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The Pathways of Reform in Legal Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Innovations in Learning Methods and Technical Means

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Abstract

This paper systematically explores the opportunities, challenges, and innovative pathways faced by legal education in the era of artificial intelligence (AI). It points out that AI technology empowers legal education by enriching educational resources and transforming knowledge acquisition methods, while simultaneously posing challenges to traditional teaching models, talent competency structures, and curriculum systems. To address these challenges, legal education should deepen reform in three areas: shifting teaching methods from knowledge transmission to competency cultivation, reconstructing the curriculum system, and strengthening faculty development. The paper emphasizes that future legal professionals must possess both "human–machine collaboration" and "human–human collaboration" abilities. Legal education should therefore seek a balance between technological empowerment and the fundamental values of the rule of law, aiming to cultivate interdisciplinary and innovation-oriented legal talents.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence; Legal Education; Curriculum System; Human–Machine Collaboration

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1. Introduction: Opportunities and Challenges for Legal Education in the AI Era

With the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence technology, the legal profession is undergoing an irreversible transformation. In law offices, "judge assistants" powered by AI software can read and analyze cases, and quickly calculate the similarity between a new case and Supreme Court precedent. Traditionally, law students' daily routine revolved around memorizing statutes, but today AI enables students to rapidly search legal texts and case law. This transformation imposes entirely new demands on legal education: how to cultivate a new kind of legal talent who are both legally adept and technically proficient?

Artificial intelligence brings significant

empowerment to legal education. It enriches legal teaching resources, allowing law schools' faculty and students to conveniently access statutory texts, case databases, and foreign legal research outcomes. At the same time, AI expands the openness of legal education, spawning diverse online platforms which promote professional exchange and international interaction in law. More importantly, AI alters the mode of learning and producing legal knowledge: generative AI models such as DeepSeek and ChatGPT can retrieve the latest legislative texts worldwide in a short time and offer brief analytic summaries.

However, AI also poses serious challenges to legal education. The limitations of traditional legal pedagogy in terms of knowledge updating pace, simulation of practice scenarios, and individualized training are becoming increasingly prominent. In 2024, undergraduate law employment dropped slightly to 74.5%, while positions in legal tech grew by 27%, highlighting a mismatch between conventional legal education and industry demand. In facing such challenges, reform and innovation in legal education are imperative[1].

2. Innovations in Legal Learning Methods in the AI Era

2.1. Paradigm Shift from Knowledge Transmission to Competency Cultivation

In the AI era, as legal knowledge acquisition becomes increasingly convenient, legal education must pivot from mere knowledge transmission toward integrated competency cultivation. Legal practitioners need political literacy, legal professional ethics, as well as technical literacy, digital literacy, and domain-specific legal skills.

Technical literacy requires legal professionals to master basic AI tools and use AI to maximize their professional potential. Digital literacy means possessing data-analysis and application skills, understanding emergent theories and regulatory principles in digital law. Domain-specific legal literacy—far from weakening in the AI era—should be strengthened: future legal professionals must comprehensively master legal knowledge, legal thinking, and professional skills[2].

To adapt, teaching methods must shift from the "teacher lectures, students listen" model to a more interactive and practice-oriented model. Teachers should update their pedagogical philosophy, move beyond the traditional bias of emphasizing knowledge at the expense of capacity, and more judiciously use intelligent teaching assistants to guide students in leveraging advanced tools to search knowledge, statutes, and cases.

2.2. Innovation in Immersive Practice Teaching

AI technology provides entirely new possibilities for practice teaching in law. Virtual simulation technology can reconstruct real courtroom settings, enabling students to complete full-process training in evidence submission, cross-examination, advocacy, etc. For example, Henan University has launched a virtual simulation courtroom platform to replicate core elements of practical teaching. Huaqiao University focuses on "AI-generated image copyright dispute" and organizes moot court teaching activities requiring litigants to explain how the AI was used and what outputs were produced[3].

Big data case teaching is another innovative method. Using big data, one can build intelligent case repositories covering Supreme Court guiding cases and typical local judgments, supplying abundant teaching materials. Students analyze real case data to cultivate data-driven legal thinking and problem-solving abilities.

These innovations not only increase student interest but more importantly cultivate their flexibility in applying knowledge in real legal environments. In virtual settings, students can practice repeatedly without real-world consequences—a "safe failure" environment conducive to deeper understanding of legal procedure and practice.

3. Innovations in Legal Technology Tools in the AI Era

3.1. Construction and Application of Intelligent Learning Platforms

Intelligent teaching platforms can provide personalized tutoring solutions for legal education, improving teaching efficiency and quality. These platforms can push customized resources and tasks according to students' progress, interests, and weaknesses. Moreover, the platform can monitor learning status in real time, give feedback on performance, and help instructors adjust strategies for precision teaching.

Some law schools domestically and abroad have

begun developing smart legal education platforms. A well-known legal education institution used AI and big data analysis to deliver personalized learning paths and recommended courses based on students' learning progress and needs. After launching, student efficiency improved significantly, and instructors better understood student learning, enabling better adjustment of pedagogy.

Building smart legal laboratories is another key direction. In law schools, establishing smart legal labs offers students a practice operation platform to cultivate their practical skills. These labs typically are equipped with advanced legal-tech tools and software, allowing students in a controlled environment to familiarize themselves with future technical scenarios.

