Research on Legal Clinics Education in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract. The in-depth application of artificial intelligence is triggering a paradigm restructuring of legal clinic education. This paper reveals three major structural contradictions formed in the process of technology embedding legal education: the structural mismatch between teachers' capabilities and digital demands, the practical paradox caused by institutional identity barriers, and the persistent conflict between public welfare attributes and the funding ecosystem. The research proposes a "technology-institution-resource" integrated reform path: first, establish a collaborative system of "double-qualified tutors + AI intelligent systems" to realize the organic integration of experience inheritance and intelligent assistance; second, promote the amendment of the Civil Procedure Law to confirm students' limited agency rights, and incorporate practical indicators into the professional evaluation system through a policy coordination mechanism; third, apply blockchain technology to optimize government procurement processes, so as to achieve precise resource allocation and sustainable operation of public welfare legal services. This paper demonstrates the feasibility of the transformation of legal clinic education from "experience-oriented" to "digital-intelligent symbiosis", providing a theoretical framework and practical paradigm for cultivating legal talents with both technological adaptability and humanistic heritage.

Keywords: Legal Clinic Education; Artificial Intelligence; Institutional Empowerment; Education Digitalization; Technology Ethics

1 Introduction

Artificial intelligence is reshaping the landscape of legal education with disruptive power, and a profound evolution of the epistemology lies behind this transformation. Unlike the traditional cognition that emphasizes certainty, in the digital world woven by algorithms, knowledge has evolved into a dynamic network of symbiotic collaboration between humans and intelligent technology. This new type of knowledge network not only incorporates the professional judgments of legal practitioners and the data computing of intelligent systems, but also embodies the practical wisdom generated by human-machine collaboration. Forward-looking arrangements have been made at the national policy level. The Outline for the Construction of an Education Power (2024-2035), reviewed and approved by the Political Bureau of the Central Committee in

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2023, for the first time incorporated the "intelligent legal education ecosystem" into the national education digitalization strategy, explicitly requiring the construction of a new paradigm for cultivating legal technology talents. The guiding opinions jointly issued by nine ministries and commissions led by the Ministry of Education the following year further refined the implementation plan, emphasizing the need to deeply integrate intelligent technology into the legal curriculum system and focus on building an interdisciplinary cluster of "artificial intelligence and the rule of law", making it a demonstration area for the reform of new liberal arts.In essence, this transformation is answering a question: when machines begin to understand legal provisions, what exactly is the irreplaceable core competitiveness of human jurists? The answer may lie in the cross-border integration of technology and humanities, at the intersection of legal wisdom and human warmth that algorithms cannot replicate.

2 Digital Practice of Legal Clinic Education

On January 31, 2025, DeepSeek-R1, a phenomenal AI reasoning open model from China, was connected to the NVIDIA NI platform. Since its release, DeepSeek has quickly become a "blockbuster" product in the global artificial intelligence field, even surpassing ChatGPT in popularity on Apple's App Store for a time. At present, all walks of life are actively exploring the application of DeepSeek in their own fields, and many legal practitioners have begun to integrate it into their work to improve work efficiency. Retrieval ability is crucial for law students and serves as the foundation of their professional competence. In the 2023 Work Report of the Supreme People's Court, the frequency of keywords such as "blockchain evidence preservation" and "AI-assisted trial" surged year-on-year. The Supreme People's Court took the lead in issuing the "Three Major Rules" for online litigation, online mediation, and online operation of people's courts, providing a legal basis for regulating various online judicial activities. It formulated opinions on the judicial application of blockchain, and the unified judicial blockchain platform has completed the on-chain preservation and verification of more than 2.89 billion pieces of data. Meanwhile, the Supreme People's Court issued opinions on the judicial application of artificial intelligence, taking the lead in proposing five major principles for the judicial application of AI, clarifying that artificial intelligence can only serve as an auxiliary tool and cannot replace judges in making rulings. This indicates that legal technology has moved from the proof-of-concept stage to the stage of in-depth application.[1]

3 Digital Amplification of Traditional Malpractices and New Challenges of Technology Integration

In the process of the in-depth integration of artificial intelligence technology into legal education, the traditional legal clinic education model is facing three major structural contradictions. These dilemmas not only restrict the actual effect of technology

empowerment, but also expose the deep-seated institutional bottlenecks in the digital transformation of education.

