Information Age to Interaction Age in Legal Education: How Far Have We Progressed?

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Abstract This paper analyses undergraduate legal education in the United Kingdom (with some reference to other countries) in the last 50 years in relation to teaching methods. In the 1960s the emphasis was on the lecturer imparting legal information by means of face-to-face lectures. This was an Information Age with legal education being teacher-centred. The lecturer was the expert whose role was to ensure that students were taught the necessary legal content. The beginnings of the Interaction Age came with the setting up of tutorials/seminars. However, they were mainly teacher-centred, where the tutor gave a mini lecture. The interaction was mainly between the tutor and students. A development of the Interaction Age came with the recognition that in tutorials/seminars the teacher should be a facilitator of learning between students, interacting with each other. The early forms of computer-assisted learning consisted of imparting information to students. Initially, the internet was used mainly to develop websites and place lecture notes and powerpoint slides. Some websites contained interactive self-assessment tutorials, the interaction being only between the learner and the content, placed by the lecturer. The Interaction Age using technology only began when interactive devices such as online discussion forums, chat rooms, video conferencing were utilised to enable interaction between students and between students and lecturers, as co-participants in the learning process. The literature review indicates that there is little effective use of interactive technological devices to assist learning in higher education institutions providing face-to-face teaching. The Interaction Age has made little progress, with pockets of innovation in a few institutions. The chief obstacles to progress are lecturers still in the Information Age and passive students who wish to be taught rather than to actively learn. In most face-to-face institutions (including those adopting blended learning) lecturers impart information. Students only engage in interaction to co-construct knowledge where the interaction is part of the assessment. The research methodology is to conduct a literature review on teaching methods from the sixties to the present day to investigate the extent to which the teaching is teacher-centred with little interaction between lecturer and students in traditional lectures. The methodology is theoretical and exploratory. The research perspective is historical. The literature was selected to throw light on the teaching methods in the Information Age and the methods in the Interaction Age.

Keywords: teaching methods, information Age, interaction age, progress, obstacles to progress


1. Introduction

In the 1960s the emphasis was on the lecturer imparting legal information by means of face-to-face lectures. This was an Information Age with legal education being teacher-centred. The lecturer was the expert whose role was to ensure that students were taught the necessary legal content. Students born after the early 1980s are familiar with the new technologies not only to access information, but also to use various technological devices to interact with each other in constructing knowledge in a social manner. Brill and Park argue that in designing learning spaces in the 21st century, educational designers should take into account student experience with new technology and student expectations.

Society has evolved from an Information Age to an Interaction Age. [1] In the Information Age, the focus has been on delivering and accessing digital content, while in the Interaction Age, the role of digital content is broadened as something around which people engage and interact.” [1]

Are we as law teachers designing learning spaces in accordance with the experience and expectations of students in the Interaction Age?

To answer this question this paper utilizes a literature review to analyse teaching methods used in undergraduate legal education in the last 50 years. The research method is from a historical perspective. There is an examination of the teaching methods used in the Information Age,
followed by those used in the Interaction Age. The paper seeks to find out to what extent, if any, progress has been made in legal education to move forward from an Information Age to an Interaction Age. What are the obstacles, if any, to progress? Recommendations are suggested for the future. The concluding section summarises the key findings of the paper.

A theoretical and exploratory research methodology will be adopted. A literature review on teaching methods from the sixties to the present day will be conducted to investigate the extent to which teaching is teacher-centred with little interaction between students and lecturer in the traditional lecture.

2. Teaching Methods in the Information Age

The literature portraying the Information Age was selected when the traditional lecture method was used to teach legal content. Bright’s article was particularly useful in that it contained information about how law was taught in 1965 in comparison with 1991. Boon and Whyte’s article containing the views of recently qualified solicitors on their degree level education was useful in that it reflected dissatisfaction of students for the traditional lecture method and indicated their preference for more interactive methods. Bloxham’s article indicates that even when technology was used, it was as a supplement to the traditional methods and was used for the purpose of giving information. Paliwala’s research provides information on technology such as online discussion boards being used as an interactive device.

