



INTEGRATING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE INTO CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A BEACON TO PROMOTE ACCESS TO JUSTICE

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The need to leverage on the benefits of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in enhancing effectiveness of law clinics in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized because law clinics contribute significantly in providing legal aid services, especially to the indigents. However, despite the global shift to the usage of artificial machines in performing human tasks, most law clinics in Nigeria have not effectively harnessed the benefits of generative AI. The aim of this study is to advocate for the usage of AI as a working tool for law clinics in Nigeria. In addressing this aim, the Law Clinic of Afe Babalola University is selected as the case study. This study made use of qualitative research, both doctrinal and non-doctrinal methods were used. Thirty student clinicians were selected as respondents. The findings of the study revealed that the benefits of generative AI to law clinics are enormous, hence, AI should be introduced as a working tool to law clinics in Nigeria. The study recommended that curriculum of law clinics should be amended to accommodate AI learning and usage.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The need to integrate the artificial intelligence (AI) into the activities of university-based law clinics in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized because it has the potential of reshaping the teaching and practice of law. The legal profession itself is also currently driven by rapid technological advancement and innovations. This progressive impact of AI however raised ethical and competency concerns, thereby causing a lingering debate on whether it should be integrated into law clinic activities. In fact, many law clinics around the world are grappling with this concern on how and whether generative artificial intelligence be used in law clinic activities.¹ This is because of the inherent challenges and cautions generally required in the use of generative artificial intelligence. The purpose of law clinics operating at universities is to enable students to establish contact with real clients and their problems while still in the universities studying.² Therefore, one major benefit of law clinic is to facilitate the understanding of what students will be dealing with after graduating. Meanwhile, the legal assistance provided by law clinics is for people who cannot afford to bear the cost of professional legal assistance nor have a lawyer. Students offer this service under the supervision of a qualified lawyer or legal advisor. The usage of artificial intelligence in achieving the objectives of the law clinics became obvious due to the enormous impacts of artificial intelligence in almost all facets of human endeavor, legal education and legal practice inclusive. Law Clinics cannot therefore not be left out in harnessing the inherent benefits of artificial intelligence, and in addressing this, the Afe Babalola University Law Clinic, one of the law clinics in Nigerian Universities is selected as a case study. As earlier noted, the major essence of law clinics is to provide legal aid service to those who needs it, mainly indigents. It is therefore imperative to briefly consider the role of law clinics in providing legal aid in Nigeria.

¹ Omidoyin T. J. *Law Clinic and Right to Justice of Pre-trial Detainees in Nigeria*, Paper presented at the African Clinical Legal Education Colloquium from 12th – 14th November, 2018 at Elizade University, Nigeria.

² *Ibid.*

2.0 CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Legal education has been defined as a science which imparts to students knowledge of certain principles and provisions of law to enable them to enter the legal profession.³ Legal education in Nigeria is designed in a way to be completed in two stages namely academic training and professional training. Although the Nigerian Bar Association has introduced the third phase of legal training for lawyers which is the Continuing Legal Education but this is still at the budding stage. The academic training aspect is acquired at the university in various accredited Faculties of Law which would lead to the acquisition of a University Degree of LL.B. The usual duration of this programme is 5 years for UTME applicants while 4 years for Direct Entry applicants. It is generally agreed that undergraduate academic law should give students broad general knowledge and exposure to other disciplines in the process of acquiring legal education.⁴

In other words, a uniform curriculum designed by the Nigerian Universities Commission and approved by the Council of Legal Education is taught by all the Nigerian Universities in order to maintain minimum academic standard.⁵ It is after the successful completion of the academic training that an aspirant to the Nigerian Bar would proceed on the professional training to the Nigerian Law School for one year vocational training in the Nigerian Law School. Upon successful completion, the graduate is called to the Nigerian Bar and authorized to practice law in Nigeria. Consequently, a person called to the Nigerian Bar is a solicitor and barrister of the Supreme Court of Nigeria.

Clinical legal education is a developed and pragmatic learning method to serve a client population that needs legal help and sometimes extra legal assistance. Clinical Legal Education exposes students to areas of legal

³ Sumithuma, 'Legal Education, Impact of Globalisation on Legal Education in India' The Law Commission of India available at www.legalscienceindia.com/articles accessed 23rd August, 2018

⁴ Enefiok Essien, Imo Udofa, Richards Eke and Uwem Udok, 'Comparative and Global Perspectives to Legal Education: Lessons for Legal Education in Nigeria' Proceedings of the 48th Annual Conference of the Nigerian Association of Law Teachers (NALT) 444

⁵ Onalaja M.O., 'Problems of Legal Education in Nigeria' available at www.alimiandco.com accessed 23rd July, 2025

practice outside the scope of the law clinic and the practices of the social or business environment within which the client's legal problem manifests.⁶ This includes the introduction of enrichment subjects,⁷ skills classes in legal research, analysis and writing, the process of analysis and structured reasoning to assist students to "think like lawyers", as a future lawyer must be taught "how to provide an objective opinion".⁸ Some students become more capable in their learning when they carry on their knowledge and application of substantive and procedural law into clinical practice. Meanwhile, a critical aspect of Clinical Legal Education is the Law Clinic. Law Clinics provide practical opportunities for students to collaborate and interact with one another. In doing so they may develop problem solving and critical thinking, as well as equip them with lifelong learning skills and begin to develop professional values. Students in law clinics learn by constructing meaning for themselves through active engagement and structured reflection.

