

The Potential of Online Tasks to Facilitate Autonomous Language Learning with the Use of Online Dictionaries in a Higher Education ESP Classroom

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Abstract:

The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and previous studies in lexicography have shown the frustration that many students experience with the amount of information to which they are exposed to solve terminological doubts in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Yet, ICTs can prepare the ground for learning inside and outside the classroom. The incorporation of technological tools together with the use of integrated resources in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) learning tasks provide multiple benefits in the field of ESP, as well as greater motivation and autonomy. This study aims at shedding new light on the ability of Higher Education (HE) students to (a) learn content and vocabulary with the use of online dictionaries and other online resources in a Legal English course; (b) foster motivation to perform an online task (OT); (c) develop autonomy; and (d) build new knowledge. To achieve this aim, the present study used a mixed-methods approach (i.e., qualitative and quantitative data) and was developed in two stages: (1) Creation and design of the online task (i.e., Lesson integrated into a Moodle platform); design of three questionnaires administered before and after the experiment; and implementation of the OT with university students (N=171) enrolled in a Legal English course; and (2) collection of data and analysis. The results acknowledged the success rates in terms of achievement (i.e., experimental group). The conclusions indicated that this OT had been valuable to students to learn specialised vocabulary and content, as well as to know how to use an online dictionary effectively. The OT design in this research adds value to previous studies' existing weaknesses in dictionary training. As

a result, this OT provides learners with training in the use of online dictionaries, which improves their autonomous language learning.

Keywords: language learning, online dictionaries, autonomy, TBLT, Moodle, online task, ESP, law

1. Introduction

In this digital era, technological advances demand a shift in the educational learning process that entails adapting and integrating curricular content in a digital context (Schmar-Dobler, 2003). This transformation allows students to take control of their learning process and adopt a critical perspective. These technological developments have not only entailed changes in the process of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) but also in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In this sense, we are convinced that not only can learning specialised English be promoted by using technology, but students/learners can also learn by using dictionaries (whether general or field-specific) integrated into the design of online tasks. Remarkably, dictionaries play a highly relevant role in learning (Campoy-Cubillo, 2021). In this regard, using online dictionaries correctly can boost students' learning process, and help them become more autonomous language learners. Students need to be taught how to use dictionaries effectively, and specific dictionary training through the design of online tasks can contribute to achieving this goal. Although many researchers have focused their studies on other aspects of dictionary use, such as dictionary pedagogy, various ways of presenting the different meanings in a dictionary, or even dictionary design itself, among other things (Müller-Spitzer, 2014; Liang & Xu, 2018), not many studies revolve around the training of students to make effective use of dictionaries. This has led to a growing interest in understanding how students utilise online dictionaries for specific academic purposes, and, therefore, learning objectives have prompted a need for a thorough investigation. Notably, there is an absence of research focusing on dictionary training in the context of acquiring specialised English, particularly through the development of online tasks that incorporate the use of digital dictionaries by university students.

Our objective, therefore, is to determine the potential benefits Legal English students can derive from mastering specialised content and vocabulary through the effective use of dictionaries and online resources with the completion of the assigned OT. Furthermore, we want to determine how students perceive this task involving dictionaries. Finally, we would like to demonstrate whether the students who completed the OT obtained better academic results in the written exam than those who did not participate in it and only took the written exam at the end of the term.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Strategies in Online Dictionary Use and Dictionary Training*

In an educational context that demands the use of technological resources (i.e., the Internet) and a series of online tools and applications that may make a significant contribution to fostering students' motivation and autonomous language learning (Stockwell & Reinders, 2019) in Higher Education (HE), we deem it necessary to favour students fulfil their expectations. For this reason, students' needs are met not only by using dictionaries (Edo-Marzá, 2016; Fuertes-Olivera, 2009) to learn specialised vocabulary and content in English but also by using online task designs that require the use of online dictionaries and other resources (e.g., text information and YouTube videos). In this regard, we consider that it is necessary to train students to use dictionaries correctly, and integrating online dictionaries into the design of OTs by carrying out different activities that promote their use can favour them to make proper use of the aforementioned resources. However, the use of online dictionaries is a field in which there are still aspects to be explored, all the studies so far are limited to the storage of files in different databases (e.g., De Schryver & Joffe, 2004; Bergenholtz & Johnson, 2005), which does not satisfy or meet the expectations of most users today.

Previous research in lexicography (De la Rosa, 2003) has confirmed that most university students lack techniques or strategies on how to use a dictionary appropriately to meet their academic demands. In his study about students enrolled in Translation Studies at university, De la Rosa (2003) concluded that students preferred bilingual dictionaries to monolingual ones and, at the same time, in general, they do not know how to get the most out of dictionaries. Another research study (Campoy-Cubillo & Edo-Marzá, 2018) has similarly analysed students' use of electronic dictionaries (e-dictionaries), concluding that they possess significant potential and are highly user-friendly. The inadequate use of dictionaries caused by insufficient training may evidence poor critical capacity on the part of students, considering that a single lexicographical work is unlikely to contain all the information they need to satisfy their academic or professional needs (Edo-Marzá, 2016).

