
THE ROLES OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN LEGAL PROFESSION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this theoretical study was to evaluate the roles of information and communication technology in the legal profession. The legal profession is known for its conservatism and traditionalism, which many believe must be preserved in order to maintain the prestige of the profession. Technology plays vital roles in our daily routines, and it also has a significant impact on legal education and legal practice. The role of information and communication technology is a welcome development not only for the legal profession but for every other aspect of human existence. The study concluded that technology has brought significant changes to legal education and practice in various jurisdictions. Since the 1980s, technology has played a significant role in legal education and practice, especially in more advanced jurisdictions. The globalization driven by ICT is having some phenomenal effects on the acquisition of the legal profession. There is no doubt that the integration of ICT into the practice of law is of great benefit to the legal profession in Nigeria in the 21st century. ICT is a remarkable tool for providing comprehensive, current, and timely legal services to citizens. However, the relevance of ICT adoption and utilization in the Nigerian legal system for effective and efficient service delivery is a contributory factor to sustainable development in Nigeria. One of the recommendations made was that, first, users of technology in the legal profession must be aware of the benefits of technology to them through educational seminars or sessions on the benefits of technology to the legal profession.

KEYWORDS: Roles, ICT and Legal Profession.

Introduction

The role of information and communication technology is a welcome development not only for the legal profession but for every other aspect of human existence. The legal practice entails a lot of documentation, information processing, storage, and retrieval. Information and communication technology are the technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. It covers any product that stores, retrieves, manipulates, transmits, or receives information electronically in digital form. This includes the Internet, intranet, email,

wireless networks, cell phones, and other communication mediums (Oluwa, 2016). On the other hand, legal practice is the application of the law and all its attendant dimensions. ICT's impact on legal practice can be described as both evolutionary and revolutionary. evolutionary in the sense that it is a gradual process. Revolutionary in the sense that the legal profession, which is notoriously conservative and resistant to change, could not avoid the ICT revolution. In the words of Schnell (2004), cited in Oluwa (2016), when the first personal computer appeared in a law office, the practice of law underwent a profound change. Technological advancement and globalization, which have swept through various aspects of society, have not left the legal profession out of their path. Technology, including information and communication technology (ICT), now plays a quintessential role in legal practice and education. According to Olubiyi, Olaniyan, and Odiaka (2015), technology has revolutionized the way, ease, speed, and time with which we conduct our activities in the legal profession. Business transactions are conducted faster, learning and teaching are richer, and generally, the legal profession is better positioned. The legal profession is known for its conservatism and traditionalism, which many believe must be preserved in order to maintain the prestige of the profession. Technological advancement may have put a strain on this ideology.

Technology plays vital roles in our daily routines, and it also has a significant impact on legal education and legal practice. Its impact on these key areas cannot be overemphasized. Technology will continue to be a major instrument that influences legal education and legal practice in Nigeria and all over the world. It is important at this juncture to clarify certain key terms: technology, legal education, legal practice, and information and communication technology (ICT). Technology covers "electronic or digital products and systems considered as a group" (Webopedia, 2015). In this context, technology therefore covers the electronic and digital products that give us access to information. Legal education is the process that equips the future lawyer, judge administrator, counselor, and legal scientist to know how the legislative, executive, and judicial organs of the government are designed and operate (Burra & Madasu, 2015). Thus, it is a process that entails the training of students for the legal profession. Legal practice may be broadly seen as the professional work of a duly licensed lawyer, encompassing a broad range of services. Essentially, legal practice is the application of the law in all its attendant dimensions and ramifications. It is appropriate to state at this juncture that legal practice in this context should not be understood from the very narrow prism of litigation alone. It should rather be viewed as a multidimensional and sometimes multidisciplinary vocation that has the law as its hub. However, ICT encompasses technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. ICT thus covers those technologies that help us gain more access to information.