The clinic is an experiential setting where students learn hands on and develop the competencies and skills relevant for professional practice. Hutchinson and Lawrence emphasize that learning is grounded in experience derived from experiential learning. In other words, a law degree is not complete and learning cannot be said to be complete if there is no experiential application.⁹ The clinic provides a vehicle for the introduction and enhancement of skills, knowledge and values relevant to the study and practice of law.¹⁰

It is worthy of note that there is a new dimension to legal education and it is the part that has to do with technology. The importance of technology to legal education cannot be overemphasized as the world has turned to a

⁶ Du Plessis, 'Access to justice outside the conventional mould: creating a model for alternative clinical legal training' (2007) 32(1) *Journal for Juridical Science* 59.

⁷ Cody A & Green S 'Clinical legal education and Indigenous legal education: what's the connection?' (2007) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 64.

⁸ Motale Z 'Legal Education in South Africa: Moving beyond the couch-potato model towards a lawyering skills approach. A case for a comprehensive course on legal research analysis and writing' (1996) 113 *South African Law Journal* 696 – 698.

⁹ Hutchinson S & Lawrence H. *Playing With Purpose: How Experiential Learning Can be More Than A Game* (Surrey, Gower 2011) 3.

¹⁰ Brayne H, Duncan N & Grimes R *Clinical Legal Education: Active learning in Your Law School* (London, Blackstone Press Ltd. 1998) 2.

wave that moves along technological drive. Legal education is likewise not left out in this era of globalization courtesy of technology, particularly the trend of artificial intelligence. Therefore, technology is of vital importance to legal education in Nigeria. The current trend of globalization has revealed that learning does not stop with the traditional learning pattern in the walls of the classroom. Technology has brought about effectiveness in this aspect as there are various software applications that can aid legal jobs and learning. The overall legal education has been made easy through the use of electronic legal education.

3.0 THE ROLE OF LAW CLINICS IN PROVIDING LEGAL AID IN NIGERIA: AFE BABALOLA UNIVERSITY IN FOCUS

Legal aid is the provision of assistance to people unable to afford legal representation and access to the court system. Legal aid is regarded as central in providing access to justice by ensuring equality before the law, the right to counsel and the right to a fair trial.¹¹ Legal aid also refers to free or inexpensive legal advice, assistance or representation provided to those who, because of their financial condition, otherwise would not be able to get.¹² Recently, Afe Babalola condemned the devastating level of poverty in Nigeria and remarked that a hungry man can go to any extent to ventilate his anger. He said, those who are complaining of hunger are doing so sincerely, they are hungry. We do not need anybody to tell us that there is hunger in the country.¹³

In essence, legal aid is the provision of free or almost free legal services to persons who by reason of their disposable income or circumstances cannot afford legal services. In other words, due to the varying economic standard of all individuals, legal aid is to be a form of welfare scheme, either by the state or other stakeholders, to people who could otherwise not afford

¹¹ 'Definition of Legal Aid' available at www.dictionary.cambridge.org accessed 24 June, 2025.

¹² 'Definition of Legal Aid' at Business Dictionary available at www.businessdictionary.com accessed 24 June, 2025.

¹³ Ayodele Joseph, 'Afe Babalola speaks on distribution of palliatives by FG' Premium Times august 15, 2024.

counsel from the legal system.¹⁴ Considering the current economic situation in Nigeria and the high inflation rate, millions of Nigerians live below the poverty line¹⁵ and some in this category needs legal problems that require legal attention which they obviously cannot afford. What is even more pronounced is the rate of human rights abuse for these indigent and downtrodden citizens but affording the service of a lawyer to defend their cause is almost a mirage if there is not aid.¹⁶

As a critical stakeholder, it is crystal clear that the essence of law clinics in providing legal aid service to the indigents is imperative. The traditional role of law clinics is to bridge the gap between the less privileged and access to justice through rendering of free legal service by law clinicians, mainly law students. It must also be added that law clinics play vital role in sensitization, awareness, campaigns and advocacy on human rights protection and other related issues. Records have shown of the various giant strides of law clinics in this regard, particularly the Afe Babalola University Law Clinics thereby making their role of no mean value.

