

Teaching English to Law Students: Interview with Suman Luhach, School of Law, Bennett University, India



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BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Suman Luhach is a graduate from BITS Pilani, Pilani Campus, India. Her observations on college students' endeavors to pen down their ideas led her to choose 'Scaffolding Writing Skills for Indian College Students' as her doctoral research topic. The work has contributed to understanding the importance of learning management systems to maximally impact classroom instruction of writing skills through a learner-centric, collaborative approach. After being awarded the institutional fellowship in 2011, She taught courses like Technical Communication, Technical Report Writing, and Effective Public Speaking at BITS Pilani to UG and PG students. Before this, she did M. Phil. in English Literature and wrote a dissertation on the works of V S Naipaul from a Postcolonial perspective. She qualified for UGC NET (English - Language and Literature) in 2012. While doing a short-term course with RELO, US Embassy, in 2012, She was awarded Outstanding Achievement in 'Exploring Web 2.0: Tools for Classroom Teaching and Professional Development'. She received Prof. SBL Rawat Memorial Trust Award in Masters in English Literature for achieving the second rank at the University level. Her research areas are Teaching of Writing Skills in Language Classrooms at Tertiary Level, Online Collaborative Language Learning and Literary theories.

INTERVIEWEE



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INTRODUCTION

Before the interview, we had a discussion to nominate several experts or practitioners in the field of ESP teaching. The team decided to invite Suman Luhach, P.hD of School of Law, Bennett University, India. She is an Indian scholar who dedicated her professional career teaching English for Law purposes and heading the editorial position for an annual newsletter 'Lawbyrinth'. Then, the team sent an invitation email for an interview (5th of August 2022) and had a quick reply confirming her willingness to participate. The team continued to negotiate the interview time, platform, and the focus of the interview. The online interview was held on 11 August 2022 via Zoom. The interview was open-ended with some probes and mirror questions (Monroe, 2002; Weller et al., 2018). There were eleven primary questions asked with additional follow-up questions to ensure information clarity. The interview lasted twenty-nine minutes and was closed by the host with some recommendations for future international collaboration (e.g. research, students exchange, guest lecture, etc.).

THE INTERVIEW

Opening (Ry)	: We would like to welcome you and thank you for accepting our request for the interview today. We are very happy and honored to have you here in the Zoom interview. Before we begin, let me introduce myself...uhm, my name is Rahayu. I am from Sawerigading University. And yeah, today we are joined by Mr Ismail from Politeknik Negeri Ujung Pandang, and he is our host for today, Doctor Suman. We have read your CV and are interested to know more about your current profession as an English teacher in the Law school. Here we have 11 questions related to your profession as ESP teacher. We hope you are pleased to share your experience with us happily. OK, can we start, Dr. Suman?
Suman	Yeah, yeah, please. Sure. Thank you, Doctor Rahayu, first of all. Thank you for inviting me for this interview. It's really a privilege for me. Thank you so much.
Rahayu	OK. Doctor Suman, could you start by telling us a little bit about your background, such as education, training, current activities, and professional development that you have attended before?
Suman	Sure, Ms. Rahayu. I have done my PhD in scaffolding writing skills for college students with technology mediation. I had submitted my thesis in the year 2016 from Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani,

Pilani campus located in the state of Rajasthan in India. And during PhD I did course works on Applied Linguistics, Fundamentals of English Language Teaching, Professional Communication and English literature. Later, I worked as a senior language teacher with Delhi Public School, Greater Noida for about three years. I started working with Bennett University as an assistant professor of English in the School of Law in the year 2018. Here I teach General English and communication for lawyers that comes under English for academic legal purposes (a branch of ESP). I also teach Law and Literature course in the university. Being in a law school is both engaging and challenging because after getting trained in the theory of applied linguistics and language teaching, the real challenge lies in entering the university teaching and aligning with the specific language requirements of students from different streams. In Bennett University, as mentioned earlier, I have been teaching ESP in the School of Law for the last five years.

Rahayu : You are currently teaching English at the school of law, Bennett University. Could you please tell us about your responsibility and role in the department?

Suman Yeah...So as I told you that I teach two courses in the law school in the first year, in semester 1, we teach General English and communication to lawyers, and in semester-2, we teach law and literature. Apart from these teaching responsibilities, I'm the course coordinator, and check the course flow and do timely updates and review of the course content as per students' needs and expectations. I'm also the editor in publications committee works that involves newsletter and annual report. Along with this, I'm also actively contributing to the literary and debating activities and helping students with components like argumentative writing and Asian parliamentary debates. Intercultural awareness and tolerance to linguistic diversity and social inclusion are some of the areas that are also taken up for law students in the form of telecollaboration, invited lectures, and projects. Such initiatives keep them informed about issues related to public policy affairs.

Ismail Woow. You must be very busy with those responsibilities. Anyway, how many lectures you handle in your department?

Suman Usually we have around five three batches in one semester handled by two instructors. Apart from this, some occasional teaching involvement

	with the School of Management and the School of Liberal Arts is also present.
Ismail	So, you do both management and teaching, don't you?
Suman	Teaching and administrative work! Yes, I think teaching cannot be separated from administration and that adds to the one's overall efficiency.
Rahayu	Yeah..I think it is challenging as well. Anyway. Talking about English for law which is categorized into ESP course, could you please tell us about the importance or significance of English for law purposes?
Suman	For law students, I think that English is indispensable especially if I talk in the Indian context. Indian laws have been influenced by common law. After independence, significant amount of the laws in have been taken from the British laws. So, the written form of laws is mostly available only in English. Moreover, it is mandatory to have all proceedings and documentation in English in the apex court i.e., the Supreme Court of India. English is also one of the official languages in India at union level and for interstate communication. But when it comes to center-state interaction and state-state interaction they mostly prefer English language. For law students, knowledge of English is highly important, and that actually makes it a compulsory course for them.
Ismail	So, English is taught almost in every semester, isn't it?
Suman	No, it is taught as a compulsory subject during the first year of the degree program. The law students study English in Semester I and Semester II during the first year.
Ismail	What....what about the teaching materials that you use? Do you use authentic materials, such law documents or something alike?
Suman	Yeah..., after teaching theory, we mostly use the authentic material. It could be like the recent news, or some document related to the education policy. For example, when we teach them plain English for lawyers, we introduce Plain Language Drafting Bill and the plain English movement to them. We also involve students in translations or revision of some

