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Simulating Authentic Legal Discourse: Innovative Strategies for Teaching Legal English: A Focusing on Pedagogy, AI Integration, and Learner Outcomes

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Abstract:

Due to the limited exposure to authentic legal discourse, the teaching of legal English to non-native speakers is confronted with many challenges. No one can deny the fact that traditional instructions and contents offered often focus on terminology memorization and written exercises, leaving a big gap between the classroom context and real-world legal communication or context. To this end, Scenario-based simulations offer a powerful alternative, allowing students to engage in realistic tasks such as mock trials, contract negotiations, and client consultations. Besides, AI-enhanced tools can further enrich these experiences by generating adaptive scenarios, providing instant feedback, and personalizing learning pathways. The aim of this paper is to address the following questions: How can scenario-based simulations effectively replicate authentic legal discourse? To what extent can AI enhance the design, personalization, and feedback of Legal English learning experiences? And how can teachers assess learners' practical competence in authentic legal tasks beyond vocabulary and grammar? As a matter of fact, addressing these questions will help educators in their process of designing immersive, meaningful, and technologically supported learning experiences that in return bridge the gap between classroom practices and professional legal communication.

Keywords: Legal English; Scenario-Based Learning; AI-Enhanced Instruction; Authentic Legal Discourse.

1. Introduction:

The teaching of Legal English presents significant challenges due to the specialized nature of legal discourse, which is characterized by complex syntax, fixed genres, and culturally embedded professional conventions. Traditional approaches to Legal English instruction have often emphasized the acquisition of terminology and grammatical accuracy, yet they frequently fall short of preparing learners for the pragmatic and interactional demands of real legal practice. Consequently, learners may possess linguistic knowledge without being able to apply it effectively in authentic professional contexts.

To address these shortcomings, scenario-based simulations have gained recognition as an effective pedagogical alternative that narrows the gap between academic instruction and professional legal practice. By immersing learners in realistic legal situations—such as client consultations, negotiations, or courtroom proceedings—simulations encourage active participation in authentic legal communication. This experiential mode of learning fosters the development of

pragmatic competence, discourse sensitivity, and professional interactional skills that go beyond the mere acquisition of vocabulary and grammar.

In parallel, advances in artificial intelligence have introduced new possibilities for enhancing both the teaching and evaluation of Legal English. AI-driven tools can support the creation of flexible and adaptive learning scenarios, tailor instruction to individual learner needs, and offer immediate, data-informed feedback on performance. Against this backdrop, the present paper aims to explore the pedagogical potential of scenario-based simulations and AI-supported instruction, while also reconsidering how learners' ability to perform authentic legal tasks can be assessed more holistically.

Accordingly, the following research questions are proposed to guide this study:

- ❖ How can scenario-based simulations be used to reproduce authentic legal discourse in Legal English teaching?
- ❖ To what extent can artificial intelligence contribute to the design, personalization, and feedback processes in Legal English learning environments?
- ❖ How can instructors evaluate learners' practical communicative competence in authentic legal tasks beyond lexical and grammatical knowledge?

2. **Legal English: No longer Optional – it is Essential:**

In today's increasingly globalized legal profession, proficiency in Legal English has become a key factor distinguishing competent practitioners from truly effective and competitive ones. As legal services now routinely cross national and jurisdictional boundaries, lawyers are expected not only to understand the law but also to communicate complex legal concepts accurately and persuasively in English. Mastery of Legal English therefore represents a strategic professional asset rather than a mere linguistic skill.

Legal English is commonly defined as a specialized variety, or occupational register, of the English language used by legal professionals in both spoken and written contexts. According to Richard (2019), it encompasses the language employed by lawyers in legal documents, courtroom interactions, contracts, legislation, and professional correspondence. This variety is characterized by technical terminology, formulaic expressions, precise syntax, and discourse

conventions that differ significantly from those of general English. As such, Legal English requires targeted instruction that reflects its professional functions and communicative purposes. Moreover, contemporary Legal English is not a single, uniform entity but rather a collection of sub-varieties shaped by the specific area of law in which it is used. Fields such as criminal law, commercial law, international law, and family law each employ distinct genres, rhetorical patterns, and lexical choices .

As Maley (1994: 13) observes, every legal domain possesses its own “characteristic flavour” and varies according to the situational context in which language is deployed. This variability highlights the need for teaching approaches that expose learners to diverse legal contexts and authentic discourse practices rather than treating Legal English as a monolithic or static form of language.