3.2. AI-Assisted Tools in Legal Research

AI technology is changing how legal texts are retrieved. Generative models like DeepSeek and ChatGPT enable users to acquire the latest legislative texts globally in a short time, supplemented by succinct analysis, enabling efficient and accurate retrieval if used properly.

AI can also generate answers to legal questions at any time. Though not always perfect, they can provide initial solution ideas and references, even enhancing expression clarity. This gradually transforms how legal professionals produce knowledge.

In legal scholarship, AI tools assist literature reviews, case analysis, and comparative statute research. For instance, AI can quickly analyze vast judicial cases, identify judges' tendencies and argumentation patterns, providing data support for academic work. These tools boost research efficiency and open new methodological directions.

4. Reconstructing the Curriculum System and Interdisciplinary Integration

4.1. Constructing "Law + Technology" Interdisciplinary Courses

Facing AI challenges, legal curricula must break disciplinary boundaries and build a three-tier progression of "foundation – application – intersection." The foundational level should include compulsory courses like legal big data analysis and algorithm ethics, cultivating technological awareness; the application level should develop practicum courses such as intelligent contract review and judicial AI system operation; the intersection level should promote cross-disciplinary "Law + X" courses, nurturing students' ability to solve problems across fields[4].

Many law schools globally have already begun systematic reform. For example, Brazil's FGV law school requires students to learn Python and data science; in China, Renmin University integrates law, business, and AI institutes to offer "AI cognition and business restructuring" series courses, helping students understand the reshaping power of AI on legal practice.

More concretely, law programs should introduce courses such as "Digital Law," "Principles of AI Law," "AI-Assisted Litigation Practice," "Legal Big Data," and "Blockchain & Digital Evidence," stressing the combination of theory and practice to train students to integrate new technologies with legal practice, meeting AI era talent demand.

4.2. Intelligent Transformation of Traditional Legal Courses

Beyond adding interdisciplinary courses, updating traditional legal courses is equally vital. Universities should organically embed AI elements into existing courses to align with the evolving competency requirements for legal professionals. For instance, in intellectual property courses, one might add a module on "copyright ownership of AI-generated content"; in administrative law courses, incorporate "legality review of algorithmic administration."

Such transformation is not merely injecting AI elements into content, but upgrading teaching methods and assessment systems. Teachers can leverage big data resources, introduce relevant classic and typical cases, guide students to deeply analyze solutions grounded in context. Meanwhile, using big data and AI to leverage comparative law resources helps students access foreign theories, institutions, and cases conveniently, broadening global vision[5].

5. Faculty Development and Strengthening Ethics Education

5.1. Enhancing Teachers' AI Literacy and Cross-Domain Collaboration

Teachers are the core agents of educational transformation,

who need to transcend traditional boundaries and actively learn frontier knowledge. Universities should regularly provide training on intelligent technologies, invite AI experts as instructors, and include application skills such as Python programming and machine learning frameworks in training[6].

Establishing a "law professor + AI expert" joint mentoring mechanism is effective in boosting faculty capacity. Technical experts can join teaching, curriculum development, research, and thesis supervision to achieve deep integration. Meanwhile, AI application capability should be included in faculty review criteria (e.g. awarding "AI Teaching Innovation Awards" or technical funds) to incentivize teachers engaged in AI pedagogical reform[7].

5.2. Strengthening Data Ethics and Ethical Education

With deeper AI application, data risks and privacy concerns are increasing. Deep AI can rapidly generate and analyze large case data, but ensuring legal accuracy and educational value is challenging. Given the opacity of technology, legally regulating its use is also a key issue[8].

Universities should embed data ethics, algorithm transparency, and personal information protection into various courses. Experiential teaching methods (e.g. "ethical risk assessment" scenarios) allow students to act as ethics reviewers of legal-tech products, cultivating judgment and ethical sensitivity.

In ethics education, particular attention should be paid to algorithmic bias and discrimination. Many courses fail to include cross-cutting modules on technology-law ethics, causing students to treat algorithms as neutral tools and ignore embedded biases. Through case analysis and scenario simulation, students can grasp the social impact of algorithmic decisions and develop responsible technology usage attitudes[9].

6. Conclusion: A Future Vision for Legal Education

Innovation in legal education in the AI era is far more than a simple technical overlay; it is a profound reshaping of talent cultivation models. The "changes" in knowledge system, pedagogy, and skill demands, and the "constants" of rule-of-law spirit, pursuit of justice, and humanistic care form a dialectical unity[10].

Future legal professionals should be interdisciplinary talents equipped with legal, digital, and AI knowledge and skills. Beyond domain competence, they must possess two essential types of collaboration ability: "human–machine" collaboration and "human–human" collaboration. AI is evolving from data-driven models toward paradigms driven by data and knowledge, increasingly merging and interacting with humans. Legal professionals must learn to cooperate with people and machines, enhancing their holistic capacity and efficiency in handling legal affairs.

Legal educators should anchor their work in practical needs, serve the construction of rule of law, and practice educational innovation. They must find a balance between technical empowerment and value adherence. Only in this way can they contribute to judicial fairness and the advancement of the rule of law in China, fulfilling the mission of "ensuring people feel fairness and justice in every judicial case." In the face of the surging tide of AI, legal education should anchor in the rule of law, ensuring technology development does not deviate from benefiting the public. We must use law to rein in technology while reserving space for innovation—drawing a new blueprint for legal education in the AI era.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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