The traditional method of teaching law is by means of lectures, with very little, if any, student participation. Blake writing in 1987 states: ‘The present approach to legal education has been portrayed as the piling of information upon students about different legal topics and the provision of basic analytical skills, at times in a contextual framework, with which to digest this mass of information.’

Bright [3] cites Wilson [4] and says that law is taught in the same way in 1991, through lectures and tutorials, as it was taught in 1965.

A criticism of the traditional lecture is that it consists of the passing of the knowledge of the lecturer to the student ‘without going through the minds of either’. In traditional law teaching the student spends so much time in acquiring knowledge of a legal topic that there is not much time left for the development of understanding or application. The traditional lecture results in surface learning.

The only student participation in traditional academic legal education is by means of tutorials or seminars where the students prepare answers in advance to essay or problem questions which are subject to critical analysis in the tutorial/seminar. However, often the seminar turns into a mini lecture to enable students to understand the cases and legal principles. In the innovative method of teaching adopted by Migdal and Cartwright it was reported that there was much more equal discussion between tutor and tutee.

In 1993 Fitzgerald [7] reported that despite a movement away from the traditional methods of teaching in the form of lectures and seminars, most legal education institutions continue to use the traditional methods. She is of the view that lectures are only useful for delivering information and do not have the capacity to develop intellectual skills such as analysis. She cites the C.N.A.A. Legal Studies Board which wrote in 1985 that ‘legal education must be more than a mere imparting of information…students should be subjected to programmes designed to stimulate a sense of critical enquiry…and [be provided] with the means for continuing self-education.’

In a survey of Foundation Legal Instruction (e.g. legal system, legal method) courses in law schools in the UK carried out in 1991/92 and 1992/93, 82% of respondents used a combination of lectures and tutorials/seminars. Only 2 used lectures alone and 4 used small group teaching to deliver Foundation Legal Instruction courses. Additional teaching techniques used by a few institutions were practicals/workshops/exercises, self-paced learning, assessed moots and role play. Interestingly, 60% of all Foundation Legal Instruction courses included some form of group work.

In interviews of recently qualified solicitors carried out between December 2001 and May 2002, it was reported that in the initial stage of their legal education, the interviewees had experienced traditional didactic teaching, that they had occupied a passive role and few felt involved in the course. The interviewees preferred the quality of teaching materials and the active learning methods of the LPC, in comparison with what they had encountered during their degree course.

In a survey of university law schools in 2002/03 it was found that 59% of full-time undergraduate law degree courses offered 5 – 10 hours of lectures per week. The pre-1992 universities offered more lecture time than post-1992 universities. The latter offered more seminar/tutorial time to students.

Bloxham [11] states that e-learning involves far more than the delivery of teaching materials via the internet or intranet. However, Bloxham reports a pilot survey carried out by BILETA which found that most law schools use the Virtual Learning Environments to upload teaching/learning materials instead of providing the students with hard copy, as in the past. This is labelled as teaching with the internet [12] and is non-interactive and non-collaborative and is used to deliver course materials as a supplement to traditional teaching.

Paliwala [13] reports the creation of asynchronous discussion groups in the late 1980s and early 1990s which enabled group work. This is an early example of creating a learning space to take account of students of the Interaction Age. The use of online discussion boards is teaching through the internet and provides the opportunity of interaction between students and teacher and students with each other, and enables students to acquire deep analytical, reflective and critical learning of the subject-matter.

In 2005 Fitzgerald [14] conducted empirical research by interviewing recent law graduates in a Canadian University and reached the conclusion that the lecture method is ‘not entirely effective or efficient for student learning…’ The students interviewed by her recollected that they were taught by the lecture method with the professor doing all the talking and the students taking notes. Although the students were of the view that the
lectures were useful in conveying information, they did not find them engaging. However, the interviewees were appreciative of the notes and summaries provided by some professors.