Researchers such as Bogaards (2003), Hadebe (2004), and Liu (2014) focus specifically on the ability to train students in the proper use of dictionaries. Hadebe (2004), for instance, refers to teacher training in dictionary abilities as a fundamental element so that students may find the right vocabulary and terminology according to their needs. More recent studies (Nkomo, 2015; Lopera, 2019; Chi, 2020; Campoy-Cubillo, 2021) focus on strategies such as finding the entry of a word in a dictionary, reading that entry, and relating the meaning to

the context, among others. These strategies enable users to grasp reading texts more effectively, connect dictionary-sourced vocabulary to task contexts, and prove especially beneficial for students completing assignments within academic environments and in broader contexts in the foreign language (FL) field. In his study on the effects of reading strategies combined with dictionary training, Lopera (2019) concluded that mixing the reading approach and the guided training of dictionary use notably improves the students' reading skills in a FL. By contrast, no studies addressing the effectiveness of this training at a specific level have been identified. In this context, Nkomo (2015) advocates for the emergence of a comprehensive training strategy on effective dictionary use, tailored to the educational level, the course of implementation, and the nature of the tasks involved. It is precisely this appropriateness to the level and to the course that the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) does not mention, as it only focuses on dictionaries per se, as well as reference materials, but without analysing what role they play in the language teaching-learning process. Two recent studies (Chi, 2020; Campoy-Cubillo, 2021) deserve further attention in this literature. To introduce dictionary training into formal EFL teaching, in her work, Chi (2020) stated that there is still a gap between dictionary use and training and EFL instructors since these lack knowledge of "dictionary literacy". One solution to this issue would be to offer teachers training on the adequate use of dictionaries, enabling them to instruct students on their effective usage. As Campoy-Cubillo (2021, p. 506) asserts, "new approaches to dictionary skills training and material provision must align with language competence frameworks to ensure that dictionary instruction at various educational levels is meticulously planned".

2.2. *Digital Learning in the Higher Education ESP Classroom*

The description of all this research as well as the technological advances in the language teaching-learning field previously discussed lead us to focus on the appropriate use of dictionaries for pedagogical purposes using electronic resources and other devices that favour (autonomous) learning and the development of knowledge. This approach allows students to develop their autonomous language learning in an ESP context and the construction of new information. Thus, from an autonomous language learning point of view, these digital resources can benefit students in that they allow them to become more confident and to be able to handle and work with the new technologies to grow as competent students in the ESP classroom. In this line, the teacher's role is no longer considered the only source of knowledge, but a facilitator (Benson, 2013) that aids learners in their autonomous learning process. Students therefore

become responsible for their learning, actively participate in decision-making tasks, and reflect on their learning needs (i.e., metacognition). As Villanueva (2020, p. 6) indicated:

If students move from being consumers to becoming active constructors of knowledge, choosing their digital routes, and developing critical and selective navigation skills while creating their own spaces for communication and collaboration, remarkable progress will be made in the field of learning but also the education of critical citizens in a complex and multicultural society.

When it comes to digital learning in HE settings, there is a feeling that students in this technological generation – ‘digital natives’ – know how to use new technologies simply because they were born after 1985 (Prensky, 2017), although this belief is not a generational factor determined by age. Therefore, it is not enough to know how to use the resources offered by the Internet or how to handle the different technological devices, along with their corresponding applications and uses. In addition to the ability and experience of these digital natives with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), these online users must be trained in these emerging technologies from an adequate pedagogical perspective for their correct learning in the classroom, considering the study plans of the subject. Accordingly, as university teachers, we will respond to students’ demands by offering support inside and outside the classroom to facilitate their long-term learning process. We can thus contribute to that learning by introducing authentic materials (e.g., text and YouTube video resources) (Suárez & González, 2020) in the English for Specific Purposes classroom within the framework of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Leaver & Willis, 2004; Long, 2016), as a theory of teaching.

The combination of authentic online materials based on the TBLT approach fosters a more dynamic and motivating picture, which contrasts with regular teaching practices (i.e., traditional teaching). Technology and TBLT provide the perfect combination, and as a result, the term ‘Technology-mediated TBLT’ (González-Lloret, 2016) has re-emerged. In this direction, and throughout the technological age, there have been several digital learning tasks such as WebQuest, TalenQuest, Cybertask, and Lesson.

Firstly, WebQuests (Dodge, 1997) encourage students’ use and management of information from the Internet to promote students’ critical thinking through the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of the digital resources offered (e.g., websites, articles, forums, YouTube videos). Secondly, second-generation WebQuests, TalenQuests (Koenraad, 2002), foster the use of ICTs in foreign language learning by integrating appropriate resources into complex tasks

(Koenraad, 2010). Thirdly, based on WebQuests, the Cybertask (Girón-García, 2013) model shares some similarities with the learning techniques. Cybertasks immerse students in online information to collect, use, and transform the data obtained from information searches on the Internet to help students learn content in the target language. Along these lines, previous research (Luzón, Ruiz-Madrid & Villanueva, 2010) has focused on the learner (i.e., learner-centred) by reinforcing a series of skills and other learning characteristics, such as (a) autonomous language learning; and (b) appropriate use of online resources (e.g., online texts and YouTube videos) proposed by the teacher to achieve specific learning outcomes. Other authors (Girón-García & Ruiz-Madrid, 2014; Girón-García & Silvestre-López, 2019) have demonstrated in their studies that after having completed the Cybertask, students were determined to (a) engage in their learning process; (b) select the adequate information from the Internet; (c) synthesise information from the Web, as well as make critical decisions and build new knowledge; and (d) not only become familiar with basic content and key concepts related to the subject matter but also get acquainted with the online sources provided by the teacher to complete the task. Finally, the Lesson, an online task (OT) integrated into a Moodle platform (Dougiamas & Taylor, 2002), could be considered an alternative practice to the digital learning techniques mentioned above. Therefore, the OT (1) involves students' training in the selection, process, and management of digital information and resources that are appropriate for the task, (2) promotes students' autonomous language learning by using ICTs, (3) encourages students' active participation in their learning process with online resources, and (4) evaluates students' acquisition of knowledge (Silvestre-López & Girón-García, 2023; Boghiu-Balaur & Girón-García, 2024).