First, Legal English encompasses several distinct yet interconnected subtypes, each serving specific communicative purposes within the legal profession. One major subtype is judicial legal language, which refers to the language of judicial decisions and opinions that are formally recorded and published. This variety is characterized by highly formal style, complex reasoning, references to precedent, and carefully structured argumentation aimed at justifying legal judgments and ensuring interpretative authority.

Another important subtype is Courtroom Language, which is used by judges, lawyers, court clerks, witnesses, and other participants during legal proceedings. This form of legal language is interactional in nature and combines formal legal terminology with spoken discourse features such as questioning, turn-taking, persuasion, and evidentiary explanation. Courtroom language varies according to participants’ roles and communicative objectives, ranging from judicial instructions to cross-examination and oral argumentation.

Legal English is also prominently realized in legal Documents, including contracts, statutes, regulations, wills, deeds, and other formal instruments. This written variety is characterized by precision, standardization, and a high degree of conventionalization. Its primary function is to establish legal rights and obligations unambiguously, which explains its reliance on technical vocabulary, fixed formulae, and dense syntactic structures.

Finally, Legal English includes the language used between legal Professionals and in interactions between professionals and clients. This communicative context

is often less formal than judicial or documentary language, yet it remains specialized and purpose-driven. It involves advising, negotiating, explaining legal concepts, and managing professional relationships. This variety highlights the importance of pragmatic competence, clarity, and adaptability, as legal professionals must adjust their language to suit both expert and non-expert audiences.

3. The Teaching of Legal English:

Traditional approaches to teaching Legal English have long been criticized for their limited focus on terminology and form, often at the expense of meaningful use. As Bhatia (1993) argues, legal language is inseparable from the professional contexts and genres in which it operates, noting that a purely lexical approach fails to capture “the realities of legal communication embedded in professional practice.” Similarly, Maley (1994: 13) emphasizes that legal language varies according to context, stressing that it “cannot be fully understood outside the situations in which it is used.” These observations highlight a fundamental weakness of traditional instruction, which tends to isolate language from its functional and situational dimensions.

This disconnect contributes to a persistent gap between classroom learning and real-world legal communication. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) point out that ESP instruction often suffers from a “mismatch between what is taught and what learners are required to do in professional settings.” In the legal domain, this mismatch becomes particularly problematic, as mastering legal terminology does not automatically translate into the ability to perform legal tasks effectively. As Candlin, Bhatia, and Jensen (2002) aptly observe, “knowing the language of law does not necessarily mean being able to use it appropriately in legal situations,” underscoring the need for pedagogical approaches that prioritize use over knowledge alone.

In response to these challenges, scenario-based simulations have been widely recognized as a powerful tool for promoting authenticity and professional competence. Jones (1982) describes simulation as a learning environment in which learners can “rehearse real-world roles in a safe but realistic setting,” allowing them to experiment with language and professional behaviour without real-life consequences. This view aligns with Widdowson’s (1998) assertion that authenticity resides not merely in texts but in “the tasks learners are asked to

perform.” By engaging students in realistic legal tasks, scenario-based simulations help bridge the gap between classroom instruction and professional legal practice.

4. Scenario-Based Simulations/ Learning:

Scenario-based learning (SBL) is widely recognized as an active, learner-centred approach that places students in interactive situations resembling real-life contexts. Rather than passively receiving information, learners are required to engage with meaningful scenarios that mirror professional practice. According to Errington (2005), SBL enables learners to experience complex situations that reflect the realities of professional environments, thereby promoting deeper understanding and sustained engagement. In this sense, scenarios function as structured representations of reality designed to support purposeful learning.

A key strength of scenario-based learning lies in its emphasis on decision-making and reflection. Learners are encouraged to make informed choices, observe the consequences of their actions, and critically reflect on their decisions. This process aligns with Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory, which highlights learning as a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Through repeated exposure to scenarios, learners gradually develop problem-solving abilities, professional judgment, and adaptive expertise in a risk-free educational setting.

Simulation-based scenarios, in particular, are understood as artificial representations of real-world events created to achieve specific educational objectives. As Gredler (2004) explains, simulations allow learners to practice skills and apply theoretical knowledge in controlled environments that closely resemble authentic contexts. Recent developments in immersive learning technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), have further enhanced the realism and pedagogical potential of simulations.

