



Digital Transformation of Legal Education in the Time of Coronavirus

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries.¹ Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 percent of the world's student population, up to 99 percent in low and lower-middle-income countries.² Despite pandemic education systems have been transformed by using information and communication technologies. Digital platforms and applications have become key instruments for supporting the continuation of the teaching-learning processes during the lockdown period. In different countries, universities have created online classes and courses for students. They have provided access to online libraries and developed training programs for the enhancement of digital skills. Regardless of these actions, new digital reality demands new visions and initiatives for overcoming challenges in this process. In this regard, on the one hand, the article aims to explore ways of digital transformation of education systems, especially in law schools. On the other hand, it examines factors that impede the successful usage of digital tools. Overall, the paper will promote to clarify key trends for modern legal education policy.

¹ United Nations, 2020. Policy Brief: Education During COVID-19 and Beyond. Executive Summary. 2.

² *Ibid.*

INTRODUCTION

Digital advances have transformed society and the economy with an ever-deepening impact on everyday life. However, until the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on education and training was much more limited. While COVID-19 demonstrated the need for higher levels of digital capacity in education and training, it also led to the amplification of existing challenges and inequalities between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not, including individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.³ The pandemic has also revealed challenges for education and training systems related to the digital capacities of education and training institutions, and overall levels of digital skills and competences.⁴

Proficient computer knowledge, communication skills, clarity of expression, emotionally connect with the students, and other necessary skills to deal with the demands of the online platforms represent online teaching skills and techniques needed to teach through online mode. Virtual classroom experience, excellent presentation skills with addressing to the point of a given topic, and proper teaching-learning tools are significant to manage the online teaching process.⁵

Teacher professional development is conceptualized within the skill acquisition discourse, meaning that professional development should equip teachers with the competences necessary for the digital transitions, but without defining what kind of competences these should be.⁶ The attractiveness of the education profession and its overall social status is connected to the idea of a highly competent profession that supports career progression through the diversification of career opportunities for lecturers, trainers, and school leaders.⁷

Despite challenges, the OECD considers that the pandemic, while representing a major stress test for education systems, has provided an opportunity to “break down old barriers” and “open up” schools and education systems to the outside world, including the introduction of digital technologies and greater involvement of private technology actors in educational affairs.⁸ The OECD depicts digital technologies as being capable of providing personalized learning, finding new responses to students’ learning needs, and making education systems more relevant to the modern world. Thus, digital learning tools need to be introduced in education systems “to provide students with more agency and autonomy over their learning”.⁹ In the light of the above, it is essential to explore how states used digital technologies to change a model of education during the pandemic. The digitalization of the education system has brought new methods and approaches for the teaching-learning process. Information and communication technologies can stimulate the creation of new opportunities for students, professors and provide communication among them regardless of boundaries. Digital advances have facilitated the development of instruments to perform tasks remotely in various institutions including in law schools. The trends of digital transformation will define the future of legal education in the digital era as well.

INTERNATIONAL TRENDS OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Estonia, the Baltic nation of just 1.3 million people has attracted the attention of world leaders and academics thanks to its high-tech digital society. 99% of Estonia’s public services are available on the web 24 hours a day and 99% of schools had already before the Covid-19 been using some type of e-solutions.¹⁰

3 Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027). European Commission. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital/education-action-plan> [Last seen: February 10, 2022].

4 *Ibid.*

5 Mishra, L., Gupta, T., Shree, A., (2020). Online teaching-learning in higher education during lockdown period of COVID-19 pandemic. International Journal of Educational Research Open. Volume 1, 5.

6 Symeonidis, V., Francesconi, D., Agostini, E., (2021). The EU’s Education Policy Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Discourse and Content Analysis. Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal. Volume 11, Special Issue, 105-106.

7 *Ibid.*, 106.

8 Zancajo, A., Verger, A., Bolea, P., (2022). Digitalization and beyond: the effects of Covid-19 on post-pandemic educational policy and delivery in Europe. Policy and Society. 41(1), (Oxford University Press), 118.

9 *Ibid.*, 118-119.