This study, therefore, presents a new proposal that aims to contribute to any course in the field of ESP with the creation of an OT integrated into the Moodle platform that specifically requires the use of online dictionaries to complete the proposed task in a HE classroom.

3. The Study

3.1. *Objective*

This research seeks to answer the following research questions: (RQ1) What strategies for using online dictionaries do university students employ to learn specialised vocabulary and content in English?, (RQ2) After having completed the online task with the use of online dictionaries, what are the students' perceptions about performing this online task with the help of online dictionaries?, (RQ3)

After having completed the online task using online dictionaries, what are the students' general perceptions about performing this task to learn vocabulary and ESP content?, and (RQ4) Is there a correlation between the results obtained in the final written exam by the Experimental group and the Control group?

3.2. Participants

The participants in this study were 171 students enrolled in the first year of the bachelor's degree in law at the Faculty of Law and Economics at *Universitat Jaume I* (Spain). The experimental group (N=150), who participated in the implementation of the OT and took an offline written exam at the end of the term, and the control group (21), who only sat the final written exam. Most participants showed an Intermediate (B1) level of English proficiency, although a small number of them had an upper intermediate (B2) level of proficiency according to the CEFR.

3.3. Method

The present study was designed using a mixed methods approach, combining rich and detailed insights from qualitative research (i.e., a pre-questionnaire, a post-questionnaire, and a general perception questionnaire) with the numerical precision of quantitative research (i.e., numerical data and statistical analysis) by using a two-sample T-test, and it was developed in two stages:

Stage 1: Design of the OT and questionnaires, implementation, and data collection. First, the design of the OT was integrated into a Moodle platform. Second, three questionnaires were administered before and after the experiment. The pre-questionnaire examined the strategies that students chose regarding the use of online dictionaries. In contrast, (a) the post-questionnaire gathered information about the students' experience with the use of online dictionaries; and (b) the general perceptions questionnaire evaluated students' impressions about the OT (e.g., knowledge acquisition, perceived level of motivation, and the perceived result of the task performed) after taking part in the OT experiment. Third, implementation of the OT with Legal English students (Bachelor's Degree in Law), and data collection through the measurement instruments designed.

Stage 2: Analysis of the results obtained. Quantitative results were gathered through a T-test, to determine whether the results obtained in the final written exam of both groups (experimental and control) were significantly different. Specifically, the focus was on investigating the possible correlation between the control and experimental groups in terms of academic achievement.

3.4. Materials

3.4.1. Pre-questionnaire

Based on their process of learning a foreign language (i.e., English), and using a scale from 1 to 5 as a guide, where 1 = “I never use this strategy” and 5 = “I always use this strategy”, students were required to rate a series of statements indicating how true they were for them. These statements were related to some of the many strategies students apply when they use online dictionaries, such as: (1) Searching for vocabulary in a bilingual or monolingual dictionary, (2) reading the meanings, (3) paying special attention to words in bold and/or italics, because they offer valuable information, (4) focusing on the ‘collocations’ section for the valuable information they provide, and (5) reading the examples, especially in a monolingual dictionary, to get a better understanding of a definition.

The pre-questionnaire gave us relevant data regarding the strategies students employed when using online dictionaries in a specific context (i.e., Legal English) to learn vocabulary and content in this field, and therefore this is valuable data to answer RQ1.

3.4.2. Online Task: ‘English for Law Students’

The Legal English course is taught during the first year of the bachelor’s degree in law and, bearing in mind that students enrolled in this course have not received any previous instruction on content focused on the field of jurisdiction, the OT: ‘English for Law Students’ proposed in this study aims to introduce students to the different types of sources of law (legal, jurisprudential, and doctrinal) in English.

The OT consisted of eight sections, each containing several questions (Figure 1 and Figure 2) related to the contents of the Legal English course (e.g., criminal, international, commercial, contractual, etc.). Also, students were required to write a final report that demanded qualitative information indicating how their learning in the Legal English course had progressed and what knowledge they had gained during the OT implementation period.

CRIMINAL LAW: Cyberbullying Video

Question 6.1. Before watching the video, explain what 'Cyberbullying' means to you (2-3 lines). Then, watch the video and explain why it can be an example of Cyberbullying (3-5 lines).



FIGURE 1. OT. Criminal Law: Cyberbullying Video¹ (Question 6.1)

COMMERCIAL LAW: Trade and Commerce

Question 8.1. "Trade" and "Commerce" are two key areas of the law that are very much connected with the general area of Commercial Law. Define both concepts and then, by using both entries (i.e. Trade and Commerce) in any of the online dictionaries provided, try to complete your definitions with the information found in the dictionaries.