These technologies support experiential learning by providing multisensory, interactive environments that increase learner engagement and authenticity (Radianti et al., 2020). As a result, scenario-based simulations offer powerful opportunities to transform theory into action while preparing learners for real-world professional challenges.

5. AI-Enhanced Instruction:

AI-enhanced instruction refers to the integration of artificial intelligence technologies into teaching and learning processes in order to improve

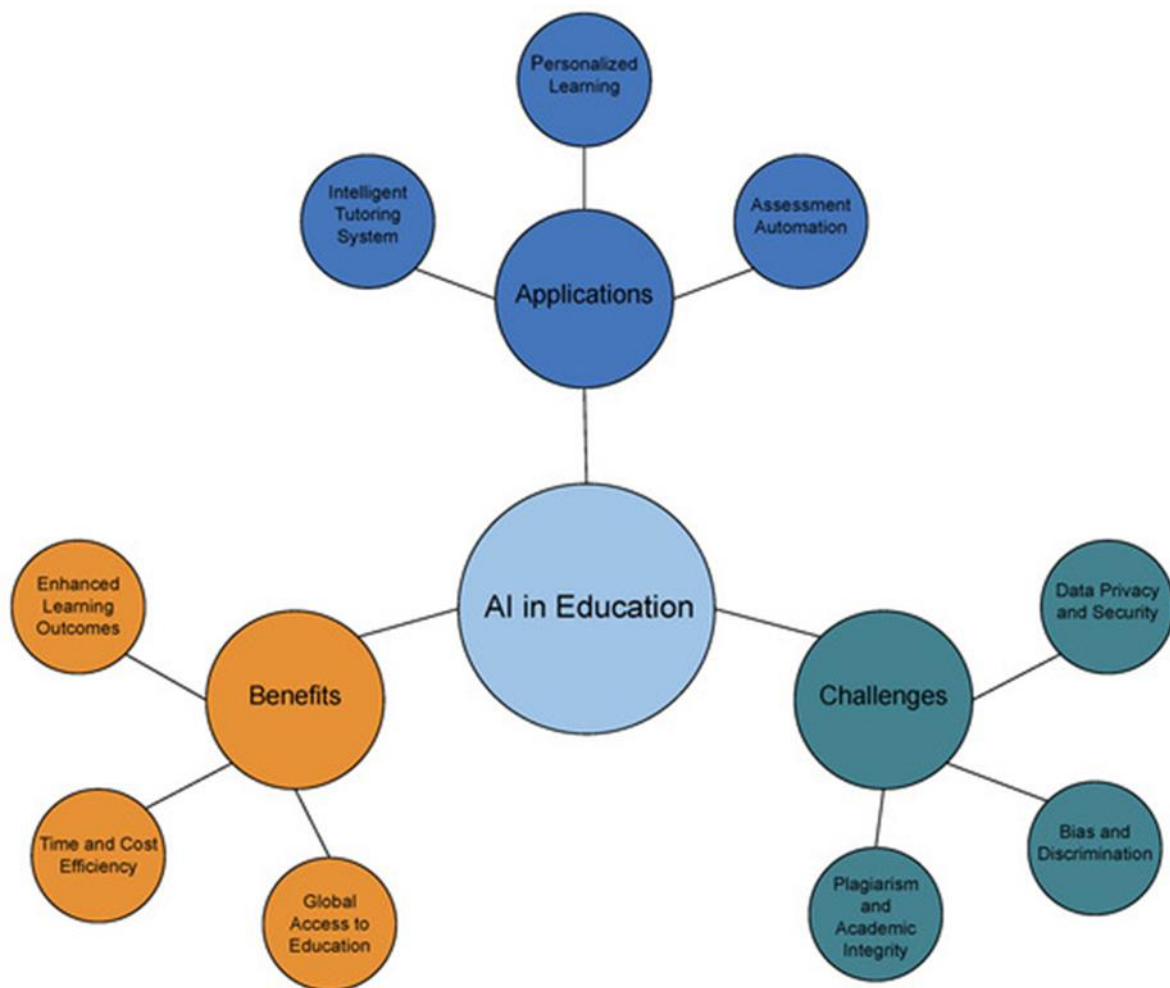
personalization, engagement, and learning outcomes. In the context of Legal English, AI offers powerful tools for designing adaptive learning environments that respond to learners' individual needs, proficiency levels, and professional goals. Unlike traditional one-size-fits-all instruction, AI-driven systems can adjust content, pacing, and task complexity based on learners' performance and progress.