3.1 Structural Mismatch Between Teachers' Competence System and Digital Demands

The teacher resource dilemma in legal aid clinic education is essentially a systematic conflict between the education evaluation system and the needs of digital transformation. At present, the teaching staff is facing multiple challenges such as the separation of theoretical and practical abilities, ambiguous role positioning, and insufficient technological adaptability.[2] Although most teachers have solid theoretical foundations, they generally lack practical legal experience. This structural defect directly leads to blind spots in their guidance when students handle real cases. For example, in contract dispute mediation, teachers often find it difficult to accurately predict the dynamic changes in the game strategies of parties, resulting in a deviation between teaching effects and the needs of judicial practice. A deeper contradiction stems from the mismatch between the current professional title evaluation mechanism and the characteristics of clinic education.

3.2 Institutional Identity Barriers and Practical Paradox of Technology Empowerment

As an important carrier of legal education practice, the differentiated development paths of legal clinics in China and the United States reflect the profound impact of institutional supply and policy support. Legal aid clinics in the United States have established their legal status through legislation such as the Legal Services Corporation Act, clarifying the rules of student agency rights and liability exemption, thus gaining substantive recognition from judicial organs. In contrast, legal clinics in China have long been in a policy vacuum. Their institutional attributes and functional boundaries have not been clearly defined in the Lawyers Law and the Civil Procedure Law, nor is there statutory authorization for the student agent status. According to Article 58 of the Civil Procedure Law and the relevant judicial interpretations of the Supreme People's Court, students of legal clinics can only participate in agency activities in the capacity of ordinary citizens. Their rights are not properly protected, leading to embarrassment in the process of handling cases. This makes students unable to feel their identity as legal practitioners, and their work enthusiasm is greatly reduced.

It is undeniable that providing legal services to parties involves certain risks. Since students are still in the learning stage, mistakes are inevitable. In fact, it is through such practical tempering that students gain experience.[3] At present, there are no clear regulations on who should bear the responsibility when the legitimate rights and interests of parties are damaged due to the services provided by legal clinics.

3.3 Imbalanced Funding Supply and Limitations of Fundraising Models

In the era of artificial intelligence, as an important bridge connecting legal theory and practice, legal clinic education is facing an acute problem of fund shortage. Legal aid clinic education has a public welfare nature, mainly handling legal aid cases and unable to obtain case-handling funds from parties. However, links such as case representation, investigation and evidence collection, and legal consulting all require substantial costs.

The funding sources of traditional legal clinics are highly dependent on university appropriations, but the financial input of colleges is limited, making it difficult to cover the full-process costs of practical teaching. For example, offline legal clinics need to bear fixed expenses such as office space rental, equipment maintenance, travel transportation, and document printing; technical inputs such as online platform development and maintenance, and data security protection require sustained financial support.[4] In addition, the public welfare nature of legal clinics determines that they cannot obtain income through charging for case representation, and external funding sources such as social donations and corporate sponsorships have not yet formed stable channels. Insufficient funds directly restrict the service scope and quality of legal clinics: on the one hand, due to funding constraints, the guidance capacity of teachers cannot be maintained at the practice base for a long time; on the other hand, students' opportunities to participate in practice are limited, and the types of cases handled are single, making it difficult to meet the diversified legal needs of grassroots communities. However, every link in the actual operation is "cost-intensive". From the basic expenses of offline physical clinics such as venue rent and printing supplies, to the technical inputs of online platform development such as server rental and data security protection, and then to the travel costs generated by cross-regional legal aid, these expenditures are like countless hungry mouths, consuming limited funds. What is more tricky is that although the introduction of artificial intelligence technology can improve service efficiency, the sustained investment required for early-stage system development and later-stage maintenance and upgrading has worsened the already tight capital chain.

4 Solutions to the Dilemmas of Legal Clinic Education in the AI Era

4.1 Organic Integration of Legal Practice and Teaching: Constructing a Collaborative Guidance System of "Double-Qualified Teachers + AI Tutors"

The influence of "double-qualified" teachers in practical teaching bases can account for more than half, which is closely related to the effect of practical teaching. However, at present, university teachers have great room for improvement in terms of practical teaching level. First of all, most tutors in local colleges and universities need to undertake the teaching tasks of undergraduate law programs.[5] In addition, since they themselves have pursued studies from undergraduate law to doctoral law, they are naturally accustomed to the traditional theoretical classroom teaching of law. In the absence of legal practice experience, they unconsciously converge to the training model of Juris

Master when choosing the training model for Juris Master (Professional), which also greatly affects the practical teaching level of teachers in practical teaching bases. Therefore, the teaching methods are relatively conservative, following the cramming teaching model used in undergraduate law courses, making it difficult to make breakthroughs in cultivating applied Juris Master talents. Thus, legal clinic education is in urgent need of breaking through the dilemma of "separation between academia and legal practice", and its core lies in building a normalized and institutionalized collaborative mechanism.

