



Students' Challenges in Employing AI Tools in Legal Writing

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Artificial Intelligence Tools, Legal English, Legal Writing

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has recently provided English learners with various interactive alternatives in classes. However, limited research has been conducted into the use of AI in English for specific purposes (ESP), especially Legal English. This paper investigates challenges students face when incorporating AI tools into Legal English Writing, stemming from either the tools themselves or their compatibility with Legal English. Forty-two undergraduate students of Legal English at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Law completed a structured questionnaire to gather quantitative data on their obstacles. The findings revealed that the primary challenges include overreliance on AI tools, educational ethics regarding plagiarism, and reduced creativity. These thoughtful insights shed light on pedagogical implications, helping guide students to use AI tools responsibly and effectively. The study also contributes to further research on AI in ESP, calling for deeper investigation to improve students' legal writing and other general purposes.

Introduction

With its rapid development since 2000, English learning and teaching have witnessed substantial assistance from Artificial Intelligence (AI) with a multiplicity of AI-based systems or tools applied. Indeed, well-known book publishers like MacMillan and National Geographic Learning have introduced AI-powered adaptive learning systems that can analyze students' performance and tailor content, feedback, and practice activities to each individual's needs and learning pace. Similarly, English teachers find AI to be a helpful assistant that plays an important role in promoting their teaching efficiency. They have employed AI-based apps to help with grading and assessment, such as Grammarly, Turnitin, PlagScan, and Dupli Checker, to name but a few.

As for students, the employment of AI tools is believed to be an essential part of their learning. According to a survey of 800 U.S. college students by Pearson (2024), 56% of those who shared generative AI helped them study more efficiently, and 51% claimed it contributed to their better grades. McKinsey (2021) also found that approximately 44% of college students had used AI tools to help them complete assignments and projects. This indicates a growing trend of students incorporating AI-based tools into their learning process.

Students of legal English, similarly, have adopted the use of AI tools during their learning, especially legal writing. It has been believed that AI tools are great assistants in offering help with legal terms, grammar, and even ideas. This can be proved by the fact that students usually

do research or make corrections with the help of AI tools in their legal writing classes. However, they are not always useful for students due to some potential difficulties. Ho (2024) expressed concern that the presence of ChatGPT (*a recent AI technology chatbot*) is reshaping how university students gain knowledge and language skills, potentially disregarding the role of English language teachers. These may prevent students from utilizing AI tools in their learning process. Therefore, lecturers need to be aware of these issues so that we can have some proper interventions. In fact, it has been of great interest for researchers to investigate obstacles students might confront in their writing learning, especially academic writing. However, due to its specific features, there are few such studies on legal writing. Therefore, we, lecturers from the Faculty of Legal Languages, HCMC University of Law, desire to figure out possible challenges for Legal English students, so some suggestions could be drawn for them to fully utilize the tools in their legal writing. Accordingly, the target students in this paper are the ones with legal backgrounds, which can contribute to the significance of this study. This can be explained by Legal English's distinctive features that need careful investigation.

This paper is organized into 4 sections, with the first one introducing the study. Section 2 then offers a brief glimpse of the literature and previous relevant studies. After that, the methodology will be well demonstrated in Section 3. In detail, the writers would portray its design, respondents, and sampling procedure before describing the instrument designed. The last part of section 3 will be devoted to the description of the data collection and analysis procedure. Finally, the focus of the Section 4 is on findings and discussions. Specifically, the writer would illustrate the results and offer reasonable corresponding discussions.

Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and AI tools

AI is formally defined in Cambridge Dictionary as "a particular computer system or machine that has some of the qualities that the human brain has, such as the ability to interpret and produce language in a way that seems human, recognize or create images, solve problems, and learn from data supplied to it." This term is now conceived as technology enabling computers and machines to simulate human intelligence and problem-solving capabilities.