One of the major advantages of AI-enhanced instruction lies in its capacity to support realistic, scenario-based learning. AI can be used to generate dynamic legal scenarios, simulate professional roles, and model authentic legal discourse through intelligent agents or chatbots. These systems allow learners to interact with virtual clients, judges, or opposing counsel, thereby practicing legal communication in contexts that closely resemble real-world situations. As Luckin et al. (2016) note, AI has the potential to extend experiential learning by providing continuous interaction and immediate pedagogical support.

Furthermore, AI-enhanced instruction significantly enriches feedback and assessment processes. AI tools can analyse learners' spoken and written legal discourse, identify recurring errors, and provide instant, individualized feedback on language use, pragmatics, and discourse structure. This form of formative assessment supports reflective learning and helps instructors move beyond the evaluation of vocabulary and grammar alone.

According to Holmes et al. (2019), AI-supported feedback enables more nuanced assessment of complex skills, including problem-solving, professional reasoning, and communicative competence. Consequently, AI-enhanced instruction represents a valuable complement to scenario-based simulations in preparing learners for authentic legal practice.

The following figure summarises the notion of AI integration in education



6. Authentic Legal Discourse:

Authenticity in legal discourse refers to adherence to established linguistic, structural, and rhetorical conventions that allow a text or interaction to be recognized as legitimate within a particular legal system. As Bhatia (1993) explains, legal discourse operates within highly conventionalized genres whose form and organization are essential to their professional validity. Compliance with these conventions enables legal communication to function authoritatively in processes such as legislation, adjudication, and contractual regulation.

Legal discourse is therefore distinguished by its institutional force and real-world consequences. Tiersma (1999) emphasizes that legal language is not merely descriptive but performative, in the sense that it actively creates rights, obligations, and legal realities. Judicial decisions, statutes, and contracts derive their authority not only from legal reasoning but also from their conformity to recognized discourse practices that grant them enforceability and legal effect.

Crucially, authenticity in legal discourse extends beyond the correct use of terminology. As Gibbons (2003) argues, legal meaning is socially and institutionally

constructed, shaped by jurisdictional norms, procedural contexts, and historical development. What counts as authentic legal discourse may therefore vary across legal systems and evolve over time. This dynamic nature of authenticity highlights the importance of contextualized and practice-oriented approaches to teaching Legal English, particularly through exposure to realistic legal tasks and genres rather than static linguistic models.

7. Conclusion:

The main conclusion to be drawn here is that the use of an Integrated Legal English Learning Cycle will help a lot in the teaching of legal English. In other words: Simulations form the core of the learning cycle by recreating the linguistic, pragmatic, and decision-making conditions of authentic legal communication. Through realistic roles and genre-based tasks—such as client interviews, negotiations, pleadings, or advocacy—simulations immerse learners in professional contexts that require them to use legal language purposefully. This approach enables learners to engage with legal discourse as a situated social practice rather than as an abstract linguistic system, fostering pragmatic competence and professional awareness.

AI support enhances this process by enabling personalization and continuous feedback. Artificial intelligence can generate a wide range of legal scenarios, adapt task complexity to individual learner profiles, and provide immediate feedback on aspects such as clarity, register, coherence, argumentation, and tone. While AI contributes significantly to scalability and responsiveness, expert human judgment remains essential to ensure legal accuracy, ethical compliance, and contextual appropriateness, particularly in sensitive or high-stakes legal tasks.

Assessment completes the cycle by focusing on performance rather than isolated linguistic forms. Teachers can evaluate learners through authentic, task-based activities—such as client counselling, legal drafting, or oral advocacy—using competency-based rubrics. These assessments prioritize reasoning quality, interactional effectiveness, professional demeanor, and strategic decision-making. Together, simulations, AI support, and performance-based assessment form an integrated learning cycle that aligns instruction, practice, and evaluation with the realities of legal communication.

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Appendices

A: Judicial Interrogatory Simulation

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Judicial Interrogatory Simulator

Spring 2024

BACKGROUND

The Judicial Interrogatory Simulator (JIS) is a web-based courtroom simulation designed to equip first-year law students for the moot court experience. A moot court session involves two grounds of appeal, with two teams of appellants and respondents presenting their arguments to a panel of judges.

