

Chapter 7

Digital Transformation in Clinical Legal Education, Virtual Law Clinics, and Access to Justice

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ABSTRACT

Clinical legal education (CLE) promotes skill training and service learning. It provides an opening to comprehend the law and practice through practical training. Access to justice with lawyering skills is the fundamental objective of CLE. Law students can uphold the 'rule of law' and play the leading role in legal services to the needy. Millions of people continue to be denied access to the legal system. The success of the digital transformation in CLE depends on the availability and efficiency of the adoption of advanced technology. The main theme of this chapter is to examine how the law schools approached the mode of CLE amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges faced while delivering services through VLC and examine the various types of online pro bono works. This chapter is designed in both doctrinal and analytical in terms of methodology. It also focuses on the new experiences globally in using IT and the methods that law schools can use through technology to improve access to justice.

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INTRODUCTION

Technology is rapidly playing a major role in our daily lives and enables users to interact and obtain information remotely at any moment. The growth of smartphones has been on the rise due to the advent of faster mobile connections, enabling connectivity while traveling. The government's mission of fiberizing every village by 2025 as part of "*The Bharat Net Programme*" is expected to increase the number of smartphone users in India and the opportunity for internet-enabled gadgets in rural areas. India's mobile subscriber base reached 1.2 billion in 2021, with 750 million of those individuals using smartphones, and by 2026 there will be 1 billion smartphone users in India (*Report of the Indian Edition of Deloitte's 2022 Global TMT (Technology, Media, and Entertainment, Telecom, 2022, 8)*). Over the past few years, there has been a consistent rise in the number of smartphone users in the US. By 2022, there will likely be over 270 million smartphone users in the United States. It will be close to 53.96 million in the UK by 2022. The quantity of individuals using the internet has also risen. Additionally, e-commerce and internet purchasing have seen substantial development (Emma et al., 2018, 52).

The COVID-19 epidemic made it necessary to rely on mobile networks to maintain connectivity and receive existing services. Due to this, despite the pandemic's negative effects on consumer earnings and the slow pace of economic development, mobile usage has continued to rise. Mobile technology will be crucial to achieving the SDGs by expanding the availability of healthcare and education, as well as tackling challenges related to inequality and poverty (The Mobile Economy 2022). In the past, pro bono activities in law school have been carried out face to face. There has been a significant increase in demand for pro bono services, and the gradual progression of pro bono web activity initially had a greater influence in the UK and globally (Emma et al., 2018, 53). All academic programs, involving legal clinics at law colleges and law schools, were in suspense as a result of COVID-19's sudden and rapid arrival. This occurrence compelled the law clinics to adopt an online platform (Welgemoed, 2021, 3).

Due to the ongoing pandemic and closure of educational institutions, clinically oriented activities in law schools have been compelled to transform from their academic sessions to a virtual platform. Under teaching-learning pedagogy, there have been attempts at virtual moot court, trial advocacy, and ADR activities by some institutions. In traditional practices, through the law school's legal aid clinic, the law teachers and students conducted a lot of legal aid activities to support underprivileged people. CLE is a practical methodology that opens wide possibilities for the establishment of "*Virtual Law Clinics (VLC)*" at law schools. In clinical learning, the skills adopted, such as teaching-learning and real-life problem-solving, provide for a live client or simulation model in VLC. As an informal justice mechanism, legal aid clinics at

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