The object of this study is AI tools, which are applications run on the basis of AI and employed as assisting tools in students' writing. Some widely recognized AI tools can be listed as follows: Grammarly, Hemingway Editor, Wordtune, PaperPal, Atomic Reach, ProWritingAid, etc. In this paper, we expect to collect some fresh information about the tools favored by students of Legal English.

Challenges

In fact, challenges can be regarded in different ways. In this paper, challenges are preferred over difficulties or obstacles students encounter when utilizing AI tools to assist their legal writing.

There are some challenges regarding AI tools that are usually reported.

Challenges with ethical issues: These involve learners' struggles to avoid plagiarism, even accidentally. This has been proven to be one of the most common challenges for learners when using AI tools. Pham & Cao (2025) also agreed that on the scale of academic integrity, students often depend on AI tools to engage in dishonest practices in their learning process. (Pham & Cao, 2025)

Challenges with critical thinking skills: These are believed to ruin learners' ability to think critically. In other words, learners may have a tendency to follow the bias suggested by the tools. Challenges with autonomy are believed to cause students' lack of independence in their writing and learning generally. Yet, with special target participants and a distinguished subject involved—legal writing—this paper expects to discover challenges through different stages of AI tool application.

Legal writing

Legal writing is believed to possess some distinctive features due to its historical background in English for Specific Purposes. Traditionally, legal writing has been taught alongside legal reasoning as they are interconnected processes. There has been debate about whether to teach them together or separately. Langdell (cited in Kimball, 2006), in the late 19th century, compared the study of law to science, leading to a theoretical approach in legal education. However, this approach resulted in students' lack of proper legal writing skills. After World War II, law schools recognized the need to teach students how to write analytical legal research in plain English. Some schools combined English grammar and composition with legal research instruction. In the mid-1980s, the teaching of legal writing shifted to a process-based approach, emphasizing practice, note-taking, and correction of mistakes. Present-day legal writing pedagogy focuses on practice, legal foundations, addressing a legal audience, and the generative aspect of writing. Some professors advocate for teaching the entire sequence of thinking and developing legal arguments.

Accordingly, legal writing owns some distinguishing characteristics (Nozima, 2023).

Authority: Legal writing heavily depends on authority. Citations of authority are essential in most legal writing, as they support and validate assertions and statements made by the writer (Harvard Law School Library, 2017).

Precedence: In legal writing, precedence is significant and distinct from authority. Precedence refers to the established way or manner in which legal cases have been decided in the past.

Vocabulary: Legal writing incorporates technical terminology that can be classified into four categories. First, specialized words and phrases are unique to law. Second, ordinary words have different meanings in the legal context. Third, archaic vocabulary was once common but now exists mainly in law, dating back to the 16th century. Fourth, loan words and phrases from other languages, which do not require italicization in English legal writing.

Formality: Legal writing is characterized by its formal nature, which manifests in various ways. This formality is evident in the usage of lengthy sentences, intricate sentence structures, and excessively formal vocabulary, as well as a primary emphasis on content rather than catering to the needs of readers.

Plagiarism: When lawyers write objective analyses or persuasive documents like memoranda or briefs, they are subject to the same plagiarism rules as others. However, they also face additional ethical considerations when it comes to presenting copied materials as original work (Ho, 2024).

Plain language movement: This aims to promote the use of clear and accessible language in legal documents, avoiding complex terminology and convoluted expressions. Its goal is to enhance the understandability and accessibility of legal writing.

Legalese is the use of complex and difficult-to-understand language in legal writing, making it challenging for non-experts to comprehend. This intentional obscurity excludes those without legal training and justifies high fees.

When it comes to classification, there are two broad categories of legal writing: (1) legal analysis and (2) legal drafting. The first one includes predictive analysis and persuasive analysis, which are considered to be the processes of analyzing and evaluating legal issues, cases, statutes, regulations, or legal principles in a written format. The latter refers to the creation of binding legal text. Legal drafting encompasses various types of written documents, including statutes, rules, regulations, contracts (both private and public), personal legal documents such as wills and trusts, as well as public legal documents like notices and instructions.

