being required to engage with

material that they did not perceive as contributing to their intellectual or professional development. A minority of respondents, principally those with an existing interest in English, found the course worthwhile, though even these participants indicated that they would prefer a closer connection between the content and their disciplinary background.

Difficulty, notably, was not a concern in this second course. Some 101 respondents reported that the material was undemanding and progressed gradually, making it relatively easy to follow. This accessibility generated initial interest but did not offset the perceived irrelevance of the content, producing a pattern in which a minority expressed satisfaction while the majority did not. The same disciplinary concern extended to the reading list: 98 respondents considered the references supplied by lecturers unrelated to their academic needs and expressed a clear preference for resources tied to constitutional law—case studies, legal texts, and articles addressing contemporary legal questions. Although such English-language resources are widely available online, respondents reported that limited motivation and insufficient guidance from lecturers discouraged them from accessing them. Participants also raised concerns about the instructional approach. While the gradual sequencing of material was helpful, respondents felt classroom methods emphasized rote learning and general comprehension exercises rather than critical engagement or problem-solving in legal contexts, and were largely one-directional rather than interactive.

Across both courses, instructor feedback was scarce. Participants reported receiving little

response during practice sessions or after assignment assessments. They stated that this left them unable to identify their weaknesses or understand how to correct their errors. Interviewees expected timely, constructive feedback after assessment, viewing it as necessary for their learning and skill development. Respondents additionally identified a need for English vocabulary specific to their discipline, holding that command of such vocabulary was essential to reading academic literature in their field and that its absence impeded comprehension. Interview participants likewise called for readings aligned with constitutional law, observing that the current selection did not adequately cover the field's principal topics.

Participants finally raised questions of coordination and evaluation that bear on how the misalignment might be addressed. They reported that their views and needs had not been meaningfully considered in the planning of course materials. They expressed a wish for greater consultation in determining course topics. They also proposed regular evaluation of the courses through end-of-semester surveys or open discussion as a means of identifying deficiencies, and asked that lecturers remain flexible and responsive to developments in constitutional law so course content might stay current. Taken together, these perceptions indicate that students experience the language provision in their program as generically conceived and disciplinarily detached, and that they attribute this condition less to the inherent difficulty of language learning than to decisions about content selection, instructional method, and feedback practice over which they have no influence.

Discussion

The dissatisfaction expressed by participants in both courses accords closely with established work in English for Specific Purposes and Arabic for Academic Purposes, which holds that materials should align with students' disciplinary practices (Hyland & Shaw, 2016). Tomlinson (2012) argues that materials must be meaningful and contextually engaging to sustain learner motivation, and the present findings—in which respondents described materials as monotonous and their own effort as futile—directly support that claim. Similarly, Daffron and Caffarella (2013) contend that learning acquires meaning when instructional materials are linked explicitly to learners' professional and academic contexts, a proposition consistent with the frustration participants reported when required to engage with general content bearing no relation to legal discourse. Jande and Ibrahim (2021) reach a comparable conclusion in arguing that ESP provision requires careful tailoring of materials to the learners' discipline. The present study also corroborates evidence from closely comparable settings: Essa et al. (2020) found that Sharia law students in Malaysia benefited substantially when Arabic materials were contextualized to legal study, showing improved performance and higher engagement. The inverse pattern documented here reinforces that finding from the opposite direction. Richards (2010) and Fitra (2023) likewise maintain that content connected to learners' goals enhances both immediate motivation and longer-term achievement.

A point of divergence nonetheless emerges. Much of the ESP literature treats relevance and difficulty as parallel design variables, each

contributing independently to learner engagement. The present findings suggest that the relationship is not symmetrical. In the Reading Text on Islamic Law course, the material was widely regarded as accessible and well-sequenced. Nevertheless, this accessibility failed to generate satisfaction: 101 respondents found the course undemanding, while 110 nonetheless regarded it as irrelevant. Appropriate difficulty calibration, in other words, did not compensate for disciplinary misalignment. It suggests that relevance may function as a precondition for engagement rather than as one contributing factor among several, a possibility that existing accounts do not clearly articulate.

The difficulties reported in the Qiraah wa Kitabah course resonate with the findings of Matukhin and Bolgova (2015) and Kustina et al. (2024), who observe that mismatched difficulty levels and insufficient scaffolding in foreign language courses produce disengagement and widen the gap between more and less proficient learners. The present data illustrate that widening gap concretely: students entering from general secondary schools reported a marked disadvantage relative to those from Arabic-medium backgrounds, and compensated by relying on peers rather than on instructional support. The present study extends this literature in one respect. Existing accounts generally treat proficiency mismatch as a condition affecting individual learners within a single cohort. In contrast, the findings here indicate a mechanism by which the problem reproduces itself across cohorts: participants who had not understood the material declined to recommend resources to junior students, so that each successive intake encountered the

same obstacles without the benefit of accumulated peer knowledge. This intergenerational dimension appears to have received little attention in the scholarship on scaffolding and warrants further investigation.