In the questionnaires analysed by Bone, [15] in a survey of seven ‘new’ and two ‘old’ universities, 81% of the students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “Lectures are the most important part of my learning experience at university”. 93% agreed or strongly agreed that “Seminars are an effective means of improving my understanding”. 78% agreed or strongly agreed to regularly using virtual learning environments such as Blackboard or WebCT to supplement other materials. 78% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ‘Face-to-face contact with other students in a classroom or similar setting is an essential part of my learning environment’.

The survey by Bone indicates that even now lectures are being delivered in universities and students regard them as being important in their learning experience. However, as Ashford [16] points out, the traditional lecture is delivered by a “sage on the stage” with students being mere passive listeners.

The literature review provides evidence that the majority of law schools in the UK provide traditional lectures, with the lecturers providing information of the legal content of the subject that they teach in face-to-face lectures. They lecture in large lecture theatres to the entire cohort of students taking a module. It is a cheap way of providing higher education. The students are passive listeners. The only ‘activity’ is taking notes of the lecture, without much time for analysis and understanding of the lecture content while they are following the lecture. The role of the student during the lecture is not very demanding. So the students are satisfied, provided they manage to write down most of the lecture content. However, it is questionable whether the traditional lecture is a worthwhile learning experience.

The traditional tutorial/seminar requires preparation and activity on the part of the student. However, all too often even the few students who attend the seminar are not well prepared and expect the tutor to provide the answer to the tutorial/seminar questions. Whether a seminar where the tutor does most of the talking is a useful learning experience is questionable.

3. Teaching Methods in the Interaction Age

The literature selected for this section reported some innovative method of teaching.

Migdal and Cartwright [5] report an interesting experiment they carried out in the School of Legal Studies at Wolverhampton Polytechnic when first year undergraduates studying Constitutional and Administrative Law were not given lectures, but were given work plans. When the students completed each work plan, they had to make a one hour personal appointment with a tutor. The authors report that ‘without the guidance given by a lecture the vast majority of students did not know what to do: they lacked confidence not knowing whether the material they were producing was correct.’ In subsequent years the authors provided the students with a 25-page lecture outline which the students could retrieve from a computer. This experiment indicates that abandoning lectures altogether would make the course challenging to first year students. While the content of the lecture is important as the starting point of the knowledge base needed by students, the content does not have to be delivered in a lecture theatre with a limited time slot, with the lecturer racing against time. The content of the lecture could be placed on the module website for students to read at their own speed at a time and place convenient to them.

The introduction of computer-assisted learning to supplement traditional teaching by means of lectures and tutorials is described by Young. [17] While C.A.L. tutorials were innovative, a problem was that the interaction was only between the learner and the content of the C.A.L. tutorial.

Widdison and Schulte [18] mention the multi-media package of legal materials called IOLIS. They are of the view that while self-paced computer-aided learning materials are useful in preparation for tutorials and as a revision aid, they cannot replace small group face-to-face tutorials where students can interact with the tutor. The authors report an interesting experiment in the University of Durham where tutors were able to offer good quality teaching with a 30 minute Contract law tutorial supplemented by one to one email discussion between the tutor and individual students. The emphasis in this experiment is interaction between the tutor and each student. While this is a useful learning experience, the face to face tutorial time where students can learn from each other was reduced. Students explaining their understanding of legal concepts and principles to other students and the tutor in a face-to-face situation and applying principles to solve legal problems is a deep learning experience and should not be curtailed.