Concept of Information and Communication Technology

Information and communications technology (ICT) refers to an extensional term for information technology (IT) that stresses the role of unified communications and the integration of telecommunications (telephone lines and wireless signals) and computers, as well as necessary enterprise software, middleware, storage, and audiovisual, that enable users to access, store, transmit, understand, and manipulate information. According to Ozdamli and Ozdal (2015), ICT is also used to refer to the convergence of audiovisual and telephone networks with computer networks through a single cabling or link system. There are large economic incentives to merge the telephone networks with the computer network system using a single unified system of cabling, signal distribution, and management. ICT is an umbrella

term that includes any communication device, encompassing radio, television, cell phones, computer and network hardware, satellite systems, and so on, as well as the various services and appliances that go with them, such as video conferencing and distance learning. ICT also includes analog technology, such as paper communication, and any mode that transmits communication. Information and communication technology (ICT) is an umbrella term that includes all technologies for the manipulation and communication of information. The work of legal practitioners involves a high level of documentation and information processing, storage, and retrieval (Owoeye, 2021). Information and communication technologies (ICT) are a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share, or exchange information. These technological tools and resources include computers, the Internet (websites, blogs, and emails), live broadcasting technologies (radio, television, and webcasting), recorded broadcasting technologies (podcasting, audio and video players, and storage devices), and telephony (fixed or mobile, satellite, visio/ video-conferencing, etc.).

Information and communication technology (ICT) may be defined as the convergence of electronics, computing, and telecommunications. It has unleashed a tidal wave of technological innovation in the collecting, storing, processing, transmission, and presentation of information that has not only transformed the information technology sector itself into a highly dynamic and expanding field of work that not only opened up new markets and brought in new investment, income, and jobs but also gave other industries faster and more effective ways to adapt to changes in demand patterns and shifts in global comparative advantage through more effective manufacturing techniques and new and improved products and services (Sage, 2012). Information and communications technology refers to the technology that supports activities involving information. Such activities include gathering, processing, storing, and presenting data. Increasingly, these activities also involve collaboration and communication. Information and communications technology are the infrastructure and components that enable modern computing (Pratt, 2022). ICT refers to a technology that is used to handle communications processes such as telecommunications, broadcast media, intelligent building management systems, audio-visual processing and transmission systems, and network-based control and monitoring functions. According to IGI Global (2020), ICT refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications and focuses on communication technologies. This includes the Internet, wireless networks, mobile phones, and other means of communication. ICT is the technology that supports activities involving information. Such activities include gathering, processing, storing, and presenting data. Increasingly, these activities also involve collaboration and communication.

Concept of Legal Profession and Types

A "legal profession" refers to a vocation that is based on expertise in the law and its applications. Although there are other ways of defining the profession, this simple definition may be the best, despite the fact that in some countries there are several professions and even some occupations (e.g., police service) that require such expertise but that may not be regarded as within the "legal profession" (Alford, Glendon, & Sawer, 2022). The legal profession is a profession, and legal professionals study, develop, and apply the law. " Usually, it is a requirement for someone choosing a career in law to first obtain a law degree or some other form of legal education. In civil law countries, there are usually distinct, clearly defined career paths in law, such as judge; in common law jurisdictions, there is usually only one legal profession, and it is not uncommon, for example, for several years of privately practising law to

be required for a judge. Historically, this has been the first legal specialization (Wikipedia, 2022). In countries with civil law, this is often a lifelong career. In the common-law legal system, judges are chosen from among practicing lawyers. Practising law means advising and representing clients as a private practitioner or in a law firm. Most countries require law graduates to complete an apprenticeship, join a professional organization, and obtain a license. The name for this profession is "lawyer" or "attorney" in most of the English-speaking world and "advocate" in many other countries. The name for this profession in canon law is canonist or canon lawyer. In civil law countries and some common law jurisdictions, there is one law society for all lawyers who want to provide services to the public. But in the United Kingdom and some of its former colonies, there are two quite separate kinds of lawyers providing legal services to the public.

Solicitors: Solicitors advise clients, draft contracts for them, and represent them in lower courts of law.

Barristers: Barristers, also called counsels, are court specialists who traditionally do not come into contact with their lay clients, but are instructed by solicitors. There are only about 10% of barristers in most common law jurisdictions.

Jurist: This term is rare and formal in English and can be used to refer to an expert on law, a legal scholar, or a judge. In other words, people who study, organize, teach, and thereby also create law, often working at universities, can be called jurists in formal English. In countries with civil law, their role is greater because they draft codes, which are major laws that govern whole areas of law. In common-law countries, the creation and interpretation of law have traditionally been the domain of judges.

Paralegal: A paralegal or legal assistant is a person, qualified by education, training, or work experience, who is employed or retained by a lawyer, law office, corporation, governmental agency, or other entity and who performs specifically delegated substantive legal work for which a lawyer is responsible.

