

# TEACHING LEGAL ENGLISH FOR LAW STUDENTS AND LAW PRACTITIONERS IN VIETNAM

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, the author analyzes the current status of law English training at universities in Vietnam today. Besides, a detailed introduction of the TOLES Law English program, a British Law English certificate. From there, recommendations are made for English law training in Vietnam in the future.

**Keywords:** English training; Law major; reality; solution; TOLES.

## INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is in the process of extensive international integration. Thus, it requires a high-quality labor force who is skilled and knows how to use foreign languages to work. One of the most popular foreign languages in the world today is English. Law students in particular and Vietnamese students in general are considered poor in foreign languages, especially specialized English in the process of working with foreign partners. Law students with good expertise and good English will have better job opportunities than students who cannot speak English. In fact, most law students who graduate from law school will have to learn more English by themselves or be supported by their employers to participate in specialized English classes for work. Law training institutions are also currently trying to improve their English language training programs for law students. It is very necessary to research and design an English language training program for law students in particular and students in general. In this article, the author will analyze in detail the TOLES program, a legal English certificate that can be applied in training law students and law practitioners in Vietnam today.

## REALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH FOR LAW MAJORS

In the program of training law students at both undergraduate and graduate levels, there are specialized English modules that students and trainees must complete before graduation. However, learning and applying or using to work in practice, there are many shortcomings. In recent years, due to the need for international integration, more and more attention has been paid to teaching students specialized English skills.

Recently, Hanoi Law University held a symposium in 2022, with the theme "Improving learning positivity for students majoring in English Language - majoring in Legal English at Hanoi Law University". Scientists and experts from prestigious higher education institutions have also contributed many valuable ideas in order to contribute to improving the positivity of English language students majoring in legal English at the Faculty of Legal Foreign Languages such as: (i) solutions related to critical thinking: using critical thinking skills to increase students' writing capacity; (ii) apply blended learning method; research method of the

Judgment; Role-playing method - Modern educational methods to improve learning positivity for students majoring in English language - majoring in legal English; (iii) using group activities to increase the positivity and initiative in developing Reading-comprehension skills for students majoring in English language - majoring in legal English. The workshop was organized to provide a forum for education researchers and practitioners to exchange from a scientific perspective the advantages and challenges of (i) Raising awareness of innovation on higher education in the application of teaching methods to increase the activeness in learning English for students; (ii) Assessment of the current situation of positive in the process of learning English for language major students at Hanoi Law University; and (iii) Proposing methods and measures to improve learning positivity for students majoring in English language - majoring in legal English at Hanoi Law University.

At the Judicial Academy, when training a team of lawyers and other judicial positions, the issue of English language training for law is also focused. The School has a Legal English Program which is one of the two main training programs that the International Commercial Lawyers Training Center will implement in addition to the International Commercial Lawyer Training Program. In addition to providing learners with knowledge of legal English, the Legal English program also aims to create a source of students for future international commercial law training programs. The international commercial lawyer program is implemented by the Center and the Nottingham Law School (UK) based on the objective of Project 123 of the Vietnam's Prime Minister. This is considered a national key training program and promises to provide a team of lawyers who are not only good at law profession but also good at English, to serve the international economic integration of Vietnam in the future.

## **ENGLISH PROGRAM TOLES**

### *Overview of TOLES*

TOLES stands for the English phrase "Test Of Legal English Skills". This is a legal English program created by an organization that is a private legal training company and directly consulted by a leading commercial law firm in the world. The birth of this TOLES training and certification program to solve the current problem is quite common that law students graduate

with many foreign language certificates but cannot use English to work. The TOLES program provides materials and learning materials that build a standard framework of knowledge and skills for law practitioners, especially useful for law graduates. This TOLES certification and knowledge test is of great significance to law graduates and practitioners, especially lawyers. The TOLES certificate is valid for an unlimited period of time, which means that TOLES certificate holders do not need to retake the exam unless they want to progress to a higher level. This has great financial implications for learners and the TOLES exam, making it superior to an IELTS or TOEFL certificate that is only valid for two years. Moreover, the cost of taking the exam to get the TOLES certificate is much more economical than the IELTS or TOEFL certificate. Therefore, many universities and legal profession associations now encourage the exam to obtain the TOLES certification when practicing law.

### ***Objects that can learn TOLES***

TOLES is a member of the International Body of Law Associations of England and Wales. Training materials and assessments under the TOLES program are well known, and many law firms appreciate and use this program when recruiting and training staff. TOLES is not affiliated with any law university or English language training organization, but only with legal profession associations. TOLES aims to train and support lawyers and law practitioners with legal English courses and TOLES certification tests, especially suitable for law graduates who want to practice law, or continue to study at a higher level such as a master of law or a doctor of law.

TOLES has been recognized nationally and internationally. Many law firms and organizations have sent candidates to study and take the exam to achieve this TOLES certificate not only because of its practical application and quite effective in work, but also because of the cost to study and take the certification exam. This TOLES is lower than other foreign language certificates such as IELTS or TOEFL. Not only that, TOLES is widely recognized in many countries around the world, has permanent value and can be converted to IELTS, TOEFL and European framework assessment tables (scale A, B, C) respectively. This is also an advantage for holders of this certificate when needed to take a career exam or for further study that requires a foreign language certificate.