- Online Dictionaries:

ENGLISH DICTIONARIES

1. Macmillan Dictionary: <https://www.macmillandictionary.com>
2. Merriam-Webster: <https://www.merriam-webster.com>
3. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>
4. Cambridge Dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/es/>
5. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE): <https://www.ldoceonline.com/>

SPECIALISED LEGAL ENGLISH DICTIONARIES

1. Law.com: <https://dictionary.law.com>
2. Online Etymology Dictionary: <https://www.etymonline.com>

FIGURE 2. OT. Commercial Law: Trade and Commerce (Question 8.1)

¹ Extracted from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_m3PikZW6o8 HUAWAI commercial "It's in your hands" (13-02-2023)

To complete the OT, students did not need to browse all the resources proposed, but only the ones they considered necessary to carry out the OT, and they were also free to select the web resources in the order they preferred, according to their objectives. Furthermore, to answer the questions, students had to:

1. Read the web resources provided carefully.
2. Select the appropriate information.
3. Contextualise the information with the OT and its objectives; in other words, build the necessary knowledge adapting it to the situation.
4. Use the online dictionaries provided to look up for words that adapt to the context of each question (1-9) presented.

3.4.3. *Post-questionnaire*

Based on their experience of the OT with the use of online dictionaries, and using a 1-4 Likert scale, where 1 = “No, never”, 2 = “Sometimes”, 3 = “Usually”, and 4 = “Yes, always”, the students were required to rate a series of statements indicating how true the statement was for them. This post-questionnaire elicited statements related to:

1. Management of the information on the online dictionaries provided.
2. Successful management of the different senses a word may have.
3. Usefulness of online dictionaries to define specific terms.
4. Knowledge of collocations for a better understanding of an unknown word.
5. Adequacy of definitions of a word found using online dictionaries.
6. Intention to use online dictionaries when a task or situation requires them to do so.

This post-questionnaire provided relevant information to answer RQ2 regarding students’ perceptions about the use of online dictionaries to complete the online task they had been set.

3.4.4. *General Perceptions Questionnaire about the Online Task*

This questionnaire, adapted from the “Intrinsic Motivation Inventory” (IMI), was implemented immediately after performing the task and the students were required to rate a series of utterances indicating how true those statements were for them using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = “Not at all true”, 2 = “Untrue”, 3 = “Somewhat untrue”, 4 = “Neutral”, 5 = “Somewhat true”, 6 = “True”, and 7 = “Very true”. This survey evoked utterances related to (a) interest/enjoyment, (b) perceived competence, (c) effort/importance, and (d) value/usefulness, which were useful to answer RQ3.

3.4.5. *Final Written Exam*

All the students enrolled in the Legal English course had to take a compulsory offline written exam, although not all of them participated in the experiment with the OT. The final written exam marks were analysed to ascertain whether the members of the experimental group, who participated in the OT, achieved better academic results in the final written exam than the control group, which was the group of students who did not work on the OT and only took the final written exam. Concerning RQ4, this written exam has been useful to compare the academic performance of students from both the control and the experimental groups.

4. Results

4.1. *Preliminary Results*

All students (N=171) took the final written exam, a condition to complete the course, but not all of them took part in the OT. While 150 students (experimental group) participated in the study with the OT, answered all the perception questionnaires, and took the written exam, only 21 students (control group) took the final exam without participating in the OT experiment.

The qualitative results will be considered with only the experimental group, whereas the quantitative results will be interpreted with both the experimental and control groups to find out the possible significant differences among these two groups of students in terms of their academic performance.

4.2. *Qualitative Study Results*

The choice of different Likert scale levels (e.g., 4-point, 5-point, and 7-point scales) (Sullivan & Artino, 2013; Robinson, 2014; European Commission, 2015) in the design of the questionnaires used in this research has been guided by a balance between capturing nuanced responses and maintaining simplicity for the respondents. Each level has distinct advantages and considerations, depending on the specificity of the data we want to seek, the cognitive capacity of respondents, and the analytical goals of the study. In this study, the 4-point and 5-point scales have been preferred for general trends and broader categorisations; and the 7-point scale for more nuanced, detailed insights.

4.2.1. *Pre-questionnaire*

RQ1: What strategies for using online dictionaries do university students employ to learn specialised vocabulary and content in English?

Strategies for using online dictionaries to learn specialised vocabulary and content in English	Response				
	(1) "I never use this strategy"	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) "I always use this strategy"
1. I search for words I do not understand in a bilingual online dictionary (English-Spanish / Spanish-English) when I read a text in English.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	1.3%	5.9%	17.6%	35.3%	39.9%
2. I search for words I do not understand in a monolingual online dictionary (English-English) when I read a text in English.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	17.6%	29.4%	26.8%	18.3%	7.8%
3. If I check words I do not know in an online dictionary, I read all the meanings provided in it.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	2.6%	9.8%	24.2%	29.4%	34%
4. When using an online dictionary, I pay special attention to words in bold and/or in italics, because they give me valuable information about the meaning of the word I do not know.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	3.9%	11.8%	27.5%	28.1%	28.8%
5. When using an online dictionary, I read the section devoted to "Collocations", because knowing this information helps me contextualise the word I do not know.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	14.4%	26.8%	24.2%	23.5%	11.1%
6. When using an online monolingual dictionary, I read all the examples provided, because I understand the meaning better if the definition is accompanied by examples.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	4.6%	9.8%	16.3%	34.6%	34.6%