The delivery of a distance learning course by CD-Rom is described by Migdal and Cartwright [6] who state that although the courseware was interactive, that it did not reach the level of interactivity of a face-to-face seminar. There were also direct email links to the tutor. Migdal and Cartwright [19] also report an analysis of a module evaluation questionnaire and say that the few students who wrote comments said that they preferred the traditional lectures as they could take lecture notes. 42% of the students said that they expected the lecturer to provide them with lecture notes. Migdal & Cartwright delivered lectures using electronic media (hypertext-based floppy disks and/or power point). The majority of the student respondents preferred the use of computers during lectures. Migdal and Cartwright also developed computer based learning and computer aided instruction, using multimedia CD-Rom and the Internet, replacing face to face tuition in some law modules. While it is useful to use technology to provide information, this appears to have been done at the expense of interaction between students and between students and the tutor at face-to-face seminars.

In 1999, Widdison [20] states that we have progressed from the age of the computer to the age of the Internet. The author mentions IOLIS (which has workbooks and a resource book) as an early example of computer based learning. Email discussions and electronic conferencing are mentioned as computer-mediated communications.

Video-lectures were included in a virtual learning environment described by McKellar and Maharg [21] who
found that they assisted student learning. Watkins [22] describes the introduction of podcast lectures in one module. The student evaluation conducted by Watkins demonstrates the benefit to students of having an audio/video recording of a live lecture which they could listen to in their home as a revision aid, when they have missed the lecture, or to test the accuracy of parts of the student’s notes. However, this innovation only delivers information and is not interactive, as the student is unable to ask questions from the lecturer while listening to the podcast lecture.

Blended learning was introduced by Field and Jones [23] to give students formative assessment opportunities as preparation for a 100% seen examination. The authors found that students are prepared to engage in formative assessment via e-learning and were more likely to engage with material than prepare for face-to-face seminars. However, the e-learning replaced some of the face-to-face seminars, while the traditional weekly lectures continued. Some of the comments reported by the authors indicate that some students were not too happy about the loss of some face-to-face contact in seminars.

‘It gives a good mix of different ways of learning, although I don’t think it should take over too much as seminar discussion groups are very useful seeing things from other students’ perspective and a more active way of learning.’

‘I did think its good to have specific questions asked as it makes you think a lot and go into more detail of the subject. It really helps remind you of key points, but the only thing is that I like it when I have a teacher there as I personally feel more confident if she’s telling me what I’m doing wrong and I can physically talk to her about it.’

The setting up of an online discussion board to replace tutor-led face-to-face seminars is described by Bromby. [24] The abandonment of the face-to-face seminars was owing to the disadvantages of the latter such as poor attendance and participation. The discussion board posts were mainly between students, with the tutor providing a passive role. The discussion forum posts were part of the assessment. Several benefits to the student learning experience were reported. While Bromby’s experiment is appropriate for teaching in the interaction age using technology, an even better learning experience could have been created by continuing with the seminars, but ensuring that they are student-led. Face-to-face seminars developing verbal communication skills, teamwork skills and interpersonal skills could have been used for initial discussion, followed by well-researched, reflective, analytical, critical and more detailed written online discussions.

The writer’s experience of teaching on the University of Liverpool online LLM, provides the students with a deep learning experience, developing their research, reflective, analytical and critical skills, by posting answers to discussion questions and follow-on posts to an asynchronous discussion board. As the course is an online course with students from all parts of the world, it is not possible to provide face-to-face seminars. However, the writer does not take a passive role, simply answering questions and monitoring discussions. The writer is a co-participant on the discussion forum so that there is interaction not only between students, but also between the writer (who is the facilitator of the forum) and the students. The students value the posts by the writer commenting on their posts, as they wish to know whether they have understood the material and find it useful when the writer lets them know whether they are on the right track, or whether they have misunderstood the material read, or have not done sufficient research to fully answer the discussion questions. The following are some of the comments made by the online students in the end of module questionnaire:

‘Overall very pleased about how the module was presented. It became obvious very early in the module that Kumari Lane not only has she got a wealth of knowledge in the subject matter, but you can almost sense the passion that she has. Her comments, pointers and repointers following different submission from the classroom over the past eight weeks demonstrates this.’