The Afe Babalola University Law Clinic was designed by Prof. Smaranda Olarinde, the pioneer Director of the Law Clinic and currently the Vice Chancellor of the University. This was borne as a result of the need to have a vocational aspect of legal education and to help students meet the dynamic demands in the legal industry. Successive Directors of the Law Clinic have continued with the mandate of the Clinic, particularly Dr. Hilary Okoegbule and currently Dr. Taiwo Omidoyin.

¹⁴ Babalola Abegunde & Taiye Joshua Omidoyin, 'Reflections on the Legal Aid Architecture in Nigeria and the Syndrome of Unequal Access to Justice' (2020) 3(1) *Journal of Law and Judicial System* 16-27.

¹⁵ Sam Tunji, 'Poverty rate among rural Nigerians now 75% - World Bank' *Punch Newspaper* 4 May 2025. Available at www.punchng.com accessed 20 July 2025

¹⁶ Malemi, E.O. *The Nigerian Constitutional Law*, Lagos: (Princeton Publishing Co. 2006) 414; Ojo A, *Development of the Executive under the Nigerian Constitution 1960-81* (University Press 1982) 169; Claude A, *The African Continental Human Rights*, a paper presented at the International Conference on Human Rights in African Context, Port-Harcourt, June 9-11, 1987; Awolowo, O. *Path to Nigerian Greatness* (Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd. 1981) 76; Aguda, A., 'Judicial Process and Stability in the Third Republic' *National Concord*. Lagos, Nov.7, 1988, p.7.

Furthermore, the ABUAD Law Clinic is an integral part of a course titled, “Introduction to Legal Practice,” which is a mandatory 400 Level course in the College of Law, taken during the first and second semesters. The course exposes students to the practical application of the theoretical knowledge of legal practice, acquired in class and this includes alternative dispute resolution (ADR) skills. Students are also encouraged to take certified courses with the Nigerian Institute of Chartered Arbitrators.

The Clinic is manned by a Clinic Director, an Administrator, Staff-Clinicians and Student-Clinicians. The Administrator, who is also a lecturer in the College of Law, administers and coordinates the activities in the clinic. The staff-clinicians are lecturers in the College of Law, ABUAD, who have been trained in clinical practice and the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) to settle disputes. The student-clinicians are 400 Level students of the College of Law. The mission of the clinic is to birth twenty-first century lawyers who can compete favourably with counterparts in the legal industry anywhere in the world through service-learning and clinical legal education. In order to fulfill the mission of the Clinic, the following objectives have been set:

1. Build the capacity of student-clinicians to be strong and responsible community leaders who can independently and collaboratively, design and implement legal solutions to social problems; especially with respect to low income households;
2. provide free legal services to indigent people and low income households in the immediate community through supervised participation to enable them complete their university education;
3. instill integrity, value of pro bono services and discipline in law students of Afe Babalola University;
4. train students to use Alternative Dispute Resolution methodologies in proffering solution to cases without recourse to litigation;
5. foster peaceful coexistence and decongest the Courts; and

6. promote peace and progress in the immediate society through strategic collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

In order to realize the objectives of the ABUAD Law Clinic, activities were planned and carried out during the period under review, which include the following:

1. Provide legal services for students from low income households to enable them to complete their University programs
2. Strategic Advocacy for low income household students and indigent people
3. Symposium on Women's rights against gender based violence and sexual harassment.

The Afe Babalola University Law Clinic is a legal aid clinic that provides free legal services to the university community and the general public. The clinic is staffed by law students and supervised by experienced legal practitioners.¹⁷

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative research and rather than select a large number of people, the qualitative researcher, identifies and used a small number of samples of 30 student-clinicians that provided in depth information about the theme. The qualitative sampling used is a non-probability sampling, and non-probability sampling that was employed in this study is the purposeful or judgment sampling.

The qualitative data collected via the research instrument was content analyzed manually. Content analysis was used to interpret the data provided by participants. Data was transcribed properly with keynotes from the field properly sorted. Content analysis of the data was done

¹⁷ This is the chronological report of Afe Babalola University Law and Community Legal Clinic from 2015-2022 <https://sdg.abuad.edu.ng/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-ABUAD-LAW-AND-COMMUNITY-LEGAL-CLINIC-REPORT.pdf> accessed 20 July, 2025.

thematically to ease out intended responses that are pertinent to the objectives of the study.

Initial contacts were made via telephone calls to the selected samples. If he or she agrees to participate, interview was conducted. Data was collected through structured interview and unstructured interviews relating to how the participants perceived the idea of using AI for law clinic activities. The views of these participants will be analyzed to see whether AI usage should be introduced for law clinic activities. An interview guide (pre-drafted questions) was used in order to avoid losing focus and to ensure that relevant questions are asked. Questions asked were both closed and open-ended. While some indicators require a brief and precise answer, it is also desirable to let information emerge from the field. Participants were given opportunity to express their thoughts on the topic as freely as possible. Participants serving as interviewees for this study are student clinicians from Afe Babalola University Law Clinic.