TABLE 1. Strategies for Using Online Dictionaries to Learn Specialised Vocabulary and Content in English

Before completing the OT, participants were asked to rate the questions using a grading scale of 1–5, where 1 = “I never use this strategy”, 2 = “I rarely use this strategy”, 3 = “I sometimes use this strategy”, 4 = “I often use this strategy”, and 5 = “I always use this strategy”. In this regard, as depicted in Table 1, 39.9% of the participants looked up for words they did not know on a bilingual online dictionary when they read a text in English; in contrast, only 1.3% stated that this is not a strategy they use. Also, only 7.8% of the students stated that they searched for words they do not understand in monolingual online dictionaries, whereas most of them (47%) argued that English-online dictionaries did not make a significant contribution to that

purpose. Most participants (63.4%) said that they read all the meanings of words provided on an online dictionary. Only 2.6%, however, have never used that strategy. Additionally, the bulk of participants (84.4%) claimed they always paid special attention to words in bold and/or italics, because they think they provide them with valuable information about the meaning of a word they do not know. This view differs from the 3.9% of participants who thought that it was a strategy they never used. Surprisingly, from the point of view of collocations, only 11.1% of the participants stated that reading that section was beneficial for them to contextualise a word they did not know, versus 41.2% who considered the opposite. Finally, most of the participants (69.2%) pointed out that they preferred reading all the examples provided in a monolingual dictionary because they understood the meaning of a word better if the definition was accompanied by examples; this contrasted with the 4.6% who did not appreciate the added value of that strategy.

4.2.2. Post-questionnaire

RQ2: After having completed the online task with the use of online dictionaries, what are the students' perceptions about performing this online task with the help of online dictionaries?

Concerning the use of online dictionaries, after completing the online task participants were asked to rate the questions using a grading scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = "No, never", 2 = "Sometimes", 3 = "Usually", and 4 = "Yes, always". Accordingly, as shown in Table 2, the bulk of participants (92%) were able to find the information required on the online dictionaries provided, and in many cases (84%) they managed to interpret the different meanings of a word. Moreover, most of the participants (85.4%) found online dictionaries to be useful when an activity demanded the definition of specialised terminology. In contrast, only one participant, accounting for 0.7% of the total, stated that this strategy was not helpful at all. Along the same lines, a major part of the participants (85.3%) considered that knowledge of collocations was effective for a better understanding of words they were not familiar with. A high percentage of the participants (88.6%) perceived the use of online dictionaries as advantageous to write more adequate definitions of a word, in the cases in which the activity required them to do so. However, only 0.7% of the participants found the use of dictionaries to be of no use at all. Finally, a significant percentage of the participants (92.7%) admitted making ongoing use of dictionaries on their own when the task and/or situation required them to do so, as compared to only 4 participants (2.7%) who said they would not use dictionaries in the future.

Students' perceptions about performing Lesson using online dictionaries	Response			
	(1) "No, never"	(2)	(3)	(4) "Yes, always"
1. Were you able to find the information required in the online dictionaries provided?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	0%	8%	50%	42%
2. Did you manage to interpret the different senses of a word in the online dictionaries offered?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	0%	16%	55.3%	28.7%
3. Were the online dictionaries useful to you when the task demanded defining specialised terms?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	0.7%	14%	34.7%	50.7%
4. Do you think knowing all the possible collocations of a word helps you to better understand the word you do not know?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	1.3%	13.3%	37.3%	48%
5. Do you think you write more adequate definitions of a word when you use online dictionaries?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	0.7%	10.7%	41.3%	47.3%
6. After your experience with the completion of this task, do you think you will continue making use of online dictionaries on your own when the task and/or situation requires that function?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	2.7%	4.7%	36%	56.7%

TABLE 2. Students' Perceptions of Performing the Online Task Using Online Dictionaries

4.2.3. General Perceptions Questionnaire about the Online Task

RQ3: After having completed the online task using online dictionaries, what are the students' general perceptions about performing this task to learn vocabulary and ESP content?

The students' perceptions about the online task were rated using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = "Not at all true", 2 = "Untrue", 3 = "Somewhat untrue", 4 = "Neutral", 5 = "Somewhat true", 6 = "True", and 7 = "Very true". As can be seen from the percentages indicated in Table 3, most students concluded that this activity was interesting and fun to do, and it, therefore, held their attention and they enjoyed themselves while they were doing it.

Students' perceptions about the 'Lesson: English for Law Students'	Response						
	(1) "Not at all true" (7) "Very true"						
INTEREST / ENJOYMENT							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1. I enjoyed doing this task very much	6.6%	5.9%	13.8%	23%	27%	4%	7.2%
2. This task was fun to do	5.9%	9.9%	8%	24.3%	24.3%	14.5%	3.3%
3. I thought this was a boring task	9.2%	27.6%	12.5%	21.7%	13.8%	7.9%	7.2%
4. This task did not hold my attention at all	19.1%	23.7%	15.8%	19.7%	12.5%	5.3%	3.9%
5. I would describe this task as very interesting	3.9%	3.9%	15.8%	21.1%	30.9%	16.4%	7.9%
6. I thought this task was quite enjoyable	5.3%	13.2%	14.5%	26.3%	22.4%	13.8%	4.6%
7. While I was doing this task, I was thinking about how much I enjoyed it	13.8%	11.2%	26.3%	18.4%	19.1%	6.6%	4.6%

TABLE 3. Students' Perceptions about the Online Task: 'English for Law Students': Interest/Enjoyment

Regarding students' perceived competence in the online task performance, as can be seen in Table 4, most of the students surveyed considered themselves competent and quite satisfied with their performance. Furthermore, according to their responses in the items provided for this section (i.e., perceived competence), the percentage of students who felt very confident or skilled in their performance was considerably higher than those who considered themselves lacking in confidence or skill.