The platform is developed to alleviate stress, and particularly to support those who find their moot court submissions to be one of the most stressful experience in their entire legal education.



Moot Court in Session

PROCESS

JIS' core application (Classic & Intelli-Judge) uses React-Three-Fiber, HTML, CSS, and Typescript, with the web-app hosted on AWS. The VR interface and functionality was were implemented using Unreal Engine 5.3 blueprints.

The judges for Classic & Intelli-Judge version are sourced from DeepMotion and animated using Mixamo, Plask.ai, and Rokoko AI motion capture. Blender and Maya were used for additional 3D assets.

NEXT STEPS

- Enhancements to Intelli-Judge:
 - Integration of emotive-response system
 - Augmentation of the AI's legal database
- Improvements to the VR simulated environment:
 - Implementation of user perspective montage in the courtroom
 - Increasing the repertoire of facial and bodily movement within the MetaHuman interface for enhanced realism and versatility

PROJECT DETAILS

JIS offers three versions aimed at enhancing legal preparation, problem-solving, and oral advocacy skills: Classic, Intelli-Judge, and Virtual Reality (VR).

The Classic version focuses on improving speech articulation and time management. Intelli-Judge offers real-time feedback and simulates judge-like questions for students to refine their argument delivery and response skills. The VR version provides an immersive environment to facilitate a deeper understanding of courtroom dynamics. Complemented by Intelli-Judge, students benefit from a comprehensive practice scheme.

INTELLI-JUDGE

Intelli-Judge is an AI language tool that allows students to engage in dynamic dialogues resembling actual judge-student exchange in a normal moot proceeding.

The server implementation includes a tailored speech-to-text functionality to enhance user experience within the virtual courtroom. Recognizing limitations in the current response time, a custom solution was developed to address challenges associated with abstracted recording processes and limited text outputs. Complete text transcripts are sent to the server to quickly prompt corresponding audio segments that are returned to the user.

This streamlined communication process optimizes performance while maintaining seamless interaction within the environment.

In this version, students not only have the option to use the application any time, but also pause the submission to collect their thoughts during a practice session.

VIRTUAL REALITY

Using Unreal Engine and MetaHuman technology, we developed a virtual courtroom aimed at providing an immersive learning experience for students. The MetaHuman judge model utilizes body animation from Mixamo, and facial animation from UE facial livenessync to enhance authenticity of interactions.



Beyond immersion, the system offers practical benefits. The virtual recreation of the courtroom gives students a private space to practice their submissions and experience first-hand the challenges of arguing their positions within a strict time limit. This is an important resource to support inclusive learning within the legal community, particularly for individuals grappling with heightened anxiety and initial discomfort with public speaking.

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Assessment Rubric: Judicial Interrogatory Simulation

Criterion 1: Judicial Questioning / Responsiveness Focus: Ability to formulate or respond to judicial questions accurately and appropriately.

- ❖ **Excellent (4):** Questions/responses are precise, logically structured, and legally relevant; demonstrates full control of interrogatory techniques and clarity under pressure.
- ❖ **Good (3):** Mostly clear and relevant questions/responses; minor issues with precision or depth.

- ❖ **Satisfactory (2):** Basic questioning or responses, sometimes unclear or insufficiently focused.
- ❖ **Needs Improvement (1):** Questions/responses are vague, irrelevant, or procedurally inappropriate.

Criterion 2: Legal Reasoning and Coherence Focus: Logical development of arguments and factual clarification.

- ❖ **Excellent (4):** Demonstrates strong legal reasoning; answers are coherent, consistent, and well-justified.
- ❖ **Good (3):** Reasoning is generally sound, with minor gaps or inconsistencies.
- ❖ **Satisfactory (2):** Limited reasoning; arguments are partially developed or repetitive.
- ❖ **Needs Improvement (1):** Weak or unclear reasoning; lacks logical structure.

Criterion 3: Pragmatic Appropriateness and Register Focus: Use of formal judicial register, politeness strategies, and institutional norms.

- ❖ **Excellent (4):** Consistently appropriate judicial/legal register; demonstrates awareness of power relations and courtroom conventions.
- ❖ **Good (3):** Register is generally appropriate with occasional lapses.
- ❖ **Satisfactory (2):** Mixed register; informal or inappropriate expressions appear.
- ❖ **Needs Improvement (1):** Register is largely inappropriate for judicial discourse.