10 How did Estonia become a new role model in digital education? 2020. Education Nation. <<https://www.>

The key initiatives started in education as Estonia pledged to put computers in every classroom and by 2000, every school in the country was online. The government also offered free computer training to 10% of the adult population. The effort helped raise the percentage of Estonians who use the internet from 29 percent in 2000 to 91% in 2016.¹¹

Since 2014, Estonians have had a lifelong learning strategy that also includes a digital transformation program. The idea of the program is to help develop the digital competencies of both, the teachers, and the students. IT-training courses and instructional materials helped to integrate digital technology into the learning process to develop digital competence.¹²

Also, Estonia set itself the goal of digitalizing all educational materials already in 2015. The success of the digital transformation of the Estonian education system relies on thorough professional development and training of teachers and educational technologists. In addition to teaching knowledge and skills in the digital field, Estonian education widely uses numerous smart solutions including digital databases, digital textbooks, e-learning materials, digital class diaries, and digital assessments.¹³

The Innove Foundation, founded in 2003 to provide implementation support for the Ministry of Education and Research, and the Information Technology Foundation for Education (HITSA), founded in 2013 to promote digital skills development in education—two government-supported foundations that have played key roles in centrally organizing Estonia's collection of digital resources.¹⁴

E-Koolikott ("e-Schoolbag") is the primary source of digital resources in Estonia, a nationwide online library of more than 20,000 educational resources. E-Schoolbag was developed in 2016 by the Ministry of Education and Research. Currently, it is run by the Innove Foundation and HITSA. Teachers, subject specialists, universities, and private publishers can all post resources to e-Schoolbag, and groups of subject-area experts are responsible for review-

ing the resources for quality. Parents and guardians also have access to e-Schoolbag to support children's learning at home.¹⁵

The e-Schoolbag resources are organized to support the teaching and learning of Estonia's national curriculum. They are searchable by curriculum subject and grade level as well as by other required elements of the national curriculum, such as Key Competency or Cross-Curricular Theme. To develop digital resources, Estonian law has required all new hard-copy textbooks and workbooks to be made available in digital form since 2015. In addition to e-Schoolbag, the Innove Foundation and HITSA provide lists of online learning resources, including tools developed by Estonia's robust educational technology sector. Some of these lists were available prior to school closures, while others respond to specific needs raised by distance learning, such as the need to assess and provide feedback to students entirely online.¹⁶

France was well-positioned in one sense for the digital shifts during the pandemic. In 2016, its digital education plan, and its curriculum reform created banks of digital resources (BRNE). These included activities and lessons. France already has a National Center for Distance Education (CNED). As soon as school closed down, it set up "My class at home" with online content for students. In addition to stock lessons, there are tasks to complete and lessons given by videoconference. The websites of both the Ministry of National Education and Youth and the Ministry of Higher Education also have a wealth of other material.¹⁷

Companies and non-governmental organizations are also getting involved. The Canope Network has developed a virtual library with plenty of resources for digital training. French EdTech companies have made their know-how available free of charge and without conditions through a solidarity portal. Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and other social networks and media disseminate thousands of initiatives developed by students, lecturers, and parents.¹⁸

educationnation.ee/how-did-estonia-become-a-new-role-model-in-digital-education> [Last seen: March 7, 2022].

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 Pfister, M., (2020). A Step Ahead: Estonia Emerges as a Leader in Worldwide Distance Learning Experiment. National Centre on Education and the Economy. <<https://ncee.org/2020/04/a-step-ahead-estonia/>> [Last seen: March 10, 2022].

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 D'Addio, A. C., (2020). Coronavirus: France has called for educational continuity. GEM Report. <<https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2020/04/15/coronavirus-la-france-a-appelle-a-la-continue-pedagogique/>> [Last seen: March 10, 2022].