	legal document. Largely, we try to keep the course more practice oriented through authentic materials.
Rahayu	Okay, now let's talk about 'Lawbyrinth'? You are an editor of this newsletter since 2020? Could you tell us about it? How does your current profession help you in this role?
Suman	'Lawbyrinth' is a biannual newsletter published by the School of Law. The newsletter covers the activities, events, achievements, and publications at School of Law. Everything gets recorded in Lawbyrinth and as the editor I feel that it aligns well with my core teaching and research interest in writing skills. Thus, this administrative work keeps me engaged with writing skills through content and form-focused editing work. And I perceive that as a continuous professional development activity for me.
Ismail	Is it challenging?
Suman	The real challenge is the time investment; rest is keeping one in practice that is required in every profession.
Ismail	is it regularly published?
Suman	We have two publications in a year: January and July.
Ismail	...oh...It doesn't have to be research-based paper, right?
Suman	Sometimes we include some invited articles written by faculty and students but mostly, we report the research output of the department along with other activities and achievements.
Rahayu	Well, now we move to the next question. You have been teaching English for specific purposes for years and, of course, you have success stories in your teaching career. Could you tell us about your best practices teaching the subject?
Suman	Yes. I think the real success for a teacher is when students come back to you after years and recall what they had learned and what further they want to learn. To me, the real success is felt when students after some years come back to me ask, if I could help them with some sort of writing

	related work. I would also share one incident when students asked me to offer one elective in their final year of law degree related to literature, social discourse and language in law.
Rahayu	What do you think you need to accelerate language learning in your context? How do you see it in the next two or three years?
Suman	All right. So, in the Indian context, as I told you that we have recently been introduced with National Education Policy 2020 and the policy talks about the three-language formula and official languages in India. I usually try to engage students in such debates where they deliberate upon issues like linguistic diversity and social inclusion. Students in our university are from different states and they speak different languages. So, when this heterogeneous group of students discuss such matters, they usually come up with some unique solutions. And I also take it as an achievement for a language teacher because the students focus on proper communication, and tolerance by contextualizing it.
Rahayu	Woow. That is an inspiring and motivating story. Could you please share your inspiring stories teaching English to Law students and social and academic values that readers can learn from?
Suman	OK. I can just relate to the recent ones that I have just mentioned that organizing group discussions in the class made students talk from their own language learning experience in school and when they contextualized the discussion with respect to the recent education policy, they also talked about the bigger challenges of translating the texts that are available in English into regional languages. The students, thus could be oriented in the right direction and that actually serves the purpose of situating them in the social and educational discourse.
Rahayu	Now let's talk about your professional development journey? How do you upgrade your knowledge and skills? How do you inspire English teachers out there to be an active learner as well as teacher and researcher?
Suman	Yeah. As we know that teachers are lifelong learners, they cannot afford to stop learning. It's more we learn while teaching than the students learn from us...ha..ha... when we are teaching in the class, because we have to prepare a lot for that. So, for me, when I entered the law school,

	<p>I underwent a six-month long course on legal English. After that I have been engaged in different faculty development programs related to like 'Language, Culture and Cognition' from IIT Madras, one FDP related to 'English language teaching and research' where the resource persons were from English and Foreign Languages University of India. It's actually very important to keep yourself updated and keep attending such faculty development programs to avoid stagnation and monotony while teaching. It helps a teacher in keeping oneself update on the materials, research and the new fields of inquiry.</p>
Rahayu	<p>From your perspective, what would you suggest ESP teachers to deliver specific content materials? You can give some tips if you do not mind, please!</p>
Suman	<p>Regarding content or materials, I would like to suggest that we need to move beyond teaching from textbooks all the time. Though textbooks are crucial but for better engagement of students, it is more important to share the authentic reading materials with them. These could be videos, news, articles, or research papers. The materials could even involve advertisements where the students could be engaged into real life communication situations.</p>
Ismail	<p>How do you see it from a CALL perspective?</p>
Suman	<p>CALL perspective! Yes, I have been making use of technology for student engagement activities beyond classroom teaching for formative assessment activities. Many online tools are integrated with the Learning management system for peer feedback activities. So, I take some briefing sessions to tell them how to give feedback on each other's writings.</p>
Rahayu	<p>Well, you have shared some insightful experiences to us, so now let's conclude our interview today by inviting you to motivate ESP teachers and learners on how they should build collaboration to reach their learning goals?</p>
Suman	<p>I think English for specific purposes is full of potential and prospects for research. We need to reach out to the people with common interests like we are doing it right now and some collaboration/telecollaboration related to research, teaching or student exchange programs could be</p>

	initiated. Comparative studies needs to promoted involving different countries and contexts.
Rahayu	OK, well, thank you, Doctor Suman for your inspiring story. We hope we can meet you again in the future for different topic. Thank you for participating.....and now I return to our host. Mr Ismail.
Suman	Thank you so much to you once again! I really look forward to initiatives and collaborations
Ismail	Thank you Doctor Suman and Ibu Rahayu for being with us today. We look forward to seeing you all again in the future with different theme and issue. Allow me to stop the recording.

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