***Contents of the TOLES training program:***

***TOLES Study Materials***

The learning materials for the TOLES training and certification program are compiled and developed by experienced international commercial lawyers. They have provided the level of legal English that law students, law practitioners, and attorneys need to achieve to succeed in their careers and fulfill minimal legal duties. The highest requirements of employers for law practitioners are drafting skills, negotiation skills, and effective business thinking. TOLES is at the forefront of helping law practitioners achieve these goals. TOLES is more about assessing commercial law practice skills than simply assessing academic legal English.

Corresponding to the three TOLES certification levels, there will be three textbooks as documents for those who want to prepare for the TOLES certification exam at each level. Specifically:

- i. Practice Textbook for Basic and Advanced Levels: Practice Book One. This book contains five practice exercises for the Foundation level and three exercises for the Advanced level for the TOLES test. This book includes answers, CDs and listening material for each advanced level test. It also has detailed score section for the test. This book is 159 pages long.
- ii. Practice book for TOLES Advanced: Practice Book One. This is a book of 5 test sets to prepare for the Advanced level test. This book also has answers and answers to the exam questions. It also has a section detailing each test score for each section. The book is 145 pages thick.
- iii. Basic knowledge book from A-Z of Business Law (An Essential A-Z of Business Law). This book is essential for law practitioners, especially lawyers because it contains most of the vocabulary a lawyer uses in practice. The book consists of 52 pages.
- iv. Advanced Vocabulary Series: Employment Law. This book introduces essential legal vocabulary in an easy-to-understand manner, evolving from A-Z. Every word Vocabulary is defined in clear, logical English. Immediately after each definition of vocabulary explanation is a practice to fill in the blank that allows students to know how to apply that vocabulary in a specific context in real life. Answers for exercises are also provided right after the book to help

students self-study and evaluate in the legal English class more effectively. This book is also very useful for legal students who are preparing for the legal English exam.

v. Book Advanced Vocabulary Series: Commercial Contracts. This is an easy to use basic legal vocabulary book presented in alphabetical order. Each word is clearly and logically defined. Right after the definition and explanation of the vocabulary, there will be a practice exercise to fill in the blanks so that students can understand how to use that vocabulary in a specific context. Answers to these exercises are provided at the back of the book, allowing students to learn and assess their own level or in a legal English class. This book is also very useful for law students who are preparing for the legal English exam. This book teaches vocabulary for commercial contracts.

### ***How to organize training and assessment TOLES:***

#### ***For law students***

Law institutions can use the TOLES program for students to study a module in the final semester as a compulsory subject of specialized English. Then encourage final year law students to take the TOLES assessment test to earn a TOLES certificate. This is of great significance for new law graduates who take the entrance exam to recruit employees into law firms or businesses. Or it is also a necessary certificate when these students continue their advanced studies to the master's or doctoral level.

In addition, legal vocational training institutions encourage students to participate in the advanced TOLES program as an extra-curricular program and take the TOLES certification exams to enjoy preferential treatment and be able to easily get a job. recruitment upon graduation.

Law practice organizations or businesses can organize their employees to participate in a short course of about three months (only on Saturdays) or focus for about a week (continuous 3-5 days work week) TOLES program before taking the assessment exam to receive the TOLES certificate. However, businesses can spend money and encourage employees to participate in this TOLES study so that they can gain labor skills in English in the law industry without necessarily having to take the certification exam.

### ***Certification exam TOLES***

TOLES has three different levels of legal English proficiency assessment. Details are following:

#### ***Basic level (TOLES Foundation).***

This level is equivalent to level A2 of the European framework CEFR, and IELTS 4.0. Students who reach this level can use English to communicate easily and understand familiar situations but still face some difficulties.

The test for this basic level has the following specific requirements:

Time: about 135 minutes.

Test of skills: legal reading and writing (approximately 90 minutes); listen (30-45 minutes). Focus on practicing legal vocabulary in real-life situations; Basic grammar problems.

This basic certification exam study material is “The Lawyer’s English Language Course-book” and basic legal English documents and books.

A good test result is a maximum of 100 points.

Students who complete the test will be awarded a TOLES Foundation Certificate with specific results achieved on the test.

#### ***Advanced level (TOLES Higher)***

This level is equivalent to level B1 of the European framework CEFR, and the minimum IELTS 4.5. Students at this level can use English to speak and write simple sentences and can understand the main points of a conversation but need more vocabulary. Students can speak and understand English reasonably and can use sentences but may have difficulty with complex words and grammar.

The duration of the test is 135 minutes. This proficiency test also tests legal English reading and writing skills (90 minutes); legal English listening skills (30-45 minutes). Focus on reading, writing and listening skills in each specific legal situation. This test is suitable for intermediate and advanced levels of English.

### ***Advanced level (TOLES Advance)***

This level requires learners to reach B2 level of the European standard framework CEFR equivalent to IELTS 5.5. Students can speak and understand relatively well but still make some mistakes and have difficulty understanding random situations.

Test time: 120 minutes.

The exam tests reading, writing and drafting skills in legal English, knowledge and business English legal idioms. Focus on reading, writing and drafting skills in each specific legal situation.

This test is suitable for intermediate and advanced English learners.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, from the above analysis, we can see that the English language training for law majors for Vietnamese students is absolutely necessary in the current global economic integration context. TOLES is one of the English language programs for law that can be applied to meet that requirement that Vietnamese universities can deploy.

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