For example, we can try to sign cooperation agreements between university law schools and local courts, where courts assign senior judges to station at the university for 3 working days every month to guide students in writing legal documents and designing litigation strategies for real cases. This mechanism is not a simple "lecture-style guidance", but requires tutors to intervene in the entire case-handling process. [6] From receiving client consultations and collecting evidence to appearing in court, students need to complete the full-process operations under the supervision of tutors. In this process, the responsibilities of practical tutors include three aspects: first, transforming the tacit knowledge accumulated in judicial practice (such as skills to respond to unexpected situations in court hearings and the design of mediation language skills) into transferable explicit experience; second, assisting clinics in establishing a "dynamic case database", converting real case files into teaching resources through desensitization processing; third, participating in clinic curriculum design to ensure that training content keeps pace with the dynamics of judicial reform (such as difficulties in the application of the Civil Code and new regulations on personal information protection cases). This combination of "domain experts + functional experts" enables students to access diversified practical perspectives and form a compound legal thinking. [7] To improve collaboration efficiency, some clinics have introduced a "tutor collaboration platform", using blockchain technology to record the traces of tutor guidance and quantify contribution values as the basis for assessment and incentive mechanisms.

4.2 Institutional Empowerment and Policy Coordination: Restructuring the Legal Clinic Education Ecosystem Through "Legislative Breakthrough - Departmental Coordination - Data Governance"

In the solutions to the dilemmas of legal clinic education in the AI era, institutional empowerment and inter-departmental coordination are the keys to restructuring the legal practice ecosystem. The institutional identity barriers faced by traditional legal clinics stem from the structural disconnection between legal practice education and the judicial system. It is necessary to build a three-in-one solution through legislative empowerment, cross-departmental coordination, and data governance.

1. Cross-departmental Coordination: Building a Cross-departmental Linked Practical Support Network.

Based on the practical experience of the Operating Rules for the Construction of the People's Court Case Database, judicial authorities can open desensitized judgment documents, court hearing videos, and typical case data for legal clinics to build a

dynamically updated intelligent case database, providing real-scenario support for practical teaching. Meanwhile, in specific operations, we can also refer to the management system for trainee lawyers, setting three-tier restrictions on case types, trial-level authority, and practice supervision, allowing postgraduate students holding legal professional qualification certificates to participate in cases with relatively simple legal relations (such as small claims litigation and family disputes) in the capacity of "legal clinic agents" under the guidance of practicing lawyers.

In terms of policy coordination, it is necessary to build a linkage mechanism among judicial, education, and technology departments: the judicial system opens desensitized judgment documents and court hearing data for clinics to build dynamic case databases; drawing on the model of co-constructing youth legal clinics by the Fujian Provincial Department of Justice and universities, practical indicators such as the number of cases represented, the duration of community legal consulting, and the success rate of mediation are incorporated into the evaluation system of university law majors, with a weight of no less than 40% of the total score of practical teaching. A special research fund for "Artificial Intelligence + Legal Clinics" is established, focusing on supporting technological innovation projects such as intelligent legal document generation and virtual court training systems. For example, in the "Smart Rule of Law" research competition co-organized by the Shanghai Law Society and universities, research achievements such as blockchain evidence preservation and smart contract management have been applied and transformed. The education department incorporates practical indicators such as the number of cases represented and the duration of community services into the university assessment system; science and technology enterprises develop smart contract-based case management systems relying on blockchain technology to realize the full-process digitalization of case progress tracking, document evidence preservation, and risk reminder.[8]

4.3 Technology-driven Resource Integration: Building a Sustainable Funding Ecosystem of "Public Welfare - Market - Government" Linkage

If legal clinics are compared to the capillaries of a society ruled by law, funds are the red blood cells that maintain their vitality. The traditional fundraising model is like an old-fashioned coin-operated telephone—functional only when coins are inserted and stopping immediately when the supply is cut off. In the era of artificial intelligence, legal clinic education should have become a vanguard of legal education reform, but it is trapped in the quagmire of fund shortage. This dilemma is like dancing in shackles—legal clinics must maintain the purity of public welfare services while coping with the rising costs brought by the digital wave. The gap between traditional fundraising models and the needs of the new era is quietly eroding the vitality of legal clinics.