‘To conclude I can say that I really enjoyed the module and learned a lot. The instructor Kumari is a great instructor who had the time to give guidance to us during all the module which was something very important so we could see how we should interpret the cases and other texts.’

‘The instructor was particularly involved with each student. It amazed me how much time she could gather to read all the stuff, picking out details to respond to every one of them. Where she found the student lapse in understanding the DQ, she always assigned an article and feedback to help each student get more informed and get the class involved.’

4. How Far Have We Progressed?

Musgrove and Thirlaway [25] report an innovative experiment in using technology, including a discussion forum to introduce group work as a summative assessment of a law module. There was initial resistance to the innovation by some staff and the initial reaction from the students was negative. It was possible for staff to monitor group work via the VLE. There was more communication between students in a group to which there was a high level of communication with their staff supervisor, which indicates the importance of active staff involvement in online discussion forums. At the end of the project, student satisfaction was 100%.

Thomas [26] describes his experience in 2005 of participating in a video-conference where he and a few other conference participants were physically based in Cardiff and the other participants, consisting of Indian academics and postgraduate students were based in Delhi. The conference lasted several days and positive feedback was received from the Indian students. Video-conferences are useful to develop verbal communication skills.

The possibility of using blogs to create a community of bloggers who not only read the blogs of their fellow students, but also post comments on the blogs is mentioned by Ashford. [16] This was an interesting experiment in that it created a community of learners, learning from each other. Another interesting experiment in creating a community of collaborative learners by means of various learning activities, including a discussion forum, which they could engage in via a virtual learning environment in the University of Auckland, School of Law is reported by al Attar. [27]
5. What are the Obstacles to Progress?

University Administrators

Lectures are a cheap way of providing higher education and for this reason may be favoured by university administrators. [28] For resource reasons lectures continue to be delivered, whereas seminar size has increased and some institutions have reduced seminars from weekly to once a fortnight. [29] Thomas [26] mentions a large number of students in both lectures and seminars. Academics compelled to take large lecture and seminar classes by university administrators should nevertheless take steps to engage the students by conducting interactive lectures and seminars and making use of technology and create online discussion forums and chat rooms to establish a collaborative community of learners interacting with one another and with the tutor.

Students

Students may prefer traditional methods of teaching such as lectures which are less demanding on them. [5] Migdal and Cartwright [19] commented that there is resistance from some students to a departure from the traditional approach and expect the lecturer to give a complete set of notes. The authors suggest using traditional methods in the first year while more use could be made of electronic delivery in subsequent years. The problem with this approach is that it is difficult to break study habits formed in the first year. In an experiment at a US law school using virtual classrooms by means of video-conferencing, supplemented by asynchronous communications by posting summaries of topics on listserve and encouraging students to ask questions and post comments, it was reported that the ‘degree of student input was less than ideal.’[30]

Fairhurst [31] reports an open and distance learning course, which involved some face-to-face meetings. An innovative feature about this course was the email discussion group set up for students to discuss the tutorial questions with their peers before submission of the tutorial by email to the tutor. Unfortunately, students did not make much use of this email discussion facility after the fourth week of the course. The reasons for not using this facility is given as students working at a different pace from others in the group and the lack of time to contribute posts and read the posts of other students owing to the majority of students being in full-time employment. Two students in this group, who submitted tutorials on time, assisted each other in tutorial preparation, by emailing each other. These two students, who achieved marks at the top end, as regards assessments, indicate the effectiveness of collaborative discussion. In another article Fairhurst [32] reports that in 1999/2000 the Blackboard Courseinfo learning environment which incorporates discussion boards, chat rooms and group work facilities were available for the students at Huddersfield University to use. However, the students who had not made much use of the email discussion facilities in year one of the course, did not use the new discussion board, as they had acquired the habit of working individually rather than collectively. The Year One students also did not make much use of the discussion facilities after the first few weeks, owing to a heavy workload. However, four students formed a private discussion board and chat room group to discuss Criminal Law, which they found difficult and reported a positive learning experience, deepening their understanding of Criminal Law. In 2000/01 the level of discussion board contributions rose, as the tutors were more pro-active and required the students to make a number of contributions as an alternative to submitting a tutorial. Furthermore, outline tutorial answers were provided by the tutors as a reward for making contributions. In the first Public Law unit nearly all students contributed to the discussion board. This indicates that students will contribute to discussion forums when they have an incentive to do so.