18 *Ibid.*

On March 14, 2020, the government of Latvia declared an emergency situation due to the global pandemic. Because of that, all educational institutions have been closed for more than a month thus making one of the biggest challenges for professors, teachers, students, parents, and the Ministry of Education. Although previously there had been developed virtual tools for contribution to the educational process, the digital capacity was insufficient since they were not originally developed for ensuring the learning process for all students of Latvia simultaneously. The shift of the educational approach has demanded a fast reaction from all the sides involved.¹⁹ Students have limited access to technologies with an internet connection. Research made by the Ministry of Education in March 2020 showed that approximately 3%, which is around 5300 of the students studying in school, do not have access to a computer, or a smartphone with an internet connection, which made it difficult for these students to participate in the distance learning process.²⁰

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia collaborated with TV companies to create a video series to help teachers, students, and their parents at the learning process during the coronavirus crisis. The lessons were 20-minute-long audiovisual materials, in which teachers, enthusiasts of their field from different cities of Latvia, presented teaching materials in an interesting and addressing manner. The learning process was designed so that students could complete a task after each item learned and switch to the next subject. Video materials were accessible to anyone as the videos were published on a website and shown in two Latvian TV programs.²¹

In early 2019, the Federal Government of Germany decided to invest 5 billion euros for proliferating digital technologies in secondary schools (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2020). However, most school districts have not been able to spend the money so far, due to complex bureaucratic proce-

dures that precede expenditure, and the need to first develop sound and aligned pedagogical concepts for the use of technology.²² In Germany, digital technology in education is a highly debated topic. For decades, emotional discussions have been centering around the usefulness of computers in education. During the Covid-19 crisis, discussions have emerged about the consequence of 'remote teaching' pointing to access inequities. While many teachers have heavily invested in remote teaching with digital tools, some teachers have demanded the immediate stop of the promotion of digital tools.²³

There are two scenarios for a national platform in Germany. One scenario is related to an open network of universities in which the online courses and related learning are provided by the own platforms of the universities themselves. This is an inclusive but rather supply-oriented approach. In addition, a second, more demand-oriented and centralized platform scenario was developed. It focuses on a consistent user experience and a higher speed of implementation.²⁴

Digitalization started in the mid-2000s in Italy. Interactive whiteboards started being introduced later in classrooms, followed by the digital register in 2012 and the National Plan for School Digitalization in 2015. This plan has been tested in the face of Covid-19.²⁵ The Technical Economic Institute Tosi of Busto Arsizio in Lombardy, the region most hit by the pandemic, activated a new online teaching mode as early as 25 February. This included teaching in MOOC mode, virtual classes, and smart working following the normal school timetable, except afternoon lessons.²⁶

Italian Moocs are also helping school-leavers

19 Linde, N., (2020). Latvia social briefing: The coronavirus pandemic has become a challenge for the Latvian education system: distance learning implementation experience. Vol. 28 (3), (LVA), 1.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia. Project 'Tava klase' (Your class) – lessons on TV. <<https://www.izm.gov.lv/en/highlights/4166-project-tava-klase-your-class-lessons-on-tv>> [Last seen: February 10, 2022].

22 Kerres, M., (2020). Against All Odds: Education in Germany Coping with Covid-19. Nature Public Health Emergency Collection. <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7198090>> [Last seen: February 14, 2022].

23 *Ibid.*

24 Scalability of Online Education in Germany; a National Platform? Hochschulforum Digitalisierung. <<https://hochschulforumdigitalisierung.de/de/scalability-online-education-germany-national-platform>> [Last seen: February 5, 2022].

25 D'Addio, A. C., Endrizzi, F., (2020). Covid-19: How is Italy coping with school closure? GEM Report. <<https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2020/04/02/covid-19-how-is-italy-coping-with-school-closure>> [Last seen: February 5, 2022].

26 *Ibid.*

as they wrestle with difficult choices about their future – potentially without the physical support of the classroom. Some 50 orientation Moocs are offered by the Polytechnic University of Milan to help bridge the school-university gap, and other courses are available via the inter-university consortium.²⁷

The Netherlands invested 2.5 million euros to ensure youngsters have the necessary devices for online learning. Educational institutions remained open to facilitating students who cannot use distance learning at home. Institutions can make their own choices for dealing with facilities on campus as long as they fit within the general instructions with regards to the pandemic. The internships and other education-related activities outside the institution can continue unless the employer has to stop the activity due to the pandemic.²⁸ The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan supported local boards of education providing adequate measures as much as possible to support youngsters' study, such as initiating appropriate home study programs and conducting supplementary lessons. It has also set up and published a learning support portal, which introduced various suggestions and tips for learning each subject, free learning materials, and videos that can be used at home.²⁹