Due to the study's narrow scope and target participants, we are specifically addressing the second type—legal drafting—in this paper. Unlike legal analysis, legal drafting typically does not require the inclusion of legal authority citations and is typically written in a straightforward manner without a distinctive or stylized voice.

Previous Studies

Researchers have been very interested in the implications of AI tools in English teaching and learning in recent years. Plenty of papers discuss the benefits and challenges brought by AI tools in students' learning process. Researchers tend to observe the issues from two different perspectives, namely teachers' and students'.

From a teacher's perspective, Duong (2024) carried out library research on AI impacts. She expected to figure out both the positive and negative effects that AI can bring to students' academic writing at Dong Nai University. With the method of literature review employed, she concluded that with the use of AI tools, students could enjoy suggestions that were suitable for them as well as customized feedback on various domains. As for challenges, two main types were found: those with ethical dilemmas and those regarding the decline of soft skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

With the same objectives and approach, a scoping review (2023) by a group of researchers from Indonesia also revealed similar findings. Specifically, they concluded that AI could help with individualized comments, assignments, and support thanks to its ability to meet individual learners' needs through their performance. Similar to the aforementioned study, ethical and academic integrity remained a big problem that both teachers and students faced with using AI tools.

In early this year (2024), Dugošija, a researcher from Western Serbia Academy of Applied Studies, released a paper examining the benefits and the drawbacks of implications of AI tools in English language teaching by reviewing the literature. As a result, apart from the privileges he brought, he came up with some downsides for both teachers and students. Not surprisingly, ethical issues and the lack of creativity were reported to be the challenges. Moreover, this study proved the increasing dependence upon AI, which might ruin student interaction and communication. This can be seen to be in contrast with what was stated in the previous scoping review.

Sharing the same goal and approach, Campoverde-Quezada & Valdiviezo-Ramírez published a paper in 2024 to explore the benefits and challenges of AI tools in EFL teaching and learning. As expected, the result was not so different from the others. Yet, it is worth mentioning that implementation challenges were the new issues raised uniquely in this study.

It can be easily seen that teachers explore students' challenges with AI tools in their writing thanks to previous literature. To some extent, this approach is useful for catching a brief glimpse at the issues. However, some limitations come from the lack of particularization, which might negatively influence students when AI tools are used in their writing. In fact, students may reflect on their own experiences with AI tools in different ways in accordance with the majors or the schools they belong to. Therefore, other researchers adopt the second approach based on a different outlook- the students' perception.

As a whole, these studies serve as a helpful source of references when it comes to students' challenges when it comes to the implementation of AI tools in writing. Although they could address the issue of particularizing the target students at specific levels and educational institutions, the problem with the subject involved remains, which is writing. In other words, they simply talk about EFL students. In our paper, we expect to focus on ESP students with their legal writing, which is believed to be an interesting field to examine. With that ambitious aim, our study hopes to offer a more comprehensive look at this topic.

Research Question

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey sought to answer the following research question: What kinds of challenges do students face when using AI tools in their legal writing?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

As required, students of legal English at the University of Law have to complete three modules of Legal Writing, comprising Legal Writing 1, Legal Writing 2, and Legal Writing 3, which are reasonably distributed to the school year sophomores and juniors. The modules aim to consolidate the knowledge and skills students have obtained in Legal Reading and Legal Listening. In other words, students apply fundamental knowledge to factual circumstances that give them more opportunities to get used to future working conditions. In the modules, students implement their knowledge to solve problems and improve their writing skills in legal situations, covering some areas such as the practice of law, business law, contract law, civil and criminal laws, commercial law, and so on. Then, legal students will be able to identify the key terms, types of responses, and the targets of the transactions. Also, they will be able to describe the basic features of some specific fields of law, analyze the situations, build up the relationship through letter responses, and give some legal advice to customers. These modules are taught in English. Before taking part in the research, the participants already finished the first two courses of Legal Writing. Therefore, the answers to the questions given, with a factual background of Legal English respondents, are expected to be relevant to their own experience during their implication of AI tools in their own courses.