Hanlon [33] reports the creation of a virtual learning environment for two modules. He writes that the use of the Discussion Boards by students was disappointing. There was very little online student-student interaction. The Legal Practice students in Polding’s [34] study did not want e-learning to replace traditional teaching, which was the reason for introducing blended learning. It is reported that students made little use of the discussion board, the reason possibly being that full-time students did not see the need to engage in virtual communication when they could communicate with each other and with the tutor face-to-face.

Law academics

Some academics do not wish to depart from traditional methods of law teaching. [35] We tend to teach the way we were taught. [36] Law lecturers are reluctant to give up traditional lectures. [37] Thomas [26] informs us that in the early sixties lectures were delivered by chalk and talk. He says that some academics have been resistant to using new technology in their teaching.

6. Discussion and Recommendations for the Future

While knowledge of legal content is important to students, they should be trained to develop the ability to analyse the information. [7] A lecture where the lecturer does all the talking for one to two hours and presents information does not provide students with the opportunity to analyse the information.

Ought we to abolish lectures? The research reported by Migdal and Cartwright [5] found that when the students were not given lectures they did not have the confidence to start on the work plans. One does not, however, have to deliver the traditional face-to-face lecture with the lecturer delivering information and the students being passive listeners, having little control over the delivery of information. [38]

We could set up ‘flipped’ classrooms. [39] Such classrooms do not have traditional lectures. The lecture and other learning material is read as homework prior to class time which is used as an interactive team work session where students engage in active learning, applying the knowledge they have gained in their prior reading. Lemmer [40] describes her experience of teaching legal research by means of a flipped classroom, blending e-learning with face-to-face learning. Slomanson [41] reports teaching civil procedure utilising a flipped classroom where there was much more student engagement. The teacher asked students to write outlines of the lecture after listening to the videos. In the class the teacher had time to move around the class talking to students answering questions and getting to know them.
In a ‘flipped’ classroom to get students started on a topic, the text of lecture notes and other learning material could be provided on a module website, [12] in audio-visual format, to take account of different learning styles and to give students greater choice. [38] Links could be created from the module website to other sources, both primary (legislation and case law) and secondary (e-textbooks, e-journal articles, practitioner websites). Students could be set questions on their reading of information and listening to information, where they have to analyse the information presented and the questions, and post written answers in an online discussion forum, to which the lecturer and the students could contribute follow-on posts. The face-to-face sessions of two to three hours per week could then become interactive sessions, where the tutor is a facilitator of learning and is an equal participant in the learning process with the students in a collaborative learning community, co-constructing knowledge. This session can provide the opportunity for students to ask questions from the lecturer on areas of the topic which need clarification.

If, owing to lack of staff resources and/or the policies of university administrators, it is essential to have a one or two hour lecture slot for the entire cohort of students, the lecture should be interactive, with the lecturer not talking continuously for more than 15 – 20 minutes. The lecture could be broken up by quizzes on the content of the short ‘lecture’. Buzz groups could be created where the lecturer breaks up the lecture and asks students to discuss some questions on the short ‘lecture.’ [42] Clicker technology could be used by the lecturer [43] to make the lecture more interactive by asking questions on the content of the lecture, the content of ‘Buzz-group’ sessions and responses to quizzes. The lecture slot could be taken by student teachers [36] who could take turns in explaining the content displayed on the power point slides.