To break this predicament, it is necessary to establish a compound funding ecosystem of "self-hematopoiesis + external oxygen supply". Solutions to the funding problems of university legal clinics need to be based on realistic conditions and start with feasible small-scale measures.[9] It is recommended to prioritize in-depth cooperation with local small and medium-sized law firms, obtaining support by leveraging their social responsibility budgets. For example, each cooperating law firm can be required

to bear an annual basic sponsorship fee of 20,000-30,000 yuan. In return, the clinic provides free training for 3 intern assistants for the firm every year and gives priority to recommending outstanding graduates to it.

The expansion of the government procurement service catalog provides a new idea. For example, public services undertaken by legal clinics, such as labor dispute mediation and community legal popularization, can be included in the government procurement list, with tiered payment based on case quality and quantity. This not only guarantees funding sources but also improves service professionalism.[9] Technology empowerment can open up new space for "cost reduction and efficiency improvement": building an aid case circulation platform through blockchain technology to realize cross-regional resource integration and reduce travel costs; using AI to conduct intelligent analysis of fund usage to accurately optimize expenditure structure. For example, building a "cross-regional legal aid platform" with blockchain technology, which puts legal needs and resources scattered in universities, law firms, and communities on the chain to realize intelligent case matching and process tracking. For instance, a migrant worker wage arrears case was automatically matched to a student team specializing in labor law through the platform; case progress (such as evidence submission and mediation records) was recorded on the chain in real time, with the judicial bureau conducting full-process supervision.[10] A more imaginative approach is the data assetization path—converting accumulated desensitized cases into AI training materials and developing legal risk prediction models. This can not only create economic value to subsidize clinic operations but also form a virtuous cycle of "capacity training - data accumulation - commercial transformation".

Finally, it is advisable to establish an alumni feedback mechanism and set up a "Senior Alumni Assistance Fund". Lawyer alumni who have graduated within 3 years can join by donating 100 yuan per month; fund members can obtain priority recommendation of clinic case sources. A university in Southwest China raises 96,000 yuan annually through this channel, accounting for 31% of the clinic's total budget. All fund flows are publicly displayed in real time on a WeChat mini-program. In this breakout battle against the funding dilemma, legal clinics need to transform themselves into "public welfare entrepreneurs", adhering to the original aspiration of legal aid while possessing the wisdom of market-oriented operation. When blockchain evidence preservation technology meets the government procurement service mechanism, and when AI big data analysis collides with the social enterprise cooperation model, it may pave a new path towards sustainable development.

5 Conclusion

The wave of artificial intelligence is reshaping the underlying logic of legal education with an irreversible trend. Under the triple impacts of efficiency leap, experience deconstruction, and scenario reconstruction, traditional legal clinic education is in urgent need of completing a paradigm shift from "experience inheritance" to "digital-intelligent symbiosis". The teachers' capability mismatch, institutional barriers, and funding dilemmas revealed in this paper are not only practical pain points under technological

impact but also profound opportunities for the digital transformation of education. By building a collaborative system of "double-qualified teachers + AI tutors", promoting legislative empowerment and cross-departmental policy linkage, and exploring a sustainable ecosystem of "public welfare-market-government" linkage, legal clinic education is expected to break through the traditional path dependence and become a frontier position for cultivating compound talents of "law + technology".

It is worth emphasizing that this reform is by no means a simple superposition of technologies, but a deep integration of technology and humanistic values. When algorithms can analyze tens of millions of judgment documents, human legal practitioners need to uphold their intuitive insight into fairness and justice; when virtual courts break through physical boundaries, the complex human nature in real cases still requires the temperature transmission of the apprenticeship system. In the future, with the in-depth application of technologies such as blockchain evidence preservation and natural language processing, legal education will move towards a new stage of balancing "precision services" and "humanistic training". However, we must always guard against the erosion of judicial ethics by algorithm bias, and achieve a dynamic balance between instrumental rationality and value rationality under institutional guarantees. Only in this way can legal clinic education truly become an incubator of the rule of law civilization in the digital era, contributing educational wisdom to "ensuring that the people feel fairness and justice in every judicial case".

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