Criterion 4: Interactional Competence Focus: Turn-taking, responsiveness, and management of interaction.

- ❖ **Excellent (4):** Manages interaction confidently; responds promptly and adapts to questioning effectively.
- ❖ **Good (3):** Interaction is generally smooth, with minor hesitation.
- ❖ **Satisfactory (2):** Limited interactional control; frequent hesitation or misunderstanding.
- ❖ **Needs Improvement (1):** Poor interaction management; disrupts communicative flow.

Criterion 5: Professional Tone and Demeanour Focus: Professionalism, clarity, and credibility in legal communication.

- ❖ **Excellent (4):** Highly professional tone; demonstrates confidence, neutrality, and credibility.
- ❖ **Good (3):** Professional tone maintained with minor inconsistencies.
- ❖ **Satisfactory (2):** Professionalism is uneven; tone may be overly hesitant or rigid.
- ❖ **Needs Improvement (1):** Lacks professional demeanour or credibility.

Optional Criterion 6: Strategic Awareness (Advanced Level) Focus: Ability to use questioning or responses strategically to clarify, challenge, or guide discourse.

- ❖ **Excellent (4):** Strategic choices are effective and legally justified.
- ❖ **Good (3):** Strategy is evident but not consistently effective.
- ❖ **Satisfactory (2):** Limited strategic awareness.
- ❖ **Needs Improvement (1):** No clear strategic intent.

Scoring (Example)

- ❖ **Total Score:** /20 or /24 (depending on criteria used)
- ❖ **Assessment Type:** Formative / Summative
- ❖ **Feedback Sources:** Instructor + Peer + (Optional) AI-supported feedback

B: Courtroom Simulation



Steps for Conducting a Courtroom Simulation

Step 1: Define Learning Objectives Clearly identify the linguistic, pragmatic, and professional skills to be developed (e.g., legal argumentation, courtroom register, questioning techniques, turn-taking, and persuasive discourse). Objectives should align with course outcomes and assessment criteria.

Step 2: Select the Legal Case Scenario Choose or design a realistic and level-appropriate legal case (e.g., criminal trial, civil dispute, or moot court case). The scenario should include sufficient factual detail to support argumentation while remaining manageable for learners.

Step 3: Assign Roles Allocate authentic courtroom roles to learners, such as judge, prosecutor, defence counsel, witnesses, jury members, and court clerk. Provide each role with clear responsibilities, procedural guidelines, and linguistic expectations.

Step 4: Provide Input and Preparation Materials Supply learners with relevant legal vocabulary, genre models (e.g., opening statements, objections), procedural rules, and sample discourse. This scaffolding helps learners prepare their arguments and anticipate interactional demands.

Step 5: Preparation and Rehearsal Allow learners time to research the case, plan their arguments, draft key statements, and rehearse interactions. AI tools may be used at this stage to support language practice, generate alternative arguments, or provide feedback on clarity and register.

Step 6: Conduct the Simulation Run the courtroom simulation following realistic procedural stages (opening statements, witness examination, objections, closing arguments, and judgment). Encourage adherence to courtroom conventions and professional conduct.

Step 7: Observation and Assessment The instructor observes learner performance using a competency-based rubric focusing on legal reasoning, pragmatic appropriateness, interactional skills, professional tone, and strategic language use.

Step 8: Feedback and Reflection Provide structured feedback, combining instructor comments, peer evaluation, and AI-generated feedback where appropriate. Learners then reflect on their performance, decision-making, and language use.

Step 9: Follow-Up Activities Consolidate learning through post-simulation tasks such as reflective writing, revised legal submissions, or comparative analysis of authentic courtroom transcripts.

C: AI Usage



D: List of Abbreviations

- ❖ AI = Artificial Intelligence
- ❖ AR = Augmented Reality
- ❖ CALL = Computer-Assisted Language Learning
- ❖ CLIL = Content and Language Integrated Learning
- ❖ EAP = English for Academic Purposes
- ❖ ELT = English Language Teaching
- ❖ ESP = English for Specific Purposes
- ❖ ILE = Immersive Learning Environment
- ❖ L2 = Second Language
- ❖ NLP = Natural Language Processing
- ❖ SBL = Scenario-Based Learning
- ❖ TBLT = Task-Based Language Teaching
- ❖ VR = Virtual Reality