Design of the Study

As mentioned in the first section, this paper aims to address the question: What kinds of challenges do students face when using AI tools in their legal writing? Ultimately, we expect to suggest some optimal solutions that may be helpful for both students and teachers in their learning and teaching.

With that goal aimed, the writers would love to conduct a survey with an exclusively designed questionnaire. It includes two main parts (13 questions total), with the first exploring the AI tools students employ. Then the second part comprises three sections that aim to figure out the

challenges students face regarding Accessibility, Reliability, and Reliance. Accessibility refers to the issue of whether those tools are easy to approach both mechanically and financially; Reliability is the one related to the quality of the tools; Reliance is involved with students' dependence on the use of AI tools. These three aspects of challenges correspond to three stages of AI tools employment: before, during, and after

Data collection & analysis

Due to the time limit, the convenient sampling method was adopted, and all the participants were second-year and third-year students who had finished two courses, Le, Gal Writing 1 and Legal Writing 2. In specific, the questionnaires would be delivered online to four classes majoring in Legal English, including LE46A, LE46B, LE47A, and LE47B. Then, 42 responses would be picked randomly for data analysis. As for this step, the writers would conduct an in-depth analysis to provide a factual background of the implications of AI tools by Legal English students based on their answers to the questions given.

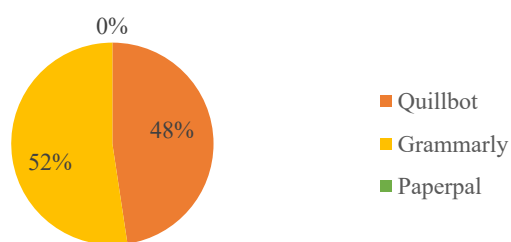
Once the findings are written, the writers would generate corresponding discussions. Initially, these are helpful for students to deal with their own obstacles. Furthermore, these useful examinations provide teachers with a heightened awareness of their students' difficulties with AI tools in Legal Writing, encouraging teachers to give assistance or conduct more effective classes.

Findings

This paper presents some of students' challenges with applying AI tools in their legal writing. It has been acknowledged that this is a single case study, so the results cannot be generalized. Nonetheless, this paper hopefully serves as a basis for future work.

Chart 1:

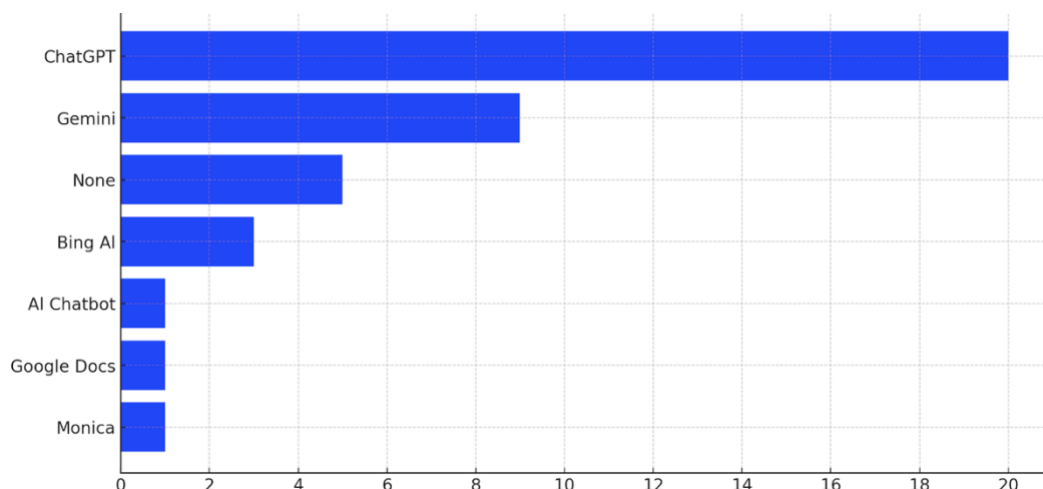
The AI Tools Employed by Students



The figure illustrates the popularity of the AI Tools used by students for Legal Writing. In particular, there was half of the students voted for Grammarly as the most well-known tool in their learning. Meanwhile, Quillbot, which was one of the most common and suitable tools on the Internet for writing learning, took over just more than 47%. The popularity of these two tools proves that students of legal English pay great attention to grammar and how they properly communicate their ideas. However, Paperpal, as suggested by the writers, happened without any selection. This means they were not getting used to this tool.