Only a small percentage of the students thought they were not competent enough to perform this task and had not been able to carry out the activity very well or were not satisfied with their performance. In this line, the student's English proficiency level (B1) may have given rise to difficulties in reading/listening comprehension of the web resources provided; this fact might therefore have contributed to their low confidence in their ability to perform this task skilfully.

Students' perceptions about the 'Lesson: English for Law Students'	Response						
	(1) "Not at all true" (7) "Very true"						
PERCEIVED COMPETENCE							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1. I think I am pretty good at this task	3.9%	6.6%	6.6%	24.3%	28.3%	19.7%	10.5%
2. I think I did pretty well at this task, compared to other students	7.2%	7.9%	12.5%	23.7%	21.7%	19.7%	7.2%
3. After working on this task for a while, I felt pretty competent	3.3%	4.6%	9.2%	20.4%	27.6%	21.7%	13.2%
4. I am satisfied with my performance at this task	1.3%	0.7%	8.6%	9.2%	28.3%	27.6%	24.3%
5. I was pretty skilled at this task	2%	5.9%	12.5%	21.1%	28.3%	23.7%	6.6%
6. This was a task that I couldn't do very well	15.8%	33.6%	17.8%	14.5%	9.2%	6.6%	2.6%

TABLE 4. Students' Perceptions about the Online Task: Perceived Competence

Regarding the students' perceptions about effort and importance, Table 5 depicts consistent results among the variables proposed. It is reported that approximately half of the students surveyed assessed the task positively since they stated they had put a lot of effort into this online activity, trying very hard to do it well, which was regarded as relevant for them. Only a small part of the students graded this item rather low, again considering the reverse worded items.

Students' perceptions about the 'Lesson: English for Law Students'	Response						
	(1) "Not at all true" (7) "Very true"						
EFFORT / IMPORTANCE							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1. I put a lot of effort into this task	0.7%	0.7%	3.3%	15.1%	15.8%	29.6%	34.9%
2. I didn't try very hard to do well at this task	46.7%	20.4%	11.8%	9.2%	5.3%	5.3%	1.3%
3. I tried very hard on this task	1.3%	1.3%	5.3%	9.9%	25%	22.4%	34.9%
4. It was important to me to do well at this task	0.7%	1.3%	3.3%	6.6%	9.9%	21.1%	57.2%
5. I didn't put much energy into this task	45.4%	21.1%	9.9%	11.2%	3.9%	5.9%	2.6%

TABLE 5. Students' Perceptions about the Online Task: Effort/Importance

Table 6 depicts students' perceptions regarding the general value/usefulness of the OT and provides relevant information for teachers. Given future online task designs for the language classroom, we deem it necessary to take into consideration students' perspectives in this line to improve our designs. Students were asked to grade several items concerning the value, the usefulness of learning English, the benefits and/or advantages, and the importance of the task presented to develop their autonomous learning skills. Likewise, as shown in Table 6, most students valued the OT very positively, since they believed the task could be useful for learning English. They added that this OT helped them learn content and develop their autonomous learning skills.

Students' perceptions about the 'Lesson: English for Law Students'	Response						
	(1) "Not at all true" (7) "Very true"						
VALUE / USEFULNESS							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1. I believe this task could be of some value to me	3.3%	2%	6.6%	16.4%	28.9%	23.7%	19.1%
2. I think that doing this task is useful for learning English	3.3%	2%	4.6%	10.5%	21.7%	25.7%	32.2%
3. I think this is important to do because it can help me to develop autonomous learning skills	1.3%	3.3%	7.9%	13.2%	13.8%	26.3%	34.2%
4. I think doing this task could help me to learn contents about my area of interest (Law)	7.2%	2.6%	12.5%	14.5%	21.7%	24.3%	17.1%
5. I believe doing this task could be beneficial to me	2%	2%	8.6%	14.5%	15.1%	25.7%	32.2%
6. I think this is an important task	0.7%	3.9%	7.2%	7.9%	19.1%	27%	34.2%

TABLE 6. Students' Perceptions about the Online Task: Value/Usefulness

4.3. Quantitative Study Results²

RQ4: Is there a correlation between the results obtained in the final written exam by the Experimental group and the Control group?

² Students' results in the Online task and the final written exam in the Legal English course.

A two-sample T-test was used to investigate whether there was any significant difference between the experimental and the control groups. For that purpose, we measured whether the performance of this online task showed a significant improvement in the experimental group than in the control group. As depicted in Table 7, the results outline significant differences between the two groups in terms of success and completion rates. The calculated value of the significance level is $p < 0.05$. The calculated value of t exceeds the critical value of $5.4289 > 1.976$, so the means between the two groups are significantly different. On that account, the $N=150$ participants who completed the OT exhibited a meaningful difference concerning successful outcomes in the written exam, as opposed to the $N=21$ participants who only sat the final written exam.