Cilex lawyers: CILEX lawyers will have taken a vocational route to qualification (the CILEX Professional Qualification, or CPQ), and unlike solicitors, are qualified to practice solely in their chosen area of specialization.

Roles of Information and Communication Technology in Legal Profession

Information and communication technology has become inevitable part in the day-to-day life of the society and the more societies come to know about technological development, the more they become able to take advantage of it. Whenever an innovation reaches a certain level after it has been presented and promoted, it becomes part of the society. ICT are relevant to the legal profession management and control of the diverse documents that they have to master in order to advance and prepare their clients' cases. It relates to the efficient use of IT systems for the efficient storage and speedy retrieval of documentation (Owoeye, 2021). The legal system is essential to maintain stability and order in the society. Lawyers in any civilized society settle fundamental human rights, disputes and clashes. A legal practitioner in Nigeria is a barrister as well as a solicitor whose primary duties are advocacy, litigation, counseling,

preparation of legal document, etc. A lawyer defends his client (s) in the court of law by applying the principles of law to the evidence available, by providing relevant facts. Lawyers enlighten the public of their constitutional rights and ensure that people are not deprived of their fundamental human rights such as freedom of association, speech, opinion, religion etc. Oyebode (2005) pointed out that the services of lawyers are needed in almost all human endeavours such as banks, insurance, companies, government institutions etc. Computers in a lawyer's office are useful for the performance of the following functions:

- ❖ check and input information and ensure correctness and completeness.
- ❖ sort information into designed sequence,
- ❖ store data for future reference and use.
- ❖ refer lawyers to previously stored information,
- ❖ carry out calculation functions,
- ❖ analyze and summarize data.

Technology has been playing a vital role in the legal industry. It has increased the efficiency of legal offices and the productivity of clerical workers. With the advent of legal technology, there is greater transparency between legal firms and clients. Clients know how much they have to pay and can keep track of the day-to-day progress of the lawyer on their case. Also, there is no doubt that technology, if used correctly, is fast and efficient—more than any human individual. This can prove to be of great assistance to any law firm. Just as technology has transformed the practice of law, it has increasingly found its way into legal education in a variety of ways. This digital revolution in the way law is taught has engendered a large body of scholarship (Pearl, 2001). Technology has revolutionized the way law is practiced and, thus, by necessity, the way it is taught and learned. Increasingly, legal educators have determined that proficiency in information and communication technologies is one of the essential lawyering skills required to prepare students for law practice. Technological advancement is known to impact the fast rate of economic development in modern society (Martins, 2015). In Nigeria, policy on the adoption of ICT was initiated in 1999, when the civilian government came to power. The hard truth is that technology in legal practice has come to stay. It makes legal practice so much more convenient. There is no doubt that in terms of human capital, the Nigerian legal profession scores high, but it is in the non-human aspect that our profession falls far short of what obtains in the United Kingdom. For instance, our legal profession is still "paper-based," and few of our lawyers are computer literate. Very few offices are connected to the internet, and research is done manually. The introduction of ICT has revolutionized the legal profession in Nigeria. In effect, the professional lives of lawyers have been fundamentally and forever altered by the introduction of a new medium—the internet. For many, it is difficult to imagine practicing law for even one day without using the internet in some form.

Conclusion

The study concluded that technology has brought significant changes to legal education and practice in various jurisdictions. Since the 1980s, technology has played a significant role in

legal education and practice, especially in more advanced jurisdictions. The globalization driven by ICT is having some phenomenal effects on the acquisition of the legal profession. There is no doubt that the integration of ICT into the practice of law is of great benefit to the legal profession in Nigeria in the 21st century. ICT is a remarkable tool for providing comprehensive, current, and timely legal services to citizens. However, the relevance of ICT adoption and utilization in the Nigerian legal system for effective and efficient service delivery is a contributory factor to sustainable development in Nigeria.

Recommendation

1. First, users of technology in the legal profession must be aware of the benefits of technology to them through educational seminars or sessions on the benefits of technology to the legal profession.
2. The government should equip law courts with the necessary courtroom technology. Inadequate funding should not be the case in the courts.
3. The government should ensure that internet service providers provide quality services to the populace generally. Once this is done, the legal profession can also benefit from the improved services of internet service providers.
4. Legal practitioners should collaborate with software developers and business personnel on this line in order to create software, e-books, and other technology that will be adapted and suited to the Nigerian legal environment and meet the required needs as well.

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