Chart 2:

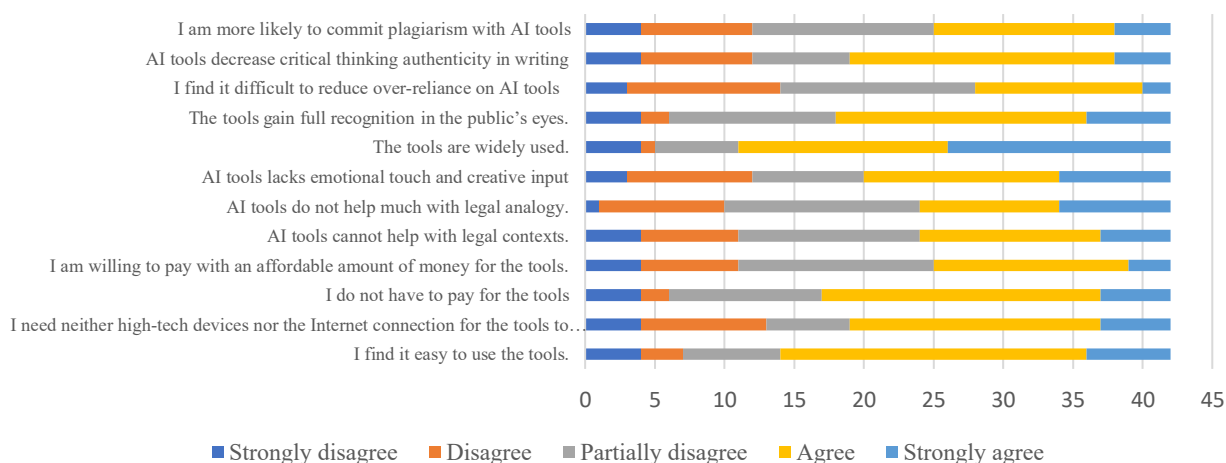
Alternative AI Tools to Help students Boost their Legal Writing Process



Besides, when requested to share the other tools, most chose Chat GPT as their alternative way to help them boost their legal writing process. Subsequently, nine (09) responses claimed the use of Gemini and three (03) choices for the tool, so-called Bing, accounting for nearly 4% and 2% of the total, respectively. More noticeably, only one (01) voted for the implementation of Google Docs and Monica in their learning process of legal writing. It can be seen that ChatGPT gained dominance over other tools.

Chart 3:

Challenges in the Employment of AI Tools



In order to discover the friendliness of the tools to the users, over 70% of participants agreed that they found it easy to use the tools for their learning, whereas some of those (only over 10%) partly disagreed with that. With regard to the feasibility of AI tools, the respondents also stated that the accessibility of these tools did not completely depend on high-tech devices as well as Internet connection. This means these tools were available and did not require complicated techniques. However, almost half of those showed their disagreements due to several technical issues. In terms of financial condition (the cost students had to pay for the tools), compared with a few responses who had to incur some expense on the full versions of the tools, many students were using the tools without payment. Besides, some of those expressed their partial

disagreement with the idea of whether they might or might not pay for the tools. More importantly, the availability of the tools experienced some differences in the willingness to pay. Specifically, the number of supporters and opponents to this criterion was similar, with an average of 40% of the total. However, there were some answers, which were "strongly disagree". Evidently, there would be great concern if they had to pay to access the tools on their own. Therefore, we can conclude that most students do not find it difficult to get access to AI tools in technical terms. Yet, that can be problematic if the tools require full purchase.