In the light of the foregoing considerations, high-tech societies have become role models for digital shifts in the education systems. In this regard, one of the best examples is Estonia with the focus on developing new digital platforms and supporting the enhancement of the digital skills of citizens. The digitalization of the education system demands to take more measures to provide access to computers and the Internet. Also, cooperation between educational institutions and EdTech companies will facilitate the development of new secure applications. It is essential to create new programs concerning digital capacity building for academic personnel of faculties including law institutions and E-libraries' professionals as well.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE GEORGIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

The Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, in cooperation with Georgian Public Broadcaster's First Channel, launched an educational project titled – "Teleskola". The project envisages the execution of tele-lessons provided by the national curriculum. Teleskola represents one of the formats for distance learning that enables all students, regardless of whether they have access to the Internet, to find interesting and cognitive lessons across all subjects.³⁰

A Microsoft Office 365 user profile has been created for Georgian public institutions (administration, teachers, and students). A portal has been created that allows the student and parent to access the student profile without the administration of the institution and the teacher. Virtual classrooms have been established for classes and subjects in the Microsoft TEAMS program. Virtual consulting spaces have been set up in all districts of Georgia where volunteer technology experts from the "New School Model" help teachers implement distance learning. Data is being collected to establish access of teachers and students to the Internet and digital technologies.³¹

On June 12, 2020, the Georgian laws on general and higher education have been amended to define distance learning.³² According to the amendments, distance learning is a process based on electronic and other communication means where students, teachers, professors do not meet in a classroom. Universities independently choose applications and platforms of distance learning. At the same time, they have the responsibility to develop appropriate guidelines on the distance teaching-learning process for students.

The lack of Internet access especially in regions has become one of the challenges for the Geor-

27 Reda, V., Kerr, R., (2020). Moocs have helped Italy keep teaching during the pandemic. <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/moocs-have-helped-italy-keep-teaching-during-pandemic>> [Last seen: February 12, 2022].

28 A framework to Guide an Education Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020. (OECD), 13.

29 *Ibid.*, 12.

30 Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia launches an educational project "Teleskola", 2020. <<https://mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=10248&lang=eng>> [Last seen: February 7, 2022].

31 A framework to Guide an Education Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020, (OECD), 12.

32 The Laws of Georgia on General and Higher Education. <<https://matsne.gov.ge/>> [Last seen: February 12, 2022].

gian education system. Also, faculties including law faculties do not have appropriate equipment for conducting online lectures from audiences of universities. The educational institutions have limited resources to develop their digital platforms and applications. Students do not have access to electronic versions of courts' decisions. Staff members of universities cannot improve their digital skills regularly. They have a lack of training possibilities. Law schools mostly do not elaborate courses on the role of Artificial Intelligence in resolving legal disputes remotely. Overall, it is essential to overcome these challenges for the effective digitalization of the education sector in the future.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic has shown the power of digital tools in various fields including in the education sector. Information and communication technologies have provided the continuity of education. In the light of the above, states should develop new visions to support the sustainable adaptation of education to digital realities. New education strategies should define the steps of digital transformation, methodology of the online teaching-learning process, monitoring and evaluation instruments, solutions, ways for overcoming challenges in the digital

world, the role of Artificial Intelligence for ensuring automatic routine tasks in universities including in law schools, initiatives for digital capacity building in education institutions. Such strategic visions will provide high-quality, inclusive, and accessible digital education.

In tech societies law schools will have to rethink the content of curriculums. Within modern legal curriculums universities should develop courses on instruments of the protection of digital rights, legal aspects of digital governance, the notion of cyberspace, the tools, opportunities, and challenges of digital transformation. In this regard, it is essential to analyze the role of digital advances especially the importance of Artificial Intelligence in terms of providing legal consultations and resolving legal disputes remotely. Therefore, every future lawyer should be equipped with appropriate digital knowledge and skills to be adaptable to new realities and changes.

Overall, the development of an appropriate digital education ecosystem promotes the effective digitalization of education institutions because it includes steps for providing digital infrastructure, connectivity, equipment, digital capacity planning, high-quality learning content, and secure platforms. This process will define future trends of legal education in the digital era as well.

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