	Experimental Group	Control Group
Mean	28.8133	18.6667
Variance	68.6985	31.9365
Stand. Dev.	8.2885	5.6512
n	150	21
t	5.4289	
d.o.f	169	
critical value	1.976	
t > critical value =>		there is sig. diff.

TABLE 7. Comparison of Experimental and Control Groups Based on Successful Completion Rates³

5. Analysis and Discussion

Regarding RQ1 on the strategies university students use when working with online dictionaries to learn vocabulary and Legal English content, we conclude that knowing how to search for words (Nkomo, 2015) they do not understand on a bilingual online dictionary is a fruitful ability for students to acquire. This

³ Degrees of Freedom (d.o.f): These refer to the maximum number of logically independent values, which may vary in a data sample.

Legal English course offers students new vocabulary and specialised content they are not familiar with. Furthermore, they have not received any previous training in dictionary use (Chi, 2020; Campoy-Cubillo, 2021) but took this skill very much into account in their language learning process. It is also noteworthy that, when dealing with monolingual dictionaries, students focused particularly on reading all the meanings provided thoroughly, as well as considering words in bold and in italics, since those features may add valuable information to the meanings found. In this regard, concern for paying attention to examples to better understand the definition of an unfamiliar word was a strategy that Legal English students implemented particularly in monolingual dictionaries.

The results of this study also consider that there was a greater preference for the use of bilingual dictionaries rather than monolingual ones. One reason for this choice may lie in the fact that students with lower proficiency levels in English have more difficulty using monolingual dictionaries because of their uncertainty as to whether they will understand the definitions and the examples provided in the target language (i.e., English).

RQ2 focused on the students' perceptions about performing the OT using online dictionaries. To address this question, we directed our attention to the learning of specialised content and vocabulary in the legal field. Our findings about the students' assessment concerning the use of online dictionaries after the intervention with the OT is that while this activity was beneficial, students considered online dictionaries to be useful resources when the task demanded the definition of specialised vocabulary in English (Hadebe, 2004). Interestingly, this kind of task (i.e., defining key concepts in English) required students to create their definitions from their background knowledge of the term and with specialised online dictionaries. For this reason, as teachers, we place great value on students' engagement in the task since this circumstance reflects a clear example of active producers of knowledge (Villanueva, 2020). In other words, students are able and willing to build new content from the information selected in the resources offered by the teacher. Additionally, their experience with the OT was valued positively, as they argued that they would continue to make use of online dictionaries on their own when the task or situation required them to do so. Therefore, this argument explicitly evidenced students' autonomous language learning (Benson, 2013) in the long term, as well as the improvement of their metacognitive skills (Villanueva, 2020).

From a contrasting perspective, first, many students struggled with their navigational skills, as they were unable to locate the necessary information on the online dictionaries provided. Second, most students faced several difficulties with the interpretation of the different senses of a word, as well as coming up against a serious stumbling block in the case of collocations as essential

information to better understand an unfamiliar term. Third, a high percentage of students did not consider the use of online dictionaries to write/produce better definitions in English.

In generic terms, the effect of online dictionary use in the language learning process is significant from an academic point of view, as regards an autonomous language teaching-learning context.

RQ3 concerned the students' general perceptions about performing the online task to learn specialised vocabulary and content in English. To fully address this question, we will divide the students' responses into four parts: (1) interest/enjoyment, (2) perceived competence, (3) effort/importance, and (4) value/usefulness.

First, we present the students' perceptions regarding their interest/enjoyment while performing the OT. In this respect, most of them assessed their experience as highly engaging and entertaining. Let us recall that this online task, which was presented in a way that differed from their regular class materials, offered a wide range of different types of online resources (i.e., text information, YouTube videos, and online dictionaries) that were associated with the questions presented and therefore encourage them to answer those questions appropriately. These resources were greatly appreciated by many students and taken into consideration as being a very important and interesting online task that unquestionably becomes an integral part of the course curriculum. This aligns with the TBLT approach (Leaver & Willis, 2004; Long, 2016) since the integration of non-adapted learning materials promotes students' motivation, in comparison to traditional teaching practices. The online resources proposed have not been previously adapted – they are authentic materials that Internet users deal with on the Web. For this reason, most students were not able to address the questions or make use of these resources successfully. This might even lead to indifference towards this online task since their insufficient knowledge of basic content and key concepts related to the field of law prevented them from completing the OT with high levels of satisfaction. As Campoy-Cubillo (2021) stated, the materials provided must coincide with students' language competence to guarantee a more adequate dictionary use when completing a task.

Second, regarding the students' perceived competence in their performance of the online task, most of them showed high levels of satisfaction and perceived they could do the task very well. In this regard, they also considered they were quite skilled in the use of ICTs (i.e., adequate resource management) and, therefore, proficient at answering the questions proposed in the OT. Accordingly, students' proficiency was observable in (1) their capacity for synthesis about their ability to analyse information from the online resources suggested, and (2) their ability to make critical decisions and build new knowledge. These words

confirm that this type of online task engages students in their learning process by using the online materials integrated into it (Silvestre-López & Girón-García, 2023; Boghiu-Balaur & Girón-García, 2024).