Another practical criterion was the quality of the tools. In other words, the participants had to determine the tools' reliability in legal contexts. Students appear to be not sure about whether the tools can deal with legal contexts so that the results offered are good enough. This indeed can be seen by the same number of those who agree and partially agree (13 students for each). However, students tend to put their trust in AI tools' expertise in legal words. Only 18 students doubted the efficiency of the tools when they had to deal with legal terms. Surprisingly, not all of the participants think that the tools will have trouble with emotional touch and creative input. Half of the participants didn't make up their minds to give a judgment on the affective aspect that AI tools can provide them with. At the same time, the other half holds a strong belief that the tools will fail to produce and process the information with emotions and creativity. The result reveals an interesting fact that learners do not impose grave doubts on the tools when dealing with legal jargon or affective aspects in legal writing.

The answers to the last two questions related to reliability reveal a very interesting tendency of AI tool users. While a majority of students (more than 30) admit that their tools are very popular, not all use highly recognized tools. Around 10 students are reluctant to state if the tools they employ are well estimated. This can be interpreted as learners not having full consciousness of the tools' reliability.

Meanwhile, when being asked about their dependence on AI tools, more than 50 percent of participants are aware that the tools worsen their critical thinking in writing. Nevertheless, around 15 of them find it challenging to get over their reliance on the tools while the others don't. This might be in relation to their responses to the last question about the risk of committing plagiarism. About 15 students admit that they are more likely to get into plagiarism with the use of AI tools. The figure means learners do not find it a real challenge to get over the dependence on the tools, although their critical thinking skills might be affected. Unfortunately, this signals potential reliance on learners' highly frequent use of AI tools.

Discussion

Data gathered from the survey has indicated that students are using more than one type of AI tool over their study time. Subsequently, they chose Quillbot and Grammarly as their popular legal writing assistants. Chat GPT is also their great choice. The figures collected reveal that these tools are highly intuitive and readily accessible to them at any time. They agreed to adopt these advanced technological solutions to justify their choices since the requirements are less complicated, and the users do not need more mechanical techniques to operate these tools. In particular, it is feasible for students to access these without the need for an Internet connection or any high-tech devices. Indeed, these tools are always at the top of the teaching and learning assistance list. They are available to the public and approachable at any time. More interestingly, students allow themselves to need more help from other tools such as Gemini, Bing, Google Docs, or Monica.

Aligning with previous research findings, this paper's findings shed light on several noticeable challenges and dilemmas that students might encounter when using AI Tools. These challenges can be categorized into three areas: (1) learning autonomy and over-reliance, (2) educational ethics, and (3) lack of creativity.

Lack of Learning Autonomy

Students obviously acknowledge one of the significant issues when using AI tools in their learning in these courses is that they cannot increase their autonomy. In fact, AI tools help them with thorough ideas, well-structured outlines, and accurate sentence structures in less amount of time. Therefore, students find it hard to control the abuse of these tools in their learning process. Meanwhile, it comes to a statement that “the learner’s psychological relation to the process and content of learning - a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action” (Little, 1991, as cited in Morbedadze, 2015, p.2). Duong (2024) agreed that depending on AI tools for structures and feedback potentially reduced their (students’) critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Therefore, Dugošija’s (2024) concluded that an abuse of AI tools in learning can deter students' ability to interact with the material meaningfully. In other words, due to a lack of learning autonomy, in the courses of legal writing, where independent reasoning and argumentation are crucial, students are in trouble producing their own language as well as developing the analytical skills needed in legal discourse. However, it is also evident that students showed their hesitation over whether they can reduce over-reliance on AI tools. As mentioned before, this turns out to be a signal for a kind of addiction that learners cannot control. Unlike previous studies on students' challenges with AI tools, the result of this dire prediction about the lack of learning autonomy leaves an issue for teachers and students to consider when using AI tools.