Participants' criticism of one-directional, comprehension-focused instruction accords with Popovic (2013), who argues that teaching methods misaligned with disciplinary outcomes diminish motivation and impede deep learning. The findings support this contention while adding a qualification: content accessibility does not ensure depth of learning when the instructional approach forecloses critical engagement. These results also lend weight to arguments for Content and Language Integrated Learning. Embedding authentic constitutional law cases, articles, and Sharia-based documents within the Qiraah wa Kitabah course would help students see the connection between classroom learning and professional practice, while requiring them not merely to decode language but to analyze, evaluate, and interpret legal meaning. Nurpahmi (2016) makes a related case, arguing that ESP courses succeed when language instruction is embedded in learners' real-world practices. Respondents' preference for bilingual legal texts, English-language case reports, and journal articles on constitutional questions suggests that such integration would meet a need students themselves recognize. Collaboration between language lecturers and subject specialists offers one route to this end, with specialists identifying authentic texts and language lecturers adapting them to student proficiency.

The scarcity of instructor feedback is the dimension least anticipated in the literature

reviewed. Hyland and Shaw (2016) emphasize teachers' role in scaffolding learners' access to discipline-specific texts and motivating engagement with authentic sources. The present findings support that emphasis, as respondents reported leaving available online resources unused for want of guidance. The feedback deficit identified here, however, is broader than the guidance function described in that work. Participants reported not simply a lack of direction toward resources but an absence of response to their own production. This absence left them unable to locate their weaknesses or correct them. Given that the analysis of legal texts and the appropriate use of legal register are competencies acquired largely through iterative correction, this deficit may bear more directly on disciplinary skill development than the materials problem that dominates the ESP literature.

A related observation concerns the participatory dimension. Participants asked to be consulted in selecting course topics and proposed regular evaluation as a mechanism for course improvement. Although the ESP literature consistently advocates needs analysis, it more often positions students as the objects of such analysis than as participants in curriculum design. The present findings suggest that students in dual-language legal programs hold articulate views about their own requirements and are prepared to contribute to the design process—a resource that current practice appears not to draw upon.

Conclusion

Students in the constitutional law program experience the Arabic and English provision available to them as generically conceived and

disciplinarily detached. In both the Qiraah wa Kitabah and Reading Text on Islamic Law courses, respondents reported that the materials bore little relation to the competencies their program requires and, consequently, found their engagement with those materials difficult to justify. The two courses nonetheless presented distinct profiles. In the former, misalignment was compounded by material pitched beyond the Arabic proficiency of a heterogeneous cohort, so that students confronted content that was at once irrelevant and inaccessible; those entering from general secondary schools reported a particular disadvantage relative to peers from Arabic-medium backgrounds. In the latter, the material was widely judged accessible and well-sequenced, yet this did not yield satisfaction, since the content remained disconnected from legal discourse. Taken together, these results indicate that appropriate difficulty calibration does not compensate for disciplinary misalignment, and that relevance operates as a precondition for meaningful engagement rather than as one design variable among several.

A second concern, common to both courses, was the scarcity of instructor feedback. Participants reported receiving little response to their own work during practice sessions or after assessment, and described themselves as unable, as a result, to identify weaknesses or correct errors. Because analysis of legal texts and appropriate use of legal register are competencies developed largely through iterative correction, this deficit directly affects the disciplinary skills the program is intended to cultivate. Participants attributed these conditions less to the inherent difficulty of

language learning than to decisions about content selection, instructional method, and feedback practice—decisions over which they reported having no influence. They also expressed articulate views about what would serve them better: materials drawn from legal sources, references matched to their actual proficiency, more varied and interactive instruction, and consultation in planning course content.

These findings carry implications for both practice and further inquiry. Language curricula serving legal disciplines require revision so instructional content engages directly with the texts and genres students encounter in their field, constitutional provisions, case reports, jurisprudential argument, and scholarship addressing contemporary legal questions, with materials scaffolded to accommodate cohorts of mixed linguistic backgrounds rather than presupposing uniform preparation. Timely, constructive feedback warrants equal priority, as does collaboration between language lecturers and subject specialists, whereby specialists identify authentic disciplinary texts and language lecturers adapt them to student proficiency. These conclusions are nonetheless qualified by the scope of the study, which was confined to two courses in a single program at one institution and which captured student perceptions alone; lecturers' accounts of their own material selection, workload, and feedback practices might disclose constraints the present design could not detect. Comparative work across institutions would establish whether the pattern documented here is more widespread in Islamic higher education, while intervention studies evaluating a course redesigned around authentic legal texts and structured feedback

against existing arrangements would determine whether the improvements students anticipate are realized in disciplinary performance. The intergenerational mechanism identified here, whereby students who struggled with the material declined to recommend resources to junior cohorts so that each intake encountered the same obstacles anew, appears to have received little attention in existing scholarship and would repay closer investigation.

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