Engaging various participants was essential as this study seeks to analyze their views to know the different perceptions about AI and Law Clinics, which will aid the study in realizing its objective of views.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study where 30 student clinicians were analysed, revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that AI would greatly help in doing law clinic activities. 10% said they have not taken a thought on the relevance or otherwise of AI to law clinics while 5% stated that AI may reduce the level of students involvement in the law clinic activities, rather there would be over reliance on the use of machines and gadgets to do the clinic works. 60% of the student clinicians agreed that the usage of AI should be incorporated into law clinic works but added that there would be the need to train clinicians on these AI tools that would be useful in performing specific tasks.

Artificial Intelligence is the new global trend and it pervades almost all aspects of human life, though in an emerging way. The Law Clinic is not left out in this as many of the respondents identified one area or the other where Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be integrated into Law Clinic

activities. From the feedbacks of the respondents, the areas of benefits between AI and Law Clinics have been broadly identified as follows:

Artificial intelligence can be of immense assistance in the area of legal research and it has proved to be useful in assisting student clinicians in researching cases, statutes, and regulations, in the preparation for their cases and writing of legal opinions. Artificial intelligence definitely makes the process more efficient. AI plays a pivotal role in enhancing the efficiency and depth of that research. AI-powered platforms like WestLaw, Lexis-Nexis, and others are useful to allow students to engage with legal databases more effectively.

Furthermore, artificial intelligence is helpful in document analysis. There are AI powered tool that can help analyze and review legal documents, contracts, and evidence. Student clinicians who are given specific task of document review often work with the aid of these AI tools and it made the work come out better because it reduces error rates and saves time. AI-driven chatbots can aid in initial client consultations, gathering information, and routing cases to appropriate student teams. In fact, AI algorithms have proved to be able to analyze historical data to predict case outcomes, helping student clinicians to develop strategies on how to go about their clients' cases.

More so, AI is being used to support the development of legal drafting skills, enabling students to draft legal documents, such as contracts, pleadings, and briefs, with AI- guided suggestions, While AI assists in grammar, structure, and the inclusion of key legal provisions, the essential skill of reviewing and ensuring accuracy is being learnt. AI-powered platforms allow students to draft contracts and other legal documents, offering suggestions and highlighting potential risks or omissions. This helps law students understand the intricacies of legal language and deal negotiation.

By embracing AI, client services will be improved, and enhance access to justice. AI is also being integrated into legal simulations, allowing students to participate in virtual courtrooms, moot courts, and negotiation simulations. These simulations use AI to adapt scenarios based on student

decisions, making learning more interactive and reflective of real-world practice.

The respondents likewise identified some associated challenges with the introduction of AI into law clinic activities. Cost of securing internet facility to power AI tools can be a major factor that could affect the usage of AI into law clinic activities, although Afe Babalola University Law Clinic could boast of *wifi* service within the premises of the law clinic building but it can sometimes fluctuate and may be very strong at the hostel areas. This cost also relates to the price of acquiring the technological gadgets. For instance, when using some AI tools, specific high-powered gadgets are needed and student-clinicians may not be able to afford this.

The unreliable internet service providers have also been identified as a cog in the wheel of a smooth usage of AI tools in law clinic activities. Respondents complained of some AI tools requiring very stable internet access at high frequency, if maximum result is to be gotten. Most of the respondents asserted that learning the requisite skills to operate the AI tools do not pose any challenge to them as they already have basic digital knowledge.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of law clinics operating at universities cannot be overemphasized especially with the level of poverty in the country and the inability of many Nigerian to afford the service of a legal practitioner. The legal assistance provided by law clinics is for people who cannot afford to bear the cost of professional legal assistance nor have a lawyer, and students offer this service under the supervision of a qualified lawyer or legal advisor. However, in a bid to make that the work of law clinics easier when rendering pro bono legal service to indigents, usage of artificial intelligence becomes imperative. Law Clinics cannot therefore not be left out in harnessing the inherent benefits of artificial intelligence, and Afe Babalola University Law Clinic has been chosen as a case study. From the feedbacks of the respondents, it is crystal clear that AI would be of immense benefits in the areas of legal research, client services, preparation

of legal documentations, grammar and legal language check, and document analysis.

The paper makes recommendations on the way forward on integrating artificial intelligence into law clinic activities in Nigeria. These recommendations include an amendment of the curriculum of clinical legal education in Nigeria to accommodate AI usage in carrying out law clinic activities. More so, there should still be periodic training of student clinicians on AI and machine learning which is quite alien to a good number of the student clinicians. In addition, there should be funding to university-based law clinics for them to be able to address the challenge of finance and infrastructural deficit.