Third, most students maintained that they devoted a considerable amount of effort to do well in this OT because it was very important for them. Let us keep in mind that, although this intervention was not compulsory and, therefore, its completion was not a requirement to pass the course, from the teacher's perspective the fact that these students engaged actively in this study was viewed favourably. Also, from the student's perspective, the completion of this OT could be perceived as very recommendable and beneficial for their learning process, since this online task (1) integrated all the contents of the course curriculum, and (2) was rewarded with a maximum additional 25 points in the Legal English course if completed.

Because of the students' perceived evaluation of the value/usefulness of their OT performance, the students assessed their development of autonomous learning skills with the completion of this OT, which is one of the goals of this task and our study. From this perspective, our findings about the support of learner motivation and autonomy (Silvestre-López & Girón-García, 2023; Boghiu-Balaur & Girón-García, Forthcoming, 2024) have been proven to foster learners' long-term learning. Our general observation is that a great number of students believed that this online task could be useful to them in learning vocabulary and content (Girón-García & Ruiz-Madrid, 2014; Girón-García & Silvestre-López, 2019) in English in specialised contexts, especially in their area of interest, (i.e. 'Law'). This is also one of the objectives established in this project and is particularly relevant for their learning process.

The insights gained from this third research question lead to the conclusion that the OT proposed in this research allowed students to (1) select the online resources offered according to their needs and objectives (i.e., depending on the type of question) (Silvestre-López & Girón-García, 2023; Boghiu-Balaur & Girón-García, Forthcoming, 2024); (2) read, interpret, analyse and synthesise information critically from the online resources suggested according to their aims and objectives; (3) evaluate their background knowledge in the area of law and relate it to the construction of their new knowledge by completing the activities proposed in the OT (Girón-García & Ruiz-Madrid, 2014; Girón-García & Silvestre-López, 2019); and (4) use dictionaries properly (Bogaards, 2003; Hadebe, 2004; Liu, 2014) to construct their knowledge for their intellectual and professional purposes.

RQ4 revolves around success and completion rates in the final written exam of the experimental and control groups. The findings confirm that the intervention with the OT has been a significant factor in achieving higher results

in the written exam on the part of the students who participated in the study, as compared to the control group, who only took the final exam. In this respect, our hypothesis that the experimental group would have more successful outcomes in the final written exam has confirmed the validity of performing the OT and its potential in the students' autonomous language learning process in the Legal English classroom. Accordingly, the OT is a clear indication of deriving more benefit from its intervention in the experimental group than in the control group, from the perspective of achieving better results in the final exam.

The OT design proposed in this study has been useful in training students in the use of several online dictionaries, since using only one is not enough to meet students' academic and professional needs (Edo-Marzà, 2016). And, considering the research gaps so far, it would be advisable to encourage the design of more tasks of this type that integrate motivating activities through the use of online dictionaries on digital platforms. Accordingly, and bearing in mind Chi's (2020) words, there is still a concern about the disconnect between dictionary use, training, and the awareness or teaching of "dictionary literacy". Moreover, this kind of task design is not only applicable to Legal English but can be extrapolated to any other specialised or general English course. Therefore, we can now confirm that the results derived from this research have significantly contributed to the fields of EFL and ESP.

6. Final Conclusions

This research is in line with the theoretical framework we set out at the beginning of this paper on encouraging EFL and ESP learning through online tasks that stimulate students' cognitive capacities, as well as their construction of knowledge with the use of dictionaries. Therefore, promoting the use of ICTs with specialised online dictionaries is fundamental for the development of students' autonomous language learning.

The identification of different strategies for the use of online dictionaries in the Law students' learning process, as well as their perceptions of their use while performing the OT, has made a remarkable contribution to teachers' planning and design of future online course tasks involving the use of online dictionaries that reinforce foreign language learning. Many students have not yet developed their strategies for dictionary use sufficiently to deal with the demands faced in the course. Secondly, the online resources offered in the OT to carry out the activities have been of great significance to learning specialised vocabulary and content in their field, and as teachers, we consider that this has been valuable information to cover the demands of the 21st-century students. Similarly, the students' general perceptions of the OT and the online resources integrated

into it may contribute to (1) enhancing the curricular adaptation in the Legal English course, as well as in other ESP courses, and (2) encouraging students' autonomous skills in their language learning process through ICTs. This study has acknowledged the success rates obtained in terms of achievement and completion in the final written exam, in the case of the experimental group, compared to the lower grades obtained by the control group, who only took the written exam at the end of the term. The potential of the OT has thus made a difference in their final course results.

Although the OT implies that students complete online reading and writing tasks, they only focus on the writing process in the offline final written exam. On the other hand, for research reasons, we have only focused on analysing the results obtained in the exam; hence, we have not carried out an analysis of the students' responses to the questions posed in the OT.

A future study could be envisaged in which a control group would receive no instruction in dictionary use in the classroom, while an experimental group would receive that training. Both groups were then compared by performing a task just as the one in this research to confirm that dictionary instruction, in the case of the experimental group, has been more beneficial and with better results in the task compared to the control group. To have more conclusive results, it would be necessary to correct the task activities to validate our hypothesis.

Ideally, such tasks should be given to learners at different language levels and in different courses, which would certainly improve their academic performance as well as the learning of correct use of online dictionaries from an autonomous language learning perspective. We, therefore, consider that this type of analysis is a research gap that could be considered for future analysis.

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