Educational Ethics

Dam (1990, as cited in Gathercole, 1990) agreed that learning autonomy is the willingness and capacity of students to control and oversee their own learning. Therefore, a lack of learning autonomy may lead to an ethical issue in relation to plagiarism. Indeed, students tend to use content generated by AI tools to blend with their own works without valuing the precise expressions, along with the significance of authenticity in legal writing. Unfortunately, students do not express their great concerns about this problem. This finding is similar to what was found in the studies by Duong (2024) and Dugošija (2024). Moreover, most of the students are reported to be willing to spend on the tools if they are required to pay due to their high estimation of the tools’ efficiency. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to develop clear guidelines as well as adequate assistance to prevent learners’ overuse of AI tools in their writing learning.

Limitations of Creativity

AI Tools can place learners in legal contexts, where students can understand the situations and implement the key terms in specific cases. However, many of them are worried about creative input. Malik et al. (2023) addressed similar findings that AI-generated works could hinder students' creativity, which might risk their learning process of legal writing. Instead of creating ideas and constructing persuasive arguments, students depend on the available sources or the contents produced by the tools. With assistance with grammar, structures, and vocabulary, the contents may lack the individualized voice and personality. Dugošija (2024) noted that responses provided by AI tools might diminish students’ creativity. Consequently, students claimed the lack of emotional engagement in learning legal writing.

Conclusion

To fulfill the aim of legal writing lessons, the application of technological advances, particularly AI Tools, has become essential. It is worth affirming the benefits of the tools that can be brought into the students' process of legal writing. However, it should be noted that the abuse of AI Tools causes some challenges. The use of these tools requires students to consider whether the contents they are using in their situations are reasonable and accurate. Moreover, students' reliance on AI tools leads to the ruin of critical thinking. Moreover, potential plagiarism can be a major issue that all language learners must be fully aware of.

With the paper's findings, we can make some suggestions for teachers and learners on how to fully utilize AI tools in their legal writing and minimize their undesirable effects. First and foremost, educational institutions can consider offering support for learners who struggle to get full access to the tools, which might hinder them from considerable assistance for their writing learning. The support can be realized by the establishment of a laboratory or a library where learners can come and do research in which they need help from fully equipped AI tools. This might be troublesome in some cases when learners have to be at school for any search or investigation. Yet, this turns out to be helpful for both teachers and learners to control their unconscious addiction or reliance on the tools. In fact, they have time for their creativity and critical thinking to develop rather than spending whole days with their AI assistants.

Additionally, it is essential to measure the reliability or the efficiency of the tools used. Teachers are believed to take responsibility for providing their students with practical guidelines on how to make the best use of AI tools. In order for this to be done, educational institutions can hold some training or talk shows on this issue. As a result, learners might have better choices in AI tools with greater reliability, which brings about better assistance for their writing learning.

As for the fear of learners' overreliance on AI tools, it is suggested that teachers and schools raise learners' awareness of their potential negative effects. Apart from the training and talk shows mentioned earlier, teachers need to be strict when dealing with ethical issues or lack of autonomy caused by overdependence on the tools. That is necessary for learners to have a full understanding of when and how to use the tools properly.

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Biodata

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Appendices

1. What AI tools do you have a chance to employ during your Legal writing?
 - a. Quilbot
 - b. Grammarly
 - c. Paperpal
 - d. Other(s):
2. Put a tick at the columns that suit you the most

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Partially disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
A. Accessibility					
I find it easy to use the tools.					
I need neither high-tech devices nor the Internet connection for the tools to be used.					
I do not have to pay for the tools					
I am willing to pay with an affordable amount of money for the tools.					
B. Reliability					
AI tools cannot help with legal contexts.					
AI tools do not help much with legal analogy.					
AI tools lacks emotional touch and creative input					
The tools are widely used.					
The tools gain full recognition in the public’s eyes.					
C. Reliance					
I find it difficult to reduce over-reliance on AI tools					
AI tools decrease critical thinking authenticity in writing					
I am more likely to commit plagiarism with AI tools					