Cartwright and Migdal [37] found that weaker students tend to perform better in modules which were electronically delivered (via CD Rom, the internet and floppy disk). The authors say that traditional information giving lectures could be done away with, without affecting student performance. They cite Fairhurst [31] where the students who were following on-line delivery achieved a 100% pass rate. There were 12 days of face to face tuition.

A study by researchers from MIT, Harvard and Tsinghua universities report that students learned more from an introductory mechanics course offered on a massive open online platform in comparison with the learning gained via traditional lectures. [44]

Moving doctrinal teaching online is advocated by Threedy and Dewald [45] who say that class time should be used for skills training, critical analysis of judicial opinions and for problem-based learning to allow students the opportunity to practice solving legal problems.

Do our teaching methods empower learners? To empower learners their lecturers must themselves be empowered, so that they can empower their students. [46] To empower ourselves and our students our learning/teaching strategy should include the establishment of a community of learners. [46] A community of learners is established by the teacher moving from the position of lecturer to a position of a facilitator of co-operative learning, where the students learn from each other, as well as from their teacher, who is a co-participant in the learning process. [46] When teachers give up their powerful position as teacher, students have the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning. [46] Even a large group could be divided into smaller groups with set tasks so that the group could assign various roles (including leadership roles) within the group. [46]

Maharg and Muntjewerff [47] are of the view that while individual learning, though isolated learning, has to take place, yet there are also benefits of collaborative learning as students can help each other to understand legal concepts through discussion in a virtual learning environment.

A peer discussion forum to reduce the need for tutor support and encourage co-operative learning was established at Glasgow Caledonian University. [48] The authors reported that the tutor also contributed to the forum. Research indicates that online discussion forums form a better learning environment, when the tutor and students contribute posts as co-participants in the learning process. [49]

One of the six outcomes of the reforms suggested in the ACLEC report of 1996 was ‘greater flexibility, variety and diversity in …methods of instruction.’ [50] In devising various teaching methods, it is essential to take into account the different learning styles of students. [36] Law schools which offer blended learning consisting of an active and engaging face-to-face interactive learning environment and an online interactive learning environment, [51] provide students with the opportunity not only to become independent learners, [52] to acquire knowledge, deep learning and an understanding of legal concepts and legal principles, but also assist in developing verbal and written communication skills, research skills, analytical, reflective, critical and collaborative skills. Blended learning environments which enable students to learn from other students as well as from the tutor is the way forward to empower learners to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in legal education. Hewitt [53] is of the view that the teaching of skills requires a low student to teacher ratio, and that this is difficult to achieve in most law schools owing to rising numbers. She advocates the use of online tools to teach and develop skills, the advantage of such tools being that students could use them at a time convenient to them at their own pace.

7. Conclusion

The literature review indicates that while technology is increasingly used for legal education, there is little effective use of interactive technological devices to assist deep, analytical, reflective and critical learning in higher education institutions providing face-to-face teaching. The Interaction Age has made little progress, with pockets of innovation in a few institutions. The chief obstacles to progress are university administrators who want to continue with traditional lectures to reduce costs, lecturers still in the Information Age and passive students who wish to be taught rather than to actively learn. In most face-to-face institutions (including those adopting blended learning) lecturers impart information in traditional lectures. Students only engage in online interaction to co-construct knowledge where the interaction is part of the assessment.
It is recommended that the way forward is creating a blended learning environment in face-to-face institutions of higher education. Traditional lectures could be done away with. The ‘flipped’ classroom model could be adopted so that the lecture and other learning material could be placed on module websites with links to primary and secondary sources of information. The students could read the information at their own pace in their homes and have the time to analyse and understand the information. In the face-to-face classroom the tutor should be a facilitator of learning in a collaborative community of learners, with students and the tutor as co-participants of the learning process.

Statement of Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests.

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